

'Community assets'

Workshop examines connections to river trails

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In an effort to increase business opportunities and local economies, the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership hosted a workshop to discuss the community assessments and visitor readiness surveys conducted in Clinton and Lycoming counties at the Pajama Factory in Williamsport on Wednesday.

Three specific assessments happened in Lock Haven, Jersey Shore and Williamsport to evaluate the communities based on how visitors can get around the area, particularly visiting river recreations and river trails. Locals and guests filled out surveys to critically analyze the towns and locate problem areas. In this meeting, the results of all three were discussed.

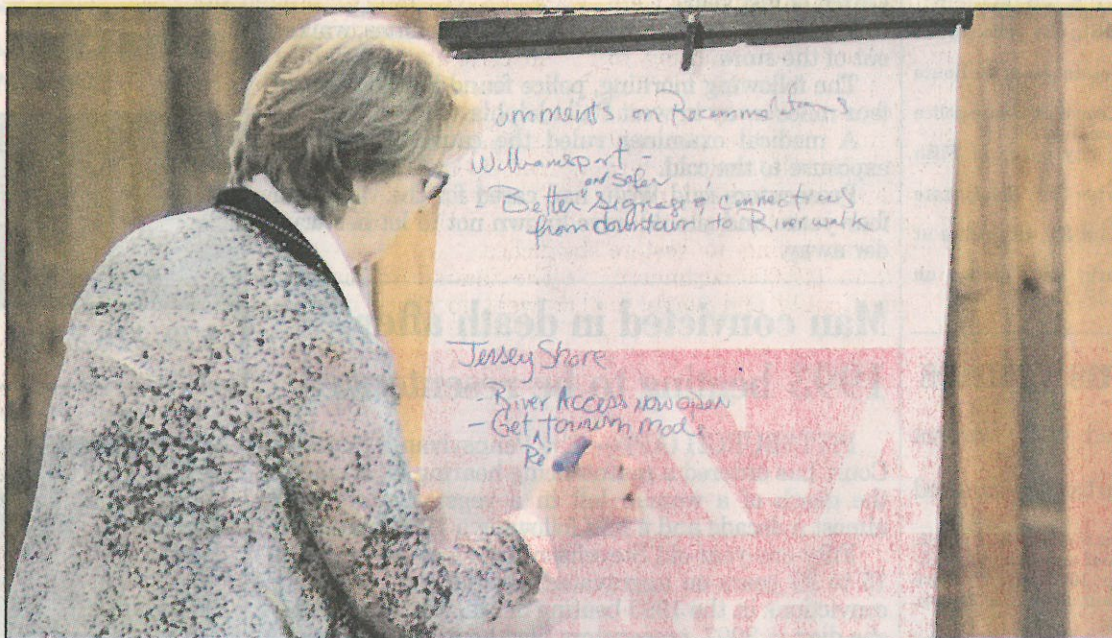
"We're going to look at the community assets. We're going to look at the assessments that were done and pick out some priorities. Then, we're going to brainstorm how to make those priorities happen," said Trish Carothers, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership executive director.

"We're going to ask the people that are representatives of the community to take it back to their communities. To take it further, and we're going to create an action plan," Carothers said.

"A healthier community is a better environment for its residents. Keeping a community attractive, livable and functioning well is really a complex task," said Chris Wallace, of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Hodrick Realty. David Kahley, the Progress



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Above, Trish Carothers, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership executive director, writes down feedback during the Community Assessment workshop at the Pajama Factory in Williamsport on Wednesday. Top, a view of the Susquehanna River Walk.

Fund president and CEO, spoke on financing entrepreneurs and the economic impact of trails.

"People need their physical, human needs fulfilled. Some people won't go out on the trail if there's no potty. Some people won't go out on the trail if

there's no beer at the end of the trail," Kahley said.

Kahley used the analogy of ski slopes, and he said that the best ski slopes that don't have facilities are not used. Likewise with river trails, they won't be used if facilities are

not available. The group discussion highlighted in particular the problems with connecting the Susquehanna River Walk to downtown Williamsport.

(See WORKSHOP, Page B-3)

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(From Page B-1)

William Prince, Trail Town Program manager, and Grace Markum, High Impact president, spoke about the results of the visitor readiness surveys and surveys from actual trail users.

In an online survey of 804 trail users, Prince said that the general preferred lodging was camping, hotel and bed-and-breakfasts. The survey also included answering that things like local shops, water recreation, events and museums can make trail users stay longer. Likewise, they also listed desired services like bike shops, public restrooms, restaurants and cafes.

In a brainstorming activity, the group came up with ideas to help get more bathroom access. One idea was to offer connections in local downtown businesses to allow public use of restrooms. Another point was made that bathrooms are needed closer to trails, and perhaps local businesses could sponsor porta potties.

As a result of what is needed locally, signage to help guests find trails and walkways was a common problem.

"Signage, signage, signage. We talk a lot about signage in these assessments, from all different levels and layers. We know

it's complicated, but we need to make sure that people can find us and find their way to and from what we have to offer in the community," Markum said.

Prince said that one of the regional priorities was to create a collaborative and consistent marketing and branding campaign to help cross promote all resources and attractions between the communities.

As a survey result, many participants answered that they were willing to travel through

the area, making stops in more than one location. Combining access and promoting what's available in the region can benefit the area as a whole.

There will be two more workshops regarding the project to make the communities more accessible to visitors.

The second workshop will look at the brainstorming ideas, identify unmet needs and business opportunities before drafting an action plan in Jan.

The third workshop will take place around April,

and it will focus with the Small Business Development Center about researching successful businesses and writing business plans.