

JS planning for a greener future

JERSEY SHORE — As a green and history-laden place, Jersey Shore is focused on more than its setting and its past. With help from the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership the borough is also aiming to make its mark on the list of “must see” river towns through green infrastructure and river-linked economic development.

The Partnership is leading efforts to build a river Greenway linking over 70 river towns in 22 Pennsylvania counties. Through its technical assistance program and partners such as SEDA- Council of Governments in Lewisburg, the Partnership is helping communities like Jersey Shore envision a new and greener future.

“Green infrastructure goes beyond conventional thinking about parks and open spaces. It addresses the natural processes essential to community well-being,” said Trish Carothers, the Partnership’s executive director. “By weaving green thinking into community development, places like Jersey Shore can turn flood hazard mitigation, storm water management and water quality protection into new opportunities for community growth, recreation, and economic development.”

Stormwater management is among the more important issues affecting flood-prone Jersey Shore.

“Anything over an inch of rain can lead to problems in parts of the community,” said Mayor Dennis Buttorff, who also serves as the borough’s public safety and emergency manager.

As with many towns, Jersey Shore’s stormwater sewers are a

conduit that channels polluted surface water runoff from streets and sidewalks directly into the river and Lawshe Run, a small stream draining much of Jersey Shore. In combination with polluted runoff from other areas, this has a real and negative impact on the water quality and biological health of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay.

With this understanding, Jersey Shore is looking to develop a Green Infrastructure Plan to lay out innovative and low impact solutions such as porous paving for parking lots, infiltration planters, bio-retention swales, street trees, and rain “gardens” — measures that add to the beauty of the community while improving environmental quality and mitigating impacts on private property.

The need for such a plan was first identified in Linking Land Use and Water Quality, a 2011 workshop conducted in Jersey Shore by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The workshop was initiated with help from the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership and with financial assistance from the Chesapeake Bay Commission.

The economic and environmental impact of vacant flood prone lands is also an issue of importance in downtown Jersey Shore where rebuilding in the flood zone is strictly limited. Measures to increase water infiltration on these sites have also been discussed.

Naturalizing these lots through urban forestry may be one way to further mitigate stormwater impacts while helping to transform the borough and its riverfront business district into an even more appealing and eco-

nomically viable Susquehanna Greenway river town.

Realizing the borough’s “green dream” will take time and it will require sustained effort on the part of the community and its citizens, leaders, institutions and organizations. Action priorities must be established. Financial resources must be identified and thoughtfully allocated.

To this end, Jersey Shore is organizing a community Green Team with representation from residents, property owners, businesses, community organizations, and local government. Buttorff anticipates the Green Team will play an important role in shaping the agenda for borough policy and project implementation, in acquiring funds, and generally promoting green infrastructure in the community.

Among Jersey Shore’s more ambitious projects is development of a public river access site on the West Branch near the Route 44 bridge. Preliminary design work has been completed and, although the community has received financial commitments for the project from the Williamsport-Lycoming Community Foundation and Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, it still needs approximately \$45,000 and is working with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (SGP) to secure the funds.

Alice Trowbridge, a landscape architect from the area, has been working with the borough to help turn plans into reality, and believes the river access site will be the focal point for numerous activities and enterprises.

“In addition to boaters,” she

says, “people will use the riverfront site to sit, walk, relax, and enjoy the river. It could be a wonderful location for complementary businesses overlooking the riverfront such as cafes, restaurants, and river-recreation related businesses like outfitters, boating and fishing equipment, supplies, etc.”

Other green infrastructure measures are also under consideration. Jersey Shore is a trailhead for the 65-mile long Pine Creek Rail Trail, which extends from the Allegheny Plateau north of Wellsboro through the “Grand Canyon” of Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources maintains a large parking area at the trail terminus where hikers and bicyclists may leave their vehicles, and an extension from the parking area to the riverfront will be completed in late summer or early fall. The addition of this new town trail is expected to create new marketing opportunities for downtown businesses catering to the needs of recreational visitors.

Connecting Jersey Shore to the Lock Haven riverfront and the Williamsport River Walk is already included in greenway and trail plans by the Lycoming County and Clinton County planning commissions.

Local green infrastructure projects also include a major upgrade of the Thompson Street Recreation Complex, which SEDA-COG is developing as Jersey Shore’s Community Development coordinator. A master site plan for the 15-acre site has been completed including additional parking, restrooms, picnic and shade areas, and improved accessibility for disabled individuals. Jersey

Shore has committed nearly \$306,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to the project.

“Planners often refer to ‘place-based’ development, which builds upon a community’s own history or environmental setting,” said Tom Grbenick of SEDA-COG’s Community Resource Center. “Jersey Shore has a unique and memorable sense of place formed by its riverfront setting, its historic streets and buildings and its outdoor spaces. Implementation of green infrastructure measures is the natural next step in the evolution of this historic river town.”

SEDA-COG is providing technical assistance to the borough in collaboration with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

Individuals and organizations interested in learning more about the borough’s plans for green infrastructure development and those wishing to become actively involved in the borough’s efforts should contact Buttorff at the Jersey Shore Borough Building or Grbenick at his Lewisburg office at 570-524-4491.

The borough is looking to appoint borough and area residents to its newly forming Green Team and is seeking individuals with a mix of interests and expertise. The Jersey Shore Green Team will work with borough and Susquehanna Greenway Partnership officials over the next year to plan specific concepts and sites with the aim of making Jersey Shore a greener Susquehanna Greenway river town destination, and one more attractive to new business and residential growth.