

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) received funding to prepare a Trail / Greenway Feasibility / Master Plan for the Greater Kingston Area in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The goal of this project has been to define in sufficient detail the wishes of the community and its priorities as they relate to the trail/greenway alignment and amenities, estimate trail/greenway construction and maintenance costs, and lay the foundation for the entity(s) which will ultimately be responsible for the development and maintenance of the trail.

STUDY AREA

The study area is located in the Wyoming Valley in northeastern Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The original study area of six municipalities encompassed the Boroughs of Edwardsville, Forty Fort, Kingston, Larksville, Luzerne, and Swoyersville. Based upon comments received at the initial public meeting for the project, the Boroughs of Pringle and Courtdale were added to the study. The entire study area covers 14.2 square miles along the western shore of the Susquehanna River.

The eight Boroughs included in this study are predominately residential communities with small, downtown business districts. The residences of this area are made up of diverse ethnic groups and many are descendants of immigrants that came to the region to work in the Coal Industry. State Route 11 (Wyoming Avenue) runs north to south thru the area, numerous retail businesses are located along this major roadway. Railroad grades, both active and abandoned crisscross the area. These numerous rail lines are a relic from the Coal Era.

Four major trail systems are currently planned or constructed within the Kingston region; The Susquehanna Warrior Trail, The Back Mountain Trail, The West Side Trail and the Luzerne County Levee Trail System. In addition, several trail systems are planned or constructed in Wilkes Barre on the eastern side of the Susquehanna River. One of the goals of this study is to provide linkage to these trail systems.

PUBLIC INPUT

PEC organized and hosted a public meeting on May 19, 2008 to provide information about the project and solicit input from the community. Held at the Luzerne County Annex Building, the meeting was attended by representatives from impacted municipalities, local business leaders, neighborhood and community groups, and adjacent property owners. The Project Consultants attended this public meeting to provide technical assistance and answer questions. A brief demonstration of the project's GIS Database was given followed by an open discussion about the goal of the project.

A Trail Steering Committee was selected by the Northeastern Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC). Members of the Steering Committee included representatives from impacted municipalities, local business leaders, neighborhood and

community groups, and adjacent property owners. A series of four Steering Committee meetings were organized by PEC and facilitated by Project Consultants. A portable GIS system was used by the consulting team to provide interactive GIS presentations during Committee meetings. This technology provided instantaneous access to invaluable information needed to make key decisions in the trail planning process.

The Committee provided local insight into regional issues that impacted the project. Key Destinations, Preferred Trail Routes and other key decisions were made by the Trail Steering Committee.

Various representatives from the Greater Kingston area as well as community organizations participated in the planning process through the steering committee meetings. Therefore, the steering committee determined it was not necessary to conduct extensive key person interviews. However, PEC conducted key person interviews with five (5) individual

Public surveys were distributed via a variety of means including distribution by steering committee members to their respective service populations. PEC also partnered with Action Communities for Health, Innovation & Environmental Change (ACHIEVE), Steps to a Healthier PA (STEPS) Luzerne County, Partners for a Healthy Luzerne County, Wilkes-Barre Family YMCA and the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership to distribute surveys.

PROPOSED TRAIL SYSTEM

Based upon discussions with the Steering Committee, Public Meetings, Opinion Surveys and Key Person Interviews the Greater Kingston Area Trail / Greenway network has been developed. Two major new trails are proposed for the area: The Kingston Area Trail and the Back Mountain Trail Extension. Access to and from key destinations from these main trails will be accomplished through a series of smaller connector trails. The trail network will capitalize on the vast network of railroad right of ways using both abandoned and active lines. Sidewalk improvements and on-street bicycle lanes have been proposed for many of the connector trails.

Details of each of the trails in the proposed network follow:

Kingston Area Trail

The Kingston Area Trail will serve as the North / South spine of the proposed trail network. Beginning at the proposed terminus of the Susquehanna Warrior Trail at State Route 11 in Larksville Borough the trail will run 5.7 miles north through the study site to the intersection of the West Side Trail and the Luzerne County Levee Trail in Wyoming Borough. Most of this trail will follow railroad right of ways with the last section of trail following an existing flood levee.

Back Mountain Trail Extension

The 2.14 mile Back Mountain Trail Extension will begin at Buckingham Street in Luzerne Borough and will connect into the Luzerne County Levee Trail behind the Kingston Recreation Center. This trail will intersect the Kingston Area Trail and will also provide linkage to the Luzerne County Vo-Tech School. The proposed trail route runs along an abandoned railroad grade which is currently owned by the Redevelopment Authority of

Luzerne County. The preliminary route evaluation found only minimal encroachments into this right of way.

Larksville Connector Trail

This 1.6 mile trail would connect Romanoskey Park in Larksville to the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, thus providing this neighborhood access to the regional trail system. The trail route is proposed along an abandoned railroad grade thru mine scarred land. Issues which will need to be addressed before this trail becomes a reality include property ownership, safe crossing of Route 11, an existing junk yard and the completion of the Susquehanna Warrior Trail.

Market Street Connector Trail

This connector trail would utilize the existing sidewalks and roadway to bring people from Five Corners section of Kingston and the Market Street Bridge to the Kingston Area Trail. This route will also provide students from the Wyoming Seminary access to the regional trail system.

Hopkins Memorial Park Connector Trail

This connector trail would begin at the parking area in John J. Hopkins Memorial Park in Edwardsville Borough. It will run across the park and down Beverly Drive and Lawrence Street to connect into the Kingston Area Trail. A crushed stone trail is proposed through the park with existing sidewalk and roadway used along Beverly Drive and Lawrence Street. At the end of Lawrence Street, the trail will follow the easement for the Toby Creek tunnel. This section of trail will once again be crushed stone until its connection into the Kingston Area Trail.

Schuyler Ave Playground Connector Trail

This Connector Trail will be a short Crushed Stone trail connecting the Schuyler Ave. Playground in Kingston to the Kingston Area Trail.

Roosevelt Park Connector Trail

This connector trail would begin at the parking area at the corner of Church and Tripp Streets in Swoyersville Borough and would run down the Tripp Street right of way to the Kingston Area Trail. This trail would utilize existing and new sidewalk along Tripp Street and Crushed Stone trail from the end of the paved road to the Kingston Area Trail.

O'Hara Park Connector Trail

This Connector Trail will be a short Crushed Stone trail connecting O'Hara Field in Swoyersville to the Kingston Area Trail.

Seminary Place Connector Trail

This connector trail would utilize the existing sidewalks and roadway along Seminary Place in Forty Fort Borough. The proposed trail and bike lane would provide students from the Wyoming Seminary Lower School access to the regional trail system. The trail will also connect Wyoming Avenue (Route 11) with the Kingston Area Trail.

Luzerne County Park Connector Trail

This connector trail would utilize the existing sidewalks and roadway from the Kingston Area Trail, down Dennison Street to an existing signalized intersection at Wyoming Avenue

(Route 11). The trail will cross over the Abrahams Creek Bridge and turn to enter into the Luzerne County Sports Complex. The trail will then wind through the County land to merge into the Luzerne County Levee Trail.

West Side Vo-Tech Connector Trail

This connector trail will provide a connection from the West Side Vo-Tech School to the proposed Back Mountain Trail Extension. The trail will begin at the Vo-Tech School and travel northeast along Evans Street (*State Route K038*). The trail will pass under Route 309 via an existing underpass and over Toby Creek on the Evan Street Bridge. This connector trail will link into the Back Mountain Trail Extension on the eastern side of Union Street, prior to the crossing of the Route 309 on-ramp.

TRAIL OPERATION, MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY

The Steering Committee was presented with the following potential organizational structure options to oversee the management of the trail system. These options included:

1. Formation of a Non-Profit Organization
2. Creation of an Authority
3. Creation of a Commission
4. Creation of a Council of Governments
5. Ownership by the ASTA, SWTC and/or WST

An ongoing maintenance and improvement program will ensure that the entire trail system is kept in optimal condition, and meets or exceeds existing standards. Landscaped areas along the trail will require some periodic maintenance, but good design can keep this to a minimum. Low maintenance and drought resistant trees, shrubs, and ground covers can also minimize upkeep activities. Like all transportation improvements, trail systems require funding and staff time for maintenance. Fortunately, several strategies and funding programs are available to reduce the burden to local agencies. Hundreds of trails around the state provide examples of successful management and maintenance strategies.

Although studies show that rail-trail crime is rare, it is nonetheless a legitimate concern for residents and trail users and should be treated accordingly. There are several methods for addressing such concerns and minimizing the potential for crime. Encouraging trail use is one way to help ensure trail safety, as the presence of other users helps to minimized undesirable behavior. In addition, trail users should exercise common sense when using trails after dark and remain aware of their surroundings at all times. Several other mitigation strategies help suppress criminal behavior and lessen the impact of incidents that do occur. In particular, trail design features and trail patrols are useful to keep in mind and recommendations for their implementation are included in this report. However since every rail-trail environment is unique, trail managers should assess the need for these strategies on an individual basis.

TRAIL IMPLEMENTATION

Based upon existing trail connections, land acquisition feasibility, and construction costs, implementation of the Kingston Area Trail Master Plan is recommended as follows:

PHASE I: Back Mountain Trail Extension

This proposed trail will connect the existing Back Mountain Trail to the Luzerne County Levee Trail System at the Kingston Recreation Center.

PHASE II: Kingston Area Trail

The Kingston Area Trail is the “spine” of the proposed trail system and will be the most beneficial to the local community.

PHASE III: Larksville Connector Trail

Although the Larksville Connector Trail will provide area residents with a valuable connection to the regional trail system, this trail is dependent upon many outside factors.

PHASE IV: Backroad Bike Route

Once the Larksville Connector Trail is completed, this bike route will provide a northern connection to the proposed trail system and the West Side Trail.