

walk run preserve grow hike swim stretch dream fish
chat learn explore connect relax jog read share float
ride picnic discover hunt camp enjoy splash bike



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For Commissioners' Resolution

“Within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment -- but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading. That’s exactly the opposite of how it was when I was a child.”

- Rickard Louv, Author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature- Deficit Disorder*





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Chapter 1

Introduction



Introduction

Nestled in the heart of the Keystone State, Union County features a vast expanse of open space, including farmlands, parks, natural vistas and resources, and historic and cultural areas. State parks, rivers, and areas for camping picnicking, hiking, fishing and hunting make the county rich in recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Open space attracts all of us. Walkers and hikers, gardeners, fishermen and hunters,

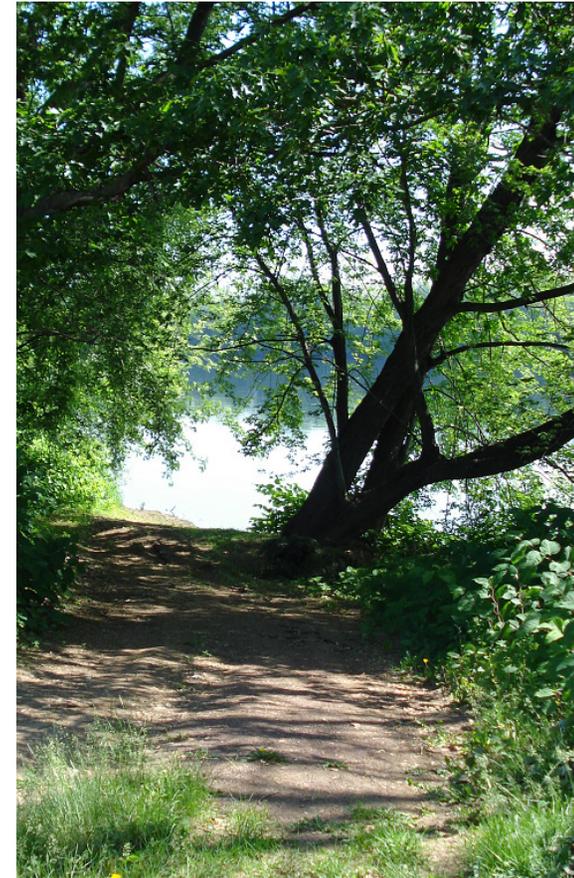


campers, farmers, and those who have retired in the county. From dog walkers to parents with children to businesspeople, we crave the call of the outdoors. Open spaces play vital roles, not only by inviting businesses to our area, but in retaining our young people as well.

Union County, like the rest of the Commonwealth, boasts an unparalleled array of natural, historic, and cultural resources. We are able to appreciate a wide variety of ventures in conservation, outdoor recreation, heritage preservation and the promotion of tourism.

While 90% of Union County is currently open space, most of that area is not conveniently located near major population centers. Agriculture and woodlands are the predominant land uses. But new patterns of development and increased mobility have affected the county.

The residents of Union County have a quality of life that is rare in more urban areas. Through the planning and managing of our natural



resources, we will continue to maintain the environment that we so enjoy.

Did You Know?

- Union County is currently 90% open space with only 10% of the total land area developed.
- Approximately 40% of our open space is permanently protected as state forest, state parks, state game lands, preserved farms, or by conservation easements.



What are Greenways and Open Spaces?

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), in the state's Greenways Plan, *Pennsylvania Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections*, defines a greenway as:

"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."

So essentially a greenway is a corridor of open space, whether narrow or wide, small or large, and used for recreation or conservation

purposes. Greenway networks are designed and managed for a myriad of reasons: natural infrastructure management, recreation, stormwater management, community and economy enrichment, and scenic character protection.

Some people view greenways as vital to the conservation of our undeveloped lands containing important natural and ecological assets like forests, wetlands, and stream banks; along with the animals and plants that live there. Others see greenways in aesthetic terms and value conserving the rural countryside and natural landscapes like stream valleys. All of these visions and descriptions are embraced within this plan.

Greenways can contain trails that follow streams and creeks, paths that meander through our forests and woods. Trails used by hikers and hunters alike. The Buffalo Valley Rail Trail (BVRT), for example, follows an old railway through the county, bisecting agricultural fields and crossing streets and roads, going from Lewisburg, through Vicksburg, and into Mifflinburg. The Rail Trail opened in November 2011 and is being used for both recreation and as a means of transportation.

Open space, then, simply is land that is not developed. It can be publicly or privately owned and includes farmland, forest land, waterways, parks, grasslands, wetlands, and even cemeteries. Outdoor sports facilities, such as swimming pools, tennis courts, skateboard

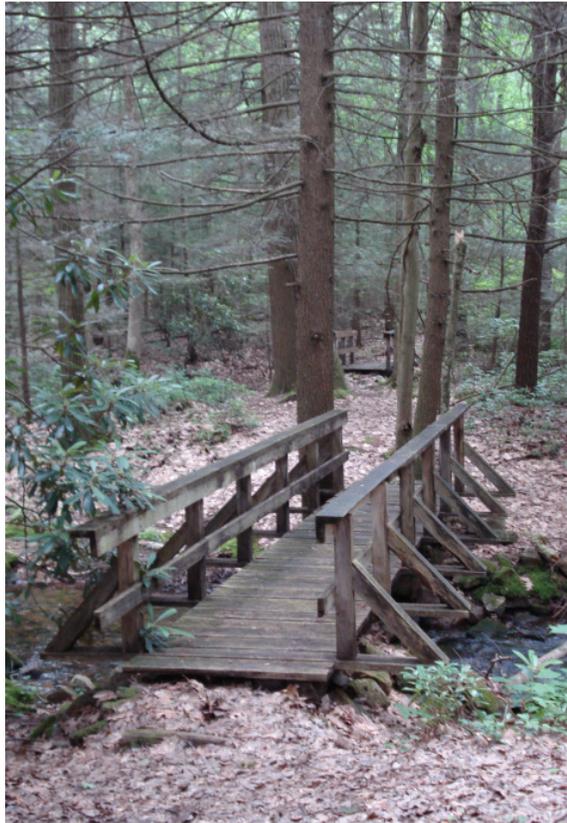
parks, and dog parks can be considered as open space areas.

Why Create a Plan?

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge's Executive Order 1998-3 set a goal for every county in the Commonwealth to develop a plan for greenways and open spaces. This plan and those in other counties will help to provide a coordinated and strategic network of greenways and open spaces throughout the state.

Given that 90% of the county land area is undeveloped some might question why a greenway and open space plan is needed. Understandably so, with an abundance of open space and natural resources, the thought of preparing such a plan might seem unnecessary. Why be concerned or worried about planning for something so plentiful? While that is certainly one





viewpoint the other way to look at it is what better time is there to plan for these features than the present? When the landscape canvas is predominantly clean, there is an opportunity to develop an implementable plan for an interconnected system of greenways and open space that protects ecologically valuable lands, supports recreational activities, protects important wildlife habitat, provides access to historic and cultural resources, and offers transportation choices. Far too often communities wait until it is nearly too late to create a plan. They watch as farmland, open space, and

natural features are slowly developed here and there, habitat is altered, streams are impaired, and cultural and historic resources are lost, not realizing the cumulative impacts that accrue over time. Once the realization has set in that action is needed planning is exponentially more difficult and implementation far more expensive if not physically impossible. This is what Union County is aiming to avoid.

Plan Purpose

The purpose of the *Union County Greenway and Open Space Plan* is to provide a blueprint for greenway development and open space conservation that will enhance the quality of living and enjoyment for current and future generations of county residents. The plan defines a network of connections between the county's diverse natural areas, various cultural and historic resources, recreation opportunities, and local population centers. These connections will help to conserve the county's natural systems, working farms, scenic qualities, and unique character while providing valuable recreation, community health, alternative transportation, and economic opportunities for all to enjoy. This *Greenway and Open Space Plan* is not a regulation but is rather a flexible tool for making informed decisions, setting priorities, and guiding investment. It builds upon, complements, and further explores ideas generated in previous planning efforts such as the county and municipal comprehensive plans and the Susquehanna Greenway Plan.

Using the Plan

Municipalities, the county, conservation groups, landowners, and developers can utilize the plan to strategically aid decisions and to facilitate partnerships for executing the plan's vision and goals. The recommendations presented provide direction for future greenway, open space, land conservation, outdoor recreation, and trail initiatives in the county and can assist with setting financial goals and resource allocation while pursuit of early implementation projects can raise awareness, create momentum and build early support. Additionally, many of the key components can be used by the county and other organizations to garner assistance and/or to justify funding for projects.

As Union County continues to grow, we will keep attracting visitors, new businesses and families. Our outdoor spaces are fundamental to providing opportunities for fellowship, for recreation, for socialization, and for fostering a deep sense of community.



Economic

- * Increases tourism
- * Improves business revenues
- * Increases property values
- * Increases municipal revenues
- * Reduces demand for public services
- * Accounts for a significant portion of people's discretionary spending

Recreation

- * Increases opportunities for outdoor activities
- * Creates and preserves open spaces for many types of recreation
- * Provides connections between parks and other recreation assets

Transportation

- * Provides alternate and safe modes
- * Reduces traffic on roads
- * Links neighborhoods to stores and restaurants through corridors
- * Provides emergency access to undeveloped areas

Benefits of Greenways and Open Spaces



Lifestyle & Wellness

- * Provides opportunities for regular exercise
- * Reduces health care costs
- * Makes communities more attractive
- * Fosters a sense of community
- * Provides access to fresh local food
- * Promotes active living and healthy lifestyles

Environmental

- * Protects habitat for wildlife
- * Preserves migration patterns
- * Reduces soil erosion along streams
- * Maintains floodplain areas
- * Promotes hazard mitigation through the conservation of open spaces
- * Reduces vehicle emissions

Educational & Cultural

- * Promotes educational opportunities
- * Provides opportunities to study plants and wildlife research
- * Preserves historic places and promotes improved access
- * Provides community meeting places
- * Promotes a sense of place and community pride
- * Reduces crime and illegal activities
- * Fosters awareness of local environmental issues

Benefits of Greenways and Open Spaces



Benefits of Greenways and Open Spaces

Greenways and open spaces provide a myriad of ways to deliver a quality of life that attracts people and businesses to the communities in our county. From economic to educational and lifestyle benefits, greenways and open spaces provide an abundance of nearby recreational opportunities. We can classify these benefits into six important areas: Economic, Recreation, Transportation, Lifestyles and Wellness, Environmental, and Educational and Cultural.

Economic Benefits

Our open spaces and waters attract tourism and the tourists will pay for canoes, bicycles, fishing and hunting expenses, food, lodging and camping sites. Recreation accounts for a significant portion of people's discretionary spending, particularly as more and more decide to spend their vacations at home. In other words, people are willing to pay for their relaxation. Nearly \$3 billion is spent annually in the state on wildlife related recreation. This, in turn, supports existing businesses and provides new entrepreneurial opportunities for sought-after amenities. New businesses can create jobs and provide tax revenues for municipalities.

Greenways improve property values for residents and businesses, particularly along the corridors that link one community to another. Quality of life is important when trying to attract businesses looking to relocate or expand

into communities. Greenway corridors and open spaces are considered to be primary contributors to an area's quality of life. According to a 2012 survey of recent homebuyers by the National Association of Home Builders, "Three community features would seriously influence the purchase decision of at least half all all buyers: walking/jogging trails (60%), a park area (54%), and an outdoor swimming pool (50%)." ¹

Recreation Benefits

Greenways and open space offer more opportunities to take advantage of walking and hiking, camping, fishing, and other outdoor activities.

Greenways provide connections between parks and other recreation opportunities and to neighborhoods. When people can get from

one place to another quickly, they tend to use corridors and pathways to do so. For example, in addition to simply walking for pleasure, people use the Buffalo Valley Rail Trail regularly to get to the local swimming pool and tennis courts or to access the farmers market and the County library, which are located near the trail.

Transportation Benefits

Greenways and trails provide alternate and safer modes of transportation. Union County is home to a large number of the Plain Sect who use bicycles as a common means of transportation. They are often seen cycling back and forth on the BVRT and along rural roads.

These alternate transportation routes also offer access for emergency services including fighting wildfires and wildland rescue.



Scattered development, particularly in new neighborhoods, cause residents in many communities to drive for even short distances, to the store, for example, or to work. Using greenways as transportation routes reduces traffic (and pollution) on local roads.

Trails can connect neighborhoods to schools and to playgrounds, providing a safer way for children to get from one place to another. This is especially helpful in those neighborhoods that do not have sidewalks.

Lifestyle and Wellness Benefits

Greenways and open spaces offer safe opportunities for regular exercise, thus making it easier for people to find ways to be physically active. Exercise not only helps to control weight problems, but it helps with diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cholesterol problems, and can improve mental health by helping reduce depression and anxiety. When people enjoy routine exercise, they may benefit by reductions in health care costs. In addition, it makes communities more attractive and safer places to live by fostering a sense of community and socialization.

Open spaces preserve farmland. Farmers can increase their ability to grow and distribute healthy, locally produced food. Our food system will help our community, our economy and our environment. In addition, the beauty of a field of corn or sunflowers provides aesthetic value to people.

Environmental Benefits

Providing for open spaces helps the environment by protecting our wildlife. How? By protecting and preserving wildlife habitat, linking fragmented habitats, and by helping to preserve the migration patterns for animals and birds.

Natural open space, particularly forests, reduces soil erosion along streams and creeks, thereby maintaining floodplain areas and also improves the water quality. These natural buffer zones around streams and creeks filters the pollution caused by agriculture and storm-water runoff.



Open space promotes groundwater recharge, reduces stormwater run off, and can promote hazard mitigation by reducing the effects of flooding.

Educational & Cultural Benefits

Greenways and open space promotes on-the-spot opportunities for educational experiences for both children and adults. Walking along a trail provides opportunities to study plants and wildlife. Furthermore, public access to these preserved open spaces helps increase awareness of local environmental concerns

Cultural benefits include the preservation of our historic places and the ability to improve access to those places. Naming trails and corridors after important historical events and places serves to enrich the experience.

Open spaces allow for community meeting places for picnics and for playgrounds. They are popular for festivals and for community celebrations, such as Lewisburg's Music in the Park series and Mifflinburg's Bluegrass and Blueberry Festival. Parks promote a sense of place and community pride.

And, as a source of community pride, greenways and open spaces help to reduce crime and illegal activities. People use parks and other spaces and they form ties with one another. That sense of community will produce safer neighborhoods.



Plan Overview and Organization

The planning process used to complete the *Union County Greenway and Open Space Plan* involved four phases over an 18-month period (See Figure 1) that included mobilizing the steering committee, reviewing prior planning efforts and current policies, analyzing existing conditions and trends, identifying opportunities, framing the vision, and establishing the greenway and open space framework.

Phase 1: Mobilization

This phase set the direction for the plan including organization of the project steering committee and design of the public involvement process. The steering committee included community representatives from across the county interested in agriculture, community planning, conservation, health, land use, livability, local government and outdoor recreation.

Phase 2: Identifying Opportunities

Phase two included an analysis of existing conditions and trends and an identification of key issues affecting the future of greenways and open space in the county. A detailed description of demographic and physical conditions and trends was developed, including GIS mapping and analysis. This included looking at community health, economic, housing, land use, natural resources, outdoor recreation, population, and

transportation information. The results of this are presented in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

In addition, a review of current plans, reports, and policies was performed to determine their influence on greenway development and open space conservation. County and municipal comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, Bucknell University research, the Susquehanna Greenway Plan, Lower West Branch River Conservation Plan, SEDA-COG Long Range Transportation Plan, US 15 Smart Transportation Corridor Plan, Bull Run Neighborhood Plan, and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and others were evaluated including their goals, strategies, recommendations and degree of implementation.

Phase 3: Framing the Vision

The purpose of this phase was to compile and articulate a set of goals and a vision that captures citizen aspirations for the future of greenways and open spaces in the county and their respective communities. Input from the steering committee, key person interviews, focus groups, public meetings, survey results, and opportunities identified through the existing conditions and trends analysis informed the vision statement and guiding principles for the greenway and open space plan. This task also resulted in establishing a greenway and open space framework that defined the overall spatial pattern and strategies for future greenway development and open space preservation in the county. This framework, which

is presented in Chapter 4, is aimed at efficiently using existing resources and facilities, adding to economic prosperity, and promoting the long-term sustainability and conservation of the county's rich natural and agricultural resources.

Phase 4: Plan Development

A combination of text, maps, graphics and tables was assembled into five chapters that included an action plan for moving the greenway and open space vision forward. Chapter 5 identifies recommended actions, roles and responsibilities, partners, estimated costs and potential financial resources. It also identifies early implementation projects that could be undertaken in the short-term to demonstrate plan goals and priorities. The final step in this phase was a review of the plan document by the steering committee and an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the plan for 45 days before it was considered for adoption. Subsequent to the public review period and the required public hearing, the Union County Planning Commission advised the Union County Commissioners to adopt the Plan.

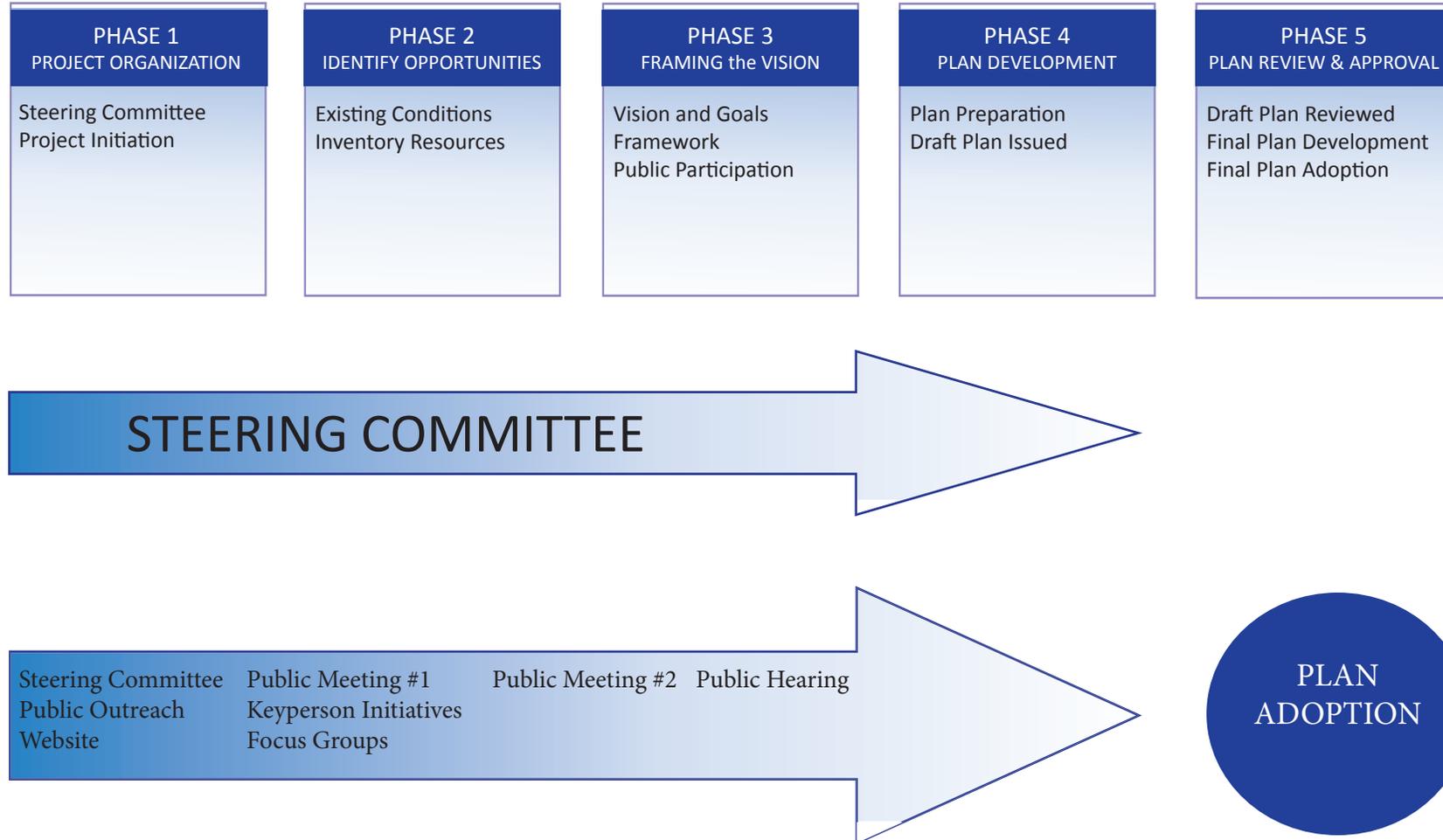
Public Involvement

A variety of techniques were used to engage the public as part of this planning effort and included a steering committee, press releases, a project website, public meetings, focus groups, interviews, newspaper articles, and an online survey. A summary of each method is provided here to provide an overview of the time and

Figure 1.

UNION COUNTY GREENWAY and OPEN SPACE PLAN

The Planning Process Chart



energy invested in hearing from people within the county on these issues; the specific results are presented in Chapter 4.

It should also be noted that prior to engaging the public, an exhaustive review was conducted to capture public input already documented from other recent planning efforts including, but not limited to, county and municipal comprehensive plans, feedback for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's 12-Year Plan update, the US Route 15 Smart Transportation Corridor Plan, Lewisburg River Town Planning, Union County Future of Agriculture Program, Lewisburg Area Park, Recreation, Greenway and Open Space Plan, and results from 160 Union County participants in the survey conducted for the Pennsylvania SCORP.

As noted previously the steering committee was made up of 14 citizen volunteers representing a variety of interests around the county. The role of the steering committee was to act as a sounding board, to review and provide comments on the plan text and maps, and to ensure that public input was translated into plan concepts. The committee met a total of six times during the course of the project.

In addition to the steering committee 22 people were engaged in interviews and/or focus groups conducted by the project team. The views of another 40 residents were captured, thanks to a forum held by the Lewisburg River Town planning team in conjunction with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership. In late February through

mid-March 2015, a series of five public meetings were held in Allenwood, Laurelton, Lewisburg, Mifflinburg, and Winfield. The sessions were announced via press releases/stories in *The Standard Journal*, *The Daily Item*, *Union County Times*, and *Williamsport Sun Gazette*, posts on the county Facebook page, county and project websites, through emailed and mailed notifications to municipal governing bodies and planning commissions and with 11x17 colored flyers posted around the county. Partner organizations and steering committee members also promoted the meetings.

The format of these sessions included displays of project information and handouts and featured a short presentation about the greenway and open space plan that addressed why the plan was being done, its purpose, benefits of greenways and open space, project schedule, and instructions on how attendees could have their ideas recorded.

After the presentation participants were asked to rotate among three stations. This included an "Idea Station" where goals, ideas, and recommendations could be written on a white board. There was a "Mapping Station" where stickers representing a variety of greenway and open space resources could be placed on a set of countywide maps to show where farmland should be preserved, new bike trails should be created, locations for riparian buffers, water access and the like. Comments could be written on the maps and additional

features drawn. Lastly was the "Money Station" where people could deposit their \$100 of Monopoly money into boxes representing predetermined project priorities (i.e. land preservation, trails, water access, riparian buffers, community parks) or use the "Other" box to designate a different priority or to suggest the money be saved.



To complement the steering committee, interviews, focus groups and public meetings a web-based survey was issued for May and June 2015 and was promoted through the county website, Facebook, the local media, and by partner organizations in order to give additional people an opportunity to provide input. A total of 150 residents participated in the survey.

Plan Vision and Goals

Based on the analysis of recent public input, and taking into account previous planning results, a vision statement was developed by the steering committee along with a set of goals. The vision and goals were shaped by ideas that were consistently mentioned throughout the public participation process and known from reviewing existing plans and reports. They are intended to articulate citizen aspirations for the future of county greenways and open space.

Vision Statement - **Preserve** agricultural and open space lands; **connect** natural and community resources through an integrated greenway network, and enhance Union County's quality of living by providing improved community health, economic, and outdoor recreation opportunities for the **enjoyment** of residents and visitors.

The goals are purposefully broad in nature and, along with the vision, establish guidance for developing the conceptual structure of the greenway and open space framework. The six goals are as follows:

-  Establish and expand greenway and multi-modal trail networks to improve quality of life and transportation connectivity in the county
-  Preserve high quality open space, including farmland
-  Increase the overall quality and quantity of riparian buffers in the county
-  Improve access, use and connection to the Susquehanna River and other water ways
-  Facilitate healthy lifestyles for county residents and visitors by providing opportunities to enjoy greenways, parks, trails and other open spaces
-  Conserve the county's natural resources and ecosystem functions

Discussion about how the above goals have shaped this plan can be found in Chapter 4 - Greenways and Open Space Framework.



GREENWAYS of Union County

PRESERVE + CONNECT + ENJOY

Vision

Preserve agricultural and open space lands; connect natural and community resources through an integrated greenway network; and enhance Union County's quality of living by promoting improved community health, economic, and outdoor recreation opportunities for the enjoyment of residents and visitors.



Notes

¹ Quint, Rose. "Home Trends and Buyer Preferences" 2013 National Association of Home Builders International Home Builders Show, Las Vegas, NV. January 23, 2013.