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Section A > Introduction

The Turtle Creek Greenway has long been recognized by many as a local treasure by the residents of the surrounding communities. Located in Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Turtle Creek Greenway encompasses approximately six (6) miles of the Turtle Creek stream valley, beginning at Duff Park in the Municipality of Murrysville, through Penn Township and the Municipality of Monroeville, ending in Trafford Borough. The Turtle Creek Greenway Project arose as a result of several planning efforts that had been completed in the region over the past several years and a growing concern that with continued development, the Greenway may be ruined for future generations. Partially funded through a planning grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Regional Trail Corporation (RTC) is leading the effort with hopes of eventually being able to extend the Westmoreland Heritage Trail through the Greenway.

The Turtle Creek Greenway is a beautiful natural area that offers wonderful opportunities for outdoor recreation and conservation. Squeezed in the middle of a rapidly developing area in Westmoreland and Allegheny Counties, the Greenway provides locations for healthy exercise, passive recreation, quiet contemplation, nature observation and environmental education.”

*—Malcolm Sias,
Parks Planning Coordinator
for Westmoreland County*

What is a Greenway?

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) defines a greenway in *Pennsylvania Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections* (2001) as follows:

“A greenway is a corridor of open space. Greenways vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of green that run through urban, suburban, and rural areas to wider corridors that incorporate diverse natural, cultural, and scenic features. They can incorporate both public and private property, and can be land- or water-based. They may follow old railways, canals, or ridge tops, or they may follow stream corridors, shorelines, or wetlands, and include water trails for non-motorized craft. Some greenways are recreational corridors or scenic byways that may accommodate motorized and non-motorized vehicles. Others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not designed for human passage. Greenways differ in their location and function, but overall, a greenway will protect natural, cultural, and scenic resources, provide recreational benefits, enhance natural beauty and quality of life in neighborhoods and communities, and stimulate economic development opportunities.”

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While every greenway is unique in its purpose and function, all greenways benefit the local communities in which they are found. Common benefits include the preservation of natural resources; protection of water resources; conservation of historic and cultural resources; conservation of scenic resources; fostering of public recreation, health and fitness; creation of educational opportunities; and the promotion of sustainable development and sound land use.

Defining a Greenways Network

Pennsylvania has developed a “hubs and spokes” approach to greenways planning. The hubs are destination areas, which may consist of natural areas such as parks and nature preserves; cultural, historic and recreational sites; and urban and suburban areas such as cities, towns, and neighborhoods. The spokes are the greenways themselves which connect the various natural, historic, cultural, and recreational areas. The Greenways Network in Pennsylvania can be analyzed at three levels: Greenways of Statewide Significance, County Greenways, and Local Greenway Network.

Greenways of Statewide Significance

Greenways that make connections beyond local and regional boundaries, connect major destinations, and help conserve significant natural areas are considered to be greenways of statewide significance. Examples include existing and proposed water trails, millennium trails, bicycle routes, heritage corridors, and conservation areas. The Turtle Creek Greenway is not a greenway of statewide significance.

County Greenway Plans

Each of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania have been encouraged to complete countywide greenway plans. The greenway plans should include identification of open space, map existing and proposed greenway hubs and spokes, and should be integrated into overall planning and revitalization efforts. As the Turtle Creek Greenway spans both Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties, both of the county greenways plans were reviewed to ensure consistency.

Allegheny Places (2008)



Allegheny County completed a comprehensive plan in 2008 entitled *Allegheny Places*, which included a Parks, Open Space, and Greenways Plan. The plan identifies the Westmoreland Heritage Trail but does not discuss the project area.

New Horizons: A County-Wide Greenways and Blueways Network (2008)

Westmoreland County completed *New Horizons: A County-Wide Greenways and Blueways Network* in 2008, which is a companion document to the County's comprehensive land use, parks, recreation, and open space planning efforts. The plan identifies 21 proposed greenway and blueway Project Corridors; the highest priority of which is the Westmoreland Heritage Trail.

As proposed, the Westmoreland Heritage Trail is a 19-mile conservation corridor that begins near Saltsburg and runs west to Trafford. The Project Corridor is designated as an improved/maintained crushed aggregate/asphalt trail (type IV). The plan specifically notes the value of protecting the resources of the Turtle Creek Gorge and the high threat level as a result of the proximity to public water and sanitary service, densely populated area, and its location within the Westmoreland County Comprehensive Plan Development Triangle.

In addition to the Westmoreland Heritage Trail designated as a high priority project of the County, there are a number of other recommended actions that support the Turtle Creek Greenway Plan:

-  Support the formation and involvement of the Westmoreland Land Trust in the management of greenway projects
-  Promote the incorporation of appropriate greenway network and recreation provisions in County and Municipal planning efforts

Local Greenway Network

While it is important to plan for greenways at the state and county level, oftentimes, the local level is where projects are implemented. Local greenway planning initiatives create connections between neighborhoods and local destinations, such as public lands, town centers and schools, or between natural areas or environmentally significant areas (such as floodplains or streams).

Saltsburg to Trafford Trail Feasibility Study (2003)

The Regional Trail Corporation commissioned a trail feasibility study to be conducted along a 19-mile corridor that followed both an abandoned Penn Central Railroad line that ran from Saltsburg Borough (Indiana County) to Export Borough (Westmoreland County) and the active Turtle Creek Industrial Railroad (TCIRR) from Export to Trafford Borough (Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties). The study concluded that sections of the corridor were feasible for non-motorized trail development; however, the trail could not coexist with the active TCIRR due to narrow conditions and concern regarding liability.

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During the study, a few landowners along the corridor expressed an interest in donating portions of their land that was considered to be undevelopable. The corridor encompassed what is often referred to as the Turtle Creek Gorge, a section along Turtle Creek that is defined by steep cliffs and floodplains.

As of February 2010, five (5) miles of the Westmoreland Heritage Trail are constructed and open for use, from Saltsburg to Slickville. The trail is ideal for walking, jogging, bicycling, and cross-country skiing and is handicapped accessible; suitable for everyone regardless of age or physical ability.

The Westmoreland Heritage Trail connects to the West Penn Trail in Saltsburg and will continue to be built in segments as property and funding are obtained. Plans are underway for an additional four (4) miles to be constructed between Slickville and Delmont.

[Penn Township Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan \(1999\)](#)

In 1999, Penn Township adopted a Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan in order to address the need for recreation programs and facilities for current and future residents. The Township's Plan addresses the Turtle Creek Greenway in a number of areas, as summarized below:

- 🌲 Vegetation/Riparian Buffer Inventory (pg. 1-6): Lands adjacent to Turtle Creek offer opportunities to preserve the natural areas, although increasing demands of development have greatly affected the size and quality of this buffer.
- 🌲 Vision Statement Excerpt (pg. 3-5)“...Last weekend a large group of volunteers cleaned up the Lyons Run and Turtle Creek Greenways. These fragile riparian buffers form green connections between the Township, Murrysville and Monroeville. Over the years, the state has provided significant funds for the protection of these unique natural resources. Environmental classes from several adjacent school districts conduct research on water quality, plant communities, and wildlife habitat along these stream corridors, while the Township conducts popular plant identification and bird watching programs...”

[Monroeville Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan \(2000\)](#)

In 2000, Monroeville completed a Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan along with a Heritage Park Master Plan. Although the plan does not specifically reference the Turtle Creek Greenway, the following excerpts address the concept of trails and

greenways:

- 🌲 Vision Statement Excerpt (pg. 1-5): *“...Residents and visitors often walk or ride bicycles along the comprehensive greenway network to any of the neighborhood parks or the new centralized community park...”*
- 🌲 Recommendations (pg 6-54)
 1. Publicize benefits of greenways and trails—form trail advisory board
 2. Develop trails through existing municipal parks and property
 3. Inventory and develop policies to preserve steep slopes, wetlands, riparian buffers, and other unique features in conjunction with comprehensive planning efforts
 4. Incorporate environmental message in education programs, fundraising, and volunteer efforts

Monroeville Comprehensive Plan (2006)

Monroeville adopted its Comprehensive Plan update in 2006, which provides a strategic direction for the future land use patterns and serves as a blueprint for implementation of policies related to development. The following are excerpts where the plan addresses or supports through policy the Turtle Creek Greenway:

- 🌲 Issues Identification (pg 1-6): Under Environment, Turtle Creek is identified as a “strength”.
- 🌲 Vision Statement Excerpt (pg. 1-7): *“...The Municipality of Monroeville is a thriving, proactive and cohesive community with unique and viable neighborhoods that access an extensive system of safe and well-maintained neighborhood parks, active recreation areas, and linear open space trails that meander through the Municipality's wooded hillsides...”*
- 🌲 Future Land Use (Map 2): The Turtle Creek Greenway is identified as “Open Space Linkages” within a residential area.

Murrysville Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan (2000)

In 2000, Murrysville adopted its Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan to help the Municipality identify the current and future needs in regards to recreation and open space. Currently, Murrysville is looking to update this plan; however, for purposes of this study, the 2000 plan was reviewed. The following bullets identify areas where the Turtle Creek Greenway was discussed in the plan or where the ideals of this plan reflect that of the Murrysville Plan:

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- ❁ Parks Inventory (pg. 1-42): Duff Park, 148-acre natural area, includes several trails, including the Funk Bikeway that runs along Turtle Creek.
- ❁ Vision Statement Excerpt (pg. 3-3): *“...We are very fortunate to have found a community so dedicated to the preservation of open space. The Municipality has identified key opportunities for the development of a greenway and open space network that will span the entire municipality. The elected officials have worked hard to put the plan into place in order to help preserve the natural resources and the rural character of our community. I am glad we chose to live in Murrysville and intend to stay here for years to come so that our family can continue to enjoy the wealth of recreational resources and the quality of life they inspire...”*

Trafford Borough Comprehensive Plan (1961)

As of 2010, Trafford Borough has not updated its 1961 comprehensive plan, nor does it have a comprehensive parks and recreation plan. The Borough was a part of the Saltsburg to Trafford Trail Feasibility Study and supports the Turtle Creek Greenway Project.

Section B > Defining the Boundary

As discussed earlier, the Turtle Creek Greenway has long been identified in county and local plans as a potential greenway that should be preserved. However, it is not the intent of the Greenway Plan to discourage growth in areas well-suited for development; rather to preserve the unique features found within the corridor and ultimately, open it to public use. Therefore, in order to move forward with implementation, a project boundary needed to be clearly defined.

Step 1: Identify Beginning and End Points

At the onset of this project, the Regional Trail Corporation in conjunction with Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation loosely identified the project area as encompassing Turtle Creek between B-Y Park in Trafford and Duff Park in Murrysville. Ultimately, it was decided to extend the boundary to include the Penn Forest Football Club land near the Westinghouse Complex as there may be long-term potential to connect the Westmoreland Heritage Trail with the larger trail network in Allegheny County via the Trafford Bridge along SR 130.

Step 2: Follow Turtle Creek Stream/Turtle Creek Industrial Railroad

The Turtle Creek stream and the Turtle Creek Industrial Railroad (TCIRR) are the base for the Greenway. For the most part, the Railroad follows the stream and ultimately offers the most realistic opportunity to provide public access within the Greenway. However, it should be noted that at this time, the Turtle Creek Industrial Railroad is active and is in no way open to the public.

Step 3: Encompass the Turtle Creek Floodplain

For the most part, Turtle Creek's floodplain is included within the Greenway, as development is not permitted. The four municipalities in the Turtle Creek Greenway, along with those downstream, are forced to spend millions of dollars to address flood damages for every severe flooding episode and tens of thousands for every modest flooding event when roads, bridges, and other municipal infrastructure are affected. In addition, the landowners are forced to spend private dollars to address direct property damage and often see decreased property values as a result. The floodplain and wetlands in the corridor provide natural stormwater management as well as protection against flooding.

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Step 4: Connect to Parks

It was very important that the Greenway provide a “connection” and tie into local municipal parks and public spaces. The following parklands were thereby identified as being important to include within the Greenway boundary:

-  Penn Forest Football Club (leased) in Trafford Borough
-  B-Y Park in Trafford Borough
-  Beechwood Park in Monroeville
-  Heritage Park in Monroeville
-  Valley Park in Monroeville
-  Bel Aire Pool
-  Alpine Park in Monroeville
-  Duff Park in Murrysville
-  Pleasant Valley Park in Murrysville

Note: Plan maps show Kelvington Park as the proposed Monroeville Inter-Park Trail System identifies a connection from the Greenway to Kelvington Park. However, the Project Boundary does not include a direct connection to this park.

Step 5: Follow 1,000 Foot Contours

As an initial starting point, 1,000 foot contours were used as a boundary following along the Turtle Creek stream and the TCIRR Corridor. Much of the corridor between Trafford and Duff Park is a gorge, with very steep slopes found alongside the creek and/or railroad.

Step 6: Finalize the Boundary

The boundary was adjusted to follow tax parcel boundaries, where deemed appropriate, to affect as few parcels as possible. In addition, the boundary was adjusted to ensure that if a trail would be developed in the Greenway, the view from the trail is one of the natural landscape and not of development. The final project boundary is shown on **Map 4.1: Project Location**.

Section C > Public Participation

As a greenway project, the scope spans different disciplines including recreation, conservation, restoration, and education. There are numerous organizations involved in the project and will be needed for successful implementation.

The Regional Trail Corporation is a non-profit organization that was formed in 1991 as a partnership between Allegheny County, Fayette County, and Westmoreland County to construct the Youghiogheny River Trail. Since then, the RTC has expanded its mission “to acquire, develop, and manage appropriate trail corridors in southwestern Pennsylvania and to create and promote opportunities for recreation, tourism, economic development, and historic and environment conservation.”























In conjunction with the RTC, the Turtle Creek Watershed Association (TCWA) partnered on this project in order to address the conservation aspects of the Greenway. The TCWA was incorporated in 1970, and received its non-profit status in 1971. It is the mission of the TCWA to address watershed issues and improve water quality in the 147 square-mile area of eastern Allegheny and northwestern Westmoreland Counties drained by Turtle Creek and its eleven major tributaries. In particular, key issues that the TCWA tries to address include abandoned mine drainage remediation, streambank stabilization, multi-municipal stormwater management and flood prevention, municipal assistance with MS4 implementation, and water quality monitoring (<http://tcwa.org>).

As stated earlier, the Turtle Creek Greenway spans four municipalities: Trafford Borough, Penn Township, the Municipality of Monroeville, and the Municipality of Murrysville. Municipal involvement and support is vital to the overall success of implementation. Many of the recommendations included in this plan are the responsibility of the municipality to implement.

In addition, the Greenway spans Allegheny County as well as Westmoreland County. Both counties have been integral in the development of the Turtle Creek Greenway project and will be relied on for assistance and support for implementation projects. Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation has taken the lead on trail development. If the Westmoreland Heritage Trail is to be extended through the Turtle Creek Greenway, the Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation Department will be a key player.

Steering Committee

A Project Steering Committee was pulled together comprised of representatives from each of the counties and municipalities as well as local organizations that have a vested interest in the Greenways Plan.

-  Malcolm Sias—Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation and the RTC
-  Diane Selvaggio—Turtle Creek Watershed Association
-  John Albertson—Representative John Pallone
-  Betsy Aiken—Murrysville Parks & Recreation Commission and the Westmoreland Land Trust
-  John Balicki—Parks and Recreation Consultant
-  Dr. Elisa Beck—Sustainable Monroeville
-  Mark Bowers—Environmental Consultant
-  Bruce Corna, Jr—Westmoreland Land Trust
-  Tom Dittman, Murrysville Parks & Recreation Commission and the Westmoreland Heritage Trail (WHT)
-  Chris Droste—Westmoreland County Conservation District
-  Chuck Duritsa—Westmoreland Land Trust
-  Christine Goswick—Allegheny County Planning
-  Alex Graziani—Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County
-  Noel Grimm—Westmoreland Heritage Trail
-  Greg Holesh—Environmental Consultant
-  Amy Myers—Allegheny County Conservation District
-  Rob Hunter—Murrysville Recreation Director
-  Jim Kress—Turtle Creek Watershed Association
-  Bruce Light—Penn Township Manager
-  Rey Peduzzi—Trafford Borough
-  Les Race—Trafford Borough
-  Jesse Jon Salenskey—Bruce Construction and the WCD
-  John Turack—Penn State Cooperative Extension/Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County
-  Marylyn Devlin—Sustainable Monroeville

The Committee met on a bi-monthly basis between May 2009 and July 2010 and was responsible for collecting data, providing review and feedback, assisting in the identification of needs/concerns as well as the development of recommendations. The Steering Committee also attended a field view on June 24, 2010 of the Greenway to assist in identifying potential opportunities and issues. Summaries of the meetings have been collected and are provided in **Appendix C: Steering Committee Meeting Summaries**.



Stakeholders

With assistance from the Project Steering Committee, over 40 stakeholders were identified and interviewed through the planning process. The stakeholders represented additional organizations who may not have been represented on the Steering Committee. Stakeholders were sent an initial survey and received follow-up phone calls to gather additional recommendations. Their responses have been assembled and are provided in **Appendix D: Stakeholder Interviews**.

Public Meetings

Three meetings were held during the planning process to gather input and feedback from the general public on the Turtle Creek Greenway Plan. The sign-in sheets, flyers, and summaries for the meetings are included in **Appendix E: Public Meetings**.

Public Meeting #1—February 2010

The first meeting was held on February 24, 2010 at the Murrysville Community Building. The meeting consisted of a presentation followed by a question/answer session. Attendees were also asked to review mapping of the Greenway and provide input related to recreation and conservation opportunities.

Public Meeting #2—June 2010

The second public meeting was held on June 17, 2010 at B-Y Park in Trafford. The meeting was designed as a public educational walk. Attendees gathered at the



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park for a cookout and project overview, followed by a 2.3 mile educational walk along the railroad in the Greenway from Saunders Station Road back to B-Y Park, and ended with a wrap-up where attendees were asked to complete a survey. The educational walk included stations where speakers presented on topics such as the importance and benefits of greenway conservation, streambank stabilization, erosion and sedimentation control, stormwater management, and invasive plant species.

The meeting was filmed by a local volunteer and a short, 20-minute video was developed to help promote the Greenway and educate residents about the value of conservation.

Public Meeting #3—January 27, 2011

A final meeting was held to present the draft plan and priority recommendations to the public on January 27, 2011 at 7:00pm in the Murrysville Council Chambers. The meeting consisted of a presentation that summarized the planning process and highlighted the high priority management strategies recommended by the plan. Approximately 13 people were in attendance and the meeting was broadcast live on the local Comcast Cable channel 19, which is available in Murrysville and Export along with parts of Delmont and Washington Township and is also available to watch online.