

Bucks County Planning Commission Newtown Rail Trail Phase II – Frequently Asked Questions

How is the trail being funded?

The design and engineering of the trail is funded with a grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Trails Program via funding made available by the William Penn Foundation, with a matching contribution by Bucks County. Additional information on the Regional Trails Program can be found here: <https://www.dvrpc.org/trails/regionaltrailsprogram/>.

Construction of the trail will be funded by grants from the Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program (TASA) and USHUD Community Project Funding Grant, along with matching funding provided by Bucks County.

Was there a public vote to approve the project?

Yes, the Northampton Township Board of Supervisors approved a resolution of support for the project on February 26, 2020.

Will the road crossings at Bristol Road and Bustleton Pike be safe?

Yes. All roadway crossings for the proposed trail are designed by licensed professional engineers/designers in accordance with all applicable state, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) regulations and standards.

The Bristol Road crossing will occur at the existing signalized intersection of Bristol Road and Churchville Road/Knowles Avenue. The Bustleton Pike crossing design will be designed to incorporate all applicable pedestrian safety devices and signs and will include pedestrian activated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons. This crossing will be designed to account for the needs of the trail users, as well as the needs of the vehicles using Knowles Avenue, Bustleton Pike and Elm Avenue.

The County is aware of the concerns regarding sightlines and speeding as southbound traffic approaches the Bustleton Pike Crossing. As stated above, all safety improvements for the crossing will factor in these concerns and be designed to PennDOT standards. There are numerous examples of this kind of trail crossing in the region.

Who will sign the lease with SEPTA?

Bucks County signed a 30-year lease with SEPTA on February 2, 2022. The lease is for the area from Bristol Road to the point at which the trail will connect to the connector trail leading to the Churchville Nature Center parking lot.

Will the trail be plowed in winter?

No, the trail will not be plowed. Snow cover will enable a different set of users such as snowshoe users and cross-country skiers to make use of the trail.

Will there be lighting along the trail?

No lighting is planned as the posted hours will be sunrise to sunset.

Will fencing and landscaping be provided?

This will be determined on a case-by-case basis as determined through careful investigation and review of existing topographic and vegetative conditions. Proposed landscaping and/or fencing will be located within the rail corridor right-of-way or Churchville Nature Center property, not on private property. The final location and placement of landscaping and fencing will also be field verified at the time of construction to respect existing vegetation and site conditions which may impact final placement. The use of landscaping and fencing is intended to better define the trail corridor and address safety along the trail corridor. The types of fences utilized may include chain link, wooden three rail fence and PVC as applicable based on need and purpose. Proposed landscaping is envisioned to utilize evergreen trees and native shrubs to provide both visual and physical buffering of adjacent residential properties.

How can I stay informed and provide input regarding the trail?

As was done with Phase 1 of the Newtown Rail Trail Project in Upper Southampton Township, Bucks County is committed to providing updates and opportunities for input on the trail via several methods:

- In accordance with the provisions stipulated as part of the Northampton Township February 26, 2020, resolution of support for the trail, and as noted in the [meeting minutes](#), the County is committed to working with the township staff and elected representatives throughout the design/engineering and construction of the trail to ensure that the safety and privacy of its residents remain a priority.

- The County is committed to ensuring that residents are kept informed of activities throughout the design/engineering and construction phases of the project. The County will include both townships on all communications provided to residents.
- The County has developed a mailing list of property owners whose properties are immediately adjacent to the project area and sends letters periodically as it may relate to the trail.
- The County has developed a website/data portal which all interested parties can access at any time. This site will contain information such as communications, plans, schedules/timetables, photographs, and this document and any subsequent updates to this document. The website address is
<https://www.buckscounty.gov/1543/Newtown-Rail-Trail-Phase-Two>.
- The County will conduct open houses as necessary to obtain feedback regarding the design of the trail.
- The County maintains an email distribution list for those interested in receiving updates regarding the trail. If you are interested in being added to this list, please email Senior Planner Christian Regosch at cpregosch@buckscounty.org.

What is the surface of the trail going to be?

The trail surface will consist of a product called Trail Surface Aggregate (TSA). This is a stone surface which represents a good balance of cost effectiveness for both construction and ongoing maintenance, while also facilitating a broad range of users. This surface, used on the Upper Bucks Rail Trail, was selected over the crushed stone aggregate used with most segments of the Newtown Rail Trail Phase One, based on performance characteristics observed to date for both trails. Information on the TSA product can be found here:

<https://www.dirtandgravel.psu.edu/center/trails>.

The use of bituminous pavement (asphalt) may also be included in certain areas to enhance trail durability and reduce maintenance.

Is the trail going to be designed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations?

Yes, the trail will be designed and will be built to current ADA accessibility standards.

Are motorized vehicles allowed on the trail?

The only motorized vehicles allowed to use the trail will be battery-powered wheelchairs/scooters for those differently abled, maintenance vehicles and vehicles used to patrol the trail.

Will horses be allowed on the trail?

No, horses will not be allowed.

Will dogs be allowed on the trail?

Dogs will be allowed on the trail if they are kept on a leash.

Will bicycles be allowed on the trail?

Yes, bicycles will be allowed on the trail.

Will electric bicycles be permitted?

The use of electric bicycles will be allowed as long as these bicycles follow the Bucks County Park System Rules and Regulations as found in [Ordinance No. 170](#), enacted January 18, 2023, as revised.

What measures will be taken to prevent trail users from parking on adjacent residential streets and commercial businesses?

For those areas identified as improper parking areas adjacent to the trail, signage prohibiting parking will be provided.

What are the plans for continuing the trail through Northampton Township and into the remaining municipalities along the railcorridor?

The County remains committed to development of the trail through Northampton Township, eventually crossing the Neshaminy Creek into Middletown Township and eventually through to Newtown Borough.

Will I need to increase the amount of liability insurance under my homeowner’s insurance policy, or will my insurance premiums increase as a function of the trail being developed?

Throughout the development of the County’s proposed trails, we have documented and noted resident concerns about the likelihood of increased premiums and liability for homeowners adjacent to the trail. BCPC staff has thoroughly researched the issue and has spoken with numerous insurance brokers and industry professionals such as the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, the Pennsylvania Insurance Department – Bureau of Consumer Services, as well as numerous local insurance agents.

Insurance carriers look at each home (and its individual perils) and policy on its own merits. The only instances of an adjacent property/use being considered as having a negative premium effect on a residential property, is when the adjacent use is of a commercial/hazardous nature. This is most common where multiple homes are attached and or a multiuse property situation exists such as a restaurant adjacent to a home. This is most likely to occur in densely populated locations. Industry experts we have spoken with said exactly the same thing: they had never heard of any example of a public space like a trail, park, or recreation field being a factor in the pricing of an individual homeowner’s policy. Furthermore, in the case of the rail trail, there is no additional peril caused by the trail as the land is separate. One industry contact even suggested that the peril is substantially reduced since the tracks are removed and the railroad has ceased operations.

While the County cannot speak to each property’s unique situation or insurance coverage, we remain confident that homeowners adjacent to the trail should not be subject to increased premiums, nor do they automatically take on additional peril as it relates to liability. By way of further illustration, the trail is viewed by insurance carriers no differently than the public street or sidewalk at the front of a house.

How will the trail be monitored?

The trail will be patrolled by County Park Rangers. Local police will also be able to access the trail to address immediate concerns as needed. Trail users are forbidden to access the property of adjacent property owners along the trail. The enforcement of trespassing measures will be handled by County Park Rangers and local police. Residents adjacent to the trail are welcome to post “no trespassing” signs as permitted by local code.

The County will not be installing security cameras along the trail. Adjacent property owners are free to install security cameras on their property as they see fit.

When will the right-of-way be cleared and construction of the trail begin?

- SEPTA and their contractors have control over the rail removal and associated right-of-way clearing process. We will provide updates on rail and tie removal as we receive them from SEPTA.
- Ties and rails may be temporarily stored along the right-of-way as items are removed. The contractors that provide this service will be required to remove the material in a timely fashion.

How will soil from the site be handled?

- All removal and displacement of soil from site will be handled in accordance with PADEP Management of Fill Policy.

What type of environmental work has been conducted and will be conducted as part of the project?

The following environmental work was performed as part of the scope of services for the project:

- Identify and locate wetlands so we can avoid them with the proposed trail location. Wetland information will be reviewed by the Army Corps of Engineers. The proposed design safely traverses or avoids all wetlands.
- Investigate threatened and endangered species (plants and animals). No threatened or endangered species will be impacted by the trail.
- Investigate cultural resources including below ground archeology and above ground historic resources. PennDOT conducted an archaeological survey and concluded no findings of significance for the area.
- A detailed Tree Survey was conducted to identify specimen trees to be avoided, as well as identify any diseased trees that might pose a safety risk for trail users. Following the survey, the County is confident it can minimize tree removal beyond that required for development of the trail.
- As part of the design/engineering of the trail, the culvert under the railroad tracks at Elm Avenue was inspected and no safety issues were found.

The following environmental work will be performed as part of the scope of services for the project:

- An application for Chapter 105/Section 404 Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection/Army Corp of Engineers Joint Permit-Small Projects for Waterway Obstruction will be submitted. This permit includes an “Environmental Assessment” which includes the details of all the above studies.
- As this project will go through the PennDOT approval process due to Federal funding, a categorical exclusion evaluation (CEE) following the National Environmental Protection Act will also be completed and reviewed and approved by PennDOT/Federal Highway Administration.
- A separate NPDES General Permit will be obtained for erosion and sediment pollution control approval, to be reviewed/approved by the Bucks County Conservation District. The plans will include both temporary measures to mitigate erosion during construction and permanent measures to mitigate any long-term erosion because of the project. This permit also includes the stormwater management approach. Linear stormwater best management practices including bioretention swales, infiltration trenches, rain gardens, riparian buffer plantings, and other measures are planned to be included in the project design to offset any new runoff generated by the trail. The stormwater management design is submitted to the local Township for review and to acquire a stormwater management and floodplain consistency letter from the local municipality as part of this permit approval process.

Who owns the railroad right-of-way?

- The owner is Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). SEPTA acquired the railroad from Consolidated Rail Corporation (CONRAIL). CONRAIL had previously acquired the railroad from the trustees of Reading Company. Although out of service for thirty-five years, SEPTA has not filed for abandonment of the right-of-way.

Will the County be addressing any invasive vines and plants present in the railroad right-of-way?

- During the development of the Phase One segment of the Newtown Rail Trail in Upper Southampton Township, the County worked with the Penn State Extension, and their volunteers of the Master Watershed Stewards Program, to address the aggressive and invasive vines. The volunteers from the program generously donated many hours of time to help with the removal of these vines within the trail corridor. We recognize that as adjacent property owners, these vines have the potential to impact your properties.

- Although the County will not be coming onto individual properties to address any invasive vines found, we are happy to share information provided by our contacts at the Penn State Master Watershed Stewards Program to assist in those efforts. More specifically, they have recommended the following websites to reference for information and management techniques:
 - Mile-a-minute (*Persicaria perfoliate*)
<https://extension.psu.edu/mile-a-minute>
 - Japanese hops (*Humulus japonicus*)
<http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=3643007&DocName=JapaneseHops.pdf>
 - Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)
<http://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=3643646&DocName=Porcelainberry.pdf>
 - Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
<https://extension.psu.edu/multiflora-rose>

If you have additional questions regarding how to manage these vines on your property, we encourage you to contact the Penn State Extension Bucks County Garden/Watershed Hotline at 267-483-2020, Monday to Friday from 9:00 AM till 4:00 PM. They will be happy to discuss your circumstances and give control recommendations.

Where will parking and rest areas for the trail be available once the trail is constructed?

- Parking will be available in Northampton Township at the proposed Churchville Train Station lot closest to Knowles Avenue, and the Churchville Nature Center located at 501 Churchville Lane, where a connection to the trail will be available. These areas will also serve as rest areas, with benches for trail users. Other rest areas or other amenities may be developed after the trail is established, but this is not within the scope of this project.
- Due to safety concerns, no parking for the trail will be allowed along Elm Avenue.