

Chapter 1 - Background Information and Data

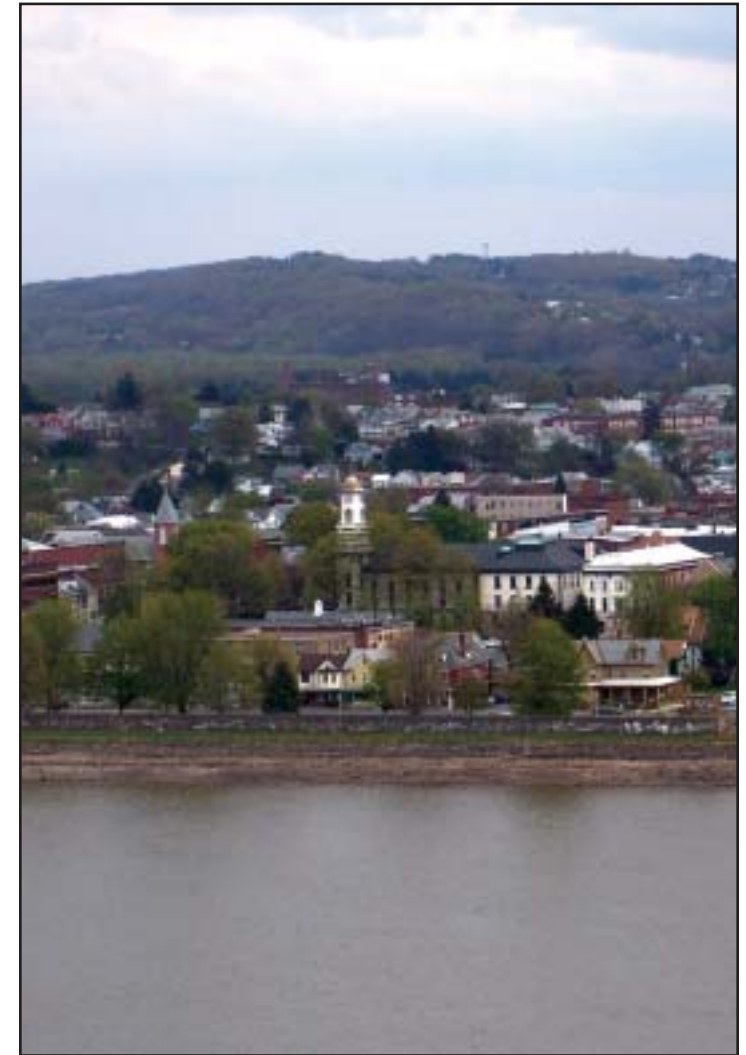
Plan Description / Purpose

Since its inception, the city of Sunbury has relied on the Susquehanna River for economic development, transportation, and recreation. As a result of several devastating past floods which resulted in substantial property damage and loss of life, an extensive floodwall protection system was designed and built by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1951. The system has guaranteed protection from 15 major flood events over the past 50 years. However, the flood protection system has isolated the city from its most valuable resource, the Susquehanna River.

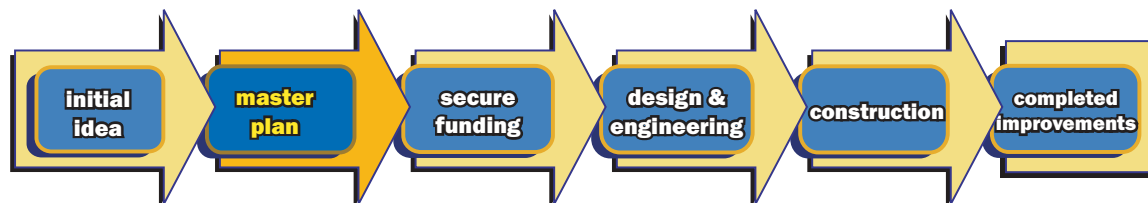
In 1969, local interests and the DEP forged an effort to enhance the use of the Susquehanna River through the installation of the world’s largest inflatable fabric dam. This inflatable fabric dam spans more than 1800 feet of the river creating a 3,000 acre impoundment called Lake Augusta. Unfortunately, the full potential of this resource has been unrecognized due to Sunbury’s restricted access to its riverfront.

The intent of the Master Site Plan for Riverfront Park is to create aesthetically pleasing riverfront improvements that combine flood protection with quality park and recreation services and facilities that benefit the diverse recreational interests of its residents, and provides access to the Susquehanna River and Lake Augusta, while serving as a catalyst for economic development.

In August of 2004, Pennsylvania’s Governor Edward Rendell set-aside 2.8 million dollars from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital-Program (RACP) for Phase I of the project (Amphitheater and Riverbank Stabilization). This funding will be used by the City of Sunbury from various sources. Overall, the Master Site Plan will help outline priorities, address federal, state, municipal and community support for the Riverfront Park Project, and provide direction for the city over the course of the plan’s implementation.



Sunbury from across the Susquehanna River.



Design process



Sunbury Population, Size, Character, Geographic Location

The City of Sunbury is a third-class city located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Northumberland County at the confluence of the North and West Branches of the Susquehanna River. It was the early site of the Indian Village of Shamokin and later, in 1756, the site of Fort Augusta, one of the strongest fortifications in Central Pennsylvania and the headquarters for military operations along the northern frontier during the Colonial and Revolutionary periods.



The City of Sunbury (Pop. 10,277) has experienced a steady decline in population since the 1950's (over 20%, from 1970 to 2000). This decline was spurred in part by: the exodus of city living for rural development of the 1950's to the outflow and/or closing of businesses in the central business district due to the perceived convenience of "mall" shopping of the 1970's and 1980's, combined with recent low interest mortgage rates providing an incentive for new homebuyers to build larger stick-built homes outside the City limits. Now, with an increasing interest in the Destination and Heritage Parks recreational concepts combined with recent state investments in the development of highway facilities (including the Central Susquehanna Valley Thruway, Interstate 80, and US 15); and the expansion of local universities, hospitals and the US Bureau of Prisons, the city is poised to capitalize on its location as a roadway hub along the Susquehanna River by providing a world-class riverfront.

Regional Context

not to scale

Sunbury Park System

The following parks and recreation sites are located in close proximity to Sunbury's riverfront:

Merle Phillips Park

Merle Phillips Park is located near the intersection of Market and Front Streets, on Front Street. This park is located within the project limits for the Sunbury Riverfront Master Plan. The park provides access to the Susquehanna River, a gazebo overlooking the river, and fishing areas. It is approximately six acres in size.

Cameron Park

Located downtown within the 200 block of Market Street, Cameron Park is a great place for families to enjoy time with each other and friends. Special events, such as live music, are held at the park. This central park is the town green which contains a gazebo and monuments dedicated to those who have served our Country. The concrete walkways in the park are lined with pedestrian scale lighting and benches for its visitors.

Keithans Bluebird Gardens

In the 1920's, Sunbury resident Charles Keithan started a hobby garden that grew, unexpectedly, into a beloved part of the community landscape. Located on a 1.5 acre tract along Sunbury's riverside, the park still contains some of the exotic trees that Keithan imported from around the world, as well as representative species of two of his favorite plants - azaleas and rhododendrons. The garden is located in the southern portion of Sunbury between Front Street and Second Street adjacent to the proposed fish ladder site at the southern tip of the project area.

Oppenheimer Pleasure Grounds

Located on North Second Street, this playground offers activities for everyone in the family. Existing since the late twenties, this playground has seen many changes. In 1999, the Oppenheimer received it's most exciting facelift in the form of a water park. Along with the new water park came new play equipment and state-of-the-art playground surface. Oppenheimer has two swing sets to accommodate the younger and older kids along with two basketball courts.

The following are the remaining recreational / leisure facilities found within the City of Sunbury:

- *Community Pool* – active recreation, pool, two water slides, lounge area, bath houses - Memorial Drive
- *Keller Street Playground* – Active and passive recreation, slides, climbing gym, swings, picnicking -adjacent to Shikellamy High School
- *Rice Playgrounds* – large open area and playground equipment – 702 South Second Street
- *Fort Discovery* – playground equipment – North Fourth Street
- *Kiwanis Playground* – playground equipment and open area – Line Street and Washington Avenue
- *Skate Park* – BMX and skateboard ramps & rails – North Fourth Street.
- *Baseball Fields* – North Fourth Street Recreational Complex.

Relevant Planning Documents

Riverfront Park Master Plan, November 1990

This study identified many of the goals common to this current plan. Recommendations include the beautification of the park, providing secure access to the riverfront, and discussion on how these improvements will help to revitalize the City.



Sunbury Riverfront Walkway, 2003

This conceptual site proposed the following improvements to be made along a continuous riverfront walkway:

- Overlook at the Bainbridge Street bridge abutment;
- Amphitheater between Chestnut and Church Streets for 1000 spectators;
- Earthen Access Ramp to be constructed at Chestnut Street; and,
- Market Street Plaza in the shape of the historic Fort Augusta footprint.

Northumberland County Comprehensive Plan

This plan does not specifically mention the Sunbury riverfront, but identifies the Susquehanna River as a major recreational resource and the need for more recreational resources within Northumberland County.

Susquehanna Greenway Partnership

The Susquehanna Greenway will link natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources along the 500-mile corridor of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. It will create a basin-wide organization for resource management and community conservation - factors of lasting importance to the economies and quality of life of river communities. Those who will benefit from this project are as diverse, as common, and as unique as the area's urban, suburban, and rural populations. The Greenway Plan will lead to the establishment of an interconnected web of communities and ecosystems spanning great distances, and addressing the varied needs of all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic status.

Public Participation Summary

The City of Sunbury selected the team of Simone Jaffe Collins, Inc. Landscape Architects, GTS Technologies, Inc., and Urban Partners to prepare this Riverfront Master Site Plan in March 2005. Work began in April 2005 with the first committee meeting when initial ideas, questions and concerns were raised and recorded in a series of 'cards' (see appendix). Additional meetings in Sunbury (two committee meetings, two public meetings), plus key person interviews and agency meetings with the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), and SEDA-COG) followed when these ideas were tested, discussed, and formulated into a DRAFT Master Plan. The Draft Plan was presented to the committee and public in September 2005. A forty-five day review period for the DRAFT plan ensued, and final comments and revisions were incorporated into a Final Plan dated December 2005. Attendance sheets and meeting notes for each of these meetings can be found in the report appendix.



Existing conditions within the Study Area.

Key Person Interviews

The following individuals were interviewed for their input towards the development of this master plan report:

- Scott A. Heintzelman – Northumberland Historic Society
- David Pershing – Mayor of Sunbury
- Jan Tippet – Editor, The Daily Item
- Lori Kieffer Yeich & Wes Kahringer – PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Tom Grbanek & Brian Auman – SEDA-COG
- Keri Albright - Susquehanna Area United Way
- Ryan Unger & Kurt Kennsellman – Greater Susquehanna Chamber of Commerce
- Randi Buener – Proprietor, Edison Hotel
- Bill Purdy and Mel Purdy – Sunbury Residents
- John Ferrara – Superintendent, Shikellamy State Park
- Greg Wilt – Sunbury Municipal Authority
- Jim Brozena – Engineer, Luzerne County

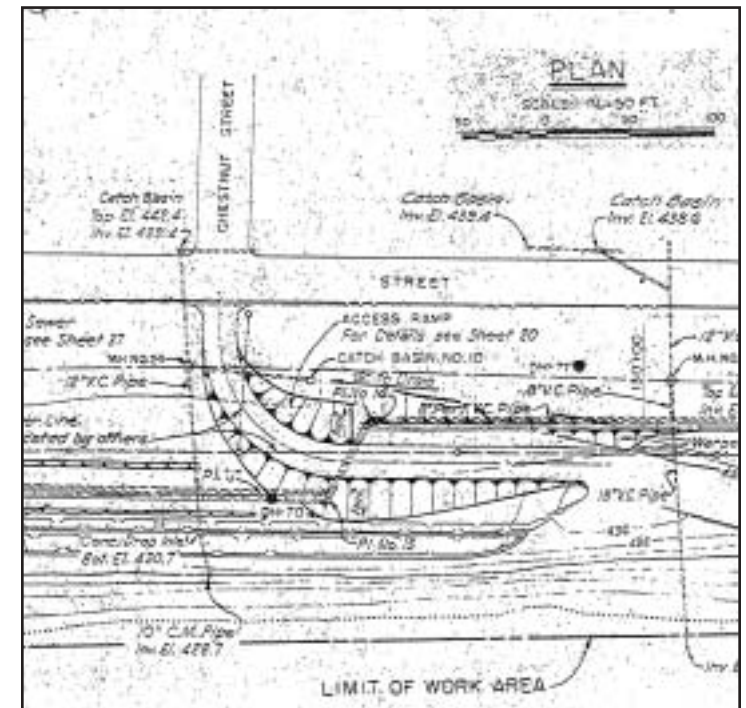
Notes from each of these interviews can be found in the report appendix.

Base Map

The enclosed Project Area Base Map was created from the following sources:

- War Department, Corps of Engineers, Susquehanna River Flood Control Project Plans, drawings dated 1947
- GIS data as provided by the City (aerial, tax parcels, wards, building foot prints)
- Field Site Inventory and Photography

Each of these resources were used via a combination of digital technologies to produce an accurate plan capable of reflecting the level of detail required for this conceptual riverfront master plan. This map is used as the base plan for the concept development plans, master plan, and estimation of probable development costs. This map is not suitable for construction documents.



Example of the 1947 Floodwall Construction Documents.



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