

Preserving the Greenbelt for Future Generations

A Five Year Plan for the Capital Area Greenbelt Association

Executive Summary - November 2010

The Capital Area Greenbelt Association formed in 1990 to re-establish a trail corridor to connect the 100,000 residents of Harrisburg and its surrounding municipalities to major parks and open spaces. This vision, first proposed in 1902, is as important now as it was then – to provide access to the outdoors, healthful recreation, and a respite from the bustle of urban life for young and old in our community.

The Association and its municipal partners have made a lot of progress to revitalize the Greenbelt, raising over \$2.5 million in state and federal funds, and relying on the work of hundreds of volunteers to build or improve about fourteen trail miles, and re-establish a continuous 20 mile trail. Volunteers and youth from various programs devote thousands of hours annually to keep it open. The Association's Tour de Belt bicycle ride attracts over 600 riders, a website promotes use of the trail, and a continuing fundraising effort supports maintenance and improvement of the Greenbelt, as well as administration of the all-volunteer organization.



Challenges: The Greenbelt and the Association still face significant challenges:

- **Lack of Permanent Trail Protection** -- two miles of the trail in South Harrisburg, including a large segment along the Riverfront, are threatened by potential sale or future development;
- **Safety Issues at Road Intersections** – this remains the key concern expressed by users;
- **Trail Links to Additional Neighborhoods** – there are a number of proposals to increase trail access for more neighborhoods in the community, if funding can be found;
- **Strained Municipal Budgets** – partner municipalities have limited resources for trail maintenance and improvements; and,
- **Shrinking Active Membership** – it's increasingly difficult for the Association to recruit and organize volunteers to work on the nearly 10 miles of trail where it takes on major responsibility to keep the trail open and inviting.

Goals for the Future: This year the Association has consulted its membership, partner municipalities and other stakeholders, and established three broad goals to guide its efforts:

- 1. Preserve the Greenbelt.**
- 2. Strengthen the Organization.**
- 3. Strengthen the Association's Municipal and County Partnership.**

Goal 1. Preserve the Greenbelt.

This is our primary mission as an organization and our responsibility to this, and future generations. We must work to assure that the mistakes of the past, which led to the decline of the Greenbelt, are not repeated. But we must also assure that the youth and adults of our area can find and make use of the recreational, educational and natural amenities of the Greenbelt that make it such a special place in our community. We will strive to achieve this goal by working to:



Strengthen Greenbelt Maintenance: This year the Association, with the help of several grants, is making a major investment in new equipment to support its trail maintenance work, and in a maintenance building to house its equipment. We will strengthen our maintenance commitment and:

- Recruit a cadre of volunteer Greenbelt Stewards to monitor and do minor maintenance on every mile of the trail;
- Expand volunteer maintenance efforts and recruit a permanent maintenance committee;
- Develop a formal maintenance project plan in partnership with our host municipalities to make our maintenance efforts, and theirs, more effective.



Advocate Permanent Trail Preservation in South Harrisburg: the two miles of Greenbelt Trail in South Harrisburg is not permanently protected through easements or public ownership and designation as public park land. To address this concern, the Association will:

- Continue to work with the landowners and the City of Harrisburg to seek permanent protection for the trail and public access to the Riverfront;
- Encourage the City of Harrisburg and the Dauphin County Authority to formally designate the portions under their control as park land, through easements or other means; and,
- Seek additional funding for trail improvements and other actions which promote protection of the trail and support development of compatible uses on the lands near this section.

Improve Safety at Major Intersections and On-Road Segments: One of the key values of the Greenbelt to the community is the ability to safely walk or ride a bike on a dedicated trail. For instance, youth who access the trail at 19th Street in Harrisburg can ride to Riverfront while crossing only one public street. But, while a majority of the Greenbelt is off-road, there are nine locations along the trail which pose safety concerns for users because of potential conflicts with vehicles. There has never been a concerted effort to plan for appropriate safety improvements at these locations, nor to seek funding for those improvements. To address this need, the Association will:



- Work with municipal partners to seek planning funds to develop coordinated and effective solutions for these locations; and
- Seek funds, in partnership with host municipalities for construction of appropriate improvements and signage for these intersections and on-road sections.

Goal 2. Strengthen the Organization.

Volunteer members from our community who offer their time, energy and expertise, are the key to the success of our Association. One of the biggest issues facing the Association is that its active membership base has shrunk dramatically over the last several years. Although overall membership remains relatively stable, new, younger, active members have not been recruited to continue administrative and trail maintenance activities. We need to create an organizational framework that communicates effectively with all members, provides opportunities for new members to participate effectively, and has more formal connections with our community. Therefore, we will strive to:

Re-Build an Active Membership: The Association will make recruitment of new active members, leaders and partner organizations a high priority, since our current declining, active membership base is not sustainable. We also need to reach out to the youth and adults in our community, and broaden our membership to include more individuals from those neighborhoods benefitting most from the Greenbelt. Recruitment efforts will include:

- Marketing, promotion, and a campaign to reach other groups, host municipalities, and Tour de Belt riders;
- Use of information technology and special events, such as Earthday or a “Greenbelt Day” declared in all the host municipalities to stimulate interest and involvement;
- Support for additional recreational events on the Greenbelt which expand recruitment opportunities;
- New trail signage to publicize the role of, and need for volunteers to maintain the trail; and,
- Recognition and reward programs to retain volunteers and members.



Improve Committee Operations and Establish a Board of Directors: The Association is committed to upgrading its current committee system to more effectively distribute the work of the Association and empower those volunteers who chair these committees to implement their responsibilities. We will also seek to transition from our current structure to create a board of directors which, while retaining our key, longtime leadership, will better link us to the community and provide a higher level of oversight to improve fundraising capabilities. Where we need additional help or expertise that is not available through our volunteers we will consider hiring contractors or staff to supplement our capabilities.

Expand the Association Website, Social Networking and Information

Technology: In the past year the Association has launched an effort to improve these capabilities and we will continue these efforts to:

- Upgrade communication and networking capabilities with Facebook and other tools;
- Modernize administrative software systems to better manage finances and membership;
- Improve on-line information about the trail, activities and the Association.

Grow Needed Income thru the Tour de Belt, Marketing, and Grant Writing: The Association is currently in a sound financial position because of the support of the community and conservative fiscal management. The Tour de Belt has grown to become the Association’s largest source of general purpose funding. But the Association will need to make use of a broader set of grants and foundation support to address the needs to protect the trail in South

Harrisburg, improve safety at key intersections, and expand access to the trail via the type of links suggested in this plan.

To meet these needs the Association will:

- Continue to grow the Tour de Belt as a community event, and a tool to recruit new members; and,
- Expand the Association's grant writing capabilities to monitor the availability of funds and market the Greenbelt's needs to potential funders.



Goal 3. Strengthen the Association's Municipal and County Partnership.

The Capital Area Greenbelt could not have been revitalized without the support and leadership of the municipalities that own or host it. The Association will seek to broaden this partnership to better coordinate maintenance activities, provide user information, and improve grant funding possibilities, and:

Establish a Network of Municipal and County Partners: This group would include representatives of Harrisburg, Penbrook, Paxtang, Susquehanna and Swatara Townships, Dauphin County and other key agencies such as DCNR, HACC, and the Harrisburg Area Transportation Study. After some initial meetings it would try to conduct business using teleconferences and email. A suggested agenda would include:

- Review safety concerns and develop a coordinated application for grant funding for design and construction of improvements;
- Coordinate plans for trail signage, information at trail kiosks, and gateways;
- Coordinate major trail service projects, and help recruit volunteers for maintenance and activities like Earthday or "Greenbelt Day"; and,
- Work with all the partners to develop a Greenbelt Maintenance Plan that better coordinates the continuing work to maintain a safe and inviting trail corridor.



Support Municipal and County Projects to Improve or Extend the Greenbelt:

New link trails create possibilities for more people to use and enjoy the Greenbelt and the parks and other natural amenities along it. The Association will work with the Network to support funding for link trails and improvements such as the following suggested during the planning process:

- Susquehanna Township Link to Harris Hills;
- City of Harrisburg Trail Improvement along Cameron Street;
- Fort Hunter Trail Connector;
- Paxtang Greenbelt Trail Relocation;
- Swatara Township “TecPort” Connector;
- Penbrook Borough Park Connector.



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The Association wishes to recognize and thank everyone who has played a role in the revitalization of the Capital Area Greenbelt over the past twenty years. None of the success of the Association could have been possible without the involvement, support and leadership of the municipal, county, and state governments that own and host the trail. We are also grateful for the financial contributions of many local foundations, corporations and individuals from the Harrisburg area. But most of all we wish to thank and applaud the volunteers who have worked to make the Greenbelt a wonderful natural and recreational amenity for our south central Pennsylvania community.

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