



*An initiative of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
in partnership with the City of Pittsfield*

Pittsfield Action Plan (West Branch of the Housatonic River)

The spring 2007 UrbanRiver Visions charrette resulted in both Vision and Action Plans. This Action Plan identifies first steps toward implementing the Vision Plan, available at www.UrbanRiverVisions2.org. A summary of the vision is included below.

The West Branch of the Housatonic is a hidden asset, even to those who live in Pittsfield's Westside. The River provides a beautiful natural environment in the heart of the city – a place to walk beside, to enjoy from a canoe, or from which to see the local wildlife that also live within the community. Working together, Westside residents can share in making the River a safer, healthier, more attractive place for all to enjoy.

A Westside Riverway of trails, parks, and more will provide new and inviting opportunities for local residents to enjoy the River that winds through the neighborhood. New on- and off-street biking and walking paths will make the River a more visible, more accessible part of the community. Small parks created on now-vacant riverside land will transform neglected spaces into community assets – places where neighborhood residents can come to picnic, play, and learn about the ecology and history of their River. A focused clean-up effort will improve water quality, strengthening the River as community asset. Extending from Wahconah Park to Clapp Park, the Westside Riverway will help the “hidden river” become a treasured place at the center of the community.

Urban River Visions 2
Pittsfield Action Plan
(West Branch of the Housatonic River)
June 2007

On May 11 & 12, 2007, local residents, activists, and community leaders came together to create a new vision for the West Branch of the Housatonic River, its riverfront, and surrounding areas. The following is an outline of initial actions to begin making this vision a reality. But this document should only serve as a starting point. The Action Plan – a list of “next steps” for moving the vision forward – will need to evolve. You’ll need to keep tackling tough questions (What comes next? How will we make this happen? Who will do what?) with the same energy and enthusiasm that made the visioning event such a success.

1. *Share the vision for a Westside Riverway from Wahconah Park to Clapp Park.*
 - Consider expanding the ad hoc steering committee into an advisory committee with members representing the Cultural Council, the Youth Commission, the business community, the Housatonic Valley Association, and the Berkshire Natural Resources Council.
 - Work with the Cultural Council to help form a committee that can begin planning the first annual “Riverfest.” Combine entertainment with river education and community outreach; consider a river theme for this year’s street art exhibition.
 - Work with the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) and local schools such as Berkshire Community College to develop a pamphlet describing the proposed Riverway, showing trails, bikeways, parks, and river access points.
 - Work with the Westside Neighborhood Initiative and the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) to print and distribute the pamphlet to residents. Explore opportunities to work with local vocational and technical schools.
 - Seek grants to develop interpretive signs for key parks and river crossings. Consider working with the Chamber of Commerce to hold a Westside Riverway logo design competition. Look for opportunities to celebrate local history.
 - Support the Housatonic River Museum as an educational resource for the Westside Community and a center of river related activities.
 - Work with the City recreation department, the HVA, Mass Audubon, and the Housatonic River Museum to provide informational canoe and kayak trips for community residents.

Timeframe: 0-2 years
Lead Party: City of Pittsfield
Potential Funding: TBD

2. *Develop a plan to begin improvements to the Westside Riverway.*

- Secure funding for repair and construction of pedestrian bridges.
- Encourage future ADA improvements in Pitt Park to enable river viewing and fishing.
- Build a wildlife viewing tower and platform at Carrie Bak Park looking into wetlands at the old King Street Landfill area.
- Work with the City to pursue pedestrian and streetscape improvements on important east-west connections to the Riverway, such as along Bradford Street and Union Street as well as along “Restaurant Row” near Wahconah Park and at the future Housatonic River Museum to be located near the entrance of the Park.
- Work with the Cultural Council to explore feasibility of Riverway murals on a building in the Westside neighborhood and develop a teen project to make the mural.

Timeframe: 0-2 years

Lead Party: City of Pittsfield Community Development, HVA, DPW, Cultural Council

Potential Funding: TBD

3. *Restore the river.*

- Take advantage of the Clean Rivers Program funding – to which the City has access - to help the City remove debris and selected fallen trees from the river.
- Secure funding from City and/or other sources, such as DCR’s ReLeaf program, to plant trees in parks and backyards along the river.
- Work with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection on their site assessment / evaluation of clean-up alternatives for the King Street Dump
- Work with the MA Riverways Program, DPW, and the City Parks Department to generate support for next steps (sediment studies, etc.) leading to the removal of the Mill Street Dam.
- Work with Trout Unlimited, the HVA, and others to monitor the temperature of the river in order to verify feasibility of creating a cold water pool at Columbus Street. Follow up with Fisheries and Game to pursue next steps in restoring fisheries habitat.
- Distribute the HVA informational pamphlet for homeowners describing what property owners and tenants can do to protect the river (for instance, use of native plants in maintaining riverbanks to control erosion and prevent stormwater run-off).
- Support HVA and DPW’s ongoing efforts to monitor water quality, identify sources of pollution, and implement remediation.

Timeframe: 0-2 years

Lead Party: City of Pittsfield

Potential Funding: Clean Rivers Program; ReLeaf

4. *Reduce impacts of stormwater runoff from nearby streets and parking lots.*
- Investigate Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Funding or Section 604b Grants – as well as possible federal funding sources - for water quality management planning.
 - Integrate stormwater best management practices into streetscape improvements and new developments on streets near the river. (Explore low-impact approaches to development and bylaws used in other communities to manage stormwater in environmentally sensitive ways.)
 - Initiate efforts to provide a pedestrian trail to the West Branch from the Conte Community School by showing the path of the tributary (Taconte Creek) running underground through the neighborhood; include nature trails, informational exhibits, good stormwater management, storm drain stenciling, and a pool habitat for fish at the undeveloped parcel at the Columbus Avenue Bridge.
 - Prioritize Department of Public Works' efforts to sweep streets and clean out catch basins in areas near the river.
 - Encourage the “greening” of the West Street and Hurlbut Street area (near the Clocktower and Berkshire Eagle buildings) as part of the effort to reduce impervious surfaces and promote best management practices in treatment of stormwater.

Timeframe: 0-2 years

Lead Party: City of Pittsfield

Potential Funding: Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant; Section 604b Water Quality Management Planning Grants; Greenways & Trails Demonstration Project Grants, federal funds

5. *Continue to identify and prioritize key parcels along the river for future public use as neighborhood parks, foot paths, bikeways, trail connections, and river access, or for wildlife habitat areas.*
- Coordinate planning with City departments to extend the future Riverway south to Wild Acres, east to South Street and north beyond Wahconah Park.
 - Work with HVA to assess the suitability of stretches of the river for recreational use; confirm the best sites for canoe and kayak access, including nearby parking.
 - Form a committee to continue planning for off-street trails and to explore potential acquisition of Tax Title and certain other properties for public use. Possibilities include (as shown on Vision Plan):
 - Land adjacent to Wahconah Park

- Tax Title properties along the river between Linden Street and West Street
- Tax Title property on Harris Street along the river near Clapp Park
- Tax Title properties at the end of Fern Street and next to the Boylston Street bridge

Timeframe: 0-2 years
Lead Party: City of Pittsfield
Potential Funding: N/A

6. *Work with interested landowners to explore possible trail connections across private land.*

- Explore with landowners near the Mill Street Dam a possible “trail” connection between two empty City-owned parcels along the east side of Mill Street.
- Talk with landowners on Harris Street to explore a possible “trail” connection along the river.
- In the event of site redevelopment, seek to acquire a trail easement along the river on the East Mill Street brownfield site.
- As an alternative to City acquisition of private property near Wahconah Park, seek a trail easement along the edge of the property adjacent to the King Street Landfill (as shown in Vision Plan).
- Consider providing incentives such as tree planting or tax relief to landowners who provide strategic easements.

Timeframe: 0-2 years
Lead Party: City of Pittsfield
Potential Funding: N/A

Action Plan Summary Table*

Action	Time-frame	Lead Party	Potential Funding
1. <i>Share the vision for a Westside Riverway from Wahconah Park to Clapp Park.</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield	TBD
2. <i>Develop a plan to begin improvements to the Westside Riverway.</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield Community Development, HVA, DPW, Cultural Council	TBD
3. <i>Restore the river</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield	Clean Rivers Program; ReLeaf
4. <i>Reduce impacts of stormwater runoff from nearby streets and parking lots.</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield	Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant; Section 604b Water Quality Management Planning Grants; Greenways & Trails Demonstration Grant
5. <i>Continue to identify and prioritize key parcels along the river for future public use as neighborhood parks, foot paths, bikeways, trail connections, and river access, or for wildlife habitat areas.</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield	N/A
6. <i>Work with interested landowners to explore possible trail connections across private land.</i>	0-2 years	City of Pittsfield	N/A

* This table summarizes first steps to making the UrbanRiver Visions 2 Vision Plan a reality. It is not exhaustive and is intended to evolve over time, reflecting changing priorities, funding possibilities, and the availability of resources.