3. Lardner's Point Park Greenway Project – Bucks County, Pennsylvania

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The eleven-mile stretch of the North Delaware Riverfront, defined as the area north of Penn Treaty Park in Center City Philadelphia to Bucks County and east of I-95 to the river, represents an enormous development asset for the City of Philadelphia. This stretch of the riverfront offers the potential for continuous riverfront green space for recreation and outdoor activities, habitat restoration, parks and open space, new housing communities and extensions of existing neighborhoods, new commercial development, continued operation of a diverse mix of port and riverfront manufacturing, utility and service industries - all anchored by one of the most powerful natural amenities in the region.

A proposed North Delaware Riverfront Greenway of approximately 300 acres is anticipated to include public open space and parkland, a new meandering, environmentally friendly and traffic calming river drive, a continuous bicycle and pedestrian trail that would be a key section of the national East Coast Greenway, as well as fishing and boating facilities and restoration of the riverbank habitat. The greenway would be the key "green infrastructure" to provide a new "front door" on the riverfront for future private residential and commercial development that would redevelop hundreds of acres of vacant and underutilized properties. The greenway would also reconnect the surrounding neighborhoods - Bridesburg, Wissinoming, Tacony and Holmesburg/Torresdale - to the river.

Existing conditions along the North Delaware Riverfront. The project will improve vegetation along the riverbanks to make it more visually appealing and ecologically-sensitive.

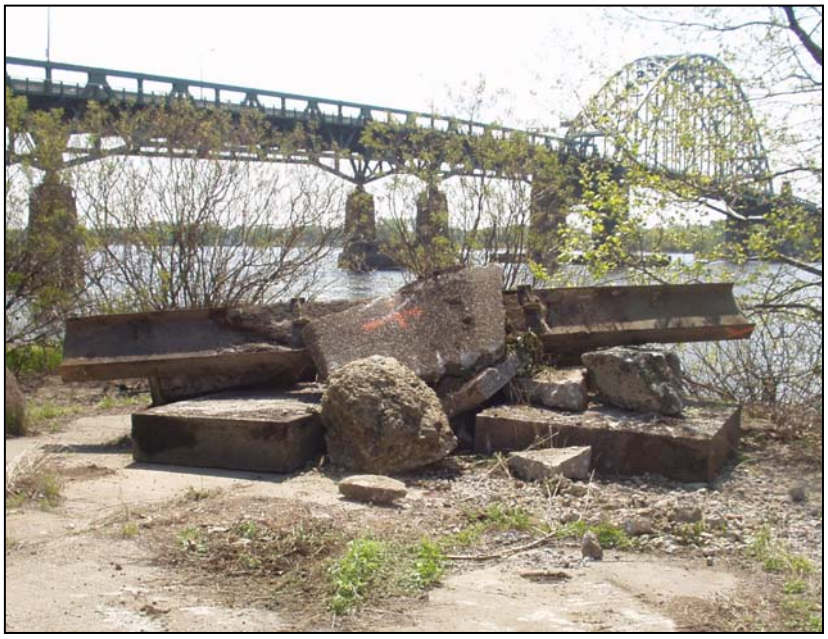
Lardner's Point Park is a key seed project of the new public greenway. It is presently a 5-acre City-owned parcel along the river in front of a Philadelphia Water Department facility, the Lardner's Point Pump Station, which is one of the largest pump stations in the country. The site was formerly used as a storage location and landing site for coal for the pump station, as well as the landing for the former Tacony Palmyra ferry to New Jersey. The site is directly south of the stately Tacony Palmyra Bridge that connects Pennsylvania and New Jersey. At the other end of the site is the new Palmyra Nature Cove Environmental

Center that features programs and exhibits about the Delaware River ecology. The future riverfront bike trail that will wend its way along the riverfront on an abandoned Conrail rail track traverses the future park site. This site was chosen for a park since it is easily accessible from the riverfront neighborhoods, is publicly-owned, and is a welcome "node" along the bike trail for a rest stop, picnic area, fishing location and a gateway for the Delaware River Heritage Trail (a bi-state bike trail that will run over the Tacony Palmyra Bridge and then extend north through the City's riverfront and into Bucks County).

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) sought funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM) to create engineered plans to develop this site as an ecologically-sensitive public park and a model for the ecological restoration that could be pursued along the entire riverbank. Biohabitats, Inc., an ecological restoration landscape design firm, was selected to develop the park plans, along with Field Operations who had developed the City's vision plan for the entire North Delaware Riverfront. A subcommittee of a larger Riverfront Task Force was organized to review the plans and provide technical input.

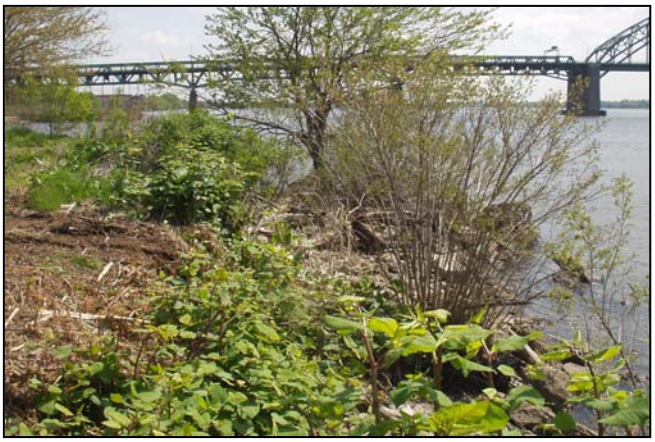
The final design includes a combination of green building amenities such as solar lighting, permeable pavement, ecologically-sensitive restoration, public recreation amenities, and interpretive signage that educates visitors to both historical and environmental facts and features. The design features include: a river overlook; restoration of the riparian buffer and riverbank forest, in addition to new meadow plantings with native trees and shrubs; repair of the finger pier for fishing and sitting, and removal of the bulkhead and boat ramp; creation of two picnic areas; creation of new freshwater high marsh and low marsh intertidal wetlands and marsh meadows; a pedestrian path along the river; K & T bike and pedestrian trail that traverses the site (also part of the national East Coast Greenway trail and trailhead for bi-state Delaware River Heritage Trail); plus interpretive signage. Amenities will include solar lighting, compost restroom, drinking fountain, sitting area around the overlook, pedestrian walking path, and large trail map.

Debris, such this concrete, will be removed from the brownfield site.



Since the site was a brownfield, the design includes building up the grading, rather than excavating, removing old concrete ramps and pads, and removing concrete that was placed along the riverbank for stabilization. The tides make it difficult to put in extensive planting, so through the process of a tide gauge and evaluating the tide flow, the tidal wetland – both high marsh and low marsh plants – was designed. It is anticipated that there will be lots of trash that will get washed up, but hopefully will not interfere with the wetland function.

PEC also received a DEP Growing Greener grant to begin the riverbank restoration while final plans were still being completed. Initially, it was envisioned that some of the riverbank forest restoration could be done, as well as planting native shrubs along the riverbank. It was intended to get the project started, keep up the momentum of community engagement, and see some results and change on the riverfront. However, due to the major growths of Japanese knotweed, Japanese honeysuckle vine, and shrub honeysuckles on the site, the funding from DEP was largely used for invasive species management. With some of the funds, PEC was able to conduct a volunteer tree planting day on an adjacent parcel south of the park, using native trees and shrubs provided by DCNR's TreeVitalize Program. Volunteers from the community Task Force, Fairmount Park Commission, Philadelphia Water Department, local elected officials, PEC, and local high schools came together to plant these trees.



Note the Japanese knotweed infestation along the riverbank. Funds from DEP were used to manage these plants.

The next step in the park's progress is to move forward with construction. The bike trail portion is in the design and engineering phase, so construction of the park and trail will need to be carefully coordinated. There is a study being completed to address access to the trail and park from the Tacony Palmyra Bridge, as well as the adjacent neighborhoods, for pedestrians, cyclists and automobile visitors. The site will be graded up, some trees removed and most trimmed, and new meadows and shrubs planted – hopefully, with no issue of invasive species to interrupt the growth of the new plantings. The plan designates some areas to be mowed in a meandering path through the understory and scrub, so that visitors can walk, sit and enjoy the landscape without it being lawn or requiring more meticulous maintenance.

One of the issues that have been encountered in this park development is the length of time it has taken to work with all of the City and community partners on developing a design that can be a pilot for future work and a model that is the "flagship" of public access and recreation along the riverfront. To this end, PEC worked closely with staff from the Fairmount Park Commission, DEP, and DCNR on selecting the amenities such as solar lighting and compost restrooms that can hopefully become standard items throughout the Fairmount Park system. Collaborating with the stakeholders and taking the time to work through a process of engaging partners may take time, but should prove, in the long run, to create a solid base of support for the park. Collaboration will also help the project become a model of ecological restoration and riverfront recreation that will set the standards for the riverfront greenway implementation to follow.

Maintenance of this park will be done by a new public/private entity being formed to lead the implementation of the greenway and private redevelopment along the riverfront. Crews will need to be trained in how to "manage" a mostly natural landscape, as well as the compost restroom and other features that are totally new to current Fairmount Park staff. It may be a challenge to set out new behaviors and pave new ground, but one that is manageable and worthwhile.