

EARLY ACTION PROJECT: KELLY'S LOCK TO LAUREL RUN PARK

A ½ MILE SECTION OF THE SRT IN MUHLENBERG TOWNSHIP

Overview

In 2022 the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA launched a three-part study of the remaining gaps of the trail in Berks County. That study, the Schuylkill River Trail Feasibility Study & Preliminary Design & Engineering includes three separately funded parts:

1. The Schuylkill River Trail From Reading to Hamburg
2. The Schuylkill River Trail in Birdsboro & Robeson Township
3. Preliminary Design & Engineering for an Early Action Project

This report discusses the Preliminary Design and Engineering for the Early Action Project. The Preliminary Design and Engineering for Early Action Projects was funded by Berks County Community Foundation.

Goals of the Early Action Engineering Trail Project

Goal 1. Identify a Portion of the SRT Trail Gap Suitable for a 2022 PA DCNR Trail Grant Application

Goal 2. Complete Site Analysis, Planning, Surveying, and Design of Early Action Project

Goal 3. Support the Submission of a PA DCNR Grant Application

Goal 4. Incorporate the Early Action Project into the Overall Project

Early Action Planning Process

Selection of the Early Action Project

The Consultant Team looked at the proposed alignment and developed four options for consideration to be selected as the Early Action Project. The three projects that were not selected but discussed as potential Early Action Projects included:

- **Old Schuylkill Boulevard** – Which used the right-of-way along River Road in Muhlenberg to accommodate an off-road side path.
- **Riverfront** – which was a trail continuing north from the existing Schuylkill River Trail section in the City of Reading.
- **Jim Dietrich Park Connector** – which would be an off-road trail that connected Jim Dietrich Park to Riverfront Road.

All four projects were required to have the ability to be implemented within the next year. Which was the expectation as a grant application was being submitted for the chosen Early Action Project in April of 2022, to help fund the selected project. The four options were presented to the SRG as well as the project steering committee. After discussion with SRG, the steering committee and site visits to the potential project sites, an Early Action Project was selected.

The selected project is a trail segment from Kelly's Lock Park through Pioneer Grove to Laurel Run Park in Muhlenberg Township. This project was selected for several reasons including that the trail would be located on property that was owned by Muhlenberg Township, there was existing room for the alignment to go through the parks, and connected three parks within the Township together, while also being a part of the proposed Schuylkill River Trail Alignment. Additionally, this project had a lot of support from the Township, who agreed to use their public works department to build the Early Action Project Trail Segment.

Additional reasons this Early Action Project was selected include:

- The Kelly's Lock section of the Schuylkill River Trail is a ready-to-build project
- The timing of the project overlaps with the larger Schuylkill River Trail Feasibility Study for Northern Berks County and will serve as a demonstration project to encourage additional sections within the Feasibility Study to be built.
- SRG can use the momentum created from his project to prepare design drawings for additional connecting sections within the City of Reading and Laurel Run Park.
- The segment of trail included within the Early Action Project was already part of a multi-year strategy for Muhlenberg Township to help complete the trail gaps of the Schuylkill River Trail within their community.

Early Action Project Benefits

The Early Action Project will provide several benefits.

Locally the Early Action Project will introduce users to the Schuylkill River Trail including the Statewide Greenway. Additionally, it will provide active and passive recreational opportunities, and will provide an ADA accessible trail segment. From a connectivity standpoint this segment of trail will provide additional access to three riverside parks in Muhlenberg Township which will provide and encourage usage by residents as well as visitors.

Regionally, the Early Action Project is a missing half-mile segment of trail of what will be part of the 120-mile long Schuylkill River Trail, and will provide additional access to communities and municipalities in Berks County. The alignment will continue to provide recreation, economic, transportation and community building opportunities that have already been seen in communities where the Schuylkill River Trail is already established.

In terms of **recreation**, the Early Action Project will provide a multi-use off-road trail alignment that will be ADA-accessible, providing increased walking, biking, running and nature observation and educational opportunities. The Early Action Project will provide both an active and passive recreational opportunity when there has been a tremendous increase in trail usage in the past few years.

Trails can provide great **economic** benefits which other communities that have access to the Schuylkill River Trail have experienced. In 2012, the area defined by the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA, including the proposed trail, generated \$589.9 million in economic impact, supported 6,154 jobs, and added \$37.7 million in tax revenue (TrippUmbach, 2012). The PA Land Trust Association and PA DCNR found that in completed sections of the Schuylkill River Trail, visitors spent an average of \$9.07 per day on soft goods. With the potential to continue the alignment from this section to connect to existing sections of the Schuylkill River Trail, the economic impact is only expected to grow, as the length of the trail does.



Early Action Project Benefits

After the Early Action Project was selected, a preliminary design was prepared for the half-mile new trail segment of the Schuylkill River Trail. The Early Action Trail segment is an off-road trail which is the preferred trail type for safety reasons. Off-Road trails can travel through woodlands, follow stream corridors and meander along riverbanks. This trail segment will be 12 feet wide to allow for two-way traffic.

The preliminary design included at the end of this report, complies with the Schuylkill River Trail design and standards. The design standards recommended are compliant with the following:

1. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Guide for Planning, Design and Operation of Bicycle Facilities
2. ADA Accessibility Guidelines and Standards for Accessible Design
3. Federal Access Board Accessibility Guideline for Outdoor Development Areas
4. US Access Board's Public Right of Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG)
5. Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)
6. Pennsylvania and SRG Trail Design Standards
7. Pennsylvania Land Trust Association's Universal Access Trails and Shared Use Paths

Signage for this segment of trail was included in the preliminary design and cost estimate. The proposed signage adheres to and uses the standards of the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA. Additional information on the SRT signage is included within the Schuylkill River Trail Feasibility Study for Northern Berks County.

Grant Application

As part of the Early Action Project a grant application was submitted to PA DCNR in April 2022. This effort was supported by the Township with support from the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA and the project consultant team. The grant application included a narrative section that included the benefits, needs and urgencies of the project, how it aligns with prior planning efforts, as well as the preliminary design of the Early Action Project and Cost Estimate.

Early Action Project Outcome

With the help and support of Muhlenberg Township, the Schuylkill River Greenways NHA, and the consultant team, the Township was able to secure funding for the construction of the Kelly's Lock Park to Laurel Run Trail Segment of the Schuylkill River Trail. The Township received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources from the Spring 2022 funding cycle. The Township will be providing an in-kind match for the supplies and labor needed to construct the half mile segment of trail. The project will begin in early 2023, with an anticipated completion in March of 2024.

