

## Priority Issue #6



### **Significant cultural and historical resources are not adequately documented, protected, and promoted.**

**Back Story** Lycoming County has a rich cultural history and contains many historic structures and sites. The GWA Planning Area in particular is the home base for most of the countywide arts, culture, and history organizations, such as the Lycoming Arts, Lycoming County Historical Society, Williamsport Symphony Orchestra, Williamsport Community Concert Association, the Williamsport Civic Ballet, and many others.



The GWA Planning Area hosts many of the county's premier arts and cultural venues, including the Avenue of the Arts, and:

- Community Arts Center
- Community Theater League
- Williamsport Scottish Rite
- Pajama Factory
- Mary Welch Theater—Lycoming College
- Klump Auditorium—PCT
- Thomas Taber Museum of the Lycoming County Historical Society
- First Friday Celebrations
- Ways Garden
- Downtown art galleries



The GWA Planning Area is also home to a myriad of historically significant structures and sites that draw interest from tourists and residents alike, who are eager to explore and appreciate the cultural heritage of this region. The City of Williamsport has a celebrated and designated historic district known as "Millionaire's Row." In 2014, the *Original Little League Field*, located on West Fourth Street, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Distinguished designations such as this are an honor that generates community pride and contributes to a greater sense of place for those that live there.

**Priority Issue Overview** Cultural and historical resources are not new topics—they were included as issues in the 2005 GWA Multi-Municipal Plan. During the 2016 comp plan process, GWA PAT members and local citizens listed an expanded array of issues they were concerned about:

- Recognize the arts and cultural assets as an economic driver
- Identify and preserve the historical transportation routes in the planning area
- Evaluate existing zoning and building codes and subdivision and land development regulations, to ensure they are conducive to the promotion of a vibrant and livable community



- Establish a neighborhood preservation program to support property maintenance and beautification, house-by-house
- Reestablish the historic sign program
- Establish neighborhood associations to promote a sense of neighborhood identity, community, and pride in ownership, and to give residents a stronger voice in local government affairs
- Develop a culture, arts and heritage trails initiative in any areas designated by municipalities as culturally and historically significant
- Increase public awareness of the cultural and historical resources unique to the area.
- Promote the implementation of the Old City/East Third Street Gateway Redevelopment Strategy
- Promote the implementation of the Lower West Branch River Conservation Plan

While the above items were each favorably supported, GWA PAT members focused on two major issues:

- Harness, protect and preserve historical resources and assets
- Promote arts and cultural events by expanding, marketing, and reaching out to a variety of audiences in a more efficient and effective way

**Historical Resources.** Historic resources often help bring a sense of place to our communities and give our communities character. Historical structures are unique properties. In particular, when historic structures are maintained well, there are generally higher property values in the surrounding neighborhoods. While the GWA is rich with historical sites and structures (the City of Williamsport having the greatest concentration), there is not a clear understanding of what is important to preserve nor is there a comprehensive approach to preserving what's most meaningful. The first step is ensuring that historically significant properties are identified then decisions can be made by communities on how to manage those resources.

Historical inventorying and preservation initiatives have not been fully addressed since the 2005 Multi-municipal Plan; in fact, most of the relevant plans and studies that focus on historic structures predate that 2005 plan.

In 1971, Lycoming County Planning Commission completed a county-wide historical site survey that identified 273 historic resources within the county. The 1971 report, the "Historic Sites and Landmarks of Lycoming County," served as the foundation for the County's 1974 Historic Preservation Plan. The recommendations of this Historical Preservation Plan are still relevant today as is the inventory of the historical buildings in the Planning Area. This paper inventory has since been digitized and inventory work has continued.

In 2005, the City of Williamsport completed another inventory of historic resources resulting in a list of 166 Significant Historic Buildings and Sites that were added as an amendment to its Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan. In 2015, the County of Lycoming worked with the City and a consultant to survey each property 50 years old or older within the City of Williamsport. The purpose of this survey was to review, refine, and amend the city's 2005 list of Significant Historic Buildings and Sites. This survey ultimately created a new list of 268 significant buildings. Of the 268, 106 were identified on the 2005 list of Significant Historic Buildings and Sites and the remaining 162 were previously unidentified. The



survey found that Williamsport's historic building stock is comprised of dwellings, commercial, industrial and municipal buildings. Surveyed significant historic structures date from the late 19th, early 20th, and mid-20th century.

Also in 2015, the Lycoming County Department of Planning and Community Development created a Heritage Plan Map as part of its LycoMap series. This interactive map includes sites listed on the County's 1971 historic resource inventory, 1974 historic preservation plan, and the 2015 draft Williamsport Historic Structures Survey. The map also includes sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and historic districts in Jersey Shore, Muncy, and Williamsport.

Continued efforts are needed to identify, protect, and preserve local historic and cultural assets and promote cultural activities. To ensure the protection of local character and history in all of the GWA municipalities, it is important to inventory additional historic assets, assess their conditions, and pursue opportunities for preservation. In terms of protecting these historical resources, the City has adopted protective ordinances for its Historic District and vanguards those assets carefully.

Historic preservation efforts throughout the remainder of the GWA Planning Area have been less formalized, however, a Planning Area-focused program would help in recognizing that there are noteworthy historic and cultural assets throughout the region.

**Arts & Culture.** Lycoming Arts is a countywide organization dedicated to the promotion of all forms of art and serves as a lead agency to work with a variety of partners, including business, community organizations, and individuals. To date, a large focus of this organization has been on the City of Williamsport, in particular, fostering the branding of Williamsport as an "Art Town" in order to attract more cultural tourism. This focus has been deliberate. The City is not only Lycoming County's hub of population, commerce, services and tourism, but it is northcentral Pennsylvania's center of cultural activity. The work done and progress made in the City serves as a model for creative place-making around the county and the greater region as well. Lycoming Arts realizes that it is time to start considering expanding its reach into other parts of the county.

Expanding the diversity and exposure to the arts has been proven to improve and strengthen communities. Arts and Cultural experiences may be very instrumental in generating the following benefits:

- Enhanced social capital of the community
- Increased sense of collective identity of a place
- Enrichment in the lives of underserved populations, such as low-income and minority families
- Increased programming within the schools
- Promotes volunteerism
- An economic driver for the businesses in Lycoming County

Furthermore, the presence of arts organizations and prevalence of arts events may play a role in attracting residents and businesses to (re)locate to a community by improving its image and making it more appealing.



Although Lycoming Arts has grown over the past decade, in order to expand its reach, additional capacity will be needed. Moving forward, Lycoming Arts intends to: create a business plan, begin fundraising from diverse sources, create a three-year plan for implementation of specific projects, hire an executive director, and consider creating a permanent office/storefront to serve as an informational hub and a retail outlet for local artists.

In a 2016 online survey, conducted by Lycoming Arts, respondents felt that the strongest aspects of arts and culture in the County were:

- Variety of programs and events offered
- Level of community support and engagement
- Cultural tourism
- Availability of free programs and events
- Public art installations

The weakest aspects were the coordinated communication of events and programs, levels of government funding and policy support, lack of media coverage, and lack of economic development resources available to the arts and culture initiatives.

Respondents felt that the top priorities for government support of the arts and culture should be for festivals and community events, public art, youth art programs, and general support for arts and culture organizational capacity to carry out these activities.

There appears to be strong public interest in the historical resources as well as the arts and culture of Lycoming County. A public survey, conducted in 2016 as part of the County comprehensive planning process, collected responses from more than 1,000 people. Respondents were asked what they liked most about Lycoming County and wanted to preserve. Local History and the Arts received the fourth highest number of positive comments.

**Key Implications** If the GWA's historic and cultural resources are not inventoried, documented, developed, supported, celebrated, and protected, then there is the unavoidable risk of losing them. Moreover, the loss of these resources may precipitate cascading impacts throughout the GWA Planning Area, including:

- Diminishment of the character and heritage of the GWA Planning Area
- Decreased quality of life for residents
- Reduced recreational and educational opportunities
- Loss of tourism and other potential ripple effects on local economies and land values
- Negative impact to the tax base due to vacancies and reduced land values



## **Top Viable Projects of Regional Significance for this Issue**

### **LYCOMING ARTS' CULTURE, ARTS, AND HERITAGE TRAILS INITIATIVE**

As the first step in expanding the countywide organization's reach, Lycoming Arts seeks to develop a *Culture, Arts, and Heritage Trails Initiative*.

In Williamsport, Loyalsock and South Williamsport, a Cultural Trail will be a urban pedestrian/bike trail that will connect the Riverwalk, the creek trails, the cultural districts (downtown, historic districts, colleges), the neighborhoods, historic sites, entertainments and public art in a way that encourages residents and visitors to get out and explore the built and natural environments.

Throughout the county's rural areas, multiple and various Cultural Trails will connect river trails, waterways, trails, historic sites, scenic routes and storytelling sites with pedestrian/bike routes that invite residents and visitors to explore our story, our land and our natural beauty.

Starting with the Urban Trail network to create a model for Cultural Trail Development, Lycoming Arts is taking the lead on this project in partnership with Williamsport Bicycle Committee, Susquehanna Greenways and Our Towns. The primary models for this project are the Indianapolis Cultural Trail and the local bike tour The Tour De Bill developed by David and Louisa Stone.

In order to fully realize the intent and ability of the *Culture, Arts, and Heritage Trails Initiative* Lycoming Arts plans to augment its volunteer base by hiring a full-time, paid executive director. The organization seeks to become more efficient, focused, and professionalized in implementing events, programs and projects. The objective is to perform greater marketing and networking outside the immediate area and enhance the creative place-making opportunities along with municipalities and volunteer organizations throughout the county.

The trail will identify areas designated by municipalities as culturally and historically significant, including bike routes, driving routes, walking tours, Indian pathways, canals, historic structures and sites, arts, cemetery, and Little League tours. It will be coordinated with Lumber Heritage Region and PA Wilds.

### **HOW PROJECT ADDRESSES THE ISSUE**

Expanding the capacity of Lycoming Arts will allow it to support a wider variety of project and programs to create regional unity. The Lycoming Arts organization, and the Lycoming County arts community in general, have demonstrated that they understand the value of recognizing our community's heritage as a key part of our contemporary arts scene. Local heritage themes are often woven into newly created art, particularly public art installations (the "Inspiration Williamsport" and the "Woodhick" statue on the River Walk are two recent, worthy examples). Expanding the capacity of the Lycoming Arts organization will allow it to take on additional projects to celebrate the arts, culture and heritage of the GWA region and the County. Foremost among those projects is the planned Culture, Arts, and Heritage Trails Initiative.



Developing the Culture, Arts, and Heritage Trail Initiative as a primarily bike and pedestrian tour expands the diversity and exposure to the arts by promoting health, recreation, and tourism.

### **PROJECT LEADERSHIP**

Lead Agency – Lycoming County Arts Alliance

Other Partners –First Community Foundation Partnership, Williamsport Recreation Department, Lycoming County PCD, Lycoming County Visitors' Bureau/Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, Lycoming College, Pennsylvania College of Technology, public and private school systems, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, Central Pennsylvania Film Office, and other community non-profits

### **STEPS FOR SUCCESS**

STEP NUMBER	DESCRIPTION OF STEP	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
1	SELECT A PROJECT DELIVERY TEAM (LED BY LYCOMING ARTS); BEGIN MONTHLY PLANNING MEETINGS	FALL 2017/WINTER 2018	LYCOMING ARTS, LYCOMING COUNTY PCD, OTHER PARTNERS
2	CREATE A BUSINESS PLAN TO FUND NEW POSITION; CREATE THREE-YEAR PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION; BEGIN FUNDRAISING & GRANT APPLICATIONS	2018	LYCOMING ARTS, LYCOMING COUNTY PCD, OTHER PARTNERS—CONSIDER USING SCORE
3	ADVERTISE AND HIRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION	FALL 2018-SPRING 2019	LYCOMING ARTS
4	DESIGN AND DEVELOP THE CULTURE, ARTS AND HERITAGE TRAIL	2019-2021	LYCOMING ARTS, LYCOMING COUNTY PCD, OTHER PARTNERS

### **FUNDING/FINANCING STRATEGY**

Potential funding sources include the First Community Foundation Partnership of PA; Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; National Endowment for the Arts; City of Williamsport Recreation Department; Lycoming County Visitors' Bureau/Chamber of Commerce, including hotel tax revenues; LycoArts membership fees and private donations; and revenues from Lycoming Arts events, such as special fundraisers or merchandise sales. Act 13 recreation funds could potentially support staff time in planning specific events relevant to the fund's purpose.

### **Additional Projects, Programs and Initiatives for this Issue**

#### **1. COMPLETE THE HISTORICAL STRUCTURES DIGITAL INVENTORY**



The inventory and catalogue of historic structures, as documented in 1971 and 1974, has been successfully digitized by Lycoming County/PCD. The County's Historical Preservation Plan is over 40 years old. It is a document whose contents and recommendations are still relevant today. For the past 40 plus years, there has been no sustained effort to update the original document's inventory of historical places and structures

In 2015, the County of Lycoming completed historic structure surveys for sites in Jersey Shore, Montgomery, Muncy Borough, and Williamsport in order to begin to review, refine, and amend the County's 1971 inventory of historic sites and landmarks. The resulting reports are initial assessments of the County's historic resources and will guide the development of an updated, countywide historic resource inventory. These lists represent the group of potential additional structures that have become eligible for historical consideration.

## **2. RETAIL OUTLET ON THE ARTS**

The creation of a retail outlet would serve as an informational hub to display local artists' works and disseminate brochures for arts venues, including galleries and performing art spaces, maps of cultural and historic trails, and other resources that may be produced by the organization or its partners to help promote arts, cultural and history.

## **3. NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

Establish a neighborhood preservation program to support property maintenance and beautification, house-by-house.

## **4. RIVER WALK SCULPTURE PARK**

Implement the River Walk Sculpture Park by installing additional public art locations along the River Walk.

## **5. AVENUE OF THE ARTS**

Implement the Avenue of the Arts plan along 4th Street in the City of Williamsport.

## **6. FAXON CIRCLE**

Enhance and improve the Faxon Circle park area in Loyalsock Township through the installation of brick pavers, benches, trees and landscaping; and the placement of a historical marker commemorating the first planned community built in Lycoming County.

## **7. HISTORIC SIGN/MARKER PROGRAM**

Implement an arts and historical marker/plaque program to improve neighborhood identify and engagement.

## **8. CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY**

Pull description from JMT report