

Plum Street Park Project Description

1. Needs and Benefits:

Project Description:

Media Borough requests funding from the Community Conservation and Partnerships Program of the Pennsylvania Department Conservation and Natural Resources to rehabilitate Plum Street Mall, a bricked-over pedestrian walkway in the heart of downtown Media, into Plum Street Park, an inviting green space for residents and visitors, featuring benches, ADA-accessible seating areas and tables, a fountain, native trees and plantings as well as stormwater mitigation/green infrastructure features.

Background:

Media Borough is a densely-developed municipality about three-quarters of a square mile in size, with a population of 5,350, located 20 miles from Philadelphia. The seat of Delaware County, Media is a thriving urban community with many positive attributes: it is a walkable town, is ethnically and economically diverse, and has strong neighborhoods as well as a thriving downtown.

The site of the project, Plum Street Mall, is the middle block of a three-block pedestrian street, owned by Media Borough, that intersects the heart of downtown. At approximately 30' x 155', the site is downtown Media's largest public open space. Currently however, the mall is underused, with a layout that works against its function as a gathering space. Benches, a disproportionately large Victorianaesque fountain, and built-in chess tables and chairs are awkwardly placed, working against social interaction and obstructing the flow of movement through the mall. With no shade features, hot summer days keep people away. In a survey conducted for this project many respondents commented that they use the mall as a pass-through only and do not stop to linger. Many wrote that they find the mall unattractive and uninviting.

Need/Importance to Community:

In the survey done for the borough's 2015 Comprehensive Plan, 43% (highest percentage) of respondents cited the lack of open space and parks to be one of the three most important issues affecting quality of life in the borough; 45% found the lack of such to be one of the biggest obstacles to the future growth of the borough. When asked to select the three top things that borough officials should focus on "as part of your vision for what Media should become," "Recreation/Parks/Open Space" was the top vote-getter at 45%. The Plan lists 19 recommendations regarding the support, development and rehabilitation of parks and open space in the borough.

Working against residents' desire for more green, recreational areas, Media is a built-up, paved-over town, with little remaining open space and few parks. Because of its dense development and an antiquated storm sewer system, the borough also faces significant stormwater management problems. Several years ago, the DEP Growing Greener Program funded the borough to create a Stormwater Master Plan to identify the most fruitful areas for stormwater management projects.

In response to both the cry for more open space and the need to increase infiltration of stormwater, Borough Council has turned its attention to opportunities to convert available lots and paved areas into small parks and green spaces. These sites will meet the needs of our residents and visitors for recreation, outdoor leisure activities and contact with nature. They will also address the borough's stormwater run-off issues; each site will incorporate green infrastructure design such as rain gardens, bio-retention basins and tree trenches. The Plum Street Mall/Park rehabilitation will be the second of these projects we have undertaken, the first being the recently-completed Veterans Square Garden.

The project site was identified by a stakeholder group several years ago in a series of meetings to plan a creative placemaking project. The many good ideas that were brainstormed pointed to three basic needs that were not being met:

- The need for more parks and green space
- The need for more public gathering spaces, where people can meet and interact on a casual friendly basis

- The need for places for public art

Plum Street Mall was identified as the best site to start—in spite of it being down-at-the heels presently, it has potential as a green central square. Many of the specific project elements emerged out of the group discussions and from a public survey posted subsequently on the borough website. See Criteria Question #4 for more detail.

Project Scope—How Grant Funding Will Be Used:

Media Borough’s DCNR C2P2 grant request is for final design and construction. Preliminary design for the Park has been funded out of the Borough’s General Operating Budget. The remaining project costs are estimated at \$1,220,366.63. We are requesting \$250,000 from the C2P2 program. We will pursue other grant funding, from programs such as the DCED Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program. Regardless of whether or not we secure additional funding, the Borough is committed to providing the balance of the cost of the project.

Phase I of the Plum Street Mall/Park rehabilitation will focus on the middle block, between State and Jasper Streets. Phases II and III, not part of this request, will treat the north and south blocks of the mall. In the current Phase I project, over 5,500 square feet of brick and concrete will be removed, and in its place a park with trees; stormwater planters; various forms of seating and tables, including ADA-accessible; bike racks; a trough fountain; and a trellised performance area will be constructed. Decorative streetlights and other lighting will illuminate the park at night. The walls of the park will feature free-standing trellises and space for future public art murals. Walking areas will be surfaced with a distinctive pattern of unit pavers in red, dark gray and light gray.

Our design creates a wide, pedestrian-friendly crosswalk (not included in this request) that extends the sense of the park/mall into the street, linking the two blocks and signaling traffic to slow down. The new crosswalk will match the width of the middle and south blocks combined—about 70 feet. Bump-outs on either side of the street will reduce the crossing distance and further slow traffic. They feature two wide curb cuts, providing comfortable ADA access.

A stormwater tree trench will line each of the bump-outs with permeable pavers and a row of three trees, providing a green frame to the Park entrances. The trenches will be engineered to maximize stormwater retention and infiltration. The green tree canopy will have a further traffic-slowing effect on the pedestrian crossing area.

The renovated Plum Street Park will offer a welcome green respite to Media residents and visitors enjoying a downtown stroll, shopping or participating in Media’s many outdoor festivals and music events.

Benefits:

Plum Street Park will be developed as a passive-use, pedestrian-friendly, downtown park. It is sited in an area that is within a 15-minute walk of most Media residents. Neighbors of all ages and abilities will have a beautiful green space in which they can meet each other, chat, relax, eat lunch and enjoy nature. Children will have open space in which they can run and play. The park will encourage exercise and support the health of the community by providing a destination for walkers, joggers and bicyclists.

Media’s downtown is already a great draw for residents of surrounding suburbs and towns that have no downtown center. Thousands of visitors from Springfield, Nether Providence, Upper Providence, Middletown, and Edgmont Townships, as well as many other Delaware County municipalities, frequent our shops, restaurants and theatre weekly. The Plum Street Mall rehabilitation into a Park will make our downtown even more inviting to visitors, offering economic benefits to our downtown shops and restaurants.

The entire region will benefit from a project that makes Media’s downtown a more livable place.

2. Green and Sustainability:

Our project addresses many of the key points outlined in DCNR’s [Green and Sustainable Community Parks](#), in particular, principles #2 and #5.

Green Principle #2: “Connect People to Nature.”

The rehabilitated Plum Street Mall will offer passive park activities to a densely developed downtown district that currently has no local park. Although the site is tiny in size (.11 acres), it will provide plenty of opportunities for users to interact with nature:

- Eight planting beds, constructed as stormwater planters, with native flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees will offer homes to birds, small animals, butterflies and other insects (Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1-5; DCNR Budget, Categories F, J, K).
- The pedestrian-only status of the mall creates space in the middle of Media’s downtown for children to move and play, touch and smell flowers and interact with nature (Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1 and 4).
- The trough fountain presents children with the opportunity for tactile experiences with water and water flow; for everyone it will provide a tranquil visual and auditory experience (Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1-3; DCNR Budget, Category I).
- Benches and tables allow for social interaction, contemplation, birdwatching and the possibility of eating lunch outdoors (Plan and Perspectives, pp. 2, 4 and 5); DCNR Budget, Items H. 3-5).
- The flat grade and companion seating throughout the park will invite older people and those in wheelchairs to enjoy the amenities. Shade trees will offer cool relief on hot days.
- The use of above-grade green infrastructure systems offers a particular educational benefit by providing the public with a visual cue of how stormwater is being managed because the interception of the downspout and the redirection of runoff into the aboveground system happens at eye level. This process will draw attention to the downspout runoff “flowing and falling” into the green stormwater systems. Additionally, signage will help enhance the educational benefit (Plan and Perspectives, pp. 2 and 4; DCNR Budget, Category B, H.7, J and K).

Green Principle #3: “Manage Stormwater Naturally/ Green Infrastructure.”

Media Borough recently completed a “Stormwater Management Master Plan.” One of the key outcomes of the Plan is Borough Council’s heightened interest in developing a series of green spaces or pocket parks throughout the borough, which will also feature stormwater best management practices such as bioretention basins, rain gardens and tree trenches. One of the goals in our rehabilitation of Plum Street Mall is to maximize infiltration opportunities by using these techniques. The design for the Park features the following green infrastructure elements:

State Street Entrance:

- Sidewalk tree trenches with Silva Cells (see Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1 and 6; Graphics, “Tree Trench”; DCNR Budget Category B and L).
- Curbscut/customized catch basin inlets (to be determined in final design)(see Graphics, “Overflow Custom Basin”and “Curb Cut”; DCNR Budget Category B)
- Inlet inserts/sumps (to be determined in final design)(see Graphics, “Inlet Insert” and “Catch Basin Sump”; DCNR Budget Category B).

Plum Street Area:

- Permeable pavers (See Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1-4; DCNR Budget Category A.2)
- Stormwater planters (See Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1-5; Graphics, “Cistern Planter” and “Rain Garden”; DCNR Budget Category J and K)
- Rain barrels/Cisterns (See Plan and Perspectives, p. 4 ; Graphics, “Cistern Planter”; DCNR Budget Category B, J and K).
- Roof runoff management (see Plan and Perspectives, pp. 1-5; Graphics, “Cistern Planter,” “Rain Garden,” “Downspout to Exposed Trench”; “Exposed Rainchain Leader” DCNR Budget Category B and K)

3. ADA Compliance

The project complies with the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design by providing a Park surface that is flat (0% slope) and smooth, accommodating walkers of all abilities as well as wheelchairs. There will be no obstacles to access at either the State Street or Jasper Street entrance. The traffic-calming, tree-lined bump-outs onto the State Street crosswalk will feature two, 6-foot wide curb cuts making it easy to navigate the crossing and enter the Park from across the street (see attached Plans and Perspectives, p. 1; DCNR Budget, Item A.7). The plan provides a designated ADA

parking place next to the State Street entrance (Plans & Perspectives, pp.1 and 6; DCNR Budget, Item A.9). The north entrance from Jasper street will also feature a wide crosswalk and ADA curb cut ramp.

The new design provides 8-foot pedestrian walkways between site furnishings and planting areas. The plan provides for ADA accessible seating in some of the fixed table and chair areas.

- Companion Seating is offered next to the west-side bench closest to State Street (Plans and Perspectives, p. 2; DCNR Budget, Item H.3).
- The oval table at the north end of the center aisle is designed to accommodate a wheelchair at one end (see Companion Seating, Plans and Perspectives, p. 4; DCNR Budget, Item H.4).
- Each of the three small café tables along the east wall offer fixed seating at either end ample space for Companion Seating at the outside edge (Plans and Perspectives, p. 5; DCNR Budget, Item H.5).

4. Public Involvement

The Plum Street Mall project was identified by a stakeholder group several years ago. Partnering with the Media Arts Council, the Borough invited representatives from 18 diverse local civic, cultural, environmental, social justice and business groups to attend a series of four meetings to plan a placemaking project that would increase the “livability” of the borough as well as incorporate the arts. The group arrived at a consensus that one of Media’s greatest needs was a viable public gathering space for the community to meet itself in a casual setting. The group’s chosen project was a creative redesign of Plum Street Mall. From the beginning the group emphasized the need to green this brick-and-concrete space and bring a calming natural presence into the heart of downtown. As the group identified specific features they would like to see developed at the Mall, it soon became clear that they were describing a park as much as a plaza.

They decided the three-block Mall could be re-designed in three Phases. Phase I would focus on the middle block of the Mall, the most centrally-located and heavily-used. Phase II (not included in this grant application) will develop the south block of the Mall into an attractive gateway from busy Baltimore Pike and the main parking garage into the warmth and charm of downtown Media. Phase III (also not included here) will upgrade the north block of the mall, maintaining it as the quiet sitting area it currently is and integrating water, landscaping and natural play elements.

Community Priorities:

The stakeholder group established a set of goals for a rehabilitation of the Mall into a Park:

- Incorporate nature into the Mall/Park—trees, plantings, trellises, perennial flowers—creating an artful and inviting environmental design
- Integrate water, lighting and shade elements into the design
- Create a friendly meeting place to promote social interaction in the Borough, with thoughtfully-placed seating and tables
- Redesign the space to facilitate pedestrian flow
- Maintain a small multi-use open space for music and performances.
- Include space for public art projects

After these goals were formulated, the Borough posted a survey on its website to solicit opinions from the public and to open the project to additional ideas. The survey allowed us to see which of these elements were of most importance to other residents and to open the door to new ideas. The goals and feedback that emerged from the stakeholder meetings and survey were forwarded to the project landscape architect, who based his preliminary design for the Park on them. This preliminary design was posted on the borough website. Designs for the north and south blocks of the mall will be developed and implemented over the next several years in Phases II and III of the project.

We will hold a public meeting for review and feedback during the Phase I final design process. Community involvement will be a part of the development of all phases of the project.

5. SCORP

The Plum Street Park project will rehabilitate a paved-over pedestrian street and create a community park in an area of the borough where none existed before. It is in line with many of the Recommendations in *Natural Connections* especially “Health and Wellness: Promoting Healthy Living Through Outdoor Connections” and “Local Parks and Recreation: Enhancing Close-To-Home Outdoor Recreation.” The proposed park development project lies in a part of the borough that is underserved by open space—downtown Media. The park will provide a local destination for residents in this section of town to walk, run or bike to, encouraging healthy physical activity. They will then have access to a nearby green space with trees, plantings, benches, a pedestrian walkway and open areas for quietly sitting in nature, strolling and children’s play.

The project addresses three specific actions under these recommendations:

Local Parks and Recreation: Enhancing Close-to-Home Outdoor Recreation, p.11

1. Connect citizens to close-to-home recreational opportunities and green space

Action Item a.:

Develop a diverse collection of park and playground designs that exemplify green practices, appeal to all ages and abilities, create whole-family recreation spaces and incorporate popular and innovative trends in recreation.

The park, developed for passive recreational use, will be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. There will be a handicapped parking space at the State Street entrance with a close-by curb cut ramp connecting to the sidewalk and Park walkway. The Park will feature 8-foot-wide walkways, smooth and level. In addition to the State Street entrance, the Jasper Street entrance is also handicapped accessible, allowing wheelchairs, strollers and people with limited walking ability to enter and walk all the way through the park unobstructed. Benches allow for quiet sitting, reading, conversation and observation of nature.

Open space within the Park offers play areas for children; planting beds offer the opportunity to touch and smell flowers, grasses and leaves; the trough fountain invites splashing; trees provide bird habitat.

1. Connect citizens to close-to-home recreational opportunities and green space

Action Item b.:

Launch a mobile-friendly website for residents to easily find local parks and collect photos, stories and amenities from users.

Media Borough is planning an overhaul of the Parks and Recreation section of its website in 2020. The re-vamped section will include mobile-friendly pages on all borough-owned parks and open space and will feature photos from the sites. We are currently going through an Open Space and Recreation Planning process, led by Ann Toole and Tavis Dockwiller. Informed by the plan, in 2021 we will launch an augmented recreational programming. As part of the launch our E-Newsletter is planning an outreach to residents to submit stories and poetry related to activities at our parks and open space.

1. Connect citizens to close-to-home recreational opportunities and green space

Action Item c.:

Identify and take steps to reduce barriers so that every citizen has equal access to local and school parks and outdoor recreation opportunities

The Plum Street Mall/Park rehabilitation is designed to welcome and accommodate people of all ages and abilities and to provide new opportunities to enjoy nature. According to *Natural Connections*, our state’s comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, local parks may be the most important entrée into outdoor recreation. As an accessible and inviting destination for walkers and bicyclists, the new park/mall will strengthen the connection between outdoor activities and health.

6. Maintenance/Stewardship Plan

The Media Borough Public Works Department has a staff of 14 who work tirelessly to keep Media’s green space clean of debris and trash, tend the trees and plantings throughout the Borough and repair site furnishings and other park amenities. Public Works maintains Borough parks with a weekly schedule of two workers on mowing and debris

removal and a 3-times/week schedule of two workers on cleaning and trash removal. Hence the borough has eyes on each park at least three times per week to spot damage and other problems. The Public Works Director inspects all parks on a weekly basis. In addition, residents call in to the Borough to report park concerns. The Borough is committed to maintaining the beauty of its green space, replacing damaged trees and beds and repairing broken site furniture when necessary.

Plum Street Park will be put on a similar maintenance schedule, with the same commitment to maintaining plantings and facilities after completion. Please see attached the Maintenance Plan.