

# **Valley News Dispatch**

## **Route announced for recreational trail along Allegheny River**

By Mary Ann Thomas

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TARENTUM — Friends of the Riverfront and Allegheny County officials Wednesday evening announced the proposed route of a recreation trail along the Allegheny River stretching from Millvale to Freeport through 18 municipalities.

More than 60 people attended the meeting in the Allegheny-Kiski Valley Heritage Museum to learn more about out how the trail will wind through their town. Another meeting is scheduled at the Boyd Community Center in O'Hara at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

The Community Trail Initiative wants to fill a missing link to other trails in the state that go to Erie, Harrisburg, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.

The trail would pass through Pittsburgh, Millvale, Shaler, Etna, Sharpsburg, Aspinwall, Fox Chapel, O'Hara, Blawnox, Harmar, Cheswick, Springdale, Springdale Township, Frazer, Tarentum, Brackenridge, Harrison and Freeport.

Given the close quarters of many of the rivers towns in the region, trail designers are threading the proposed walking and biking trail around some major obstacles such as the Allegheny Ludlum steel mill in Harrison, other businesses and homes, and railroad tracks along the Allegheny River.

Preliminary routing of the trail is along roughly 16 miles of railroad property, six miles of public land, two miles of private land and two miles of existing trails.

"The reason why this project will get done and we get the money is that we have 18 municipalities all involved in this effort," said Darla Cravotta, special project coordinator for Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato.

"That is what makes it jazzy, and that's how we're going to get it funded," she said.

With grants already paying for the preliminary trail design by McTish Kunkel & Associates of Allentown, Cravotta said the project could attract funding from the state, county and private foundations.

But for now, she and Tom Baxter, executive director of nonprofit Friends of the Riverfront, are stopping in local communities to present their plans. They want to meet with residents to get their ideas and support.

They are taking a piecemeal approach to developing the trail, one community at a time.

After considering public comments, the trail organizers will come back to the communities with more detailed plans this summer, according to Cravotta.

And then it's on to fundraising and picking what portions of the trail to develop first.

"These things are tough to get started and build momentum to move forward," said Jim Bonner, executive of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania.

"But once they move along, they will get people on board," said Bonner, adding, "and these people â€” the Friends of the Riverfront and the county â€” know what they are doing."

A trail linking Pittsburgh to the Alle-Kiski Valley would open up opportunities locally, said Bonner, a longtime Tarentum resident. "People from Pittsburgh come up here now to go the Butler-Freeport Trail and Todd Nature Reserve."

In fact, communities are vying for a piece of the tourist action, trying to showcase their towns.

Revitalization groups such as Natrona Comes Together and Springdale STAR are looking to bring visitors into town and show scenic slices of the riverfront â€” a challenge for much of the trail because of railroad tracks and businesses blocking the view.

"It's more appealing to look at the river than the front of a business and older homes," said Debbie Sigmund, vice present of Springdale STAR.

She wants some river frontage when the trail comes through her town, saying, "This is where Rachel Carson's home was and she swam in the river."

*Mary Ann Thomas can be reached at [mthomas@tribweb.com](mailto:mthomas@tribweb.com) or 412-782-2121 x1510.*

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