

A Greenway grows in New Jersey

The prestigious Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy held a Planning Studio of graduate students in the fall of 2008 with the charge of developing the Rahway River Greenway for the next generation. Presided by Susan Gruel and Fred Heyer of the renowned Heyer and Gruel Planning Firm, the class collected information from a wide range of sources in county, municipal and state agencies and institutions pertaining to parkland, open space funding, natural resource inventories and greenways that was planned and/or implemented in the 41 square mile Rahway River watershed.

After collecting the data, the class collaborated and wrote a draft greenway handbook that will offer a vision of developing the Rahway River Greenway throughout the region. The greenway would expand eastward towards the Rahway River mouth to include the cities of Linden and Carteret. From the traditional Union County Park system's green necklace, which ends at Milton Lake Park, the Rahway River would connect to the emerging City

of Rahway River Greenway and the Linden Hawkrise Nature Sanctuary on the north side of the River. On the south side of the Rahway, a greenway would extend from Middlesex County's Medwick Park to annex lands that are landlocked and economically underutilized such as junkyard, wetlands and vacant lots east and west to the confluence with the Arthur Kill. Consolidating municipal greenways in Essex County would create a shared vision, design standards and accessibility on an urban landscape.

With a preliminary draft in hand, the class held a public meeting in mid-December of 2008 for the benefit of the public. With nearly 40 attendees, the class presented a PowerPoint demonstration of how to achieve the expansion of the greenway. Five case studies were presented of where the greenway is planned to include the daylighting the river in Woodbridge, reversing a redevelopment area that endangers sensitive wetlands in Carteret, and increased parkland in Cranford. Look for additional information on our Web site (www.rahwayriver.org) later this year.

Do ospreys nest on the Rahway River?

Throughout the months of July through September, the children of the John F. Kennedy Community Center in Rahway were led by Executive Director Dennis Miranda on nature walks of the seldom-used Rahway Riverfront Park. Donning binoculars, the boys and girls saw dozens of species of birds, butterflies and other elusive animals like muskrat and woodchuck. But the highlight of every tour was the likelihood of seeing an osprey diving into the Rahway River in search of fish.

For weeks, the parent birds would first appear from the east, coming from the direction of the Arthur Kill. Those same birds would return back toward the Arthur Kill with fish in their talons, presumably to feed their young.

In fact, seeing four different ospreys in early August was absolutely mind boggling. It became readily

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RIVER RIPPLES

A Publication of the
Rahway River Association

The Rahway River Association is a volunteer-driven organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of the Rahway River and its watershed.

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RRA office open for business

In a late March cold snap in 2007, the RRA Office suffered extensive damage from burst frozen water pipes. Subsequently, the City of Rahway and the Rahway River Association pulled together to raise nearly \$25,000 for repairs. All of 2008 was spent rebuilding the water pipes, putting down new floors, laying up new dry wall and installing a new furnace and hot water heater.

The Rahway River Association would like to thank the Hyde and Watson Foundation, E.J. Grassman Trust and the Union Foundation for their generous grants, which were critically important to fund the needed repairs.

The RRA would also like to thank Mayor James Kennedy and the City of Rahway for the financial support and in kind service to remove debris, monitor the repairs and work closely with the Rahway River Association.

For more information on our Biodiversity Program, Celebrate the Rahway '09 and upcoming events, please visit us online at www.rahwayriver.org

Do ospreys nest on the Rahway River?

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apparent that the osprey comprised a family group, as two of the birds were seen feeding the two others. While they all looked the same, the 'younger' ospreys would perch on tall trees along the river begging for food. Their high pitched shrills and whistles could be heard from great distances.

Ospreys, while not federally endangered, are threatened as a breeder in New Jersey due to loss of habitat and degradation of wetlands and have not bred in Union

County for decades. However as these wetland habitats improve year after year, migratory fish and eels have returned at so has the osprey. The New Jersey population has increased to over 250 pairs after it declined to less than 50 pairs in 1975.

To answer the eye catching headline, the ospreys were discovered nesting on a wood pile resting on an abandoned pier on the western shores of Staten Island just across from the mouth of the Rahway River!

A park is born!

The Riverwalk Condominium project sits astride a windswept field adjacent to the Rahway River waiting to be transformed. Since the 1990s, when the City of Rahway bought a series of mixed-use properties under a redevelopment plan, the vision of a ten-acre riverfront park has gone through the trials and tribulations that seems to be the hallmark of urban challenges in modern times.

One setback after another related to funding issues, contaminated soils, economic cycles and simply the priorities of a small city trying to reinvent itself took a decade long wait for the Essex Street Riverfront Park to be born. Finally the brand new park is being built within a short walking distance of downtown Rahway.

Soon, a curvy new trail will greet the active outdoor enthusiast. Brand new signs at different exercise stations greet the visitor. Stepping on

the rubbery, recycled material gives you an uncontrollable urge to jump, run or simply start exercising. At a time when the United States is dealing with an epidemic of obesity, having a new park in a city that encourages exercise is a welcome amenity for the neighborhood.

Thanks to a Natural Resource Settlement amounting to \$1.2 million that was earmarked for the City of Rahway by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, a degraded, three-acre tidal marsh will be restored as part of the park creation.

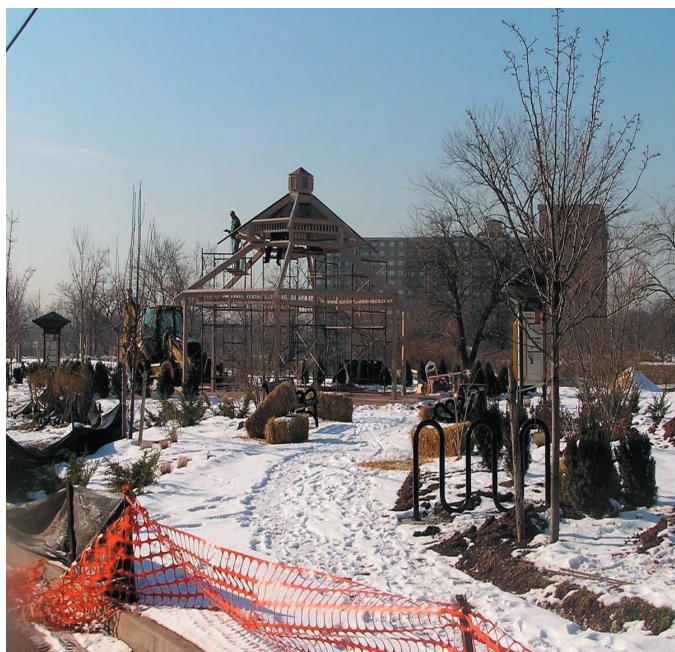
Located at the southern end of the park, where the main stem of the Rahway River meets the South Branch, the marsh is now a weedy, garbage-strewn wetland with little natural resource value. Here tidal action has allowed for sediments to collect after years of siltation, runoff and erosion from newly-developed areas in the upper reaches of the watershed.



phragmites, a type of wetland reed that takes advantage of degraded wetlands, has invaded this location. Choking the waterway and outcompeting native grasses, phragmites create a stand of reeds with very limited wildlife value. Moreover, it contributes to poor water, because the tidal affect cannot flush the impurities captured by the dense mat of reeds.

The restoration of the wetlands will see the sediments dredged and removed creating rivulets for water to flow. Spartina grass, a native, salt-loving wetland vegetation will be planted. Aquatic life will return as well in the form of fiddler crabs and fish. For nature lovers, a nature trail will wind its way through the edge of the restored wetlands with an observation blind and signage explaining what can be found. Seeing Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons and Black Crowned Herons will be possible soon, even without binoculars.

U n w a n t e d



The State of Biodiversity on an Urban Landscape Conference

Rahway Public Library, Rahway, NJ
Friday, May 8, 2009

Invasive plants are on the march. The growing deer herds are munching everything in sight and destroying wildlife habitat everywhere. Are we losing our natural resource values?

Islands of nature, local and regional parks and nature preserves in the Rahway River watershed have been surrounded by development, industry and housing for decades sometimes for centuries. Until recently benign neglect was the management approach taken by park managers, Recreation Commissions and Department of Public Works regarding public lands that served as natural areas for passive recreation. Because of this, the conditions on the ground have changed dramatically. Burgeoning deer herds have eaten away the native vegetation. Invasive plants have taken advantage of the vacuum; replacing the natives that are gone. As a result, beneficial insects, butterflies, birds and other animal have disappeared as well.

What are we losing? At what rate? And, can we restore what has been lost?

The Rahway River Association proudly announces the *State of Biodiversity on an Urban Landscape Conference* for Friday, May 8, 2009 at the Rahway Public Library, located at 2 City Hall Plaza in Rahway (corner of Main St. & E. Milton Ave.).

We will explore this growing issue and give it the attention of the public that it deserves. The conference will educate the public of the losses and explore how we can restore what is gone.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Fred Virrazzi
Zoologist & Chemist/
Founder,
National Biodiversity
Parks, Inc.



Gerry Moore
Director of
Department of
Science at the
Brooklyn
Botanic Garden



Michael Van Clef
President,
Ecological
Solutions



Become a member of the Rahway River Association today and help protect one of New Jersey's most challenged and diverse natural resources.

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All donations to the Rahway River Association are tax-deductible.

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