

TOWNSHIPS IN THE NEWS

Blazing a New Trail

Townships Work with Neighbors to Clear a Recreational Path

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Intermunicipal cooperation can result in more than just lower costs and shared services. Sometimes, it can allow a municipality to blaze a new trail, both figuratively and literally.

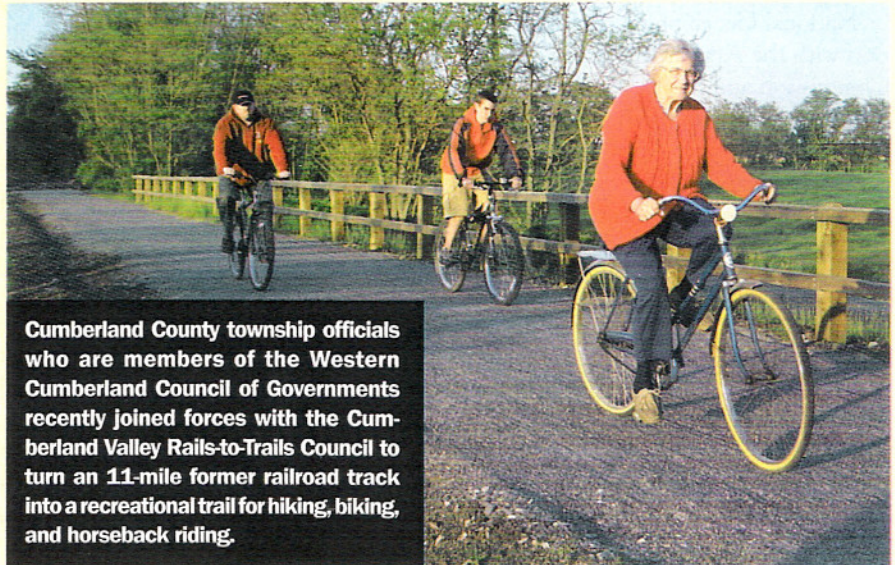
Just ask Brad Spahr, supervisor for North Newton Township in Cumberland County and coordinator of a recent effort by members of the Western Cumberland Council of Governments to clear a five-mile section of the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail. The trail is an 11-mile former railroad track stretching from Shippensburg to Newville that has been rehabilitated into a recreational trail for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and other non-motorized forms of travel.

A cooperative venture

The council of governments stepped in last year after the Cumberland Valley Rails-to-Trails Council realized it did not have the funds for the cleanup. Spahr suggested that the COG members could help. Until then, they had worked together only on paper on such projects as joint bids and regional planning studies.

Convincing the COG to take on the project took some doing, Spahr says, but once the COG was on board, the Rails-to-Trails Council provided a list of what had to be done, including brush cutting and grading. COG members provided the equipment and labor to tackle the cleanup. "Six of the 14 municipalities in the COG participated," Spahr says. "Two provided chippers, two supplied dump trucks, and our township provided a grader and a front-end loader."

In addition to North Newton,



Cumberland County township officials who are members of the Western Cumberland Council of Governments recently joined forces with the Cumberland Valley Rails-to-Trails Council to turn an 11-mile former railroad track into a recreational trail for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH NEWTON TOWNSHIP, CUMBERLAND COUNTY

project participants included West Pennsboro, South Newton, and Lower Frankford townships and the boroughs of Newville and Mount Holly Springs. Cumberland County Prison provided four inmates for labor, and the Cumberland County Landfill provided a bulldozer.

Thanks to the COG's cooperative effort, the trail is open its entire span from Shippensburg to Newville, although the recently cleared portion awaits additional funding for final ballast stone to be laid. The trail has been under construction since 1995, when Conrail donated it to the Rails-to-Trails Council.

The wave of the future

Spahr believes the project showed how municipalities can work together to achieve something they couldn't do on their own. "With the way things are going today, with the costs of materials and labor, small municipalities with a

work force of two or three people can't do much of anything," he says. "This proves we can work together on something small, so why not try to cooperate on a larger project?"

Municipalities working together are the wave of the future, Spahr says. "We can't have the mentality of 'We've never done it that way before, so we can't do it that way now.' Things have changed tremendously, and we have to be a participant in the program if we want to get things done."

News stories about the project also shed a favorable light on the COG. "All the community feedback I've received has been nothing but positive," Spahr says, which just might make it easier for the townships to blaze the next trail in intermunicipal cooperation.

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