

# Lehigh Valley Greenways Conservation Landscape SUCCESS STORY

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## Activating Bethlehem's South Side Greenway (Awarded 2017)

### SUMMARY

*Activating Bethlehem's South Side Greenway* involved multiple pop-up projects designed to both beautify and increase residents' and visitors' use of the South Side Greenway. These projects included a pop-up parklet, transforming a parking spot adjacent to the Greenway into a seating area with a free library and sand garden, and pop-up murals painted by local artists during the Spring on the South Side festival. This was a collaborative effort involving Lehigh University students and faculty, Banana Factory staff, and representatives from the city's Department of Community and Economic Development and the SouthSide Arts District.



### CHALLENGE

This project had multiple goals and objectives: 1) activating the South Side Greenway; 2) jump-starting the city's parklet and mural arts programs; 3) amplifying and publicizing the SouthSide Arts District; 4) better connecting South Side residents with existing and new green spaces and arts assets in the neighborhood; and 5) improving perceived and real neighborhood quality of life and neighborhood safety. This last goal was especially important, because debunking people's negative perceptions of the area would make the other goals that much easier to achieve. At the start of the project, student surveys had found that perceptions of conditions and safety within SouthSide Arts District were notably worse than actual conditions warranted (the vast majority of Lehigh University students, for example, considered the neighborhood to be unsafe). Bringing murals to the area, creating more destinations to give people an excuse to explore the area (and test their perceptions against reality), and enhancing the public realm, subsequent surveys found, went a long way to improving these perceptions.

### FUNDING

**Grant Award:**  
**\$3,000.00**

**Match:**  
**\$3,000**

**Total Project Cost:**  
**\$6,000**

### PARTNERSHIP IS KEY

Lehigh University  
SouthSide Arts District  
Banana Factory  
ArtsQuest  
City of Bethlehem



**BANANA  
FACTORY**  
ARTS CENTER



## SOLUTION

This project, by designing and installing pop-up parklets and murals on the South Side Greenway, and by bringing the Greenway out into the neighborhood through a photography exhibit (highlighting the work of local artists) on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, successfully raised the visibility of the South Side Greenway, enticed more residents and visitors to enjoy it, and tested some strategies for public space improvements are now being replicated in a more permanent way. For example, the year after these pop-up parklets were tested, a semi-permanent parklet (modeled on the pop-up ones) was installed in front of Joe's Tavern (Broad Street, Bethlehem) from June to November and was found to generate additional foot traffic on its block. Similarly, based on the success of these pop-up murals, the SouthSide Arts District has since received support for permanent easels on the Greenway and plans to replicate the "arts walk" this grant helped pilot each year.

## RESULTS

Ultimately, the creative "placemaking" strategies supported by this grant reached the thousands of South Side residents and visitors drawn to the Greenway for their own exploration or during one of the many festivals scheduled during the spring and summer. (The murals were painted during *Spring on the SouthSide* in 2018, playing a large part in drawing festival-goers from the Banana Factory out into the neighborhood more generally and onto the Greenway specifically.) They also helped elevate the Greenway and highlighted its key role in enhancing walkability and quality of life on the South Side. These "proof of concept" projects have sparked others (the more permanent parklets and burgeoning mural program mentioned above) and, even more importantly, encouraged dialogue between the City of Bethlehem, Lehigh University, the SouthSide Arts District, and Banana Factory, around additional efforts to put the Greenway at the center of neighborhood revitalization strategies and better connect it to ongoing community and economic development efforts along New Street, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Street Commercial Corridors.

### Contact



[www.LVgreenways.org](http://www.LVgreenways.org)

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