

Saucon Rail Trail

Status Update, Summer, 2010

Hellertown Borough, Lower Saucon Township, Upper Saucon Township, and Coopersburg Borough have signed a 30-year lease agreement with SEPTA to convert 8 miles of rail bed into a recreational trail linking the communities and their respective parks and businesses. An advisory committee composed of volunteers asked to serve by three of the four municipalities has been formed and the name "Saucon Rail Trail" (SRT) was chosen for the project. To date, Upper Saucon Township has not asked any of its residents to serve on the committee, but we are hopeful that this will change in the near future. The goal of the committee is to meet regularly in a setting open to the public, plan trail development, help secure funding for trail development, and make recommendations to the four municipalities for implementation. The group's efforts have resulted in making an inventory of trail infrastructure, cultural, and natural resources, the completion of a master plan outline, outreach to stakeholders affected by trail development, the creation of webpages and related internet-based information sharing, and drafting the protocols for sustainable fund raising and community partnerships.

Taking advantage of the spectacular environment of Saucon Creek, numerous historical and natural points of interest, and developed recreational facilities, the SRT stands to transform our community and make our good quality of life even better. We are being particularly mindful of the direct and distal impacts that the trail will have on property owners and businesses and have already solicited public input on these issues. We are hopeful that positive impacts to property values bordering the trail, community cooperation, and increased bike and foot traffic to parks and businesses associated with successful rail-trails in surrounding communities will also be realized for the SRT. The advisory group welcomes participation and energy from community members who are passionate about seeing the trail developed. Volunteerism will play a large role in the successful development, maintenance, and any future expansion of the trail.

The four municipalities have entered into discussion regarding an inter-municipal agreement that will guide trail development, allocation of resources, and long-term oversight. The municipalities are committed to trail development in a timely manner, pending available resources, safety, and uniformity in trail design. Concurrently and in accordance with the agendas of their respective governing bodies, the four municipalities are moving forward, guided by the recommendations of the advisory committee. Most of the development activity currently resides through a constructive cooperation in vision, materials, and resources shared by Lower Saucon Township and Hellertown Borough. These two municipalities are committed to beginning trail development in 2010 and have taken solid steps in seeing part or all of their sections of the trail covering ~2.5 miles open before the end of the year. Over the next few months, trail development in these municipalities will focus on laying the trail bed material, installing fencing and related safety guides at bridge crossings, updating parking and vehicular/pedestrian flow of traffic at trail access points, updating road crossings with appropriate safety materials and devices, and partnering with volunteers, such as the Boy Scouts, for signage and information kiosks. We are hopeful that Upper Saucon Township and Coopersburg will soon be able to follow Hellertown and Lower Saucon in coordinated development of their sections of the trail.

The pace of trail development will hinge on the availability of funds. Unfortunately, the project does not lend itself to traditional sources of public funding because of specifics of the lease agreement. As a result, soliciting donations and coordinating private fund raising are an important activity of the advisory committee. Donations can be directed to any of the four municipalities. Donors should contact the Township or Borough managers prior to the donation and specify that it is to be used specifically for Saucon Rail Trail development (Hellertown, 610-838-7041; LST, 610-865-3291; Coopersburg, 610-282-3307; UST, 610-282-1171). The advisory committee has forwarded guidelines to the municipalities that provide for corporate sponsorship of trail components and segments that can bear advertising.

Our next meeting is Monday September 27th at 7:00 PM at Hellertown Borough Hall. Future meetings, a map of the SRT, the master outline, and project announcements can be found under the Parks and Recreation tab at: <http://www.lowersaucontownship.org/>. Come join us.

The SRT Advisory Committee.

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