



## Connecting Communities Program Description

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission is committed to the continued development of non-motorized trails throughout the County. The Commission has made significant investments in non-motorized trails during the last 10 years. Continuing that commitment, at the May 14, 2009 meeting the Commission authorized the **Connecting Communities Initiative**. Through this new program, WCPARC has pledged to make available up to \$600,000 each year during the 2010 – 2014 period (\$3 million in total) toward the cost of eligible trail projects.

The Connecting Communities Initiative will allow WCPARC to maximize its resources and assist communities with local trail projects that are consistent with the county-wide vision and aligned with WCPARC goals. The intent of the initiative is to work in partnership with local communities and other organizations, providing funds to supplement those provided or obtained by the partner organization. Funding will be available only for construction, not for planning or design development. Eligible projects will be those that accomplish the Commission's primary objective of providing valuable, non-motorized connections between communities and activity centers – offering a healthy alternative for recreation, transportation, fitness and energy conservation.

Application Process and Timing – Applications for Connecting Communities funding will be reviewed once per year. Project applications will be due by December 31st each year with funding decisions made at the WCPARC meeting in March of the next year (approximately 10 weeks later). The awarded funds will not be made available to the applicant until a contract for project construction has been executed.

Staff will review the application forms and present the projects to the Greenways Advisory Committee (GAC). With input from GAC, staff will prioritize the applications and make recommendations to WCPARC for final approval.

Project Eligibility – Funding will be authorized only for projects that meet the following specific eligibility requirements. Projects generally considered eligible for Connecting Communities funding:

- important links between communities, parks, or other points of interest.
- highway, river, railroad and other barrier crossings (grade separation structures)
- trail development within utility corridors
- trails adjacent to waterways
- park trails that connect with the county system
- abandoned railroad corridor preservation and development
- on-road bike lanes and shoulder improvements providing important links
- key property acquisitions (easement or title)
- major multi-jurisdictional project
- locally cost prohibitive project of regional or county wide significance

Projects generally **not** considered eligible for county assistance:

- trails within existing local parks
- replacement or restriping of existing trails/trail facilities
- limited use hiking or nature trails (non hard surfaced)
- trails related to building structures and parking lots
- planning, preliminary engineering, and land surveys
- streetscape improvements or sidewalks
- site furnishings (lighting, benches, bike racks, etc.)
- street crossing improvements
- utility relocations
- fencing, buffers and barriers
- trails maintenance equipment
- surveys and public participation programs
- local signage or traffic controls
- publications and marketing

Review Criteria – Applicants must document a compelling need for the project and its value to county residents. WCPARC has greatest interest in supporting projects with *County-wide Significance*. In reviewing project applications, the following review criteria will be applied to select projects that:

- are components of the existing or planned county greenway network (as shown on an existing county planning or parks map).
- link or have high potential to connect significant destinations or existing trails. Highest priority will be given to projects that connect to a WCPARC park or facility.
- directly relate to the county's important natural features, i.e., Huron River, River Raisin, Saline River, etc. NOTE: The Huron River Corridor has been identified as WCPARC's highest priority.
- involve partnerships of two or more adjacent communities or other entity (such as schools or Washtenaw County Road Commission)
- have a high use potential
- provide a wide range of functions (recreation, transportation, education/interpretation, conservation, water quality, tourism/economic)

Secondary rating criteria (applied to high ranking projects)

1. project quality
2. site suitability
3. land availability or encumbrances
4. probability of funding from outside groups or agencies
5. special considerations (community need, visibility, geographical balance, development intensity, safety, etc.)

WCPARC reserves the right to modify these criteria whenever it feels the interest of the County will be so served.