

Natrona working for link to trails

By Mary Ann Thomas
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As planners plot the route of a 270-mile bike and walking trail from Pittsburgh to Erie, community activists in Natrona want their town on the map.

"It's coming here one way or another. Which way, I'm not sure of," said Pat Walters, secretary of Natrona Comes Together Association, a nonprofit community group.

Association representatives have met with Allegheny County officials about the trail and have been attending rail-to-trail meetings. A path through Natrona is sketched in a preliminary trail route from Pittsburgh to Erie.

The Erie-Pittsburgh Trail Alliance, a conglomeration of trail associations and other rail-to-trail advocates, is working on the details of connecting a series of community trails, many of which traverse the defunct routes of the Pennsylvania Railroad, into a seamless path stretching from Allegheny to Erie counties.

For Natrona, a bike lane on River Road seems like a natural course to take as well as a trek along the Allegheny River, but the Association and the Trail Alliance want to wind around the ATI Allegheny Ludlum Corp.'s plant and Lock and Dam No. 4.

As Tarentum and Brackenridge already have parks along the river, the stumbling block is the ATI Allegheny Ludlum Corp.'s mills, said Bill Godfrey of Natrona, president of Natrona Comes Together.

"We plan to get a presentation to approach Allegheny Technologies," Godfrey said. "We're going to have to form some sort of a partnership with them down the line."

Godfrey and Walters are unsure what kind of trail access is possible with the construction of a new \$1.5 billion hot strip mill planned for ATI Allegheny Ludlum Corp.'s plant. Until there is a meeting with mill officials, it's difficult to pinpoint how much of the trail can lace the riverfront.

But, after discussing plans with Allegheny County officials, Walters says the county can help secure grants for the Natrona portion of the Pittsburgh-to-Erie trail. Such a regional route could make the town a destination, which fits in well with the Natrona Comes Together redevelopment plans.

By mounting fund-raising and securing grants, the Natrona group has been working on a half-million-dollar playground along River Avenue.

With a trail in town, Godfrey would like his group to produce a map pointing out

sites of historical and cultural interest.

"We're hoping for a kayak launch, canoe rental, or restaurant to cater to people walking the trail," said Godfrey. "We're just like bees collecting honey."

Although there isn't a time line for the Pittsburgh-to-Erie Trail -- results of a study for the Allegheny River portion of the trail are expected early next year -- Walters said her group is ready.

"We'll do whatever it takes," she said. "Whatever help they need."

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