



LOCAL

News from your hometown

Rails To Trails Committee members mulling paving options

By **JIM DINO**

jimdino@standardspeaker.com

The parking lot that will serve the rail trail that will begin in Hazleton and end near Weatherly can be paved, or the first mile of the proposed 16-mile trail can be paved.

Members of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership's Rails To Trails Committee will have to decide before spring whether to pave a parking area near the beginning of the trail – off Route 93 near the intersection with Route 424, the Arthur Gardner Parkway – or the first mile of the trail.

"If we pave the first mile of the trail, we'll be addressing some drainage and handicapped accessibility issues," said Sue Nasrani, a member of the committee.

"But aesthetically, some people believe that is not proper," she continued. "The committee is going to walk the trail, and look at the issue. Maybe we can compromise."

That compromise, Nasrani said, could be paving portions of both.

Bob Skulsky, the Partnership's executive director, said the trail was originally planned to get a topcoat of No. 10 limestone, which is a very fine, sand-like clay that packs very well.

But Skulsky said No. 10 limestone is not impervious to water.

The alternative for the parking lot – and the picnic benches that will also be placed there – is crushed stone.

The committee will have a few months to mull over what to do. Construction on the first four miles of the trail will begin in the spring.

Meanwhile, the committee is readying to develop the rest of the trail.

At one point in the trail, a bridge is going to be needed. Two existing concrete pads from an old railroad trestle are there, and the committee intends to use them for the bridge.

So Skulsky said the committee is applying for a \$100,000 grant from federal transportation

enhancement legislation to build the span.

The Partnership is applying for another grant, this one for \$70,000, to continue the Gateway improvement project.

Skulsky said the money, if received, will be used to improve six entrances to Hazleton, three of them along Route 93 – a sign near Arby's in West Hazleton; a sign near the intersection with Route 424, near the Rails to Trails sign, and one along Route 93 near Conyngham.

The other three sites that will get improvements are: The rail trestle along South Church Street, near the Beech Street Playground; Route 940 on the way in from Freeland, and at the intersection of Route 309 and Route 424, where a sign already exists.

The original project in the Gateway program, Route 924 from Interstate 81 to the intersection of Broad Street and Diamond Avenue, is also getting some attention. Some weeding will be done before the winter.

From a previous state Department of Trans-

portation grant, a second phase of the project will be done. Architect Art Sweeney is designing the next phase.

The Gateway entrance to Hazleton along Route 93 near the Turkey Hill store in West Hazleton – near the Valmont Industrial Park – has been adopted by Arc Electric. That area, which has a sign, will be maintained by Arc Electric.

Skulsky said he is also working on a grant to obtain operating funds for the Partnership and its sister organization, the Mountain Council of Governments.

He said he is working with Dr. David Zanis, of the local Community Development Corporation to obtain what is termed a Next Generation grant, which is a federal grant meant to keep agencies like the Partnership operating.

The Community Development Corp. is a nonprofit firm – which the First Federal Foundation helped set up with a grant – meant to assist nonprofit agencies and local governmental entities obtain funds for operation.