

# Trail improvements planned for city parks

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By Rich Lord, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Walk along the trails around Schenley Park's Panther Hollow, and you'll find a lot of nature, combined with a lot of need.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy today plans to announce a \$3 million parks improvement effort that will try to improve the nature and address the need.

The coming work on the Panther Hollow trails, plus other path improvements and the deployment of new signs throughout city parks, marks a shift for a conservancy that had focused on specific projects like the transformation of Schenley Plaza. Now it is increasingly looking at overall improvements that affect all four big city parks.

The conservancy just finished a capital campaign that aimed to raise \$27 million, but instead brought in \$30 million. If it hadn't exceeded its target, thanks in large measure to federal funds steered its way by Sen. Arlen Specter and U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle, it would have been hard to do the impending sign and trail work, said conservancy President and Chief Executive Officer Meg Cheever.

She said the funding allows the conservancy, working with the city, to finally put up new signs unveiled two years ago. Most of it, though, will go toward trails.

The money "is not going to be enough to do all of the trail work in all of the parks," she admitted. It will, though, get the conservancy started on fixing some of the crumbling Depression-era stone bridges that carry the Panther Hollow trail over streams.

That's part of what she calls an eventual "soup-to-nuts restoration of that valley." The conservancy is working with Carnegie Mellon University biomedical engineering professor Jeanne Van Briesen on a study of the hollow's ecology.

"The water quality in the lake and streams really needs to be improved before it is fishable and swimmable," Ms. Cheever said. A new boathouse could be part of the long-term picture. "Everybody, including ourselves, wants to see that come back."

The conservancy is also completing a business plan that Ms. Cheever hopes will lead to a new Frick Environmental Center with financially sustainable programming.

The conservancy has worked with the city's parks and public works departments on improvements like the Schenley Park Visitor Center, the Riverview Park Chapel Shelter, the Highland Park Entry Gardens and additions to Frick Park's Blue Slide Playground.

"Our parks are without a doubt some of the greatest assets we have in the city of Pittsburgh," said Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, "and without the leadership of the Parks Conservancy, I'm not sure that would be the case."

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