



RiverPlace

ON THE SCHUYLKILL

RIVERPLACE MASTER PLAN

GREATER READING, BERKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA



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RIVERPLACE MASTER PLAN

Greater Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania

Prepared for

RiverPlace Development Corporation
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources
Schuylkill River Greenway Association

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executive summary 1

VISION

With new trails and a connected park system, the Schuylkill River will draw people from both banks to the water's edge. Once there, residents and visitors will explore its natural beauty, formal attractions, and historical legacy. Performances, festivals, and other events will punctuate the quieter day-to-day activities. With connections into the surrounding city, people will find that they can walk, jog, or bicycle on the continuous paths. For those who wish to engage the river more directly, fishing, small boats, or ecological explorations will be available. Communities will link not just to the river, but to each other, through their shared interest and common meeting ground along the banks of the Schuylkill (Figure 1).

Overlooking the riverfront parks, economic development in the form of new housing and innovative business districts will replace languishing industrial areas. The Reading Area Community College (RACC) will continue to anchor the central riverfront, complementing their core educational services with theater and other cultural activities. Downtown uses from both the Reading and West Reading side will draw closer to the river along the Penn Corridor.

The riverfront ties Greater Reading and Berks County into the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area with walking, bicycling, and hiking opportunities. Stories about along the river banks about the history of canals, rails, industry, and immigration in the region, which can be translated into public art, interpretive displays, and education programs. The commitment to fine and performing arts in the community will be expressed in the riverfront through exciting venues for music, creative exploration, and play. The RiverPlace creates a wonderful setting for new attractions, such as a children's museum, canal inter-

pretive center, and/or railroad museum. A public market will be a destination that attracts a diverse mix of residents and visitors, while celebrating the region's agricultural heritage.

The river will celebrate its tributaries on the west bank, and the mountains will once again meet the river on the east bank (Figure 2). Three tributaries link RiverPlace to major institutions: the Penn State Campus on Tulpehocken Creek; the Reading Museum, Reading Hospital and Medical Center, and the Nursing School on Wyomissing Creek; and Alvernia College on Angelica Creek. The Union Canal Trail on Tulpehocken Creek is already a major recreational resource that connects important open spaces and interpretive sites. This open space system will join the Schuylkill trails with a new bridge and parks at the Confluence. Wyomissing Park is a continuous open space system along Wyomissing Creek with passive and active recreation. RiverPlace will complete the trail system with new parks at the mouth of Wyomissing Creek and connections to the Schuylkill River system. Next to Alvernia College, the City of Reading is restoring Angelica Park and its creek into an ecological and recreational resource for the community, which will tie more directly into the existing Thun Trail.

On the east bank, the expanding trail system on Neversink Mountain will join riverfront trails just below the existing manufacturing plant on South Street. With this critical link in place, park users will be able to enjoy the challenging trails, majestic raptors, and long range views on the tops of the mountains. This experience will connect directly to the level trail system, regional resources, and riparian ecology and birds found along the Schuylkill River.

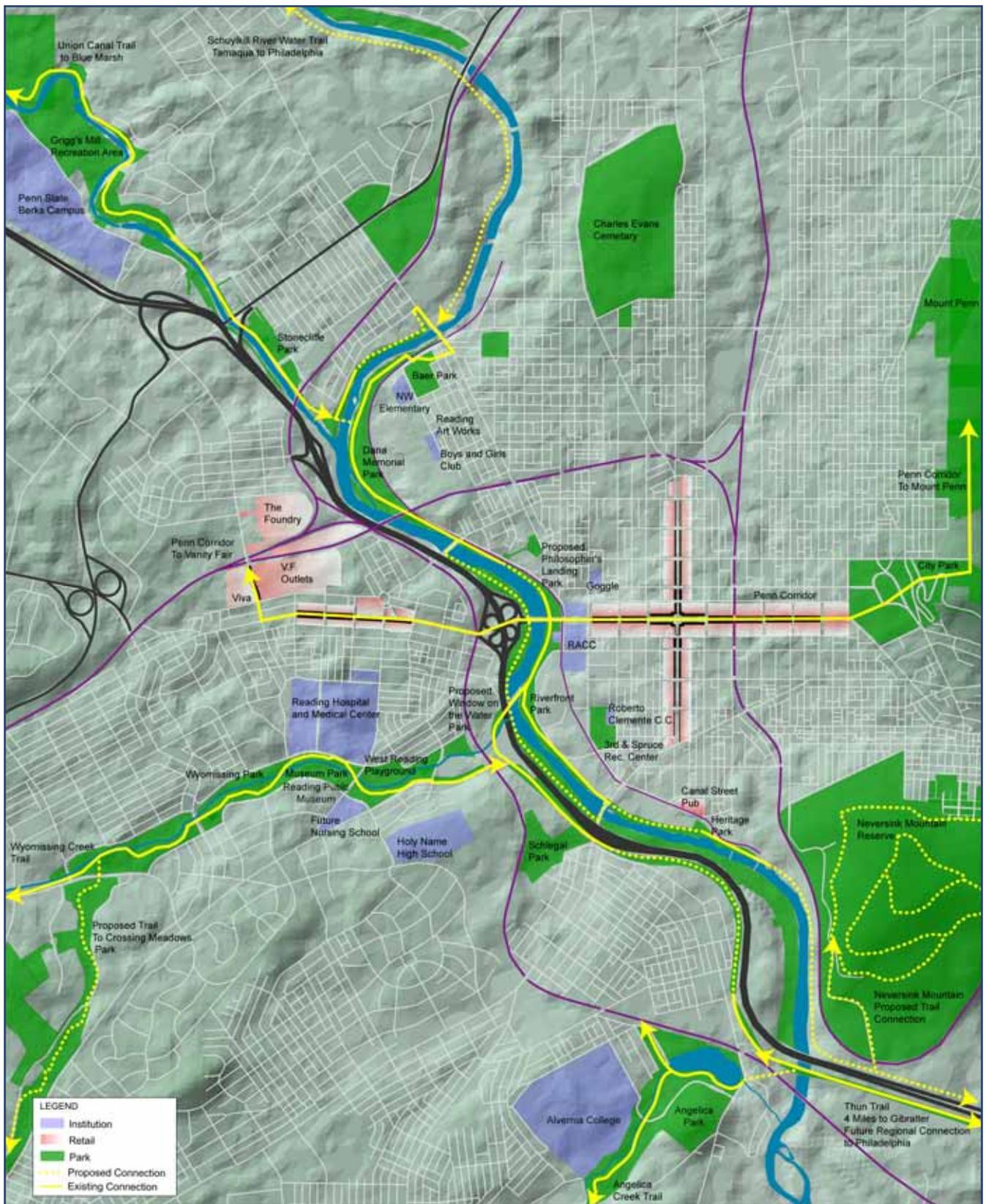


FIGURE 2. Regional Context

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

The RiverPlace plan is a flexible framework that will guide decision making about public improvements and private development over many years. The key principles that will shape the built form are as follows:

1. Promote synergy between the river and economic development: New development should contribute to the riverfront environment and derive a benefit from this amenity (Figure 3).
2. Provide continuous public access: Filling strategic gaps in the existing trail system will form a single continuous trail that moves from bank to bank; where possible, a system of loops with bridges and trails on both sides should be considered (Figure 4 and 5).
3. Connect the neighborhoods to the river: Every effort should be made to extend lateral streets, which will penetrate the vacant and industrial land to bring residents closer to the water.
4. Build on momentum and assets: Greater Reading, Berks County and RiverPlace have many unique features that should inspire new investment, including architecture, natural features, historic legacy, existing trails and parks, festivals and events, and anchor uses such as RACC and Goggleworks.
5. Stay focused to build critical mass: The initial phases of investment should be concentrated around existing centers of activity and should create a sense of a complete district within a five-minute walk circle.
6. Link both sides of the river: Decisions around physical improvements and priorities for investment should create destinations that are centered on the river with complementary activities on both sides.



FIGURE 3. RACC Campus



FIGURE 4. Continuous Public Access (Erie Canal)



FIGURE 5. The River as a Recreational Resource (Erie Canal)

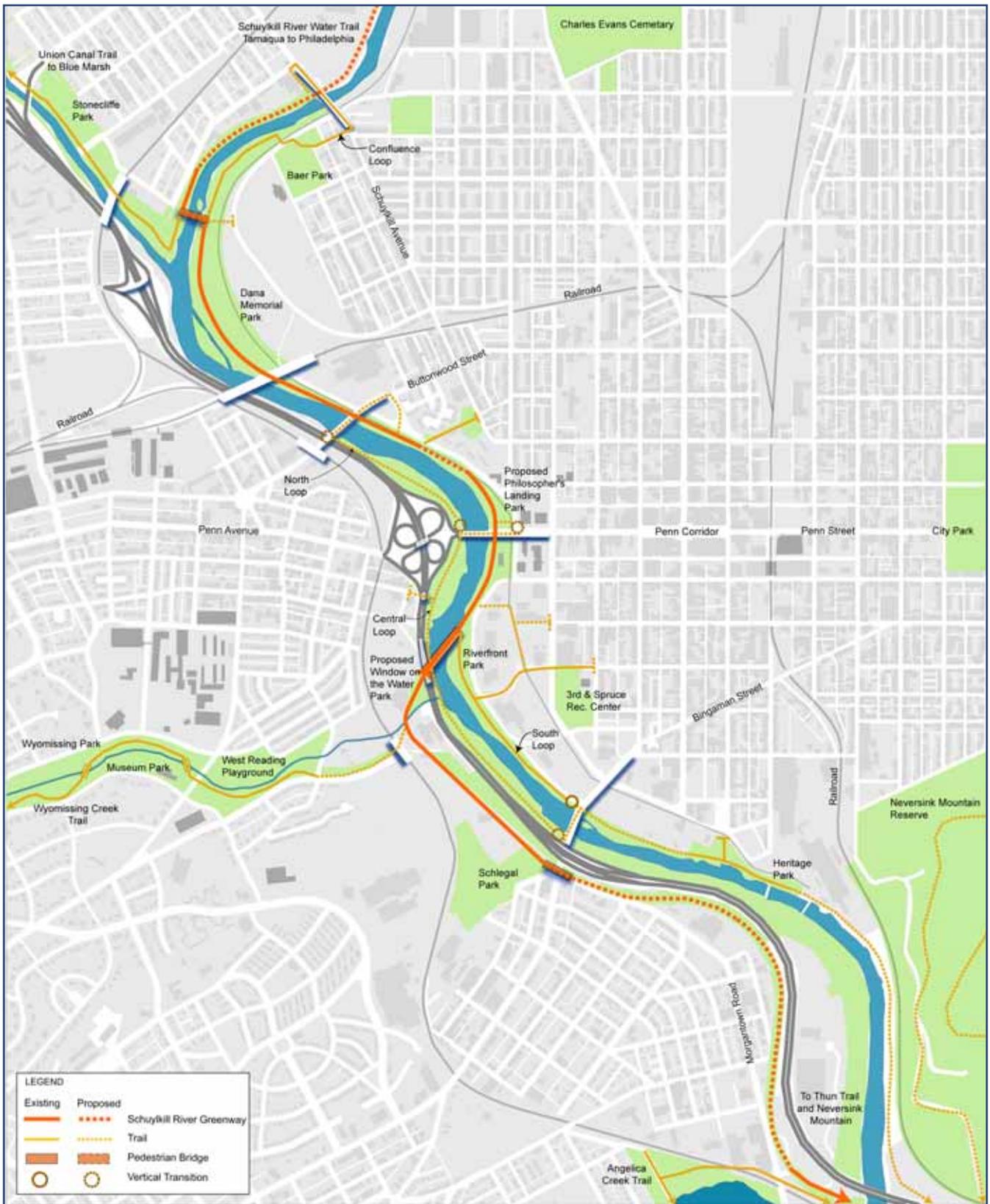


FIGURE 6. RiverPlace Trail Map



FIGURE 7. *Riverfront Economic Development Opportunities at the Old Dana Yards*

NEED FOR A VISION AND STRATEGY

Flowing through the heart of Greater Reading and Berks County, the Schuylkill River defines a region that touches the City of Reading, the Boroughs of West Reading and Wyomissing, and the Township of Cumru. As a major element in the region's legacy, the river continues to be a seam that binds these communities together (Figure 6). At this point in time, the competitive advantage of the riverfront presents one of the strongest economic development opportunities available (Figure 7). Partnerships built around the power of the river will be essential to achieving positive change along the riverfront. A major goal for this study and its sponsors is to "use the power of the river as a catalyst to unite communities and foster economic development."

The riverfront is poised for change and is one of the most dynamic areas in Greater Reading and Berks County. Much of the riverfront today is dominated by industrial uses and vacant land, with only occasional glimpses of the natural beauty of the water with its wooded shores and diverse habitat. At one time, canals were the lifeblood of the city, carved into different sides of the river to provide a deeper channel for transportation, generate power, and bypass the various falls. Industrial uses grew up around the falls and around the central canal basin in the low lying land along

today's Front Street in Reading. By the mid-19th century, railroads began to replace the canals, and they continue to dominate portions of the riverfront today. Like most American cities, highways also followed these natural transportation corridors, with the West Shore Bypass (Routes 422) now dominating the west bank. Between the transportation infrastructure and the historical and more recent industrial projects, the many residential neighborhoods on both sides of the river are almost totally cut off from the river.

The riverfront can be transformed into a front door for all the communities in the region. The riverfront brings together the best of the natural and the urban environment, which will make Greater Reading and Berks County a more attractive setting for its residents and create new destinations that extend the stay of its visitors. With these assets, businesses will be more likely to find a strong workforce and a positive environment for investing, whether this involves retention or expansion of current businesses or the attraction of new businesses that want all the benefits of Berks County and RiverPlace along with revitalized downtown areas.

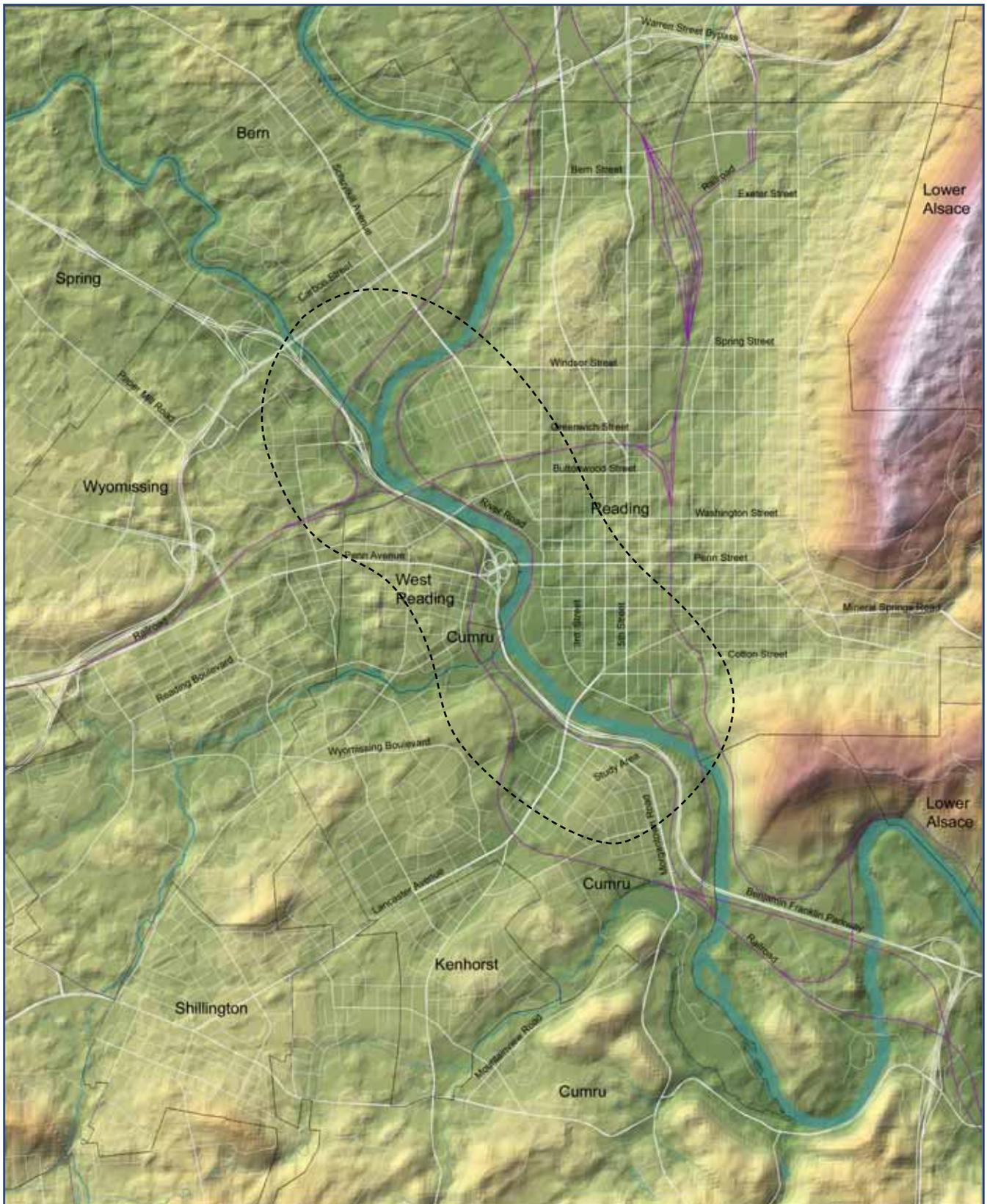


FIGURE 8. RiverPlace Study Area

PROCESS

In 2003, the citizens and leaders of Greater Reading and Berks County asked the Washington, D.C. based Waterfront Center to host a charrette that became a catalyst for a riverfront clean-up, a re-institution of the Riverfront Festival, and the creation of a new non-profit corporation. The RiverPlace Development Corporation was established to serve as the champion and coordinator of riverfront activities, including the preparation of a master plan for the area. During this same time frame, the National and State Heritage Area was designated to include the entire Schuylkill River watershed in Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties with Greater Reading and Berks County near the center. The Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) is responsible for managing this resource, in partnership with the National Park Service, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and other public and private partners. In November 2004, the SRGA and RiverPlace selected Sasaki Associates to lead the master plan process, with Gannett Fleming for engineering and Basile Bauman Prost & Associates for market research.

The master plan addresses the riverfront area between the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge on the north and the Heritage Park on the south, extending approximately one half mile inland on both sides of the Schuylkill River (Figure 8). In order to understand the issues and the opportunities within this area, however, a much larger context area is considered, acknowledging the Schuylkill River Heritage Area, opportunities for regional trail connections on the Schuylkill River and the Tulpehocken Creek and Wyomissing Creek, the role of the County, and the relationship of the river to the mountains that define the eastern edge of the city - Mount Penn and Neversink Mountain. In making recommendations for priority improvement areas, the master plan focuses on the area around the central riverfront, with Wyomissing Creek anchoring the southwest corner, and the Goggleworks anchoring the northeast corner of the area.

In order to make sound recommendations that would stand the test of time, the master plan included a community outreach and engagement process that extended between

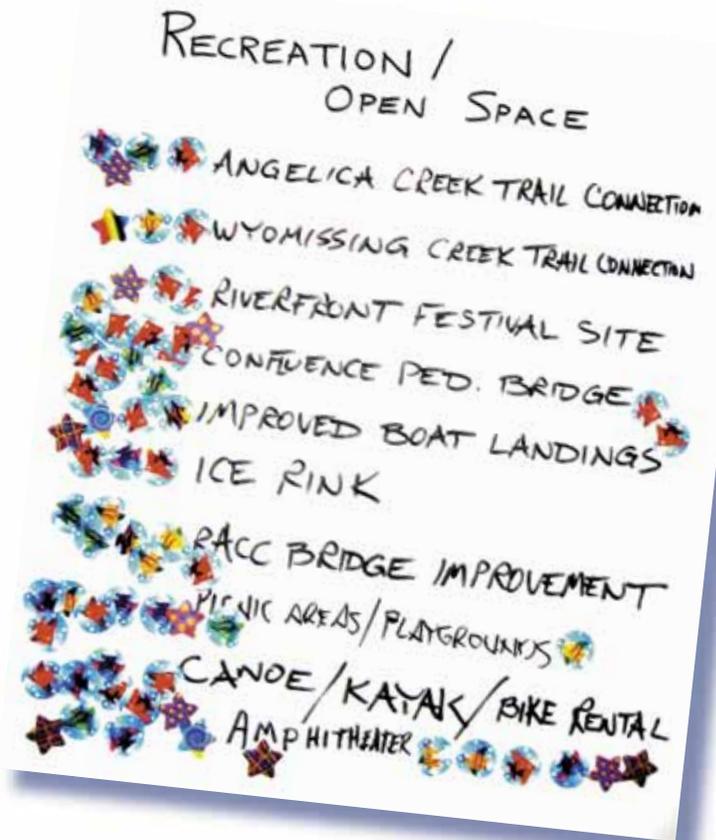


FIGURE 9. *An Engaged Community Shaped the Plan*

December 2004 to June 2005, when the master plan was presented. Through this process, the project team reached out to over 500 individuals including: citizens, neighborhood leaders, publicly elected officials, municipal and county staff, regional organizations, and civic, institutional, and business leaders among others. These discussions, which included one on one or small group meetings, open houses, and public presentations, generated ideas for uses, activities, and connections based on local knowledge of the site and its history (Figure 9). These meetings also yielded aspirations for the riverfront, the downtowns, and the neighborhoods and how to integrate these to create vibrant, connected places. The project team was able to bring insights regarding RiverPlace, share lessons from other riverfronts, present alternatives, and synthesize diverse ideas to develop a single recommended vision and strategy for RiverPlace.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

RiverPlace will be more successful if surrounding development complements the recreational opportunities on the riverfront. While industry was once tied to the power and transportation of the river, this link is irrevocably replaced first by rail and now highways as the primary infrastructure. Industry itself is changing from large-scale, labor intensive, heavy manufacturing to more refined, higher value technology produced by a skilled workforce that can maintain a competitive advantage in a global economy. Businesses make location decisions based on availability of a trained work force and the ability to attract and retain highly mobile knowledgeable workers. Ideally this location has a high quality of life with recreation, culture, and proximity to larger urban markets, attributes on which Greater Reading and Berks County can capitalize (Figure 10).

In their recent study, the Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR) identified three main economic sectors tailored to this area including

- Hospitality, entertainment, and tourism especially along the Penn Corridor from the Sovereign Center to the VF Outlet;
- Professional and shared services, such as customer services, human resources, accounting, information technology, law, and design, among others;
- Nutrition and wellness such as food processing and healthcare.

As a cross-cutting issue, the ICGR also identified the need to encourage innovation in manufacturing and increase entrepreneurship. A component of the ICGR study is to “brand” the Penn Corridor as a single identifiable place that overcomes local boundaries. RiverPlace will complement the ICGR study by providing new areas for development along the river and enhancing the center of the Penn Corridor as it crosses the river.

Given the market locally and nationally, future development should be targeted toward a careful mix of uses. The strongest demand will be for new residential development, which should include a greater range of housing types and expand choices for people who want to live in an urban environment (Figure 11). Residential uses facing onto riverfront parks offer the advantage of continuous surveillance and a committed constituency that cares about parks.

In concert with the ICGR branding, an ongoing effort will be required to establish a positive identity for business investment. Along the riverfront, a positive identity should build on



FIGURE 10. *Economic development should target innovative industries that value quality of life. (Cambridge, MA)*

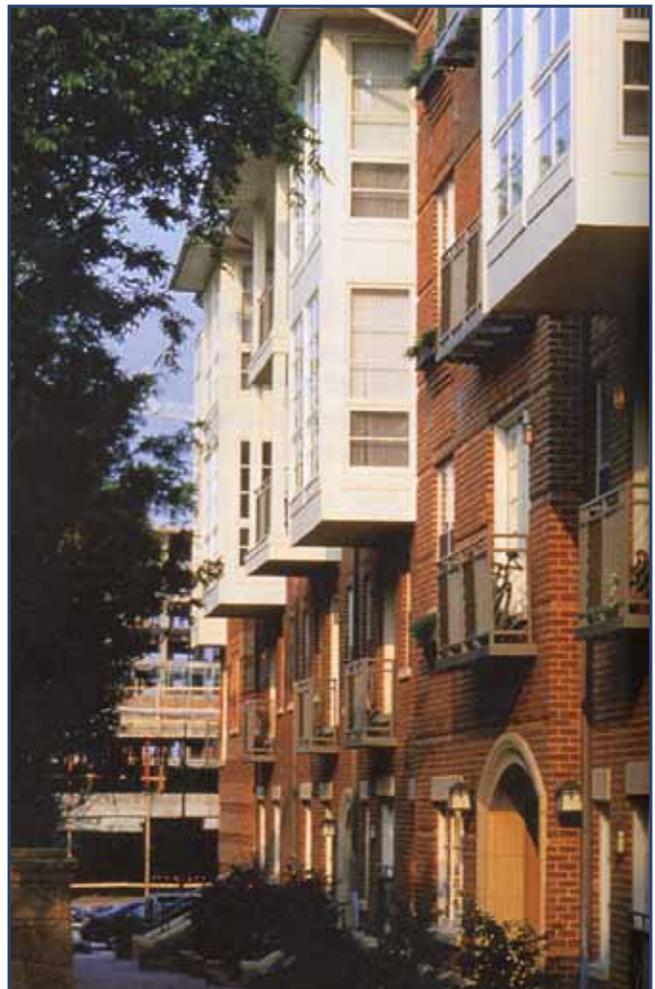


FIGURE 11. *New building types will expand choices for urban living. (Addison, TX)*



FIGURE 12. Opportunities for new development at the Confluence

the competitive advantage of desirable, prime riverfront land and proximity to downtown and neighborhoods. This approach recognizes that many areas along the riverfront, such as the Dana Yards and the Wyomissing Creek area, are quite different from suburban locations that have large parcels and better highway access.

Because of the proximity of existing and future residential neighborhoods, business investment along the riverfront must be compatible with these uses (Figure 12). Small innovative companies involved in research and technology and light manufacturing of high value products will have minimal trucking requirements and may feature studios and live/work units. Workforce training and partnerships between RACC academic programs and existing businesses will encourage local employment. As an anchor to the central riverfront, RACC should prosper and grow over the coming years.

Today's shared and professional service firms have workforces that value the amenities of water, recreation, and proximity to downtown and residential neighborhoods. In many places, these firms have taken the lead on adaptive reuse of warehouses and historic structures. Most health services are appropriately sited near easily accessible highways, although smaller community health centers may be appropriate next to neighborhoods. Food processing, which

also requires truck access, is unlikely to derive a direct benefit from a riverfront location.

The key retail uses and major cultural attractions within RiverPlace should be clustered in the central riverfront so that they can complement the hospitality, entertainment, and tourism uses envisioned for the Penn Corridor (Figure 13). In other locations, small amounts of neighborhood retail will follow residential development.

STRATEGY

Implementation of the recommendations in this report will require leadership from geographically focused entities such as RiverPlace, as well as committed efforts from other key partners including the municipalities, development partners, and county and regional entities. Through this master plan process, priorities for short-term, mid-range, and long-range projects have been defined, yet the overall vision will be accomplished by the collective action of many individual entities working toward a shared vision and committed to the same overall goals.

The current and priority capital projects are organized into phases below. The lead entity responsible is listed first along with partners that may be involved in implementation. The status and next steps also are identified.

0-1 year projects	lead & partners	next steps
CURRENT		
Goggleworks	Public/Private	September 2005 opening
Miller Center	RACC	Under construction (Completed Feb '07)
Schmidt Training & Technology Center	RACC	Under construction (Completed Jan '06)
Goggleworks District Parking Structure	Reading Parking Authority	Funded; in design
Wyomissing Square	Private Sector <i>Borough of Wyomissing</i>	Developer negotiations
Reading Hardware Complex	Private	Planned expansion; tenant negotiations
South Street Triangle Housing	Private	Pre-development
Lancaster Avenue Trail Bridge	SRGA <i>Penn DOT</i>	Under Construction (November 2005)
Art and Community Landscapes	RDC <i>City of Reading</i>	Design and Installation

BCCF = Berks County Community Foundation
 ICGR = Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading
 PennDOT = Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
 RACC = Reading Area Community College
 RDC = RiverPlace Development Corporation
 RFP = Request for Proposal
 SRGA = Schuylkill River Greenway Association
 TIP = Transportation Improvement Plan



FIGURE 13. Opportunities for new development at the Central Riverfront

1-5 year projects

lead & partners

next steps

CIVIC		
Philosopher's Landing/RACC Amphitheater	RDC <i>RACC</i>	Relocate parking, Fundraising, Schematic design
West Reading Boardwalk	Borough of West Reading	Environmental permits
RACC Bridge	SRGA <i>Berks County Parks</i>	Establish ownership entity; remove fences/gates; install appropriate railing
Window on Water Park	RDC <i>Borough of West Reading</i>	Coordinate w/ Old Wyomissing Road extension
Festival Site	Berks Festivals, Inc. <i>City of Reading</i>	Install infrastructure
Whitewater Park	RDC	Funding and Feasibility
Penn Corridor Streetscape & Bridge Lighting	City of Reading <i>Borough of West Reading</i>	Feasibility study/schematic design
Goggleworks District Streetscape	RDC <i>City of Reading</i>	Concept design
Old Wyomissing Road Extension	City of Reading <i>Cumru Township</i> <i>Berks County</i>	Feasibility study/schematic design
Riverfront Drive Extension	City of Reading <i>Greater Berks Development Fund</i>	Realign rail siding under rail bridge
Wyomissing Creek Connector Trail	RDC <i>City of Reading</i> <i>Borough of West Reading</i>	Funding
Confluence Point Park	RDC <i>City of Reading</i>	Funding
DEVELOPMENT		
Penn View Motel Site	Berks County Redevelopment Authority	Developer RFP
Narrow Fabric Site	Borough of West Reading	Site preparation for developer RFP
Chocolate Factory District	Private Sector <i>Borough of West Reading</i>	Site assembly; adaptive reuse and infill
American Chain and Cable	City of Reading <i>Private Sector</i>	Land clearance and site preparation
Riverfront Commerce Center (Old Dana Yards)	Greater Berks Development Fund <i>Berks Economic Partnership</i> <i>Berks Co. Community & Economic Development</i>	Site preparation; select master developer
Penn Bridge Marketplace Restaurant	Private Sector <i>RDC</i>	Identify developer/operator
Children's Museum	Private Non-Profit	Identify site, sponsor, and program
BCCF Headquarters	BCCF	Permitting

6-10 year projects

lead & partners

next steps

CIVIC		
Thun Trail Extension North	SRGA	Identify trail alignment
Neversink Mountain Trails	Berks County Conservancy <i>RDC</i>	Identify trail alignment for connection to RiverPlace
Confluence Bridge	SRGA <i>Berks County Parks</i>	Fundraising
PennDOT Bridges at Wyomissing Creek	RDC <i>PennDOT</i>	Negotiate design strategy and schedule
DEVELOPMENT		
El Mercado Public Market	Non-Profit Entity/Private Operators <i>RDC</i>	Establish site and entity
Goggle District Infill	Private Sector	Land assembly
Confluence Housing	Private Sector	Land assembly
West Side Bluff Housing	Private Sector	Land assembly

11-20 year projects lead & partners next steps

CIVIC		
Penn Corridor Interchange Redesign	Reading Area Transportation Study (TIP)	Traffic study
Met-Ed Substation Relocation/ Consolidation	Met-Ed <i>Borough of West Reading</i>	Identify alternative sites or strategies for consolidation
DEVELOPMENT		
Blair Avenue Redevelopment	Private Sector	Land assembly
Penske Area Redevelopment	Private Sector	Identify alternative areas for expansion

In order to set many of these projects in motion, policies must also be updated and initiated through partnerships of key entities involved in Greater Reading and Berks County. The role of corporate sponsors will be critical for many of the policy initiatives, capital improvement, and economic development projects to be successful. In order to get the projects off the ground, the corporate sponsors program

will provide “seed” money for soft costs and grant writing, funding such tasks as appraisals, schematic design, approvals, and providing a local match where necessary. RACC will continue to be an invaluable partner in RiverPlace development, providing a key anchor for activity and jointly planning and developing parking and open space improvements such as the Philosopher’s Landing.

policy initiatives lead & partners responsibilities

Marketing and Branding	RDC <i>Berks Economic Partnership Berks County Office of Community and Economic Development ICGR SRGA</i>	Coordinate message, signage, websites and print materials Business recruitment Data management
Coordinated Planning	RDC <i>City of Reading Borough of West Reading Borough of Wyomissing Cumru Township County of Berks BCCF</i>	Annexation Coordinated zoning changes Joint negotiations over transportation improvements Joint meetings with Federal agencies as needed regarding flooding
Parks and Open Space	RDC <i>SRGA Berks County Conservancy Berks County Parks Local Municipalities</i>	Joint planning for parks development, priority acquisitions, and maintenance of riverfront parks
Development and Infrastructure Projects	RDC <i>Berks Economic Partnership Local Municipalities Greater Berks Development Fund Berks County Redevelopment Authority Berks County Office of Community and Economic Development</i>	Agreement on priorities and funding requests Identification of non-profit partners for land assembly, real estate and parking development Identify partners to accomplish key street extension and streetscape projects if necessary Incentive packages
Coordinated Events and Operations	RDC <i>Berks Festivals Inc. Berks Jazz Fest Sovereign Center & Performing Arts Reading Downtown Improvement District West Reading Main Street Authority</i>	Coordinated schedule of events Downtown clean and safe



FIGURE 14. Five-Year Plan for the Central Riverfront



FIGURE 15. Existing View of the Central Riverfront

SUMMARY

The timely implementation of key projects will be essential for building and maintaining momentum at RiverPlace and in Greater Reading and Berks County. This sustained effort is necessary to change perceptions and create confidence for investment. Leadership and partnerships will go hand in hand toward achieving the plan's goals (Figure 14).

Many entities have a stake in the future of Greater Reading, Berks County, and RiverPlace, each bringing their own interests, resources, and capacities. No single entity can accomplish the plan on its own, however, nor would this provide the best outcome. Instead, it will take collaboration, sharing of resources, and above all trust to achieve a shared vision that moves beyond a single site or a single municipality. A connected open space system and a critical mass of activity will create a setting that inspires more residents and businesses to invest along the river, and will draw visitors from the metropolitan area and beyond (Figure 15).

Strong leadership from the public and/or the non-profit sector is typically required to demonstrate resolve, however. Without this, the private sector often is unwilling to make the first move or risk investment. The most challenging aspect of economic development is the assembly of land and the ability to carry out infrastructure improvements to prepare the site, all the while championing the vision embodied in the master plan. The success of this plan will depend on the incorporation of its recommendations into municipal and regional plans and the identification of an appropriate non-profit development partner to complement the RiverPlace Development Corporation.

