

Stories from Small Towns

Columbia, Pennsylvania (Pop. 10,382)

Several parks in the borough of Columbia were run down, and a master plan identified the need for improvements. Mayor Leo Lutz started revitalizing, purchasing more land for the park system. One example is the Susquehanna River Park, four acres now refitted with a trail system and a new building with educational center. The borough obtained several grants to fund this project.



Susquehanna River Park. Used by permission.

Another project was carried out amidst concerns from residents, who thought the new basketball courts and play apparatus would be destroyed. Residents came around to the idea and now even support the new park projects. The important aspect seemed to be letting them have their say and be heard by the town leaders.

The borough's changes have taken place over 12 years. Columbia was listed as one of the 20 best small towns to visit in 2014 by Smithsonian Magazine and in the same year among the top 16 small Pennsylvania cities by Cities Journal.

Key Lessons

- Funding can be cobbled together from multiple places. Columbia obtained Urban Enhancement Funding from the county, along with funds from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, and the Department of Environmental Protection.
- Involve everyone you can think of, from the very beginning. The more people and the more public, the better your chances of success.

Thank you to Mayor Leo Lutz, Columbia, Pennsylvania.