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Susquehanna Greenways Partnership pushes 'River Towns' to promote economy, nature

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By JIM RUNKLE (jrunkle@lockhaven.com) , The Express

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LOCK HAVEN -Work to improve the environment, beautify the community and help the economy, all in one fell swoop ... What's not to like?

Representatives of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership approached the Clinton County commissioners with just that argument Monday.

Two Greenway representatives advocated for the county's participation and to encourage local governments to consider becoming an official "River Towns" sponsor.

Executive Director Trish Carothers and Greenways Coordinator Alice Trowbridge offered the county board an extensive overview of the program, while outlining the potential benefits to local, river-connected communities.

The SGP has a number of programs promoting development and beautification of some 500 miles of the Susquehanna River, with the focus being on one-mile swathes on either side of the bank.

The nonprofit Greenway organization seeks to link natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources along the 500-mile corridor of the river in Pennsylvania.

The agency has been working since 2001 to develop a corridor of interconnected river towns, trails, parks, river access points and natural areas linking people to the river region's heritage and the recreation it offers.

As for the River Towns program, protecting local natural resources and helping to facilitate job growth are among the partnership's goals.

Commissioners Joel Long, Pete Smeltz and Jeff Snyder were intrigued by the idea, and wondered aloud how it might be incorporated or melded with the various recreational and outdoor opportunities the county is already supporting in connection with the river.

In the end, the interest was there from the county board, but actual participation will have to wait until they and their administrative staff can determine how this particular piece fits into the puzzle of myriad outdoor interests that exist in Clinton County.

A small group of representatives from Downtown Lock Haven Inc. and Lock Haven University are working on a River Town designation application and assessment, and intend to garner support from the city and its neighbor across the river, Woodward Township.

The assessment process will identify the strengths of both communities as they relate to waterfront activities, from concerts to boating to festivals to fundraising and more.

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Carothers said "River Town" is an attractive message that can garner support for small or large projects, from widely varied groups with and different levels of manpower.

Communities that join the program, she said, are asked to embrace their riverfront as a focal point for recreation, tourism and economic development - both for short-term projects and long-term improvements.

Trowbridge said the Greenway staff stands ready to offer a variety of technical assistance in creating a community vision statement for reconnecting with the river, bringing community members and river enthusiasts with diverse interests to the same table, and developing connections between downtown and the river.

Beyond its standard offer of plan development and staff contributions, Trowbridge said there are grant opportunities out there, and mentioned in particular the Peer-to-Peer program run by the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which could provide up to \$10,000 for a nature-related initiative, upon commitment of a \$1,000 local share.

County Planner Tim Holladay and Recreation Planner Greg Smith noted a number of current projects that might lend themselves to inclusion in the program, including ongoing efforts to connect the Pine Creek Trailhead in Jersey Shore to the Castanea Train Station Trailhead, via a "Rails-To-Trails" effort that passes through Pine Creek and Wayne Townships.

Smith also noted a number of smaller projects involving increased access to the river, including handicapped fishing platforms and passive access to the river for canoes and boats.

Any community located within the Susquehanna Greenway corridor can submit an application (view map at www.susquehannagreenway.org). The application must be completed by a local town official.

Trowbridge said it will be necessary to create or assign a River Town Team to work with the River Town coordinator through this process, and an assessment will be necessary to "establish a benchmark and structure" for the effort.

Carothers also noted that the requirements include hosting an annual event or project that lends itself to the River Town concept.

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