



Janice Fritz loves walking the 1.7 mile Pop Warner Rail Trail near the old Springville Depot in Springville. The trail will be part of a 27-mile trail stretching from Orchard Park to Ashford. (Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News)

27-mile trail on old rail line will link communities from Orchard Park to Ashford

By [Barbara O'Brien](#) | Published August 16, 2018 | Updated August 16, 2018

A nonprofit group and the Buffalo Pittsburgh Railroad have signed a 49-year agreement that allows the construction of a 27-mile trail along an old rail line from Orchard Park to Ashford, showcasing some of the most spectacular scenery in Western New York.

With five additional 10-year options, the agreement essentially is a 100-year lease, said Deb Fenn, president of the Erie Cattaraugus Rail Trail group.

The next step is planning how each section could be used, from hiking, bicycling and cross-country skiing to horseback riding or snowmobiling.

"We really have to meet with residents along the corridor to see what their vision is," she said.

The trail links two counties, five towns, two villages and one hamlet – the towns of Orchard Park, Aurora, Colden and Concord, the villages of Orchard Park and Springville and hamlet of West Falls in Erie County and the Town of Ashford in Cattaraugus County.



There are historic rail depots, quaint villages, woodlands, marshes, farmlands, ski areas and a high-trestle bridge over Cattaraugus Creek along the trail.

"It's just a great place to walk and enjoy the beautiful community," said Ann S. Bergantz, a member of the Erie Cattaraugus Rail Trail board of directors. "We're really thrilled and excited for Western New York."

The 1.7-mile long section in Springville, the Pop Warner Rail Trail, opened two years ago after the village secured a right-of-entry agreement with the railroad to allow development of the trail, which cuts a diagonal line across the village.

When the rail line was abandoned, New York State was interested in developing the trail as a linear park, and entered negotiations with the railroad, Fenn said. Negotiations broke off about five years ago, leaving Erie Cattaraugus Rail Trail to pick them up.

She said an economic impact study might be completed.

"What happens typically is that real estate values increase and businesses are attracted to these corridors," Fenn said.

But not everyone wants a trail in his backyard, and some opposed to the trail have raised questions about safety and property values, and created an online petition in opposition to the trail that has garnered 55 signatures.

The petition cites concern over privacy, aesthetics, safety, property values, lifestyles, increased cost and liability to adjacent property owners, as well as its proximity to **the West Valley Demonstration Project.**

"Any trail that has ever been built anywhere will always have a few people who don't want the trail," Fenn said.

Values of property near other trails has remained the same or increased slightly, the group's website says. And houses close to the trail could attract home buyers looking for nearby recreation.

That's what the Town of Tonawanda found after opening its rails to trails path two years ago. Safety concerns are typical, but have not been an issue, said Town Engineer James Jones.

"It does go through a populated area and it does go right behind people's houses. It actually increased people's property values," he said, calling it "incredibly important" for a strong community to have strong trails.

"Rail trails have been built all around the country," Bergantz said. "It's not something that's new. Our communities are no more dangerous than any other community. There's no reason why we can't have something great in Western New York."

"Our goals are to protect and maintain the trail as a natural, cultural and historic resource while providing a safe, welcoming place for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy nature and outdoor recreation," Fenn said.

The trail group is seeking funding for economic studies and plan design. Fenn said she has met with municipal, county and state leaders to inform them of the agreement and to discuss next steps. Most of the rails have been removed.

The group also is setting up meetings with adjacent landowners, community members and other stakeholders to discuss preferences for trail surfaces, activities, access points, and to address privacy and safety concerns.

"There will be areas that will be perhaps open, but not developed," Bergantz said. "The development will occur as the moneys become available. These things work when the communities are supportive and behind it."



Barbara O'Brien – *Barbara O'Brien reports on suburban issues for The Buffalo News.*