

From the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

Riverfront trail plans under way in Allegheny Valley

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By Len Barcoucky, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Allegheny Valley residents are not asking *if* a riverfront trail should be built through their communities, Thomas E. Baxter IV said.

"They want to know *when* it will happen," said Mr. Baxter, executive director of Friends of the Riverfront. "And it is happening as we speak."

Volunteers, for example, have been busy planting spring bulbs and helping with cleanup at the Aspinwall Marina, which was recently acquired by the nonprofit Friends organization.

The marina will continue to provide services for boat operators, but a portion of the property will become part of a planned 10-acre park. The site also will be home to one section of a 26-mile multiuse trail planned along the Allegheny River.

The trail project will be the subject of a public meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday in the Harmar Township Municipal Building, 701 Freeport Road. Allegheny County, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Friends of the Riverfront are hosting the event.

One purpose of the session will be to release the results of a trail development plan. Organizers also hope to gather additional community ideas and build support for the undertaking. The transfer of information should be a two-way street, according to Darla Cravotta, special projects coordinator for Allegheny County. "It's not just a meeting, but a discussion," she said. "We want to hear public comments."

"We're also looking for ideas on implementation," Mr. Baxter said.

When completed, the trail along the north bank of the Allegheny River will extend from Millvale to Harrison in the northeast corner of Allegheny County. Walkers, hikers, runners and cyclists will be able to

transfer in Harrison to the Freeport-Butler trail and, at some point in the future, to the planned Pittsburgh-Harrisburg Mainline Canal Greenway and the Pittsburgh-Erie Greenway. At its Millvale end, the Allegheny Valley trail will link to 22 miles of already completed similar paths in Pittsburgh.

The route of the new trail will pass through 17 communities. Hundreds of people already have taken part in about two dozen meetings dealing with the project. They have included public events similar to the one planned for Wednesday as well as sessions between municipal leaders and project consultants. "Local officials love showing off and sharing their slice of the riverfront," Mr. Baxter said.

Many questions remain to be answered. They include its exact route and how much of it will be shared with cars and trucks. The ideal route would adjoin the river and be set aside for use by pedestrians and nonmotorized vehicles. That likely will not be possible along the entire route, Ms. Cravotta said, because railroad lines, many businesses and homes are close to the Allegheny. Planners will respect the rights of existing occupants of the riverbanks, she said.

Local municipal officials in participating communities will decide where the trail will go, she said.

The community trails initiative is part of the county's comprehensive development plan, which is called "Allegheny Places." The goals of the initiative include providing additional transportation options, linking communities and providing more access to recreational activities along the riverfront.

The effort has received financial support from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Friends of the Riverfront, the Allegheny River Towns Enterprise Zone, Allegheny County, the Fox Chapel District Association and all municipalities along the route.

Free CDs containing the 26-page feasibility study and its eight appendices will be distributed at the Wednesday meeting. Printed copies of the report are available for review in municipal libraries in sponsoring communities. The information also is available on line at

www.friendsoftheriverfront.org. Click on the "Trails" tab at the top of the page and select "trail status." Choose "community initiatives -- Extending the trail up the Allegheny" to see a copy of the report.

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