

Background Data Report – Parks and Open Space

There are a number of community parks and public open spaces scattered throughout the township. These resources vary in size and range of amenities, as well as access and visibility. Over 300 acres of parks and open space provide active and passive recreation for the township residents. A few, like the Community Park and Hickory Park, serve as the location for many community events held annually. Others are not used in any formal sense, particularly the open space resources which may or may not have any improvements or access points. As we consider the future of the township, it is important to establish a vision for how these parks and open space amenities will be treated and what role they will play in the community. While the township has an operating budget that includes maintenance at these sites, any additional improvements will have to be balanced with the ability of the staff to maintain the properties in good working condition. The 2015 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan created a comprehensive listing of all parks, features, and established specific park-level goals as well as some township-wide goals. Consider these recommendations as you review this month's materials.

Listing of park and open space amenities

- **Briar Ridge Park:** Magnolia Drive
Amenities: Small Playground
- **Hickory Park:** 2140 Big Road
Amenities: Swimming Pool, Concession Stand, Pavilion Rentals, Grills, Playground, Volleyball, Fishing & Barrel Ball.
- **Swamp Creek Park:** 3179 Reifsnyder Road
Amenities: Model Airplane Flying, Walking Trail (.8 miles), Historical School House, Small Playground & Dog Friendly
- **NHT Community Park:** 2766 Gail Drive
Amenities: Barn Rental, Baseball/Softball Field, Basketball Court, Frisbee Golf, Hockey Court, Walking Trail, Pavilion Rental, Picnic Tables, Grills & Playground
- **Pleasant Run Park:** 600 Schultz Road
Amenities: Fishing Pond & Park Benches
- **Deep Creek Park:** Deep Creek Road
Amenities: Trails, Bird Watching & Picnic Tables
- **Windlestrae Park:** 132 Chalet Road
Amenities: Small Playground
- **New Hanover Recreation Center:** Hoffmansville Road/Houseman Road
Amenities: Indoor gymnasium, kitchen, conference room and classrooms.
- **Anthony "Tony" Gambone Sports Complex:** Chalet Drive
Amenities: Parking area, Soccer Fields
- **Middle Creek Athletic Fields:** Dotterer Road
Amenities: Parking area, baseball fields. Adjacent to the fields at Boyertown Middle School.

- **Wassmer-Layfield:** Between Dotterer Road and Charlotte St
Amenities: Forested open space with a trail connecting into the township building from Dotterer Road.
- **Hunter's Run Open Space:** Between Reindeer Ct and Fairbrook Dr
Amenities: Small Playground. Adjacent to Suloman's Farm, whose development rights were recently purchased by the township.
- **Kurtz Road Open Space:** Address
Amenities: Undefined open space.
- **Parestis Open Space:** Layfield Road/Little Road
Amenities: Undefined open space.
- **Rosenberry Road Open Space:** Rosenberry Road
Amenities: Small playground accessed off of Magnolia Drive
- **Windlestrae Park:** 132 Chalet Road
Amenities: Small Playground

Community Events

- List of yearly community events are posted on the township's website.
- Events are either held at the Community Park, Hickory Park, or the Recreation Center. One event is at the township building.

Funding and Maintenance

- There is a recreation fee and a recreation infrastructure fee assessed on properties (defined under the SALDO). This is diverted to a specific fund earmarked for park and open space improvements.
- Township's Public Works Department is primarily responsible for general maintenance at the parks, however some non-profit organizations that use the parks for their recreation leagues also provide funding, labor, and equipment to maintain the fields.
- Decisions for parks are made in part with input from the Recreation Board, which meets monthly and serves as an advisory body to the governing body.

Open Space and Recreation Master Plan, 2015

The township adopted a parks master plan in December 2015. It included a list of priority tasks, policies for maintenance, funding, and acquisition, and facility needs. Some of these priorities are summarized, below. Additional recommendations address more specific policy changes to facilitate the process and procedures of parks maintenance, including stormwater retrofits, and acquisition. It was not recommended that New Hanover build a regional recreation center. The full plan is

General Priorities

- First Priority: Upgrade existing facilities to be ADA compliant
- Second Priority: Create multi-modal connectivity to parks and open space resources, and incorporate comments from the EAB and the Recreation Committee into the land development process.

- Third Priority: Construct trail sections to provide linear green links throughout the township.
- Fourth Priority: New land acquisition and construction of undeveloped parks
- Fifth Priority: Install additional active recreation amenities.

Future Parks Opportunities

- Closure of the YMCA creates opportunities for redevelopment of the site, but also created a loss of recreation programming.
- New trails projects
 - Girl Scout Camp easement to connect into the Sunrise Trail/West County Trail. This is a critical open space preservation achievement, and will ensure a connection through the township to the Sunrise Trail and further out to the Perkiomen Trail. No current trail connects this area further west into the township.
 - Dotterer Road to connect the Gambone Sports Complex to the Middle Creek Athletic Fields
 - Wassmer-Layfield trail connecting the township building with Dotterer Road and into new trail on the north bend of Dotterer Road.
- Grant opportunities allow the township to leverage funding for additional capital input to install necessary equipment, acquire easements, or provide other park infrastructure.
- Multiple golf courses within the township may be unsustainable in the long-term, and there is potential for redevelopment of these properties.

Key Takeaways

Access and Connectivity

- Many of the parks are marked with signage but others are not as well indicated, either from a major roadway or at the entrance. Some communities create unified “wayfinding” signage that establishes a uniform design for all park signs and even road signs directing residents and visitors to these points of interest.
 - Creation of unified signage was listed as a general recommendation.
 - Do you feel residents are aware of the park and open space resources?
 - What barriers, if any, exist that would limit usage of the parks?
 - What kinds of trails, if any, do you want to see connecting parks and open spaces to other parks? To residential neighborhoods? How important is this to you they be provided? Trails can be formal or informal, can follow roadways or cut through properties. They can also be pedestrian-only, or created to be shared with bikes.
- One big question is if the township needs (or if residents want) a unified, central park feature. The Community Park and Hickory Park are both somewhat detached from the main residential areas and can be difficult to get to other than by car for most residents.
 - Where else would you want to see parks and open spaces be established?
 - Is there a need or a desire to have a more centrally located park feature? What function would it serve?
 - Would you want to eliminate any existing parks and open space features in order to establish a new central park area?

Amenities

- A few of the open space resources have little to no improvements made to them, but most of the parks have a minimum of amenities such as parking areas and active or passive recreation features. Active recreation refers to amenities like sports fields, tennis courts, swimming pools, and playgrounds. Passive recreation refers to amenities like walking trails. With a growing population moving in predominantly into residential subdivisions and potentially into the higher density housing of Town Center, there will be a growing need for park space and outdoor recreation opportunities.
 - Are you happy with the types of amenities provided at the parks?
 - What role do you feel the community events play? Are they attracting community members, especially newer community members? How are they being advertised and is it working?
 - What other amenities/features/recreational activities do you want to see in the township? What will the demographics find the most useful and desired?
 - Would you be more interested in seeing active or passive recreation provided at the parks? What kind of maintenance and access to open spaces do you want to see?
 - What did the closure of the YMCA mean to the community?
 - What needs are there for private membership gyms/independent fitness studios?
 - Do you ever feel constrained or limited from using a park because it is occupied by another group? The township shares many of its fields with private non-profit organizations like youth baseball teams.
- The Open Space Plan identifies a number of critical and specific goals and tasks for each of the parks and for park management as a whole. The comprehensive plan will not replicate this hard work that was put into making these recommendations, but consider what it calls for, and if that is in alignment with your vision for the future of the park and open space.
 - Many of the specific park-level recommendations is to create a master plan for each of the parks, and make sure all parks are fully accessible. At a broader level, future park and open space acquisition is recommended to be based on following a prioritized list for key lands. Consider the map – what are other areas contiguous to existing open space that should be preserved? What other areas not contiguous to existing open space could be preserved?

Value of Preserved Land

- As a whole, consider what the opportunity of having parks and open space in your community means to you. What are the main reasons why you value it if you do, or why not?
- Signage, available parking, and other amenities (restrooms, kiosks, etc) can play a role in community awareness and interest. How do your parks measure up?
- Parks and open space can play a key ecological role in preserving forest stands, meadows, and riparian buffers. Where is this working, and where is more protection needed?