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Ohio River Trail Council

"Joining communities through fitness, recreation, heritage and transportation networks"

Ohio River Trail and Safe Communities

The Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) is committed to developing safe trails as well as protecting landowners' rights. As with many public works projects citizens may have concerns when a trail is proposed through their community, however the ORTC's community outreach group is available to answer any questions including apprehensions about liability, security, crime, trespassing, privacy, property values, funding and community cost issues. The Ohio River Trail Council welcomes community involvement in every stage of development from the acquisition and design to the construction and maintenance. Often former citizens who initially opposed trails become the most ardent trail users and vocal proponents. The ORTC invites you to attend our public meetings and serve on the trail advisory committee in order to have direct input into the development of the Ohio River Trail Project. Presently there are 1,683 open rail-trails in the U.S. for a total of 19,872 miles. In addition, there are 721 rail-trail projects for a total of 9,232 miles. With nearly 27,000 miles of open and project rail-trail, it is easily concluded from all that success that a trail will have a positive rather than negative effect on your community.

Natural open space and trails are prime attractions for potential homebuyers. In 2002, a survey of two-thousand recent homebuyers, co-sponsored by the National Association of Home Builders and the National Association of Realtors, inquired about the "importance of community amenities," and greenways finished second only to highway access. In 1995 according to research conducted by American Lives, Inc. for the real estate industry, 77.7 per cent of all home buyers and shoppers in the study rated natural open space as either "essential" or "very important". Trails are well known to increase real property values and improve the marketability of property located near greenspace. Crime on trails is not a common occurrence. In fact, greenways remain much safer than many other environments and can be one of the safest places in the community. Vandalism, graffiti, littering and dumping is more likely to occur in an isolated corridor than a well-used and maintained trail with clear rules and regulations. Crime generally does not occur in places where there are many people. Positive-looking places tend to encourage positive behavior. Nonetheless, crime does occur on roads, parking lots, in shopping malls, office buildings, airports, and at zoos. However, no one would rationally argue that we should not build any of the above because crime will occur there. The same should be true for trails. The most frequent crime along rail trails is an occasional bicycle theft. The concern that trails increase crime is not supported by actual experience and numerous studies.

Even though trail crime is rare and trails have an excellent public safety record, the ORTC considers it a legitimate concern for residents and trail users and should be treated accordingly. There are several methods for addressing such concerns and minimizing the potential for crime. Trail safety is maximized by the presence of other users, which helps to minimize undesirable behavior. Good trail maintenance is an effective way of deterring crime. Eliminating overgrown vegetation and tall shrubs will minimize hiding places along the trail and maintain long sight lines for users. Installing security lighting at trailheads and in parking lots also improves trail safety. Keeping all trail corridors clean and well maintained increases the feeling of community ownership of the trail. Volunteer or professional trail patrols are also useful mitigation strategies. These patrols range from informal monthly clean up and maintenance crews to daily patrols that provide maps, information and emergency assistance.

Privacy is a common fear before a trail is built, but after a trail is constructed, most abutters are very happy to live nearby. Surveys have sought the opinions of trail neighbors to evaluate the issue of privacy. If an adjacent landowner requests, a fence can be erected as part of the trail construction funds, at no cost to the abutter. As an alternative to a fence, shrubbery can be planted to provide screening. With other trails, the experience has been that many abutters who have had fencing installed later remove the fencing because it is unnecessary and blocks their own access to the trail! Several large studies of rail trails have revealed that neighbors become the most frequent users of the trails. It is also worthwhile to note that trees may need to be removed to install fencing and that certain types of fencing can impede the movement of wildlife.



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Trespassing is very uncommon among trail users and can be made clear that they are not welcomed on adjoining land, which can be aided with signs, vegetative screening, shrubbery and fencing. In addition, trails have frequent road crossings so that it is easy for trail users to get on and off the trail without going through private property. With respect to parking, most trail users will use designated areas. Often parking facilities are designed into the trail plans. In other cases nearby municipal facilities already exist or agreements will be negotiated with commercial property owners. The only motorized vehicles allowed on the trail would be emergency vehicles, maintenance vehicles and motorized wheel chairs. Other motorized vehicles definitely are not permitted. Bollards at the intersection of the trail with roads will also provide a physical deterrent to motorized vehicles on the trail.

Communities will face the same liability as they currently have for accidents on the roads, sidewalks, recreation areas and conservation areas. These liability costs are usually minimal and are capped by statute. From the municipality perspective the risk of liability for bicycle and pedestrian use of trails are less than those associated with similar use of streets and highways. The relative safety of trails is one of the major reasons why they are so popular with families, cyclist and pedestrians. All fifty (50) states have Recreational Use Statues that provide liability protection to landowners who allow the public to use their land for recreational purposes. Under these statutes, no landowner is liable for injuries that occurred on the trail. In addition, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy surveyed 61 rails-with-trails in 2000 and found that existing state, county or city insurance insures the vast majority of trails.

Not much litter is expected along the trail. The kinds of people who use the trail are generally people who appreciate the outdoors and respect it. Recent Trail User Surveys indicate the age of the majority of trail users is forty-five (45) and up and the gender mix is approximately forty-five percent (45%) female and fifty-five percent (55%) male; sixty-four percent (64%) had at least a college education; twenty-four percent (24%) of the respondents indicated that they had earned a degree above the undergraduate level and eleven percent (11%) of respondents indicated that they graduated from high school. Fifty-four percent (54%) indicated a household income between \$40,000 and \$120,000. Sixteen percent (16%) of respondents reported a household income less than \$40,000 and 12 percent (12%) of respondents reported a household income greater than \$120,000. The average income for the local users was about 60,000, while the average income for the nonlocals was greater than \$80,000.

Sincerely,

Dr. Vincent Troia

Dr. Vincent Troia
Chief Executive Chairmen & CEO
January 16, 2012
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