

# river towns

## *report*

2014







Four years ago, when Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) first launched the River Town Program, we could not have predicted the success it would experience, nor could we anticipate the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication of the community leaders and volunteers we would meet. With 25 communities as past or current participants, it has been our delight to work with Pennsylvanians on projects ranging from trail development, to business attraction strategies, to public art installations, and so much more. The program seeks to offer a platform for bringing together the individuals and organizations working to improve their communities in a cooperative, collaborative and regional approach.

PEC developed the River Town Program specifically to focus attention on the important role rivers play in our communities. Since then, the program has evolved to be a model for implementing collaborative solutions to environmental protection and restoration, by recognizing the inextricable links between the environment, the economy and quality of life.

While this report has been prepared by PEC, the successes described here belong fully to the communities themselves and the many partner organizations that have made this work possible. It has been our honor to work with you in 2014.

Davitt B. Woodwell  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Pennsylvania Environmental Council

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## background

“River Towns,” the communities bordering rivers throughout Pennsylvania, were founded as manufacturing centers close to river and rail transportation. With the decline of manufacturing, these communities suffered both job loss and population decline as generations that once worked in industries next to the river were forced to leave the region to find employment elsewhere.

The River Town Program was developed, in part, in response to reduced funding for many state and local government community development programs. PEC saw potential in communities where there were projects occurring--- trail development, business attraction strategies, public art etc.—but in a piecemeal, disjointed manner. The program builds on these existing projects by bringing together the individuals and organizations already working to improve their communities in a more cooperative, collaborative, and regional approach.

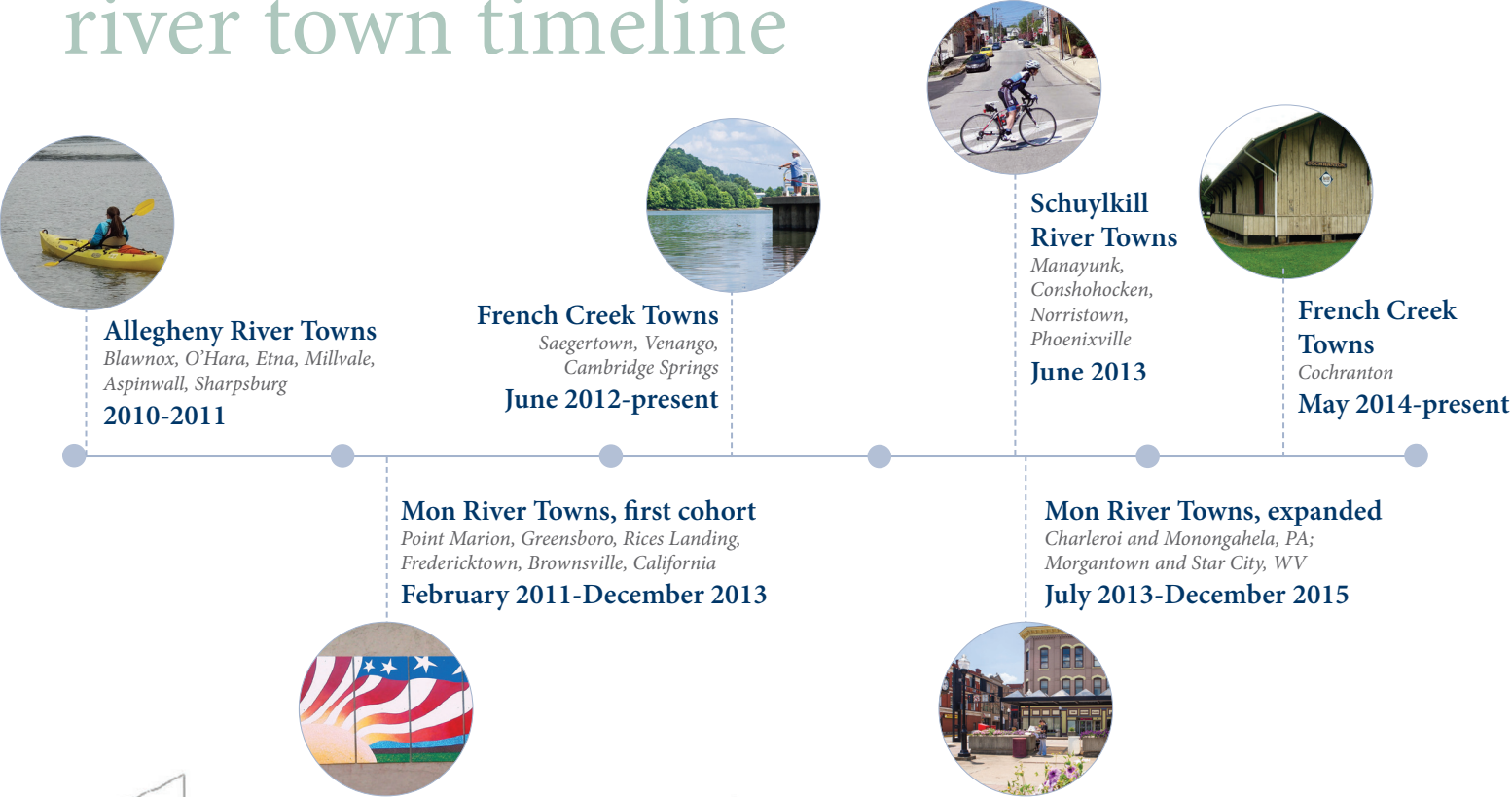
While each community has an individual identity and character, they all share an historical connection to the river. The program uses the river as a central focal point for bringing together otherwise diverse projects and programs into a regional revitalization effort. By recognizing the river as a resource and an important part of the regional identity, PEC hopes to increase a sense of stewardship and respect for it. In this way, the program blends environmental conservation with community and economic development.

The first iteration of PEC’s River Town Program was launched in 2010 along the Allegheny River, just north of Pittsburgh. Envisioned as a pilot, it applied strategies from other asset-based community development initiatives (e.g. the trail town initiatives along the Great Allegheny Passage and the C&O Canal Towpath; traditional Main Street Programs) to communities bordering a river. The program has since expanded to a total of 25 communities along the Monongahela River in southwestern Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia, French Creek in northwestern Pennsylvania, and the Schuylkill River in southeastern Pennsylvania.





# river town timeline



### Program Staff

PEC staff bring knowledge and experience on trail development, river conservation, stormwater management, land reclamation, and fundraising to the River Town Program. To provide expertise on economic development, PEC partnered with McCollom Development Strategies.

In addition, “on the ground” support is provided by the Student Conservation Association (River Town Outreach Corps) in the Monongahela River Towns and by the French Creek Valley Conservancy in the French Creek Towns.

# the process

By working collaboratively, pooling technical assistance resources, and attracting new sources of funding, the River Town Program provides an effective, regionally-based resource to help local communities recognize the river as a potential economic and community asset, and thus a resource worthy of protection.

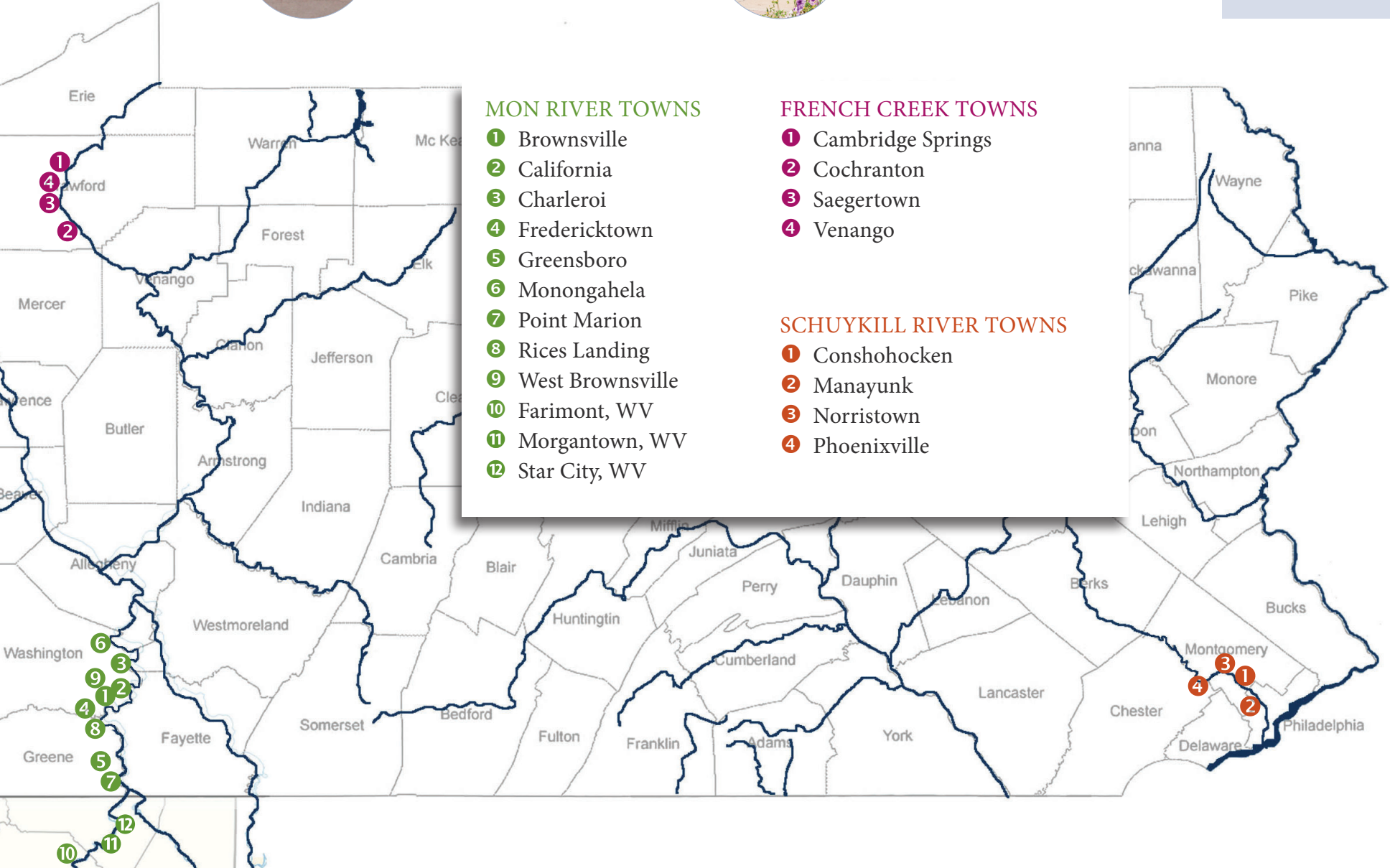
Strategies include:

- Economic growth based on outdoor recreational services and businesses.
- Community engagement that connects residents with healthy leisure activities through outdoor recreation.
- Well-maintained business districts that offer needed goods, services and jobs and demonstrate continuous community reinvestment.
- Safe, clean, “green,” and well-maintained communities that demonstrate continuous community re-investment.
- Effective, well-maintained, and well-managed community infrastructure and resources.
- Economically and socially desirable land uses that support strong, vital, and healthy business growth, stability, expansion, and turnover.
- Strong healthy communities based on a sound institutional foundation that supports strategic decision-making, informed action, and continuous reinvestment.

The River Town Program naturally lends itself to phased development.

- PHASE 1:** Review all previous planning efforts  
Engage community and municipal leadership through action teams  
Develop priorities for implementation and community engagement  
Implement short-term, immediate projects  
Regional branding and outreach
- PHASE 2:** Implement short- mid-term projects with community action teams  
Launch marketing for new businesses, expand existing businesses  
Seek funding and support for strategic long-term projects
- PHASE 3:** Transition program leadership and implementation to community action teams

Although PEC remains a resource to the communities, even after the third year of the program, the three-year timescale encourages the towns to take ownership of any projects established, rather than relying on program staff. In this way, we make sure we are building capacity in the communities themselves, ensuring longer term success.





# the towns

## Allegheny River Towns

Six communities north of Pittsburgh--Blawnox, O'Hara, Etna, Millvale, Aspinwall and Sharpsburg—participated in the River Town pilot program in 2010. Sharing a common industrial past, these communities all had active, engaged community leadership. The River Town Program brought them together for a more collaborative, regional approach to sustainable community development.

Successfully implemented projects include the following:

- the purchase of the Aspinwall Marina by a community organization
- improved access to the riverfront park in Millvale
- streetscape planning in Blawnox
- gateway design in Sharpsburg
- the attraction of several new business ventures in the communities
- plans for a river conservation overlay in the six River Towns as well as neighboring Shaler Township

PEC used the lessons learned through this pilot to develop the more comprehensive three-year program along the Monongahela River.



## Monongahela River Towns

PEC launched its River Town Program along the middle- and upper-Monongahela River in Fayette, Greene, and Washington Counties in early 2011. Although close enough to attract visitors from Morgantown and Pittsburgh, these communities are mostly rural, with rich historic amenities, including buildings dating back to the Revolutionary War and artifacts of the region's industrial past. The "Mon" and its tributaries provide opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and motorized boating while trails along the river provide an opportunity for hiking and biking.

Examples of Regional Projects:

- Regional branding and promotion, via a website geared towards visitors, design and installation of gateway signage for each community, and marketing of vacant buildings
- Streetscape beautification, including installing flower planters, painting buildings, hanging banners, and cleaning windows
- Educational workshops, especially geared to small businesses and community leaders, on topics such as leasing or selling a building, using websites and social media, and financing opportunities for new or expanding businesses
- Regional events, including five canoe and kayak sojourns on the river

## ORIGINAL MON RIVER TOWN COMMUNITIES

Between February 2011 to December 2013, six communities along the Mon participated in the program--Point Marion, Greensboro, Rices Landing, Fredericktown, Brownsville and California. These towns continue to collaborate regionally on community revitalization, visitor attraction, and promotion of outdoor recreation. Highlights of their achievements through the program include:

- Over \$1 million raised towards community projects during three years of program
- Installation of three pieces of public art in Point Marion, two in Greensboro and one mural in Rices Landing
- Installation of gateway signage in Point Marion, Greensboro, Fredericktown and Rices Landing
- Resurrection of the popular Riverfest in Rices Landing, which had not been held in eight years. In 2014, attendance was 6,000. Planning is underway for 2015
- Improvements to Point Marion Community Park in preparation for completion of the Sheepskin Trail, which will connect the community to the Mon River Trail system in West Virginia
- Improvements to the Fredericktown Public Docks, including paving, landscaping, and installation of lighting, signage and benches
- Restoration of a historic caboose, along with clearing of view corridors, at a riverfront public park in California
- Improvements to the California public boat launch



*To learn more*  
about the Mon River Towns, including upcoming events, visit  
[www.monrivertowns.com](http://www.monrivertowns.com)

## Mon River Valley Coalition

While the River Town Program is a three-year initiative, it is unrealistic to expect that a change in the economy and culture of a region will occur in this time frame. Rather, the program aims to launch the process, identify leaders to carry it forward, build relationships with potential partners, and spur individual communities and initiatives to work together collaboratively.

The original six Mon River Towns, upon "graduation" from the program, expressed interest in working collaboratively as a region to continue the work started by this program. Their efforts to self organize resulted in development of the Mon River Valley Coalition, which has expanded to include neighboring towns, as well as county agencies, non-profit organizations, and regional institutions of higher education.

The Coalition, with assistance from the River Town Program and the National Road Heritage Corridor, has secured grant funding to support regional efforts such as boat launch improvements, installation of regionally branded signage and further trail development.

The evolution of the Mon River Valley Coalition demonstrates the energy, interest, and capacity generated through the River Town Program.



EXPANDED COMMUNITIES

In the summer of 2013, a second group of communities along the Monongahela River were added to the program: Monongahela and Charleroi, in southwest Pennsylvania, and Morgantown and Star City, in northern West Virginia. In the summer of 2013, a second cohort of communities along the Monongahela River was added to the program: Monongahela and Charleroi, in southwest Pennsylvania, and Morgantown and Star City, in northern West Virginia. Additionally, Fairmont, West Virginia, began participating in River Town Program activities in the summer of 2014, and is expected to officially join the program in the future. More detail on these communities follows.

MONONGAHELA

Currently the northernmost River Town, Monongahela has a handsome business district with several antique stores, coffee shops, and an active Historical Society. The Aquatorium, an outdoor auditorium built into the river bank, seats 3,700 and hosts dozens of concerts and events each year. This facility also includes a public boat launch and public docks that are popular fishing spots.

Highlights:

- Funds have been raised to install an accessible kayak/canoe launch at the public docks in Monongahela.
- Improved signage to guide visitors to the riverfront and business district will be installed in spring 2015.
- Kent State University students will engage in multi-disciplinary projects focused around Monongahela and Charleroi, with a kick-off planning meeting scheduled for spring 2015.
- In partnership with Washington County Planning, work will be done to improve accessibility, landscaping, and signage at the Monongahela public boat launch, starting in early summer 2015.



Partners: Monongahela Area Revitalization Commission, City of Monongahela, Washington County Planning Department, Monongahela Aquatorium.



CHARLEROI

Named for Charleroi, Belgium, this community was a heart of the glass manufacturing industry of southwestern Pennsylvania. With a population of just over 4,000, Charleroi today is focused on revitalizing its unique, historic downtown shopping district and improving opportunities for river recreation. Its riverfront has multiple amenities including open space, two ball fields, a stadium site, boat launch and abundant parking.

Highlights:

- Improved signage, a priority identified by the needs assessment, will be installed in spring 2015.
- The Borough is in negotiations to assume ownership of Trustee’s Park, a riverfront community park. In 2014, the Borough added picnic tables and benches and has further plans to improve the property.
- To beautify and highlight the historic natural of the business district, Charleroi has installed metal arms to light poles in the downtown, to which banners will be installed in the spring of 2015.
- In partnership with Washington County Planning, work will be done to improve accessibility, landscaping, and signage at the Charleroi public boat launch, starting in early summer 2015.
- With support from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and the Mon River Valley Coalition, Charleroi’s SMAART (Sustainable Marketplace for Arts, Artisans, Recreational, and Trending Businesses) initiative will launch a business entrepreneurial contest in spring 2015. The contest will award three business plans \$10,000 each in goods and services to launch or expand a business in Charleroi. The SMAART initiative provides pop-up marketing and design services for arts and artisan businesses.

Partners: Charleroi Borough, Mon Valley Initiative, Washington County Planning, Mon River Valley Coalition





**STAR CITY, WEST VIRGINIA**

Star City, adjacent to West Virginia University, is located along the Mon River Trail and has developed the lovely Edith Barill Riverfront Park. The community, with a population of 2,000, has a rich heritage of glass-making and coal-mining.

*Highlights:*

- A public art project at the riverfront which depicts the historic ferry crossing is underway, with installation expected in the spring.
- Master planning for the riverfronts in both Star City and Morgantown has been completed through the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center. Fundraising is underway to execute the plan, including improvements to the riverbanks as well as installation of wayfinding signage.
- To improve access to the riverfront trail, wayfinding signage highlighting the amenities and services available in both Star City and Morgantown is being designed, with installation planned for summer 2015. An application is pending for funding to establish a loop into the Star City business district from the existing riverfront trail.
- Improvements have been made to the Van Voorhis trailhead, including installation of signage funded by the River Town Program.



*Partners:* City of Star City, Mon River Trail Conservancy, Star City Planning Commission, West Virginia University (Recreation and Landscape Architect departments), Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center

**MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA**

Home to West Virginia University, Morgantown has 30,000 full-time residents, plus over 29,000 students, making it a dynamic place to live, work, study, and play. In addition to outdoor recreation on the river and 56-miles of trails, visitors can get a glimpse into the area’s industrial and mining past at the Morgantown Museum downtown, take in a play at the Metropolitan Theater, a restored former Vaudeville theater, enjoy riverfront dining, or shop at the Seneca Center, a retail-hub housed in a repurposed glass factory.

*Highlights:*

- Fundraising is currently underway to improve signage and lighting along the existing walking path from the Mon River Trail at the Hazel Ruby McQuain Park to High Street in central Morgantown, providing a safe route from the rail trail to town that passes under several busy intersections. Work expected to begin in summer 2015.
- In association with partners, the River Town Program organizes two clean-ups each summer at the riverfront park, which includes repairing and painting park amenities, cleaning up trash and debris along the riverfront, and providing kayak lessons on the river.
- Morgantown’s River Town Action Team identified the need for a comprehensive riverfront development plan to strengthen coordination and leverage external resources. In response, the city issued a request for proposals for master planning for the riverfront. In addition, an economic development action team has been formed. The River Town Program has invited two development teams from Pittsburgh, who visited Morgantown for site tours and a meeting with the economic development action team.

*Partners:* City of Morgantown, Main Street Morgantown, Mon River Trail Conservancy, Board of Park and Recreation Commission (BOPARC), West Virginia University (Recreation and Landscape Architect departments); Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce, Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center

**FAIRMONT, WEST VIRGINIA**

Fairmont sits at the confluence of the Tygart and West Fork Rivers, which join to form the Monongahela. The county seat of Marion County, Fairmont boasts a large downtown historical district that attracts history and architecture buffs alike. This community of just over 18,000 is also home to Fairmont State University, which, with over 4,500 students, contributes added vibrancy to the city. With nine city parks and miles of riverfront, the City of Fairmont has actively embraced outdoor recreation. The planning department recently completed a connectivity study to expand the West Fork Trail into the historic district of Fairmont and an aggressive Parks and Recreation Master Plan prioritizes access to the rivers that surround it.



*Highlights:*

- The planning department recently completed a connectivity study to expand the West Fork Trail into the historic district of Fairmont and an aggressive Parks and Recreation Master Plan prioritizes access to the rivers that surround it.

*Partners:* City of Fairmont, 1230 Group, Mon River Trail Conservancy, Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission (MoPARC), West Virginia University (Recreation and Landscape Architecture Departments)





### French Creek Towns

French Creek flows from its headwaters in Chautauqua, New York, through northwestern Pennsylvania before joining the Allegheny River at Franklin, Pennsylvania, passing through some of the most scenic countryside and historic small towns in the state. Unlike many streams and rivers in the state, which have been negatively impacted by land development and industry, French Creek’s water quality has been maintained. With 15 species of darters, 27 species of freshwater mussels and thriving hellbender, muskrat, and bald eagle populations, French Creek is recognized by conservation biologists for its significant biodiversity.

In the summer of 2012, PEC partnered with French Creek Valley Conservancy (FCVC) to rebrand its River Town Program as the Creek Town Program. Three communities along the creek – Venango, Saegertown, and Cambridge Springs – all located in Crawford County joined the program. Community needs assessments were completed to identify priority projects.

In May 2014, the community of Cochranton officially joined the Creek Town Program. Two additional communities, Meadville and Union City, have also expressed interest.

Regional projects and priorities have included the following:

- Establishing a web presence for each community on the French Creek Valley Conservancy website
- Designing and installing gateway signage in each community (currently underway)
- Draping American flags from the bridges crossing the creek on July 4th weekend, to commemorate the holiday and draw attention to the creek
- Improving access to the Creek for fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and wildlife watching
- Hosting an annual canoe and kayak sojourn on the creek

In contrast to the Monongahela River Towns, where PEC and its contractors are heavily involved in program execution, FCVC has emerged as the lead organization steering this program in the region. To the greatest extent possible, PEC seeks to build capacity and ownership at the local level. As such, we have been pleased to support and assist FCVC, including providing funding for specific initiatives.



### VENANGO

Located along scenic Route 6, the Borough of Venango is a small community, only 0.3 square miles in size with a population less than 300. But what it lacks in size, it makes up for with beautiful views of French Creek, historic buildings, and welcoming businesses, such as the Venango Valley Inn golf course and restaurant and Sprague Farm & Brew Works, which regularly features live music and seasonal festivals.

#### Highlights:

- FCVC worked with borough officials to facilitate the transfer of property in Venango to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. This organization is preserving the property and restoring it to a natural state.
- FCVC is also working with the borough to install gateway signage featuring the French Creek Watershed logo on this property.

*Key Partners:* French Creek Valley Conservancy, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Borough of Venango



### SAEGERTOWN

Located along the banks of French Creek, Saegertown is also close to the Erie National Wildlife Refuge and Woodcock Creek Lake Dam, offering multiple opportunities for outdoor recreation. Whether looking for supplies for a day on the water or hoping to refuel after exploring the outdoors, Saegertown’s small business district offers a grocery store, several small restaurants, a laundromat, a gas station, and ice cream at the classic Saegertown Dairy Inn.

#### Highlights:

- Saegertown has cleared an area along French Creek, installed benches, planted landscaping, and installed a welcome sign with the tagline “A French Creek Community.”
- FCVC is also working with the Bborough as it prepares to replace a bridge over French Creek to determine if there is a possibility of improving creek access at that point as part of construction activities.

*Key Partners:* French Creek Valley Conservancy, Borough of Saegertown



*To learn more*  
about the French Creek Towns, visit  
[frenchcreekconservancy.org](http://frenchcreekconservancy.org)





CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS

Although only the Riverside Inn and Dinner Theater remains from this community’s heyday as a spa destination, there were once more than 40 inns and resorts in Cambridge Springs, serving the visitors who came seeking the purported health benefits of the local mineral springs. Today, there are several small shops and restaurants in the town itself and it is only a short drive to the renowned Campbell Pottery.

FCVC recently partnered with the Cambridge Springs Borough to acquire a canoe/kayak launch on French Creek located in Firemen’s Park in downtown Cambridge Springs. The ramp is paved and has direct parking access. Firemen’s park has flush toilets, picnic tables, pavilions, and also has showers that can be opened by calling the Cambridge Springs Borough. Overnight camping in the park is permitted by reservation only.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission also owns a launch just north of Cambridge Springs on Miller Station Road. Miller Station Road can be accessed by traveling north on Route 6/19 and turning right onto Miller Station Road. A current boat registration sticker or PFBC launch permit are required to use this launch.

Highlights:

- FCVC partnered with Cambridge Springs Borough to acquire and reopen a canoe/kayak launch in Firemen’s Park. The park has restrooms and pavilions, as well as showers available to park campers with reservations.

Key Partners: French Creek Valley Conservancy, Cambridge Springs Borough



COCHRANTON

Situated at the confluence of French and Sugar Creeks, Cochranon is a popular spot for fishing for smallmouth bass, walleye and northern pike. With a riverfront trail, creekside park, and canoe and kayak launch, Cochranon provides ample opportunities to enjoy French Creek. Its business district, just a short walk from the Creek, offers all of the provisions and supplies visitors need, with a gas station, gift shops, groceries, and several restaurants and bars. This small community also hosts several annual events, including the Cochranon Community Fair, an antique equipment show, Memorial Day services, and weekend flea markets.

Highlights:

- FCVC and the Borough worked with PennDOT to allow for the existing creek access to be greatly improved as part of a PennDOT bridge replacement project.
- Portable restrooms and improved signage will be added to the boat launch and creek-side park in 2015, to improve the visitor experience for creek and trail users.

Key Partners: French Creek Valley Conservancy, Cochranon Area Redevelopment Effort (CARE), Cochranon Borough



Schuylkill River Towns

Following the successes with the River Town Program in the western side of the state, PEC launched the Schuylkill River Town Program in the summer of 2013 to foster stewardship of the Schuylkill River and adjacent trails through education and engagement. The project focuses on the 26 miles of trail and river that includes the communities of Manayunk, Conshohocken, Norristown, and Phoenixville.

Former hubs of manufacturing, the towns suffered decline as the local industrial sector diminished. All are rebounding, though at different rates and with different strategies. The Schuylkill River Town Program is helping the communities to see the river in a new light: no longer a tool for industrial growth, but an asset in the towns’ economic rebirth.

EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL PROJECTS

In Progress:

- Educational and recreational programming such as historic walking tours, guided kayak trips, birds of prey shows for children, and multi-town bike trips

Planned:

- Creation of cohesive signage through the towns that directs residents to trail and river access points and directs trail and river users to in-town businesses and amenities
- Public art on the trail in the form of permanent installations and gateways, functional artist-designed benches and pollinator gardens, and cultural events such as pop-up concerts on the trail
- Assessment of existing attitudes towards the river, via a professional survey of residents before River Town activities began





### MANAYUNK

Manayunk is a neighborhood in the northwest of Philadelphia. Originally called Flat Rock, the neighborhood started as an independent town in the late 18th century and developed as an important mill town thanks to the construction of the Schuylkill Navigation Canal, which still runs through the neighborhood today. With a current population of over 10,000, Manayunk has recovered from the loss of manufacturing jobs by supporting the proliferation of small businesses along Main Street. In addition to fine dining establishments and creative design stores, kayak rentals and bike shops draw visitors to the neighborhood to enjoy outdoor recreation activities that are easily accessible from Manayunk's charming downtown.

#### Key Projects:

- The Schuylkill Navigation Canal is a unique remnant of Manayunk's industrial past which runs directly behind Main Street, flanked by a picturesque boardwalk. But many Manayunk residents are not aware of its presence. Schuylkill River Towns partnered with the Manayunk Development Corporation to design fire lighting events on the canal to celebrate the seasonal solstices and equinoxes. These events draw people to the canal and the trail through the excitement of fire and musicians, and they teach residents about Manayunk's history and ecology through storytelling performances and bird of prey shows.
- Schuylkill River Towns partnered with Destination Schuylkill River and Hidden River Outfitters to offer guided historical paddle tours of Manayunk. Hidden River Outfitters, a locally owned kayak outfitter, offers boats at a discounted price to event attendees, and a local historian explores the industrial history of the neighborhood and the ecological diversity of the river as the kayakers, many of whom did not know they could access the water, paddle down the Schuylkill.

*Partners:* Manayunk Development Corporation, Destination Schuylkill River



### CONSHOHOCKEN

Conshohocken is a town of nearly 8,000 people that has grown substantially in recent years. Like Manayunk, Conshohocken came to prominence in the mid-1800s as an important mill town and manufacturing center. As manufacturing in the region declined in the 1970s and 1980s, Conshohocken repositioned itself as a development-friendly location with easy transit access to Philadelphia. Conshohocken today is host to massive commercial and residential riverfront development as well as a charming retail corridor. There is currently no public river access in the borough, however, as the new developments block residents from the river (just as the former industrial buildings did throughout the 19th century). Though people flock to Conshohocken for its quality of life and ideal location, the lack of river access is a challenge that Schuylkill River Towns seeks address in its work.

#### Key Projects:

- Downtown Conshohocken boasts several bike-friendly businesses, but the charming retail corridor on Fayette Street is not visible from the Schuylkill River Trail due to the steep slope of the street. Conshohocken's small train station is also easily missed by the uninitiated. Schuylkill River Towns is working with a group of community volunteers and borough officials to add informational signage to the trail to allow trail users to discover the amenities Conshohocken offers.
- The borough, along with two local private schools, will open the Conshohocken Rowing Center in the coming year. The Rowing Center will include a boat ramp and plaza area offering access to the river as well as rare river views in a town that is cut off from the river by train lines. The current agreement between the co-owners is that one third of the new Rowing Center will be preserved as public access to the river. Schuylkill River Towns is promoting the forthcoming public river access and helping residents discover the new amenity through marketing and educational programming.

*Partners:* Conshohocken Borough, Conshohocken-White Marsh Rotary Association, Spring Mill Arts League, Conshohocken Public Library





NORRISTOWN

Norristown is the county seat of Montgomery County and home to 35,000 residents. Norristown, like the other towns down river, was once a hub of industrial activity and a retail destination for the region. Breweries, cigar factories, textile mills, ice houses, foundries, rolling mills and lumber yards provided ample employment for skilled laborers and artisans. The downtown featured two department stores, several theaters, and many specialty goods stores.

However, with the opening of new malls nearby after World War II, the downtown declined as a retail destination. Despite Norristown’s excellent transit access to Philadelphia and role as an important government seat, the city has struggled to revitalize in the wake of industrial decline. Many trail users, uncomfortable leaving the trail, miss out on the diverse locally businesses and plentiful city parks Norristown offers. Riverfront Park in Norristown boasts one of the only public river access points in all four River Towns. Schuylkill River Town’s goal is to change perceptions of Norristown and leverage its assets for community and economic development.



Key Projects:

- In partnership with Norristown Arts Hill and Creative MontCo, Schuylkill River Towns is working to bring art and culture to the Schuylkill River Trail. The goal of the art is to draw people to the trail and river and give them a new reason to discover and appreciate what is in their community. This discovery will hopefully lead to stewardship of the trail environment. The art being installed along the trail ranges from permanent installations and gateways by local artists or the Mural Arts Program to temporary “functional” art such as palette benches to pop-up concerts at the Norristown Transit Center which flanks the trail.
- The Dragon Boat Team of Norristown practices in Riverfront Park and has had an incredible impact on the community by inviting locals to join their practices and get on the river. The Dragon Boat team specializes in training cancer survivors and handicapped rowers. Though Riverfront Park has public river access, it does not have a floating dock that meets ADA accessibility criteria, preventing all participants from comfortably using the dragon boats. Schuylkill River Towns worked with the Dragon Boat team to lobby the city for a floating dock at Riverfront Park to better serve the mission of this amazing organization.

Partners: Dragon Boat Club of Norristown, Creative MontCo, Montgomery County Planning Commission, Norristown Arts Hill, Fairmount Waterworks.



To learn more  
about the Schuylkill Towns,  
[schuylkillrivertowns.com](http://schuylkillrivertowns.com)

PHOENIXVILLE

Phoenixville sits at the confluence of French Creek and the Schuylkill River 28 miles north of Philadelphia. Known for its iron and steel industry in the 19th century, today its 16,000 residents appreciate how the city has turned to outdoor recreation and community events to create economic development. The Phoenixville Green Team works to make sure new development in the borough respects the environment, and the Phoenixville Farmers Market attracts a large crowd throughout the year.



The main challenge in Phoenixville is that the Schuylkill River Trail diverges from its path along the river and cuts through downtown Phoenixville before rejoining the river north of town. While this allows trail users to pass through Phoenixville’s vibrant downtown, the residents and trail users are disconnected from the river and the benefits it offers.

Key Projects:

- To reconnect the town with its river, Schuylkill River Towns partnered with the Green Team to host trail and river clean-ups. In addition to fostering stewardship of these amenities, the clean-up program allows residents in the know to show others how to access the river and where to discover trails that connect to the Schuylkill.
- Schuylkill River Towns has facilitated a lecture series with several experts presenting at the monthly public Green Team forums. Topics have ranged from the history and present day use of the Black Rock Dam and fish ladder, to the design of pollinator gardens, to the science of angling. Schuylkill River Towns also organized a lecture about the three revolutions of the Schuylkill to be presented by the executive director of the Schuylkill River Heritage Association. These events have successfully engaged both old and new residents in discussions about the past and future of the Schuylkill in Phoenixville.

Partners: Phoenixville Borough, Phoenixville Green Team, Phoenixville Iron Canal Trail Association, Schuylkill River Heritage Area, Schuylkill River Heritage Center, Phoenixville Arts League, Valley Forge National Historic Park

conclusion

Diminishing resources at the national, state, and local level have forced communities to be creative in their revitalization and community improvement efforts. The River Town Program offers an alternative approach to economic and community development by encouraging regional collaboration and refocusing attention on riverfronts.

The River Town Program was developed around the idea that when communities embrace the river as a key component of their identity, a greater sense of stewardship of the resource naturally evolves. Through the program, visitor attraction, outdoor recreation, and business development become focused on the regional brand as river towns, blending the region’s economic goals to the conservation and protection of the river. For PEC, this program reinforces our vision of a sustainable world where quality of life, environmental protection, and economic vitality are intrinsically entwined and dependent on one another.



Thank you

The River Town Program has been generously supported by multiple funders. In particular, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, William Penn Foundation, and McCune Foundation have provided program support.



A blue kayak is beached on a rocky shore. On the kayak, there is an orange life vest, a red dry bag, and a black paddle. The kayak has a logo that says "NECKY" and another that says "MANITOUL SPORTS". The background shows a calm body of water and a forested hillside.

*Photos by:*

French Creek Valley Conservancy

Greater Morgantown CVB

Main Street Fairmont

Mon River Valley Conservancy

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