



A Phoenix Rises in Yorklyn: Reclaiming a Delaware Mill Town

YORKLYN – tucked in the hills in the northwest corner of the state – resembles a ghost town of abandoned mill buildings. Once a thriving industrial center, the last mill closed its doors in 2008. Town residents witnessed mills come and go over centuries, beginning with grist and snuff mills

in the 1700s and 1800s, and ending with the production of vulcanized fibre by the former National Vulcanized Fibre Corporation (NVF) in the 2000s. Now, after a public-private partnership has been established to map out the future of the town, plans are underway to transform Yorklyn into a vibrant, lively and scenic

centerpiece while still retaining its mill town roots.

The partnership, between the state and private developers, is beneficial to the public for two reasons. The contaminated and flood plain sections of the NVF site were going to be abandoned to the state after NVF declared bankruptcy in 2008, making the state responsible for cleanup and demolition costs while all of the desirable property would have been sold off to developers. Some of the land that is currently open space could have easily been converted into housing developments or strip malls.

The second public benefit is that the Auburn Heights Preserve, owned and managed by DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation, borders much of the former NVF property. This state park site was created through a generous donation by Tom and Ruth Marshall in 2008, whose family has had a presence in Yorklyn since 1889. In fact, the family owned the paper company that would eventually become NVF.

The goal of the public/private partnership is to reclaim the former mill

BY DANIEL CITRON



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The No. 1 Fibre Mill (c. 1904) was the first major expansion for the company that would eventually become the National Vulcanized Fibre Corporation (NVF). The roof collapse occurred shortly after the company declared bankruptcy in 2008. Auburn Village LLC is working to save the buildings as part of the Auburn Valley Master Plan. The Railroad crossing in front of the structure is a part of the Wilmington & Western Railroad, another community partner in the project.



The Auburn Mills Historic District as seen from the front of the Auburn Heights mansion in 2009, a few months after the Marshalls donated the property on top of the hill. The Auburn Mill, at the top of the photo, was not a part of the property when this picture was taken. This property is the core of Auburn Heights Preserve, and where all of the programs and events currently take place.

town by cleaning up contaminated areas, restoring floodplains and expanding on recreational, educational, shopping and dining opportunities. Currently there are virtually no places to shop, and nowhere to go out for a meal in Yorklyn. Not only does the new plan call for this to change, but a trail system will connect these new commercial sites with historic and natural areas in addition to connecting to existing attractions like the Marshall Steam Museum and Delaware Nature Society.

The new development will not come



Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Auburn Mills Historic District is shown here in 1958. This historic district is a combination of buildings that were either purchased or built by the Marshall family as part of Marshall Bros. Paper, the company that evolved into NVF. The Auburn Heights mansion is in the upper right corner. To the left of the mansion are the carriage house and Marshall Steam Museum, the home of the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve and its collection of operating steam automobiles. The Auburn Mill, now owned by Delaware State Parks, is across the bottom, with the Red Clay Creek alongside.

at the cost of open space and natural vistas; the plan is designed to create responsible, managed growth that will ultimately have less of an environmental impact than the current derelict mill buildings. This is why the new plan, the Auburn Valley Master Plan, was created by the partnership of private developers, neighboring organizations, and

several divisions of DNREC, including the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances' Site Investigation and Restoration Section, and the Division of Water.

A partnership to preserve the land
Following NVF's bankruptcy in 2008, many developers were interested in the

property, looking to build strip malls, office complexes and houses. Since the flood plain and contaminated land were going to be abandoned to the state, DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation began working with some of the local developers, CCS Investors and Auburn Village, LLC, that were interested in the land. As local companies, they were seeking responsible growth and wanted to preserve the mill town character of Yorklyn.

Working together, a purchase plan was developed utilizing federal flood remediation grant money, and state and private funds to purchase the bulk of the former NVF property in Yorklyn. Following court approval, parcels were purchased and ownership transferred to either the state or the developers, depending on the parcel. While this was happening, the Auburn Valley Master Plan was in development to make sure the partnership would continue.

Flooding problems addressed

Today, much of the former NVF property is preserved land. The Auburn Heights Preserve now stands at nearly 240 acres, with an additional 160 acres of privately owned land under conservation easements adjacent to the state property. With this addition of former NVF land, the state now owns the entirety of the Auburn Mills Historic District.

As a result of the state's oversight of the newly acquired NVF site, flooding problems will be addressed. Most of the floodplain that stretches through the former NVF property will be restored to its natural state by removing impervious surfaces and regrading and replanting areas as appropriate. While this will not erase the Red Clay Creek's flooding problems, especially in a 500-year flood event like the one in 2003 that severely damaged the NVF facility, it will lessen the effects of flooding by absorbing more of the water and creating basins for it to gather in, as opposed to rushing downstream.

Remediation

Flooding isn't the only issue of concern. Chemical contamination at the property

is also addressed in the Auburn Valley Master Plan, which includes remediation measures to clean up the mill site. This has brought another partnership opportunity – this one within DNREC.

DNREC's Site Investigation and Restoration Section took the lead on remediation efforts. SIRS staff already knew about contamination at the site, and worked with Delaware State Parks and DNREC's Division of Water to complete the remediation.

Without all of these partnerships, the contaminated property, most of which is in the floodplain, would have been simply left to the state. While the cleanup costs may be the same, the development around the remediation will be done in tandem and all at once, so there will

be no delays. With this land preserved, recreational and economic opportunities also called for in the master plan can be realized more quickly.

Re-envisioning

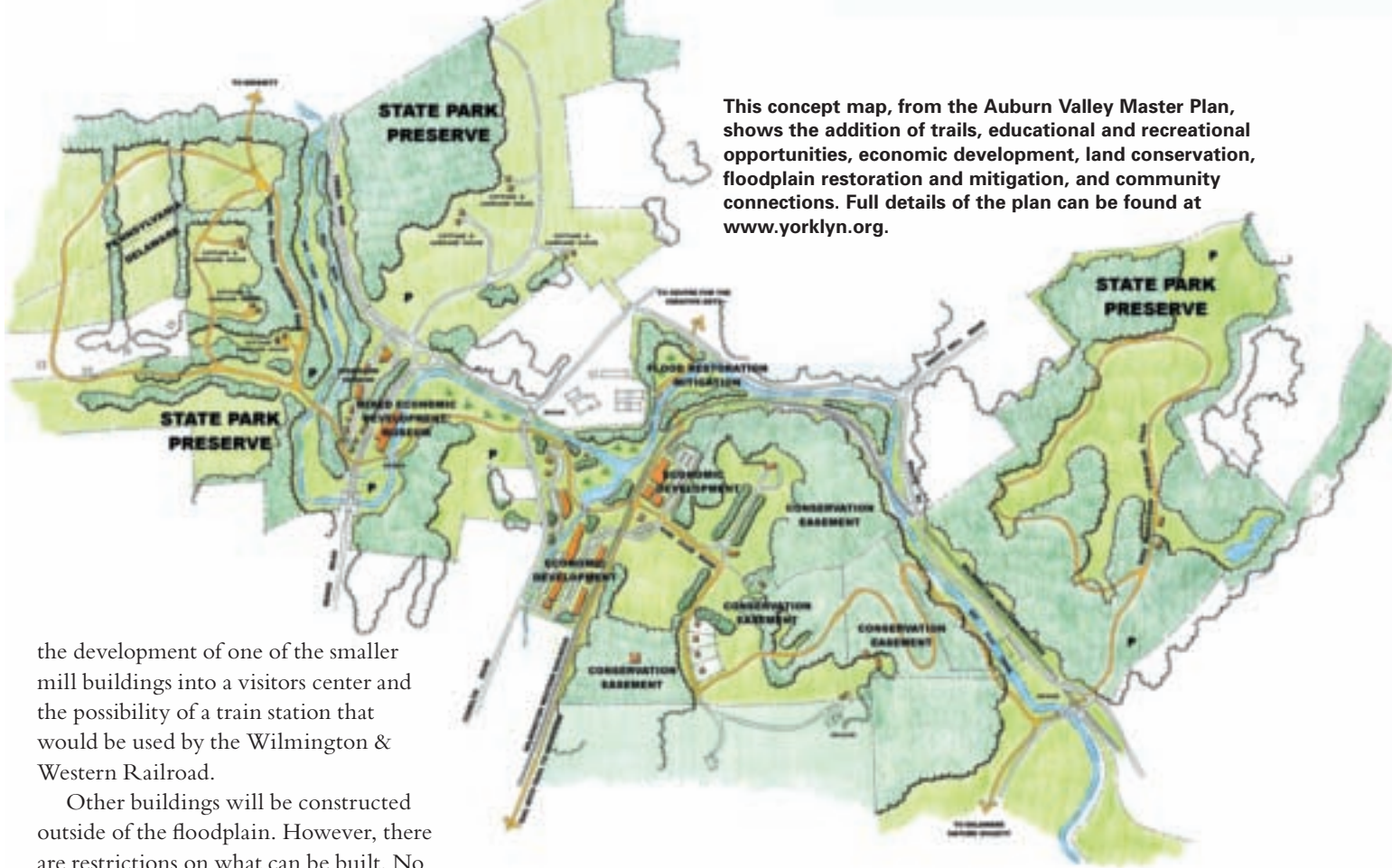
Revitalizing the abandoned mill site is a key element of the master plan. The crumbling buildings with overgrown weeds will be replaced with a mix of restored and new structures that have appropriate facades. In addition, no new buildings will be constructed in the flood-prone area.

The buildings that remain from the main NVF mill site will be redesigned for mixed uses to include retail, restaurants and housing. Historical and natural interpretation of the site will be aided by



Photos of the NVF Corporate Headquarters before and during the demolition. This building, originally built as a rag warehouse in 1935, is the first phase of demolition and remediation of the floodplain along the Red Clay Creek.

MIKE CIOSEK



This concept map, from the Auburn Valley Master Plan, shows the addition of trails, educational and recreational opportunities, economic development, land conservation, floodplain restoration and mitigation, and community connections. Full details of the plan can be found at www.yorklyn.org.

the development of one of the smaller mill buildings into a visitors center and the possibility of a train station that would be used by the Wilmington & Western Railroad.

Other buildings will be constructed outside of the floodplain. However, there are restrictions on what can be built. No new building can be built higher than any current mill structure, effectively limiting new construction to three stories. New buildings must also integrate into the mill building architecture, thus eliminating concern about too modern-looking redevelopment projects in the area. Overall, fewer buildings and more permeable surfaces will allow for more open space and better drainage of the site.

Museums and Trails

The Auburn Valley Master plan also calls for the transformation of The Auburn Mill, also known as the Marshall Bros. Paper Mill, along Bengé Road, into a museum that focuses on how paper is made, the history of the mill site and the Yorklyn region. The second floor of the mill will be leased out, and could become anything from offices to apartments.

All of the various sections of the new and redeveloped areas will link up with a number of proposed trails. The trails will become a network with an approximately six-mile loop connecting Auburn Heights, the Auburn Mill, the main NVF mills along Yorklyn Road and Oversee Farm – a 120.5-acre preserve owned by Delaware State Parks.

Under the plan, this loop trail will pass through private land that is preserved via conservation easements. The loop trail would also have connections that lead to Delaware Nature Society's Ashland Na-

ture Center, the Center for the Creative Arts in Yorklyn and preserved land in Pennsylvania owned by The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County.

Other spurs are also under consider-

Steamin' Days

Currently, The Auburn Heights Mansion and Marshall Steam Museum are open for tours during Steamin' Days events and by appointment for groups of eight or more. In addition to tours, visitors to Steamin' Days can also enjoy rides in antique Stanley Steamers and hop on the Auburn Valley Railroad, a 1/8-size passenger line that circles the estate property. The remaining 2011 event dates are:

Steamin' Days, noon-4 pm

Saturday & Sunday, Oct. 22 & 23
Friday & Saturday, Nov. 25 & 26

For more information on any of the events, or to schedule a private tour of the mansion and/or museum, please call the Auburn Heights Preserve office at 302-239-5687. For more information on the car collection, please visit www.AuburnHeights.org.



Anne Cleary, of the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve, tends to the fire in locomotive No. 401 of the 1/8-size Auburn Valley Railroad. The two trains of the miniature line carry passengers around the Auburn Heights estate during Steamin' Days in the spring, summer, and fall.



MIKE CIOSEK

Dan Citron explains some of the details of the Auburn Valley Master Plan to local residents during a public open house on April 14, 2011 at the Center for the Creative Arts in Yorklyn. The crowd at the meeting surpassed expectations, and the majority of comments about the plan were positive.

ation that would connect the loop trail to other properties and into Hockessin. While many park trails are open to pedestrians and bicyclists, the loop trail will also be open for equestrian uses and as a route for antique cars – mainly a group of antique steam cars housed in the Marshall Steam Museum, the largest collection of operating steam cars in the world.

Moving Toward the Future

Not all of the ideas that are part of the Auburn Valley Master Plan are finalized, but work is moving forward. Asbestos abatement and demolition of the NVF corporate headquarters building along Yorklyn Road is complete.

The first section of trails, leading from the building that will become the park office along Bengé Road to the Pennsylvania line, are being laid out. Planning is slated to be completed by fall, with trail construction beginning in the winter. If all goes according to plan, and the weather cooperates, the first loop of the trail network will be opening in the late spring of 2012.

This ambitious project, the Auburn Valley Master Plan, is designed to be used as a model for adaptive reuse, historic



Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve volunteer Bill Rule (left) speaks with a visitor during a Steamin' Day event in front of the Marshall Steam Museum. The 1908 Stanley model H5 is part of the world's largest collection of operating steam cars. The car was outside of the museum as part of a "Firin' Up" demonstration that shows visitors how to start the fire, build steam pressure, and start to drive a Stanley.

preservation and responsible growth. Energy efficient construction and materials will be used. Solar and water power will be utilized to generate renewable energy.

Instead of a derelict, contaminated, oft-flooded and abandoned industrial site, the community and visitors to Yorklyn will have new recreational and educational opportunities, shops, restaurants and a greater opportunity to learn about the cultural and natural resources of the area. **OD**

DANIEL CITRON IS HISTORIC SITE MANAGER AT THE AUBURN HEIGHTS PRESERVE.

TO VIEW THE MOST UP-TO-DATE PLANS AND PROGRESS, VISIT WWW.YORKLYN.ORG.

NVF Update

IN OCTOBER THE DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION WILL KICK OFF THE SECOND PHASE OF THE NVF RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT. THIS WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THE COMPLETION OF THE DEMOLITION PROJECT FOR THE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS AND ZINC TREATMENT FACILITY ON THE NORTH SIDE OF YORKLYN ROAD. IT ALSO MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE DEMOLITION PROJECT FOR THE MAIN PLANT ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF YORKLYN ROAD. THE DEMOLITION PROJECT WILL MAKE WAY FOR THE UNIQUE REDEVELOPMENT SITE THAT WILL INCLUDE HISTORIC BUILDINGS, WETLANDS, FLOOD MITIGATION AREAS AND MULTIUSE TRAILS.

