



Warrior Run Pathways Project Summary of Discussion Group Findings

To solicit input about the issues and opportunities relevant to pathways in the Warrior Run School District, two focus group discussions were organized involving key community members who had previously expressed interest in either recreation or environmental issues. Each discussion group explored participants' understanding and perception of pathways, evaluated the community's needs relevant to recreation or conservation, and examined the local opportunities and challenges associated with creating a system of pathways.

Recreation

The discussion group focused on recreation revealed that participants from the Warrior Run community largely identify the term "pathways" with *multi-purpose trail systems* that are *safe from traffic* and that *interconnect a variety of places*. People stated a strong preference for pathways that offer a variety of choices, both in distances and in destinations, and also indicated a desire for trails that offer some sort of amenity, such as restroom facilities, parking, or way-finding signs. When asked what recreational opportunities they felt were missing from the Warrior Run community, respondents indicated that there was a need for safe paths for kids and seniors to walk or bike, more activities that engage the whole family, connections to the river, as well as connections to surrounding towns and villages. In addition, respondents expressed a desire for safe, well-lit places to walk in the evenings after work.

When asked what pathways should look like in their own community, respondents felt that loop trails of varying lengths would provide the greatest range of use and enjoyment for different user groups (walkers, cyclists, joggers, equestrians, etc.). Participants emphasized the importance of connecting to the community's existing natural and cultural resources and liked the idea of thematic trails that emphasized a particular piece of the area's history or natural features. Handicapped accessibility, multi-season use, and pet-friendly facilities were each cited as important features of pathways.

When asked about the challenges of creating pathways, participants generally shared concerns about liability, trail maintenance and financing. The issue of balancing emergency access with restricting ATV access was also discussed. Finally, in some instances, fences were considered a physical obstacle to creating pathways in the more rural areas.

Environment & Conservation

The discussion of environmental and conservation issues focused on the opportunities and threats associated with the area's natural and scenic resources. Diversity was considered to be one of the community's greatest assets, and was used to describe its diverse population as well as its varied landscape. When asked what they considered to be the community's most important natural assets, participants stated that they valued the area's rural landscape, complete with its farms, forests, sweeping views and historic small villages. The West Branch of the Susquehanna River was considered to be a very under-utilized resource. When asked about the greatest threat to these natural assets, unmanaged development pressure was a primary concern. Complementary to that concern was the loss of "traditional" farmland, either to residential development or conversion to factory farming. Participants felt the loss of family farms threatened the rural character of the area and could lead to a decline in community pride, values, and self-worth.

When asked what local action is needed to address the environmental and natural resource issues of the community, participants felt the need for a regional plan and regional cooperation to guide future decision making affecting the school district area. Raising awareness and teaching stewardship of the community's natural resources was also a priority, with particular emphasis on cultivating the involvement of younger generations in conservation efforts. Participants recognized a need for clear standards with regard to managing future growth and development in the area.

Participants expressed a strong desire to take the long view on economic development, building on the community's natural and historic assets to attract residents with similar values to those in the community today. Participants' vision for a preferred future of the area fifty years from now with respect to pathways reflected a desire to provide an array of trail types tailored to different ages groups that preserve the scenic rural character of the area while linking the community to its most important assets – including places of recreational, historic and cultural value (parks, playgrounds, towns and villages, and the River).