



Great Places in Pennsylvania

2026 Category Criteria

Greenways/Trails or Preserves & Public Spaces

Great Greenways/Trails or Preserves

What is a Greenway/Trail or Preserve? A Greenway/Trail or Preserve is land set aside to preserve/protect open space, scenic landscapes, historical resources, natural resources, and/or plant/animal habitats. They can be found in urban, suburban and rural settings.

A **Greenway/Trail** is a linear corridor of open space that provides linkages to connect people to parks, schools, downtowns, places of employment, pristine natural areas, and/or historical structures and features. It can be limited to foot traffic or accommodate multiple users (pedestrians, bicyclists, horseback riders). It is frequently created out of a disused railway, canal towpath, utility, or similar corridor or along a natural or man-made feature.

A **Preserve** is a protected area that is mostly undeveloped and open to the public. The primary focus is on conserving natural resources and protecting important ecosystems and landscapes for future generations. However, a Preserve may also have historic or cultural features that are worthy of protection. Passive recreation opportunities, such as walking/hiking trails, hunting, and fishing, are managed to ensure the health and integrity of the natural environment.

Nomination Form: The nomination form is the means to describe the planning story and characteristics that make your nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve worthy of a Great Places designation. Address the following criteria, as applicable, when writing your responses. Where possible, quantify the information provided.

Livable Built Environment: Great Greenways/Trails or Preserves provide access to the outdoors, connect people to their communities, preserve open space and scenic landscapes, protect natural resources, and enhance the sense of place that helps define the quality of life. *Does the nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve...*

- Have accessible parking areas and/or designated trailheads?
- Incorporate natural/cultural features, topography, vistas, and/or public art?
- Provide connectivity to surrounding uses, such as residential, commercial, and public, as well as transit systems and other trails/preserves?

Social Interaction and Interwoven Equity: Great Greenways/Trails and Preserves accommodate people of all ages and abilities and serve as an informal social network where users can meet and interact. *Does the nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve...*

- Accommodate multiple users?
- Encourage use by a diverse cross-section of the community?
- Provide opportunities for social interaction through events and activities?

Unique Characteristics: Great Greenways/Trails and Preserves have special characteristics that enhance natural features, cultural awareness, and community identity. *Does the nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve...*

- Have a sense of importance or extraordinary characteristics that set it apart from other greenways/trails or preserves in the community or region?
- Protect and/or connect to places of cultural, historic, and natural importance?
- Complement the surrounding landscape?
- Incorporate interpretive signage?
- Provide opportunities for environmental or public health education?
- Reflect local, State, or national history/culture?
- Serve as a site for any special or unique programming or events?

Environmental and Sustainable Practices: Great Greenways/Trails and Preserves augment environmental stewardship, create value, and generate economic activity. *Does the nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve...*

- Have public/private or multi-municipal investment or commitment for ongoing operations, maintenance, and environmental stewardship?
- Incorporate green infrastructure (i.e. pervious pavement, natural buffers, native plants)?
- Support economic development and ecotourism?
- Promote the safety of users?

Planning and Authentic Participation: Great Greenways/Trails and Preserves reflect the desires of all segments of the community, are designed through a planning process that involves a broad cross-section of the community and have a commitment to long-term success. *Did or does the nominated Greenway/Trail or Preserve...*

- Demonstrate the importance of planning? Did the greenway/trail or preserve evolve through a planning or due diligence process?
- Involve planners and/or partnerships?
- Engage diverse participation and community involvement, including the disadvantaged and underserved?
- Have a management plan for long-term success?

Great Public Spaces Criteria

What is a Public Space? A Public Space may be a formal or informal gathering space within a neighborhood, downtown, district, waterfront or other area of a community that is within the public realm, promotes social interaction and community engagement, and fosters a sense of community. Public Spaces may be indoors or outdoors, man-made or natural, and provide opportunities for passive or active social interactions. Some examples of public spaces include plazas, parks, public commons, marketplaces, convention centers, monuments, and special areas within public or private buildings.

Nomination Form: The nomination form is the means to describe the planning story and characteristics that make your nominated Public Space worthy of a Great Places designation. Address the following criteria, as applicable, when writing your responses. Where possible, quantify the information provided, such as number of visitors, events, activities, and economic impact.

Livable Built Environment: Great Public Spaces are compatible with surrounding land uses, other public spaces, and the community as a whole and are designed to support the quality of life. *Does the nominated Public Space...*

- Utilize design, scale, form, architecture and other features to create a visually interesting experience that is appropriate to the location?
- Incorporate landscape and hardscape features that are unique or special to the public space?
- Incorporate natural features, topography, and vistas?
- Accommodate multiple types of users by its accessibility and for a variety of purposes/activities?
- Connect to surrounding uses including residential, commercial, and public uses via sidewalks, pathways, transit, or other means?
- Support physical activity and healthy lifestyles?

Unique Characteristics: Great Public Spaces have unique qualities that set it apart from other public spaces. *Does the nominated Public Space...*

- Convey a sense of importance or extraordinary characteristics that set it apart from other public spaces in the community or region?
- Promote an atmosphere of discovery, inspiration, contemplation, or spiritual reflection?
- Have cultural, economic, historic, or natural importance?
- Incorporate environmentally friendly practices, such as green infrastructure, recycling, and water conservation?
- Promote or act as an example of infill development?
- Conserve or reuse historic resources?

Social Interaction and Interwoven Equity: Great Public Spaces are treasured by their entire community and serve a diverse population's need for safe and healthy recreation and social interaction. *How does the nominated Public Space...*

- Utilize activities or events to attract people to the space or engage them?
- Encourage users to interact with each other?
- Ensure activities, events, etc. are accessible to residents of the community, regardless of age, income, disability, ethnicity, etc.?

- Provide a sense of comfort and safety to people using the space (ie. traffic calming, lighting, police, etc.)?
- Improve the physical, environmental, and/or economic conditions of the community or neighborhood?

Resilient Economy: Great Public Spaces build a community’s capacity to react to changes in economic circumstances by providing a hub for community connections and economic activity. *Does the nominated Public Space...*

- Provide opportunities for economic activity?
- Support physical activity and healthy lifestyles?
- Attract visitors that support the local economy (# visitors, # events/activities)?
- Serve as a local or regional anchor to spur economic activity in the greater community?

Planning and Authentic Participation: Great Public Spaces reflect the desires of all segments of the community and are designed through a planning process that involves a broad cross-section of community members in analyzing issues, generating visions, developing plans, and monitoring outcomes. *Does the nominated Public Space (or its related planning efforts)...*

- Have a plan that has contributed to its development and/or ongoing sustainability?
- Demonstrate the importance of planning through a planning process?
- Involve planners and/or partnerships?
- Engage diverse leadership, participation, and advocacy with the community, including the disadvantaged and underserved?