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## Input on trails path wanted

By yourfoxchapel

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Friends of the Riverfront will hold three public meetings in March to go over plans for a 30-mile trail stretching along the Allegheny River from Millvale to Freeport.

The public is urged to attend and contribute to the meetings tentatively scheduled for March 2 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Millvale borough building, 501 Lincoln Ave.; March 4 in Natrona from 6 to 8 p.m. location pending, and March 6 from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Boyd Community Center, 1220 Powers Run Road, O'Hara.

Known as the Community Trails Initiative--as 17 municipalities are involved--the project is a missing link for regional trails such as the Three Rivers Heritage Trail to the Armstrong Trail, the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail and the Pittsburgh to Harrisburg Mainline Canal Greenway.

Communities involved in the initiative include: Pittsburgh, Millvale, Shaler, Etna, Sharpsburg, Aspinwall, Fox Chapel, O'Hara, Blawnox, Harmar, Cheswick, Springdale, Springdale Township, Frazer, Tarentum, Brackenridge and Harrison.

Large maps detailing the preferred and practical routes of the trail will be on display at the meetings and will be discussed.

McTish Kunkel & Associates of Allentown has produced preliminary maps detailing proposed routes of the trail.

"This is the beginning of a process to engage municipalities, leaders and the public," said Tom Baxter, executive director of Friends of the Riverfront. "So now is the time to be involved," he added.

Baxter's group has been a key player in pushing for the trail, along with Allegheny County officials and other members of the Allegheny Valley Community Trail Initiative, a coalition of local officials, trail groups and greenway advocates.

After the March meetings, trail officials will strategize on what sections of the trail can be built soon and then will pursue grant and other financing options, according to Baxter.

In the Fox Chapel Area School District, the proposed trail goes along the Allegheny River at the 13th Street boat ramp in Sharpsburg and at the Chapel Harbor section of O'Hara, and winds through secondary streets close to the river and main thoroughfares such as Freeport Road in Sharpsburg.

Active railroads and privately owned property along the river make it difficult to wind along the riverbanks.

The trail does not go through the main business districts of Sharpsburg, Aspinwall and Blawnox.

"Overwhelmingly, the citizens of this area really care about making this happen," said Susan Crookston, of Aspinwall, president of the Fox Chapel District Association.

The nonprofit has raised more than \$60,000 for local trail projects in the last several years. In fact, the group contributed to help pay for the preliminary work of the Allegheny Valley Trail.

"Ideally, people would love it to go along the river," she said. "With the railroad so close, there are so many safety issues and then there's personal property."

Crookston stressed that if anyone has ideas to change the route--for instance to take the trail into the business section of Aspinwall--they need to become part of the process and attend the meeting.

"One of the important things here is that this is a proposal," she said. "We as citizens have to agree and have to make it happen."

Visit [www.friendsoftheriverfront.org](http://www.friendsoftheriverfront.org) [1] to confirm meeting dates and to download PDFs of the trail route later this week.

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