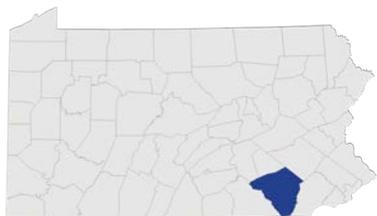


My Story



The Key to Columbia

Columbia Crossing Center and Park

By Mary Wickenheiser, Volunteer and former Councilmember

"I've met visitors from surrounding counties who were drawn to the area by Columbia Crossing and the River Trail."



Little did I realize--nor could I have dreamed--the directions I would go when I was sworn in as a member of the Columbia Borough Council in January, 2000. During the next thirteen years, as a member of the Council, I became involved in numerous projects. These



Keystone Fund Investment: \$1.4 million

Total Public/Private Investment: \$3.3 million

ranged from public works and economic development and strategic planning within the Borough to multi-municipal projects. Two of those projects--the revitalization and expansion of the Columbia Borough River Park and the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail--have become closely related. Both projects were supported by the Keystone Fund, and have made a positive impact on Columbia and the other communities along the river.

During my first year on Council there was a request made from Lancaster County for

representatives of Columbia and Marietta Boroughs, East Donegal, West Hempfield, and Conoy Townships to meet for a discussion on an envisioned trail. This trail would connect all these municipalities, as well as Lancaster County park land, along the

Susquehanna River on the western edge of Lancaster County. Eventually with the guidance of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Lancaster County Planning Commission, committees were formed, agreements among the municipalities were approved, and a consultant was hired to develop the master plan for the trail.

Jump forward to 2016. Eleven of the planned fourteen miles of trail have been

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completed and paved. The final three miles through Conoy Township anticipate completion in 2017. A portion through Marietta Borough will be better defined by the end of 2016. In order to maintain oversight of the trail, an advisory committee has been formed of residents and elected representatives from the municipalities and Lancaster County. The individual municipalities and County are responsible for the maintenance of the portion of the trail within their boundaries.

As the southern trailhead, Columbia Borough has benefitted from the construction of Columbia Crossing at Columbia River Park. This facility provides restrooms, information, interpretive displays, and indoor/outdoor event space that can be rented by community members. Columbia Borough, which owns the facility, has entered into an agreement with the Susquehanna Heritage Area for management of the facility. This facility has seen monthly visitors in excess of 3,500 in both June and July. As a volunteer at Columbia Crossing, I have met with visitors from Lancaster and surrounding counties who were drawn to the area by Columbia Crossing and the River Trail.

The challenge facing Columbia is to benefit from this influx of visitors to draw them to the downtown business area, Market House, restaurants, museums, galleries, and thriving antiques shops within the Borough. The economic benefits will come--the trail is the draw, and Columbia Crossing is the key to opening that door for Columbia Borough.

[Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.](http://KeystoneFund.org)