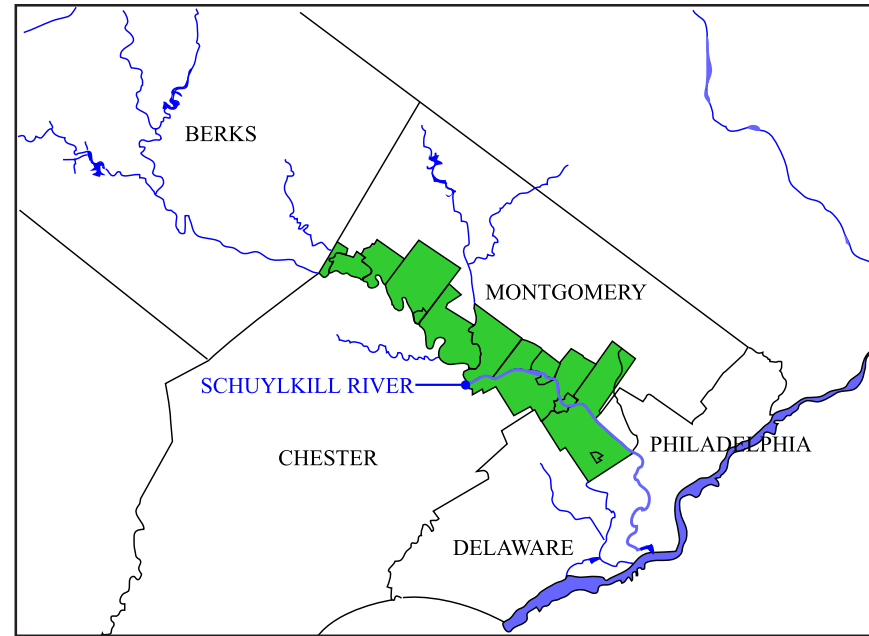




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BUILDING A GREENWAY COMMUNITY

A SCHUYLKILL RIVER GREENWAY STEWARDSHIP STUDY FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SPRING 2002

The Schuylkill River Greenway Community

Montgomery County is blessed with a river of striking beauty, a centuries-old culture, and a diverse landscape of town, industry, and countryside. The County has a unique opportunity to create a “greenway community” along its 42-mile segment of the Schuylkill River. This window of opportunity is narrow, however, and closing fast.

To envision the future of the Schuylkill River Greenway, we must look at the river’s journey through history. The river’s water powered nineteenth century gristmills, setting the stage for a long period of industrial use in the Schuylkill River Valley. As industry prospered, its by-products turned the river into an unfortunate casualty of progress, ignored as the region’s “hidden river”.

The 1970’s saw a major decline for many of the heavy industries and with them, the fortunes of once-bustling river towns. Ironically, the recent benign neglect of the river has preserved old foundries, railroad corridors, and coal desilting basins as potential heritage sites. These relics now offer special opportunities for adaptive reuse.



NOW is the time . . .

- to build our Greenway Community.
- to establish the Schuylkill River Greenway.
- to create a river legacy for 21st Century Montgomery County.

Today a much cleaner river has resulted from a growing awareness of environmental protection issues. Interest in trails, greenways, and river-based recreation is at an all-time high. In addition, river communities are focusing on open space preservation and the reclamation of “brownfield” sites.

As real estate values rise along the river, greenway sites are also increasingly attractive for private development. Competition is keen for undeveloped properties with a riverfront address, and opportunities for greenway connections and preservation are rapidly disappearing. Environmental cleanup programs for contaminated sites, and transportation initiatives such as the proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro, promise revitalization of former industrial areas and a renewed commitment to “smart growth”.

Immediate action will be required to combine these diverse interests, resources, and opportunities into a connected greenway community. Recognizing this narrow window of opportunity, Montgomery County has prepared this *Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study* as a first step in reincorporating the river into our shared fabric of regional life.

The Schuylkill River Greenway Recommendations

Creating the Schuylkill River Greenway Community will need the partnership and participation of everyone who benefits from, or whose actions and decisions impact upon, the river and its greenway corridor. These partnerships will become a model for greenway development in areas of intense development pressure.

- Priority Action 6.....** *Complete the Schuylkill River Trail.*
- County: Acquire rights-of-way for the trail.
Work with various partners to complete the trail.
Provide funding and staff expertise.
- Municipalities: Promote/facilitate completion of the trail and connector trails.
Promote public support for trail implementation and activities.
- Others: Promote and provide trail education; adopt trails.
Raise funds for trail connections and trail education programs.
- Priority Action 7.....** *Continue to Protect Open Space in the Greenway.*
- County: Provide funding, expertise, and management.
Identify priorities; help coordinate coalitions and projects.
- Municipalities: Acquire and manage open space; protect natural resources.
- Others: Build preservation coalitions; raise funds; educate property owners.
- Priority Action 8.....** *Update and Implement Municipal Vision Plans.*
- County: Review existing plans; provide models and technical expertise.
- Municipalities: Incorporate Greenway objectives into development/planning projects.
- Others: Support/promote community visions and innovative Greenway projects.
- Priority Action 9.....** *Promote Community Revitalization.*
- County: Provide funding, expertise, models, and coordination for revitalization.
- Municipalities: Identify revitalization goals and promote initiatives that encourage adaptive reuse of resources.
Partner with private sector in implementing revitalization initiatives.
- Others: Partner in revitalization projects; invest in community revitalization.
- Priority Action 10.....** *Implement Greenway-Friendly Land-Use Regulations.*
- County: Promote regional planning; provide technical expertise.
Evaluate existing land-use regulations; provide models and examples.
- Municipalities: Evaluate existing land-use regulations in light of promoting the Greenway.
Incorporate greenway objectives into local planning and development activity.
Participate in regional greenway planning initiatives.
- Others: Support local land-use decisions that promote creation of the Greenway.
- Support Actions.....** *Establish a Framework for Volunteer Greenway Maintenance.
Begin Public Education Programs About Greenway and Watershed Topics.*

The Schuylkill River Greenway Recommendations

The Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study contains ten priority actions that are essential components of building the Greenway Community. Additional support actions that begin to implement the greenway have also been identified.

Priority Action 1..... *Adopt the Greenway Study.*

- County: Adoption by Commissioners in Spring 2001
- Municipalities: Endorsement by elected officials beginning Summer 2001
- Others: Endorsement by conservation organizations, civic groups, other counties, major landowners, etc. beginning Summer 2001

Priority Action 2..... *Prepare a Corridor Management Plan.*

- County: Provide matching grant funds, staff coordination, and technical expertise.
- Municipalities: Participate on CMP subcommittees and early demonstration projects.
- Others: Provide input into CMP; facilitate early demonstration projects.

Priority Action 3..... *Establish Greenway Administration Responsibilities.*

- County: Take lead in Greenway Startup Phase.
Coordinate implementation of Greenway administration.
Share in permanent administrative responsibilities.
- Municipalities: Share in permanent Greenway administration responsibilities.
- Others: Advise on establishment of Greenway administrative approach.
Play continuing role in long-term Greenway administration.

Priority Action 4..... *Fund Greenway Implementation.*

- County: Provide match for federal, state, and foundation funds.
Continue funding County Greenway programs.
- Municipalities: Provide match for county grants.
Develop municipal Greenway funding.
Work with local developers to provide funds for the Greenway.
- Others: Access local and regional funds to leverage county and state grants.

Priority Action 5..... *Engage in Partnerships to Build a Greenway Community.*

- County: Promote and support public/private partnerships.
Coordinate creation of Friends of the Greenway groups.
Promote regional partnerships and planning initiatives.
- Municipalities: Promote and participate in local partnerships.
Work on joint municipal Greenway planning and zoning.
- Others: Work with the County and municipalities on Greenway projects.
Promote stewardship and Greenway-friendly initiatives.

- Support Actions.....** *Identify and Implement Early Demonstration Projects.*
Coordinate Greenway Implementation with Related County/Regional Initiatives.
Market the Greenway to Promote Stewardship and Public Support.

The Schuylkill River Greenway Vision

The Schuylkill River Greenway in Montgomery County will be a continuous 42-mile riverfront system of trails, protected open space, revitalized towns, and connected suburban development that is designed to enhance river access and recreation, preserve key natural resources, and foster economic development, inter-municipal planning, and smart growth among the watershed communities.

Imagine.....

Clean water, protected green space, continuous trails, and vital, healthy greenway communities that are coordinated by an experienced management coalition of public and private sector partners.

Greenway Now.....

The Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study defines a common purpose to unite riverfront communities in maintaining and enhancing the river's environmental quality while allowing for its prudent use.

The hidden beauty of the Schuylkill is rapidly being rediscovered. A walk along the riverbanks or a canoe trip down its sparkling waters reveals a river rejuvenated by time and hard work. People now seek to live, work, and play near the once "hidden river".

Our historic region is being revitalized with a focus on the Schuylkill River. Protecting the river and featuring its unique assets is the unifying principle of our new greenway community.



With our greenway vision and our common greenway goals, we can ensure that the increasing development pressures in Montgomery County do not close off our chance for a comprehensive network of recreation, transportation, economic opportunity and community revitalization in the Schuylkill River Valley.

This Greenway Stewardship Study charts a course for Montgomery County and its riverfront communities as partners to navigate the 21st Century Schuylkill River.

The Schuylkill River Greenway Community Goals

The Schuylkill River Greenway Community Goals reflect common principles that are shared by Montgomery County, each of the County's riverfront communities, and the many stakeholders and interested residents that have communicated a vision for a connected greenway along the river.

- Goal 1.....** Preserve natural resources of the Schuylkill River Valley environment, while revitalizing existing riverfront communities in ways that respect the characteristics and qualities of the Schuylkill River.
- Goal 2.....** Provide access to the water and encourage recreation along the river in ways that minimize conflicts between river users and also protect the natural features and sense of solitude along the river.
- Goal 3.....** Protect water quality, enhance natural diversity, and improve the overall aesthetic appearance of the river.



- Goal 4.....** Promote sustainability and economic development in existing riverfront communities.
- Goal 5.....** Conserve and enhance the cultural resources of the river corridor.
- Goal 6.....** Preserve important open space lands for passive recreation, riparian buffers protection, and protection of native species habitat along the river.
- Goal 7.....** Establish a cooperative framework for education, planning, and coordination between Montgomery County and its public and private Greenway partners.

The Schuylkill River Greenway Plan

The plan divides the Greenway into four zones, as illustrated below. These Greenway zones establish a framework for planning, municipal cooperation, and coordination. This framework simplifies the complex nature of the Greenway Community by permitting specific focus on the issues within each zone.



In suburban communities, the emphasis in the Stewardship Zone is open space preservation.

In river towns, the emphasis in the Stewardship Zone is redevelopment of the historic urban core to enhance local economies and to help relieve development pressures in adjacent suburban communities.

GREENWAY ZONES:

The River Zone – the Water: River Zone issues include water quality and habitat, recreational use, dams, dredging of the river pools, and preservation of scenic views. The River Zone is the life-blood of the Greenway.

The Riparian Zone – Preservation and Enhancement of the Riverbank: The Riparian Zone will promote best management principles in riparian corridors along the river's edge. These BMPs include erosion control, reintroduction of native plant species, and sensitive access to the river.

The Stewardship Zone – Creating a Local Vision for the Greenway: In river towns, community revitalization is encouraged within the Stewardship Zone. In suburban communities, open space preservation and protection is emphasized.

The Community Zone – Watershed Communities as Stewards of the Greenway: The Community Zone empowers the entire municipality to provide a framework for inter-municipal cooperation and planning, and to create resident awareness about the Greenway, the river, and the effect that each resident has on the river's preservation and enhancement.