

CITY OF WILKES-BARRE TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Public Meeting

July 21, 2008

11:00 am

Kirby Memorial Health Center

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Attendees:

Julie McMonagle	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Janet Sweeney	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
George White	Rettew
James Caldwell	Rettew
Ted Kross	Wilkes-Barre City Health Department
Michele Schasberger	Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership
Andy Gegaris	Luzerne County
Larry Newman	Greater WB Chamber
Marissa Ragnacci	Wilkes-Barre City Health Department
Paul Ginter	Wilkes-Barre City Health Department
John Maday	Riverfront Parks Committee
Bob Skulsky	D&L/SGP
Rory Sweeney	Times Leader

Julie McMonagle, Vice President, Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) NE Region Office gave a brief overview of the agenda and the project background after introductions. According to Julie, the Wilkes-Barre City Health Department is the grant recipient of a Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant to undertake this master plan project. The Anthracite Scenic Trails Association (ASTA) is the grant recipient of matching funds from the Luzerne County Office of Community Development. Other matching funds were provided by the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership and the Edith Reynolds Trust.

According to Julie, a feasibility study was already conducted by ASTA for this project and we are conducting the master plan. Julie explained that we are starting to fill in the missing gaps of our trail system with this project and another master plan trail project for the Greater Kingston Area. She stated that we will be following the DCNR guidelines for the scope of work including conducting a physical inventory and assessment of the right of way, reporting on general demographics and community character and identifying potential trail linkages, connectors and key destinations. According to Julie, the time frame for this project is approximately twelve (12) to fifteen (15) months. She added that funding for design and acquisition can be applied for during the next DCNR grant round in April 2009. She also stated that PennDOT may also have enhancement funding which would provide another avenue for funding. Julie then turned the meeting over to Jim Caldwell from Rettew, the consulting firm conducting the master plan.

Jim Caldwell, Rettew, then provided the committee with background information on the firm. He explained that they are currently in the inventory stage. He added that we are looking for links, corridors, and key destinations and are hoping the committee will be able to provide this input. He explained that PEC is conducting a public participation process and will be sending out surveys and Rettew will utilize the information from the surveys. He added that once the preferred route is chosen, issues and opportunities will be identified based on feedback and then we will finalize the plan.

The floor was then opened up for questions and comments.

Michelle Schasberger stated that she spoke with Allen Bellas, Luzerne National Recreational Trail, and according to Allen there are plans to extend the trail to the corner of East Market and Wilkes-Barre Boulevard where it will end at the rail station.

Michelle then asked if the City has any property that may have fallen into their hands due to non-payment of taxes, as we may want to examine these sites to ascertain their potential for this trail. It was recommended that we speak with Bill Harris and/or someone in administration.

Michelle also stated that there is an old canal bed that passes through Kings College, the old Laurel Line.

Larry Newman asked if there is a goal to have two separate routes because there are a few potential routes identified in the feasibility study.

Larry explained that the City is looking at South Wilkes-Barre with larger planning goals specifically between Franklin and Carey Avenue corridor.

Larry then informed the committee that there is a draft downtown wayfinding analysis that was just completed a few months ago. The purpose of the wayfinding study is to guide people to downtown Wilkes-Barre and then get them around downtown. The analysis is focused on automobiles so we may want to avoid the areas recommended for vehicular traffic when recommending trails. The study will be used for signage.

Other studies that we should be aware of were also identified by the committee members including the Coal Street Extension Project and a River Street traffic calming study. It was suggested that we either contact PennDOT or Adrian Merolli from the Luzerne County Planning Commission directly.

Larry asked if there is a GIS parks layer. According to George White, Rettew, there is not a parks layer yet for the GIS. He asked if we could get a list of the parks within the City. Ted Kross, City of Wilkes-Barre Health Department, stated that he could get this information. Some of the larger parks within the City include Kirby Park across from the Market Street Bridge, Coal Street Park on Coal Street, Gordon Avenue, Hollenback Park, Miner Park on Old River Road and River Common on South River Street.

Larry then stated that he may have GIS data from the downtown revitalization project and would look into obtaining it for this study.

John Maday stated that interconnectivity is key, and he would like to see a connection to Riverfront Parks.

John wanted to know when we get to the point of having people actually on a trail? Julie stated that it depends on funding, property issues and interest by stakeholders. Some sections will be as simple as stripping and signage. We will certainly look at quick wins and getting at the “low hanging fruit”

Some action items for follow up include the following:

- Obtain a copy of the City of Wilkes-Barre Downtown Wayfinding Analysis – Larry Newman
- Obtain a copy of the Coal Street Extension Project – PEC will contact Luzerne County Planning Commission
- Obtain a copy of the River Street Traffic Calming Study – PEC will contact Luzerne County Planning Commission and/or PENNDOT
- Obtain (if available) GIS data layer of parks within the City of Wilkes-Barre – Ted Kross
- Obtain GIS data layer from the Downtown Revitalization Project – Larry Newman

Julie then stated that our next steps are to continue to gather data and establish key destination and corridors.

There being no other comments or discussion the meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

CITY OF WILKES-BARRE TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Steering Committee Meeting

November 19, 2008

11:30 am

The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Attendees:

Janet Sweeney	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Susan Hazelton	PENNDOT 4-0
George White	Rettew
April Hannon	PENNDOT 4-0
Bob Skulsky	D&L/SGP
Larry Newman	Greater WB Chamber
Michele Schasberger	Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership
Andy Gegaris	Luzerne County

George White gave a brief update of the project status. He showed the committee the newest GIS map with the existing, planned and proposed trails in and around the study area. George added the park and recreation areas to the database. George mentioned that these are the areas we want to bring into the study and make connections.

George began the review of the study area beginning on the east side of the study area in the Parsons neighborhood. He reiterated that at the last meeting it was discussed that we look like to see a connection to this neighborhood because it is cut off from the city. He added that LCRA has a rail line that goes under the Crossvalley Expressway. The culvert that goes under the Crossvalley has enough room for trail with separation from the track and could provide a valuable link to the trail network. There is also a wetland mitigation site and a trail running along the back of it would be nice. George continued that the trail could then run along the Wilkes Barre Boulevard right of way separated by trees. This would go from the LCRA property to city property to PENNDOT property. Further into the Parsons neighborhood there may be more possibilities for linking parks to the trail.

Larry Newman mentioned that there is a new subdivision in that section of the study area called Pineridge. It was the consensus of the committee to continue developing this link.

George then directed the committee to look at the study area further to the east. It was decided that it makes sense to stay south of Mill Creek in this area. He added that the National Recreation Trail is planned to run along Pennsylvania Boulevard instead of the rail line. Susan Hazelton informed the committee that Pennsylvania Boulevard is not a state route but is a federal aid route which means it would qualify for federal funds if the City planned any improvements.

George informed the committee that Allen Bellas is working on getting the second half of the design funding for his project. He has the DCNR grant funds but needs to get the fifty percent match.

The committee then began looking in the western portion of the study area and discussed a small connector to Dan Flood Elementary School.

Michelle Schasberger stated that the first two blocks from the Courthouse towards the river would make a very nice pedestrian area. This area is owned by Kings College. Michelle also stated that the second two blocks could also be a pedestrian oriented area. Larry Newman stated that it is a long term planning goal to use the canal right of way in the long term plans for this area and this should be reflected in this plan. We should show it as a future corridor or pedestrian plan.

George stated that we need to look at Coal Street Park and providing some type of connections there. He added that we still need to talk with Pennoni, the consultants working on the project, but the bottom line is that we need something going down Coal Street.

Andy and Larry stated that any possibilities for bringing in the East End neighborhood would be good. Scott Street runs through there but it is heavily traveled. Also the Wilkes-Barre Academy is on the east side of the park.

George stated that we will continue to look at this area in greater detail and he will get some site photos for the next meeting.

George then moved on to Race and Academy Streets. This area is still an issue as it is the end of the D&L trail. We need to look at some terminus issues with the D&L.

Andy suggested River Street as an option.

Michelle asked that Andy write down his ideas and proposed routes in conjunction with Bob Skulsky, Alan Sachse and Larry Newman as it pertains to the D&L and connections to the Levee trail. We want the best connection for the final leg of the D&L.

The next meeting date was not set but Janet stated that it will probably be mid to late January.

There being no other comments the meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.

CITY OF WILKES-BARRE TRAIL MASTER PLAN

Steering Committee Meeting

May 20, 2009

11:30 am

The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Attendees:

Janet Sweeney	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Brent L. Birth, PLS	Rettew
Christina Decker	City of Wilkes-Barre Health Department
Ted Kross	City of Wilkes-Barre Health Department
Leo Kucewicz	Senator Ray Musto's Office
Rob Lauriello	Rettew
Jim Caldwell	Rettew
George White	Rettew
Michele Schasberger	Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership
Bob Skulsky	D&L/SGP

Jim Caldwell gave a brief update of the project status since our last meeting which was held on November 19, 2009. According to Jim, the steering committee was focusing on providing alternative east-west connections through the City. Based on the feedback received from the steering committee, Rettew has revised these options since that last meeting.

Early on in the process the committee was looking at different alternatives on the west end of the study area in order to get to the levee. There were certain challenges associated with these options. Therefore, after further review of the study area, Rettew has provided, as an option, an alignment that follows railroad right of way (ROW) which continues into the City, eventually to the train station.

According to George the official D & L website has the old alignment still on the website.

The questions was raised as to whether or not we need to get an official blessing from the D&L regarding the new alignment along the abandoned rail bed to the train station.

Also in the eastern portion of the study area there is a Carey Avenue Connector, where there is already an unofficial community path however; we would need an easement from the company along the green path. This Carey Avenue Connector follows abandoned rail ROW to the Carey Avenue Bridge (which already has a well designed pedestrian walkway) and the Levee trail. A little farther east there is a connection into Miners Park.

Also on the west side of the study area there is an option for an alignment (the Newtown Rail Trail) which shows a connection to the Black Diamond Trail. The alignment follows a rail line until Blackman Street and Frederick Street. It then follows Frederick Street to South Sherman Street. Jim added that the Earth Conservancy currently is remediating a site along the Black Diamond Trail.

Coal Street Park, the main alignment runs right through the park along New Sherman Street.

Miners Memorial Park has a levee that runs along the park that can be used as the connection to the park as opposed to the residential street section.

Polish American Veterans Club owns a large parcel of land on the east end of the study area and perhaps this could be a good site for a trail head. Their property runs parallel to the Canadian Pacific (CP) rail line. CP is not likely to want a rail with trail. However there is a twenty (20) foot elevation change to the rail and a fifty (50) foot horizontal distance from the rail right of way.

Rettew recommended that we perhaps keep the original Ridge to River Connection but put it in as a segment to be looked during a later phase. This segment is very steep. The new proposed alignment could be an earlier phase as it does connect to downtown and then eventually down to the river.

Rettew then stated that they are looking for the approval of this committee regarding the alignments as proposed today. It was PEC would send out an e-mail to the other steering committee members including an attachment of the map containing the proposed alignments and ask for comments regarding the proposed alignments within two (2) weeks.

According to Rettew, they need to complete the section of the plan regarding ownership, right of way, costs, etc. So the draft plan is approximately 75% complete.

There being no other comments the meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm.