

Greenways



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INTRODUCTION

Overpasses and underpasses, by-ways and highways...roadways provide our human population with the means to transport our vehicles and selves from place to place. As our population has grown, so too have the length and width of our roadways, often to negative effect. A case in point is the Snoqualmie Pass, which cuts through the Cascade Mountains outside of Seattle, Washington. Now a “pass” in name only, the Snoqualmie has morphed from a pass to a trail to a wagon road to a seasonal highway to a four-lane interstate to the current six-lane Interstate 90. In the process, it bisected forested land, harmed wildlife populations, and dramatically increased the vehicular traffic using the route. The ease with which the human population could now transport itself through this region left it vulnerable to unchecked development, both residential and commercial (Benfield, 2001).

By 1990, some folks were taking notice. One in particular was Jack Hornung. A hiker who traversed the Snoqualmie Pass route, Hornung organized an 88-mile march from the Cascade Mountains to Puget Sound, the goal of which was to raise awareness of the human encroachment upon the pass’ surrounding environs. A year later, the Mountain to Sound Greenway Trust was born. Its goal: the protection of wildlife, forests, and working farms; the preservation of the area’s natural beauty and historic communities; and the enhancement of recreation, tourism, and employment. The proposed greenway would abut the interstate on either side and consist of linked trails, farms, forests, and parks (Benfield, 2001).

Meanwhile, back on the East Coast, Robert Borski, a former U.S. Congressman from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was looking at the northern reaches of the Delaware River and thinking much the same as Hornung: What a mess and what a shame. Specifically, he said, “All over the world, people celebrate their rivers. Here in Philadelphia, we hide it.”¹ Between Interstate 95, abandoned lots, brownfields, and defunct industry, the citizenry of northeast Philadelphia were almost completely cut off from their river...a river that William Penn was once so enamored of that he built his home, Pennsbury Manor, along its riverbanks in 1681.² Borski took action...with talk of a ‘river renaissance’ that began in the mid-90’s.³ Almost 10 years later, the Delaware River City Corporation (DRCC), a non-profit agency, was created in 2004, with Borski as chairman of the board.

¹ “So Much Potential on the Waterfront.” Northeast Times. Brian Rademaekers. June 28, 2007.

² “A Rising Tide Lifts All Ships on Delaware River Development.” Councilwoman Joan Krajewski. Nov. 10, 2006.

³ “Down by the River.” Northeast Times. Tom Waring. July 26, 2007.

The DRCC promotes itself as “the principal advocate and watchdog to ensure that river projects are funded and implemented in a proper and timely manner.”⁴ Its mission is to reconnect the riverfront with Northeast Philadelphia, most of which sits on the west side of I-95; to reclaim, improve, and preserve green spaces along the river; and to enliven the area with residential development that doesn’t block access to the river or dispossess existing businesses.⁵ Specifically, the plan is to provide public access along the riverfront; create a 12-20-foot wide, multi-purpose continuous trail system; construct an actual river road—not like Columbus Boulevard or Delaware Avenue; restore the riverbank, including wetlands, mud flats, etc. as natural habitats; and incorporate public esplanades, fishing piers, and open spaces for civic events, festivals, and revenue-generating activities and the like.⁶ The DRCC also has a mandate allowing it to absolutely require that all development establish a 50-foot setback, or buffer, from the river.

THE WEST COAST GREENWAY AND THE EAST COAST GREENWAY: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

The two greenways differ in some dramatic ways. Geographically, one is west while the other is east. One exists in the mountainous country while the other is situated in an urban city. One cuts through a mountain while its eastern counterpart abuts a river. For brevity’s sake, let us refer to them as the mountain greenway and the river greenway.

The mountain greenway runs from Alki Point to Thorp and spans 105 miles and 50,000+ acres (Benfield, 2001).⁷ The river greenway pales in size by comparison; when completed, it will extend 11 miles from Pulaski Park at Allegheny Avenue to Glen Foerd Mansion at Grant Avenue and cover 700+ acres.^{8,9} Here, too, lies another difference: the mountain greenway is complete; the river greenway is far from it.

As the river greenway is situated in an urban setting, the current river real estate is



⁴ “Down by the River.” *Northeast Times*. Tom Waring. July 26, 2007.

⁵ “Nutter Tours Hidden Side of N.E.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Larry Eichel. July 21, 2007.

⁶ North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan, November 2005.

⁷ See map in Appendix A.

⁸ It should be noted, however, that it is anticipated that the North Delaware Riverfront Greenway will ultimately connect with the East Coast Greenway, which will extend from Maine to Florida.

⁹ See map in Appendix B.

used residentially, recreationally, commercially, and industrially. (See photo above.) Though these latter two uses are rather more prevalent than the former two, there is the fact that much



of Philadelphia's industry has long since left the river, and what was once industrial is now brownfield.¹⁰ The mountain greenway, by comparison, was mostly farms, forests, and parks. (See photo at left.) It was when the push for massive development began that Hornung stepped in to forestall development, or, rather, "sustainably" develop (Benfield, 2001).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the planning stages of the two greenways also differ rather dramatically. While the mountain greenway was mapped out in about two years, the river greenway was 10 years in the planning stage. This may be attributable to several factors: one, the dysfunctional nature of Philadelphia's city government;¹¹ two, a lack of will and organization to act; three, the sheer volume of stakeholders; four, the jumble of public and privately owned land parcels;¹² and five, the extensive development/damage all ready done to the river's edge over 300+ years of habitation. The mountain greenway, by contrast, was generally under-developed land that was more under threat of massive, unchecked development than it was all ready subject to it, excepting the six-lane interstate, of course.

THE WEST COAST GREENWAY AND THE EAST COAST GREENWAY: WHAT'S THE SAME?

There are, actually, more similarities between the two greenways than one might think. In fact, the similarities outnumber the dissimilarities. First, and rather interesting to this author's mind, is the impetus for the greenways. In both instances, it was an interstate. In Washington, I-90 generated increased traffic, increased population, and increased development. In Philadelphia, I-95 created a 10-15-mile canyon cutting off most residents from the Delaware River. In Philadelphia, too, of course, there was the abandoned industry leading to brownfields and the mixed-bag, unchecked, haphazard development along the river.

¹⁰ "Plans for River Revitalization are Flowing." Northeast Times. Jon Campisi. July 3, 2008.

¹¹ This applies particularly to the complex, convoluted, archaic, and unequally applied zoning laws, per Janice Woodcock of PCPC, on river walking tour, fall 2006, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹² "Down by the River." Philadelphia City Paper. Daniel Campa. May 2, 2007.

Secondly, in keeping with current trends, all stakeholders were invited to the respective greenway tables. The mountain greenway players included government officials, residents, environmental leaders, and forest company executives (Benfield, 2001). The river players were comprised of private developers, local government, business and industry executives, civic groups, and the citizenry at large. In Washington, all nine city and county jurisdictions through which the greenway runs endorsed the final plan (Benfield, 2001). In Philadelphia, too, the DRCC was able to get all parties on board with the final master plan. Though there were some initial concerns and resistance on the part of some property owners (business, company, industrial), the DRCC worked closely with them to allay their fears, which related to public access to/near their space and the potential for vandalism, theft, and the like.¹³

It follows that if the Mountain Trust and the DRCC were savvy enough to include all stakeholders in the planning process, they would likewise be flexible in their dealings with those very same stakeholders. As an example, the Mountain Trust worked with logging firms to encourage them to employ best practices. With developers, they encouraged smart, sustainable development (Benfield, 2001). The DRCC, too, was flexible in dealing with industry and in tailoring their final master plan to succeed rather than confront. For example, the trail will not always be able to follow a direct, contiguous route as it wends its way along the 11-mile stretch of river. There will be instances where it will have to take a circuitous detour around a plant or a prison or a sensitive stretch of wildlife habitat.¹⁴

Another rather interesting similarity is that though the length of the planning stages of the two greenways differed dramatically, the time to complete the implementation stage is anticipated to be the same. As mentioned, the mountain greenway is now complete; it took 10 years to achieve the end result. It is expected that full implementation of the river greenway will also take 10 years. One must recall, however, that the mountain greenway encompasses 105 miles and 50,000+ acres while the river greenway is 11 miles and 700+ acres. Though Benfield does not provide us with all the details of the mountain greenway's implementation, it still seems commendable that the DRCC and the City of Philadelphia will be able, in 10 years' time, to undo brownfields and the like and create in their place healthy and vital environments.

A less surprising commonality between the two greenways is funding sources. The Mountain Trust received funding dollars from the county, the State of Washington, the federal government, and corporate citizens. The trust also received can't-put-a-price-tag-on-it funding in the form of 60,000 volunteer man-hours. The DRCC is funded in a like manner. Their donors include the federal government (especially the Department of Transportation), the

¹³ September 12, 2008 telephone conversation with Sarah Thorp, Executive Director, DRCC.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the City of Philadelphia, and private foundations. In fact, the DRCC relies on funding from private foundations to cover its administrative costs, for which federal dollars cannot be spent.¹⁵

THE WEST COAST GREENWAY AND THE EAST COAST GREENWAY: WHAT'S NEITHER THE SAME NOR DIFFERENT?

There are several items where the two organizations do not fit neatly into either of the first two categories...

The first item is cost. It is expected that implementation of the North Delaware Riverfront Greenway master plan will cost \$150 million dollars; Benfield does not provide us with the final dollar numbers.

The future ownership of the land and its acquisition is also neither completely similar nor completely different. Firstly, the Mountain Trust was tasked with brokering land purchases, facilitating land swaps, and pressing for “good” use of privately-owned lands (Benfield, 2001). The DRCC is also tasked with land acquisition, whether through purchase or easements. It also does fundraising and develops signage and educational programs.

Finally, there is the question of ultimate land ownership. It is not completely clear from Benfield’s account who owns all of the land. On the one hand, he says, “More than 50,000 acres of **private** [emphasis mine] farms, forests, and other green space have been protected” (P. 180). Yet earlier in the text, he says, “The trust’s goal was never to buy **all** [emphasis mine] the greenway properties...” (P. 179). So, whether all of the land is in private hands or some is held by local jurisdictions is not clear. In Philadelphia, on the other hand, privately held land will, of course, remain privately owned. Land purchased by the DRCC, however, will be owned by the Fairmount Park Commission while the city will own “all of the stuff that we’re developing.”¹⁶

DISCUSSION

Greenways have much to recommend them—environmentally, ecologically, and economically. Nando Micale, an associate at the Wallace Roberts & Todd design firm, suggests that social equity, ecology, and economics are “essentially the definition of sustainability.”¹⁷ If we accept his definition, then greenways meet all of these criteria and are, therefore, sustainable

¹⁴ September 12, 2008 telephone conversation with Sarah Thorp, Executive Director DRCC.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Green Infrastructure’s Expense.” Planphilly.com. Alan Jaffe. Nov. 1, 2007

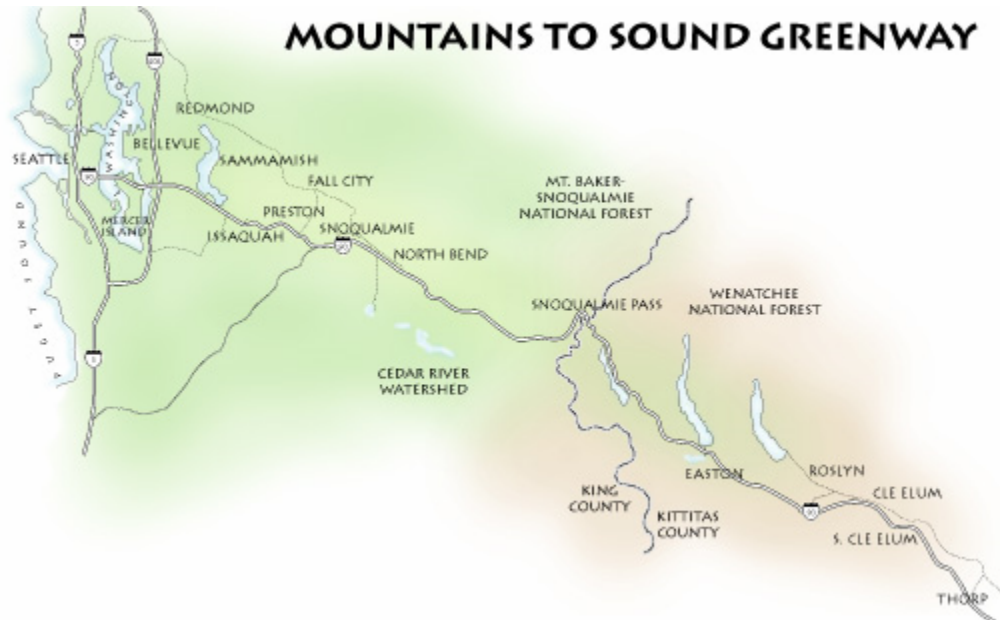
undertakings. Clearly, greenways are good for the environment: They curtail development and/or counsel wise development; they *are* green spaces—grasses, trees, natural habitats—thereby encouraging the return and/or proliferation of fauna, whether it be avian, reptilian, or mammalian. Greenways along rivers are ideal riparian buffers, filtering pollutants of all kinds and thereby protecting water supplies, a factor which can be considered both an ecological plus as well as an economical one. Greenways are an ideal source of recreation, creating open, friendly spaces for outdoor activities that are often sorely absent in inner cities. Outdoor activities are good for one's spiritual and mental health. Greenways, when created with stakeholders and the common good in mind, as they often are, foster a sense of community, resulting in feelings of goodwill towards one's fellow and, possibly, a concomitant reduction in crime. Greenways, if agenda-free, are egalitarian, open and inviting to all, i.e., socially equitable. Economically, greenways increase property values and encourage new business. Aesthetically, greenways provide natural beauty.

According to Benfield et al, the Mountains to Sound Greenway is a successful greenway. All indicators point to the North Delaware Riverfront Greenway being a successful greenway as well. If these two greenways are successful, and successful greenways are sustainable, then the mountain greenway and the river greenway are sustainable undertakings.

In conclusion, then, everyone should have access to a greenway. Go greenways!

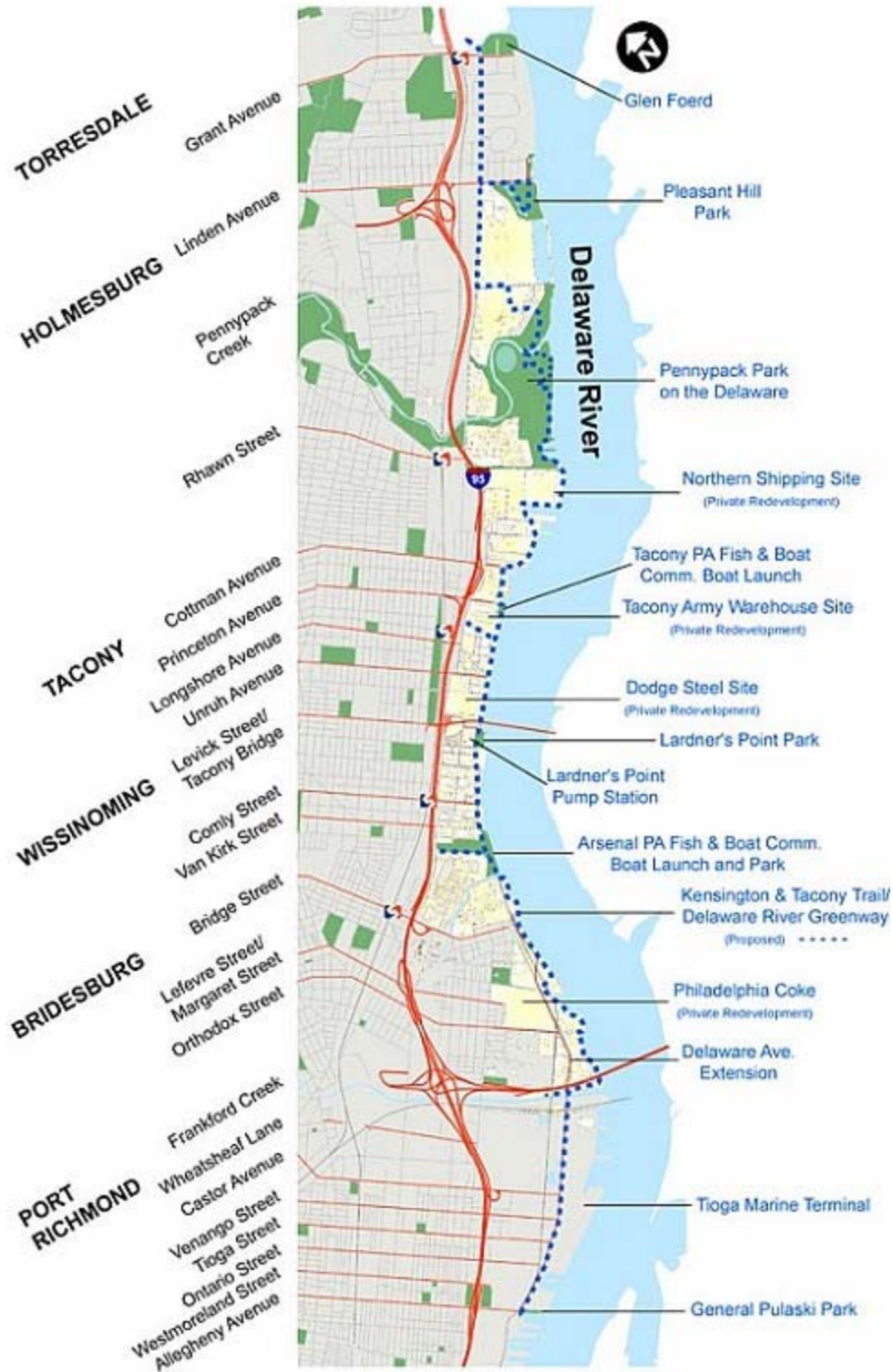
¹⁷ "Green Infrastructure's Expense." Planphilly.com. Alan Jaffe. Nov. 1, 2007

Appendix A



<http://www.mtsgreenway.org/about/greenwaymap1.jpg>

Appendix B



References

Benfield, Kaid, F., Jutka Terris, Nancy Vorsanger. Solving Sprawl. Washington, D.C: Island Press, 2001.