

Cumberland County Greenways are...

...trails that connect parks, nature and communities

...corridors of green space that protect wildlife

...scenic views of our ridgetops and valleys

...public access to rivers and streams

...wide open spaces

...forever.

Study Purpose

This study examines ways in which Cumberland County can create greenways and provides a framework for the establishment of greenways through a collaborative effort of public-private partnerships. As we move into the 21st century, the way we deal with the protection of our open spaces and natural resources will determine the quality of life both for ourselves and future generations.

The Cumberland County Board of Commissioners and the Planning Commission would like to promote the importance of recreation and open space preservation to ensure the quality of life for residents as well as protect natural resources within the County. It was their goal to develop a plan to build linkages between rural and urban land uses. The concern for open space preservation in Cumberland County is becoming more pronounced as land is becoming developed. In response to these concerns, the Commissioners and the Cumberland County Planning Commission supported the creation of a Countywide greenway plan. The corridors chosen as a result of the study would receive more detailed planning in the future. They determined that the greenway plan would include the following:

1. A plan of action for public participation and data collection
2. Data collection and analysis
3. Identification of potential greenway corridors
4. Determination of potential users
5. Identification of potential linkages
6. Prioritization of greenway corridors
7. Potential impacts and benefits
8. Greenway management and financing strategies
9. Recommendations for implementation

Cumberland County obtained a grant from the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Grant Program to fund this study. The planning process was designed to meet the requirements of this program.

Challenges

Although greenways have been planned for over a hundred years, the idea of creating a green infrastructure through the community planning process is a relatively new concept in Pennsylvania. Typically, greenway studies are targeted to specific areas or linkages to determine feasibility. Cumberland County is on the cutting edge by looking at greenways Countywide instead of piecemeal fashion.

The rich natural resources of the Cumberland Valley make it imperative for the County to establish a strong, unifying vision towards which both public and private organizations can work. The County cannot achieve a regional greenway system on its own. The collaborative efforts of a great many organizations are needed to forge a strategy for the future. As other counties in the more rapidly developing areas of Pennsylvania have shown, time is of the essence. As land becomes developed, it is more difficult to establish greenways and connections are lost. Greenways can help Cumberland County retain its wonderful rural agrarian character so treasured by the citizens. As Charles E. Little expressed in his book, *Greenways for America*, “to make a greenway...is to make a community.”

The Planning Process

Cumberland County hired a team of landscape architects, community and recreation planners, and ecologists to work with the County's Task Force on the greenway study. The study included the following objectives:

- Create linkages between rural and urban areas
- Promote the preservation and conservation of open space
- Reconnect fragmented natural areas
- Provide corridors for the movement of humans and wildlife
- Protect and buffer critical environmental resources
- Provide corridors for recreation, transportation, and the enjoyment of the environment

The planning process consisted of four main areas: public involvement, inventory and analysis, development of conceptual alternatives, and recommendations and action plan.

Public Involvement

The foundation for the study was citizen participation. It included four elements: a task force, a Countywide public opinion survey, key person interviews, and public forums. Throughout the planning process, there was considerable outreach to key stakeholders as well as the general citizenry in recognition of the fact that greenway development is everybody's business. Overall, the public participation process showed that there is great support for greenways and concerns about funding and finding ways to make the greenways happen. During the public participation process, it was evident that the concept of greenways is still new to the general public and requires effective communication in order to build understanding about this important issue. For the purpose of the study, the following definition of greenways was developed and included in materials presented to the public.

Definition of Greenways

Greenways are corridors of protected public and private land established along rivers, stream valleys, ridges, abandoned rail corridors, utility rights-of-way, canals, scenic roads, or other linear features. They link recreational, cultural, and natural features; provide pathways for people and wildlife; protect forests, wetlands, and grasslands; and improve the quality of life for everyone.

Inventory and Analysis

The planning team conducted an inventory and analysis of the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources of Cumberland County. This included:

- A review of available information including plans, reports, and government data
- Field reconnaissance of the entire County
- Aerial assessment via helicopter
- Data collection from recognized sources within the County

- Assessment of the data collected from all sources and synthesis of the information to determine greenway possibilities, constraints, and issues

Greenway Corridors

Based upon the information synthesized in the inventory and analysis, greenway corridors were identified. Criteria were established to identify the means by which decision makers could make informed decisions about moving ahead with greenway planning and development.

Recommendations and Action Plan

Criteria were applied to identified areas and prioritized potential greenways in order of importance. Recommendations for greenway development were based upon the priorities established in partnership with the Study Committee and Cumberland County. In establishing the recommendations for greenway development and protection, it was clear that there would be a tremendous amount of work and great expense to achieve the vision set forth in the recommendations. Just as clear was the fact that Cumberland County could not possibly do this alone. Both time and financial resources are limited given the County's planning staff levels and budget.

Given these findings and potential for greenways in Cumberland County, the planning team conducted research in other areas of the State to develop case studies of how other counties developed greenways and protected open space and natural resources. Based upon this research, the planning team developed an action plan for helping the County to move ahead with a greenway program. The action plan consists of recommendations for funding, technical support, planning, role of the County, municipal involvement, and public-private partnerships.

Uses of the Study

The study can help Cumberland County in a number of ways. It identifies and sets forth areas of the County that are important for greenway development. Showing these in a plan provides a common reference for people in the County to consider when undertaking land use planning and development. When Cumberland County and the municipalities within the County undertake comprehensive plans, this study should be incorporated as part of those and other related plans.

Grant Assistance

There are a number of grant programs that provide funding for greenway and trail projects. These include:

Keystone Grant Program - The Keystone Grant Program is a program administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Keystone program offers State funding for acquisition of park land and open spaces, development of recreation facilities and trails, river conservation, and planning. A trust fund, a bond issue, and a portion of the realty transfer tax support the program.

Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century – This federal program known as **TEA-21** is administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. The program has about \$80 million remaining in its allotment for the next four years to address transportation alternatives to automobiles. Project funding is available for transportation-related projects including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, education programs

for pedestrians and cyclists, landscaping and beautification, historic preservation, rehabilitation of historic structures for transportation, preservation of abandoned rail corridors, control/removal of outdoor advertising, archeological planning, mitigation of water pollution due to highway run-off, and establishment of transportation museums.

Advisory

This plan serves as a reference document for planning and management. The recommendations of this plan are based upon an investigative and educational process to identify greenway initiatives and opportunities that are important in Cumberland County. The plan is intended to be a living document that will play a role in the decisions the County makes about greenways and trails, parks, financing, management, open space preservation, and related planning efforts. The plan should be reviewed annually prior to budget season. Through this review, accomplishments, needs, and emerging opportunities should be determined. Actions should be adapted to changing circumstances in the County's pursuit of the goals identified. Budgets should then be based on the formulation of an action plan for the upcoming fiscal year. This proves to be a sound way of targeting resources to the actions required to establish a Countywide greenway plan.