
Promoting and Developing a Trail Network Across Suburban, Rural, and Urban Communities

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Background: The Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership received an Active Living by Design grant late in 2003 for a project centered on a growing trail network linking urban, suburban, and rural communities in northeast Pennsylvania, a former coal region, in order to increase physical activity among residents.

Intervention: The partnership conducted research, collected information, created promotional documents, worked with partners on events and programs, and participated in trail planning. Local trail organizations continued planning and construction toward developing a trail network. Other partners spearheaded policy change in schools and worksites and worked toward downtown revitalization. The partnership assisted these efforts by providing a forum in which organizations could meet.

Results: The partnership became a central resource for information about local parks, trails, and outdoor recreational activities. The partnership increased awareness and use of recreational facilities. Trail partners constructed 22 miles of walking and biking trails. The partnership took advantage of an allied effort that created organizational capacity for wellness in schools and worksites.

Lessons learned: Messages promoting social and entertainment benefits of physical activity were more successful than those promoting health benefits. The existence of multiple small, independent trail organizations can help advance trail development through concurrent development efforts. Urban, suburban, and rural residents' conceptions of walkability may differ.

Conclusions: Trails provide options for recreational and transportation-related physical activity across urban, suburban, and rural landscapes that are supported by all constituents. Trail builders can be strong allies in bringing active living to suburban and rural places.
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Introduction

During the 1990s, technical support and public funding spurred trail planning and development throughout Pennsylvania, including in the Wyoming Valley, a community of small urban, suburban, and rural municipalities along the Susquehanna River. Enthusiasm for trails and the belief that nature-based outdoor recreation encourages healthy practices led environment and trail partners to seek the involvement of health organizations at a “trails and

health” forum organized by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and the National Park Service in 1999. After the forum, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council was funded by diverse entities to work with local trail organizations and the healthcare community to develop the vision, mission, and structure of what eventually became the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership.

In 2002, the partnership's action plan established four goals: (1) promoting trails as places for physical activity, (2) advocating for trail development, (3) developing events and programs on trails, and (4) conducting wellness-related trail research. This plan listed 21 initial partners, including local trails organizations, economic development organizations, health services organizations, and state and national partners, and included a network of nine trails in development.

The partnership responded to the 2003 Active Living by Design (ALbD) call for proposals with a plan to increase physical activity using the growing regional

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trail network. In November 2003, the partnership received ALbD funding to ensure that every urban, suburban, and rural community would be an active place. The Wellness Trails Partnership was distinguished by its emphasis on trails, its large geographic area, and its inclusion of urban, suburban, and rural residents.

The lead agency for the ALbD grant was Maternal and Family Health Services, a preventive health services provider that also administers the U.S. Department of Agriculture Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in 16 Pennsylvania counties. This agency, a founding partnership member, was chosen as lead agency because of its geographic location in Wilkes-Barre's downtown, its strong administrative support, and its role as an established neutral health services provider in an area with strong competition between a few key health providers and insurers. The agency served as the partnership fiduciary agent, provided a project director, and was a core partner. The partnership operated as an independent organization, with its own by-laws and staff. Because of the agency's role, the partnership increased consideration of women with infants, prompting inclusion of parks and outdoor play in the project.

Using the ALbD 5P model¹ (www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model; preparation, promotion, programs, policy, and physical projects), the partnership worked toward five goals: (1) to understand local opportunities for and messages about out-

door physical activity; (2) to work with the local health services sector, partners, and media to increase awareness of parks, trails, and opportunities for outdoor physical activity; (3) to create programs that increase use of local parks and trails; (4) to create plans that increase trail connections, bring trails into residential communities, and revitalize existing communities; and (5) to build trails and other outdoor facilities that promote physical activity.

Methods

Settings and Population

The 36 municipalities in the project area are centered around the City of Wilkes-Barre and the Susquehanna River in the northern half of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania (Figure 1). The project area includes former coal towns along the river and adjacent suburban and rural communities. Area population is 190,000, including 43,000 in the city of Wilkes-Barre. Municipality size ranges from 0.37 square miles to 29 square miles, and population density ranges from a population of 84 per square mile to almost 6500 per square mile.^{2,3} While many older towns in the river valley area are pedestrian-friendly (e.g., sidewalks, relatively dense housing, neighborhood retail, bus transit), suburban communities and rural areas are automobile-centered.

The project area has many older residents, with 18.2% aged ≥ 65 years compared to 12.4% nationally.² Thirty-six percent of adults state that they do not exercise, while rates of heart disease, diabetes, and colon cancer in the community exceed national averages.⁴ While the formerly industrial

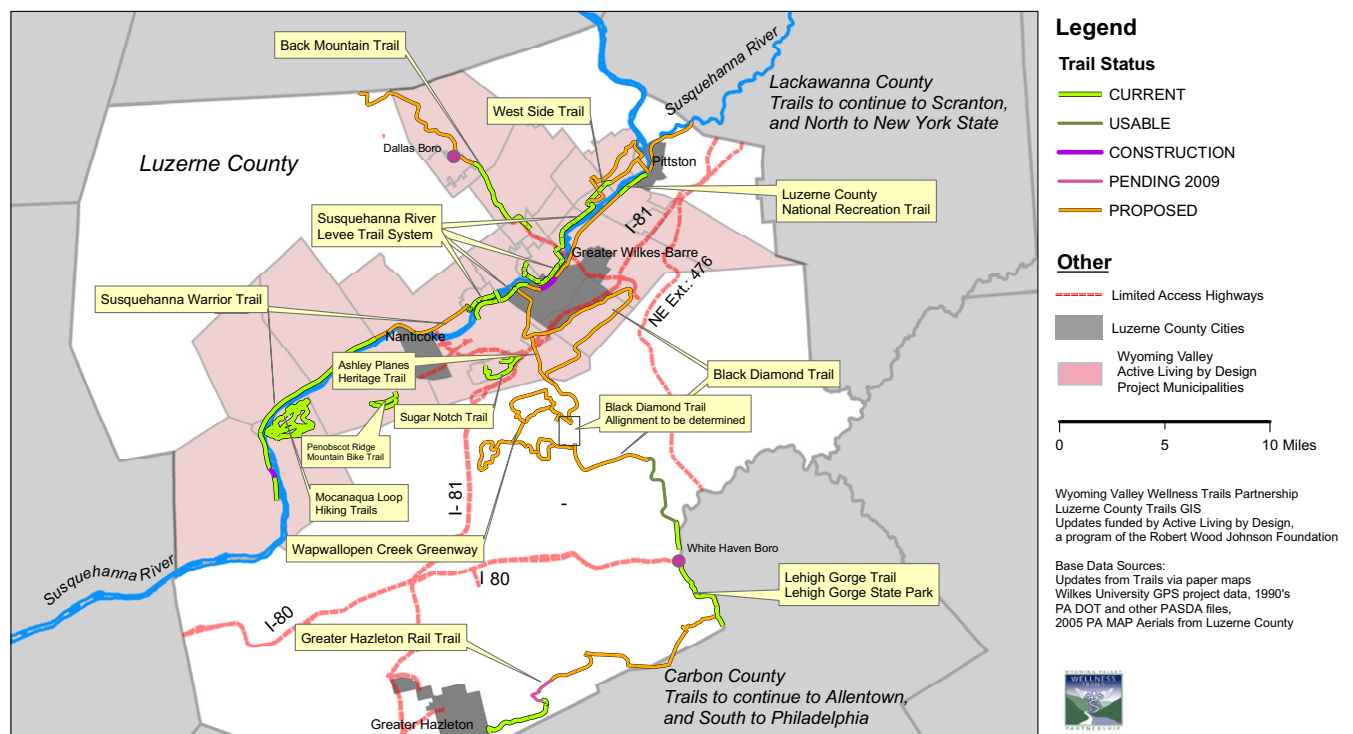


Figure 1. Map of Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership Project Area and Luzerne County Trails as of the fall of 2008

economy has become more resilient and diverse, statistics still show lower levels of education and median family income, more manufacturing and retail jobs, and fewer management and professional jobs compared with state and national averages.⁵

At the time of the partnership's action plan, much of the proposed trail network had been envisioned, but only eight of 93 planned miles of multi-use trail were open. Trail plans included in the action plan were also part of the Luzerne/Lackawanna County Open Space and Recreation Plan (2004) adopted by Luzerne County Commissioners.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model

Preparation. The partnership used the ALbD grant funding to hire a part-time project manager and to pay for research, programs, and promotions. The partnership convened meetings to share information and promote collaboration. The partnership also established an annual work plan with the assistance of the ALbD National Program Office. Preparation, promotion, and program tasks were accomplished by the project manager or by an ad-hoc work group. For example, the *A New You* brochure and prescription program work group consisted of the local Steps to a HealthierPA Luzerne County (Steps) office, Blue Cross of North East Pennsylvania, a physician, and others. Individual organizations accomplished physical project tasks, especially the trail development. Partnership meetings became a place to report progress, describe stumbling blocks, and get feedback.

The partnership aimed to increase active living opportunities across the varied urban, suburban, and rural landscapes of the region. Some activities such as developing trails spanned the region, while other activities such as urban revitalization were targeted at particular landscapes.

The partnership met monthly or bimonthly for the project's first 3 years. A core group of partners (Table 1) with funded staff actively attended meetings and served on work groups. Steps participated in most of the partnership's efforts, leading some, and was key to partnership successes. A number of partners attended few meetings and were contacted when specific projects required their participation. As partnership-related tasks became institutionalized and consistent, the partnership met less frequently.

In Spring 2004, the partnership convened a focus group of communications professionals to understand the types of messages that motivate outdoor physical activity. The focus group revealed that community members were more motivated to participate in outdoor physical activity by messages about fun, adventure, and socializing with friends and family than by messages about health benefits, regardless of age, gender, or place of residence. A 2008 survey of participants of a partnership effort, the Luzerne County Keystone Active Zone Passport program (a scavenger hunt through local parks and trails), underlined this finding. Among the respondents ($n=64$), top reasons for doing the program included "fun and adventure" (70%) and "to get outside, fresh air and sunshine" (69%).⁶ Fewer respondents did the program "to improve my (family's) health" (42%).⁶

In the summer of 2005, the partnership surveyed local trail, recreation, health, and fitness organizations to assess gaps in opportunities for physical activity. The survey showed that

most of the community is well served by physical activity opportunities, with seniors having the most low-cost and free options. School-aged youth have fewer options for organized outdoor recreation (e.g., hiking, biking, paddling) independent of scouting and summer camp, but many opportunities for organized sports.

Implementation

Programs and promotions. The partnership planned and implemented promotion and program interventions (Table 2). Promotions and programs were identified to meet a specific need, follow a model, or take advantage of an opportunity. For example, the YMCA teen hiking program met an identified need: lack of youth outdoor recreation opportunities. The *A New You* brochure and prescription program was modeled after the physical activity prescription program of another ALbD grantee (Upper Valley). The Luzerne County Keystone Active Zone Passport program was based on a statewide framework and branding campaign created for Pennsylvania by the Center for Nutrition and Activity at the Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital Center. Promotions and programs—such as the Passport program, Great Places Close to Home busboards, and the teen hiking program—were designed to appeal to urban, rural, and suburban residents alike, by stressing fun, adventure, and discovering local natural treasures.

Partnership members discussed and qualitatively evaluated each activity, assessing fit with goals, people reached, ease of implementation, and expense. Programs or promotions that successfully met goals were continued, often with improvements. For example, the Keystone Active Zone Passport program has evolved into a web-based program through the assistance of Steps.

Policy and physical projects. Policy and physical project goals were to increase trail connections through planning, bring trails into residential communities, revitalize existing walkable communities, and build planned trails (Table 2). The partnership's actions to revitalize existing urban communities focused on visioning and education. The partnership invited municipalities to a Livable Communities conference and held an associated "place-making" workshop for the West Side Trail. The partnership also co-sponsored an active living architecture student visioning studio with the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry.

Multi-use trails in Luzerne County have a lengthy planning and construction process, often with more than 10 years to construction (Table 3). Most trails constructed during the course of the grant were included in the action plan for the partnership and had existing master plans before the ALbD grant was awarded. The partnership is currently serving on the steering committee and provided some funding for two Trail and Greenway Master Plans begun in 2008 that aim to increase trail connections in the urban communities of the Wyoming Valley.

In contrast, the partnership's trail projects at two suburban elementary school campuses were planned and constructed by school grounds staff within a year. The partnership provided funding and linkages to design assistance. Steps provided additional funding. This process was simpler and quicker since these projects (a 1-mile trail and a 0.25-mile trail) did not require obtaining federal or state funding or land acquisition for the trail right-of-way, nor did they face

Table 1. Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails partnership members

Partner	Organization goals ^a	Major contributions
Core partners		
Steps to a HealthierPA Luzerne County	Chronic disease prevention and health promotion, especially related to obesity and lack of physical activity	School Wellness and Worksite Wellness Policy Infrastructure (allied effort) Keystone Active Zone Passport program, School Campus Trails, Great Places Close to Home Campaign, <i>A New You</i> brochure and Hospital Grand Rounds, Livable Communities Workshop
Gateway Health Plan, Office of Community Development ^b	Develop community health resources to improve health of client medical assistance recipients	Project Director 2004–2005, <i>A New You</i> brochure and Hospital Grand Rounds, Livable Communities Workshop, monthly list of walks, bikes, and active nature exploration
Pennsylvania Environmental Council, North East Regional Office	Develop environmental partnerships and improve environment through planning and projects	Greater Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Master Plan, Greater Kingston Trails and Greenways Master Plan, State of the Trails document
Luzerne County Department of Parks and Recreation	Manage county parks and promote county and other local resources for outdoor recreation	Great Places Close to Home Campaign, Wyoming Valley Riverfest, National Trails Day, State of the Trails document, monthly list of walks, bikes, and active nature exploration
Blue Cross of Northeast PA, Community Outreach Department	Health promotion, worksite wellness, SafeKids coalition	<i>A New You</i> brochure, Worksite Wellness Challenge and Toolkit, National Trails Day
Maternal and Family Health Services	Provide preventive health services, including WIC, family planning, and some health screenings	Project Director 2006–2008, Great Places Close to Home Campaign, Outdoor Play Everyday Campaign
Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails/Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership	Manage, develop and promote trail, and help develop recreation and heritage resources in Southern Luzerne County	Trail Counters, State of the Trails Parks and Trails Map, National Trails Day, Keystone Active Zone
Development partners: parks and trails and downtown		
Anthracite Scenic Trail Council/Back Mountain Trail, Earth Conservancy, West Side Trail Commission, Susquehanna Warrior Trail, Luzerne County National Recreation Trail, Riverfront Parks Committee, Luzerne County Flood Protection District/Susquehanna River Levee Trail, Nescopeck State Park, Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Lehigh Gorge State park, Frances Slocum State Park, Architecture and Engineering Group	Develop and manage parks and trails Luzerne County Flood Protection District also manages the Susquehanna River Levee and other flood protection infrastructure and land	Partnership projects: Keystone Active Zone, National Trails Day, State of the Trails Document and Map, Monthly Walks and Active Nature Exploration, Safe Routes to School (WST), Trail Counters Trail projects: open at start of grant; Back Mountain Trail, Susquehanna River Levee Trail, Earth Conservancy-Mocanaqua Loop. Constructed trails during the grant period: Back Mountain Trail, West Side Trail, Earth Conservancy/Sugar Notch Trail, Luzerne County National Recreation Trail, Susquehanna River Levee Trail. River Common park (allied project)
Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry	Promote regional economic development, revitalize downtown Wilkes-Barre, and support Chamber members	Penn State Student Visioning Project, City of Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Masterplan, River Common park, Northampton and Main Infill Commercial development, Downtown Business Improvement District (allied projects)
Health, Community Center and Voluntary Organization Partners		
City of Wilkes-Barre Health Department, Pennsylvania Department of Health, ^a Geisinger Heart Center, ^a Arthritis Foundation, ^a Girl Scouts of NE PA, ^a Area Agency on Aging, Wilkes-Barre Family YMCA, Pittston YMCA, Greater Hazleton YM/YWCA, Susquehanna Trailers Club, Northeast PA Mountain Biking Association	Provide health, social and/or recreational services to members or citizens	Keystone Active Zone, YMCA Teen Hiking Program, Monthly Walks and Active Nature Exploration, City of Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Master Plan

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Table 1. Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails partnership members (*continued*)

Partner	Organization goals ^a	Major contributions
Community Members^c Jessica Raczkowski, Mark James	Community Members	Partnership President, Photography, Penn State Student Visioning Project, Feasibility Study for the Black Diamond Trail “Ridge to River” Connector, Keystone Active Zone Passport Program, National Trails Day
Research Partners Joint Urban Studies Center, Penn State Research, Community Extension Architecture Department, Penn State Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Penn State Hazleton		Table of Prevention Activities in the Wyoming Valley by Health and Community Service Organization, Penn State Student Visioning Project, Survey of Organizations for Physical Activity and Outdoor Recreation Programs, WIC Survey of Outdoor Play, Trail Counters

^aGoals are for department if indicated

^bInvolvement in Partnership ended during the grant period because of entity reorganization or staff change

^cCommunity Members initially belonged to organizations that were Partnership members, and continued involvement after changes in employment WIC, U.S. Department of Agriculture Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

delays from engineering and construction permitting, bidding and contracting processes.

Results

Programs and promotions increased awareness of parks, trails, and other outdoor recreation opportunities. Successful programs and promotions have continued beyond the ALbD grant period (e.g., Luzerne County Trails Geographic Information System, National Trails Day, and the Passport program). Most partnership programs cross-promote local parks and trails by providing information about and incentives to use multiple local facilities. Successful programs have proven easy to implement, match partnership goals, engage the media, and have increasing public appeal. Attendance at National Trails Day celebrations increased from fewer than 100 walkers, hikers, and bikers to more than 300 hundred people, with six events and organizations spanning urban, rural, and suburban areas in 2008.

The partnership’s State of the Trails map and document centralized information about Luzerne County trails for the first time. The Lackawanna/Luzerne County Metropolitan Planning Organization reproduced the entire map and summarized trail descriptions in 2008. The partnership presented data from the document to Luzerne County Commissioners, showing how \$332,000 of county funds had leveraged more than \$9 million of additional funding.

The Outdoor Play Everyday program is a collaboration between the partnership and Maternal and Family Health Services that promotes outdoor play at WIC nutrition centers. Approximately 24,000 Outdoor Play brochures have been distributed to clients, and each center developed a fall Outdoor Play Everyday lobby bulletin board.

Local TV, radio, and print media have helped promote the Luzerne County Keystone Active Zone Passport program, donating more than \$40,000 in free promotions in 2007 and in 2008. Passport messages stressed the availability of great local places for outdoor fun and adventure. Program registration increased from 48 in 2007 to 450 in 2008 to over 800 at the time of publication. A 2008 survey to evaluate the Passport program shows that participants visited places they had never been before and increased their physical activity.

Partnership policy work focused on planning to extend and connect existing trails, especially in urban areas. Two notable trail planning efforts led by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, the Greater Kingston Area, and the City of Wilkes-Barre Trail and Greenway Master Plans will be complete in 2009. These two plans, created concurrently and referencing each other, will provide trail continuity through urban communities along both sides of the Susquehanna River. The Recreation Entity Feasibility Study, begun in 2006, is led by the Luzerne County Department of Parks and Recreation. Partnership members serve on the steering committee and report progress at partnership meetings. This effort aims to estimate the costs of building and maintaining parks and trails and will propose a countywide funding and administrative mechanism to the county commissioners.

Many physical projects were undertaken between publication of the action plan in 2002 and the end of the ALbD grant in 2008. Parks and trails partners built 22 miles of multi-use trails connecting at least 12 communities. The monumental River Common Park, dedicated in June 2009, includes 0.5 miles of trail along the Susquehanna River Levee, adding to the existing 12 miles of Levee trail (www.rivercommon.org). This park, a hub for the regional trail network, aids downtown revitalization

Table 2. Partnership and allied activities by partnership goal

Partnership goal	Partnership and allied activity
Preparation	
Understand local opportunities for and messages about outdoor physical activity	Focus group of communication professionals on communicating about health, exercise, and outdoor recreation (2004) Survey of local fitness, health, community centers, and clubs for physical activity programs (2005)
Promotions	
Increase awareness of parks, trails, and outdoor physical activity opportunities	Annual County Celebration of National Trails Day (2004–2008): (2004, 2005 with Riverfest) five to six organizations plan hiking, biking, walking events; partnership provides premium and helps with publicity Monthly list of hikes, bike rides, and Active Nature Exploration (2005–2008) (sometimes every other month) State of the Trails document and map (2008) Luzerne County Keystone Active Zone Passport Program: scavenger hunt through local parks and trails; 2006 book; 2007 flyer; 2008 on-line program Great Places Close to Home Campaign (2008) Busboards Website (uses State of Trails text and map) YouTube video Outdoor Play Everyday Campaign (2008) Brochure Bulletin board at WIC centers in 16 counties Survey of WIC recipients use and access to outdoor facilities
Increase awareness of Active Living and Active Living by Design	Grand Rounds Presentations at local hospitals (2005) Livable Communities conference (2005) Wilkes-Barre 4th-Year Architecture Studio: Wilkes-Barre studio, urban and individual wellness for people and cities (Wilkes-Barre, Kingston, Edwardsville; 2006) State of the Trails document and map (2008)
Programs	
Create programs that cross-promote local parks and trails to increase their use	Annual County Celebration of National Trails Day (2004–2008) Luzerne County Keystone Active Zone Passport Program (2006, 2007, 2008) Y Teen Hiking Program (2007) A New You brochure and prescription program (2005, 2007) Brochure listing places to be active w/prescription (2005, 2007) Posters (2005) Intake form (2005) Grand Rounds at local hospitals (2005)
Create programs that fill identified gaps in physical activity options	Y Teen Hiking Program (2007) Outdoor Kids Bike Safety Workshops (2004, 2005)
Policy	
Create plans that increase trail connections and bring trails into residential communities	Greater Kingston Trails and Greenways Master Plan (2008–ongoing) City of Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Master Plan (2008–ongoing) State of the Trails document and map and GIS (documents 2008, GIS 2005, both ongoing) Recreation Entity Feasibility Study (2006–ongoing): Allied Effort
Policy changes that revitalize existing walkable communities	Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District (2007–ongoing) ^a West Side Trail “Place-Making” workshop (2005) Livable Communities conference (2005) Black Diamond Trail Ridge to River feasibility study (2005) Wilkes-Barre 4th-Year Architecture Studio: Wilkes-Barre Studio, Urban and Individual Wellness for People and Cities (Wilkes-Barre, Kingston, Edwardsville; 2006) City of Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Master Plan (2008–ongoing) Greater Kingston Trails and Greenways Master Plan (2008–ongoing) Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District (2007–ongoing) ^a
Build organizational capacity for wellness in worksites and schools: Allied effort: Steps to a HealthierPA Luzerne County	School wellness policies and councils (2006–ongoing): 11 school districts Worksite Wellness Challenge and Toolkit (2007, renewed every 6 months since)

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Table 2. Partnership and allied activities by partnership goal (*continued*)

Partnership goal	Partnership and allied activity
Physical projects	
Build trails, measure trail use	Susquehanna River Levee Trail/River Common Park (2004, 2009; over 6 miles since 2001) West Side Trail (2006; 1.5 miles) Luzerne County National Recreation Trail (1.8 miles; 2007) Susquehanna Warrior Trail (10 miles; 2008) Back Mountain Trail (2.4 miles; 2008) Sugar Notch Trail (3 miles; unimproved trail; 2008) Trail counters (2007, 2008)
Build other outdoor facilities that promote physical activity	Design workshop for worksite campus trail (not built; 2006) Mountaineer Mile on Dallas School District Campus (2006) Walking Trail at Lehman–Jackson Elementary School (2008) Mountain Bike Trails at Moon Lake County Park (2008; 20 miles)
Physical projects that contribute to revitalization of walkable communities	Northampton and Main downtown mixed-use development (2007) ^a West Side Trail (2006) River Common Park (2009)

^aAllied effort

WIC, U.S. Department of Agriculture Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

and provides access to the river. Countywide, trail development is extensive and ongoing (Figure 1). Electronic counters indicate approximately 1000–3000 monthly trail visits and 25,000 annual visits on both Greater Hazleton and Back Mountain trails.

Policies and projects to revitalize downtown Wilkes-Barre, the regional employment center, reach city dwellers and commuters alike. The partnership sponsored architecture students to create visions for the Wyoming Valley's urban core. The studio suggested a walking district on a former canal bed, echoing an earlier charrette (collaborative) recommendation. This recommendation is currently included in the City of Wilkes-Barre Trails and Greenways Master Plans.

The partnership's downtown revitalization aims were enhanced by independent work not anticipated in the ALbD project (Table 2). The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, a partnership member, created a mixed-use development called Northampton and Main, including a cinema, ground-level retail, and proposed lofts. This development has been credited with increasing activity downtown, based on more than ten new businesses opening in 2007 and 2008 and a 10% increase in downtown office occupancy.⁷ Exciting commercial destinations provide a reason for people in nearby urban and suburban areas to come downtown, where they have more opportunities to be pedestrians.^{8,9}

Table 3. Trail planning and construction process in Wyoming Valley

Trail planning	
Step 1	Fund trail planning through public grants and local matching funds
Step 2	Release bid Select an engineering or landscape architecture consultant
Step 3	Form a steering committee to respond to consultant's findings Set priorities for trail alignments
Step 4	Select trail alignments based on available linear rights of way, safety, aesthetics, construction costs, destination goals (e.g., schools, parks, visitor's bureaus, other trails), and public opinion; selected alignments may be separated from automobile traffic or routed with traffic on bikeways and existing sidewalks, or mixed
Step 5	Estimate construction costs
Step 6	Phase construction based on steering committee goals and possibilities for construction funding
Trail construction	
Step 1	Apply for funding for construction using the completed Master Plan Apply for funding for design costs Fundraise and purchase insurance
Step 2	Finalize land acquisition, if necessary
Step 3	Complete environmental and design review process with state and local agencies
Step 4	Send construction out-to-bid Select construction contractor and set start date for construction
Step 5	Begin construction and construction management process
Step 6	Plan and celebrate trail opening Work with partners to promote trail use

Perceptions of order and safety are important for creating walkable communities in places that already have active living infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, mixed-use communities, mass transit).^{8,9} The newly formed Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District addressed these concerns by funding cleanliness and security. In its first year, the district repositioned or replaced sidewalk pavers, removed graffiti tags, and power-washed sidewalks.

In another independent effort, partner Steps to a HealthierPA Luzerne County worked to create organizational capacity for wellness in schools and worksites. Beginning in 2005, Steps worked with 11 school districts to create wellness policies and school health advisory councils. A workplace action team reached out to area businesses, challenging them to create worksite wellness committees and implement policy changes that reached 30,000 employees. Steps' work transformed and improved the partnership's involvement with schools and worksites by providing wellness awareness and contacts within these organizations.

Discussion

Lessons Learned

Reaching in and reaching out. The partnership's role as a convening point was useful in two ways. It helped similar organizations share information and pool resources. It also helped dissimilar organizations identify ways to work together, such as the Pittston YMCA contacting the Luzerne County National Recreation Trail to promote a program using the trail.

Managing a partnership including both grassroots trail organizations and established health providers also presented challenges. Most trail organizations were voluntary and met at night, while health partners had paid staff members available for daytime meetings. Most trail organizations focused on physical aspects of trail construction. They hoped that the partnership would plan events on their trails and engage partners such as health organizations to fund trail construction, expectations that were only partly met. Health organization representatives in the partnership were primarily funded for health education, promotion, and marketing and did not have access to funds for capital construction.

The partnership learned the importance of organizational capacity supporting wellness. Initially, the partnership's outreach to schools and worksites was inefficient. Then, Steps worked with school districts and worksites to create wellness councils and committees. With this infrastructure in place, the partnership was assured that resources reached decision makers whose institutional role involved wellness.

The partnership learned two key lessons from the *A New You* prescription program about reaching out to health service providers and healthcare practices. First,

health service providers apply information about active living to individuals, not at a societal level (i.e., "if my clients lack sidewalks, I can tell them to use the high school track," not "if my clients lack sidewalks, I should work with the municipality to provide sidewalks"). This perspective was incorporated into revised *A New You* program materials, which provide extensive information on local groups and places for activity.

Second, the proposed prescription program aimed to work with medical organizations to screen patients and prescribe physical activity. Two medical organizations that piloted the program noted that assessing physical activity was already part of existing patient intake. They felt that adopting a new procedure would be duplicative and time consuming. Given the limited amount of time medical professionals have for each visit, asking them to give a special focus to physical activity may be difficult. The partnership plans to update the *A New You* brochure and provide the resource to healthcare providers to hand out, but it no longer aims to recruit healthcare providers to write "physical activity" prescriptions.

Active living by design across urban, suburban, and rural areas. The ALbD initiative aimed to create communities that foster everyday physical activity through both active recreation and active transportation. Dense urban areas have been shown to increase walking, even among people who do not think of themselves as walkers.⁸ Factors that facilitate active-living behaviors include proximity and connectivity between residential and commercial land uses, pleasant and interesting surroundings, and feelings of personal safety.^{8,9}

While the partnership participated in planning to revitalize urban communities, it emphasized developing trails in urban, suburban, and rural areas, rather than trying to affect suburban development patterns to encourage proximity of uses and connectivity. Trail facilities provide both recreation and transportation physical activity that fits into existing suburban development patterns. Suburban residents, including some trail partners, were puzzled by an urban, active living definition of "walkability" emphasizing sidewalks and communities with multiple uses (e.g., residential, commercial) in proximity because of their awareness of walking (e.g., dog walking, recreational walking) in suburban subdivisions, which do not have these features. Future active-living work should be informed by research on perceptions of walkability across different landscapes, in addition to built-environment features that elicit walking behaviors. Communities undertaking active-living projects across different landscapes and population densities may also find that planning for trails provides a solution.

Trail planning and development. Trail development is uncertain, complicated by acquisition issues and long funding and construction approval processes that delay

some projects for years. A planned map and brochure were postponed until 2009 so that they could include the important trail openings and expansions that occurred in 2007 and 2008. To address this issue, among others, the partnership expanded its messages and programs to include other recreation facilities, meeting a vital need to cross-promote and centralize information about parks and trails in Luzerne County.

The Wyoming Valley trail network is being constructed by many organizations at the same time in competition with each other for funding for their projects. Because of the challenges and uncertainties of the trail construction process, having multiple trails and trail organizations has provided benefits. Local volunteers are easier to recruit and motivate, and setbacks experienced by an individual trail do not stop the progress of others. This method of trail development also has drawbacks; trail organizations must make efforts to reach out to neighboring groups to achieve economies of scale or share knowledge, and there may be no central source of information for the public. Communities can take advantage of this approach by dividing trail networks into segments, rallying communities of local volunteers, and developing the segments concurrently.

Conclusion

Suburban and rural dwellers often share a Jeffersonian vision of the good life, involving single-family houses, green space, and proximity to agriculture and nature. Pennsylvania writer and advocate Thomas Hylton's influential book *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns* suggests that farm land and natural area preservation and urban revitalization go hand in hand.¹⁰ In the Wyoming Valley community, suburban and rural concerns focus on preserving existing natural and agricultural assets, while urban revitalization contributes to growth and increases attractiveness and safety in places that already have infrastructure (i.e., connectivity) and a dense mix of land uses (i.e., proximity). Trails that connect suburban and rural areas to a revitalized urban core provide a strong basis for active living across landscapes. Trails and trail builders, land conservation proponents, and supporters of outdoor recreation are natural allies for people working to bring active living to suburban and rural areas.

Active living aims to increase daily physical activity through recreation and transportation. In rural and suburban areas it can be challenging to increase access to opportunities for active living. Successful options include increasing active living on institutional campuses (e.g., schools, workplaces); offering transportation alternatives (e.g., trails, transit) to more densely developed areas; and promoting use of backyards, forests, parks, and trails. The ALbD program has led the partnership to create and articulate concepts about

effective changes in social and built environments to increase physical activity. Some of these changes vary by landscape type (e.g., urban, rural, and suburban), and some, like trails, connect these landscapes.

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