

Lower

# Big Creek

Greenway Redevelopment & Restoration Plan





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Greenway Redevelopment & Restoration Plan

prepared by:



*in association with:*  
schmidtpelandparkerstevens



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# Acknowledgements



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**Ohio Canal Corridor**  
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SHADY SPOT ALONG BIG CREEK

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# Introduction

**T**he Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation, the City of Cleveland, Cleveland Metroparks and the Ohio Canal Corridor partnered in 2007- 08 to develop a comprehensive master plan and land use strategy for the Lower Big Creek Valley Greenway. A variety of planning studies had been previously developed over a number of years, resulting in a wealth of knowledge about the Valley environment and leading to a variety of restoration, recreational and economic development concepts. The partners sought to consolidate this thinking into a single document that realistically envisioned the future of the Valley. The planning team of Floyd Browne Group in association with schmidtcopelandparkerstevens was engaged to assist the partners in this effort. The resulting ***Lower Big Creek Greenway Redevelopment and Restoration Plan*** builds on the previous efforts by blending the best concepts of each study with new ideas developed by the planning team to create a new vision for the Valley Greenway. The creation of this vision incorporates detailed future land use, public access, infrastructure, ecological restoration and environmental regeneration, open space and trail linkages and economic development concepts.

A driving force in the development of this vision for the Valley was to dispel the view of many in the surrounding neighborhoods that the Valley is a

place to avoid, with its concentration of industrial and transportation uses. With 135,989 residents living within a 2-mile radius (Source: Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, 2000 Census), the Lower Big Creek Valley is a vital element in the growth and economic strength of the surrounding City neighborhoods of Brooklyn Centre and Old Brooklyn.

At approximately the same time, four other planning initiatives are being conducted of the study area, including a Watershed Management Plan for Big Creek, a Master Plan for the neighborhoods, a planning study of the Pearl Road corridor and an Economic Feasibility Study that supported the other plans. Coordination with these other plans was an important component of the planning process for this study.

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# Valley Resources



**B**ig Creek is the third largest tributary of the Cuyahoga River, with a watershed of 39 square miles in the Cities of Cleveland, Brooklyn, Linndale, Parma, Parma Heights, Brookpark and North Royalton. The Creek joins the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland at a point about 7.4 miles above the mouth of the River at Lake Erie. It is a highly urbanized stream with a narrow greenbelt and little of its original floodplain remaining intact. The lower reach of Big Creek from Ridge Road to its confluence with the Cuyahoga River at Harvard Avenue is channelized or culverted for most of its length and is subject to intense rainfall surcharges and periodic combined sewer overflow discharges during storm events. Its banks are poorly vegetated and occasionally armored with walls or rock. Water quality is poor and, combined with the storm surges, produce a weak ecology.

The valley floor is populated with a variety of heavy industry, a railroad corridor that includes CSX and Norfolk Southern lines, service roads, storage yards and parking area, in addition to Cleveland Metropark's Brookside Reservation and Zoo. Several parcels within the Valley are underutilized, featuring container storage, auto salvage and construction aggregates processing yards. These uses have crowded the stream edges, further deteriorating the quality of Big Creek.



Despite this bleak picture of the stream's natural state, the greenbelt associated with the stream is ideally situated within the neighborhoods of Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre to provide much desired contact with nature for the residents and visitors to the neighborhoods. This greenbelt, although highly manipulated still retains a large forest canopy, substantial wetlands and potentially accessible routes to the neighborhoods, their commercial centers and the Ohio and Erie Canalway to the east along the Cuyahoga River.

Nearby the valley are the commercial districts of the two neighborhoods, connected by the Brooklyn Brighton Pearl Road bridge. The valley is accessible regionally through nearby interchanges with the Jennings Freeway and Interstate 71. The newly developed Steelyard Commons commercial

center is immediately north along Jennings Road.

The valley's prize is the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo within Brookside Reservation. The zoo attracts 1.5 million visitors each year from its entrance off Fulton Parkway and Pearl Road and includes a wide array of exhibits, both new and refurbished. Brookside Reservation originated as a Cleveland city park and still today serves the local population with ballfields, picnic and events area as well as trail connections from the valley to the neighborhoods. Also, adjacent to the Valley rim is the City's Calgary Park, a neighborhood park serving Brooklyn Centre.

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# Public Involvement



LOWER BIG CREEK PUBLIC MEETING



**T**he Lower Big Creek Greenway Redevelopment and Restoration Plan was developed through an intense public involvement process that included regular meetings of an Advisory committee of community and neighborhood leaders, individual interviews of key stakeholders along the greenway and public involvement workshops where residents, business and property owners were encouraged to identify key attributes in the valley and to express their preferences about several options available. Stakeholder interviews were held in the fall of 2007 and public involvement workshops were held in the Fall of 2007 and the Spring of 2008. The workshops were widely advertised in the local media, where interested parties were invited to attend.

The first public workshop reviewed alternate routes and land uses that may be considered. The public was invited to comment at work stations about the various options, additional options that should be considered and important features or issues that should be addressed in the plan. A series of four stakeholder interviews were held to engage land owners in the valley, whose partnership are critical to the plan's success. These individual interviews gave participants the opportunity to speak freely about the potential impact of the plan on their own plans and goals.

The second public workshop presented the draft concepts that resulted from the meetings of the advisory committee, stakeholder interviews and the first public meeting. Again, the public was invited to comment at various work stations about the plan elements. Comments, although diverse, were overwhelmingly positive about the potential the plan has to address important community access, recreation, environmental recovery and economic growth issues.

Summaries of the meetings are included in Appendix D.

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# Trail Route Alternates





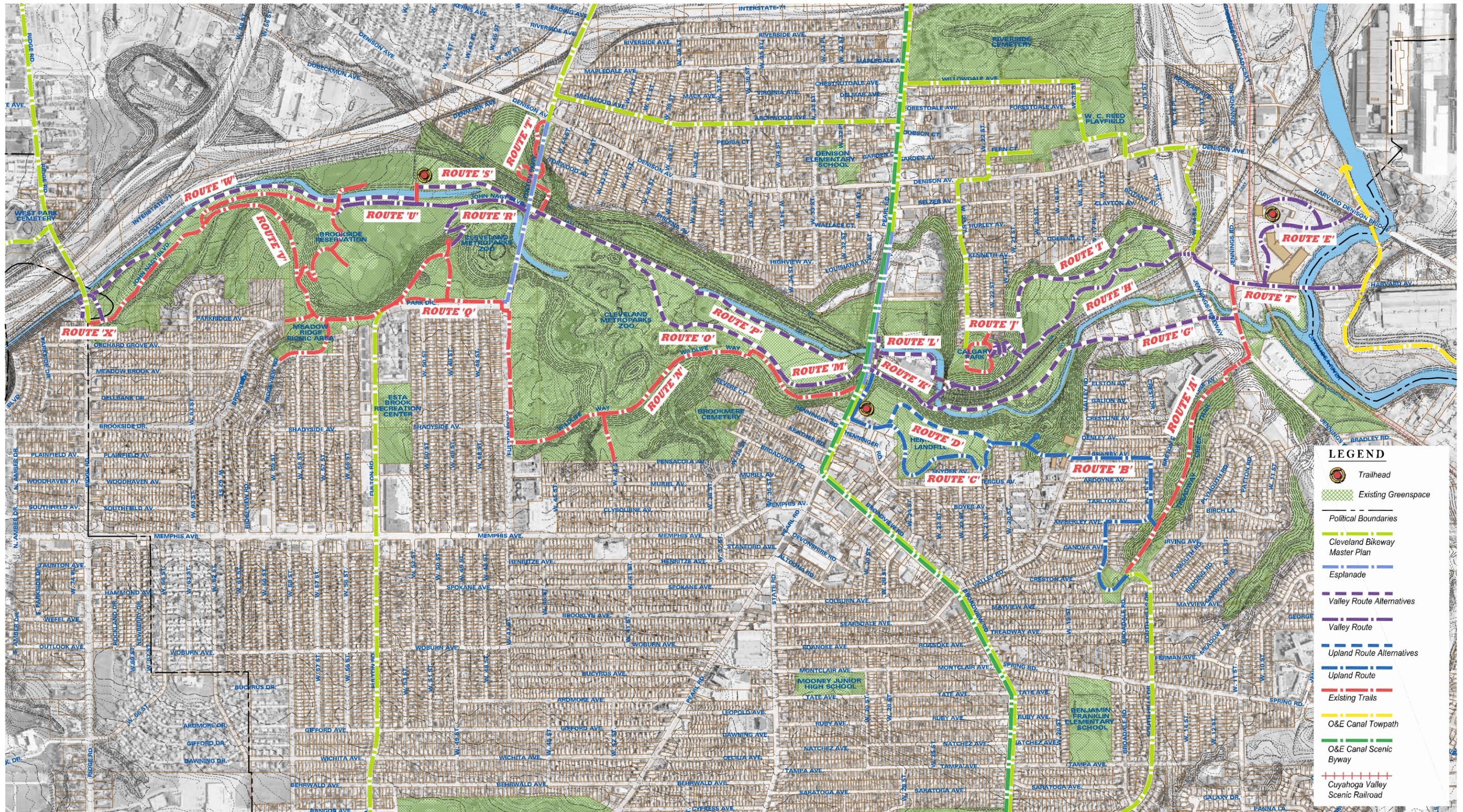
**T**he accompanying Alternative Routes Map and Matrix outlines the numerous different options that were considered during plan development. Both Valley and Upland Routes were considered.

A number of objectives were considered when selecting the preferred trail routes. These are outlined in the matrix and the relative success that each alternative achieved in meeting the objectives. These included:

1. Providing a direct connection between the Zoo and the Ohio & Erie Canalway Towpath Trail.
2. Providing a practical solution for future tram service for Zoo visitors from the Harvard Avenue Rail Station of the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway.
3. Providing accessible pedestrian connections for the resident population of Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods.
4. Providing a catalyst for environmental regeneration/ecological restoration.
5. Providing access to expanded recreational options.
6. Providing continuous off-road/separate access.
7. Providing access to visitor services- restaurants and lodging.
8. Providing minimal risk for flooding.
9. Providing visual connection to water resources.
10. Not conflicting with federal regulations and mandates.
11. Providing cost-effective solutions.

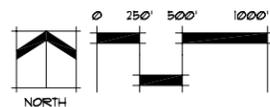
	A direct connection between Zoo and the O & E Towpath Trail	Providing for future tram service to & from the Zoo to the Harvard Ave. Rail Station (CVSR)	Accessible pedestrian connections for the resident population	A catalyst for environmental regeneration/ecological restoration	Access to expanded recreational options	Continuous off-road/separate access	Access to visitor services	Providing minimal risk for flooding	Visual connection to water resources	Not conflicting with federal regulations and mandates	Cost-effective solutions
Route A											
Route B											
Route C											
Route D											
Route E											
Route F											
Route G											
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**NOTE:**  
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**THAT WERE**  
**COMPARED**  
**WITH ONE &**  
**OTHER WHEN**  
**SELECTING THE**  
**PREFERRED**  
**ROUTES**



# Lower Big Creek Greenway Redevelopment & Restoration Plan

Trail Route Alternates Considered



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# Trail & Greenway Concept



**T**he concept for the Lower Big Creek Greenway focuses on its important geographic position relative to the neighborhoods of Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre. The valley, its flanking valley walls and nearby valley rim parcels, all provide the neighborhoods an opportunity to orient toward a restored and protected greenbelt that connects the neighborhoods with one the region's major recreational attraction, the Ohio and Erie Canalway. The *trails* that could potentially connect the neighborhoods with the Canalway, the *environmental regeneration* proposed that can heal and protect the greenway, making it once again a valued resource and the *land use* changes that can revitalize the neighborhood's economy are vital components of a new success strategy. The plan is explored in these three components in the following paragraphs.

## Trail & Greenway Concept

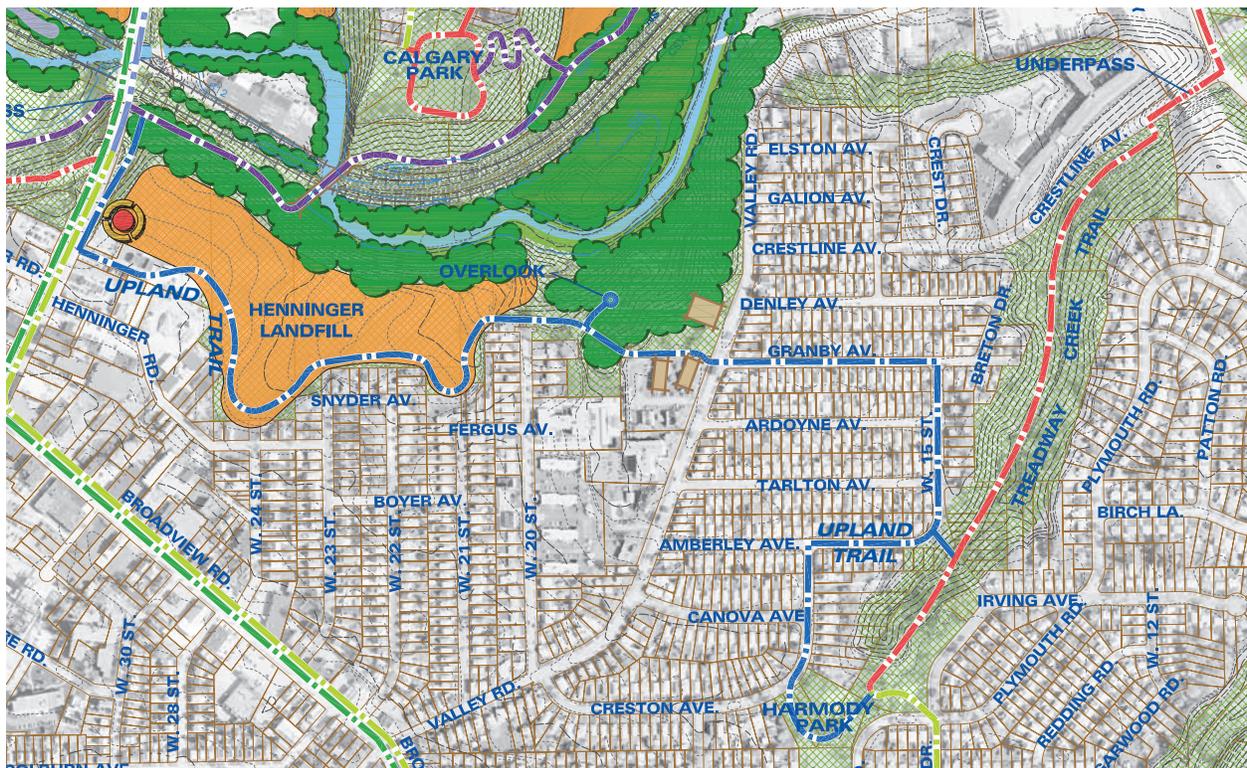
**T**he plan includes both a Valley trail and an Upland trail, connecting the Canalway with the neighborhood and the Zoo. These two trails were seen as critical by residents of both neighborhoods. The 4.6 mile Upland Trail follows the southern valley rim from Brookside Reservation to the Cuyahoga River Valley at Jennings Road and the Towpath Trail. The 3.7 mile Valley Trail shares a portion of the Upland Route along Valley Way and Fulton Parkway but mostly remains in the Valley from the Brookside Reservation to the Towpath Trail at Harvard Avenue. Both meet the plan's objectives described above and together provide a dramatically new way of experiencing the neighborhoods.



MEADOW RIDGE PICNIC AREA

## Upland Trail Description

The Upland trail connects the Old Brooklyn neighborhood with the Zoo and Towpath by interconnecting previously completed routes at Treadway Creek and Brookside Reservation. The trail begins at the current western terminus of the Brookside trail along John Nagy Boulevard. It follows the existing route paralleling the street until it branches to rise out of the valley and into the adjoining residential neighborhood at the Meadow Ridge picnic area in the Brookside Reservation. The existing trail continues along Park Drive and Fulton Parkway to Wildlife Way. The planned bike lanes on the Fulton Parkway bridge connect to the trail at the southern end of the bridge. At Wildlife Way the trail follows the existing trail alignment parallel to the street and the Zoo. The trail route diverts from the existing trail just beyond the Zoo entrance and follows the edge of the eastern Zoo parking lot, passing under the Pearl Road bridge to the old Pearl Road alignment. Adjustment to the Zoo's composting operation will





PEARL ROAD UNDERPASS



HENNINGER LANDFILL OVERLOOK OF  
MARTIN RECYCLING OPERATION

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be needed at the easternmost end of the parking lot to accommodate the trail.

The trail continues along the old Pearl Road alignment up to the level of the Old Brooklyn commercial district at the southern end of the Pearl Road bridge. Bike lanes proposed on the Pearl Road bridge connect to the trail at this point. The proposed trail continues east past the Burger King site to the Henninger landfill property. The Henninger site is included in the land use changes proposed for the Greenway and

is further discussed in the *Land Use* section of the report. The trail follows a curving alignment near the southern edge of that property to West 20th Street where it transitions to the street level and the Young property. Near this location the Young property includes a spit of land that overlooks the valley floor under the canopy of huge trees comprising a remnant of the native forest in this area. An overlook spur is proposed for this area. The trail continues across a pedestrian bridge over a side valley and along the edge of the Young house property to Valley Road.





The proposed trail crosses Valley Road at Granby Avenue, a brick residential street where it continues in the street to West 15th Street and Amberly Avenue, all within the residential neighborhood. A spur connection is made to the Treadway Creek Trail at the intersection of Amberly and West 15th along a sewer access route to the Treadway Creek valley. The main route continues on Creston Avenue to Harmody Park and the head of Treadway Creek Trail in the park.

The Upland trail follows the existing Treadway Creek trail into the Creek valley to Crestline Avenue where the existing trail continues as a widened sidewalk along Crestline and Jennings Road to its intersection with Harvard Avenue. The trail is planned to continue east as a widened sidewalk along the southern side of Harvard Avenue in a streetscape enhancement that will include street trees and paving enhancements. The trail crosses Harvard at a signed crosswalk near its intersection with the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway onto the property commonly known as the Harshaw Chemical site. This site is being remediated and eventually is proposed to be reused as the site of the Harvard Avenue station of the Scenic Railway and other reuse possibilities described under the *Land Use* section of this

report. The trail passes through this property and ends with its connection to the proposed location of the Ohio and Erie Canalway Towpath trail on the west bank of the Cuyahoga River.



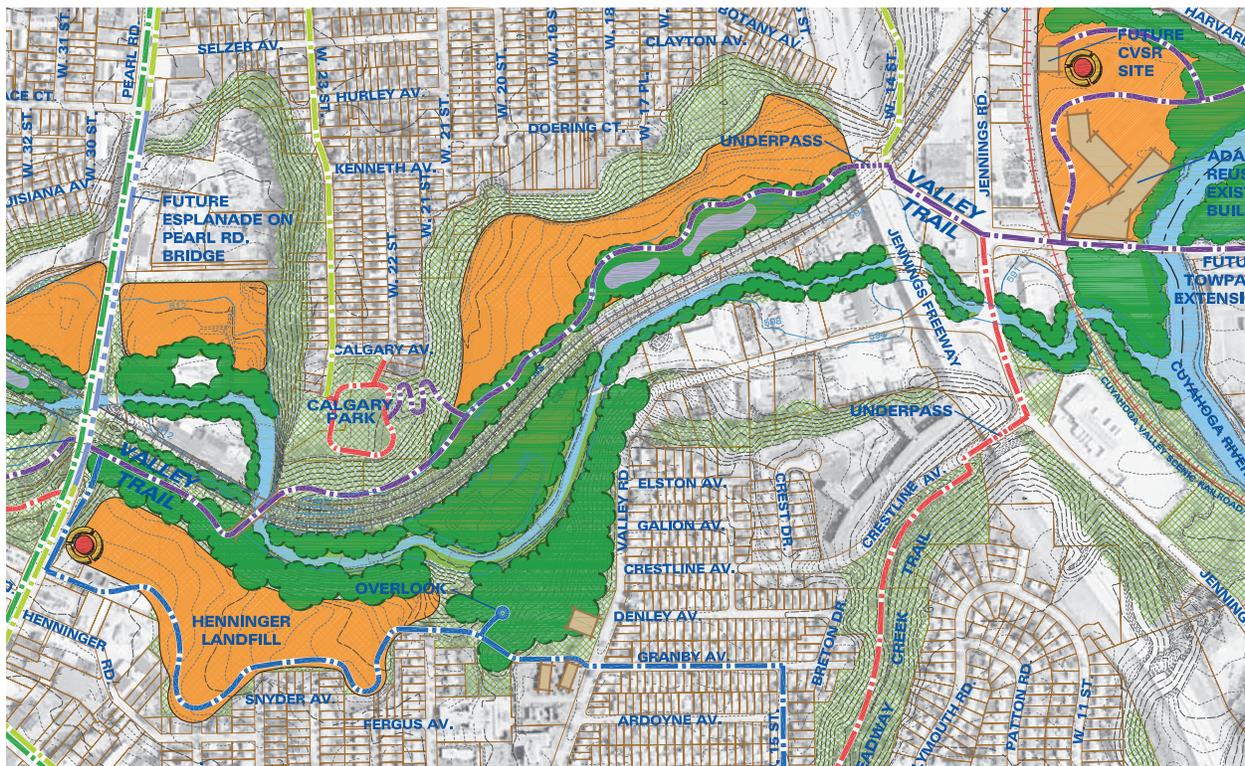
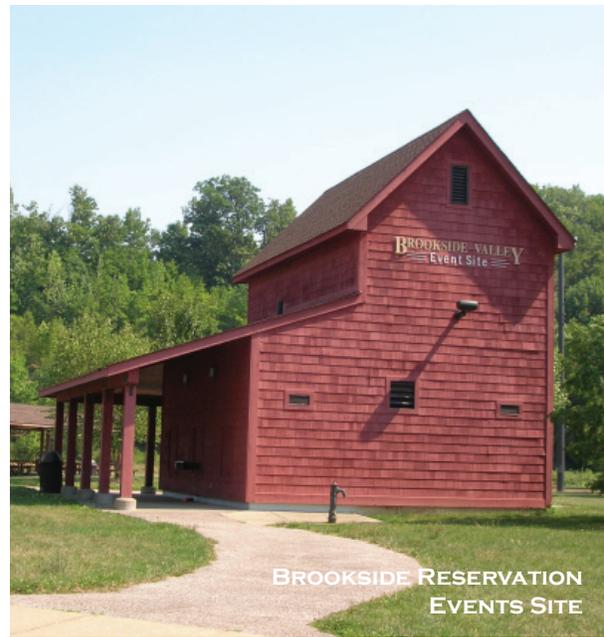
HARMODY PARK



TREADWAY CREEK TRAIL

## Valley Trail Description

The Valley trail connects both Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods to the Zoo and the Towpath trail. It makes use of the existing Brookside Reservation trail for part of that distance like the Upland Route but strikes out over the Valley floor for most of its length. It too begins at the west at an underpass of the Ridge Road bridge over the Big Creek Valley. From this proposed underpass the trail connects with the Brookside Trail at John Nagy Boulevard. It follows the existing trail all the way into the Valley and Brookside Reservation's ballfield complex. The trail is planned to continue parallel to the park road past the ballfields to a proposed switch back trail that provides an accessible route out of the valley to the existing overlook trail in Brookside Reservation. At the base of the switch back the trail connects with the proposed trail spur that connects the northern end of the Fulton Road bridge and Brooklyn Centre with the Valley. That spur takes advantage of the existing underpass of





BROOKSIDE RESERVATION PICNIC AREA



BROOKSIDE RESERVATION CONNECTION  
FOR BOTH UPLAND & VALLEY ROUTES



EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTOR TO  
BROOKSIDE RESERVATION & ZOO

the rail lines in that area.

The trail continues from the overlook along the existing Brookside trail to the Meadow Ridge picnic area. Like the Upland route, the trail continues to follow the existing trail parallel to Park Drive and Fulton Parkway to Wildlife Way. The trail continues to follow the existing trail parallel to Wildlife Way to the Zoo entrance. Just beyond that entrance the trail is proposed to divert from the Brookside Trail and continue parallel to the Zoo's easterly parking lot. The trail passes under the Pearl Road bridge at the location of a reconfigured Zoo composting facility.

While the Upland Trail is proposed to climb the old Pearl Road grade to the Old Brooklyn commercial district on the east side of the Pearl Road bridge, the Valley trail crosses over the paired rail tracks and Big Creek on a pedestrian bridge and lands on the hillside of Calgary Park. The bridge offers the Valley trail the opportunity to make an accessible connection to the park and the Brooklyn Centre neighborhood through a spur route that includes a switch back up the valley wall. From that spur the proposed trail drops into the Valley at the Lustig Trust property, currently subleased to PB Express as a long-haul truck container storage yard. The plan calls for eventual change in the land use here as described in the *Land Use* section of this report.



The trail is proposed to be a key element of the new use of this property. A greenbelt is formed against the rail tracks within the floodplain limits here and the trail is proposed to be contained within the greenbelt as it continues east to West 14th Street.

The West 14th Street public crossing of the rail corridor provides an opportunity for the trail to cross the tracks at grade and continue parallel to the street as a widened sidewalk to its intersection with Harvard Avenue and Jennings Road. The trail here is proposed as a part of the street improvement that also would include streetscape enhancement such as street trees and decorative paving. The Valley trail crosses Jennings at a signaled crosswalk, joining the Upland Trail and continuing parallel to the south side of Harvard Avenue. Similar improvements are planned as suggested for West 14th Street.

The trail crosses Harvard Avenue at a crosswalk just beyond the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway crossing of Harvard and enters the property commonly known as the Harshaw Chemical site. As previously mentioned in the Upland Route description, this site is planned to be remediated and reused as a mixed use development site for the Harvard Avenue Station of the Scenic Railway and other uses. The site would also become part

of an extensive greenbelt proposed to be restored along Big Creek and the Cuyahoga River. The trail passes through the property to its connection with the Towpath Trail on the west bank of the river.

