



## State of New Jersey

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## Phillipsburg Riverfront Heritage Trail moves one step closer to reality

*Highlands Council-funded plan is basis for \$1.3 million grant from NJDOT and NJTPA*

CHESTER, N.J. — The Phillipsburg Riverfront Heritage Trail – designed in part using Highlands Council planning grants and assistance – was among the [recently announced](#) projects that will receive funding from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) through the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program. The Town of Phillipsburg will receive a \$1.36 million grant to begin implementation of the Riverfront Heritage Trail.

“The Town of Phillipsburg has a number of wonderful assets, but the most prominent of these is clearly its location right on the Delaware River and the many historic sites in the riverfront area,” says Mayor Todd M. Tersigni. “The Riverfront Heritage Trail was originally conceptualized by the town as a way to maximize these assets, connecting residents and visitors with local history and businesses. Funding and support from the Highlands Council helped us articulate this vision in the Riverfront Heritage Plan, which was an essential first step and integral in getting this new funding for implementation.”

Located at the nexus of two rivers, three canals and five railroads, Phillipsburg boasts a long history as a vital center of transportation in the region. The Riverfront Heritage Trail is an interconnected *system of trails* that provides unique eco-heritage and recreation tourism opportunities to support Phillipsburg’s downtown revitalization efforts.

The proposed route includes four main trails, three spurs and one loop trail, leveraging the Morris Canal Trail and connecting with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor across the river in Easton, PA and the Highlands Trail just north of town. The proposed “Riverbank Trail” will follow a scenic path along the Delaware starting near the boat ramp just north of the Northampton Street Bridge, continuing alongside the Phillipsburg Historic District through state-owned open space, and terminating at Lopatcong Creek. The Riverbank Trail is intended to increase access to the Morris Canal Arch and the riverbank.

“The exceptional planning work that Phillipsburg has done for the Riverfront Heritage Trail fits well in the larger framework of the Highlands Regional Economic Sustainability Plan,” explains Maryjude Haddock Weiler, Planning Manager for the Highlands Council. “The connections with the Morris Canal Greenway and the Highlands Trail in particular demonstrate how seeing beyond municipal boundaries and taking a regional view of planning can expand economic potential.”

With funding and assistance from the Highlands Council, the Town of Phillipsburg has completed a comprehensive Riverfront Redevelopment Plan and an Historic Preservation Plan in addition to the Riverfront Heritage Trail Plan, all of which will inform implementation of the Trail. The Highlands Council has been working in partnership with Phillipsburg since 2011, funding development of various ordinances, a Master Plan Reexamination, and a Redevelopment Plan for Commerce Park among other work.

The Highlands Council can provide noncompetitive, no-match required planning grants to any of the 88 municipalities and seven counties of the Highlands region. These grants enable local governments to save money on planning and engineering costs so that financial resources can be directed toward implementation of the plans or toward other municipal priorities. Grants are reimbursement based, require an approved scope of work, and pending funding availability.

In 2022 alone, the Highlands Council approved funding for 15 projects benefiting 10 municipalities and two counties. The Council also reimbursed 11 municipalities and two counties in 2022 for projects such as Sustainable Economic Development plans, Stormwater Management plans, Lake Management plans, and Fair Share Housing plans.

“It can often take some time to see plans that were approved and paid for by the Council come to fruition, but when they do, it’s very rewarding,” says Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “We look forward to visiting the Phillipsburg Riverfront Heritage Trail once it’s completed.”

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## **Possible story perspectives/focal points**

### **Hiking the Highlands**

The Appalachian Trail is not the only game in town. Novices and day trippers can soon explore the beauty of the Highlands Region via the proposed Phillipsburg Riverfront Heritage Trail. For

long distance hikers, the proposed trail system will one day give them a path all the way to Wilkes Barre. The Highlands Council is committed to helping facilitate the economic and environmental benefits that trails bring to communities and the region.

*Expert source available for interviews: Ben Spinelli, Highlands Council Executive Director and former mayor can discuss how small towns can leverage trail systems as part of overall sustainable economic development plans, attracting visitors to local businesses as well as recreational opportunities.*

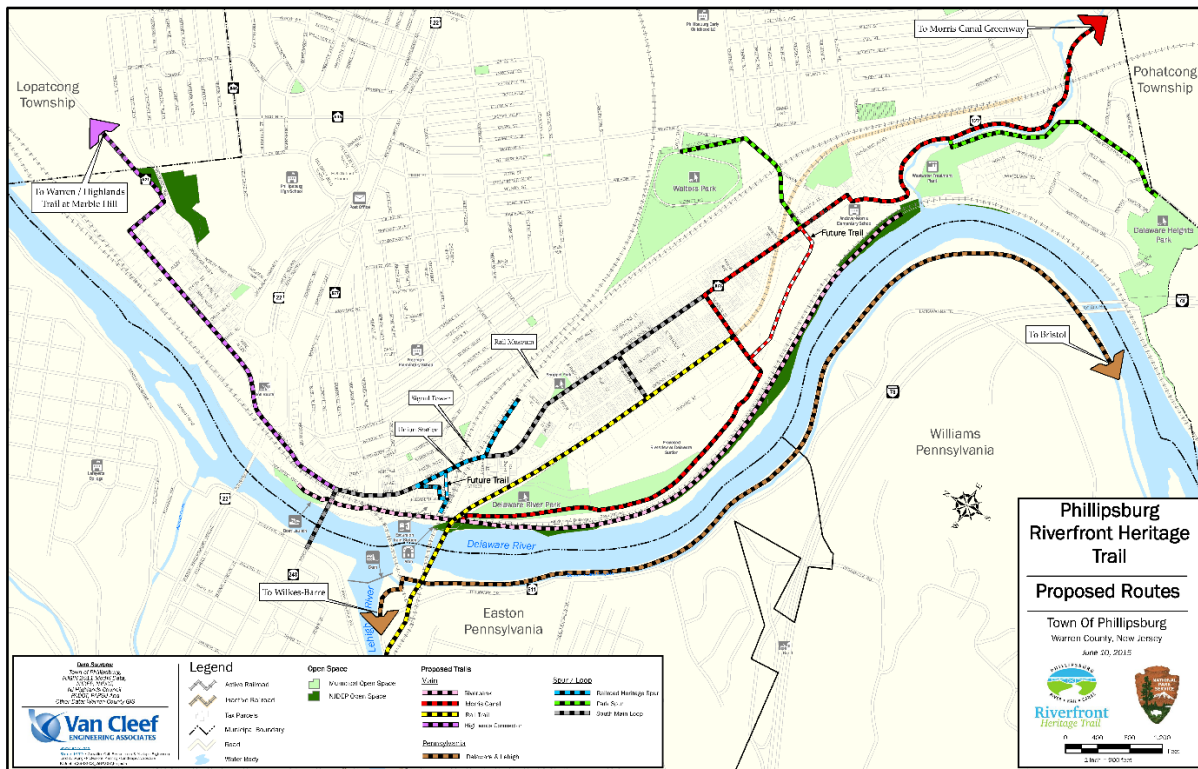
### Maximizing Municipal Budgets

With municipal budgets stretched thin, towns can leverage Highlands Council grant funding for planning, design and engineering costs, leaving more money in municipal coffers that can be directed toward project implementation or other municipal priorities. The Highlands Council provides planning grants to help small towns in the Highlands maximize their economic assets while protecting natural resources.

*Expert source available for interviews: Ben Spinelli, Highlands Council Executive Director and former mayor can speak directly to municipal challenges and how the Highlands Council can help.*

### Proposed Trail Map from Riverfront Heritage Trail plan.

Complete plan along with other Highlands Council-funded plans available on the [Phillipsburg page of the Highlands Council website](#).



*The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at [www.nj.gov/njhighlands](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands).*