

TO: Area News Media

FROM: Steve Kusheloff

DATE: September 13, 2011

SUBJECT: FIRST FRIDAY EVENT TO FOCUS ON CONNECTORS TO SUSQUEHANNA RIVER WALK AND RIVER WALK EXTENSION

It was one of the Susquehanna Greenway's original demonstration projects. Local officials spent years pursuing state and federal funds for it, and it was completed by Lycoming County in early 2010. On October 7, the Susquehanna River Walk will be the centerpiece of a *First Friday* event beginning in Williamsport and stretching across the river. Several activities are planned, all of which are open to the public and accessible via walking, biking, or trolley. Pre-registration is not required, but participants are asked to call 1-877-883-4791 to assist those planning the activities.¹

The River Walk is a four-mile long paved bikeway/walkway loop along the levee system in Williamsport, South Williamsport, and Loyalsock Township.

"The River Walk," says Jerry Walls, Chairman, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, "meets so many of the Greenway's original objectives — raising awareness of the River; bringing communities together and connecting them to natural, cultural, and recreational resources within the Susquehanna watershed, while promoting active, healthy lifestyles."

"The Greenway Partnership's support for the project," said Walls, "and the high priority we placed on it is one of many factors leading to funding and eventual construction of the River Walk" The \$2.5 million project, carried out by Lycoming County, was primarily funded with state and federal grants administered by PennDOT and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

As part of October 7th's event, an additional one-and-a-half miles of River Walk will be dedicated in South Williamsport. The addition will link to the Borough's recreation complex.

The day's initial activity, however, is scheduled for the Genetti Hotel in Williamsport at 3:00 p.m. when the City's *Walkable and Bikable Communities* plan will be unveiled. Refreshments will be available and information provided on walking, active living, and similar pursuits. The plan is being developed through the SEDA-COG Community Resource Center (CRC), which also headed the original Susquehanna Greenway planning effort.

According to Brian Auman, a landscape architect with the CRC, "The Walkable and Bikeable Communities project is an outgrowth of our work on the Susquehanna Greenway. There are many physical barriers to walking and biking in our communities and, through this project, we hope to raise awareness of those issues with residents and local leaders. This project comes at such an opportune time as Williamsport is making great progress in becoming a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly city."

Underscoring the "bikeable" aspect of the plan, the Genetti Hotel and Williamsport Rotary Club will kick off their Bike Share program, which loans out bikes on an hourly or day-long use for free. Borrowers will be asked to leave their drivers license behind as security.

Following activities at the Hotel, the walking and biking tour moves to the corner of High and Walnut streets where phase one of the City's *Pathways to Health* will be dedicated. The project, which is currently under construction, will improve pedestrian and vehicular access to Williamsport Regional Medical Center, and promote active, healthy living through its connection to the River Walk.

The day's events also include unveiling of a sculpture being prepared for mounting on a flood wall along the River at Maynard Street. When completed, the 35-foot piece of art will depict fish species in the Susquehanna's West Branch. It is the work of Williamsport artist Mike Patterson.

Looking ahead to October 7, Walls said, “The Williamsport area is a bike- and pedestrian-friendly community, and we want the region to know it. In the not-to-distant future, there will be over 120 miles of walking and biking trails stretching from Wellsboro to Muncy, and we’ll be right in the middle of it.”

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