

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Introduction

The recommendations described in this chapter germinated from ideas from several sources and groups. Some evolved out of ideas discussed during stakeholder interviews, several from observations made during the riverfront tour held in October 2009, some from the open house held in May 2010, and many evolved from or were modified by the Planning Commission, acting in their capacity as the Steering Committee for this Plan. Many of the recommendations evolved during the course of the Plan, so that initial concepts morphed over time to result in the more detailed recommendations summarized in this chapter. Though not every recommendation falls discretely into a single category, the recommendations have nevertheless been grouped into nine categories which attempt to provide logical groupings. The categories are: trail related recommendations, amenities, water use recommendations, public safety, an environmental concern, recommendations dealing with circulation, signage recommendations, landscaping recommendations, and recommendations concerning service uses. These groupings are not discussed in any priority order. Recommended priorities for implementing the individual recommendations (regardless of what category they may fall under), are found in the next chapter. However, consistent with the Township's *Open Space Plan*, is an overriding general recommendation (not listed in any of the following specific categories), that the Township should pursue preservation and possible acquisition of any property that becomes available along the River.

(Note: Map 4 is included at the end of this Chapter, showing the potential location for a number of the facilities described in the specific recommendations below.)

Trail Related

- Develop Multi-Use Trail. Development of a multi-use trail should be pursued along the entire riverfront within the Township. This requires construction of a trail where one doesn't currently exist along the riverfront. In the southern section of the study area, the County's Schuylkill River Trail is located close by and overlooking the river. However, proceeding north beyond Spring Mill, the County trail is on the inland side of the SEPTA R6 train tracks, resulting in it being remote from the river and in many places, having no connection with the river, even visual connection is lost. The Riverfront Development District (RDD) in the Zoning Ordinance requires the installation of such a trail as development/redevelopment of riverfront property takes place; it further requires perpendicular trail connections with this trail. (This is an overlay district which applies to ground from Spring Mill to Conshohocken.) However, the Township should consider taking the initiative to develop this trail on properties where land developments are not occurring or are not imminent. In those situations, rights-of-way or public access easements will be needed. The Township should be reimbursed for all of the expenses associated with development of the trail on properties where it does so, once development does occur; the legal ability to do so and other legal aspects of such an arrangement needs detailed review by the Township Solicitor's office in conjunction with the Board of Supervisors. There may be some isolated instances where the trail conflicts with existing uses. In these situations, there may have to be some signs or warning devices to alert users of the conflict; alternatively, a minor modification in the trail alignment may also be warranted. One property where there is some concern, is the property of the Whitemarsh Boat Club. (This point was discussed previously in Chapter 2 summarizing the October 31, 2009 Riverfront Tour and in Chapter 5 summarizing the stakeholder interviews.) However, during subsequent discussions of these recommendations, the Planning Commission urged that every effort be made to keep the trail in close physical proximity to the River. A final recommendation concerning the trail location, is that it be coordinated with trail locations in Conshohocken. There is an existing trail at the 'Riverwalk at Millennium' apartment complex, which spans the municipal border with the Township.

- Design Riverfront Trail for Leisurely Use. The RDD-area trail should be designed for more leisurely use and public interaction; an appropriate surface treatment should be utilized. This trail should be distinguished from the Schuylkill River Trail which is designed for and used by joggers and bikers (as well as others); this is a high activity trail intended to facilitate non-vehicular travel between various locations along it. By contrast, the RDD-area trail is envisioned as one in which people might take a leisurely after-dinner stroll or a casual early morning walk while sipping on their coffee, and running into neighbors and friends. The trail surface should be comfortable for such use, but must also be able to withstand flood. Currently, the trail required to be installed as part of any development in the RDD, is specified to be red shale macadam. If an alternative trail surface is chosen, that zoning district should be amended to reflect the change. (*Figure 2* is a cross-section of the easement area along the river showing the trail currently required for any riverfront RDD development.)
- Develop Focal Point at Spring Mill. Develop more of a ‘focal point’ at Spring Mill (through joint efforts of the County, Township, PECO and SEPTA). In addition to expansion of the boat launch, this location is becoming the natural convergence of several trails including the existing Schuylkill River (County) Trail, the PECO trail, scheduled to be constructed by the Township within the PECO right-of-way from Butler Pike to Hector Street, an extension of the PECO trail from Spring Mill Park to the Philadelphia City limits along the high bluffs overlooking the river, and the proposed walking path/sidewalk recommended along Joshua Road as part of an ‘urban greenway’, all as recommended in *A Feasibility Study for the Township-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Network* and the *Whitemarsh Township Greenway Plan*. This area becomes a natural trailhead, given the convergence of the three trails, the existence of the County park, and the parking afforded by the joint parking facility at the park and SEPTA train station. Supplemental parking could possibly be developed in the PECO right-of-way where it intersects at Hector Street. In addition, a substantial redevelopment project can be expected in the future on the adjacent Reilly Foam site (1101 E. Hector Street). This was already the site of a proposed multi-family development (with a small retail component) under the RDD zoning district. That project was aborted due to the financial status of the developer and the economy; however, a similar project can be anticipated for this site in the future. Public amenities which may be included as part of any development of this site should be complementary to the existing and planned features at Spring Mill.



Montgomery County’s Spring Mill Park

- Create Trail Crossing of R6 Tracks. Create a safe crossing of the R6 tracks from Washington Street to the County’ Schuylkill River Trail in the stretch between the Finneran & Haley property and Cherry Street (just inside the Conshohocken border). Unless and until Washington Street is extended to tie back to the Township’s street system (see separate discussion below), a safe cut-through would

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be advantageous; patrons of the Whitemarsh Boat Club or other properties in this section, would otherwise have to backtrack to Cherry Street even if they want to return to the Spring Mill area or proceed back toward the city on the trail.

- Address Safety Issues. Safety issues along the trails should be addressed. (See ‘Public Safety’ section below.)

Amenities

- Provide A Restroom Facility. This could possibly be done through a Township/County partnership at Spring Mill similar to a cooperatively built facility on Longford Road in Upper Providence Township. In that situation, the County proposed a trailhead on lands owned by the Township. The Township was in agreement except that it preferred a more permanent, attractive restroom structure than initially proposed by the County. The Township funded the upgrade of the facility and agreed to oversee its maintenance; in addition to constructing the facilities (restrooms and parking lot), the County covered the cost of the sewer and water connections.
- Install River-Related Art. Art can be considered for any location along the riverfront. As an example, a sculling-inspired sculpture might be placed in the vicinity of the Whitemarsh Boat Club property, visible from the proposed public gathering space. Other boating-related sculptures could be considered at any of the potential boat launch areas. A sculpture of a person or group fishing, might be appropriate at a fishing pier. Another possibility would be a water fowl sculpture somewhere east of Spring Mill, where the riverfront is in a more natural condition. There are numerous possibilities; materials to be used for the sculptures or other artwork are also many and could be varied based on the subject matter, location, and other factors.
- Consider the Installation of a Water Screen. A “water screen” could be considered for installation along some segments of the River. It could minimize road noises experienced by users of the riverfront area, act as a draw for gatherings and the public, and draw people in at nighttime as well as during the day. The illumination of the water screen at night would be an attraction along both banks of the river and could be visible from nearby buildings as well as highways and roads. Specific images or even a film, can be projected onto a water screen. The water screen consists of underwater pumps along the center of the river. Nozzles force river water upward into flat fan shaped water screens. Electrical power for the pumps is supplied by nearby photovoltaic panels, making it energy-efficient; the screens are safe for river life and users of the river. (A fuller description of water screens is found in Appendix D.)
- Install Overlooks. One or more overlooks could be considered in the area east of Spring Mill where there are spectacular views but the only place to stop and take in the views, is on the Schuylkill River Trail. There is frequently too much activity on the trail to encourage people to stop on it. An overlook, as an “extension” of the trail toward the river, would allow users to pause off the trail out of joggers’ and bikers’ ways. Some seating might be incorporated in the overlook design. (*Figure 3* is a conceptual sketch of an overlook.)
- Provide a Civic Gathering Space. A civic gathering space for civic events, concerts and similar activities, should be developed along the flat portion of the riverfront. A possible location would be at the northern end of the Finneran and Haley property, immediately adjacent to the Whitemarsh Boat Club property. Though design possibilities for such a facility are endless, a very simple design is envisioned. Two tiers of seating walls in semi-circular design, with the central (stage) area being left

FIGURE 2

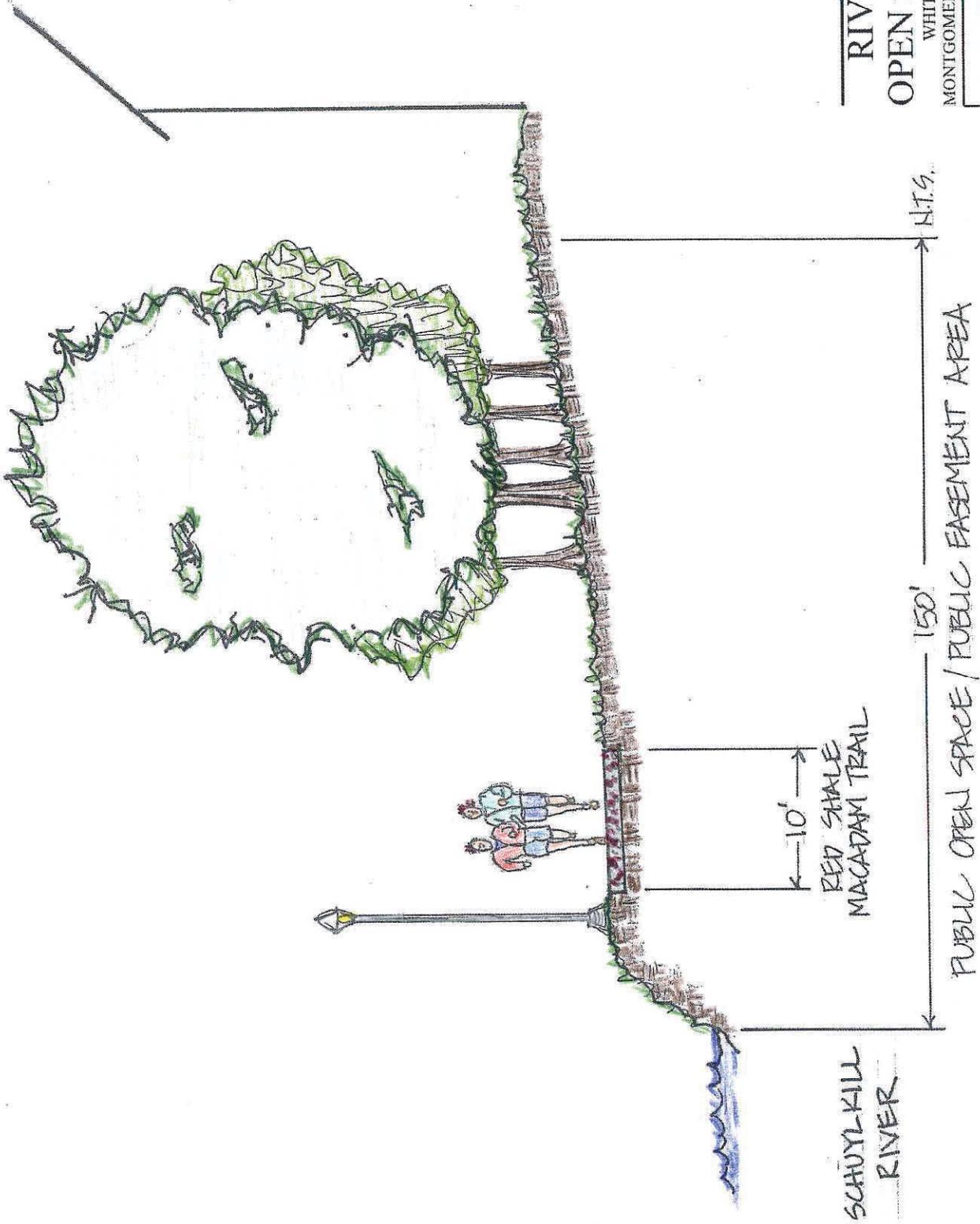
**RIVERFRONT
OPEN SPACE PLAN**

WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

RIVERFRONT TRAIL
Cross Section

Scale: Not to Scale
Date Prepared: May 18, 2010

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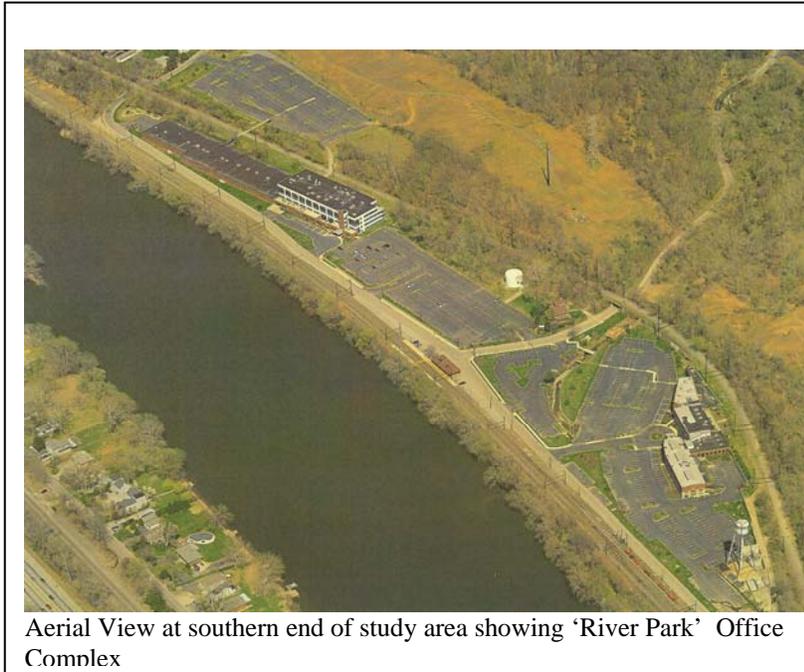


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natural, is one possible design that would complement the setting. (*Figure 4* is a sketch illustrating this design concept.)

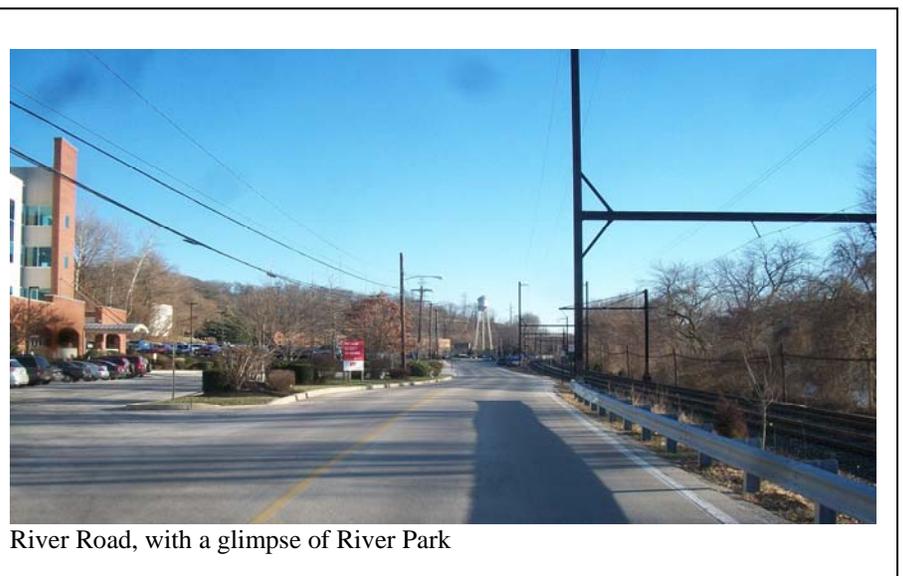
Water Use

- Install Boat Launches. Boat launches are recommended in several locations: one along the riverfront



nearer Conshohocken; one possibly at Spring Mill; and one near the Miquon train station. All boat launches would be for non-motorized boats. The Miquon location would be for portage only (no trailers brought to the water's edge), and would require the improvement to the safety features of the R6 SEPTA track crossing. A public/private partnership should be pursued with the owners of 'River Park', the office complex adjacent to this area for parking; parking for the offices would be essentially unused during peak times for the boat launch. For the boat launch closest to Conshohocken, investigation should be coordinated with the Borough where there is already a Borough-

owned boat launch area adjacent to the 'Riverwalk at Millennium' apartment complex; this was installed for fire-fighting purposes. Any other use could only be for portage, as well, due to steepness of the ramp and existing barriers. If private use is to be pursued here, the possibility of a Township/Borough partnership should be investigated, with the Township possibly providing any necessary upgrades and ensuring availability of adequate parking. These could be done directly by the Township or through 'public amenities' provided privately by a development in the RDD Riverfront Development District. To accomplish a boat launch at Spring Mill, the existing one in the County's Spring Mill Park could be upgraded with a partnership between the County and Township. Parking is already available at the Spring Mill train station and the park; the train station parking lot is owned by the County and leased to SEPTA. Adding the Township as a party to this lease, should be explored. [In addition, implementing the other parking recommendations discussed in the section



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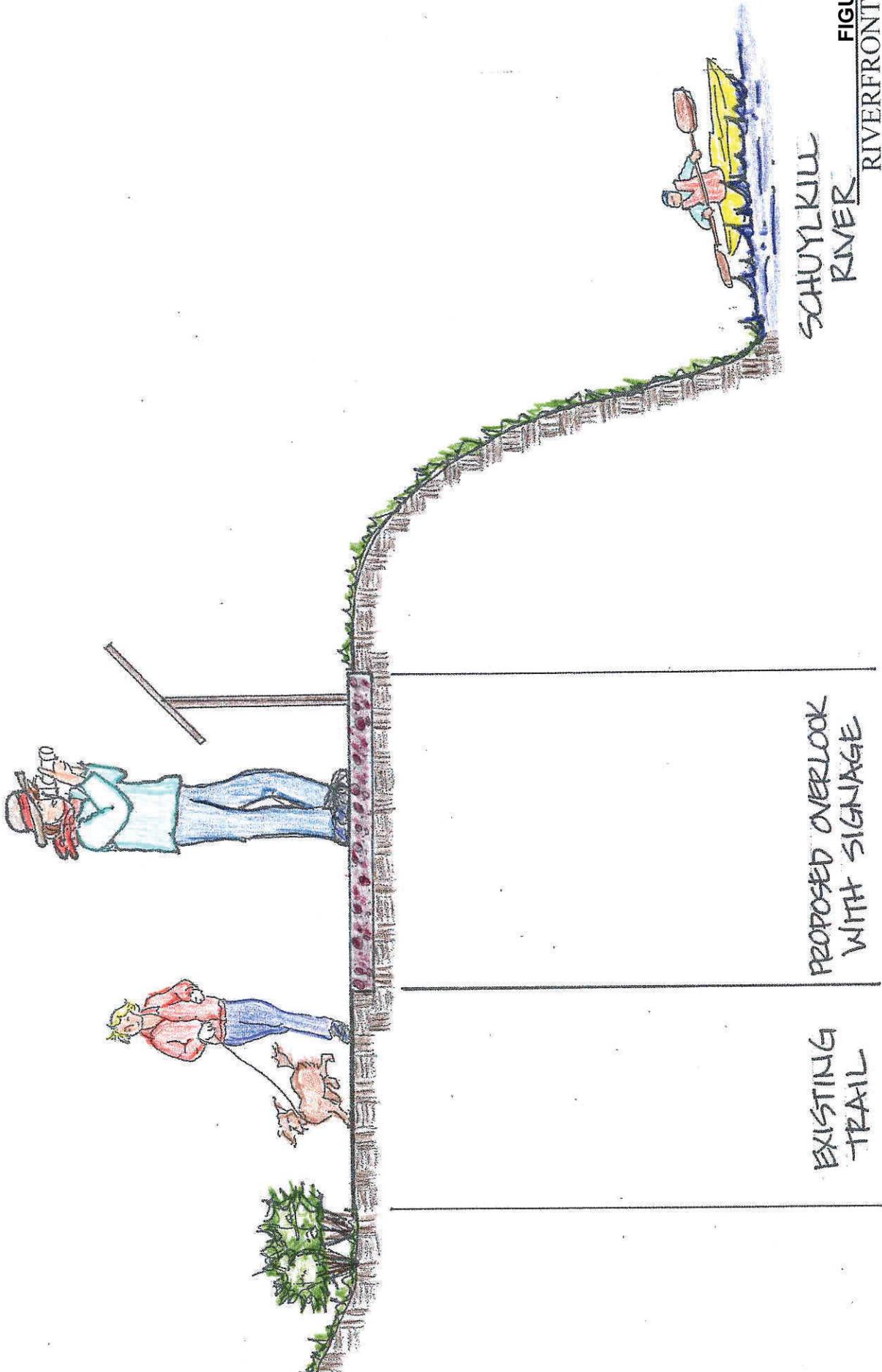
above discussing the creation of a focal point at Spring Mill, could also serve a boat launch at Spring Mill.] The Finnaren and Haley site was also discussed as a possible boat launch location due to its lengthy level shoreline. This former paint factory is closed and the site is expected to be redeveloped; a sketch plan for an office complex has been presented to the Planning Commission as a possible redevelopment scheme. As part of any redevelopment done under the RDD Riverfront Development District, a boat launch could be constructed as a required 'public amenity' by the developer.

- Initiate Water Tours. Self-guided and possibly guided tours could be established, dependent upon private sector interest in organizing and/or providing such excursions. If there is sufficient interest, facilities could be made available by a private business for boat rental, perhaps for paddleboats and others. (See additional discussion of boat rentals under 'Service Uses' below.)



SEPTA's Miquon Station

- Install Fishing Piers. Simple fishing piers could be developed at various locations where there is easy access to the river. It would be logical to plan these adjacent to boat launch areas.



SCHUYLKILL RIVER

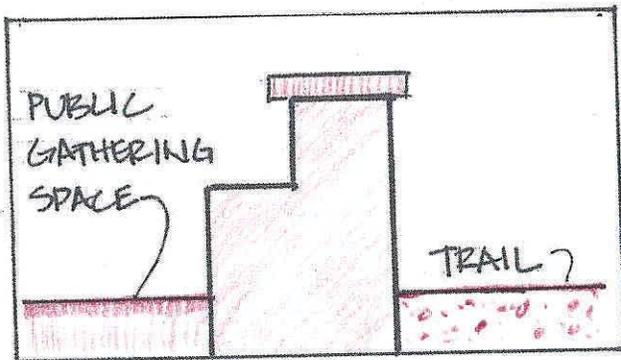
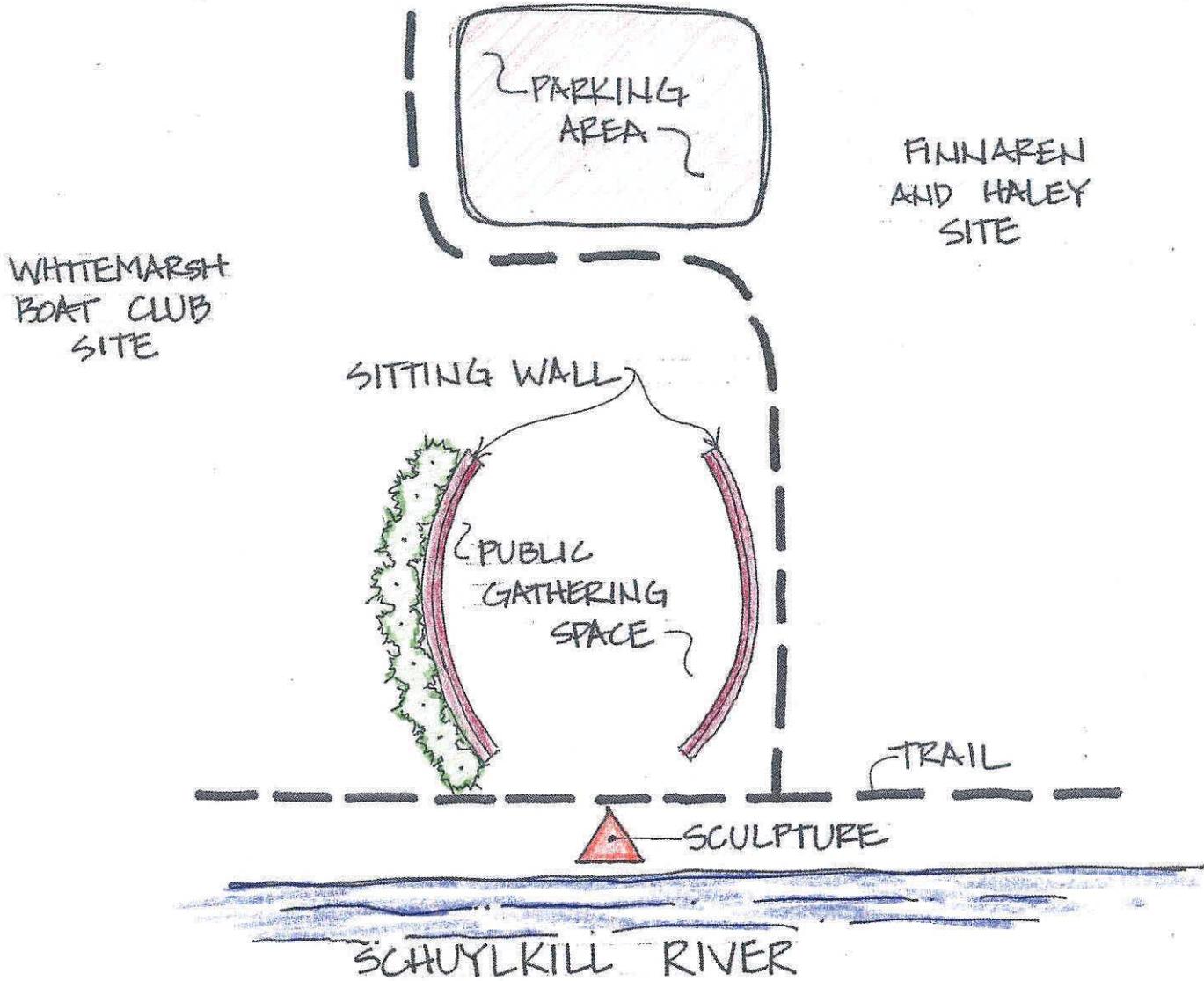
FIGURE 3
RIVERFRONT

OPEN SPACE PLAN
WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

OVERLOOK
Conceptual Sketch

Scale: Not to Scale
Date: Proposed: May 18, 2010
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WASHINGTON STREET



DETAIL - SITTING WALL

FIGURE 4

RIVERFRONT
OPEN SPACE PLAN

WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

PUBLIC GATHERING
SPACE

Conceptual Sketch

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Public Safety

- Provide Locations for Water Drafting for Fire-Fighting. Township fire officials are interested in access to the river for purposes of drafting water (removing it by suction) for fire fighting. They would like to see new or improved river access at Miquon, Spring Mill, and the northern end of the Finnaren and Haley property. This could occur at the potential boat ramp areas, as long as there is about thirty feet of shore access for the fire trucks to maneuver. (The fire companies have permission to access the river at other locations as well; these are discussed in the ‘Public Safety Concerns’ section of this document.) In addition, dry pipes are often laid into the river to facilitate drafting; there is already a pipe under the SEPTA tracks down to the river at Miquon, installed at the Township’s request when the River Park office complex (former Simpson Paper) was under development. A similar pipe installed in conjunction with a river access at the Finnaren and Haley property, would also be desirable for fire fighting purposes.

Provide Security Lighting. Bollard-style lighting and other pedestrian-oriented lighting should be provided along the riverfront trail; lighting is one of the improvements required in the RDD when development is implemented pursuant to the district. The need for such lighting here and elsewhere along the river (perhaps on the Schuylkill River Trail) was raised by the Township Police Department in discussion with them during the development of this Plan. Different locations along the river may call for different types of lighting; however, all should be of a coordinated design chosen by the Township. (The Planning Commission recommended the lighting series shown in Figure 5 or fixtures of similar style; other street furniture, such as trash cans and benches, should be in a compatible style to the light fixtures chosen for any area.)

Figure 5: Potential Light Fixture Styles



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- Provide ‘Security Posts’ With Emergency Phones. These would be similar to the systems typically found on college campuses. The Township Police Department felt that security cameras should also be considered in conjunction with these systems.
- Design for Emergency Vehicles. The riverfront trail should be capable of accommodating emergency vehicles. The 10-foot width required in the RDD would be adequate; however, the trail must be capable of holding 20 tons for emergency fire equipment. Therefore, specifications for the trail would be needed and applied whenever any portion of the trail is installed. The Township Engineer has recommended specifications to satisfy this requirement. They are included in Appendix E of this Plan.

Environmental Concern

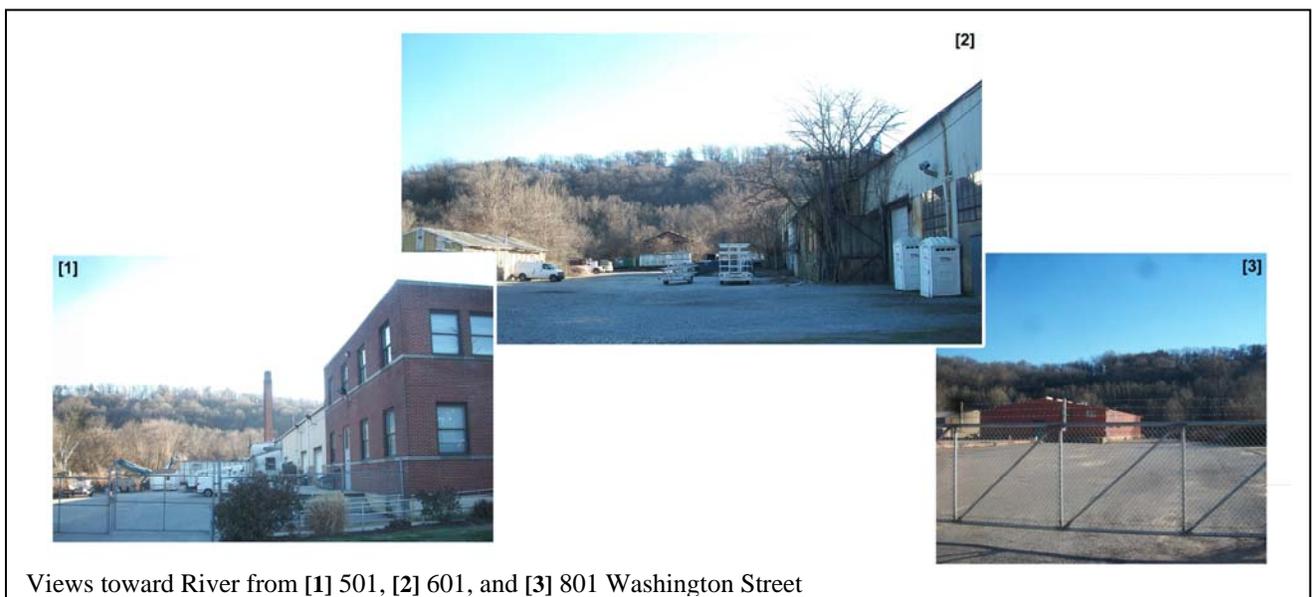
- Alert Potential Developers of Environmental Concerns. Any potential developers in the industrial RDD area should be alerted of possible hazardous materials to be investigated and if necessary, mitigated during the redevelopment process. Most of the properties in this area have previously been used for various heavy industrial and manufacturing facilities, potentially leaving behind hazardous or toxic substances.



Aerial view showing a portion of former Finneran and Haley paint factory (left) and David’s Bridal complex

Circulation

- Extend Washington Street. The extension of Washington Street should be considered, to connect with Hector Street/Spring Mill Avenue at Lee Street. This would allow for a full loop from Cherry Street (in Conshohocken) to Lee Street; currently, Washington Street dead-ends at the southern end of the Whitmarsh Boat Club property, where it adjoins the former Finneran and Haley property. When



Views toward River from [1] 501, [2] 601, and [3] 801 Washington Street

the Finneran and Haley property is redeveloped, it is anticipated that Washington Street would be extended the full width of its property (this has been shown to the Township Planning Commission in an unofficial sketch plan presented prior to the publication of this Plan). The final leg of the extension to tie it back to Hector Street and Spring Mill Avenue would need to be made through the property of David's Bridal. Some rearrangement of existing improvements on this site, would be necessary; engineering study would be required to determine exactly how this connection could be made.

- Explore Potential River Crossing. A proposed river crossing is included in some recent Lower Merion plans, which would go from Flat Rock Park in Lower Merion to Fairmont Park (at the foot of Shawmont Street), east of the Township/City boundary. Some type of river access between Riverbend Environmental Center, also in Lower Merion and The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, just outside the Township in Philadelphia, has also been discussed (possibly a dock on either side of the river at these locations to allow water access from one to the other).

Signage

- Provide Way-Finding Signage. A consistent way-finding sign system should be provided to let trail users know where comfort and commercial facilities are located. Such a signage system would be uniform throughout the riverfront area and possibly with the rest of the Schuylkill River corridor. The Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area (SRNHA) already uses a uniform sign design on their trails in the River corridor; which they have provided to the Township for use if the Township wishes to do so. Such a signage system would alert trail users to facilities either along the trail or nearby; these could include public facilities as well as nearby commercial facilities. Directional arrows and number of blocks or distance in miles or fractions thereof, would be included. (A sample sign design is shown in *Figure 6*. This design is based one of the SRNHA designs, and incorporates the Whitemarsh Township seal.)



Figure 6: Way-finding Sign Example

- Install Interpretive Stations/Signage. There are a variety of natural habitats, unique vegetative areas, and other natural conditions found along the riverfront, particularly from Spring Mill south toward the city. Some simple signage identifying these features for the trail user, with some explanation of their significance and why they are found in their respective locations, is envisioned. The signs would be of a consistent, naturalistic design and could be of similar design to the way-finding signs. (An example of such a sign is shown in *Figure 7*. This example describes what an observer can expect to see in a wetland area.)

Figure 7: Interpretive Sign Example



Landscaping

- Creation/Restoration of Riparian Buffer Landscaping. Much of the natural landscape is in tact between Spring Mill and Miquon. However, wherever the trail or other construction has removed it, plans should be developed to restore it and actual planting could be done by a scout group or other environmentally concerned organization, with proper direction. In areas where industrial development has removed most natural landscaping and redevelopment is planned, suitable riparian plantings should be installed. The RDD requires a 100 to 150-foot wide open area along the river, where planting would be appropriate. Any proposed riparian landscaping should be coordinated with the Township's Environmental Advisory Board and Shade Tree Commission.
- Restore Habitat on 'East 33'. Habitat restoration, on East 33, possibly in conjunction with Manatawna Farm (Fairmont Park Commission lands). The *Whitemarsh Township Open Space Plan* recommended acquiring this tract (which has been accomplished) and restoring it as a natural area, in conjunction with abutting lands both within the Township and adjacent in the City.
- Provide Beautification and Landscape Enhancements. Generally, appropriate beautification and landscaping should be provided in the Study Area to enhance the user experience. In addition to riparian buffer landscaping, all development in the study area should include appropriate landscaping to define spaces, provide buffers, and generally enhance the appearance of the area. The RDD includes landscape standards but landscaping should be implemented even where other development or just site improvement, occurs.

Service Uses

- Provide Additional Public Parking. Additional public parking will be needed to serve the active riverfront and the facilities anticipated. This is one potential public amenity which could be developed in conjunction with an RDD redevelopment. Developments in the area of Spring Mill, the Finneran & Haley site, and sites near the border with Conshohocken, would be logical locations to require additional public parking.
- Provide Opportunities for Bike and/or Boat Rental Facilities. Spring Mill is one obvious location for such rental facilities, especially if a boat ramp is improved here. Other locations near possible boat ramps, where there is also adequate public parking, would be appropriate. In addition to boat rentals for tours (discussed above) boats could be made available for rental for individual use. Concessions may be enticed to the riverfront for boat rentals of various types of non-motorized boats, including canoes, paddleboats, row boats, and kayaks. Fishing supplies and limited snack foods may also be made available. The demand for such concessions will depend, in part, on what commercial facilities are developed as part of redevelopment projects under the RDD.

Map 4: Recommendations