

Greenways and Open Space

Greenways are linear spaces established along a natural corridor, such as a stream or open space. Greenway corridors are often designed to link floodplains, wetlands, steep slope areas, wildlife habitat, and gamelands, and can include trailways, parks, and historic sites. The purpose and uses of greenway corridors often overlap.

A. Five General Types of Greenway Corridors

- Urban riverside greenway, developed as part of renovation of run-down waterfront areas
- Environmentally significant natural corridors, often along rivers and streams
- Scenic and historic routes along a road or highway, often allowing pedestrian access or “points of view”
- Recreational greenways, featuring trails; may be based on man-made corridors (such as railbeds) or natural corridors
- Comprehensive greenway systems, usually based on natural corridors, but sometimes arbitrarily designed to link parks, schools, and other cultural nodes

B. Key Open Space Opportunities

Open space and riparian buffers are often key elements in a greenway system. Undeveloped open space and vegetative cover is abundant on steep slopes and along streams and tributaries throughout the County. The County as a whole however, continues to lose forest cover and open areas due to industrial and residential development over the years. Existing stands of second and third growth woodlands are comprised largely of red, black, scarlet, and chestnut oak; yellow poplar; sugar maple; beech; and yellow birch.

C. Significant Riparian Zones

Increasing demands of development in the region have the potential to greatly affect the size and quality of riparian buffers. The vegetated areas along waterways are of significant ecological importance for the following reasons:

- ✓ Slow flood waters and reduce the volume of water through root absorption.
- ✓ Improve water quality by filtering runoff and promoting sediment deposition.
- ✓ Allow water storage in plant roots and provide pathways to ground water layers.
- ✓ Provide canopy cover which shades and cools the stream, improving habitat conditions for in-stream organisms. This shade also provides relief from extreme heat for terrestrial animals.
- ✓ Provide habitat for a variety of birds and small mammals. These buffers also act as corridors to similar habitat, providing food, shelter and nesting sites.
- ✓ Provide great opportunities for recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, bird watching, wildlife observation, picnicking, and camping.

D. Benefits of Greenway Corridors

- ✓ Environmental protection: Greenway corridors protect wildlife and habitats, wetlands, and steep slopes and stream valleys; reduce landslides and flooding; improve water quality; and provide migration corridors
- ✓ Educational opportunities: Greenway corridors are ideal sites for students and the general public to observe and study natural systems

- ✓ Increase property values: Greenway corridors can attract residents and improve property values
- ✓ Improve recreation opportunities: Greenway corridors can include trails for walking, cycling, skiing and horseback riding
- ✓ Connect parks and cultural features: Along their routes, greenway corridors can incorporate parks, gamelands, trails, historic sites, etc., creating linkages for both wildlife and recreational users

A recent report from the Trust for Public Land examines how communities can benefit from greenways and open space. The results conclude that the designation of a greenway and open space system curbs urban sprawl, attracts businesses and residents, stimulates revitalization, brings in tourism dollars, protects farm economies, provides flood control and serves to protect the overall natural environment.

Greenways and open space also play a critical role in providing a quality of life that attracts residents, businesses and economic activities to communities. The economic benefits are becoming quite clear, as businesses clearly prefer communities with a high quality of life, including an abundance of open space, nearby recreation and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods. “A 1995 poll by the Regional Plan Association and the Quiniipac College Polling Institute queried nearly 2,000 people from around the country about quality of life. Major elements cited as crucial for a satisfactory quality of life were low crime with safe streets and access to greenery and open space.” Real estate industry analysts confirm quality of life as a determining factor in real estate values and economic vitality, and a 1996 report by Arthur Andersen Consulting found that mid- and high-level executives increasingly choose to work in locations that offer a high quality of life outside the workplace.