

www.stltoday.com

Five Questions with Susan Trautman

BY TIM BRYANT • tbryant@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8206 | Posted: Friday, August 12, 2011 12:10 am

Susan Trautman is quick to point out reports and articles that describe the benefits of recreational trails as drivers of private development and revitalization of neglected areas. Examples: A University of Massachusetts study that found bicycle infrastructure projects produce 11.4 jobs for every \$1 million invested, compared with 7.8 jobs for road-only projects. A Landscape Architecture magazine article about a greenway that transformed a gritty river area in New York.

Trautman is only the second leader of Great Rivers Greenway. Last year, she succeeded David Fisher, who was the district's first executive director when the sales-tax-aided agency formed in 2001.

Before joining Great Rivers, Trautman worked as parks director in Des Peres, where she helped lead the effort to build the Lodge at Des Peres, the municipality's community center. Previous positions included management jobs for the city of Clayton. Right out of college, she helped allocate federal land and water funds for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Great Rivers' biggest project is The River Ring, a web of greenways, parks and trails that will reach from St. Louis and St. Louis County into Metro East and St. Charles County. Trautman says biking gives her mind-clearing time to think about ways to do her job better.

What are the direct economic development benefits of greenways and recreational trails?

You can build a trail, but it's the connectivity of the trail from community to community or neighborhood to neighborhood that provides you the real economic benefit. Giving people the opportunity to move from community to community creates spaces where businesses, residential developers, transportation all can happen.

What are some examples that have resulted from development of greenways?

In St. Charles County, at Barat Haven, we've got the housing development. The houses on the trail are the houses that sold at the highest price and sold the fastest.

Along Grant's Trail, you've seen the redevelopment of the Sappington House, apartment complexes, businesses that now advertise along the trail or have provided parking along the trail to draw people into the businesses.

Another example is at Missouri Research Park, where we've got the connectivity. Our Duckett Creek Trail connects into the Katy Trail. You've got Novus International, which has expanded its campus to include trails that will eventually connect into ours.

How do you compare the public attitude toward trail development now, especially the attitudes of adjoining property owners, with the hostility against the Katy Trail when it was proposed in the 1980s?

What we've seen over time with the River Ring is that cities that have built greenways and trails have become more popular. There is this energy, or flywheel effect, of a greenway that once we've built it, more and more people want it.

Like years ago, when there was opposition to the Katy, we still find occasional opposition, but it has changed substantially in the 10-year period that the district has been in effect. In the early years, people didn't really understand what we were doing.

What I find really great now is that when I go to a meeting, I find that people, particularly mayors, ask me when they are getting their trails. That's something that would have never happened in the past.

Do greenways promote new connections among the region's natural features, such as rivers, and economic development?

All of our greenways are built within the region's natural features, primarily in the watersheds. But the real connectivity comes from people embracing the greenway from its natural features in terms of the habitat around them and connecting those pieces to our urban environment, where we've got economic vitality and where we can enhance it.

The real power of it is people moving from one community to another, creating more economic vitality that stimulates growth.

Where do you see the district in five years and in 10 years?

First, it's going to be really important to promote and engage people in the district. So we'll be focusing on getting people actively involved in a myriad of ways, whether that's transportation or health, promoting good fitness or connecting people to nature.

Over time, what we're really going to be looking at is the way the district can use its property for public benefit and long-term stewardship. An example might be using a percentage of our land for private development and using the income from that to support the long-term maintenance of the district, which in itself will lend viability to the neighborhoods that we're in and give people a greater chance to interact and strengthen the communities.

That's a long-term approach that provides us with additional revenue streams because the sales tax alone won't support us over time. I want to make sure that the district lasts into perpetuity.