

Extending Monocacy Way northwest (Reprinted from March 27, 2019)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Serious Issues, Walkability and Bikeability May 19, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on Walkability and Bikeability* 

Brian Nicas reminded us of the value of this rail trail the night the candidates visited the Environmental Advisory Council and remembered that John Marquette had posted on it in 2019.

Gadfly has wanted to walk the trail and report on it but just never got around to it, but he calls attention to it here as he goes out the door hoping to keep the idea alive.

Brian notes that this trail can be found in the 2015 **BETH CONNECTS: A Trail Study for the Bethlehem Area (p. 25)**, which, by the way, is a very interesting document — reminding us how rich we are in actual and potential natural resources.

John Marquette is a retired librarian/archivist, author, historian, and a resident of Bethlehem. His current project is focused on the restoration of the interior of the Archibald Johnston Mansion in Housenick Park.

Gadfly –

WEST BETHLEHEM RAIL TRAIL - MONOCACY WAY to ALLENTOWN (Proposed)

Surface:	Existing railroad right-of-way and railroad ballast
Widths:	10-12' with vegetation overgrowth
ADA:	Trailway could be ADA compliant on existing slopes
Safety:	This is an abandoned railroad corridor adjacent to businesses and neighborhoods. There are road crossings that would have to be navigated.
Parking & Access:	This property is still owned by the railroad. Land acquisition will be the first step. Parking could be provided in an existing business lot.



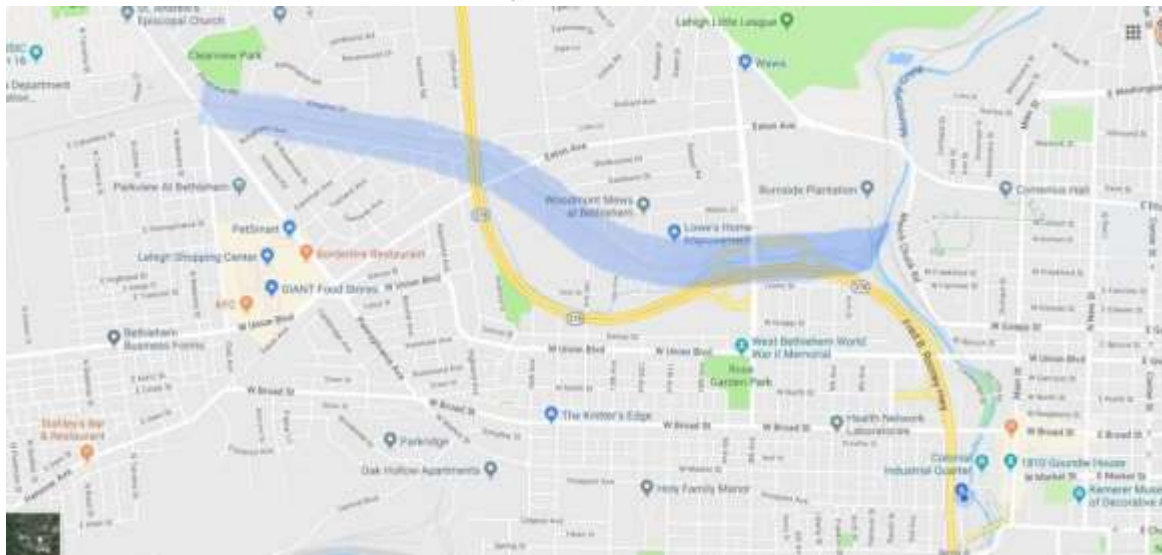
Future West Bethlehem Rail Trail from Monocacy Way to Bethlehem /RT 378 overpass



Future West Bethlehem Rail Trail from Bethlehem/RT 378 overpass to Allentown



Existing RT 378 overpass



The old Lehigh and New England Railroad tracks branching off of Monocacy Way could be the next expansion of the Bethlehem trail system. It could connect Pennsylvania Avenue (think Queen's Nutritional Products) to Burnside Plantation and on to the Colonial Historical District and the D&L towpath trail.



Many readers will recognize this portion of the trail at Monocacy Way, Union Boulevard, and the Route 378 north onramp.



About a quarter-mile north, we see the branch of the old Lehigh and New England's Allentown line head off to the west. For reference, the dog is facing east. Burnside is visible through the trees.



As the track condition shows, the line is not active. It no longer serves the old Durkee's plant and never served the Lowe's. It passes under the Eighth Avenue overpass and roughly follows the (seasonal) west branch of Monocacy Creek.

Action steps Lehigh County and the City of Bethlehem would need to take would be to have Norfolk Southern formally abandon the line and transfer possession to the same entity owning Monocacy Way. The parks department and streets bureau would need to determine access points along the new trail. Selecting property for the access points, noting that they'd need to be ADA accessible, would be the most expensive part of converting the rail line to public access.

While public focus is now on the pedestrian bridge, this stretch of land offers residents of northwest Bethlehem new and grade-free access to the heart of the city. Norfolk Southern has a foundation offering grants which might pay for some or all of the rail-to-trail conversion.

I've seen early plans from the 1970s when the American Parkway was being planned showing it following this line to a major interchange with Route 378 at Eighth Avenue. That will never happen. This could.

John