

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Trails increase quality of life

As the 20th century began, Montgomery County's rural roads safely accommodated pedestrians, bicyclists, horseback riders and horse-drawn vehicles.

Cars were sparse and not going very fast. As motor vehicles evolved and became the dominant method of travel, however, fast-going cars and trucks soon monopolized our roads and made them unsafe for anyone on foot.

Besides driving pedestrians off the roads, universal car use also led to the great suburban migration after World War II, as people moved out of our traditional cities and towns and into formerly rural areas.

People aspired to live on large lots in the countryside, where they could drive over uncongested roads to stores, schools and workplaces. Such a lifestyle is possible when only a small number of people try to live it. When the masses move into the countryside, it loses the very qualities - beauty, solitude, tranquility - that make rural life desirable.

Moreover, as residents drive everywhere, they are seeing the countryside whiz by at 40 or 50 miles an hour, watching from behind a wind-

shield. There's no way to slow down and savor the sights and sounds.

Trails allow people to enjoy the countryside and get healthy exercise at the same time by walking or biking through it. Trails can even provide an alternate transportation route.

For example, retired Mercury editor Nancy March often commuted on her bike from her home in Union Township to the newspaper in Pottstown by using the Schuylkill River Trail. It took a little longer, but she loved the exercise and the calming influence of nature up-close and personal.

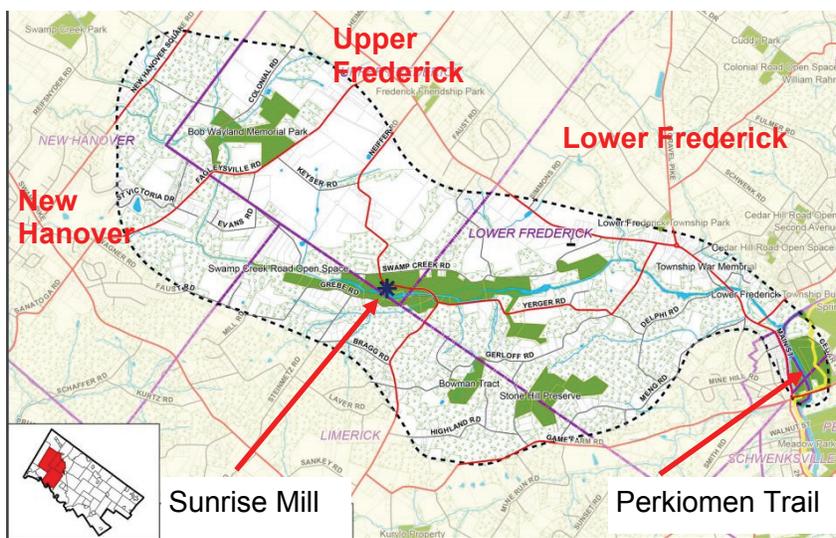
In countries like the Netherlands, where walking and bicycling are major forms of transportation, trails are everywhere. Outside Dutch towns, you can travel to every destination on walking and biking trails without ever mixing with car traffic.

Likewise, Montgomery County needs to put a trail within reach of all its residents, even though it will take decades.

The best way to protect our environment and increase our quality of life is to get out from behind the wheel of our cars, and take a break from our computer and TV screens, and walk out into nature.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



SWAMP CREEK STUDY AREA — The proposed Swamp Creek Greenway and Sunrise Trail is part of an ambitious effort to create a trail system linking all parts of Montgomery County. The Swamp Creek trail would extend west from the existing Perkiomen Trail in Schuensville to the county-owned Sunrise Mill complex in the Fredericks and beyond to New Hanover.