

# 2008 Green Futures Achievement Awards

## Lower Merion Township: The Cynwyd Trail Public Outreach

Vision can turn an abandoned railway corridor into a vibrant connection to an historic bridge. It can empower citizens to overcome daunting challenges in funding, open space acquisition, trail restoration, and organization. Vision has brought the Cynwyd Trail off the drawing boards and into reality for Lower Merion Township, while galvanizing the restoration and preservation efforts of numerous community groups.

The Cynwyd Trail was originally proposed as part of Lower Merion's Open Space Plan in 2006, and when completed, will incorporate open spaces as well as historic places and architecture. The heart of the project is the 1.5-mile long, inactive portion of the SEPTA R-6 Commuter Rail corridor between Cynwyd Station and the stone arched railroad bridge spanning the Schuylkill River. Rails and infrastructure for the abandoned commuter line west of the station were removed in the 1980's.

In 2007 Lower Merion Township leased the property from SEPTA; prior to that, the township had been acquiring land, easements and agreements for using property along the proposed trail for public use. The Lower Merion Historical Society, which subleased the Cynwyd Station building from the township, is renovating and stabilizing the historic building while the Neighborhood Club

of Bala Cynwyd has been landscaping the grounds around the structure.

Further west, the trail will link to West Laurel Hill Cemetery, which is constructing a new ornamental entranceway to provide access to the cemetery's landscaped trails and historic structures. The trail will also pass Westminster Cemetery, another historic area rich in trails and architecture. Beyond the cemeteries, the trail connects to the Connelly Tract, an eight-acre tract of woods recently adopted by the Boy Scouts of Lower Merion Township. The scouts are cleaning the site and constructing walking trails. The Connelly Tract will facilitate access to the Schuylkill waterfront through a 1919 tunnel built under the main line of the Reading Railroad. The Connelly Tract also connects the trail to the bridge crossing the Schuylkill River to Manayunk.

The Cynwyd Trail has been nurtured by the collaboration and shared vision of township officials, homeowners, volunteers, private institutions, developers and neighboring municipalities who recognize the value of open space—especially in urban settings. This project has imaginatively linked traditional open spaces with historical landmarks and non-traditional places such as cemeteries. When completed, it will connect trail users to an extensive network of trails leading into both Philadelphia and the suburbs.



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