

Allegheny County officials plan 128-mile greenspace along the region's rivers

By Zandy Dudiak
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Allegheny County officials are planning what they call the longest urban linear park in the world, touching more than half of the county's 130 municipalities.

The 128-mile riverfront park would cover the banks of all four rivers -- the Allegheny, Monongahela, Ohio and Youghiogheny.

Officials said it will take several years to secure 30-35 miles of riverfront to close all the gaps between recreational areas. The banks of the Ohio River could prove toughest, they said.

Some communities have begun developments that will complement the planned system.

With more than \$3 million in private investment, the Millvale Riverfront Park is home to Three Rivers Rowing Association, Mr. Small's Skate Park, bike and kayak rental, a borough pavilion available for rent, and the Heritage Trail for hiking and biking.

Building the park had a domino effect, bringing new customers into the nearby Millvale business district, said county Councilman Jim Burn. That kind of impact is what county officials are hoping for with the regional riverfront park.

Up river, a public boat access in Sharpsburg should open this summer, said Sean Brady, assistant executive director of Venture Outdoors, which provides about 100 recreational programs along the rivers each year.

Steel City Rowing Club in Verona and Friends of the Riverfront built a dock for non-motorized boats and fishing a few years ago on the border of Verona and Penn Hills, said Dori Tompa, rowing club executive director. As part of the same \$1.6 million project, Steel City Rowing plans to build a "green" boathouse.

Near the entrance to the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium, along Butler Street, the site of a former bridge could be excavated to allow access to an area for soccer fields, said county Councilman Dave Fawcett.

The Ohio riverfront poses the biggest challenge, Brady said.

CSX railroad tracks run down one side of the river and Norfolk Southern tracks run up the other.

Making the park a reality is a matter of "connecting dots," Brady said. But

planners don't know how to do that on the Ohio, he said.

The Ohio has "the biggest opportunities but the biggest challenges," Fawcett said.

"The Ohio is still rather industrialized," said Tom Baxter, executive director of Friends of the Riverfront.

Established trails in the area offer one bright spot, they said. The Montour Trail connects to the riverfront and the Chateau Trail extends from the North Shore to the vicinity of Brunot Island.