

# Rails to Trails slates expansion plans for 2012

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The second leg of the Greater Hazleton rail trail will be built in 2012, if plans unfold as expected.

At the same time, the trail's planners are trying to remedy problems on its first leg.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, said Wednesday that volunteers have been identified to install drainage facilities on one side of a 121-foot pedestrian bridge that will be built to span an active Norfolk Southern rail line.

There are two large holes on either side of the bridge, and Skulsky said a large drainage pipe will be installed on the north side of where the bridge will go before fill is poured into the cavity to fill it.

"Before we put the pipe in, we had to clear trees from the site," he said. "We had two work parties in there, and got the trees cleared.

"There's quite a bit of water flow there, so we thought we'd put the pipe in, and then backfill it," Skulsky said. "Coal Contractors has offered to provide the heavy equipment for the job."

The fill will come from old mine spoils at the site that the partnership has received permission from Cabot Corp. - the owner of the property where the former Beryllium plant was located - to use.

The agreement to use the fill was issued verbally in the spring and finalized Aug. 11.

Skulsky said he hopes the work to fill in the two caverns can be completed soon. That will allow bids for the design and construction of the trail extension - which will start in the Ashmore section of Hazle Township, and go approximately two miles to Hazle Brook Road - to be advertised this year, so it can be built next year.

All necessary approvals have been obtained to build the trail, Skulsky said.

But filling in the two holes near the bridge has to be done first, likely putting off actual construction of the trail until next spring.

The partnership has received three grants to build this leg of the trail - a \$210,400 state Department of Transportation grant to build the bridge and two state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grants: \$195,000 to build the trail and \$70,400 for engineering work.

Skulsky said the engineering grant expires Dec. 31, but the partnership will request an extension until November, 2012, which committee members discovered they can do.

The construction grant has to be under contract by Dec. 31, 2012, and as a precaution, Skulsky said the partnership will ask for an extension on that grant as well.

## Drainage work

Back on the first leg of the trail, Skulsky said volunteers have come forward after a public plea with heavy equipment to install more drainage pipes.

That portion of the trail already has drainage pipes but needs more, while a larger pipe is needed at the trailhead.

While the volunteers - Nick Beltrami and the Hazleton City Authority - have come forward, the partnership still needs materials, particularly the pipe.

"We want to install a 48-inch (in diameter) concrete pipe underneath the trail near the environmental

education garden," Skulsky said. "It comes in 8-foot sections, and we need three sections."

The pipe currently there would be removed and placed in another area where there are drainage problems, Skulsky said.

The partnership also needs the material that tops the trail and makes walking on it softer. The Skulsky can be reached at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce at 570-455-1509.

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