

HCA, Rails to Trails enact lease

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The Hazleton City Authority's board of directors formally voted to enact a lease with Rails to Trails.

Rails to Trails is being run locally by the Greater Hazleton Joint Civic Partnership. GHJCP had been asking for easements on land HCA owns along the Arthur Gardner Parkway (the Heights Beltway), stretching to Ashmore, near the former beryllium plant.

GHJCP eventually intends to run walking and hiking trails to the Lehigh River.

The vote to grant the lease was 3-0, with Chairman Frank DeAndrea, Vice Chairman Joe Zoba and Joe Fay, all voting "yes." Richard Ammon and Phil Andras were both absent, though both have expressed support for the program in the past.

The lease grants RTT access to 3.24 miles of HCA-owned land for 40 years, at a cost of \$1 annually. It expires Aug 1, 2043.

While the trails themselves are to be 8- to 10-foot wide, GHJCP was granted easements of 30 feet from the proposed parking lot to the boundary line with land owned by Butler Enterprises, then 20 feet wide after that.

The trails will be off limits to all-terrain vehicles, inline skaters and horse back riders, but will be open to just about everyone else.

The partnership will also install 500 to 600 feet of 6-foot-high fence around the nearby Dreck Creek reservoir at its expense, but HCA will maintain it.

The lease also includes several performance clauses. They mandate RTT keep the land clean, bar it from sub-leasing the land to any other group, prevent RTT from blocking HCA access to its adjoining lands and mandates RTT carry insurance worth "\$2 million per claim and \$4 million per occurrence."

The lease also allows HCA to cancel it if RTT fails to use it for a year.

RTT co-chairs Sue Nasrani and Bob Sagen were at Monday evening's meeting, along with Greater Hazleton Area Civic partnership Executive Director Bob Skulsky. RTR is under GHJCP's umbrella. After the vote, Nasrani thanked the board for its "professionalism."

Earlier, she'd said she hoped to have trails finished on the land within a year or two.