

## **PLAN FOR ENHANCING WALLKILL VALLEY RAIL TRAIL LINEAR PARK & GATEWAYS IN NEW PALTZ CORE**

### **Project Character**

**I-1. Provide a brief summary statement that describes the project, including its location, objective(s), and what will be achieved if the project is selected. The project's objective(s) should not convey or implicitly assume a predetermined result or recommendation. 5 points**

A Plan for Enhancing Hudson Valley Rail Trail Linear Park & Gateways in New Paltz's Core would consist of a facilities and sub-area transportation study, based on community and stakeholder engagement, that would define options to optimize multimodal active transport and open space and recreation level of service on the heavily utilized part of the trail within the heart of the Village of New Paltz. This study will focus on how to establish one of the main hubs within the burgeoning regional trail system. It will pinpoint ways to optimize resource utilization and provide strategies to manage this linear park. It would consider that this segment of trail is already heavily used and visitation can be expected to increase with the promotion of recreation and tourism and the implementation of an as yet defined future connection with the Hudson Valley Rail Trail. The project will provide planning to help facilitate complementary and supportive adjacent land use, such as connections to Historic Huguenot Street, mixed uses, outdoor dining, and parking. Importantly, the project will present, test and refine alternative linear park and active transport design options for the trail and its gateways, generating planning-level cost estimates and graphics that can be used to advance next-stage programming and readiness, including future grant applications.

Design process would explore notions like:

- Addition of benches and viewing areas, along with introductions of unified wayfinding and interpretive signage;
- Gateways and trail connections, with enhanced intersections, transit connectivity, safety upgrades, and visual appearance upgrades at locations like Main Street/ Route 299, Broadhead Avenue and North Front Street;

- Potential to add lighting and landscaping enhancements along an entire high-order segment, such as using decorative lighting provided on the trail and other physical actions to enhance ambiance;
- Options for trail surface/ tread improvements, to accommodate safe and convenient travel and mixed modes, including walking and bicycling, and possibly accommodation of modes like horses and roller blades.

The core of the rail trail in the Village is envisioned to run from Huguenot Street in the north, by Ulster County BOCES and Old New Paltz Road, South to by the Village boat launch on Plains Road. It is recognized that planning process may identify there should be establishment of two or more different level of service zones within this area.

If this project is selected, it is envisioned there will be a comprehensive plan produced for the corridor and its immediate surroundings that is rich in graphics, schematics, and landscaping criteria. There is a need for building consensus on how to sensitively steward and enhance this linear park so that it maintains very special character that contributes to community identify, but so that it also can sustainably accommodate an expected increase in overall use. It is also an objective of this plan to help provide visitor access and improved active transportation, on and around Historic Huguenot Street, which is a major community and regional resource and attraction.

**I-2. Describe (a) the issues and trends that give rise to the need for this project, (b) efforts to date to address them, and (c) why it is important to advance the project at this time. 15 Points**

The County Executive is strongly advocating for healthy communities and enhancement of the recreation and open space economy and the County is actively assisting the design and buildout of a major regional trail network. It is necessary to plan now for enhancement of this section of trail in order to define how a trail hub will be established here and so that it can accommodate heavier usage while retaining and magnifying the special open space and aesthetic features of this corridor.

At the same time, there is dialogue involving the non-profit Historic Huguenot Street and the municipality about ways to manage traffic so that historic building resources and the historic landscape character of Huguenot Street environments

do not degrade, but also so that there is increased visitation and enjoyment of these historic landmarks. It seems that the rail trail can be enhanced and better promoted so that more people walk and bike to Huguenot Street.

Another issue, given the already established recreation and tourism economic base of the community and region, is one of consistent non-recurrent congestion, meaning off-peak weekend highway congestion. This results in travel time delays and inefficiencies and quality of life impacts. Overall planning for congestion management can benefit from detailed planning into how this linear park facility and the street grid that services its gateways can be developed to foster active transport and reduced auto trips within Route 299 and from satellite parking areas during periods of peak congestion.

Considering the recent planning, the 2004 Transportation - Land Use Plan catalyzed extensive non-motorized transportation planning within the Town and Village. The community formed a Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee and a Transportation Implementation Committee, each of which is addressing aspects of multi-modal system development. Moreover, both municipalities have been active on the County Trails initiative, organizations like Open Space Institute and Mohonk Preserve have been assisting non-motorized system supply enhancements and connectivity, and groups like Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Association have been stepping-up to enhance and steward this linear park. It is now at this time important for multiple stakeholders to evaluate progress to date and form options and consensus on ways to optimize this facility and its role within the local and regional system of recreation and active transportation.

Many people in the community appear to value the current level of service, dirt surface with narrow tread and the rural character of the trail as it is now and might not feel that upgrades could be provided without loss of open space character. However, intersections that are heavily used by pedestrians at dusk and at night, such as the one on North Front Street, can benefit from safety improvements, such as to improve the aprons and surface, provide high visibility signage and crosswalks, and upgrade lighting. There can also be planning to improve the trail surface so that it is more uniform and drains well and is safe for people like runners and more universally accessible for people with mobility limitations.

**I-3. Explain how this project will (a) help to fulfill any of the 8 Goals and Objectives in Chapter 2 of UCTC's Draft 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan ([http://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/planning/LRTP\\_Draft\\_081915.pdf](http://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/planning/LRTP_Draft_081915.pdf)) and/or (b) is recommended as part of any other UCTC Plan. 15 points**

The project is consistent with most goals of the LRTP, including for: safety; economic vitality; accessibility and connectivity; mobility and reliability; system preservation; and protection and enhancement of the environment. The study will help identify ways to improve pedestrian access through completion and upgrade of sidewalks in critical locations and by connecting them with this rail trail corridor, while it will also examine how to provide improved pedestrian accessibility with Huguenot Street and the North Chestnut Street (NYS Route 32) corridor, the latter which is targeted for compatible mixed-use development and incorporation of a more pedestrian-scale than auto-oriented design.

The proposed project will support the current regional economy and future economic growth. It will bring this park and active transport facility into good repair and address existing safety deficiencies and anticipated safety needs, including by finding appropriate ways to accommodate diverse active modes. It is supposed it would help foster measurable improvement to reduce serious walker and biker injuries at intersections with the trail in the Village as well as help improve reliability of travel time within the Route 299/ Main Street corridor.

Finally, this project furthers goals and notions in Ulster County's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan. In doing so, it promotes environmental protection by aiding the use and fit and development of active transport facilities (that are GHG friendly) and the non-motorized and physical enhancements that it explores can help further smart growth and quality land use that is desirable and which compliments community character.

**II-1. Describe how the project will facilitate the effective and efficient use of public resources to (a) improve the safety of transportation services and/or facilities; and (b) enhance community character and quality of life. 30 points**

This project provides for effective use of public resources because it promotes alternative transportation, multi-modalism and the enhancement of a linear park that provides a place for people of all ages and abilities, and means, to live active lives and get outdoors. It represents investment to plan for the cost-effective, sustainable development of an existing resource. It also embodies effectively

mixing parks and recreation and cultural resource access and management and transportation within a project.

There is strong evidence about the benefits of active transport from an environmental justice perspective as well as based on the role physical activity plays in helping reduce disease incidence, such as of the heart and also diabetes. Moreover, Ulster County's and New Paltz's economies are heavily tied into and dependent upon recreation and tourism. Enhancing the non-motorized system in this linear park can help keep Main Street vital and provide a way for multiple modes to access retail and service businesses within the community.

Ulster County Executive Hein is initiating development of an extensive/world-class trails system. New Paltz is evolving as a major hub within it and enhancement of this segment of trail through a linear park programming and connectivity study would setup visual enhancements in the heart of the community.

This project would enhance and sustain a non-motorized linear park facility on a heavily used section of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. The plan will provide guidance to facilitate safe bicycle and pedestrian interaction within this linear park, show cost-effective ways to enhance service, such as in terms of travel lanes and surface treatments.

III-1. Provide a step-by-step outline of the primary tasks necessary to conduct the project as you currently envision it. Tasks should be sufficiently well-defined to allow UCTC to: (a) understand how the proposed project leads to expected accomplishments (see below) and (b) how the project will be conducted and monitored . **5 points.**

It is contemplated that this study and plan could be completed within nine months to a year. The main elements of the study would be: goals and objectives; inventory and contextual analysis; alternatives exploration; public outreach program; preferred plan and planning-level cost estimates; plus a project implementation program. These same elements should be translated into tasks and there should be an additional task for a study implementation strategy/ steering committee meetings.

The consultants hired to lead this project should be qualified in active transport and landscape architecture as well as public opinion research and public participation so that they can lead key groups and interested persons in a detailed dialogue in the formulation of a strategy to enhance the park and provide for on-

going maintenance and stewardship of the resource, including with the assistance of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Association and the involvement of Historic Huguenot Street, key municipal boards, committees and commissions, as well as other area non-profits and other recreation and economic development-oriented interest groups. Conduct of the project could probably benefit from opinion research, such as administration of a questionnaire and focus groups on active transport, recreation, area land use and economic development, since the community is preparing to embark on long-range comprehensive planning and the findings from these types of input-gathering probably would also assist general planning as well as understanding public perceptions and interests regarding the Rail Trail itself.

III-2. List the project's anticipated accomplishments and final deliverables (guidelines, ordinances, recommendations, concept plans, etc.). Explain how the completed project and its recommendations and deliverables will be applied, implemented, or carried forward. **10 points**

Accomplishments of this project would be a plan, well-vetted within the community that analyzes and prioritizes alternate approaches to providing landscape park enhancements, in order to physically improve the corridor and the major gateways to the rail trail, as well as the safe and sustainable operation of these. As part of providing management and development strategy for the park facility, desired products of the project are: graphic designs, recreation service standards and facility standards, including typical details, examples of forms of adjacent site linkage and mitigation, and project and alternative planning-level cost estimates. These tools will be used by the community to move the program of recommended improvements forward, including by seeking grants from implementation. The plan should be rich with graphic information which will enable us to build a vision for this corridor within the community, region and among potential funders. This type of linear park concept and enhancement plan will help New Paltz advance to design and project readiness, including through future project implementation funding requests to federal or state DOT's, other government entities, as well as foundations or other potential donors.

III-3. Name the contributors of any additional sources of funding and/or provide qualifications for individuals that will provide in-kind contributions and specify whether their support is confirmed or anticipated. **5 points**

There are no additional sources of funding identified for this project at this point in time. However, the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Association did recently receive an award from a Hudson River Valley Greenway Trails Grant for the purpose of improving iconography/symbols and signage along the full 18-mile length of the fuller corridor. Moreover, it is quite conceivable that other resource leveraging can occur to aid development of this project and its implementation. For instance, Historic Huguenot Street is actively planning for maintenance and development of its overall facility that is adjacent to the corridor. There is also community planning to advance a microgrid. Furthermore, a SUNY-led project will help engage the community in the design and rapid deployment of solar technology. Thus, it is conceivable there will be a readiness to implement some signage and / or kiosks in enhanced locations that this plan identifies within a broader overall program of possible linear park and gateway enhancements. WVRTA representative Feeny was contacted about this project and appeared to indicate support for it.

As noted, one important community based institution that serves to benefit from this project and establishment of revitalized gateways to the trail and enhancement of the corridor as a linear park leading from Main Street to the national landmark district on Huguenot Street is the HHS. The Village is actively partnering with this organization to elevate awareness of the historic and cultural resources there and increase visitation to HHS's facilities while also helping promote non-motorized access so that historic buildings can be protected from the adverse effects of adjacent vehicular traffic.

III-4. Identify the level of support from elected officials and municipal decision makers. Describe the outreach efforts (public meetings, advisory groups, survey, Internet, etc.) that will be used to reach the general public and the project stakeholders, including individuals, community organizations, underrepresented groups, and businesses affected by the project. **10 points**

The level of support from the Mayor and the Village board for this project is high. Likewise, the level of support from the Town Board appears to be equally high. The Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee and the leader of the TIC have identified their support, and the former resolved to provide a letter of support. WVRTA and Wallkill Valley Land Trust are being contacted to explore and enlist their support. Also, groups like OSI and Mohonk Preserve appear to support this project. In September 2015 the Village's Municipal Planner identified that the UPWP call for

projects would be forthcoming and at that point started coordinating with the Town–Village Transportation Implementation Committee as well as the joint bicycle pedestrian committee, who have reviewed this project. The support of the Town and Village administrations is encouraging as evidenced by the letter of support for this project respectively endorsed by each body.