

Proposal would expand trails in Murrysville

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By Annie Siebert / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Turning a 37-square-mile rural municipality into a walkable community is an ambitious task, but Murrysville is going to try.

Murrysville council received a trail expansion plan from its trails committee this month and planned to discuss the committee's recommendations at a meeting that was held Wednesday night.

The plan calls for 90 percent of homes in Murrysville to someday be within 1 mile of a pedestrian or bike trail that would connect residents with parks and nature conservancies in the municipality.

"This plan is meant to support that process going into the future," said Betsy Aiken, chairwoman of the Murrysville Trail Alliance and a member of the trail committee.

Although trails have been popping up in the municipality since the 1970s, the plan is still in its infancy and the trails are disjointed. The majority of the trails that exist now were developed by volunteers and are maintained by them, something that council President Joan Kearns hopes to continue as the trail network expands.

"We don't want to add any burden to the tax rolls," she said.

Murrysville still has a lot of undeveloped land, and the plan calls for future developments to include trail access to improve walkability, even if it's just a narrow path or right of way, Ms. Kearns said.

She said the Murrysville Trail Alliance and a half-dozen other volunteer organizations drive the expansion of the trail network.

"They so value having the ability to have a place to do that, that they're willing to come in and build and maintain the trails," she said.

Murrysville owns about 1,100 acres of park land, Ms. Aiken said, and there are seven nature reserves owned by Westmoreland Conservancy. Ms. Kearns said that's an attraction to potential residents.

"I think that one of the reasons that people move out here, over and above the good school district, is that we still have a fair amount of open land," she said.

"They value that."

She said that connecting the municipality's natural resources is just one goal of the plan.

"As residents become more aware of those types of amenities and become more appreciative of them, then the impetus is there to develop some kind of connectivity" for pedestrian and bike paths, she said.

Council and the municipality's planning commission would have to OK the plan for the trail network to move forward. Ms. Aiken emphasized that the plan does not call for proposed trails to cross privately owned properties without permission from the property owner.

Those interested in exploring the existing trails can attend Hike Murrysville at 9 a.m. Saturday at the lower pavilion at Townsend Park.

The shortest hikes will be through Townsend Park or to Sloan School. A 5-mile hike will run through the Don Harrison Community Trail and the Westmoreland Conservancy's King and Caywood Nature Reserves and end at the Murrysville Community Park wetlands. Those who wish to continue hiking can double back and return to Townsend Park.

The event is free. Hikers are encouraged to wear comfortable shoes suitable for walking in wet grass. To take part in the hike: mtamail@murrysvilletrails.org or 724-733-5007.

For more information or to check on whether the event is postponed until April 28 due to inclement weather: www.murrysvilletrails.org.