

Yonkers rail bike trail nearing construction



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Groundwork Hudson Valley got \$394,000 in 2015 from the state Regional Economic Development Councils for a trail along the former Getty Square spur of the New York and Putnam Railroad



(Photo: Ricky Flores/The Journal News)

The cement slabs strewn with trash on a lot off Lawrence Street may look like a dumping ground, but come next summer, the lot will transform into a park along a new trail.

Groundwork Hudson Valley and the City of Yonkers are putting the finishing touches on a plan to connect Caryl and McLean avenues with a half-mile trail that would run along a former railroad line that once connected Getty Square to a defunct railroad in the Bronx.

Construction is expected to begin in the spring, and the goal is to promote bicycling and provide an amenity to the neighborhoods along the new trail.

"Decades ago, this park failed," said Robert Baron, president and chairman of the board at Groundwork Hudson Valley. "It failed because it was in this scary place where people couldn't see in from the outside. Not a lot of people were coming through, so we want to reactivate this space by having the bike and pedestrian path so people are going to be coming by here all the time with a lot of eyes on the park."

The decommissioned park is about the size of 16 house lots accessible from Lawrence Street on the north, and on the east from Wolffe Street, which dead ends at the entrance to the park. Much of the park has large cement slabs with no grassy areas or play equipment.

Groundwork Hudson Valley got \$394,000 last year from the state Regional Economic Development Councils for the first phase of the trail along the former Getty Square spur of the New York and Putnam Railroad. The goal is to ultimately connect Getty Square by trail to the subway station at 242 Street and Broadway in the Bronx.

The southwest Yonkers rail trail is separate from the South County Trailway that runs from Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx through Tibbetts Brook Park in Yonkers to Greenburgh. The South County Trailway will be accessible from the southwest Yonkers rail trail because the new trail will connect to existing paths in Van Cortlandt Park at Caryl Avenue that lead to the Putnam Greenway, New York City's name for its section of the South County Trailway.



The first phase of construction will stretch from Caryl Street to McLean Avenue and will include the new park by Lawrence Street partly funded by the Impact100 Westchester group. The vision for the park is to have a children's playground and a community garden, along with the trail.

"We're trying to turn it into trail-oriented development, whereby people will use this to take care of their daily needs," Baron said. "Going to work, going to school. Taking care of errands and be able to ride back and forth from Van Cortlandt Park and hopefully, one day, the subway station."

The proposed rail trail bike path that will run from Van Cortlandt Park to Getty Square in Yonkers.

(Photo: Ricky Flores/The Journal News)

Groundwork had hoped to begin the project this summer, but the need for some final approvals delayed construction.

One delay was the need to get permission from Yonkers housing authority to run the trail through land adjacent to the Joseph F. Loehr Court public housing complex on Western Avenue. Part of the complex was built on the former rail line's right-of-way, but there is enough open space to accommodate the trail.

On Aug. 11, the housing authority's Executive Director Joseph Shuldiner discussed the matter with the agency's board, which took no action.

On Thursday, Robert Porter was sitting in a playground next to the Caryl Avenue parking lot where the trail would run. On the north end of the parking lot are locked gates leading into the former railway heading toward Lawrence Street.

Porter, 60, a maintenance man, said he would use the railway even in its undeveloped state.

"They don't open it," said Porter, 60, referring to the locked gates.

Porter also said he would like to see bike lanes throughout southwest Yonkers.

"Riverdale Avenue is big enough," he said. "They should look at all the roads."