

Chapter 8: Summary

The Riverfront throughout Whitemarsh is a valuable asset. While most of this area is in private ownership, this Plan seeks to increase public access to the River in a variety of ways. Wherever possible, physical access is stressed, though there are some areas where the best we can achieve, is visual access.

The Riverfront is essentially divided into two sections, each with its distinct physical characteristics. The change occurs around Spring Mill. From Spring Mill south (toward Philadelphia), the frontage is in a more natural form, due largely to topographic constraints. This area, though, is afforded public access via the County's Schuylkill River Trail; while it isn't possible to get to the River's edge in most areas, the Trail runs close by and afford spectacular views. North of Spring Mill (toward Conshohocken), the Schuylkill Trail shifts inland, with not even visual access in many areas. Most of this area has been developed at one time, and is characterized by outdated industrial enterprises, with some tracts of land and buildings currently in no productive use.

Redevelopment of the area north of Spring Mill is anticipated and to facilitate this, the Township adopted a new zoning district, the Riverfront Development District (RDD) in 2007. Dependent upon the scope of each tract's proposed development, certain public amenities are required by the RDD. One of the purposes of this Plan was to provide some focus on these and recommend specific amenities in certain locations, where they would provide the most public benefit. For the remainder of the study area, the Plan sought to make general recommendations which would help achieve the Plan's goals, and specifically, improve access in whatever ways are feasible.

Prior to developing any recommendations, existing open space and preserved land, as well as previously planned open spaces, were inventoried throughout the study area. The same was done with various types of existing and proposed pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The goal was to develop a plan consistent with what had previously been planned, and to determine if there was any unnecessary redundancy with respect to the various bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Though on the map they may look like a labyrinth of criss-crossed colored spaghetti, cumulatively they will create a complete and logical network for pedestrians and cyclists. Concluding that there were no unnecessary redundancies in the network, this Plan makes no recommendations for elimination of any of them.

Through work with the Planning Commission as the Steering Committee for this Plan, and with meaningful input provided by other Township committees and groups, a variety of stakeholders, and the public, a considerable list of recommendations was developed. Some of the recommendations involve site-specific facilities or improvements while others apply generally throughout the Riverfront area. An overriding recommendation applicable throughout the Riverfront area, is that the Township should pursue preservation and possible acquisition of any property that becomes available.

The individual recommendations fell into nine separate categories: trail related recommendations, amenities, water use recommendations, public safety, an environmental concern, recommendations dealing with circulation, signage recommendations, landscaping recommendations, and recommendations concerning service uses. These recommendations were then prioritized. The ones recommended for immediate or high priority implementation, generally are those which will improve public safety and which will result in better access to the River. The highest priority recommendations, therefore, included the following:

- Address safety issues
- Provide security lighting

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- Provide security posts with emergency phones
- Alert potential developers of environmental concerns
- Create/restore riparian buffer landscaping
- Develop multi-use trail (from Spring Mill north to Conshohocken)
- Install boat launches
- Install fishing piers
- Provide locations for water drafting for fire-fighting
- Design trail specifications for emergency vehicles
- Extend Washington Street (to avoid dead-end access)
- Provide additional public parking

Implementation can occur in a variety of ways. One way mentioned above, is for private developers to provide certain improvements as part of a development project. In addition to a potential for other public amenities, the RDD requires a riverfront trail to be constructed when any land in that district which has River frontage, is developed. Perpendicular trails, to create linkages to that trail, are also required. The Township might also decide to install certain improvements either on publicly held lands or on private land with a public easement. For example, if the riverfront trail is installed on most of the parcels in the RDD which front the River, but there are a couple of gaps where development has not yet occurred, the Township may opt to negotiate easements on those parcels and fill in the trail gaps. If the Township is unable to secure grant monies to make such improvements, it may be able to recoup the cost of the trail from the developer when these parcels are later developed (subject to legal limitations on such reimbursements). Various types of partnerships are also encouraged and are discussed in Chapter 6, 'Recommendations'. These partnerships may be public/private partnerships or partnerships among two or more public entities. An example of the latter would be a partnership between the County and the Township to make improvements at Spring Mill Park, so that a full trailhead facility could be implemented there. There may be several opportunities for partnerships between the Township and a private landowner to provide public parking on private lots at off-peak hours. Partnerships not only bring the potential for more financial resources for a particular project, but they also improve the prospects for securing various grants.

The Township should continually re-evaluate the priorities established within this Plan. Changes may be appropriate as the result of certain recommended facilities being implemented through the land development process, and as the result of changes in Township policies and circumstances. It is recommended that a re-evaluation be done at least on an annual basis, to coincide with the Township's budgeting process.