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# Guest Column: Preserve Riverside Park for pedestrians

Sharing path with cyclists, skateboarders and rollerbladers will be dangerous

David Giacalone | May 3, 2018

*For The Daily Gazette*

The city and county of Schenectady are gambling with the nature of Riverside Park, a tiny treasure on the Mohawk River known for its beauty and relative tranquility.

Under the Bike Schenectady Plan, the park's only paved pedestrian pathway will be converted into a "shared-use" path, allowing two-way travel by cyclists, skateboarders and rollerbladers.

The Riverside Park pedestrian path is only 10 feet wide (broadened to prevent city trucks and patrol cars from creating deep ruts).

The path has been used for generations by people of all ages as a destination in itself, almost like a long, thin "public square", for leisure purposes, such as meeting friends, watching sunsets, walking dogs, pushing baby strollers (to an unfenced play lot), enjoying the wheelchair accessibility and playing hopscotch.

Bike Schenectady would make it into a "keep-moving" transportation thoroughfare, purposely attracting cyclists seeking to move as quickly as possible through the park.

The path, an integral part of the experience of Riverside Park, is likely to become so unsafe and uncomfortable that it will be a "scared use path," frightening away a large portion of its current users, especially the most vulnerable users.

Many cities, nations and cyclist groups have concluded that shared-use paths should be the choice of last resort when looking to create safer cycling experiences, especially when dealing with an existing, well-used pedestrian path where the new design may "design out" the most vulnerable.

Because it has so many people on foot, current standards of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) would require a shared use path in Riverside Park to be 11 to 14 feet wide, plus a two-foot buffer on each side.

It also would require a 3-foot clearance from trees and signs.

Such a path could not be stuffed into Riverside Park, which is only 6 acres, stretched over about 0.3 miles, and interrupted by a pump station, without removing its last stands of mature trees.

Let's preserve and promote what is best about Riverside Park by making it a pedestrian sanctuary so that users can continue to stop and chat, walk dogs, or view the river.

Those with bicycles could enjoy the park as a park, by dismounting and walking their bikes, or staying awhile.

The current Schenectady Code does not permit cyclists over 10 years of age on park paths/trails.

The good reasons for this ban are still relevant at Riverside Park, for many of the same reasons that cycling and skateboarding are banned from the Jay Street and Stratton Plaza pedestrian walkways.

When the Mohawk River Trail reaches Riverside Park, cyclists should dismount and walk their bikes the short distance across the park, or use any of the five streets that dead-end at the park to connect with the on-road bike path.

Close-by parking and lack of significant inclines and barriers at the end of those five streets make Riverside Park especially accessible for older and younger park users, and therefore especially appropriate as a pedestrian sanctuary.

For discussion and photos, see <https://tinyurl.com/SaveThePeds>.

*David Giacalone lives a block from Riverside Park in the Schenectady Stockade. Since retiring as a mediator and children's lawyer, he has become an avid photographer of the park and neighborhood, and works to preserve both at his website "suns along the Mohawk."*