

ASSAWOMAN CANAL TRAIL CONCEPT PLAN

Current Project Scope:

To conceptually plan and develop design elements for a walking, hiking and biking trail along both sides of the Assawoman Canal. The Canal extends from White's Creek (north end) to South Bethany (south end). The main element of the conceptual plan is to conduct public workshops from which maintenance, safety, access and crossings can be identified and addressed. In addition, public workshops will gauge the level of interest. *Without local support for this project, the Trail will not move beyond a plan.*

Canal History & Vision for A Pathway:

The Assawoman Canal, built in the 1880's, is part of the Intracoastal Waterway. In 1990, the Army Corps of Engineers deeded the entire canal to the State of Delaware. In 1995, the State began a conceptual design for a trail to parallel the canal but did not have public participation and shelved the plan. In 2008, the municipalities requested funding from the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund to conduct a conceptual plan for a trail along the Canal.

Most Recent Meeting of Project Leaders & Participants:

Thursday, January 22, 2009, initial meeting with Municipalities and adjacent communities
Thursday, April 2, 2009, Junction & Breakwater Trail bike field trip
Friday, May 15, 2009, Salt Pond community, Home owners Association meeting

State of Delaware Project Partners:

Paul Nicholson – DNREC Park Operations Administrator for Operations & Maintenance
Doug Long – DNREC Park Superintendent for Delaware Seashore State Park
Bob Ehemann – DNREC Outdoor Recreation Planner, Division of Parks & Recreation

Town or Civic Association Project Partners:

Bahamas Beach Cottages – Bill Just (Council Member-At-Large)
Bethany Beach – Tony McClenny (Mayor), Cliff Graviet (Town Manager)
Ocean View – Conway Gregory (Town Manager), George Walter (Town Administrator)
Sea Colony – Pat Davis (President, Sea Colony Civic Association), Jim Toedman (Member, SCCA)
South Bethany – Melvin Cusick (Mayor)
Dr. Richard Nemphis – invited guest of Conway Gregory, primary participant coordinator
Salt Pond – Rosie Marks, Jessie Pieplow, Dick Malone and Chris Brown
Other communities?

Project Funding:

The project has received a \$20,000 grant from the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund for planning; additional state and federal funding will be needed to complete the engineering and construction phases of the project; the communities of Bethany Beach, Ocean View, Sea Colony and South Bethany have each contributed \$5,000 to the project; other communities have not been asked to contribute and that is not a condition of their participation in this process.

Physical Extent of The State's Assawoman Canal Ownership:

From the centerline of the canal, the state fully owns (for the entire length of the canal) 105 feet equally on either side for a total of 210 feet across; the State is required to maintain a 20 foot buffer from the high water mark of the canal; this will leave adequate space to construct the pathway and remain within the bounds of State owned property; no structures, no signs, no towers, no roadways, no maintained land or anything like this may be constructed or kept within this 210 foot space for the entire length of the canal.

Ensuring Compliance with The State's Canal Ownership:

DNREC will send letters to adjacent landowners, advising them of the State's requirements to remove structures currently within the 210 foot property range (105 feet to either side of the canal's centerline). These encroachments must be removed by Dec 31, 2009.

Representative Input from Town & Civic Association Participants:

The town leaders from Bethany Beach, Ocean View and South Bethany all conceptually support this project; the civic leaders from Sea Colony and Bahamas Beach Cottages also conceptually support this project. The Trail is envisioned to provide the public with recreation and commuting opportunities which will connect communities with their past and each other. Walkers, joggers and bikers will be able to enjoy the natural setting free of motorized vehicles. The specifics of the Trail will be determined by the workshop participants and the Assawoman Canal Trail Planning Committee.

Concerns expressed include the following (in no particular order of importance): do as little damage to the environment as possible; construct privacy fencing where property owners are close; provide for security and safety of users; identify needs for policing and protection; define hours of use; discuss ways to ensure cleanliness and maintenance; give trail as natural a "look" as possible; construct boardwalks over the rock-falls beneath bridges versus routing across roadways; provide access areas to launch canoes and kayaks; remove invasive plant life and replace with native species; mount small plaques to identify unique trees, similar to James Farm; mount informational plaques when passing from one town or community to another; also, mount plaques to identify local wildlife; provide periodic placement of benches for people to rest and relax; construct boardwalk along water's edge in South Bethany enabling passage to southern-most point; intelligently place points of entry and exit to the pathway; en-sure a meandering trail versus "straight line"; construct peaked-roof information "tack" boards along trail; set up informative and open opportunities for town and community residents to meet, review and assess plans and drawings developed by DNREC and provide feedback suggestions for improvement.

DNREC Response to Representative Input Noted Above:

DNREC is supportive of all the concerns noted above and fully committed to collaborating with the Committee to conduct public workshops. Staff will be available to speak with concerned homeowners and respond to their questions.

Short-Term Follow-up Action by Town & Civic Association Participants:

DNREC, Division of Parks and Recreation, will provide maps and conceptual rendering for the workshops for the public to comment on. Once the renderings are available, the Committee will meet to review them and survey questions in preparation for the workshops.

Longer-Term Follow-up Action by Town & Civic Association Participants:

We will have follow-up meetings together; prepare for meetings with respective towns and civic associations; seek input, guidance and support from DNREC representatives, and respond to questions you may have as the Trail moves from the planning stage toward actual construction and beyond.

Expanded Project Scope:

Build the trail and connections from the Canal to other trails, communities and destinations.

Other Successful & Similar Multi-Community Trail Projects:

- (1) Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Trail Chesapeake - MD and Delaware City, DE (planning phase)
- (2) Junction & Breakwater Trail - Lewes and Rehoboth Beach (nearing completion)