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Redevelopment Authority of the County of Bucks

From: Jane Dembner, HNTB

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**Subject: Summary of Existing Conditions—
Community Design and Waterfront Access**

This technical memorandum provides an overview of the existing community design and waterfront access issues in the Bucks County Waterfront Revitalization study area. This is one of several background memos supporting the Bucks County Waterfront Revitalization Plan. The purpose of the study is to provide for improved access to the riverfront and to promote targeted economic development in the study area. The study area includes portions of the following municipalities: Bensalem Township, Bristol Borough, Bristol Township, Falls Township, Morrisville Borough, and Tullytown Borough.

Introduction

The Delaware River plays a number of important roles in the lives of the waterfront communities in Lower Bucks County. It is a vast natural resource that supports diverse plant and animal communities, as well as recreational pursuits. The river also has a historic and current identity as a maritime and economic resource, with manufacturing and heavy industrial uses lining its banks. The historic communities and downtowns along the waterfront in Bucks County reflect the river's diverse nature.

This industrial image of the river has recently begun to change. A shrinking national manufacturing sector has reduced the number and intensity of the heavy industrial uses in the study area, leaving behind large tracts of land that may have significant industrial contamination. Historic downtowns, riverfront mansions, and other cultural resources in the study area are hard to find and harder for visitors and residents to access. Roads and railroads provide high levels of mobility for employees and residents, but also create physical and psychological barriers for those residents and visitors who want to use the river for recreation.

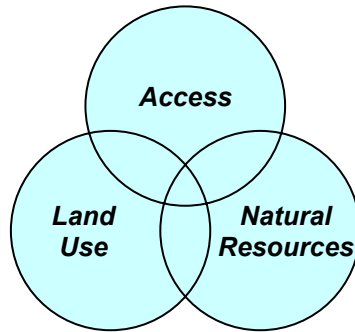
These deficiencies detract from the present-day character of the study area, but they also point out key opportunities for changes. The existing design and access conditions, and their related solutions tend to fall into three primary categories:

Access to the River: These elements and issues address the ability of residents and visitors to get to, and have a meaningful interaction with, the Delaware River. Specific elements that address this category may include roads, paths and trails, waterfront parks and open space, and boating facilities.

Land Use: The balance between existing land use and the combination of land uses needed for the future is critical to the revitalization of the communities along the waterfront. Land Use issues address riverfront development, the distribution of residential and non-residential land in the study area, downtown land uses, and historic resources.

Natural Resources: The Delaware River and its tributaries offer a diverse array of natural landscapes, many of which have been degraded by human contact. Natural Resource issues address opportunities to restore some of these landscapes, to create new resources, and the ability of residents and visitors to use and enjoy natural surroundings.

As shown below, these categories are interrelated. For example, redevelopment of a riverfront property necessarily involves decisions about land use, and offers opportunities to create distinct river access points, and to preserve or restore natural resources along the river.



Each of the six study area jurisdictions, as well as the study area itself, possesses different relationships between access, land use, and natural resources. This memorandum summarizes the observations of residents and stakeholders about the study area, as well as the HNTB team's observations about the relationships between access, land use, and natural resources. This memo also identifies some opportunities for improved relationships, new resources, and future revitalization.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD: OBSERVATIONS FROM CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS

During a series of public meetings, citizens and stakeholders were asked to provide their input on the nature of the waterfront revitalization study area, as well as their views on how the study itself should proceed. This input was solicited in the form of a questionnaire; the questions, and a summary of citizen and stakeholder responses, are listed below.

What are the things, areas, or characteristics that you would like to build on or enhance?

- Re-use of under utilized industrial sites.
- Build on partnership with private sector and development community.
- Enhance the relationship between Lower Bucks and the Delaware River—make the river a destination from both the land and the water.
- Build and enhance Downtown areas in the communities.

What are the things that you would like to change?

- As land uses change, we would like to see opportunity for re-development and natural resource conservation.
- Provide opportunities to access and enjoy the river.
- Change public perception of river (river is there, but no one knows it).

When the Plan is completed, what do you think will be the major challenges to getting it implemented?

- Creating a plan with buy-in from all of the communities.
- Changing the image of river.
- A more aggressive Government stance, such as proactive support, funding, and marketing.

I believe this planning process will be a success if:

- There is legitimate public involvement and support with a common vision and principles.
- There is a legitimate possibility for implementation, combined with a proactive attitude toward fulfillment of the plan's recommendations.
- The health and protection of the river is maintained or improved.

WHAT WE'VE SEEN: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE HNTB TEAM

Study Area-Wide Design and Access

Summary

A number of elements and issues affect community design and riverfront access across the study area. One striking observation is the difference between the Townships and Boroughs. Because of their compact nature, Bristol, Tullytown, and Morrisville Boroughs have more of an “urban” design context, as well as significant historic resources (whether officially listed as such or not). They also have the most distinct opportunities for community gateways. On the other hand, Bristol and Falls Townships have almost uniformly chosen to use the waterfront for industrial and manufacturing uses. These townships also offer fewer opportunities to access and interact with the river. Bensalem Township is much less urban than the Boroughs, but its waterfront is much more balanced than in the townships, with a roughly even split between residential, industrial, and open space.

US 13, the study area's northern boundary, has the potential to act as an “address street” for the study area—providing mobility through the municipalities, as well as access to the municipalities themselves and their natural and cultural resources. Right now, however, the road (combined with the Amtrak/SEPTA/Conrail corridor) tends to serve as a barrier to those opportunities. Gateways from US 13 to the communities and the river are often poorly marked and even functionally inadequate.

Parallel to the road/rail spine, the Delaware Canal offers a unique opportunity to emphasize access, land use, and natural resources throughout the study area. In the boroughs, the canal can be a “front door” resource, offering unique urban design and redevelopment opportunities. Outside the downtown areas, in the townships, the canal and its trail are recreation features that provide access to all of the study area jurisdictions except Bensalem Township, as well as the entire East Coast Greenway system.

Bensalem

Summary

Bensalem's waterfront has significant industrial and warehousing operations, but is occupied by a roughly equal split between residential, industrial, and open space. However, with Pen Ryn Mansion and Neshaminy State Park, Bensalem offers better access to the river. It can also capitalize on the busy Cornwells Heights SEPTA station, as well as a number of community gateways along US 13.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- Bensalem has numerous gateways. Major gateways (such as I-95/Woodhaven Road) provide access to the study area, but not to the river. The smaller gateways at Tennis Avenue and

Station Avenue do provide riverfront access, and should both receive special design attention landscape treatment.

- Street Road could be enhanced as a landscaped boulevard to enhance its gateway potential. It has direct access from the riverfront area to I-95 and US 13.
- Ideally, a new industrial access road should be built parallel to State Road, between State and I-95. This road will provide access between Bensalem's industrial sites and I-95/US 13 while minimizing truck traffic on State Road.
- State Road should be enhanced to become a local-serving "address street," and an attractive setting for significantly reconfigured riverfront land uses. This configuration should emphasize mixed-use development and riverfront open space with continuous public access. If major industrial/warehouses are to remain along the north side of State Road over the long term, major landscape treatment (in combination with site standards) will be necessary to maintain an attractive setting along the road.
- The area adjacent to the Cornwells Heights SEPTA station has some long term potential for a mixed-use, transit-oriented development.
- While a continuous riverwalk is desirable, this may not be possible in certain areas, such as large private residential properties. To provide links between these gaps, pedestrian and bike trails will have to be extended back to State Road. It is therefore important to provide comfortable and safe pedestrian/bike trails within the State Road ROW.

Bristol Township

Summary

Wrapping around the borough of the same name, Bristol Township occupies two separate stretches of waterfront, both of which are home to a significant concentration of industrial uses. The Township also has few opportunities to create its own waterfront gateways, and must instead share those gateway sites with Bristol Borough and Tullytown Borough. However, as waterfront industrial properties become available for redevelopment, Bristol Township has the opportunity to create an entirely new relationship to the river.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- There are two riverfront gateways in the western side of the township (Cedar Avenue and PA 413). Both of these gateways provide access to State Road and River Road. Cedar Avenue runs through the Croydon residential area, so major access to the river should be minimized.
- The Burlington/Bristol Bridge is a gateway to Pennsylvania, Bucks County, Bristol Township, and the Borough of Bristol. A gateway park consisting of a riverfront linear park and a generous landscaped setback along PA 413 can create a favorable impression for visitors. In addition, landscape enhancements are essential along State Road and River Road.
- The eastern end of Bristol Township shares a gateway with Bristol Borough at Green Lane. Access can also be accommodated at the Tullytown Borough gateway. Both of these gateways require improvements, which should be cooperative efforts with Bristol Borough and Tullytown Borough.
- The land straddling the canal between the SEPTA station and the turnpike gateway on US Route 13 may have long term development potential for both Bristol Borough and Bristol Township. Visibility and accessibility to the turnpike, the SEPTA station and US 13, coupled with the ambience of the canal, create value for this area. A joint master plan for both sides of the canal could capitalize on a shared gateway at Green Lane and US 13.
- Land adjacent to the Riverside Industrial Complex could be developed as mixed-use and a waterfront park, perhaps including a marina. Papermill Village needs to be revitalized to realize its full potential and complement adjacent improvements.

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- Radcliffe Street on both sides of the I-276 bridge and Old Main Street are attractive and should be further enhanced to capitalize on a very positive asset to the township.
- Rohm and Haas' undeveloped properties present a major redevelopment opportunity on Bristol Township's western riverfront. A marina, public riverfront park and mixed-use development are major potential uses. This property could also support a riverwalk with a length in excess of two miles, and with connections to Bristol Borough's riverfront park and the restored Delaware Canal.
- Neshaminy State Park Marina and other private docks are separated from the Rohm and Haas redevelopment by industrial and utility uses, and a commercial dock.
- Hogg Creek should be enhanced up to the Atlantic tidal forest (Rohm and Haas, Natural Lands Trust Section 4)
- A new pedestrian/bicycle trail could be created along Adams Hollow Creek, connecting Silver Lake to the Delaware Canal, and crossing of US 13 at Beaver Road.

Bristol Borough

Summary

Bristol Borough's primary resource is its historic downtown. The downtown, as well as the rest of the Borough, has seen a number of successful redevelopment activities. However, access to the downtown is unclear and unattractive, and parts of the downtown, such as Mill Street, would benefit from enhancements that build on the Borough's existing successes. In addition, the Delaware Canal and its southern terminus are both vastly underutilized resources, and may be the key link between Bristol Borough's waterfront, its historic district, and recreational activities in Silver Lake Park and the rest of the study area.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- The Borough has four riverfront gateways along US 13 (Old Rte 13, Bath St, Beaver Dam Rd, and Green St). Major enhancements are necessary at these gateways, including street trees, sign control, improvements to the rail bridges, and screening of large asphalt areas and storage yards.
- Restoration of the canal and locks would reinforce Bristol's historic role in the Delaware Canal. The restoration can be a catalyst for redevelopment of lands adjacent to the canal and locks. Restoration of the canal and reuse of historic buildings can also contribute to the Borough's historically-oriented tourism economy. A major portion of the lands adjacent to the canal (or former canal) is also within a ½ mile of the Bristol SEPTA station, making it especially accessible
- The land straddling the canal between the SEPTA station and the turnpike gateway on US 13 may have long term development potential for both Bristol Borough and Bristol Township. Visibility and accessibility to the turnpike, the SEPTA station and US 13, coupled with the ambience of the canal, create value for this area. A joint master plan for both sides of the canal could capitalize on a shared gateway at Green Lane and US 13.
- The canal's full length should be restored (all the way from Beaver Dam Road to the Canal Basin), and should accommodate boats. This could enhance the borough's historic district by providing additional programs and events.
- New development and redevelopment should continue the downtown street grid, and should provide streets perpendicular to the river to provide access and visibility. This is especially important in new development that is on the land side of an arterial street that is parallel and relatively close to the river.
- Radcliffe Street is the shining star for Bristol, with its elegant homes and streetscape, all on the riverfront. The portion of Radcliffe at the Riverside North development needs to be

enhanced to match the high quality atmosphere of the more “downtown” section of the road. Redevelopment of the Simon Shuster property could help to achieve this goal.

- With the advent of more visitors (brought about by the canal restoration and associated redevelopment), Mill Street can become more focused on restaurants and specialty retail. Structured parking behind the southern façade of Mill Street would increase parking capacity and free up land adjacent to a restored canal for new complementary development.
- There are two opportunities to link Silver Lake with both the Delaware River and the Delaware Canal, using natural stream corridors. The connection to the river would follow Mill Creek, while the linkage to the canal would follow Adams Hollow Creek (this should be a joint endeavor with Bristol Township). Both connections could be to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle trails.

Tullytown Borough

Summary

Tullytown occupies the study area’s narrowest point and, despite its relatively small population, has potential access to a number of important resources. Franklin Cove, the Delaware Canal, Lower Van Sciver Lake, and a potential riverwalk offer recreational opportunities. Improvements to Tullytown’s US 13 gateway can help create clearer access to these opportunities, as well as the town’s Main Street.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- The main point of access from US 13 to Tullytown is a very unattractive crossing over the railroad. This gateway, as well as the nearby SEPTA station and parking area need to be enhanced with landscape treatment and signage control.
- The primary access to Pennsbury Manor is through Tullytown. Improved wayfinding would improve visitor experience, creating a more positive image of Tullytown.
- Tullytown’s Main Street and Fallsington Ave have a quaint, charming residential setting. Special attention should be given to enhancing and extending its influence.
- The land that surrounds the north side of Franklin Cove could eventually be redeveloped as mixed-use and park (especially in flood plain). This area is also within a ½ mile of the Tullytown SEPTA station, making it a transit-accessible district.
- There is a long term potential for creating a linear park around the entirety of Franklin Cove, as well as a pathway along the river to Pennsbury Manor. Waste Management has offered the northern point of the cove (with its excellent views along the river and into the cove itself) to the Borough, and may eventually abandon their riverfront service road, allowing adequate space for a riverfront trail. This scenario would permit the creation of a riverwalk in excess of three-miles. This is a unique opportunity that should not be missed. If the borough is unable to accept Waste Management’s offer, the County should do so instead. Regardless of the parties involved, it is essential to gain public access to the river for Tullytown residents.

Falls Township

Summary

With the Port of Bucks County, ongoing activity at the USX facility, and the GROWS Landfill, Falls Township has the largest concentration of industrial uses in the study area. The township faces the challenge of accommodating this industrial presence alongside current resources, such as Pennsbury Manor, as well as potential future recreational opportunities along the river. The massive amount of land covered by the USX complex makes riverfront access difficult in Falls Township. Away from the river, however, Van Sciver and Morrisville Lakes offer excellent

recreational opportunities. As with Bristol Township, community gateways must be shared with Tullytown and Morrisville Boroughs.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- The only riverfront gateway within Falls Township is actually in Tullytown Borough on US Route 13 near the Levittown SEPTA station. As described in the Tullytown section, this gateway needs significant design and wayfinding improvement. This includes signage and road connections to Pennsbury Manor (via Tullytown and Bordentown Road). Gateways to USX and other heavy industrial sites are from Tyburn Road and Pennsylvania Avenue.
- Water-related recreational opportunities abound in Falls Township. The riverwalk from Franklin Cove to Pennsbury Manor would cover a significant portion of the Falls waterfront. Additional trails could lead from Pennsbury Manor around the Van Sciver lakes and Manor Lake, connecting with the Delaware Canal at the Tyburn/Bristol Pike interchange.
- A riverwalk from Morrisville Borough to Biles Island may be feasible if Biles Island is accessible in the future. However, it is currently used as an extraction site for Waste Management and a dump site for Army Corps' dredge operations, making it an extremely hostile climate for recreation.

Morrisville Borough

Summary

Morrisville Borough has abundant access to the riverfront area, but few opportunities for public access to the river itself. North of US 1, the waterfront is occupied by a levee and Williamson Park. South of US 1, industrial uses complicate access. As with Bristol Borough, Morrisville has the opportunity to use the Delaware Canal as a “front door” to the community.

Access, Land Use, and Natural Resources

- There are three primary gateways into Morrisville, none of which is particularly conducive to waterfront access. The US 13/US 1 interchange provides access to downtown Morrisville (via Bridge Street), while the two bridges from Trenton (US 1 and Bridge Street) are the northern gateways into the study area as a whole. Only the Bridge Street gateway has any direct access to the waterfront area, via Park Avenue.
- As with Bristol Borough, there is an opportunity to develop or redevelop the portions of the Delaware Canal that run through Morrisville. The canal can become a significant tourist and recreation resource, and can become a prime location for downtown service-sector businesses. As the canal exits Morrisville, it can take on a greener nature, becoming a primary recreation resource, with links to Morrisville and Van Sciver Lakes, as well as the other study area jurisdictions.
- The addition of a riverwalk along the Morrisville levee could bring more residents and visitors to the river, and could link them to a longer riverwalk that stretches south to Biles Island.
- The Staley property, in the Borough's southeastern corner, is looked to by many residents as a significant future redevelopment site. This site could provide a location for a marina to serve Morrisville and Falls Township.
- There is an urban infill opportunity at the intersection of Bridge Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, extending north along Pennsylvania. This area has a partial urban fabric which could be enhanced and connected to the Canal, in a manner similar to that suggested for Bristol Borough.