

A. OVERVIEW

The West Hanover Township Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan represents a culmination of a year-long “strategic planning” process which involved citizen participation, facility and program evaluation, and an assessment of administration and maintenance procedures in place within the Township. The citizen participation process included neighborhood meetings, two focus group meetings with seniors and teens, and key person interviews. The Study Committee met monthly to focus on the development of this plan.

This plan was initiated in May 1998 by the West Hanover Township Supervisors. The “strategic planning” approach used in the development of this plan is intended to be realistic, action oriented and easily implemented. As such, the plan is organized primarily into three main parts:

1. Recreation Profile identifies administrative and maintenance operations, program offerings, facility conditions, and documents the citizen participation process.
2. Creating the Vision summarizes key findings of the Recreation Profile, establishes goals, and develops a vision for the future of recreation and parks in West Hanover Township.
3. Strategies for Action sets forth the policy options, detailed strategies, and priorities for implementation. In addition, this section contains a detailed Action Program for Year 1 including estimated costs, responsibilities, and potential funding sources, and a 5-Year Action Program Summary. In order for this plan to be effectively implemented, the Action Program must be tracked and evaluated each year prior to the Township’s annual budgeting process.

B. KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the Recreation Profile include:

- Limited pedestrian access to existing neighborhood parks.
- No regular schedule or plan for park maintenance.
- No large, centralized community park facilities.
- Neighborhood parks have good strategic locations.
- Indoor and outdoor school facilities are available for Township recreation programs.
- Limited recreation programming for all ages, so residents must travel outside of Township to participate in nearly all recreation programs.
- Ordinance for mandatory dedication/fee-in-lieu-of land dedication not updated with a proper fee structure.
- Citizen groups are active and have financed many park improvements.
- No capital budget exists for park and recreation.

C. GOALS AND VISION

The goals and vision of the plan clearly indicate that residents of the Township desire the same outcome from this process. The citizens of West Hanover Township want an extensive system of safe and well-maintained neighborhood and community parks, active and passive recreation areas and linear open space trails. Together with surrounding municipalities and non-profit, religious, and civic groups, businesses, and school district, citizens want the Township to provide a variety of meaningful programs and special events for all age groups and abilities. Within walking distance of their homes, citizens want to be able to enjoy the outdoors and participate in a wide variety of recreation activities.

D. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this plan include:

- Placing a priority on upgrading five existing neighborhood parks, Fairville, Houck Manor, Houck Memorial, Lenker, and Skyline Commons.
- Spending no municipal funds to improve the land at Fishing Creek Elementary School, due to possible expansion plans of the school district and its ownership of the property.
- Having Municipal Park remain a passive recreation site, because of its topography.
- Pursuing the acquisition and development of a centralized community park, which has easy access to arterial roads, collector side streets, and trail systems.
- Directing available funding to improve the park facilities that currently exist, before developing any new parks.
- Revising the mandatory dedication ordinance, setting fee-in-lieu-of land dedication rates at significantly higher amounts.
- Expanding the recreation program opportunities available to residents.
- Integrating the Pedestrian Pathways Plan into the Comprehensive Recreation and Open Space Plan. Once completed, the Pedestrian Pathways Plan should be considered to be a subsection of this plan. The Pedestrian Pathways Plan will be initiated late in the year 2000. The Pedestrian Pathways Plan will be developed in conjunction with the Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan by providing recommended pedestrian walkways or paths linking the existing and proposed Township's park and recreational facilities that are identified in the Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan.
- Increasing funding for Township park and recreation services, to properly maintain the existing neighborhood parks and to fully develop them, and to purchase the land and develop a centralized community park facility. Both Township general fund dollars for park and recreation and the mandatory dedication fund should increase.

E. IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YEAR 1

For West Hanover Township park and recreation services to improve and to begin meeting the expressed needs of the community, the following five action steps should occur within the first year.

Step 1 - Schedule and conduct the maintenance of the park facilities on a consistent, regular basis. To do so, a maintenance management plan should be prepared. Communication between the Park and Recreation Coordinator and Public Works Director will be essential to maintain the parks for optimum public use.

Step 2 - Make board development a priority, so that the Park and Recreation Board becomes a more smoothly functioning advisory board for the Township. By-laws, a mission statement, board roles and responsibilities and an annual meeting calendar should be developed. Communication between the Board and Township Supervisors is essential.

Step 3 - Lay the groundwork to increase the amount of funding for Township park and recreation services. The combination of general fund dollars and mandatory dedication dollars should be enhanced to adequately fund the operation of the Township's Park and Recreation Board. These funds can be used to match state grant opportunities to buy parkland and improve the existing parks. The current ordinance for mandatory dedication of land/fee-in-lieu-of land dedication is in dire need of updating. The dollar amount per lot should be set at a much higher rate than is currently collected. Once updated, the mandatory dedication fund will become an important source of revenue for park improvements and parkland purchase in the coming years.

Step 4 - Hold at least one Township-wide special event, and offer a small but varied schedule of recreation programs, since recreation program opportunities are minimal at this time. Use of schools and other indoor facilities and all partnership opportunities should be explored. Consideration should be given to holding a West Hanover Township Community Day.

Step 5 - Consider upgrading the Park and Recreation Coordinator position to a full-time position. Successful implementation of the strategies outlined in this plan will hinge on the abilities of the Coordinator. Allocating additional funds to make this a full-time position will help by giving the Coordinator more time to do the job.

F. CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this plan that West Hanover Township, with dynamic and committed leadership, will meet the goals of this plan and make park and recreation resources in the Township a source of pride for the entire community. Key to the implementation of this plan is cooperation and communication between Township officials, staff, Park and Recreation Board, citizens, and outside agencies and groups.