

Chapter 5: Trail Planning Process

5.1 Trail Planning Consultants

The development of the City of Wilkes-Barre Trail / Greenway Feasibility / Master Plan has been coordinated by the Northeastern Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC). In May of 2008 PEC released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for consulting services on the project. The consulting firm of RETTEW Associates was selected from the applicants and a contract was executed in October of 2008. Jim Caldwell from RETTEW was designated as the Project Manager for this Trails / Greenways project. Subsequently, George White of White Environmental Services was retained as a sub-consultant for the project. Mr. White's duties included development of the GIS Database, working with Mr. Caldwell on the proposed trail routes and compilation of the Master Plan Report.

5.2 Geographic Information System (GIS) Database

The Consultants developed a GIS database of the region using existing Luzerne County parcel mapping, PAMAP aerial photography, USGS Topography, NRCS soils mapping, and other pertinent data. Digital photos documenting proposed trail routes, structures, amenities, and surrounding points of interest throughout the project were taken and their locations were incorporated into the GIS Database. This GIS Database was used for mapping throughout the planning and design process.

5.3 Public Participation

5.3.1 Public Meetings

PEC organized and hosted a public meeting on July 21, 2008 to provide information about the project and solicit input from the community. Held at the Kirby Memorial Health Center, the meeting was attended by representatives from the City of Wilkes-Barre, local business leaders, neighborhood and community groups, and interested citizens.

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 goals of the project.

A Public Presentations of the draft final plan was given on December 17, 2009 at the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry's office in Wilkes-Barre. A Power Point presentation was made by the Consultants outlining the project goals, planning process and proposed trail alignments. Final comments were solicited from the attendees and some of those recommendations were incorporated into the final plan.

Minutes from the Public Meetings have been included in Appendix A of this report.

5.3.2 Trail Steering Committee Meetings

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 the City of Wilkes-Barre, local business leaders, neighborhood and community groups, and interested citizens. Table 5-1 contains a list of the individuals which

were named to this committee. A series of three 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. The minutes from the Trail Steering Committee meetings have been included in Appendix A of this report.

Table 5-1. *City of Wilkes-Barre Trail / Greenway Steering Committee*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Brent Birth	RETTEW
Jim Brozena	Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority
James Caldwell	RETTEW
Vinnie Cotrone	Penn State Cooperative Extension
Jackie Dickman	Earth Conservancy
Scott Everett	D&L
Dale Freudenberger	D&L
Andy Gegaris	Luzerne County Recreation Department
Joe Gibbons	Luzerne County Engineer
Howard Grossman	Jewish Community Center
April Hannon	PENNDOT
Lance Kittleson	Susquehanna Warrior Trail Council
Ted Kross, Jr.	City of Wilkes-Barre Health Department
Julie A. McMonagle	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Adrian Merolli	Luzerne County Planning Commission
Larry Newman	Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry
Teri Ooms	Joint Urban Study Center
Andy Reilly	Luzerne County Office of Community Development
Judy Rimple	ASTA
Michelle Schasberger	Wyoming Valley Wellness Trail Partnership
Bob Skulsky	Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership
Janet L. Sweeney	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Karen Szwast	West Side Trail Commission
George White	White Environmental Services

5.3.3 Key Person Interviews

Various representatives from the City of Wilkes-Barre and community organizations participated in the planning process through the steering committee meetings. Therefore, the City of Wilkes-Barre determined it was not necessary to conduct extensive key person interviews. However, PEC did conduct the following five (5) key person interviews:

- **Mike Dziak, President CEO, Earth Conservancy (EC)** – EC leads communities in the reclamation of mine-scarred lands and streams, returning strong economic, environmental and social value by creating a well-planned vibrant valley protected by green ridge tops.
- **Lance Kittelson, Vice President, Susquehanna Warrior Trail (SWT)** – SWT builds and maintains an 18 ½ mile hiking and biking trail for the benefit of the public in the Southern Wyoming Valley of Luzerne County.

- **Karen Szwast, West Side Trail Project Manager, West Side Trail Commission (WSTC)** – WSTC provides for operation and administration of the West Side Trail and future recreational programming as the participating entities may agree.
- **Carol Hussa, Program Manager, Steps to a Healthier PA Luzerne County (Steps)** – Steps was the first federal program (CDC) to fund an integrated approach to evidence-based chronic disease prevention and health promotion at a community level focused on bringing together all different sectors of the community; schools, workplaces, recreation, health care/insurance, local government, etc. to implement sustainable program and policy change in order to improve health.
- **Dale Freudenberger, Heritage Projects Manager/Anthracite Alliance Coordinator, Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L)** – D&L is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit that is building the D&L Trail and fosters stewardship of historical, cultural and natural resources along the historic canals and railroads that transported anthracite coal from mine to market in Eastern Pennsylvania.

All of the interviewees stated that a trail/greenway would benefit their respective organizations as well as their respective constituents. D&L indicated that the trail will greatly benefit their particular organization as it will eventually link with the 165 mile long D&L Trail extending it from Bristol, PA to the City of Wilkes-Barre. The respondents indicated that the development of the City of Wilkes-Barre trail will advance the goal of having an interconnected trail/greenway system throughout the Valley. The trail/greenway will provide an opportunity for local citizens and visitors to recreate thereby improving overall community health. The trail will also broaden local transportation options, help to conserve natural areas, provide an avenue for the preservation and interpretation of the rich history of the region and improve the use of outdoor spaces that are connected through the system, as well as, benefit the regional economy. One respondent remarked that, “linking trails together greatly magnifies the benefit of the individual trail.”

All of the respondents regularly use and/or promote the existing trail facilities in the region through special event programming, as well as, advocating for complete street design, traffic calming techniques and safe routes to school.

Most of the interviewees felt that the state of bicycle and pedestrian mobility within the region was improving; however a coordinated effort of trail developers and promoters would definitely benefit trail usage. Other respondents, although acknowledging that residents are more supportive of trails due to the recreational and physical activity opportunities they provide, raised concerns regarding safety, need for education, disparities/differences between facilities in urban, suburban and rural areas, provision of mode connections (i.e. bike racks on busses) and the need for connections to other trails, schools, parks, etc.

Most stated that they would like to see the following facilities/amenities and/or linkages for the trail/greenway: good trail, interpretive and usage signage, installation of kiosks at well marked public access points, improved safety, benches, lighting, barrier-free design for “differently-abled” people, parking and connections to schools, parks, shopping centers, work places, and clearly marked connections to existing trails and/or greenways. However, the number one concern of all of the respondents was safety.

When asked as whether or not the respondents felt that their respective organizations would be interested in participating in the long-term management and maintenance of the trail all the respondents indicated that they would be supportive and willing to partner.

In summary, the key person interviews offered valuable input towards how this plan targets where bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be located and recommending the proper facility type for those locations.

5.3.4 Public Survey

A major component of the Plan was to determine what the priorities of local citizens were with regards to the trail including potential trail alignments, trail amenities, connections and other general issues and concerns regarding the development of the trail. This goal was accomplished by distributing a public survey during the planning process for the project.

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. The surveys were distributed during two public events held in the City of Wilkes-Barre; 1) the River Common Grand Opening Ceremonies for the Riverfront Park located along the Susquehanna River on June 19, 2009 and 2) the Diversity Picnic held in Kirby Park on June 27, 2009. STEPS and ACHIEVE worked with PEC to add trail related questions to their Community Health Assessment survey which was distributed during both of these events.

The survey was also distributed during the annual RiverFest event held in Nesbitt Park in Wilkes-Barre in June 2009 and made available at the Wilkes-Barre YMCA.

Surveys and a draft trail map were also made available to the public for two weeks at the Barnes and Noble Book Store located on South Main Street in Wilkes-Barre and the Wilkes-Barre YMCA located on West Northampton Street. A press release prepared by PEC appeared in the Citizens Voice and Times Leader directing people to view the map and complete surveys at the Barnes and Noble Book Store and the YMCA. The press release included PEC contact information for any potential questions.

286 surveys were completed. Based on an analysis of the survey data received, the average age of survey respondents was forty-one (41) years old, and of the respondents that indicated gender, the majority was female (62%). The public survey responses indicated that current users of existing trails indicated that they use the trails on a weekly basis, at a minimum. The survey respondents also indicated that they utilize the trails on a fairly consistent basis both throughout the week, as well as, throughout the day. Based on these findings there does not appear to be a peak time for trail usage.

The survey respondents were questioned as to which amenities were important for inclusion in any trail/greenway that would be developed. The most requested feature for inclusion in the trail/greenway was benches (70.3% of responses) spaced approximately ½ mile apart. The majority of the respondents indicated that benches were a very important amenity to be

included in the trail/greenway. The need for fencing to be included in the development of the trail/greenway was not a priority for the respondents with only 16.8% of respondents listing it in their survey response. The other amenities that received a high priority according to the survey responses were restrooms (66.1%), garbage cans (64.7%), mile markers (60.1%) and lighting (59.8%).

Some survey respondents also provided additional comments recommending other amenities/considerations that should be included in the development of the trail/greenway. The comments included the need for a dog park, installation of water fountains, placement of cigarette receptacles, provision of bicycle parking facilities, consideration and design for the needs of the handicapped and finally the importance of installing new sidewalks where necessary and maintenance of existing sidewalks.

The following table provides a breakdown of the percentage of response for each of the amenities listed in the public survey.

Table 5.2: Public Survey Results - Trail Amenities

Amenities included in trail/greenway	% of Responses
Benches	70.3%
Restrooms	66.1%
Garbage cans	64.7%
Mile markers	60.1%
Lighting	59.8%
Pet waste disposal	55.9%
Picnic areas	55.2%
Directional trail signage	52.1%
Historical/interpretive signs	51.4%
Native plant landscaping	47.2%
Parking at trailheads	46.9%
Emergency phones	45.5%
Shelters	40.9%
Bird houses	40.9%
Information kiosks	40.9%
Community garden	38.5%
Fishing access areas	33.2%
Artwork (murals, sculptures)	29.0%
Fencing	16.8%

The survey respondents were also questioned as to potential connections for the trail/greenway. Based on the data analysis, parks were the highest priority with regards to being connected to the trail/greenway. The respondents also indicated that providing a connection to other trails (52.1%) and historic sites (43.7%) should be given priority in the development of the trail/greenway. Some respondents also suggested that the trail/greenway be connected to local health facilities (e.g. Wyoming Valley Health Care System), senior

centers (e.g. Jewish Community Center, Charles T. Adams Center, Lee Park Senior Center) and libraries (Osterhout Free Library).

The table below provides a breakdown of the percentage of responses for potential connections listed in the public survey. The majority of the respondents indicated a need to connect the proposed trail to existing parks. However respondents also favored connections to other trails, historic sites, athletic fields and schools.

Table 5.3: Public Survey Results - Potential Connections

Sites to be Connected to Trail	% of Responses
Parks	65.7%
Other trails	52.1%
Historic sites	43.7%
Athletic fields	35.0%
Schools	32.2%
Rest areas	30.4%
Public buildings	23.8%
Businesses	18.2%

The survey respondents were also questioned as to possible locations for trail heads. The overwhelming majority of the survey respondents indicated that the trail/greenway should develop the trail locating trail heads primarily at existing parks (71.7%). However, respondents did support, to a lesser degree, trail heads at schools, municipal parking lots and libraries.

Table 5.4: Public Survey Results - Potential Trail Head Locations

Potential Trail Head Locations	% of Responses
Parks	71.7%
Schools	39.5%
Municipal parking lots	37.4%
Libraries	27.6%
New construction	19.9%

Several trends can also be discerned from an analysis of the survey data. The majority of the respondents indicated that their community has an identified network of walking routes which can be used safely during the day and evening. The respondents also felt that it is safe for their children to walk to school or ride their bicycles. Most respondents agreed that their community has parks, recreational facilities, shared open spaces and trails/paths that are within walking distance of their residence. Most respondents also felt that their community has various recreational facilities for use by people of all ages, thereby providing opportunities, as well as, different choices for physical activity. However, several respondents commented on the need for more information, education and promotion of the existing recreational and trail facilities in order to encourage more usage by the residents of the County. Also, the need for maintenance of existing recreational and trail facilities was a common comment by respondents. Survey respondents also indicated a need for trails to be

connected so residents can travel to different areas of their communities safely on foot or by bicycle. Finally, the majority of survey respondents were in favor of their respective communities becoming part of a regional organization and using municipal tax dollars to maintain their parks, trails and greenways.

5.4 Development of the Trail Master Plan

5.4.1 Project Goals and Methodology

A Kick-off meeting was held between the Consultants and representatives from PEC to define goals for the project and identify the most effective methods for achieving these goals. The existing regional trail system was discussed and a need for linkage of the various trail systems which end in Wilkes-Barre was identified. The GIS database and field investigations would identify potential routes to connect the existing trails and key destinations. These potential routes would then be reviewed by the Trail Steering Committee and Preferred Routes would be selected.

The defined Goals and Methodology were then outlined at the Public Meeting and open for discussion. A general consensus was reached that the primary goal of this project was to provide linkage of the existing trail systems and provide access to key destinations.

5.4.2 Identification of Key Destinations & Trail Connections

Base upon information from PEC, the Steering Committee and the Public Meeting, existing trails and key destinations within the Study Area were identified. The locations of the key destinations and the routes of existing and currently proposed trails were entered into the project's GIS database.

5.4.3 Identification of Potential Trail Corridors

Based upon key destinations, existing and proposed trails, existing right-of-ways, utility easements, public properties, and abandoned rail lines, the Consultants identified potential trail corridors within the study area. These corridors were reviewed by the Steering Committee and evaluated for their value in meeting the goals of the project.

5.4.4 Identification of Proposed Trail Route with Alternatives

Potential trail corridors which were selected by the Trail Steering Committee were evaluated in the field by the Consultants. Site photographs of existing conditions were taken along these routes and the photos were "hot linked" into the GIS database for easy access during Steering Committee meetings and presentations. Where potential impediments to the trail were identified, alternative routes were identified for consideration by the Committee.

5.4.5 Identification of Property Owners

Ownership of parcels within the proposed trail corridor was identified based upon the Luzerne County's GIS parcel data of the region. Whenever ownership of a parcel was unclear, the Consultants recommended the level of title search activity required to determine property ownership. The Consultants provided property owner contact information to PEC so that they may contact the owners, if appropriate, to describe the project and determine the level of interest in supporting the project.

5.4.6 Physical Inventory and Assessment

Based upon GIS data and field observations, the Consultants documented existing conditions within the proposed trail corridor and prepared mapping for presentation to the Steering Committee. Issues addressed included:

- Physiographic analysis
- Wildlife
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Environmental hazards (*need assessment for Phase I*)
- Natural features inventory
- Structures (*visual evaluation*)
- Intersections and access points.

5.4.7 Selection of Preferred Trail Route

Based upon all available information including ownership and existing conditions the Consultants conferred with the Trail Steering Committee to select Preferred Trail Routes which best met the Project Goals. Whenever feasible, key destinations were linked into the trail routes and potential trailhead locations were identified.

5.4.8 Prepare a Trail Concept Plan

Using the preferred trail route, the Consultants prepared a trail concept plan using the compiled GIS database as a base. Issues that were addressed in the plan included:

- Trail location and any alternative routes
- Proposed location of trailheads and related facilities
- Areas for trail barriers and emergency access
- Areas needing natural buffers and/or screening
- Proposed linkages to parks, schools, and neighborhoods.

This plan was then reviewed and approved by the Trail Steering Committee.

5.4.9 Final Design and Report

The City of Wilkes-Barre Trail / Greenway Feasibility / Master Plan and Report were prepared by the Consultants and submitted to the Pennsylvania DCNR for their review and approval. A second Public Meeting was held to present the plan and to discuss the recommendations made in the report. Based upon comments from the PA DCNR and the Public Meeting, final revisions were made to the Plan and Report and the final draft was submitted to PEC and the PA DCNR in both hard copy and digital format.