

Chapter 3: Plan Summaries

The following is a summary of the plans that are related to the Riverfront Open Space area. WPG has reviewed Whitemarsh Township planning documents, along with adjacent municipalities' planning documents that relate to the riverfront.

A Feasibility Study for the Township-wide Pedestrian and Bike Network. May 14, 2009. Prepared by Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects.

The Plan recommends several trail networks leading into or along the riverfront open space and thus should be included into this planning process as well. The plan is divided into several phases, the majority of recommendations to the riverfront district are in Phase 1 (Schuylkill Hiking Trail from City Limits to Manor Road) and Phase 5 (Manor Road from River Road to Hageys Mill Road and River Road, then Barren Hill Road from River Road to Cedar Grove Road).

As indicated on Map 3, proposed bicycle routes along sidewalks and/or shoulders are located along Manor Road, River Road up through Cedar Grove Road and ending on Joshua Road at Copper Beach Drive. Additionally, a Bicycle Lane is proposed for Harts Lane, which also intersects River Road. There is also a proposed bike trail along North Lane, leading into Hector Street. A footpath is proposed along the PECO right-of-way.

Whitemarsh Township Greenway Plan. August 16, 2007. Prepared by Stell Environmental Enterprises, Inc.

Generally, the Greenway plan recommends the expansion of and connection to the Schuylkill River Greenway and Trail. The plan recommends the Riverfront District be considered as a multipurpose greenway area due to the natural resources, as well as cultural and recreational resources located along the riverfront.

Specifically, the plan identifies much of the river and its tributaries' riparian areas as a primary natural resource, and what is not identified as primary is identified as secondary. The Greenway Plan also identifies a portion of the riverfront, towards the southern portion of the Township, as a Special Concern Species Area (See Map 2). This area is designated an important area of concern by both the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program and The Nature Conservancy. Additionally, the area along River Road is identified as a cultural resource network, in this plan. The predominant proposed urban greenway identified in this plan that links into the riverfront open space area is located along Joshua Road, to Cedar Grove Road and onto Center Street. These areas are identified on the Map.

The Plan recommends the Township consider purchasing conservation easements or working with conservation organizations to purchase such easements. Four specific properties are identified as key conservation areas within the riverfront district. These include: 200 Center Street, East 33 property, Ashford Farms, and PECO transmission line easement. Additionally, the Plan recommends the ACE Country Club be considered as a right of first refusal by the Township. These are identified on Map 2 as well.

Whitemarsh Township Open Space Plan. August 2006. Prepared by Gannett Fleming.

In the Open Space Plan, the Riverfront District is identified as an underutilized asset and states that the goal for this district is "to make strategic sections of the riverfront accessible to the public and to preserve and/or restore the remaining sections as natural area." There are priority actions in the plan that directly relate to the riverfront district, and this open space plan. The first priority action has been accomplished; it directs the Township to create a Schuylkill Redevelopment district (The RDD, Riverfront Redevelopment District was adopted in December 2007.). The permanent preservation of Ashford Farms

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and the acquisition of the scrap yard that links Spring Mill Park (County owned) are also priority actions. The next action item consists of a natural buffer with a walking trail, along the river between Conshohocken Borough and Spring Mill Park. (This runs through the area of RDD overlay through the HVY-X District.)

Lastly, the plan recommends the creation of access for non-motorized boats in the Spring Mill Park vicinity of the river and the pursuit of opportunities to preserve and restore the riverfront, particularly the River's Edge section. These areas can be seen on Map 2.

Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Plan. 2007. Prepared by Gannett Fleming.

Goals and recommendations identified for the Riverfront District reiterate that of the Open Space Plan, to increase public access to the river and recreation opportunities. Additionally, the plan indicates that Spring Mill Park is underutilized, and recommends partnering with Montgomery County to develop a site master plan for the park. The plan also recommends the Township acquire lands adjacent to Spring Mill Park to improve public access.

Open Space & Environmental Resource Protection Plan. Township of Lower Merion, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Fall 2005

Relevant Goals and Objectives:

- Create a continuous multi-use trail along the LM side of the Schuylkill River, and create access to the Schuylkill River Trail.
 - Identify sources of funding available to leverage acquisition and improvement costs along the Schuylkill River Trail West.
 - Work with neighboring municipalities to secure non-motorized bridge access to the east bank of the river.
 - Work with the Township-wide Bicycle/Pedestrian Network Implementation Committee and Montgomery County to prioritize projects and to acquire the most critical lands that enhance public use, access and enjoyment.
 - Partner with large institutional landowners to receive donations of land to acquire easements to complete the Schuylkill River Trail West network.
 - Use Township land use regulations to preserve open space, protect natural resources and create recreational opportunities.
 - Protect water quality along the Schuylkill River greenway.

Feasibility Study for the Schuylkill River West Trail March 13, 2009

This study investigated the feasibility of constructing a multi-use trail in Montgomery County and Philadelphia, on the west side of the river between Valley Forge and Fairmount Park. This trail would connect existing networks of sidewalks and regional trails. At the northernmost part at Valley Forge National Historic Park, the trail would connect to the Schuylkill River Trail, the Horse-Shoe Trail, and to a loop system of multi-use trails. At the southernmost point near Falls Bridge, the trail would connect to the existing southern reaches of the Schuylkill River Trail on both Kelly and Martin Luther King Drives.

Recommendations from this study include the following:

- A continuous multi-use trail is feasible, but approximately 1/3 of the proposed alignment is located on private property.
- A hard-surfaced, 12 foot wide trail is recommended. When not feasible, an 8 foot wide trail is recommended.

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- The southernmost mile of the trail cannot be constructed on the Lower Merion side of the river because ROW is not available. The study therefore recommends the utilization of the existing Schuylkill River Trail on the east (Philadelphia) side of the River, with the trail crossing on existing bridges.

Borough of Conshohocken Schuylkill Riverfront Linkages Study and Recommendations. Remington, Vernick and Beach Engineers. Not dated.

- Main goal of study: choose best bicycle/pedestrian routes for enabling travel from Borough's residential areas to the riverfront.
- Goal: to determine how to overcome access impediments (primarily in the southern riverfront area of the Borough).
- Schuylkill River Trail and R-6 line run through study area.
- The zoning district for land below the railroad in the western portion of the study area is zoned Specially Planned District 3, which requires developers to reserve 15% of the land as open space along the river. Currently there is a development proposal to replace some industrial buildings with office buildings, and is proposing a walking trail, access points and benches and picnic tables, etc.
- The Central portion of the study area contains the SEPTA rail station. A vision plan for upgrading the station has been submitted to the Borough (believed to be in 2006).
- The eastern portion of the study area is bounded on the north by Spring Mill Avenue and to the east by the Borough line. Generally from Cherry to Ash Streets developers have installed a riverfront path. The developer of a property west of Ash Street has proposed to extend the path to the Fayette St Bridge. Most of the land is zoned SP-2, a small portion on the easternmost area is zoned SP-3. The zoning requires a 100-ft wide area adjacent to the river for public access except west of Matsonford Bridge; there, a 10-foot walking path is required along the riverbank.
- The plan identified several possible perpendicular access routes to the River. Along with the recommended routes, wayfinding and signage was also recommended.
- In addition to access, other recommendations included:
 - A small concession and a dog park at the East link.
 - Boathouses
 - A promenade, picnic areas and small plazas.
- Funding sources were also listed.

Borough of Conshohocken Open Space Plan. Gannett Fleming. September 2006.

Goals/Objectives:

- Enhance the public to and along the Schuylkill Riverfront while providing opportunities to appreciate and preserve the unique natural resources of the River. Eliminate the feel of private space and create a sense of public open space.
 - Acquire the necessary easements along the River to complete the Schuylkill Riverfront Path.
 - Encourage creative alternatives for providing public access on private lands within this area.
 - Maximize Borough's access to the River and the Schuylkill River Trail.
 - Encourage the re-establishment of riparian corridor and restore natural habitat along the riverbank.
 - Create a sense of public open space that encourages all Borough residents and visitors to utilize these areas.

Map 2: Previously Planned Open Space

Map 3: Previously Planned Trails

- Provide active recreation amenities that will meet the current and future needs of Borough residents, workers and visitors.
 - Ensure that the Borough continues to provide...and plan new water-based activities such as canoeing, kayaking and rowing...
 - Work to create walking trails and multi-use trails throughout the Borough along the Schuylkill River and Plymouth Creek in conjunction with neighboring municipalities and Montgomery County.
 - Create public access points from the Borough to the Schuylkill River and to other trail segments in Plymouth Township, Whitemarsh Township and West Conshohocken Borough. Ensure that access to the river is provided, park areas along the river are established, and that the Schuylkill Riverbank Path is completed.
 - Develop safe routes throughout the Borough to...the riverfront.
- Provide passive open space amenities that will meet the current and future need of Borough residents, workers and visitors.
 - Utilize the Schuylkill Riverbank Path for passive open space such as riparian buffer, as active open space such as walking trail and as access to river docks.
 - Re-establish vegetation and trees along the Riverwalk footpath.
- Protect the significant natural features that exist within the Borough.
 - Create a Natural Features Resource Protection Ordinance that will focus on the preservation of riparian corridors along the river and smaller creeks.
 - Establish setbacks from stream corridors along the river and other small creeks.
 - Enact regulations protecting and maintaining trees in the Borough.
 - Undertake a stream corridor study most likely at the multi-municipal level for the Schuylkill River and waterways within its watershed. Analyze the existing features and identify potential threats to these resources. Recommend policies and actions that can be taken to conserve and/or enhance these resources.
- Protect scenic viewsheds and vistas that exist within the Borough.
 - Work with developers to maximize the view that could be provided both to Borough residents and to those people living or working in structures located along the river.
 - Protect the views of the Schuylkill River and the cliffs and forested ridgeline in Lower Merion Township that exist from various locations in the Borough.

Conshohocken Borough Open Space Plan Recommendations January 2007

- Developing a waterfront plan along the Schuylkill River which would encompass the 100 foot wide strip along the Schuylkill Riverbank for the entire length of the Borough.
- Riverfront amenities for river recreational activities and integrate the riverfront with river life. Examples include a fishing pier, sitting pier, dog stations, pavilion, picnic area and river related businesses such as rental facilities for bikes. For the Borough to provide these activities, it must first build a publicly accessible car-top boat launch along the riverfront, create secure boat storage for river vehicles, and develop a boathouse with public and private partners.
- Feasibility study for riverfront access west of Matsonford Bridge.
- Linkages study for the development of the cross-county trail and access linkages in planning trail alignment and designing facilities. (in the Schuylkill Linkages Study)
- Pedestrian and parking access to the trail in the eastern portion of the Borough in Whitemarsh Township.
- Develop a Schuylkill River Greenway System along the riverfront by acquiring land parcels and building a path extending from Whitemarsh and Plymouth. (Schuylkill Linkages Study).

- Public access, passive recreation and trail amenities and design

Recreation Plan Amendment. Schuylkill Riverfront Trail and Park. (Conshohocken Borough)

- Borough acquisition of waterfront parcels as they become available.
- Development should be sensitive to the greenway environment and must consider:
 - Public access to the Schuylkill River Trail and Waterfront
 - Passive recreation
 - Trail amenities and design
- Public access through streetscaping and railroad crossings.
- Specific waterfront study to address specific recommendations to park and trail design. Park should have multiple waterfront access points for water sports and recreation. In addition, passive recreation such as dog parks and stations, promenades and picnic areas, etc.
- Waterfront plans should incorporate the Schuylkill trail into its recreation element. This would include upgrades to the trail and connector trails such as lighting, wayfinding and signage, and landscaping. This would also include supporting amenities such as rest areas, concession stands, and rental stands for bicycles etc.