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## An Observation of the Two River's Greenway

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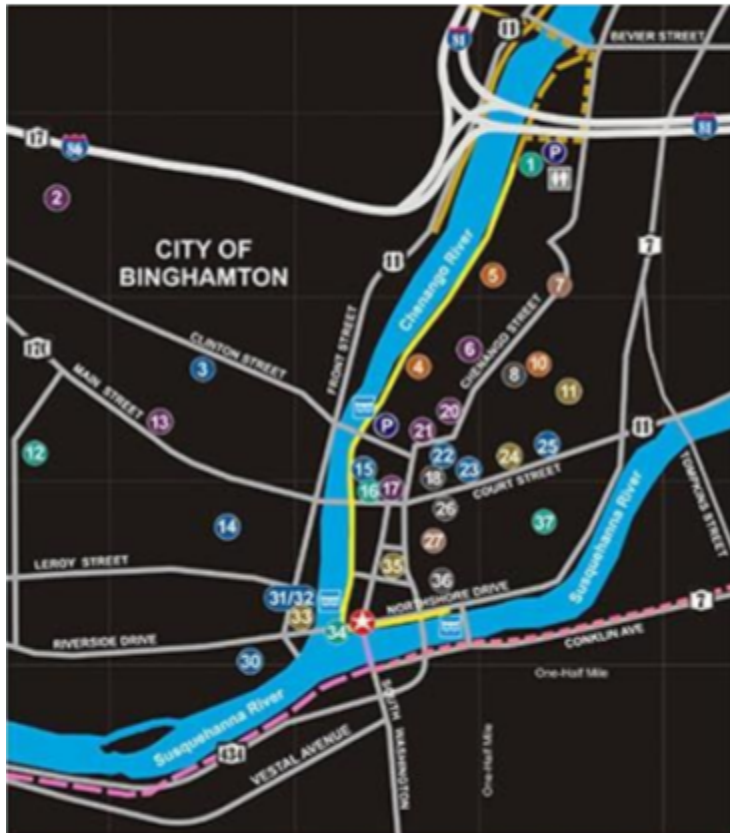
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## An Observation of the Two Rivers Greenway

Access to pedestrian walkways and recreation are essential parts of a city. Binghamton is situated attractively at the confluence of the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers. This is advantageous for adding walkways and paths that allow citizens to walk, bike, run and enjoy the

**Figure 1**  
*Two Rivers Greenway:  
Chenango Promenade Section*



*Note. Image provided by Delta's Two Rivers Greenway plan*

view of the river. Increased foot traffic by the rivers could lead to an increase in customer base for riverside restaurants and shops. In return, the added business could give a boost to an economy that has been quite stagnant. In addition, the availability of recreation is an important attraction to people looking for work in Binghamton and could add to the appeal of the city. Water has always been a place where people meet and will continue to be. I will observe the current scene along the

Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers and determine what opportunities the city may be able to capture to better utilize such a natural endowment.

I conducted my observation on a stretch of the Two Rivers Greenway plan between Confluence Park and the Court Street bridge. Two Rivers Greenway is a project designed to create standard signage throughout the pathways along the Chenango and Susquehanna, increase

trail usage, teach trail users about the cultural and historical identity of the area, and to widen the audience of the signage by creating a uniform marketing campaign (Two Rivers). The program's main goal is to increase use by walkers and bikers and promote outdoor recreational opportunities. The plan was started in 2012 and is run by multiple agencies including Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS), New York State Department of Transportation and Broome County Planning. The trail system stretches from the Greater Binghamton Urban area to the Village of Owego. The preexisting signage had been inconsistent and outdated. The new signs were informational, engaging and taught me about many of the cultural centers throughout Binghamton that could be reached through the various trails. As a nature lover myself, I was able to appreciate the signs that taught pedestrians about the abundant wildlife native to the river ecosystem. Other signs informed walkers of the importance of The Upper Susquehanna River Watershed and how our actions are integral in maintaining the health of the local ecosystem. I reflected that the signs themselves encouraged citizens to learn about the rivers and be invested in the wellbeing of them through their actions. The pathways connect parks that exist along the rivers and likely increase the use of such parks.

For more than 10,000 years people have gathered by the confluence of the Chenango and Susquehanna rivers. Archeologists discovered broken projectile points, and bowl fragments at the Roberson Site, in the backyard of the Roberson Museum and Science Center. The remnants indicate the former presence of Native Americans. Certain projectile fragments such as rhyolite are naturally found in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania and point to the existence of long-distance trade among Natives. The confluence provided natives with abundant food sources and provided a spiritual connection with the land. Today, we are still drawn to the water as a meeting place and enjoy the tranquility that the rivers offer.

## Opportunity Where The Water Lies

The Chenango River Promenade trail starts at the confluence of the rivers and travels up the Chenango River towards I-81. I was immediately impressed by the sheer beauty of the foliage throughout the valley Southwest of the University Downtown Center (UDC) and towards the University. The Chenango River was full and flowing with a swift pace. I could see waterfowl floating out on the river. I saw another bird appear to dive into the water multiple times hunting for fish. As I sat on one of the benches overlooking the river, I could feel a sense of serenity as the sun warmed my skin. I quickly

came to realize why making the rivers accessible to the citizens was such a priority. I witnessed multiple bikers, walkers, runners and skateboarders using the path. The path was a great place to spend leisure time. I sat near a woman that was reading a book and enjoying the view as I was. As I walked from the UDC past the Court Street bridge I saw two restaurants that overlooked the river. The first restaurant looked to be preparing for dinner reservations and the second appeared closed. I was surprised that more shops and restaurants did not exist along the river. It appears the foot traffic may not be abundant enough to support more businesses. I believe if the rivers themselves could be utilized in a greater capacity and made more accessible for fishing, kayaking and other activities that enough

**Figure 2**

*The Chenango River Promenade*



*Note.* By Liam McKenna. 2019

customers could be made available. I was encouraged by a newly built apartment complex that was built across from the UDC on the opposite side of the Chenango river. This may indicate a rise in demand for higher-class apartments. I saw multiple people in business attire that appeared to be walking on the path while on lunch break from their jobs in the city. On the last leg of the path in Confluence Park there were multiple gardens with signs educating pedestrians about the insects that pollinate the flowers. There were also many sitting areas that overlooked the meeting of the Chenango and Susquehanna rivers. The path seemed to be used as the planners had anticipated, this being for walking, biking, running and relaxing. It appears their goals have been accomplished and it would be intriguing to measure the usage of the many pathways and determine any areas for improvement.

### **Urban Renewal**

I believe that the city has been successful in their project up until this point. I was impressed by the signage and access to trails adjacent to downtown. However, I do believe that Binghamton can stand to gain from introducing further access to the rivers. One thing that strikes me when I look at the rivers, are their lack of use. Coming from Rochester, NY I am accustomed to the Erie Canal. On the canal, people kayak, fish and spend leisure time walking. I believe that if Binghamton were able to add boat launches along the rivers, that they would be able to boost the amount of use on the rivers. Another aspect of the canal in Rochester that could be incorporated in Binghamton are the villages that exist on the canal. For example, in Pittsford, NY where the canal passes through there are restaurants, ice cream shops and other stores that line the canal. I believe that if Binghamton could further advertise the rivers as places of outdoor recreation that increased usage could lead to demand for these types of businesses that exist along the Erie Canal. The City of Binghamton could also attempt to incentivize businesses to

open along the rivers. Flooding does pose a problem to any businesses that are in close proximity to the rivers; However, if the city offered to pay for the hike in insurance costs associated with the flooding risk, then businesses may be enticed. Another way to incentivize business is through tax breaks. Greater access to the rivers will lead to more usage and therefore more opportunity for businesses along the rivers.

Binghamton has done a great job providing pedestrian and bike paths through the Two Rivers Greenway project. The signage is informational and consistent throughout the plethora of trails. I observed the trails being used and enjoyed by many people. In the future, I believe that it would be beneficial to the economy of the city if water recreation is encouraged and made more accessible. With any government initiative, the public support must follow. If BMTS were to propose funding towards the enrichment of waterfront activity, would public opinion be in favor? Tax revenue would need to be partitioned for a proposal to be viable and this is where the heart of the question lies. Where will the funding come from? Regardless, I believe that the long-term economic gains, business opportunity and job growth will be apparent and net positive in comparison to a minor investment in waterfront accessibility.

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