

# CHAPTER 4

## PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Recreation and parks are essential to quality of life.

### **Recreation is:**

- Essential to personal health
- A key to balanced human development
- A significant economic generator

### **Recreation:**

- Reduces self-destructive and anti-social behavior
- Builds strong families and healthy communities
- Reduces health care, social service and police/justice costs

The citizens of Whitemarsh Township highly respect the diversity and high quality of the Township's recreation programs and services. This is reflected in the favorable ratings of recreation services captured in the survey, the increasing number of residents who

are participating in the programs and citizen requests for additional programs.

### **Recreation Success**

The Parks and Recreation Department offered over 320 scheduled programs/program sessions in 2005. This is over a four-fold increase in programs since 2000. A number of factors contributed to this success:

- Strong leadership by parks and recreation management.
- The Department's program planning expertise in attending to the needs and desires of the citizenry; creativity; responsiveness and sound business skills.
- Expansion of the programming team from one to three professionals.
- Establishment of the recreation building that enabled year-round recreation opportunities 24/7.
- Partnerships with key stakeholders such as organized sports, commercial providers of recreation services and associated groups such as the Arts Center and Library.

### **Recreation Trends**

Nationwide trends that will affect and influence recreation opportunities and direction in Whitemarsh Township include the following:

- The most significant trend that will affect recreation services is the aging of the citizenry and the large population over the age of 55.

### **Recreation Services Rated as Good to Excellent**

In the community parks and recreation survey, 79 percent of the respondents who are familiar with Whitemarsh Township's recreation services rated them as good to excellent.

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- Recreation for senior adults was once addressed as one group – “retirees” or “senior citizens”. Today this group cannot be considered as one homogenous entity. Physical, mental and emotional characteristics are more indicative of lifestyle, participation and interest than is chronological age.
- Sports participation is increasing dramatically. New leagues are emerging. Sports are played for multiple seasons rather than only a single season such as fall baseball and year round soccer.
- Increased interest in outdoor, nature based recreation. Nearly half of all American families say they spend time together outdoors at least once a month. Outdoor recreation is important to families with young children. Today, two thirds of all Americans recreate outdoors monthly while in 1994 only half did.
- People want information and education about recreation opportunities including activities they might not have done before such as kayaking, canoeing, bicycle trips and so on.

Despite increasing participation in recreation, new sports and activities, and a broadening of the participation base from younger males to both males and females of all ages, obesity and the lack of physical activity in the United States is at an all-time high. The United States Surgeon General issued a report in 1996 that physical inactivity among Americans is the number one public health issue<sup>6</sup>. Obesity costs the United States \$238 billion annually in expenses associated with diseases such as diabetes, stroke and heart disease not including the cost of treating the obesity itself.

The Center for Disease Control has stated that public park and recreation departments have a primary role in addressing this issue. They can provide attractive and safe places for people to walk, hike, bike, and enjoy other

active pursuits. Whitmarsh Township has certainly been working in that direction by offering fitness programs and improving parks for active recreational use. Another challenge facing both private enterprise and all arenas of public recreation is that increasing demand for facilities is outpacing availability and the resources to develop and manage new ones. Combined with rapid development in the metropolitan areas of Pennsylvania, the available open space is dwindling and land costs are escalating. There is an ever-present concern that future recreation opportunities for the public will be limited because of high demand and/or budget constraints. Whitmarsh Township is at a critical juncture for the provision of parks and recreation facilities. The potential still remains for open space conservation and park development land within the Township, however land is very expensive and development pressure is intense. It will become increasingly important to find creative ways to bring

## **Township Responds to Participation Increase**

In 2006, over 400 people/families registered for the Parks & Recreation Department’s programs. For over three hours, the Department registered people for the winter recreation classes. As a result, the Department responded immediately by establishing new methods for registration including Internet registration and a faster method for processing payments in-house. The number of 400+ citizens wanting to register was unprecedented and demonstrative of the dramatically growing participation in community recreation here.

<sup>6</sup> Surgeon General. (1996). Physical Activity and Health. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Public Health Service, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. <<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/npai.htm>>.

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recreation opportunities to facilitate healthy active lifestyles of the citizens in the future.

## Whitemarsh Township Recreation Trends and Issues

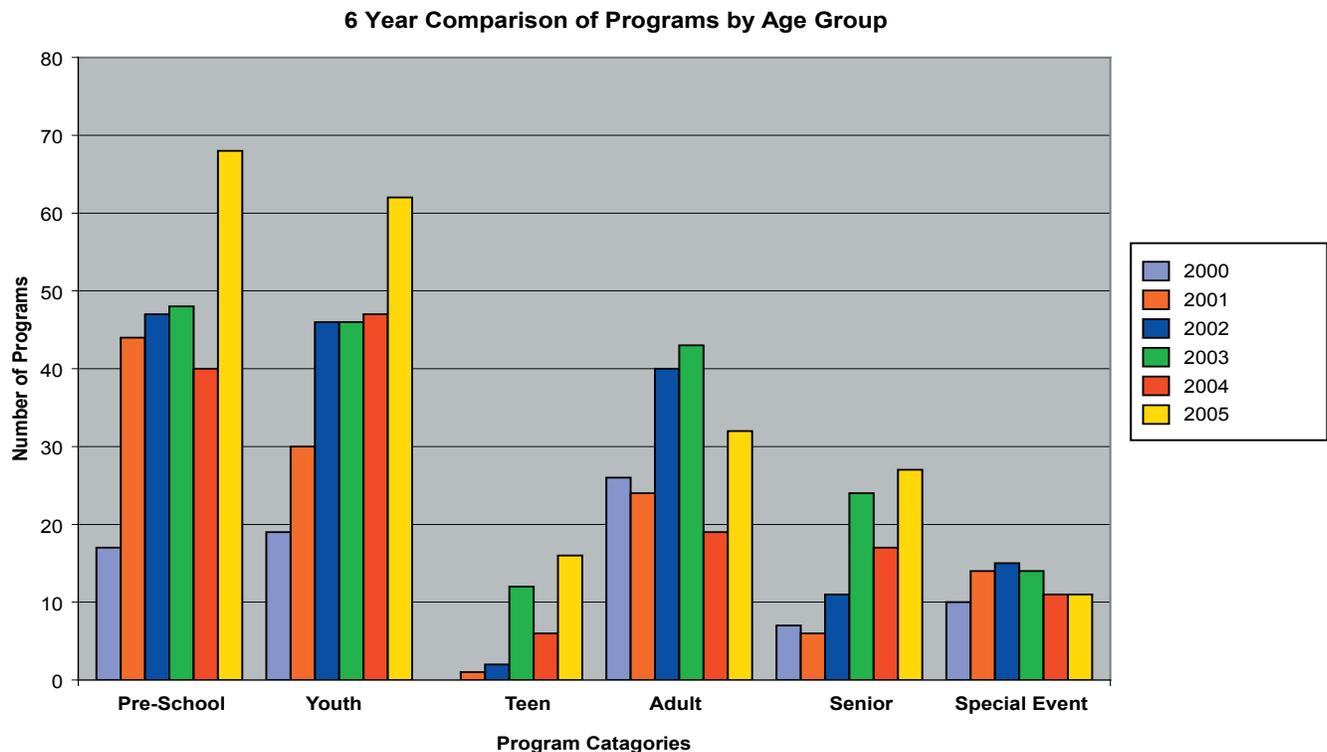
Based upon key person interviews, work sessions with township officials, the community survey, focus groups, and visits to the parks, the following trends are apparent in Whitemarsh Township:

- Participation is rapidly increasing.
- Interest in self-directed types of activities such as bird watching, photography, water-based recreation, nature study, relaxation and refreshment is on the rise thus requiring natural and scenic areas in addition to traditional sports-oriented facilities.
- Sports are expanding to year round play indoors and outdoors. New sports are on the horizon such as lacrosse. Sports fields have been so limited in Whitemarsh that the citizens actually play in leagues in other communities

such as field hockey in Whitpain.

- The sports groups report not having enough ball fields or gyms.
- Sports are geared towards youth athletics. Field supply is very limited so adults have little or no access to fields and gyms for league play.
- The Greater Plymouth Community Center is an influencing factor on Whitemarsh citizens. The public participation process generated many comments and requests to have a similar community indoor recreation center in Whitemarsh. An alternative expressed by the citizens was working with Plymouth Township to establish a partnership that would enable Whitemarsh residents to obtain lower membership and program rates at GPCC. About 62 percent of the survey respondents indicated that having an indoor recreation center with a gym, pool, fitness and activity facilities is important for Whitemarsh Township to have.

Chart 4-1 · Program Growth, 2000 - 2005



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- The Whitemarsh Art Center is a community treasure. Having such a facility is very unusual for a municipality and very appropriate for a community with Whitemarsh Township's demographics. The Arts Center needs considerable investment in order to function at an optimum level of community service.
- Chart 4-1 depicts program growth by client group and special events from 2000 through 2005.

## **Community Survey Findings**

The community public opinion survey reached a random sample of households. For the most part, they represent the residents who are not in any organized or special interest group. The findings of the community recreation and park survey related to recreation opportunities include the following:

## **Survey Findings Related to Programs and Services**

The community recreation survey addressed recreation opportunities in order to obtain information regarding needs, interests and future directions in services. The following findings emerged.

## ***Special events***

Whitemarsh Township Days, Movies in the Park and the Summer Concert series reach the broadest segment of the community for the very young through the older age groups.

## ***Preferred departmental focus***

About 65 percent of the respondents stated that enhancing programs and services is a priority (43%) or a high priority (22%).

## ***Activities with the highest response on participation***

- Special events

- Exercise and fitness
- League sports

## ***Activities with the highest response from those who would like to participate***

- Self improvement and education
- Exercise and fitness, special events
- Nature, performing arts

## ***Impression of township recreation programs***

- Good to excellent according to 79 percent of the survey respondents familiar with township recreation services.
- About 14 percent were not familiar with township services. This is a satisfactorily low rating.

## ***Level of service to client groups***

- Comments revealed that the groups most in need of services were teens, active adults, and older adults. About seven out of ten survey respondents indicated that establishing a senior center in Whitemarsh Township is important or very important.

## ***Self-directed recreation***

- The most desired facilities according to survey respondents were walking paths (73%) and bike paths (71%), comfort facilities (70%), and natural areas (67%). This is indicative of national trends towards self-directed activities such as walking, biking, hiking, and enjoyment of the great outdoors at one's own pace. The provision of these facilities will increase recreation opportunities for the citizens of Whitemarsh Township exponentially. The role of the Department would be (other than maintaining them) to promote and advertise these facilities to the citizenry and to develop some program aimed at getting people active in using them.

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## Community Recreation Services in Whitemarsh

Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Department offers approximately 320 programs, events and activities annually – and the number is growing! Numbers alone do not tell the full story.

### **Model: Public/Private Partnership to Get the Community Walking**

The Lewisburg Area Recreation Authority, Playworld Systems®, Inc., and Evangelical Community Hospital are pleased to be working in partnership to bring adults over the age of 50, a free membership to The LifeTrail Club. LifeTrail is a wellness product of Playworld Systems. Comprised of a series of seven outdoor Wellness Stations™, LifeTrail provides strengthening, flexibility and balance activities that address the major components of a fitness program for an older adult. The LifeTrail stations are installed along an approximately half-mile walking path in a park. Each of the wellness stations has three sides. Two of the sides offer activities with two levels of challenge and the third side is a wheelchair/ADA accessible activity panel. Evangelical is designing a LifeTrail Club for community members to join. Memberships will include incentive prizes, opportunities to attend health lectures at the trail, and an orientation session to learn how to use the trail equipment. Exercise Specialists from the Fitness Center and Community Health Departments will be offering private training sessions for a nominal fee.

More important than numbers is the quality of the services. Every aspect of the public participation process and management evaluation for this study found ratings in the good to excellent range for programs and services across the board.

These programs range from one-time major community events such as Whitemarsh Township Day, with hundreds of participants to programs held on a daily basis seasonally such as the Summer Camp to single session workshops. The Department also facilitates activities that people can undertake at their own pace such as Discount Ticket Sales to places including amusement parks, cultural and historical destinations.

Most programs have multiple visits such as everyday for the summer camps or the many games and practices each participant has for a league sport. Actual user visits are much higher than registration numbers convey. Events such as the Race-Walk and Parents Night Out might have a designated number of participants registered but many times over that number are involved as spectators or beneficiaries of the program. Spectators who come along to watch make community recreation events a true multi-generational family opportunity.

In addition to providing programs directly to the public, the Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Department also facilitates the provision of recreation programs by other groups such as sports groups; community groups; private organizations; and individuals holding their own events. By supporting other groups such as the organized sports associations, the Township greatly expands its capacity to offer public recreation that it could not provide independently.

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## *Program Revenues*

Since 2000, the Department of Parks and Recreation has increased program revenues by 250 percent all while keeping programs affordable and making provisions for those who need financial assistance. The percentage of the Parks and Recreation Department's budget offset by non-tax revenues has increased from about 24 percent to about 46 percent.

## *Partnerships*

In addition to program fees, the Department has partnerships and sponsorships that contribute valuable products and monetary contributions to support township recreation. In 2005, Whitemarsh Township had about 17 major sponsors for recreation events and programs and about 50 to 60 contributors of supplies and materials for recreation programs.

## **Parks and Recreation Department Program Inventory**

Table 4-1 presents the legend for the Whitemarsh Township Program Inventory shown in Table 4-2. Table 4-2 presents the summary of Whitemarsh Township's programs for 2005. It is important to note that programs vary by season. For example, camp programs are generally held in the summer when students are not in school.

## *Inventory Legend*

The Program Inventory offers a significant database for program planning. With 28 factors and over 250 programs, the data need to be focused on summary types of information. For this reason, the data is organized in Tables 4-1 and 4-2. While program data can be sorted in a variety of ways, the tables are consolidated according to the above noted program elements.

TABLE 4-1 KEY TO PROGRAM INVENTORY										
Age Group		Class		Format		Gender		Season		Number
P	2-6 years	A	Arts	S	Social	F	Female	F	Sept. - Dec.	# of participants
Y	Youth 7-12 years	C	Crafts	SI	Self-Improvement	M	Male	W/Sp	Jan. - Apr.	
T	Teens 13-16	Dc	Dance	C	Competitive	B	Both	S	May - Aug.	
A	Adults 17+ years	Dr	Drama	PS	Participant / Spectator					
F	Families	E	Environ.	SD	Self-Directed					
		F	Fitness							
		Mt	Mental							
		Ms	Music							
		Sp	Sports							
		So	Social							
		V	Volunteer							

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TABLE 4-2  
WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP PROGRAM INVENTORY

Program	Age	Gender	Class	Format	Season	# Participants	Comment
<b>Performing Arts</b>							
Dance Camp	Y	F	Dc/F	SI	S	0	New
Summer Concert Series	All	B	Ms	S	S	425	Postponed for 2006
Movies in the Park	All	B	A	S	S	1,050	
Trips							
Garden Golf & Go Carts	T	B	So	S	S	0	New
New York City	All	B	So	S	W/Sp	119	3 trips
Parents Night Out	F	B	So	S	F,W/Sp	270	9 sessions
Philadelphia Flower Show	A,Sr	B	So	S	W/Sp	4	
Legendary George Burns	A,Sr	B	So	S	All	15	1 trip
Ultra Zone Lazer Tag	T	B	So	S	All	1	
PRPS Discount Ticket Sales	All	B	So	Sd	All		Cooperative program with PRPS
<b>Sports &amp; Fitness Programs</b>							
Aerobics	A	B	F	SI	F,W/Sp,S	24	5 multi-week sessions
Baby Boot Camp	A/P/F	B	F	SI	W/Sp, F, S	0	New program
Cheerleading Camp	Y	F	Sp,F	SI	S	0	New
Co-ed Volleyball	A	B	Sp,F	C,S	W/Sp, F,S	14-16 avg.	About 20 sessions
Family Recreational Swim	A	B	F,So	S	W/Sp, F,	35-97 per session	30 sessions
Fun, Fit & 50	A	B	F	SI	W/Sp, F,	18	2 sessions
Golf	C	B	Sp	SI	F	13	3 sessions
Hip Hop Fitness	C,T	B	F,D	SI	F,W/Sp	40	4 sessions
Indoor Pee Wee Soccer	Y,T	B	Sp	SI	F, W/Sp	101	4 sessions
Intermediate Yoga	A	B	F	SI	F,W/Sp,S	45	5 sessions
Kids in Motion	C	B	F	SI	F,W/Sp,S	72	7 sessions; at capacity
Learn to Swim	P,Y, T	B	Sp,F	SI	F,W/Sp,	55	9 session with 5 levels
Martial Arts for Seniors	S	B	Sp	SI,So	F	0	New
Morning Lap Swim	S, A,T	B	F	SI	F,W/Sp, S	9 average	Year round
Pee Wee Soccer	C	B	Sp	SI	F,W/Sp,	194	12 sessions
Pee Wee Tennis	C	B	Sp	SI	F,W/Sp, S	40	4 sessions at capacity
Pilates	A	B	F	SI	F,W/Sp, S	24	3 sessions NEW
Pint sized players	C	B	Sp	SI	, S	30	
Private Swim Lessons	P,C	B	Sp,F	SI	F,W/Sp,	10 per session	65 sessions
Richie Ashburn Baseball Clinic	C,T	M	Sp	SI	S	190	
Self Defense	A	B	F	SI		15	3 sessions
Skyhawks sports camps: baseball, basketball, flag football, soccer, multi-sports	C	B	Sp	SI,C	S	125	7 sessions
Tennis	C	B	Sp	SI,C	S	85	9 sessions
Volleyball Camp	T	B	Sp	SI,C	S	0	New
Yoga	A	V	Sp,Mt	SI	F,W/Sp, S	60	5 sessions

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TABLE 4-2 CONTINUED

WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP PROGRAM INVENTORY

Program	Age	Gender	Class	Format	Season	# Participants	Comment
<b>Educational</b>							
Babysitting	T	B	Mt	SI	F/W/ Sp	48	5 multi-week sessions
Bebelingua	P	B	Mt	SI	W	5	New
Family CPR	A	B	Mt	SI	W/Sp	0	New
Junior Lifeguarding	T	B	Mt	SI	F,W/Sp	11	
Kinderlingua	P	B	Mt	SI	F, W/Sp	11	3 sessions
Science Explorers	C	B	Mt	SI	S	45	3 1 week camps
Sciensational	C	B	Mt	SI	S	24	2 two day caps
<b>Social</b>							
Bingo	S	B	Mt	SI,So	F/W/ Sp	0	No interest
Birthday Parties	P,Y	B	So	S	F,W/Sp	20 parties	Parties serve 16-24 participants
Bridge	S	B	Mt	SI, S	F,W/Sp, S	67	3 sessions
Club Hot	T	B	So	S	F,W/Sp,S	Over 100 avg.	New; held monthly
Club Gecko	C	B	So	S	S	0	New 58 sessions
Kid's Corner	C	B	So	S	F	0	Program being canceled due to addition of all day Kindergarten
Leisure Lunch	Sr	B	So	S	F, W/Sp	33	5 sessions
Monday Social	Sr	B	So	S	F, W/Sp,S	25 avg	9 sessions
Rock Night	T	B	So	S	W/Sp	75	4 sessions
Silly Slippers	C	B	So	S	F, W/Sp,S	80	11 sessions
The Garden Tea Room	A	B	So	S	W/Sp		New
Two's Days					W/Sp, F	66	6 sessions
Cedar Grove Playground	C	B	So	S	S	300 50 per week	6 weeks
Teen Extreme Camp	T	B	So	S	S	270 total, 45 per week	6 weeks
Nature/Environment							
Pony Grooming & Horsemanship Camp	C,T	B	E	SI	S		New
Special Events							
Halloween Pool Party	C	B	So	S	F	56	
Karaoke Night	T	B	So	S	W/sp	131	
Township Day	All	B	So	S	W/Sp	3500 avg over 7 years	Attendance increasing annually
Whitemarsh 5-K Race/Walk	A	B	So, Sp	So,C	W/Sp	85 avg for past two years	
Arts & Crafts							
Crafty Kids	Y	B	C	SI,S	F,W/Sp,S	53	5 sessions
First Friday Art	A	B	A	SI	F, W/Sp,	25	5 sessions, Cooperative program with WCAC
Let's Make a Mess	P	B	C	SI	F,W/Sp,S	50	5 sessions; at capacity
Saturday Sampler	C	B	C	SI	F	0	New
<b>Cultural</b>							
History Camp	Y	B	Mt	SI	S	0	New
Source: Whitemarsh Township Parks & Recreation Department							

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## Chart Highlights

There are a number of key points to note about the Whitemarsh Township Program Inventory. These include number of participants, classification, and service to clients.

- **Participants** – The participation numbers reflect a single registration by an individual for a program. It does not include multiple visits by one client for most of the programs. The numbers shown do not include spectators. With multiple visits and the spectators factored in, the volume of service and the real numbers become very large.
- **Classification** – The program classification is broad based including sports and fitness, culture, performing arts, studios arts and crafts, special events, and trips.
- **Service to Clients** – The programs are targeted to both males and females and are gender specific when appropriate. The beauty of Whitemarsh Township's planning focus is that it is centered on service to clients and not on just coming up with programs to offer hoping that people will sign up. Whitemarsh Township has a true customer service orientation first and foremost.
- **Location** – Programs are held in the Recreation Building, Miles Park, Cedar Grove Park (including the Art Center and the Barn) and the Colonial School District, mainly the pool.
- **Large Scale Programming** – What the chart does not reflect is the enormity of many of the programs. Large scale community events such as Township Days, the summer concerts and movies and so on require many hours of planning, volunteer coordination, sponsorship solicitation, event management, security, coordination, financial management and customer service.

## Facility Rentals

The Township permits the use of sports fields. Non-profit and for profit organizations have to pay a facility use fee.

## *Whitemarsh Community Art Center*

The Whitemarsh Community Arts Center seeks to provide an atmosphere of discovery in the arts for diverse audiences and to promote an understanding of the arts for the cultural enrichment of the community. The Art Center offers experiential programs in the arts, outreach programs for special audiences and special events. Table 4-3 presents the Art Center Programs. The Art Center operates autonomously from the Township.

The Art Center Programs include cartooning, clay, young artists' series, jewelry making, pottery, paper making, doll making, sculpture, ceramics, beading, watercolor, painting, printmaking, knitting, summer art camp, trips, the sale of local art, and special events. The hallmark program for the Art Center is the Valentine Tea which features art products and an artistic theme in a refined and delightful setting.

The center is limited by its facilities now. The Township has undertaken a study to evaluate the building and grounds to determine how to maximize the facility for community art programs and services.

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TABLE 4-3  
WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP ART CENTER PROGRAMS

2005 Sessions						
	Fall	January	Spring	May	Summer	Total
<b>Adult Programs</b>						
# of Classes	10	5	10	7	2	34
# of Students	101	30	86	45	10	272
<b>Children's Programs</b>						
# of Classes	18	12	19	11	6	66
# of Students	182	105	215	98	60	660
<b>Special Events</b>						
Bus trips	35	0	69	0	0	104
Cinema	51	0	0	0	0	51
Valentine Tea	0	0	179	0	0	179
2006 Sessions*						
	Fall	January	Spring	May	Summer	Total
<b>Adult Programs</b>						
# of Classes	15	5	7	6	0	33
# of Students	115	37	61	42	0	255
<b>Children's Programs</b>						
# of Classes	17	9	17	9	8	60
# of Students	182	84	141	74	92	573
<b>Special Events</b>						
Bus trips	40	0	69	0	0	109
Wine Tasting	51	0	0	0	0	51
Valentine Tea	100	0	179	0	0	279
Not all numbers are available for 2006 at this time.						

## William Jeanes Community Library

The William Jeanes Memorial Library is dedicated to serving the Whitemarsh Township's educational and recreational needs through its collection of more than 50,000 books, periodicals, videos, CDs, DVDs, and other resources. More than 120,000 visitors use the library each year to select materials, attend programs,

and use its Internet-accessible computers. Located on Joshua Road, the library, Recreation Building and Miles Park along with the nearby school district campus creates the heart of the community.

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## **Future Directions and Limitations in Programs and Services**

Department records are vital sources of information about Whitemarsh Township's capacity and demand for services. The Director has implemented a tracking system that shows capacity for programs along with actual registration and participation. Overall the Department is at about an 85 percent capacity with waiting lists for many recreation programs. The Department has added two full time recreation professionals to develop and implement recreational services.

One of the limitations of recreation services in Whitemarsh Township is facilities. The establishment of the Recreation Building was a major achievement in advancing recreation year round for people of all ages and interests beyond sports. The center has become the hub of teen and senior activities. However the building is small. The Township is undertaking an assessment of the building to determine how to maximize its use. Consideration should be given to building a gym, potentially with an indoor track on-site.

## **Whitemarsh Township Program Analysis**

Recreation programs and services are important in Whitemarsh Township. The program classification is wide ranging encompassing nine different areas. These include aquatics; the arts; camps; exercise; fitness & wellness; leagues; performing arts; self-improvement and education; special events; sports; trips; pre-school, youth, teen and family programs.

A strength of Whitemarsh Township program planning is the management focus on customer service and not on programs per se. The goal is to serve identified clients groups. Whitemarsh

Township offers programs in a variety of formats. Program formats are tools for offering a variety of experiences within activities. Formats include: self-improvement, competition, social, participant-spectator, and self-directed. For example, "soccer" could include league play, a trip to a soccer game, or volunteerism through coaching. Township program focus is diverse and well balanced.

## **Program Structure and Schedule**

The program schedule operates in a three season schedule consistent with how the school calendar operates: fall, winter/spring and summer. This works well in terms of client service, management and promotional functions. The Township offers multi-week classes, single time events, special events and "pay at the door" opportunities. The emphasis of programming is on creating developmental experiences to enrich the lives of the participants and build lifelong active healthy lifestyles, not on competition. The Township has worked hard and successfully in creating year round recreation facilities. The Township is also moving ahead in making parks more "park-like" with amenities including pavilions, trails, comfort facilities and so on. This will enable people to participate on their own.

## **Fee and Revenue Philosophy**

Whitemarsh Township aims for cost recovery from the direct user of the service, program, or special facility. The parks are generally available at no cost to park visitors. Charges for the reservation of special use facilities in the parks are the exception to free park use. The Township has worked cooperatively with community organization such as Little League

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in providing facilities on township owned property. An example of this is the ball field lighting at Miles Park which Little League constructed and supports in terms of paying the electrical costs of operating the lights. A partnership with the Philadelphia Sports and Social Club also generated the donation of basketball backboards.

The Parks & Recreation Department works with citizens who are in financial difficulty to assure that children are able to participate in recreation programs.

Ironically, the program fees that received the most comment during the public participation process were those charged to Whitemarsh Township residents for the use of the Greater Plymouth Community Center. Residents expressed the idea of Whitemarsh Township working with Plymouth Township in the formulation of an agreement in which Whitemarsh residents might be able to pay lower costs than are charged to non-resident by Plymouth Township. Since GPCC is operated on the basis of cost recovery, such an agreement would require some financial contribution from Whitemarsh Township in order for their citizens to pay lower fees at GPCC.

## **Good Service/Good Will**

The public participation process found that the goodwill towards the Parks and Recreation Department creates an overall favorable impression of Whitemarsh Township. The Director pays a high degree of attention to public comments and questions. He responds immediately to citizen concerns via a telephone call or in writing.

## **Program Planning and Management**

Great recreation programming does not just happen. It requires expertise, training, creativity, and

a willingness to take risks. Recreation programs must meet client needs for socialization, enrichment, creativity, adventure, and physical and emotional well-being.

Changes in programs, locations, times, staff, and other factors need to be carefully considered. The goal should be to balance the introduction of activity or event changes with quality existing services in order to insure a vibrant, thriving full-service recreation program. Any changes in program planning must be rooted in an analysis regarding the impact upon existing programs, services and staffing. Adding and changing recreational programs needs to be a decisive process. Because the Department provides recreational services so successfully, it is easy to underestimate all that it takes to make these successful. Program changes impact management, staff, funding, promotion, scheduling, financing, other programs and support staff. While the Department is innovative, creative and flexible, it would be easy for these positive traits to take over to the detriment of quality services. Staff judgment should play an important role in management decisions regarding individual programs and services.

The Parks & Recreation Department is in its “New Age” of recreation programming and services. Never before has the township had the staff, facilities and support underway now to grow the kind of community recreation services vital to 21st century living. The staff continually tries out fresh programs, monitors cancellation rates and assesses reasons for cancellations. This practice should continue as it means that the staff is designing programs that are new and creative. The goal for new programs introduced annually should be about 20 percent.

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About 30 to 50 percent of all new courses are likely to be cancelled while only about 15 percent of existing classes should be cancelled.

- The Department is attempting to phase in methods to systematize the guidelines for cost recovery in an organized and equitable fashion for each and every program. The following components, along with their ideal percentage, should be considered as factors in a pricing formula for programs :
  - Income projected – Fees paid by participants – 100%
  - Direct Cost – Instructors, materials, supplies - Not more than 60 percent
    - Operating Margin (Income minus Direct Costs) – About 40 percent
  - Administration – Administrative salaries, space – About 35 percent
  - Promotion – Advertising, brochures, postage – About 10-15 percent

## **Program Registration**

Program registration is available through drop-in, mail, phone, fax and on-line via the Internet, beginning in 2006. The Township has made registration even more convenient by accepting credit cards.

## **Program Promotion**

Whitemarsh Township completely re-did the recreation program guide in 2006 to make it a state-of-the-art publication consistent with the values and sensibilities of the Whitemarsh residents. Survey comments found that people would like to get more information about parks, recreation programs, and other leisure time opportunities. More than three out of four survey respondents reported that they

get their information from the recreation guide and about 62 percent would like to continue to receive it. The difference in these two numbers is made up by 21 percent of survey respondents who would like to download the newsletter. Newspapers ranked second in terms of providing information about recreation to the citizens – but only at a response rate of 36 percent.

Important promotional tools that Whitemarsh has are the programs and the parks themselves! When the citizens experience top notch service from the Township, they join in on future programs and tell their family and friends about their experiences. Another important promotional tool is word-of-mouth. Many people talked in the interviews and focus groups about how they heard about the great programs in the Township.

## **Self-Directed Programs**

People want to be able to use facilities such as trails, bike paths, fitness facilities, scenic areas, and have access to natural areas for their own self-directed recreation. The survey shows that these are among the most preferred activities. It is important for the Township to secure the land for such facilities before it is lost to development.

## **Other Recreation Service Providers**

Whitemarsh residents are fortunate to have a number of recreation service providers in addition to the Township's services. The role of the Township is to work in cooperation with the other providers and to facilitate their programming wherever possible. Whitemarsh Township has a host of groups that all contribute to public recreation in the community.

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The Department's philosophy is that collaboration is mutually beneficial and results in effective public service for less cost. The Department and the community sports organizations have worked hard at building a strong working relationship. The Department rigorously avoids duplication of effort to focus on programs that are not offered elsewhere.

## **Fort Washington State Park**

Whitemarsh Township works with state park staff in community recreation programs. The state park will be the site for the Township's 5-K race. The park is also serving as a destination for planning township pathways. The State Park provides for overnight tenting which is primarily utilized by organized groups, such as the Boy Scouts. The State Park has also added a state-of-the-art playground at the Militia Hill area.. Discussions are ongoing to develop some type of environmental education facility within the park. The Township and the State Park administration have opened a dialogue to explore opportunities to form a stronger partnership for community-oriented activities and events.

## **Montgomery County Parks & Historic Services**

Montgomery County adopted a strategic plan, **Shaping Our System**, in 2005 in which Parks & Historic Services is looking at partnerships with municipalities and other park, recreation and heritage service providers. There is an opportunity for Whitemarsh Township to collaborate with the County in the area of nature and environmental education as well as in creating connections to the Cross County and Schuylkill River Trails. As Montgomery County develops its Visitors Services Division, Whitemarsh Township could pursue discussions with the County

regarding future partnerships. Potential collaboration could also be discussed with respect to Spring Mill County Park.

## **Colonial School District and Related Programs**

The Adult Evening School sponsored by the Colonial School District is a nonprofit organization. Courses fall under the categories of Arts and Crafts, Business and Finance, Languages, Special Interests, and Sports Health and Recreation, and are designed mainly for the self-improvement and enjoyment of the students. Classes are held Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights. No high school or college credit is given.

## **Organized Youth Sports**

Whitemarsh Township has several organizations that provide organized sports on a volunteer basis. The Parks and Recreation Department provides facilities for the leagues. Over the past ten years, participation has increased, year-round play emerged, more females are playing, and players are involved at older and younger ages. This has resulted in the need for more facilities and additional maintenance requirements. Table 4-4 presents the Whitemarsh Township organized sports inventory.

## **Issues and Opportunities Regarding Youth Sports**

Matters that affect sports play in Whitemarsh Township include:

### *Field Use Conflicts*

- Overlapping field design results in organizations vying for the same space, irregular patterns of use that affect sports play differently for the various sports using

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TABLE 4-4  
WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP ORGANIZED SPORTS INVENTORY

Organization	Sport	Partici- pants	Number	Season	Fee	Comments
Whitemarsh Boys Youth Basketball League	Basketball	Boys 6-17	500 total 450 resi- dents	10/15-3/31	\$75	Additional gym time needed. Growing.
Whitemarsh Girls Basketball	Basketball	Girls 6-14	300 total 275 resi- dents	10/1-3/15 and 6/1 - 8/1	\$50/winter \$25/summer	Enrollment increasing yearly. More indoor court time needed. Improvements in Miles Park courts needed
Plymouth Soccer	Soccer	Boys & Girls 5-18	1,137 total 358 resi- dents	Year round	\$115/person/travel team \$65/person/inter- mural	Additional soccer fields needed for yr. round play
Whitemarsh Intra-mural Soccer	Soccer	Boys & Girls 6-9	72 total 72 residents	4/1-6/15	\$40	
Whitemarsh Girls Softball	Softball	Girls 5-16	245	4/1-6/30 & year-round travel	\$50/instructional \$60/intermediate, jr, &sr.	Need practice areas
Philadelphia Sports Club	All	Adults				Willing to help the Township with facility improvements.
Plymouth Whitemarsh Aquatics Club	Competitive swimming and diving	Boys & Girls 6 - 18	200	Fall / Winter		

the same space; user conflicts and over use of the field.

- Year round play precludes the use of overlapping facilities.
- Miles Park is perceived as a much larger park than it really is leading to higher public expectations for this facility that are unrealistic.

### *Changes & Growth in Sports*

- Soccer is going to smaller numbers of players on the field at one time e.g. going from 11 players on a side to eight players on a side. This change will require a greater number of teams, and thus a greater number of fields to accommodate them.

- Additional organized sports leagues for youth are emerging such as lacrosse. Facilities for emerging sports and adult use are needed. Focus is on youth sports with current sports. Emerging sports for adults include lacrosse, soccer and rugby leagues.
- Some sports leagues are operated regionally such as field hockey in Whitpain Township. Some programs such as Little League have designated territories that do not follow municipal boundaries.
- Both women's and men's leagues are emerging in these sports for over 30, over, 40 and over 50! Field hockey and soccer leagues for older players are springing up in municipalities across the state.

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## *Maintenance*

- The Colonial School District has experienced over use and abuse of school district fields.
- Overlapping field use and overlapping sports' seasons place more wear and tear on the fields requiring a higher level of maintenance.

## **Sports Group Needs and Concerns**

Representatives of the community organized sports groups participated in a focus group regarding how to improve facilities and services to the community through league sports. The following points were made:

- The major concern is working with the Colonial School District. Group wants to establish an effective working relationship with the school district and improve the use of school district facilities for community recreation and sports. This includes improving field scheduling and the policies on facility use.
- Lack of gym time is a pressing issue.
- Girls softball fields are at a lesser quality than the Little League Fields.
- Little League owns and pays for the lights. This was in conformance with an agreement between the Township and the neighbors around Miles Park.
- More field lighting is needed especially for fall sports when daylight is limited.
- Need more help for field maintenance – some groups do all of their maintenance.
- Concern about Miles Park emerged as a focus of the discussion for much of the meeting. Concerns include foul balls, lack of restrooms, lack of pavilions, field conditions, number of fields, inadequate parking. The participants discussed creating better communication among the groups using Miles Park.

- Concern about lack of fields for adults.
- Some sports such as boys' basketball reported having to go out of the Township to play. This includes soccer in Plymouth and field hockey in Whitpain.
- A unified approach to seeking sponsorships should be considered.
- Group determined that they should unite as an umbrella organization in Whitmarsh to come together on a regular basis to share issues and opportunities of common concern.
- Philadelphia Sports Club expressed a desire to assist the township financially with park improvements that they use and that are used by others. The example that emerged was the Club providing funding for new basketball posts and backboards at Miles Park.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

1. Work towards achieving a balance in recreational opportunities and facilities between organized groups and the general public.
  - Use criteria for determining the types of projects and programs that will be undertaken to insure that facilities and service for both organized groups and the general citizenry are achieved.
2. Continue to grow the programs and services in the manner established since 2000.

Insure that all programs and service provide excellent customer service, high caliber staff, quality experiences in the programs, and responsiveness to participant requests or concerns.
3. Continue to focus on serving client groups as the primary organizing factor in recreation planning and service delivery. This is highly preferred to simply identifying programs to offer. Heed the demographic characteristics of the community. The relative affluence, higher

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educational levels, and physical health attributes, especially in the older age groups defy typical stereotypes of program interests. Active seniors expressed great interest in higher level intellectual pursuits, fine dining, trips, and active pursuits, not the stereotypical bingo and senior center.

4. Concentrate on growing the pre-school program. Establish the Barn as the official Pre-school Hub for Whitemarsh Township. This is highly preferred to simply identifying programs to offer. Recycle the programs by shelving programs with declining attendance and adding new programs to keep them fresh and attractive.

5. Focus on teens, active seniors and families. These are the client groups identified as priorities in the public participation process.

- Work with active aging people in the 55-65 age group to plan and implement programs. Consider holding focus groups or establishing an advisory council. Send staff to conferences dealing with this topic as it is a challenging program area that is just breaking ground.
- Continue the approach to program planning with teens. Improve the facilities at Miles Park to be more “Camp-like” to improve conditions at the camp. The Park is set up as a sports complex not a camp thereby not offering the kind of amenities conducive to the camp programming and participant comfort.
- Take existing program in which families can participate and package and promote them as “Family Recreation Service”.

6. Merge the Art Center as a division of the Parks and Recreation Department.

- Undertake a collaborative approach between the Art Center Board, the Parks & recreation Department and Whitemarsh Township Administration to determine the process for merging functions.
- Work towards consensus on how the transition will be phased in, mission, goals,

roles responsibilities and processes.

- Identify a time line with assigned roles and outcomes expected.

7. Work with the Colonial School District to establish a collaborative relationship to maximize public service, apply effective policies, and make the optimum use of public facilities. This includes:

- Continuing School Board representation on the Parks and Recreation Board as well as on advisory boards for parks and recreation planning projects.

- Explore policies related to the public recreational use of facilities.

- Look for areas for potential collaborative projects such as in the areas of environmental education, fitness and wellness and so on.

8. Establish a consortium of community sports organizations.

- Hold regularly scheduled meetings semiannually or in conjunction with field use allocation.

- Involve the Colonial School District in these meetings and discussions.

- Evaluate field allocation policies, policy on field lighting with Little League and concession policies and operation.

- Work towards the establishment of additional ball fields and game courts.

- Determine where field lighting could be installed.

- Investigate how an additional gym(s) could be constructed.

- Construct sports facilities within the context of making the area useful and attractive for park visitors who come to the site for uses other than playing sports.

9. Work on facility design and improvement to support life long self-directed recreation. This

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includes:

- Trails for walking and biking.
- Access to the river.
- Recreation Building expansion to enable year round recreation for people of all ages and interests. Adding facilities for drop-in recreation such as a gym, indoor track, socialization areas and so on would be important.

10. Consider nature and environmental education as the next specialty area.

- Work with the Township to identify potential future park land acquisition areas that would incorporate natural resources areas and scenic landscapes.
- Examine nature and environmental services as a program area.
- Explore a partnership with the Colonial School District, Morris Arboretum, Schuylkill Valley Nature Center, Andorra Nature Center, and Montgomery County Parks & Heritage Services in the area of environmental education and nature.
- Investigate a partnership with Montgomery County Parks & Heritage Services regarding environmental education, especially at the Spring Mill site.
- Establish connections to the Schuylkill River in conjunction with regional partners. Places for citizens to access the river may only be possible through the adjoining communities, but Whitemarsh could establish connections through trails and other revitalization projects along the river.

11. Explore the creation of a “healthy community” program.

- As a result of the top public health issue of lack of physical activity and the obesity problem among youth, explore developing a program targeting these issues in the community.

- Insure that the program could be absorbed within the resources of the department or through other partnership or grant funding sources. Carry out the program as resources allow.

- Target youth and senior adults as the main program participants.

12. Update the WEB site to become the “go to” location for information about parks and recreation.

- Make the WEB site maintenance a designated responsibility of a staff person and charge them with keeping the site current.

13. Continue to look at support issues that affect programs and services.

- Explore hours that serve people best especially programs for children that require extended hours for working parents.
- Investigate the provision of transportation for recreation for people in the under 16 and senior adult age groups.
- Insure that top-notch instructors and program contractors are retained. They are the difference between success and failure in public recreation programming.
- Calculate and adopt the funding formula for programs and services that includes direct costs for the programs such as instructor wages and materials; administrative costs which cover overhead of administration and program space; and promotional costs.
- Consider the facility and staff needs that are basic to offering programs that draw people to facilities. This includes parking, fitness center size, and current sports field numbers and maintenance. Look at sports regionally with other townships.

# RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Map #4 Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space Resources

