



Rails to Trails program gets boost from HCA

■ *The proposal would build a trail from the authority's Dreck's Creek reservoir to the Eckley Miner's Village, eventually connecting to the Delaware-Lehigh Heritage Corridor.*

By JAMES QUIRK JR.
Standard-Speaker

A local group has received the tools it needs to go after state funding to transform a rail bed running along a Hazleton City Authority reservoir into a hiking and biking trail.

During a special Hazleton City Authority meeting Tuesday, the board voted unanimously to execute a site control agreement with the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership.

Although the resolution does not allow the partnership to begin transforming a rail bed that runs along the authority-owned Dreck's Creek Reservoir into a "Rails to Trails" public pathway, it does permit it to go after state Department of Conservation and Natural

Resources grant funding.

The grant funding, according to Rails to Trails Co-Chairwoman Sue Nasrani, would pay for a fence that separates people using the trail from the authority reservoir.

HCA Chairman Phil Andras said that the likes of the proposed "Rails to Trails" project is "25 years overdue for this area."

Andras explained that the board action does not permit the group to begin transforming the rail bed into a trail. A final design will have to be presented to the board before it votes on granting the organization permission to use the authority property for a trail, he said.

The trail would lead to the Eckley Miner's Village, and eventually connect to the Delaware-Lehigh Heritage Corridor.

Before the board voted to pass the resolution, Nasrani said the group has worked hard for three years to find an appropriate place in the area for the trail.

"This is an excellent 'Rails to Trails,'" she said of the authority land. "It's beautiful. We'll do everything to protect the water. We

will work very hard with you."

Nasrani said the group does not want anyone going near the authority reservoir, and would hang many prohibitive signs to that end.

"As volunteers, we would police (the area)," she added.

Board member Richard Ammon said that although he has concerns about the reservoir, he thinks the "Rails to Trails" concept is worthwhile.

Ammon asked the group if there was funding available that would pay toward policing the reservoir area. Nasrani said the group will look into it.

"Rails to Trails" members at the meeting agreed with board member Frank DeAndrea that the state may provide forest rangers in the future to help police the area.

Board member Jack Mundie wished the group good luck with its effort, adding that the Hazleton area needs much more recreational activities.

"This could be a step," Mundie said.