

City takes River Town lead

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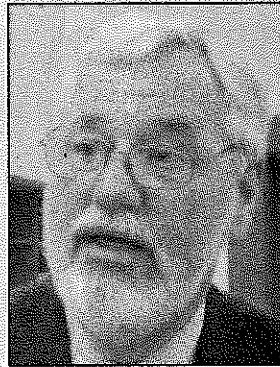
LOCK HAVEN – The city is, and always has been, a river town.

And now, City Council has given its support to a local effort to attain official “River Town” status.

Susquehanna Greenway Partnership offers the River Towns Technical Assistance Program to help communities return to the river and their historic downtowns.

The partnership’s goals include helping towns along the Susquehanna create river parks, bike trails, walking trails and water access points; attract and promote sustainable economic development; protect water quality; and lessen flood damage with green infrastructure.

The program’s focus on attracting businesses and tourists makes it a natural for Downtown Lock Haven



**Commissioner Pete
Smeltz**

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Inc., the nonprofit agency that boosts the city's shopping district. The organization is already on board with the idea, and it fielded a group of supporters at City Council's meeting Monday evening.

Downtown Board members and merchants attended, including Pete Lopes, tourism director for the Clinton County Economic Partnership.

Two county commissioners, Pete Smeltz and Jeff Snyder, also showed their support for the idea.

Lock Haven University has expressed an interest and is hosting a public forum about the River Town program for everyone interested on Thursday, March 27 at 7 p.m. in Durrwachter Alumni Conference Center. The evening begins with an informational open house at 6 p.m.

The benefits of becoming an official River Town include help toward building or sprucing up an attractive riverfront. This in turn can draw tourists, attract businesses and jobs, increase property values and tax revenues, and encourage healthy exercise.

Susquehanna Greenway Partnership has been working since 2001 to connect communities along the 500-mile river, Alice Trowbridge, the partnership's greenway coordinator, told City Council. This giant greenway is being developed community by community, she said.

The partnership can bring the city into this current of connection.

It can offer technical help for planning and project development, money to make things happen, and marketing through its website, newsletter, press releases and social media.

But first, Lock Haven must be deemed a "River Town."

"It's something that's right in our wheelhouse," Mayor Richard P. Vilello Jr. said. "We've been building on this for the past 15 to 20 years with downtown revitalization."

He pointed to things like the streetscape projects that continue to beautify the downtown and give a tip of the hat to its history, the scenic Riverwalk atop the levee that attracts pedestrians, and annual events already held on the river including the summer concerts and the boat regattas. Also this year, the river between Lock Haven and Woodward Township will host the USCA National Canoe and Kayak Championships.

As a River Town, the city can go after grants it otherwise would not be eligible for, Vilello said. A \$1,000 local match allows a River Town to apply for up to \$10,000 in the form of a Peer-to-Peer state grant. And, such a grant might provide matching money for other funding, Vilello said.

"There's really no downfall" in trying for the status, Downtown Manager Natasha Gorham said.

Downtown Lock Haven Inc. will recommend members for the "Green Team" that council is required to appoint to get the ball rolling and apply for River Town designation.

The city also is required to promote the river as a resource in at least two ways, Councilman Ted Forbes reported, requirements that seem entirely possible for Lock Haven to meet.

"It's a wonderful program, and I think we should get on this really quickly," he said.

Council voted unanimously to step up as a river town.

"We appreciate that Lock Haven City will be on the forefront of this effort," Smeltz said. "We think it's something other communities should consider."

The county commissioners heard a presentation about the program and are supportive. The Woodward Township supervisors also learned of the program recently but chose not to act on it yet.

Smeltz also spoke of potential trail connections that he said this board of commissioners supports. A long-term objective is to connect Castanea to Jersey Shore, and the city's riverfront to Castanea. A mountain bike trail also has been proposed that would involve the Zindel Park area, in the city's watershed.

"I compliment the city for being leaders in the community to get some things done," he said.

Also representing Susquehanna Greenway Partnership at the meeting were Trish Carothers, executive director, and Zac Pyle, River Town coordinator.

VIDEO MARKETING

City Council also voted to sign a three-year contract with CGI Communications Inc. to film and produce short videos, about three minutes long, about Lock Haven and its attractions and post the videos on the firm's website. From there it may be shared on Facebook, and the city's website can include links to them.

These "video tours" are free for the city. CGI finances them by selling ads to local sponsors.

The videos will be redone every three years. City Manager Richard W. Marcinkevage said. Somerset and Warren have CGI videos, and West Chester is on its third set.

CGI is recognized by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities.

These videos could be the first step in updating the city's website, the mayor said.