

# CHAPTER 3 · COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

## OPEN SPACE NEEDS

### *Whitemarsh Open Space Needs Calculation*

The open space, parks and recreation needs of a community vary depending on the composition of the community; however, a formula to calculate the minimum amount of open space required to adequately serve a community based on population has been developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). These standards are considered the primary guidelines in assessing and projecting a community's future open space needs.

The NRPA has created a formula that utilizes current and projected population to calculate the minimum amount of open space, park and recreation land needed to accommodate the open space needs of a community. The formula created by the NRPA recommends that a community have at least 6.25 – 10.50 acres of open space per 1,000 population. This formula does not take into account the location or uses of open space, or the requirements, needs and desires of an individual municipality.

### *Needs Calculation*

Using the NRPA guidelines for the year 2000, Whitemarsh Township needed between 104.39 acres and 175.37 acres of open space. The 813 acres of open space available in the Township in 2000 significantly exceeded the minimum required by the NRPA. However, the NRPA guidelines are only a guide for municipalities to ensure that they provide the minimum necessary open space to adequately serve a certain population. In order to provide as many open space opportunities for existing and future residents as possible, the Township should continue to require open space and recreation areas as part of the land development process, actively work with property owners to preserve open space, provide neighborhood parks in all future subdivisions, and link all open spaces through on- and off-road connections.

**Whitemarsh Township Population in the year 2000:** 16,702 People

**Total Acres of Existing Open Space, Parks and Recreation Land:** 813 Acres

**Formula:** 6.25 – 10.5 Acres of Open Space per 1,000 population

**Given:** 2000 Population of 16,702

**Calculation:** 16,702 population/1,000 population = 16.702

1. Range Minimum Calculation:  $16.702 \times 6.25 = 104.39$  Acres of land required to meet the minimum of the range recommendation
2. Range Maximum Calculation:  $16.702 \times 10.50 = 175.37$  Acres of land required to meet the maximum of the range recommendation

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## *Present Open Space Deficit Areas*

### *Overall Deficit Summary*

Although it appears on the surface that there is more than adequate open space within the Township, it is important to note that much of the protected open space is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is preserved as passive open space. The 1996 Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan detailed the issues related to looking only at the overall acreage of open space within the Township. This plan noted that “...even with 890 acres of parkland in Whitemarsh, there is a need for developed recreation areas in the southern portion of the Township.” A needs analysis for active recreation facilities will be addressed in the 2006 Whitemarsh Township Park and Recreation Plan.

### *Active Recreation*

The Township has several community-level parks within the Township; however, there is a deficit of neighborhood-level parks. Those that do exist are cut off from the remainder of the Township by major roadways.

### *Non-Automobile Linkages*

The Township is heavily dependant on the automobile for mobility. With several major roadways cutting through the landscape both north to south and east to west, many sections of the Township are cut off from other sections. A goal of this Open Space Plan is to ensure adequate pedestrian and non-vehicular connections between parks, open spaces, neighborhoods and retail areas. This will likely be attained through a combination of on- and off-street multi-use pathways and walkways.

## *Deficit Areas by District*

This Plan has divided the Township into five distinct districts, each of which has different open space needs.

In the Central District, which is predominantly built out, there is a need to provide open space access, as stated above. There is also a need for additional active recreation areas. These will likely be attained by purchasing undeveloped lots in strategic locations.

In the Riverfront District, there is a need to provide a connection from the riverfront and Schuylkill River Trail to the northern portions of the Township. If the older industrial section of this district is developed, this should generate significant additional open space areas for residents. Connections to the existing, and construction of proposed, non-vehicular trails and pathways should be provided in this area.

The Miquon District has a unique character as a result of the steep valley walls that surround the creeks in this area. These same features limit the area’s accessibility.

The Stenton/Wissahickon District comprises vast large estate lots, farms, golf courses, and other undeveloped tracts of land that are most susceptible to large-scale residential development.

In the Broad Axe District, much of the land is under private ownership, and therefore has the potential for development.