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## 6.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The research, public outreach and feasibility analysis completed for this study indicate that Trail Alternative #2 (South side of Doctors Creek) is the most comprehensive and feasible alternative. This particular alternative has a number of positive attributes associated with its selection including: the presence of numerous natural, cultural and historic features, fabulous scenic vistas, a number of trail linkages with proposed trails currently under consideration in the project area, and its use of many of the recreational and open space areas within the project area.

Although a land trail running primarily along the south sides of the Doctors and Assunpink Creeks will most likely present a number of political, social, physical, and economic challenges, the Crosswicks Doctors Creek Regional Greenway Planning Group (CCDC Greenway Group) has an attitude of realistic optimism. The Group does not expect every municipality and every landowner to fully support the Doctors Creek – Assunpink Creek Trail right away. In addition, the trail selected may present engineering challenges as it is located in areas with steep slopes and will require a number of creek crossings. The group is also fully aware that funding will need to be obtained for future phases of the project, and that even with the best cooperation of local municipal governments, county park system, agricultural development boards and others, the implementation of the trail will take a number of years.

Implementing the necessary next steps now falls upon the CCDC and the strong, local partnership cultivated previous to and during the course of this study. Implementation will also require additional, supporting partners. The following recommendations are recommended to be completed in the next twelve-eighteen months:

- **Municipal Adoption of Crosswicks Creek-Doctors Creek Greenway Plan & Feasibility Study Alternative-** The Crosswicks Creek-Doctors Creek Regional Greenway Plan was adopted by the CCDC Group in 2004. The conservation management plan includes comprehensive recommendations intended to protect significant watershed features. The plan clearly recommends the completion of greenway trail feasibility studies and greenway trail implementation. Although Allentown Borough has formally adopted this plan, Hamilton, Upper Freehold and Millstone Townships have not.

It is recommended that the CCDC Group continue efforts toward municipal adoption of the Greenway Plan and urge local officials to incorporate plan recommendations into individual municipal master plans.

Distribution of this study to individual municipalities, and continued formal presentations about the greenway management plan and this feasibility study are recommended. Group representatives should suggest municipal revision of open space and recreational maps to include the selected Doctors Creek-Assunpink Creek trail route.

- **Landowner Education-** There are numerous benefits associated with greenway conservation and the development of greenway corridors and low impact recreational trails. Further, there are a number of commonly-held misperceptions associated with low-impact recreational trails. However, there are also a multitude of economic and environmental benefits associated with landowner participation in land preservation programs.

In order to educate the general public, landowners and elected/appointed officials, the CCDC Greenway Group should continue educational efforts that focus upon the benefits associated with greenways and low-impact trails. Educational materials should work to dissipate commonly-held misperceptions regarding trail development. It is imperative that specific landowners along the chosen trail route be targeted for support. Formal presentations regarding the rationale for the selected alternative are recommended.

- **Local Policies, Zoning & Land Development Regulations-** Research regarding local planning policies, zoning and land development regulations was completed for this study. For the most part the planning policies for the four municipalities support the protection of water resources, floodplains, stream corridors and also agree with providing recreational amenities for their citizens. Similarly, the majority of municipal zoning districts within the project area allow for recreational uses. The municipal land development regulations provide for the protection of floodplains, stream corridors, wetlands and significant natural resources.

However, not all of the municipalities consistently provide the same regulatory means for planning and developing low impact trails along stream corridors. For instance, Hamilton Township and Allentown Borough have regulations indicating that proposed *development* (e.g., low impact recreational trails) is not a permitted use within the 100 year floodplain. On the other hand, Millstone Township allows trails within the 100 year floodplain and flood hazard zones. Upper Freehold and Millstone Townships provide the means for their Planning Boards to work with County agencies to require conservation easements, while the other two municipalities do not.

It is therefore recommended that the municipal representatives work with their individual Planning Boards and planning and legal consultants to clarify permitted uses and whether the selected trail alternative will require a variance. This would be a worthwhile educational effort as well as an important facet of subsequent study (e.g., Master Trail Study).

- **Farmland Preservation Program Coordination** - As noted previously, the Farmland Preservation Program does support trail opportunities on preserved farms where appropriate, but those needs should be identified *prior* to preservation so that land designated for trails or trail easements may be excluded from the deeds of easement associated and negotiated for future farmland preservation parcels. Therefore, it is recommended that the CCDC Greenway Group coordinate closely and concurrently with the Mercer & Monmouth County Farmland Preservation Boards, individual municipalities and individual farmers to ensure that *new* land under consideration for Farmland Program preservation contains easements for trails and trail access.

In addition, working with farmers currently in the Farmland Preservation Program would also be beneficial as limited recreational-type activities are permitted on some farmland preserved parcels. Trail access may be a possibility on some parcels as long as the land is utilized in its existing condition and the activities do not interfere with the use of the land for agriculture. Distribution of this study to the agencies and to farmers as well as formal presentations regarding the rationale for the selected alternative are recommended.

- **Open Space Preservation Coordination-** A number of parcels in the selected trail alternative area are owned and managed by individual municipalities and other government agencies such as the New Jersey Department of Protection and Monmouth and Mercer County Park and Recreation Departments. The CCDC Greenway Group should therefore coordinate closely with the four municipalities and those agencies, so they are aware of the selected trail route, and so that the Group is aware of pending land acquisitions within the selected trail route. Distribution of this study is a first step as well as formal presentations regarding the rationale for the selected alternative.
- **Additional Study** - The completion of the Crosswicks Creek-Doctors Creek Greenway Plan in 2004 was an important step as it recommended the completion of greenway trail feasibility studies and greenway trail implementation. Securing a small grant from NJDEP's Office of Environmental Services (OES) and the four municipalities for completing this preliminary study was another necessary and worthwhile step as it enabled completion of this preliminary feasibility study, important public outreach, and the selection of a preferred trail route.

However, additional work will need to be completed to further develop the selected trail alternative. The Master Trail Plan is normally the next step in developing the selected trail route further. The Master Plan refines the selected trail route chosen in the feasibility study and takes it several steps further.

Some common components of the Trail Master Plan include: additional public outreach, parcel-by-parcel study, finalizing/revising selected trail route, preliminary trail design, environmental conservation and protection measures, access and supporting facility locations, management specifications, trail maintenance plan and budget, and pre-construction cost estimates. It should be expected that the selected trail route may need to be adjusted in response to new information obtained during the next phase of study.

- **Funding-** Funding research and fund-raising is a necessary next step for all future trail implementation efforts. Funding for a Doctors Creek-Assunpink Creek Master Plan is required as indicated in the previous recommendation. Funding should also be obtained for actual trail implementation as research for this study indicated an approximate cost of \$10,000.00 to \$40,000.00 per mile of constructed trail. Since the selected trail alternative is approximately 22 miles long, the estimated cost would be \$22,000.00 to \$880,000.00. Again, a comprehensive budget and management plan would be developed as part of the Master Plan.

Many groups, such as the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy provide information on creative ways to raise funding. The Conservancy and other agencies and groups maintain up-to-date lists of federal, state and local government funding mechanisms including grants, private partnerships and other funding methods. This should be part of subsequent research.

Private companies and groups are also potential sources for funding. For instance, many regional foundations and companies are beginning to provide grants for trail and greenway projects and open space preservation due to the direct link between community development and community health. Local agencies in the project area, and throughout the region should also be contacted (e.g., Mercer and Monmouth County Parks Departments) as they also support recreational trail planning and development.

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## 7.0 Project References

Allentown Borough Planning & Zoning Board. *Allentown Borough Master Plan: Conservation Plan Element* (November 2005), *Historic Preservation Element*. (September 2005), *Housing Element and Fair Share Plan* (March 2006), and *Reexamination Report* (May 2006).

Ibid. Borough of Allentown Code, Land Use Procedures (Chapter XXVIII), Off-tract and Off-Site Improvements (Chapter XXIX), Land Subdivision, and Zoning Ordinance (Chapter XXXII). 1975-1978.

Conservation Fund, Flink, Charles A. and Robert M. Searns. *Greenways: A Guide to Planning, Design and Development*. Island Press: Washington, DC, 1993.

Coppola & Coppola Associates, *Township of Upper Freehold: Monmouth County, New Jersey Master Plan*. Land Use Plan Element (1995), and Amendments to the Land Use Plan Element (2002, 2003). Lawrenceville, NJ.

Duerksen, Christopher and Donald Elliot, N. Thompson Hobbs, Erin Johnson and James R. Miller. *Habitat Protection Planning: Where the Wild Things Are*. American Planning Association (PAS Report 470/471). 1997.

FX Browne, Inc. *Allentown Borough Critical Natural Resources Analysis Project*. January 2005.

Ibid. and the Crosswicks Creek/Doctors Creek Regional Greenway Planning Group. *The Crosswicks Creek/Doctors Creek Regional Greenway Plan*. April. 2004

National Park Service (Steven Elkinton). *The Economic Impacts of Long Distance Trails*. Washington, DC. 2000.

Natural Lands Trust. *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Codes*. Philadelphia, PA. 2001.

Pennsylvania Environmental Council & PADCNR. *Creating Connections: The Pennsylvania Greenways and Trails How-To Manual*. Pennsylvania Greenways Partnership. Harrisburg, PA. 1998.

Pennsylvania Environmental Council. *Creating Connections: Healthy Communities Movement and Recreation and Park Programs*. Philadelphia, PA. 1998.

Ibid. *Pennsylvania Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections*. June 2001.

Princeton Hydro, LLC, Suzanne Forbes AICP, *The Allentown Borough Natural Resources Inventory*. March 2003.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Flink, Charles A., Kristine Olka and Robert M. Stearns. *Trails for the Twenty-First Century: Planning, Design and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails* (Second Edition). Island Press: Washington, DC, 2001.

Trust for Public Land. *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*. San Francisco, CA. 1996.

Upper Freehold Township, Upper Freehold Township Scenic Byway Report, 2006.

Upper Freehold Township Vision/Scenic Byway Committee. *Upper Freehold Historic Farmland Byway Tour*. May 2006.

### **Greenway Website Links**

The Canada Department of Forestry (Corridor Validation Standards):  
[www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/corridors\\_verts/html/criteres\\_validation\\_e.html](http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/corridors_verts/html/criteres_validation_e.html).

Clerkbase (Upper Freehold Township Code of Ordinances)  
[http://70.168.205.112/upperfreehold\\_nj](http://70.168.205.112/upperfreehold_nj)

The Natural Lands Trust: [www.info@natlands.org](mailto:www.info@natlands.org)

National Park Service, Wild and Scenic Rivers Program: [www.nps.gov/rivers](http://www.nps.gov/rivers)

North Carolina State University (Corridor Width Validation Standards):  
[www4.ncsu.edu/~grhess/papers/Sinclair-et-al2003.pdf](http://www4.ncsu.edu/~grhess/papers/Sinclair-et-al2003.pdf)

Rails to Trails Conservancy: [www.railstrails.org](http://www.railstrails.org)

The Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse: [www.sprawlwatch.org](http://www.sprawlwatch.org)

The Trust for Public Lands: [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)