

Public Meeting #2 Summary

2021 River Rock Connections Project

City of Buffalo, New York

Overview

The City of Buffalo's Office of Strategic Planning and consultant team held a public meeting on October 13, 2021 at the Riverside Academy located at 51 Ontario St. within the study area. The purpose of the second public meeting was to provide the community with an update on community engagement outcomes to-date, share and obtain input on preliminary findings from the inventory phase, and to share next steps of the planning process including information on the next focus group meeting on November 10.

The public meeting was open to anyone from the public. The meeting was advertised on the City of Buffalo website and with a flyer distributed to the project's stakeholder advisory group, other identified stakeholders in the community, and hand delivered to several businesses within the study area. In addition, the meeting flyer was translated into Spanish, Burmese, Arabic, and Mandarin. These translated flyers were also shared and distributed within the community.

In total, 21 members of the community participated in the public meeting. Meeting participants were actively engaged in the discussions and provided valuable insight and input. City staff and the consultant team were on hand to facilitate the public meeting and to take notes and answer questions.

The meeting consisted of three parts: (1) open-house format with poster boards containing maps of inventory items and question cards for meeting participants to individually answer; (2) a formal welcome and presentation to highlight key aspects of the planning process and provide an overview of key findings from the inventory of the study area; (3) engagement activities focused on mapping exercises, collaging, open-ended questions, and ranking/choice questions.

Open House Inventory Boards

Several poster-size inventory boards were available for meeting participants to review at the beginning of the public meeting. Content on these boards included project overview information and maps of waterfront access, waterfront views, waterfront park connections, boating access, natural resources, historic resources, roadway classification, roadway ownership, number of travel lanes, estimated daily vehicles, estimated daily trucks, volume-to-capacity, bike facilities, transit facilities, parks, playgrounds, trails, land use, zoning, rail property, rail bridges, and publicly-owned land. Meeting attendees did not comment on these poster-size inventory boards as the meeting included specific engagement activities for participants to provide input and comment. These inventory boards were also made available on the project website for viewing after the meeting. The project website link is provided at the end of this document.

Meeting Presentation

A brief presentation was provided to meeting participants which included a review of the members of the stakeholder advisory group, project-level goals, project study area and schedule, findings from the guided walking tours held on September 29, 2021, findings from the first focus group meeting held on September 29, 2021, and a review of preliminary findings from the inventory of waterfront access & connectivity, neighborhood connectivity, and the rail trail opportunity. The presentation was made available on the project website following the meeting. The project website link is provided at the end of this document.

Engagement Activities

Five engagement activities were part of the public meeting: mapping exercises, collaging activity, identity game, open-ended questions, and ranking/choice question. Each of these activities is described below with a compilation/summary of the input/comments received.

Mapping Exercise

Two poster-size aerial maps were available for meeting participants to use post-it notes and sticky dots numbered 1 through 4 to express their priorities for future infrastructure investment in the study area. A scan of these aerials maps is provided at the end of this document. A summary of these priorities and comments is provided below with a table of priorities and comments provided in Figure 1 on page 2.

There were five “1” dots, five “2” dots, two “3” dots and one “4” dot placed on and adjacent to the rail line at various places making the trail the top priority and the most prioritized element of the exercise. The potential rail trail was mentioned in six post-it notes.

Other “1” priorities were Unity Island (2 instances), Ontario and Niagara streets (“Not a pedestrian friendly corner”), Black Rock Harbor, Buffalo State College, I-190 (“wish list: remove or slow 190”), and the open space behind Tim Horton’s plaza located near the intersection of Niagara Street and Tonawanda Street.

Dots were also placed on the shoreline trail, at the foot of Hertel Avenue, Tow Path Park, Riverside Park, Royal Avenue, and in the Niagara River. Many numbers were affixed to notes that were placed along the edge so the maps and outside of the project area. Still other notes were not associated with priority numbers, and some dots without corresponding notes.

Figure 1: Input from Mapping Exercise

Priority	Location	Comment
1	190	<i>Wish list: remove or slow the 190</i>
1	Behind Tim Horton's Plaza	
1	Black Rock Canal Road	
1	Black Rock Harbor	
1	Buff State	<i>Connections to Buffalo State</i>
1	Ontario and Niagara streets	<i>Not a pedestrian friendly corner</i>
1	Rail line	<i>Rail 2 Trail *security is a key to success</i>

Priority	Location	Comment
1	Rail line	
1	Rail line	
1	Rail line	
1	Rail line	
1	Unity Island	<i>Install boulder to keep people from parking on the grass and on Unity Island, posts to keep people from driving on paths</i>
1	Unity Island	<i>Waterfront access, especially to Unity Island</i>
1		<i>Rails to trails</i>
1		<i>Water access Scajaquada Creek, canoe, kayaks, etc.</i>
1		<i>Water access through portals under 190</i>
2	Black Rock Harbor	
2	Niagara River	<i>Water access (pedestrian)</i>
2	Northwest corner	<i>Speed bumps available to streets requesting</i>
2	Ontario and Niagara streets	<i>Not a pedestrian friendly corner</i>
2	Rail line	<i>Develop rails to trails for dead space</i>
2	Rail line	
2	Rail line	
2	Rail line	
2	Rail line	
2	Shoreline Trail	
2	Unity Island	<i>Nature preserve and boardwalk trail on Unity Island "mounds"</i>
2	Unity Island	<i>Unity Island access</i>
2		<i>Daylight and connect under rail corridor</i>
2		<i>Safety on the trails, lighting, etc.</i>
3	190	<i>Walking under and behind 190 is isolated and dangerous</i>
3	Niagara River	<i>Environmental focused habitat areas</i>
3	Northwest corner	<i>Connections north/south</i>
3	Northwest corner	<i>New street paved on Chandler</i>
3	Outer edge of study area	<i>Waterfront access and bathrooms</i>
3	Rail line	
3	Rail line	
3	Riverside Park/Shoreline Trail	<i>Connect Park to water over 190</i>
3	Royal Avenue	<i>Bridge at Royal</i>
3	Shoreline Trail	
3	Shoreline Trail	
3	Tow Path Park	

Priority	Location	Comment
3		<i>End rails to trails with something great @ north end</i>
3		<i>Pollinator gardens, spaces to enjoy nature</i>
4	198/190	<i>Stop Scajaquada here (at the 190)</i>
4	Black Rock Harbor	<i>Water access to Black Rock Harbor and clean the litter!</i>
4	Foot of Hertel	
4	North of study area	<i>Free outdoor skate park</i>
4	North of study area	<i>Recreation spaces in vacant spaces with paths & trails to connect</i>
4	Peoria/Garfield Street area	
4	Rail line	
4		<i>Access to the rail trail</i>
4		<i>Connect rails to trails to ?/Ontario Street</i>
4		<i>Street and sidewalk improved for residents to get to the water</i>
	Rail line	<i>Great connection to community</i>
		<i>Accidents at Crowley and Niagara</i>
		<i>Irene Gardner Bridge over Niagara Thruway is not handicapped accessible, ramp too steep</i>
		<i>Mural at viaducts at Austin and Amherst</i>
		<i>People want a traffic signal at Crowley and Niagara</i>
		<i>Riverside Park bridge too steep</i>
		<i>Tonawanda Street between Amherst and Austin: fix the wall along rail parcel and beautify the plantings, native garden flowers and trees</i>

Collaging Activity

Creating collages using the simple tools of images clipped from magazines, glue sticks and construction paper is a powerful visioning tool. Very often it is easier to articulate emotions and emotional responses in images rather than words and the act of searching through magazines for the perfect image becomes a meditative exercise, allowing the creator to articulate a fully formed vision of their preferred future for the River Rock study area. Participants created collages that expressed their visions for the River Rock community and physical surroundings. Each participant presented their work to facilitators, and the common themes of these preferred futures that emerged from the collected collages were developed. These emerging themes are summarized below.

Nature and Greenspace

- *Arboretum in green space*
- *Use goats and sheep rather than mowing, "pastoral"*
- *Birds and birdwatching*
- *Birds*
- *Birds and bird feeder*
- *Nature important*
- *Places to watch nature*
- *Pollinator gardens*

- *A lot of natural vegetation – reflective of purity and pristine*
- *Plants that will grow and spread*
- *Communing with nature*
- *Flowers and nature*
- *Flowers and planting*
- *Water as fountain*
- *Nature and connection*
- *Nature and plants*

Waterfront and Shoreline

- *Softening the shoreline*
- *Natural shoreline*
- *Green space between school and maritime as corridor to water*
- *Importance of water*
- *Greening the waterfront*
- *Canalside is a great example*
- *Greening with modern benches and surrounded by vegetation*

Solitude and relaxation

- *Gathering spaces for resting and relaxing*
- *A place of solitude*
- *Sanctuary spot*
- *Relaxing space*
- *Places to sit and relax*
- *Breath*
- *Experience the beauty of it all*
- *Bring more joy (2 mentions)*

Access and Circulation

- *Access under and over 190!*
- *End of Ontario St larger- focus road as a feature*
- *Limited areas frustrating*

Recreation

- *Heathy benefits of being active*
- *Boardwalks, variety of trail types*
- *Rails to Trails*
- *Trail for walking and biking*
- *Walking*
- *Walking important*
- *Walk dog on trails*
- *Biking*
- *Exploring the neighborhood*
- *Yoga on waterfront*
- *Winter activities*
- *Access to activities – kayak, sunset*

Art and Historic elements

- *Making use of Industrial Elements in new ways*
- *“Focus Elements” in park- to focus views*
- *Art and sculpture, mural*
- *Playing with history*

Food & Entertainment

- *Music and concert- small venue*
- *Music space*
- *Music*
- *Drum circle, music*
- *Food trucks*

Family-friendly

- *Children need places to grow, to learn, to have fun*
- *Children are our future*
- *Children need color*
- *Places that inspire the children*
- *Playground (2 mentions)*
- *Kids to play much*
- *Parents can relax*
- *Place for seniors and families to release stress*
- *Address safety with specificity*
- *Pet friendly*
- *Family*

Amenities

- *Garbage and recycling (2 mentions)*
- *Anti-litter education*
- *Needle collection*
- *Cigarette butt collection*
- *Restrooms and sinks (2 mentions)*
- *Hand washing*
- *Dog clean-up station*
- *Gazebo and shelter at water*
- *Seating (2 mentions)*
- *Wood benches to keep the natural feeling*
- *Fountains, benches, trees*
- *Bikes and bike racks*

Identity Game

The identity game gave meeting participants the opportunity to provide direct input on the current identity of the community and to provide their vision of a preferred future. They also provided thoughts about what hinders the preferred vision from being realized and finally, what is needed to achieve success. The questions were written on Kraft paper and participants put their thoughts on each with Post-It Notes. Their responses are listed below.

How do you see your community's current identity?

- *Too much criminal activity in some places*
- *Neglected*

- *Judged by others*
- *Restricted in access to amenities*
- *Lack of respect for Mother Earth. Litter*
- *Sense of belonging together*
- *Variety*
- *Poverty, mindset and distrust*
- *Cool out of the way place most people don't go. Best kept secret*
- *Music supporters (on Amherst St)*
- *Humility, accepting my lot, maintaining tradition, honesty*
- *Cleaning up the streets*
- *Everything is in question seemingly*

How would you describe the identity you want your community to have in the future?

- *All feel welcomed*
- *Safe, welcoming, exciting, a calming place we look forward to visiting*
- *A beautiful world, being part of nature, protecting the environment, self-respect, health, enjoying life, social justice*
- *Live music destination w/ outdoor venue*
- *#30 Family security*
- *International bird sanctuary (2 mentions)*
- *Scajaquada Creek mouth landscape under road*
- *Over and underpasses through 190 barrier to water*
- *Equality*
- *Family neighborhood*
- *Garden haven*
- *Nature wildlife watching*
- *Abundance mindset and friendly neighbors*
- *Kayak, canoe rentals access*
- *Waterfront haven*
- *Protecting environment*
- *"green" healthy environ.*
- *Healthy*
- *Safe neighborhood*
- *Eco-minded neighborhood, green haven*
- *More music destination*
- *Love & peace*
- *Helping each other*

What do you see that holds us back?

- *Neglect, judgement, fear, stuck*
- *Parks Department leadership is going too slowly*
- *Crime*
- *Lack of love & respect for nature & each other*
- *Lack of funding, crime, appearance*
- *Water treatment plant smells bad*
- *Rules and hours of the Riverside Pool. Should go later and we should have lounge chairs and towels*

- *Too much litter.*
- *There is no beach or place to access the water*
- *No beach/water access points*
- *No bathroom buildings*
- *Excess litter*
- *Lack of cross walks + safe sidewalks*
- *Trust, mediocrity*

What do you see is needed for success?

- *Bathroom building please + thank you*
- *Better lighting*
- *Community togetherness*
- *Money*
- *Lexington Coop or equivalent should open up on Niagara or Tonawanda St.*
- *Community engagement/ (Neighbors)*
- *Public education about litter*
- *More stuff for kids, playgrounds*
- *Strategic plan*
- *Garbage receptacles (& recycling!!) and emptied more often*
- *Take risks and seize opportunities*
- *Public school in the area from Hertel to Parish Street, Tonawanda + Niagara so kids can walk to school*
- *Money, innovations*
- *More access to fresh grocery, Riverside*
- *Bathrooms at the parks*
- *Concessions open daily at the parks*
- *Follow through*
- *Bus shelters*
- *Use music to bring us together*
- *Better signage to prevent litter*
- *Leadership, focus, clarity, beginning*
- *Cooperation, volunteers*
- *Accountability for absentee landlords who don't beautify their properties*
- *More tenant + homeowner ordinances*

Open-Ended Questions

Meeting participants were invited to complete a series of open-ended questions that allowed them to reflect on and share their experiences with trails, waterfront and park uses, and about traffic and transportation. Each question is provided below with a transcription of the responses received.

Question 1:

"If there was a trail near my home, I would use it for_____."

Fifteen participants answered this question. Their responses included exercise and recreation, enjoying nature, and spending social time with family and friends. Their specific uses of the trail are listed below.

- *Walking (2 mentions)*

- *Walking everyday*
- *Occasional walks*
- *Taking walks with my family and friends. I would love to start a neighborhood bike club as well*
- *Walks with the kids and dogs*
- *Walking dog (2 mentions)*
- *Bird watching (3 mentions)*
- *Bird watching, flowers etc.*
- *Picnicking*
- *Drum circle*
- *Contemplation*
- *Kids adventures*
- *Biking (3 mentions)*
- *NOT off-road unregistered vehicles*
- *Roller skating*
- *Skate boarding*
- *Looking for bugs!*
- *An escape*
- *To take me to a natural setting*
- *Opportunity to connect with the natural world*
- *Exercise (2 mentions)*
- *Recreation (2 mentions)*
- *Hiking*
- *Photography*
- *Moving through the community safely*
- *Running*

Question 2:

“If the elevated rail was available for recreation, I would use it to _____.”

Thirteen respondents suggested ways in which they would use the elevated rail for recreation. Their answers included relaxing, exercising, and enjoying nature, as well as the answers listed below.

- *Walk (2 mentions)*
- *Sunset drum circle*
- *Morning exercise (class)*
- *Local musical interests (like guitars on porches)*
- *Watch birds flying over the Buffalo River*
- *For connection to other places*
- *Exercise (2 mentions)*
- *Hike*
- *Relax*
- *Bike (2 mentions)*
- *Enjoy nature*
- *To get outside*
- *Maybe understand neighborhood history if it were presented*
- *Maybe*
- *Lay on green areas to get above the noise*
- *Meditate*
- *Plant a rain garden*

- *Walk my dog*
- *Birdwatching*

Question 3:

“My family and I would visit our waterfront parks such as Towpath Park, Black Rock Canal Park, Riverside Park and Unity Island more often if we could _____.”

When asked how local parks could be improved to encourage more frequent visits, 13 respondents suggested improvements for safety, amenities such as bathrooms, and better access. Their responses are listed below.

- *Feel safe*
- *Feel safe getting them and safe when there*
- *Feel safer*
- *Have a bathroom building available!*
- *If there were better washroom facilities*
- *Use bathroom facilities in the park*
- *More organized activities – maybe healthy stuff*
- *Have better access*
- *Get to the river. I live by the park we need a walk over to the river by our streets the one in the park fixed. Playground fix ground*
- *Park nearby*
- *Find it*
- *Walk to it more easily (going under or over 190 is dangerous)*
- *Kayak to it*
- *At Unity Island stop people from parking on the grass and create a Nature Preserve Boardwalk on “The Mounds”*
- *Learn more about the history and diverse people who came before us*
- *Get there by trails that connect to other parts of the city*
- *Easily park- have activities to do at the park*
- *Access the park- Unity Island access is a huge challenge*
- *Yes- my access is more difficult- I don’t drive*
- *Enjoy music and nature*

Question 4:

“What kinds of transportation improvements or enhancements would you like in Black Rock and Riverside? Where should these be located?”

Eleven participants suggested improvements to local transportation. Many would like to see better options for commuter train stations, bus stops, shuttles to the airport, electric car charging stations, bike rentals, and streetscape improvements. Specific suggestions are listed below.

- *Clean*
- *Well lit*
- *Safe*
- *Open*
- *Commuter train station stops in Riverside and Black Rock to connect us to waterfronts further down towards the city!*

- *A commuter train to downtown with stations all along the West Side. Black Rock stations at Austin and Tonawanda St. and Ontario and Skillen*
- *Electric charging stations – in parking area with access to trail*
- *Electric car chargers everywhere*
- *Better roads (fewer potholes)*
- *Bike racks (2 mentions)*
- *Bike rentals*
- *Reddy Bike stations*
- *More safe bike routes*
- *Boat rentals*
- *Eco-friendly busses*
- *Better bus stops*
- *Airport express bus from each neighborhood*
- *Shuttle to the airport*
- *Park & rides*
- *More benches*
- *Walking and bike connectivity- along and across rail corridor*
- *Better traffic control on Ontario St., Tonawanda St.*
- *Distributor streets that circumvent the neighborhood and direct trucks to other on ramps*
- *I would like to see some kayaking and canoeing rental companies, so as to get out into Scajaquada Creek and the Harbor to do some birdwatching. I would LOVE to have access to the railways via trails and lit areas for more safety.*

Question 5:

“Where in Black Rock and Riverside does traffic make you feel unsafe? Why? Because the street is too wide? Traffic goes too fast? No sidewalks? Please explain.”

Thirteen respondents pointed out specific streets and intersections that feel unsafe. The intersection of Hertel and Tonawanda streets was frequently mentioned for the lack of lane markings and crosswalks as well as high traffic volumes. Other streets felt busy, fast, or had poor infrastructure. Their responses are listed below.

- *Hertel and Tonawanda*
- *Tonawanda and Hertel Avenue intersection. Lines on the street are needed, turn lanes, crosswalks!*
- *Lights- one at Crowley and Riverside Park. Car accidents there every year*
- *Ontario at Niagara – too wide, signal lights are too unpredictable*
- *Hertel at Niagara and Tonawanda- much traffic. People running lights.*
- *Hertel and Tonawanda intersection, on Tonawanda St., people in the left turn lane (going South) go straight ahead, crowding into those going straight ahead.*
- *Austin and Tonawanda is not so safe.*
- *Tonawanda and Hertel needs better lanes and turning lights. And something done about trucks.*
- *Austin/Military/Grant needs a circle so you could make a left on Austin going North*
- *Tonawanda and Amherst*
- *Hertel and all intersections*
- *Elmwood and Hertel*
- *Tonawanda, Ontario, main drags... unsafe driving habits (ATVs ugh)*
- *Niagara St, Austin to Ontario, busy traffic*

- *Hertel, narrow street*
- *Military, very busy, large vehicles*
- *Railroad underpasses, unsafe and dark*
- *Ontario Street- traffic too fast*
- *Tonawanda St- traffic too fast*
- *The light on Niagara and 265 is confusing and Austin St. at the underpass from the viaduct is dark. Hertel Ave has too many trucks.*
- *Tonawanda Street at West and Niagara sidewalks need repair badly. Traffic these days is too fast everywhere*
- *Clay and Military has seen many accidents*
- *Sidewalks leading down Austin under the viaducts needs repair*
- *Ontario and Niagara is a very heavy intersection. Very scary to walk across, the street is very wide.*

Ranking/Choice Questions

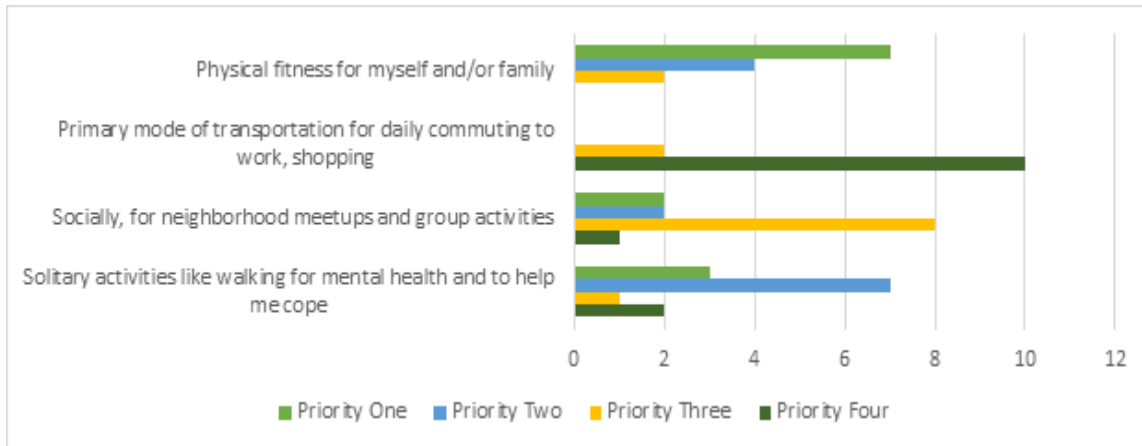
Participants were invited to complete three ranking questions on uses of trails, neighborhood development and neighborhood connectivity. Respondents ranked statements in order of importance to them from one to four with one being the most important and four being the least important. The results are shown in the charts below.

Question 6:

Please rank the following in order of importance to you in terms of how you use trails with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important.

Thirteen participants completed this ranking question. Most frequently, respondents stated that their top priority is physical fitness for themselves or their family, with people selecting this response. Ten people responded that of the choices given, their last priority is to use the trails daily as a primary mode of transportation. One respondent wrote in their top priority for the use of a trail, which they feel is for “Nature preservation.”

Figure 2: Question 6 Results

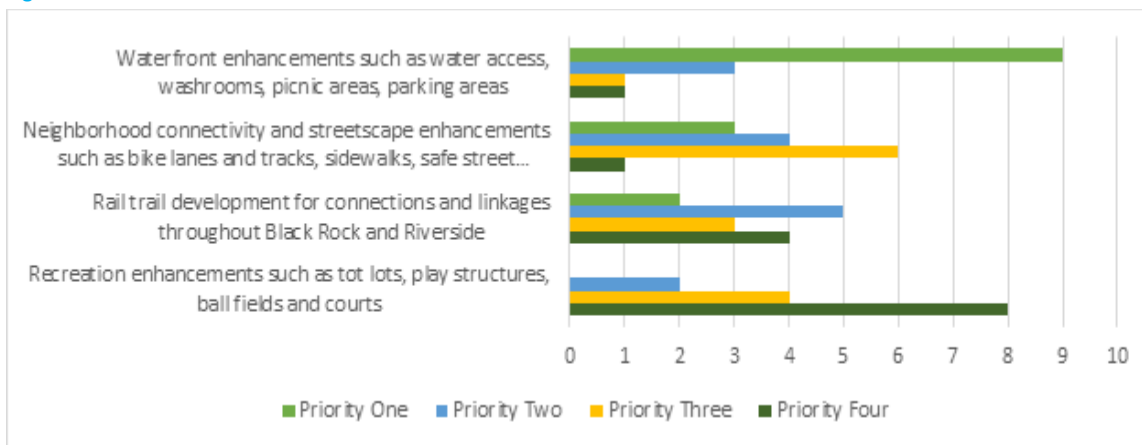


Question 7:

Please rank the following in order of importance to you in terms of your priorities for neighborhood development with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important.

Nine out of a total of 14 respondents agreed that the top priority for neighborhood development is waterfront enhancements, including water access, washrooms, picnic areas and parking areas. No respondents felt that recreation enhancements should be the number one priority, while eight respondents felt that recreation enhancements should be the lowest priority. Write-in responses included an alternate top priority of "Litter prevention and clean up." Another respondent suggested a fifth priority: "An area for outdoor concerts etc."; a sixth priority: "A grocery back in the immediate area of Riverside"; and a seventh priority: "Pollinator gardens."

Figure 3: Question 7 Results

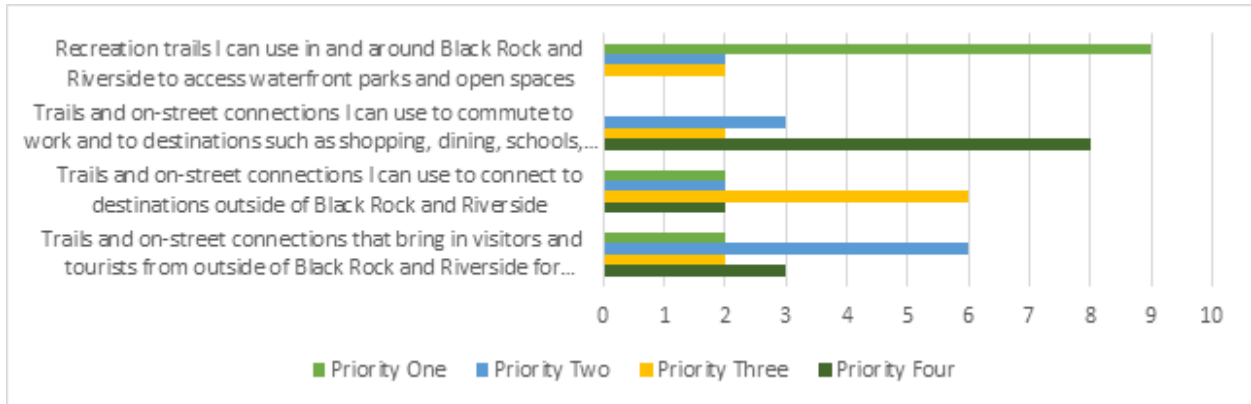


Question 8:

Please rank the following in order of importance to you in terms of neighborhood connectivity with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important.

Thirteen respondents answered this question about their priorities in regard to neighborhood connectivity. The most popular response for Priority One, chosen by nine respondents, was recreation trails to use in and around Black Rock and Riverside to access waterfront parks and open spaces. No respondents felt that trails and on-street connections for commuting was a top priority, and eight respondents chose this as their last priority of the choices given. One respondent wrote in their Priority Three: “Trails that have many points in and out for safety and convenience.”

Figure 4: Question 8 Results



Project Contact Information

Project Website:

www.buffalony.gov/1403/River-Rock-Connections

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