



# Greenways revive neglected stream corridors

By **Kerry Miller**, ANJEC Assistant Director

In almost every town, there are riparian resources that become invisible to local residents, and not because the stream has dried up. Adjacent old or abandoned industrial sites, railroad tracks, fenced private properties, and overgrowth or shading out by invasive species can gradually cause a once-vibrant water resource to fade out of the view and the consciousness of the community.

For a variety of reasons, towns are now giving these “wallflower” waterways a second look to determine what it would take to restore and reconnect them to the community by establishing a greenway that will, in turn, provide recreation, mobility, aesthetic, historic and stormwater benefits. Neglected waterways often connect to other community resources, like parks or the downtown, so establishing a user-friendly greenway can increase foot traffic to them.

Two recent local projects, spearheaded and carried out by environmental commissions under ANJEC Planning Grants, are typical examples of this kind of targeted effort.

## **Maplewood’s Rahway River corridor**

A branch of the Rahway River runs through Maplewood, open and accessible to residents as it traverses the town’s



*Rahway River in Maplewood*

Memorial Park. But just upstream of the park, it flows through a commercial district abutted by parking lots, institutional uses and an elevated NJ Transit rail line. The river is something of a back lot feature there, where trees and invasive weeds tend to obscure the view. Retaining walls and fill or rip rap of varying types line the river, which receives runoff from adjacent parking surfaces and stormwater discharge pipes.

The Maplewood Environmental Advisory Committee wanted to investigate opportunities to bring this section of the Rahway back as a community resource. They selected Edgewater Design, a landscape/architectural firm, to assess the area and help them develop recommendations for environmental, recreational, visual and transportation enhancements. The consultants researched and mapped the area in detail, showing structures and impervious surfaces, land uses and owner-

ship, the 50-foot riparian buffer zone, infrastructure, paths/sidewalks, the condition of the river banks and vegetation, crossings and viewsheds.

Privately owned adjacent land is a constraint to creating a continuous public walking path, but properties along the river that are within the public domain could provide access and amenities to enhance the river experience. The study, which included stakeholder participation and outreach, resulted in a 50-page *Rahway River Corridor Study* that made recommendations to:

- establish a biking/walking path through the river corridor;
- put vegetated swales along parking lots to absorb runoff and increase safety;
- test and remove fill from an old dumping area to convert it to usable open space and river access;
- prune trees and plant native vegetation;
- stabilize slopes and restore the riparian corridor;
- install seating and signage at overlooks; and
- coordinate with neighboring South Orange to create a continuation of the greenway between the towns.

Soon after the *Study* and recommendations were adopted by the Planning Board, Maplewood's Township Committee adopted an ordinance establishing a seven-member task force to prepare a schedule and determine costs, funding sources and mechanisms to work with property owners to implement both the Rahway River corridor plan and the town's new bikeway network plan.

*Middlesex  
Greenway visioning  
in Metuchen*

## **Metuchen's Middlesex Greenway Extension**

The Metuchen Environmental Commission took on the challenge of moving the community forward on its longstanding vision of creating a walking/biking link from a park near the center of town to the southeastern corner of the Dismal Swamp that extends into Metuchen. A vacated freight rail corridor and the course of the partially-piped Dismal Creek provided a linear opportunity for this greenway connection, which would be an offshoot of the Middlesex Greenway, a regional bike/pedestrian corridor.


An extensive public participation process informed the project, including press coverage, fact sheets, a booth at a community fair, walking tours, community workshops and a resident survey. An evening workshop at the senior center attracted about 50 participants who took a PowerPoint "tour" of the greenway and then pored over large maps of the area, brainstorming about what they would like to see there. The project professional was Metuchen's municipal planner, Jim Constantine, who not only provided mapping and technical expertise for the initiative but was one of its chief cheerleaders.

Ultimately, the plan for the Middlesex Greenway Extension envisions a mosaic of features in addition to both linear and



meandering multi-use trails and boardwalk sections. It includes water features, raised bed community garden plots, interpretive signage, butterfly gardens and wildlife viewing areas. The plan also recommends stormwater management features such as bio-swales and rain gardens to control and filter stormwater runoff, and preserves some upper trail areas suitable for mountain biking.

The plan also suggests a “shared space” concept to solve a local traffic problem -- a narrow, gated access road that would allow trucks access to the area’s industrial areas by day, but would be closed during evenings and weekends for recreational use and community activities along the greenway.

These two projects are examples of how environmental commissions act as catalysts in their municipalities, providing leadership that engages community members around a common good, and setting the municipality on a path to restoring and enhancing a degraded or underutilized natural resource. 

#### MORE INFORMATION

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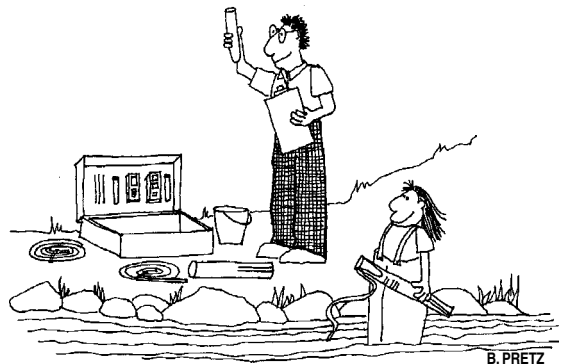
# Landmark law restricts fertilizer use

By **Julie Lange Groth**, ANJEC Report Editor

**G**overnor Christie signed groundbreaking legislation on January 5 to impose the country’s strictest limits on fertilizer use in New Jersey. Sen. Bob Smith (D-Middlesex) and Assemblyman John McKeon (D-Essex) sponsored the new “Fertilizer Law,” which aims to reduce nonpoint source pollution by limiting the nitrogen and phosphorous being washed from fertilized lawns into streams, rivers and bays.

The new law aims to protect the health of the State’s waterways by:

- Requiring at least 20 percent slow release nitrogen in all lawn fertilizers;
- Mandatory training of lawn care professionals about appropriate fertilizer application and content;



- Prohibiting lawn fertilizer application when rain is falling or predicted, and when the ground is typically frozen and cannot absorb the nutrients. Specifically, homeowners may not apply fertilizer between November 15 and March 15 and professional lawn care providers are restricted from applying fertilizer from December 1 through March 15 each year.