

PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Plan sets forth a vision for how Whitemarsh Township can provide a premiere parks and recreation system reflective of the quality of life here. The Plan represents Whitemarsh Township's commitment to parks and recreation in response to the public's expressed opinions. It is based upon consensus achieved through a public participation process that brought together elected and appointed officials, township management, community organizations, and citizens.

Whitemarsh is a vibrant community with a high quality of life, outstanding municipal services, a top-notch educational system, and an affluent, well-educated and interested citizenry. A changing population and growing demands on parks and recreation combine to show that a new strategy for enhanced community service through parks and recreation is essential to meet the standards set by the community. Improvements will take time, commitment, and investment from public and private partners and can be phased in as resources allow.

The Township will use this plan as a guide. It does not serve as law but rather as a blueprint for action. The Plan creates a vision for the future, not merely a tune-up for what exists today. Just as the community develops and evolves, so must parks and recreation in order to serve the needs and interests of the people of Whitemarsh Township throughout their lifetime.

It is important to note that although the community places a high value on the current quality of life, it is in no way a static situation. The amount of developable land in the Township could potentially bring in as many as 10,500 new residents. This potential population increase in the Township must be considered in ongoing planning for parks and recreation services. A potential 62 percent increase in population would require another 100 acres of parkland, at a minimum, along with commensurate facilities to be developed on the parkland, in order to continue to provide the same or greater level of parks and recreation service for the existing and new population.

In addition to growing, the population is also aging. Baby boomers are active, healthy, well-educated and engaged. Senior adults in Whitemarsh are interested in activities that challenge the mind and foster social interaction and activity. The community continues to be a family-oriented as well as a retirement destination with the recent approval of age restricted housing. Population changes warrant planning ahead for adult park and recreation consumers who comprise 76 percent of the population. The large number of senior citizens that will emerge as baby boomers retire comprise a significant demographic change that the Parks and Recreation Department must address.

Through an extensive planning process which integrated public involvement throughout, the

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Township formulated this Parks and Recreation Plan. When considering the changing demographic dynamics in the Township, combined with the goal to maintain and expand an already excellent parks and recreation system, a series of strategic projects, programs and policies have been identified.

Goals and Recommendations

Strategies to address the key findings that emerged from the planning process are organized around four goals. The goals represent the long-term condition for which Whitmarsh Township will strive. Some of the highlighted recommendations for each goal are presented here. The Plan provides a comprehensive list of detailed recommendations in Chapter 7 and detailed Action Strategy for Implementation in Chapter 8.

Goal 1: Establish a premiere system of parks, recreation facilities, greenways, and trails balanced for resource conservation and responsible public use.

Undertake General Park Improvements

1. Continue to program and undertake aesthetic improvements to all parks within the Township in order to make the parks places where people want to spend their time, serve as neighborhood assets, and are attractive.
2. Enhance access to all parks for all members of the community regardless of age. The top trail priority should be creating a central spine along Joshua Road.
3. Landscape parks in a manner that enhances biodiversity and use plantings that are native to the region. Park improvements should be developed with the involvement of the Township's Environmental Advisory Board.

4. Pursue a capital investment financial strategy such as borrowing or a bond issue in order to make improvements that are urgently needed.

Existing Park Improvement Recommendations

1. Master Plan Cedar Grove Park and expand it as much as possible.
2. Master Plan Kline Park with a focus on a trail as an extension of the Joshua Road trail spine.
3. Master Plan Leeland Park using the approach of creating a more formal "town square".
4. Deal with basic functional issues at Miles Park.
5. Re-evaluate and update the previous Master Plan recommendations for Valley Green Park.
6. Renovate, expand or replace the Recreation Building.
7. Partner with Montgomery County to master plan and improve Spring Mill Park.

Develop New Special Use Facilities

1. Create a high-quality facility for the Arts Center.
2. Develop a soccer complex.
3. Build a gym/neighborhood center.
4. Develop facilities for current and emerging user needs such as a skate park, roller hockey, dog parks, ice skating rink, rock climbing wall, etc.
5. Enhance access to the Schuylkill River.

Increase Supply and Distribution of Parks

1. Develop at least one new neighborhood park in the Central District.

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2. Seek land adjacent to existing public parkland, including State and County lands, to expand the size and functionality of the parks.
3. Develop two or three additional neighborhood parks.
4. Target land acquisition activities that could be the basis for a future new community park.

Goal 2: Provide recreation opportunities, programs and services that will enrich the quality of life for the people who live, work, and visit in Whitemarsh Township.

Expand Recreation Programming

1. Develop a program and service management plan, annual programming plan and an annual program report.
2. Broaden the perspective on service delivery from organized scheduled programs to providing opportunities for self-directed recreation that people undertake on their own schedule as they wish. This will enable the Township to expand recreation opportunities without increasing staffing requirements.
3. Develop a plan for providing recreation services to senior adults, including for the active aging population.
4. Expand the summer camp program.
5. Incorporate teens in the recreation program planning and park master planning projects and establish a teen advisory council for the purpose of facility planning and program development.

Address the need to provide and promote recreation opportunities aimed at improving lifelong fitness and wellness.

1. Establish partnerships with health care providers in this effort. Partner with the

Pennsylvania Activities and Nutrition Advocates (PANA) and especially the Colonial School District and the local private schools including Germantown Academy.

2. Consider after school programs for middle school students, especially in the Recreation Building.
3. Consider an adult recreation/self improvement evening and weekend program.
4. Change the approach to working with the School District by identifying programs that are suitable for collaboration; develop a proposal outlining goals, objectives, parameters and support requirements for the program.
5. Expand environmental education and nature based recreation and consider an expanded working relationship with Morris Arboretum, Fort Washington State Park and Montgomery County Parks and Heritage Services.

Continue to facilitate the provision of community recreation services by other providers.

1. Continue to collaborate with community organized sports organizations. Work with them to establish an umbrella sports organization for Whitemarsh Township.
2. Continue to work with commercial recreation providers to offer public recreation opportunities

Develop a formalized marketing program

1. Identify the department's customers and their demographics. Develop a plan for collecting and using additional information that would help with planning and advertising recreation services.
2. Incorporate the Whitemarsh Community Arts Center into the Township's advertising and promotional activities.

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Goal 3: Manage the parks and recreation system in a professional manner that conveys the greatest possible benefit to the public.

Implement Departmental Reorganization

1. Institute department reorganization recommendations and establish performance standards for each functional area of parks and recreation.
2. Develop a maintenance impact statement for all capital improvement projects.
3. Computerize the workload cost tracking system using the coding and reporting system.
4. Add staff and budget commensurate with the park improvements in order to insure well maintained, safe and attractive parks. Include a Park Superintendent to oversee managing and evaluating parks, recreation facilities and trails as well as construction management.
5. Adopt a strategic and vigorous program to document the facts and figures related to parks and recreation along with an interpretation of what the figures mean.

Establish an umbrella organization for volunteerism related to parks and recreation

1. Focus on volunteerism through organized groups and not on individuals. Expand the current basic policy on volunteerism. The nature and scope of the current policy needs to be fleshed out. Recognize that volunteers are not free.

Develop a strategic plan to merge the Whitemarsh Community Arts Center with the Parks and Recreation Department.

1. Develop the plan collaboratively along with a vision, mission and guiding principles to serve as the foundation for the merged entities.

2. Establish an Arts Coordinator position for Township-wide arts management.

Goal 4: Invest in parks and recreation to sustain and enhance the quality of life in Whitemarsh in the 21st Century.

Provide adequate financial support for park and recreation through its operating budget.

1. Work to fund Parks and Recreation at a level of five percent or more of the operating budget of the Township.
2. Develop an impact statement for all projects to demonstrate the need for support to undertake the project and protect the investment. This would enable the Department to hire additional staff for maintenance and programming as improvements are made to the system.
3. Continue to support organized sports and work on collaborative projects for the benefit of the community.

Continue to use the current revenue strategy of tax and non tax sources

1. Determine how Whitemarsh Township could increase budget support for parks and recreation operations and capital projects.
2. Strive to increase the percentage of the operating budget generated through non-tax sources. Set 45 percent as the benchmark with increases of five percent annually over the next five years. Evaluate progress in cost recovery and set new goals based upon successful track record of generating revenues through user fees and charges, events, concessions, sponsorships, gifts, grants, bequests and other means.
3. Develop a targeted program for soliciting sponsorships and donations on an annual basis.

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4. Develop a parks and recreation gift catalog and promote the catalog as a way of encouraging donations to improve the parks. Items could range from a few dollars up to full-scale facilities such as pavilions.

5. Establish a five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) based on the recommendations in this plan.

Moving Forward

This Parks and Recreation Plan focuses on transforming the parks and recreation from a small collection of parks into a comprehensive parks system that meets current and future recreation demands. Although the list of recommendations is extensive, if they are addressed incrementally, they are achievable. The Township alone cannot fully achieve success. Partnerships are essential. While the recommendations present the Township's vision for a successful parks and recreation system of the future, how the Township will implement the recommendations is equally important. Continued leadership by the Parks and Recreation Department along with the Parks and Recreation Board, Township department representatives, elected officials, and existing and proposed organizational groups will be critical.