

Public participation is an integral component to the formation of a River Conservation Plan. It provides ideas for action and prioritizes potential projects, creating a community-driven plan. For this report, a variety of methods were used to gather information: public meetings, website updates, interviews, and municipal surveys.

A. Initial Public Meetings

Four initial informational public meetings were held in early 2002 (notes of comments taken at the meetings and from email and phone calls appear in Appendix G). Participants at the public meetings noted an improved river corridor – cleaner water, more wildlife, more trails, increased development. However, participants noted again and again the need for more public access to the river. A few sites were suggested, and it was noted that working with the railroads is necessary to gain access to the waterway. As sites are established, it is important to include amenities such as restrooms and food and fuel establishments. Attendees noted that some recreational improvements have occurred along the riverfront. With regional cooperation and planning, these types of improvements could increase along the river.

Participants preferred a mix of land use types in the corridor (business, recreation, residential). Participants were concerned that riverfront development may be at the expense of some of the natural areas and encouraged the protection of ravines and tributaries. They believed that the area should be managed jointly or regionally, and questioned whether the scope of the River Conservation Plan was too narrow since the issues surrounding the corridor are regional.

Transportation was cited as a big issue within the corridor, exacerbated by the topography. Mass transit alternatives are necessary, and participants suggested that bike trails could alleviate some of the problem, particularly if they were integrated into the neighborhoods.

Participants recognized the problem of sewer overflows in the region and noted the garbage problem in the river and along the riverbanks.

Comments received by email or expressed through phone calls mirrored those from the public meetings. Recreational boaters need boat ramps near adequate parking and places to get gas, as well as dock facilities that will allow boaters to access food, service, and entertainment venues from the water. Pittsburgh should become bicycle friendly and integrate the bike trails into the neighborhoods, using them as a means of transportation, not just recreation.

Individuals suggested looking at the amenities created in other cities, including Providence, San Antonio, Louisville, and Chicago, but suggested that guidelines for development are needed to avoid poorly thought-out developments. Other suggestions included making a video of the rivers from a boat and use it for marketing the region to tourists, and adding more fountains to the Point.

B. Key Person Interviews, Surveys, Presentations

Municipal managers were interviewed by phone in fall 2001 and mailed written surveys in June 2002. Examples of the interview questions and surveys appear in Appendices A and G. These individuals noted that the corridor has great potential for recreational opportunities like fishing, boating, and biking, hiking, and walking along trails. However, they were less likely to support an activity like swimming in our rivers. Most municipal officials indicated that water quality,

streambank erosion, and combined sewer overflows were a concern as well as a lack of access to the waterways. Several communities are actively working on recreational improvements within their borders. *Their projects are mentioned elsewhere in the report.*

Additional meetings were held with members of the Riverlife Task Force, Allegheny County Planning Department, and major riverfront landowners. Project briefings were also conducted before the North Hills and Char West Councils of Governments.

C. Public Prioritization of Recommendations

Over 50 recommendations were developed during this process. They were sorted into 10 categories: river access, amenities, biology, culture, education, litter, planning, recreation, transportation, and water. The potential recommendations were circulated among several key individuals - including municipal managers, representatives from non-profit organizations, academia, business, developers, and government - to refine them and eliminate those that were impossible or beyond the scope of the study. These individuals then were asked to rank the recommendations according to when each item should be initiated: 1) first year after completion of document, 2) two to four years after the completion of the document, or 3) five years and beyond the completion of the document. Where appropriate, they also offered a project cost estimate of low, medium, or high.

During the spring of 2003, five public meetings were held to prioritize and refine the recommendations. Participants were asked to rank their most important recommendation in each category and their overall five most important recommendations, with the option of distributing those five votes however they wanted (e.g., the same or different from the original picks, as well as multiple votes for a particular recommendation.). The five overall votes were weighted in the final calculation of votes for each recommendation.

These exercises provide an action plan and timeline for the study area. The results appear in Chapter 8 along with a more thorough discussion of potential projects for the Three Rivers area.

The public meeting dates and locations were:

Round 1 – 2002

Avalon – March 25
Oakmont – April 9
Millvale – April 11
South Side – April 16

Round 2 – 2003

Avalon – March 31
Oakmont – April 3
South Side – April 7
Millvale – April 10
Downtown Pittsburgh – April 14