Project Overview

The City of Jersey City is preparing a plan for a future bicycle and pedestrian greenway that follows the former path of the Morris Canal to the greatest extent possible. The final products of this study will be complete in Spring 2013. It is envisioned that the greenway will be off-road where feasible and on-road where necessary to establish a continuous 6-mile bicycle and pedestrian route through Jersey City. The addition of a greenway will enhance bicycle and pedestrian accommodations; increase recreational space in the City; connect trails, parks, schools, neighborhoods, and businesses; and celebrate one of the City’s historic resources.

From 1836 until 1924, the Morris Canal in Jersey City traveled around the upland Palisades formation in the southern half of the city and linked the Hudson and Hackensack Rivers. Most of the right-of-way has been filled in and could be used by bicyclists and pedestrians. If the right-of-way is not suitable for an off-road greenway, an alternate off-road alignment or on-street bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will be identified.

Selected by the City of Jersey City to develop the Plan, the RBA Group is working with the community to identify a route that is safe, contiguous and provides connections to community amenities. The public will be able to review and comment on the study through a project website and at public meetings. The study is funded by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority.

Greenways

Greenways are corridors of open space managed for conservation, recreation and transportation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features, and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features, historic sites, and other public spaces with each other and with populated areas.

Creating a greenway on the former Morris Canal will benefit residents and visitors alike. The greenway is envisioned to be a facility for local circulation, providing connections to transit, retail, and parks, as well as connections to regional bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as the East Coast Greenway and the Liberty-Water Gap Trail.

Benefits of Greenways

Trails and greenways support healthy lifestyles and improve communities by providing not only recreation and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development. Some of the many benefits of greenways include:

- Providing connections to transit, parks and open space, and other community destinations;
- Making communities better places to live by preserving and creating open spaces;
- Creating new opportunities for non-motorized transportation and outdoor recreation;
- Strengthening local economies;
- Protecting the environment; and,
- Preserving culturally and historically valuable areas.
In operation between 1831 and 1924, the Morris Canal stretched 102 miles across New Jersey connecting the coalfields of northeastern Pennsylvania with northern New Jersey’s iron industry, major industrial cities, and the New York City markets. The Morris Canal terminated in Newark at the Passaic River in 1831, but was extended through Jersey City in 1836. This brought goods from Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey to the Hudson River Waterfront. It also brought new business and industries to Jersey City.

The Morris Canal was an engineering marvel of its time. Although flat through Jersey City, a system of 23 lift locks and 23 inclined planes enabled the Canal to overcome 1,674 feet of elevation change, more than any other transportation canal in the world. Its inclined planes served as a model for engineers from around the world. The Canal’s historic engineering artifacts have been captured in the Historic American Engineering Record, a program of the National Parks Service to document historic mechanical and engineering artifacts.

Competition from faster, more efficient railroads at the end of the 19th century led to the Canal’s decline, and eventually to its closing in the 1920s. The Morris Canal was crucial to the economy and development of northern New Jersey and is a significant historic feature of the State. Some sections of the Canal are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Morris Canal - A Waterway through the City

The canal crossed through 36 municipalities in 6 counties in New Jersey.

A Regional Initiative

There has been a long-standing and energetic effort to establish a statewide contiguous Morris Canal Greenway from Phillipsburg to Jersey City. Various municipalities and counties across the state have created public spaces along the path of the Morris Canal. The New Jersey Transportation Planning Authority has formed a working group to coordinate the many activities and successes within each of the six counties along the route and to discuss ways to further enhance the corridor.

Project Contacts

Naomi Hsu, AICP, PP
Senior Transportation Planner
City of Jersey City
Division of City Planning
hsun@jcnn.org

Annette Schultz AICP, PP
Principal Planner
The RBA Group
aschultz@rbagroup.com

Other Related Websites:

Canal Society of New Jersey
www.canalsocietynj.org

Warren County Morris Canal Greenway
www.morriscanal.org

Project Website: www.jcmcgreenway.org

May 2012