

Print this Page

[<--back to story](#)

## Floating an idea

• Development of Ohio River shoreline eyed

By MICHAEL SCHULER, Times Leader Staff Writer

POSTED: August 5, 2008

MEMBERS OF the Ohio Valley Riverfront Development Committee joined local officials for a tour of the Ohio River, Monday afternoon, boarding the "Wild Wild West" at Wheeling Island for a first-hand look of Belmont County's eastern shoreline, from a river perspective.

The committee has been working with riverfront communities to turn the Ohio River into a viable point of business, recreation and entertainment, that will center around a health and cultural trail stretching the entire length of Belmont County's river shoreline.

"What we are trying to do today is get everyone on board with our master plan of getting this wellness path along this waterfront," said Danny Popp, chairman of the Ohio Riverfront Development Committee. "We've been giving this presentation for almost two years now and asking the various communities to put together their advisory committees to figure out where they want the path to go. Now, we want everyone to get on the same page and start looking at this from a regional approach a county approach so we are all working together to achieve a common goal."

After leaving the back channel of the Ohio River, the boat traveled south to just past the Moundsville Bridge, while members of the committee, explained some of what they hope could be accomplished by getting the communities to work together.

Popp said he would like to see each community develop its own unique identity to attract tourism and provide residents with recreational opportunities.

Some of Popp's suggestions were for Martins Ferry to focus on its history as Ohio's first settlement and its Civil War Cemetery.

For Bridgeport, he said the village could capitalize on the success of Wheeling Island's casino by developing theaters and restaurants.

Bellaire could create recreational facilities that focus on its reputation for producing professional football players and as the All-American Town.

For Shadyside, Popp said the village could focus on its reputation as a "bedroom community."

"The first thing we want to do is get this pathway done," Popp said. "Part of our goal is trying to attract some new business and industry back here. One of the first things people look at is the quality of life. Biking and exercise is a big deal and we have nothing like that on the Ohio side of the river.

"People who live here and grew up here sometimes forget the value and the beauty of the Ohio River. We've got a great recreational facility here that we don't utilize to the fullest."

Members of the committee also said the potential of the trail, along with riverfront development, could benefit other aspects of life in Belmont County, including education, recreation and even farming.

Susan West, who is on both the riverfront development committee and the Ohio Valley Farmers' Market, said that the Farmers' Market move to Bellaire has attracted customers from West Virginia. It has also seen an increase in customers because of its visibility from Ohio 7.

An increase in tourism and recreation along the riverfront could benefit farmers, West said, because it allows them to keep more of the money they earn by selling directly to consumers, while consumers benefit from buying locally grown produce and other products.

The Ohio Valley could see an increase in other agricultural products, even locally made cheeses, if farmers know they will be able to have a base to sell their products.

Nationally, there has been an increase in farmers' markets as consumers look to buy more organic and locally grown foods, West said.

### Article Photos



PLANS TO create a health and culture trail along Belmont County's riverfront took a step forward Monday after the Ohio Riverfront Development Committee held a boat tour of the county's eastern shore. Plans call for the riverfront communities to work together to create opportunities that utilize the river to attract business and tourism, while also providing more recreation and entertainment for Ohio Valley residents. Pictured here are Ohio Sen. Jason Wilson and Belmont County Port Authority Director Larry Merry, who is discussing some of the potentials for riverfront development

Arts and cultural developments could also benefit the county that could attract business and industry who are looking to relocate, but also want to have recreational opportunities for employees, said Jerry Narsici, who is also on the board of directors.

Another educational opportunity that is available along the riverfront is in Monroe County. Mike Willis, director of Broken Timber Outdoor Education Center at the site of the former Ormet facility which promotes outdoor activities, such as camping, for kids, teens, all the way up to senior citizens, said the outdoor center includes a library where people can learn about activities as well as demonstrations on how to tie fishing flies, make lures and water safety are taught and seminars on hunting.

He is also working on creating an Olympic rifle training facility at the site.

During the boat tour, members of the committee, along with local and state officials also pointed out some of the riverfront points where development could take place.

Recreational facilities, such as boat launches, were mentioned. The possibility of increasing barge shipping was another highlight of the project.

Another possible project would be to build condominiums on the riverfront, with boat launches.

Larry Merry, Belmont County Port Authority director, said the county is looking at different avenues to help move the project forward.

"The thing that this effort has done has put all of the riverfront communities together in one effort and one cause," Merry said. "Many of the small towns along the river can't do it by themselves. Combining efforts is a great idea and the county can assist and try to find those monies for these projects. The river needs to be enjoyed; not only for the prospect of jobs, but also recreation . . . The Ohio River is probably one of the greatest natural resources that is in several states for recreation and transportation."

According to Ohio Sen. Jason Wilson, right now there is also a great deal of interest in the potential uses of the closed U.S. Army Reserve facility in Bellaire.

"Today is a start," Wilson said. "A lot of good can come to our area and we have a lot of good people working on a common goal. I think the river is by far our greatest natural asset and what we can tap into that asset. There are so many attributes - coal, and steel are the obvious, but the less obvious are quality of life issues education; the arts. We need to focus on the positives . . . and today was a beginning to focus on these attributes."

Wilson, along with U.S. Rep. Charlie Wilson and Ohio Rep. John Domenick, said the riverfront development committee's work could get a boost from the \$1.7 billion Ohio stimulus package.

"I am impressed with the number of people who have shown an interest," Domenick said. "Now we need to work together with the talented people on this boat and with the involvement of government, we can make a lot of things happen on the riverfront. That's part of our future and with the stimulus package going into play, we'll hopefully be able to use some of those dollars to make this happen."

According to Charlie Wilson, the river tour was an opportunity to share ideas that can benefit both Ohio and West Virginia.

"I know on the federal level we are pushing for job creation, everywhere we can and Gov. (Ted) Strickland has really made an issue of it," he said. "I like the sharing ideas and if we start planning now, with this stimulus package that is available in Ohio, I think we can do much."

Wilson also said that the recently passed farm bill will help the Ohio Valley, and that in the future, federal funds could be made available for some of the riverfront development projects.

Schuler can be reached at [shoe@timesleaderonline.com](mailto:shoe@timesleaderonline.com)

[Subscribe to Times Leader](#)