

# CHAPTER 5

## PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN MANAGEMENT

The Whitemarsh Township Parks & Recreation Department manages a wide range of facilities and services including the indoor Recreation Building, parks, sports facilities and programs year round.

Park and Recreation professionals need a diverse set of skills and techniques to manage the complex systems in the ever-changing and demanding world of public parks and recreation. Successful operations are rooted in effective management. While it is important to do things right, it is even more important to do the right things.

Whitemarsh Township has earned the well-deserved reputation for having a professionally managed parks and recreation system for over thirty years.

### **Purpose of the Management and Financing Assessment**

The purpose of the management and financing assessment was to work with the Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Department in taking a fresh look at operations. The assessment addressed organizational structure, staffing, employee development, public involvement, maintenance, and information management.

### **Parks and Recreation Department Organization**

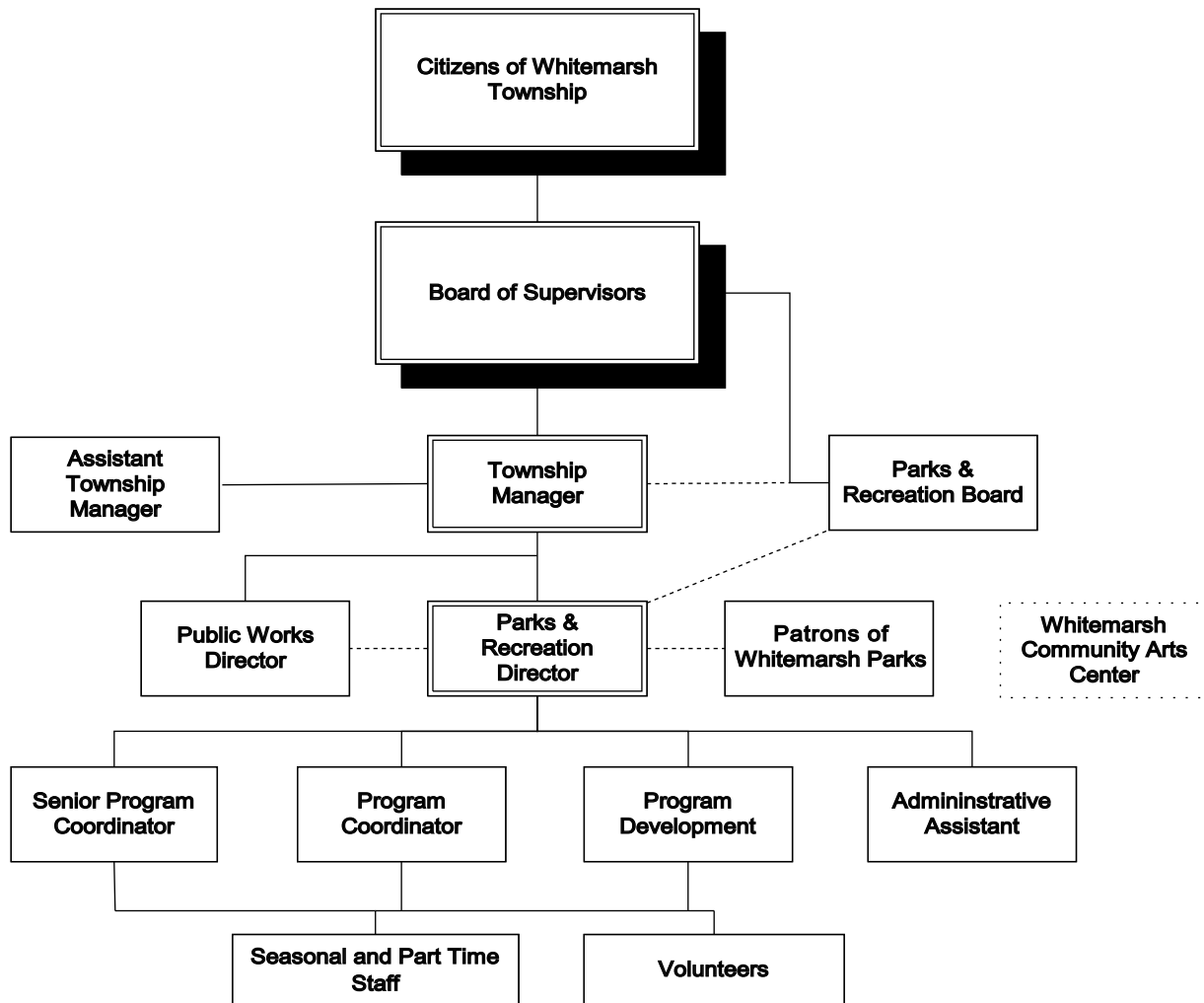
Figure 5-1 depicts the Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Department Organizational Structure. The Whitemarsh Parks and Recreation Department has four full time employees and over 50

seasonal and part-time employees and independent contractors.

### **Management**

The Parks and Recreation Department is housed in the Recreation Building, a move made in 2005. Having a centralized location in a facility that can also be used to provide parks and recreation programs is a major step forward for Whitemarsh Township. The chief management position for this department is the Director of Parks and Recreation. The Director reports to the Township Manager. The Director oversees full-time and part-time staff as shown in the organization chart. The Parks and Recreation Director is responsible for implementing the policy directives of the Board of Supervisors through the Township Manager by administering the day to day functions of parks and recreation. The Director is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Parks & Recreation Department including planning, directing, controlling and evaluating all aspects of the system including personnel, administration, programs, services, promotion, financing, parks planning, Recreation Building, and coordination with volunteer boards and committees. The Director works closely with the Public Works Director in coordinating park maintenance.

**Figure 5-1**  
**Whitemarsh Township**  
**Parks & Recreation Department**  
**Current Organizational Structure**



Whitemarsh Township has assembled an important group of supporting staff under the Director as part of the Parks & Recreation Department management team. These include:

- **Program Development** is responsible for overall program and recreation opportunity development in Whitemarsh Township as well as for teens, senior adults, discount ticket sales and party bookings.
- **Program Coordinator** is responsible for aquatics, camps, sports, some adult programs, soccer
- **Senior Program Coordinator** manages pre-school programs, pee wee soccer, some adult programs, and contracted staff
- **Administrative Assistant** is responsible for program registration, newsletter production, mailings, permits, security deposits for park use, customer service, and program assistance.

## **Parks Maintenance**

Parks maintenance falls within the Public Works Department of Whitemarsh Township's overall organization. The Facilities Manager assists Parks & Recreation in program set up. Maintenance tasks are the responsibility of the Public Works Department overall. However, some major management responsibilities fall under the Director of Parks and Recreation. This includes the mowing contract which is expected to lapse, with the responsibility once again going back to the Township.

## **Professional Parks & Recreation Positions**

Management positions dealing with parks and recreation require a high level of professionalism and appropriate certification and licensure. The number

of part-time positions creates a large workload for the Department in terms of recruiting, hiring, training, supervising and evaluating the number of employees in the system. Consequently attracting and retaining dedicated, skilled, and highly qualified people is in the best interest of the Township in terms of both service delivery and cost containment.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers are integral to parks and recreation operations in Whitemarsh Township. Organizationally, volunteers fall under the Parks and Recreation Director. Volunteerism should continue to operate as is with sports associations, support organizations, the volunteer boards, scouts, and community service projects. Because of the extensive amount of time that volunteers require, volunteerism in Whitemarsh Township should be directed towards groups rather than individuals. The exception would be for high quality, dedicated volunteers such as Eagle Scout or Gold and Silver Medal projects. Until the Parks & Recreation Department can allocate dedicated staff time to coordinate a volunteer program, no extensive outreach for volunteers should be undertaken.

## **Grantsmanship and Support**

At present, the Director is in charge of seeking grants, gifts, donations, sponsorships and partnerships. Grant writing is a major responsibility with significant commitment of time required to do the job right. With numerous township projects on drawing board for many departments besides Parks and Recreation, consideration should be give to creating a position for a grant writer or retaining a grant specialist as a consultant. The designated

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individual would have Parks and Recreation Department grant writing as a responsibility.

## **Parks and Recreation Board**

Established by ordinance, the Whitemarsh Township Park and Recreation Board consists of five members with five year terms. The Board is advisory and is charged with making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the supervision, regulation, equipping and maintaining of township funded recreation programs and facilities. All of the present members joined the Board within the last two years.

## **Patrons of Whitemarsh Parks**

The Patrons of Whitemarsh Parks is an organization set up to support parks and recreation in the community. The Patrons coordinated a successful fundraising campaign that resulted in the creation of the tot lot at Miles Park. The group is currently inactive but is expected to come to life with the adoption of this plan. In order to be effective, the group should develop a mission statement, determine responsibilities and roles, and create an action plan with a time line for the accomplishment of identified tasks.

## **Parks and Recreation Department Operations**

Whitemarsh Township's organizational structure is set up to empower the Director to manage day to day operations and coordinate with township officials, volunteer boards and committees including the Parks and Recreation Board and organizations such as the sports groups, Colonial School District, and other community members.

## **Recreation Programs**

Whitemarsh Township offers a large number of recreation programs (320+) and services given the small staff. Having the program staff in place is crucial to the Department in being able to offer the range, diversity and number of scheduled recreation programs and events.

Special events are important such as Whitemarsh Township Day, the movie series and others. The special events require extensive work hours, coordination and support in terms of planning and event implementation. This needs to be recognized as an official part of the department workload and not merely voluntary support for related community functions.

In addition to managing department sponsored events and components of community events sponsored by other organizations, the Department coordinates community sports with numerous leagues. The leagues presently operate as independent organizations. The Director is working with the leagues to form an umbrella organization in which the leagues could still operate independently but come together to collaborate, exchange information, and discuss common issues and opportunities.

Based upon the program and a management assessment, consider the following:

1. **Recognize that there are a large number of programs and services that are provided by a small staff.** Because of the significant foot and phone traffic the programs generate, the Department could use Customer Service representatives to handle transactions and respond to requests during peak operating times,
2. **The Director coordinates with recreation-oriented businesses and contractors in the private sector to provide a significant**

portion of the public recreation programs. This is a very positive use of a manager's time: leveraging outside sources.

3. **The department offers three programming seasons.** This is an effective schedule that complements the Colonial School District calendar and to which most citizens relate.
4. **Explore the support issues related to program and recreation participation.** Evaluating programs *with participants* will be crucial to future sustained participation. This includes issues such as transportation, information dissemination, program locations, program content especially for long term programs such as camps, advertising, hours of events and other issues and ideas that the participants would bring out.
5. **Develop the program management plan for the next fiscal year in the fall.** The Department adds many programs over the course of a year. While this is an admirable and refreshing way to offer parks and recreation opportunities, care must be taken not to overextend the staff. The plan should address the market segments to be addressed; total number of services, locations, events or programs to be offered for each programming season; income goals that also include provision of services for those with financial needs. It is important to create a program vision for three to five years out and then develop the program management plan in detail for the first year. It is equally important that the program plan be realistic. Use this approved plan as a guide and for decision-making purposes when other programs are requested to be put into place. Programming benchmarks could include the following<sup>1</sup> :

- New programs – 10%

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<sup>1</sup> Based upon formula supplied by LERN, the Learning Resources Network which is the leading association in lifelong learning programming. LERN PO Box 9 River Falls, Wisconsin, 54022. <[Http://www.lern.org](http://www.lern.org).

- Overall cancellation rate – 15%
- New program cancellation rate – 30-50%
- Divisions – keep the same program areas as available now within the current workload.

While LERN (a nationally recognized recreation programming organization) recommends that 20 percent of a municipal park and recreation organization's programs be new annually, this percentage appears to be high given the scope and sheer number of programs offered by Whitemarsh Township. For Whitemarsh, new programs offered annually should be in the ten percent range. The recommendation for new programs is based upon the premise that existing programs would be evaluated to determine which ones could be discontinued due to low interest and changing trends or needs. It does not mean that 60 programs should be added to existing program offerings; some programs should be discontinued as new ones are planned. Systematizing overhead calculations and their application to program fees and charges should be implemented in order to generate additional revenues.

6. **The Department's program management system is now being computerized.** This is important for registration, customer service, needs assessment, customer target marketing. Computerization will offer real time information, historical records, reduce registration time, enable target marketing, provide mailing lists, provide management and elected officials with immediate and long term comparative information. All of this translates into more effective decision-making and planning based upon high quality information.

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## **Park Planning and Management**

Park planning has been done in the past in response to a pressing need. In order to make the best use of existing parks and recreation facilities, park planning should include master planning for all sites. In 2006, the Department in conjunction with Township administration took a major professional step forward in undertaking several professional planning projects including this parks and recreation plan, the open space plan, the evaluation of the Arts Center, and the assessment of the Recreation Building. The common denominator in all of these projects was retaining consultants with appropriate expertise to work with the Director and other township officials in the planning process which also included public participation. Incorporating a public participation process into park planning is crucial. Developing policies on gifts and donations along with park master plans will enable the Township to guide the park development process as well as to make sure that gifts and donations are in line with the best use, configuration, park design and operational resources for the good of the overall community. Consider the following:

1. **Policies on gifts and donations are needed.** Consider the impact of the gift in terms of future maintenance and budgeting requirements.
2. **Groups that are primary users of the parks such as organized sports groups, teens and youth in summer camp programs, park neighbors, and others should be part of the planning and management processes.** It is important to involve the users in order to maintain and enhance park stewardship.
3. **Collaboration between the Parks & Recreation Department and the Public Works Department is crucial.**
4. **Volunteers are an essential part of park maintenance and development.** It is important

to recognize that volunteers are not free: they require supervision, management, recognition, and training. Volunteerism in Whitemarsh Township needs to be clarified in terms of what volunteers expect in return for their services. This is an issue common to many municipalities in which sports groups generously contribute support through facility improvements or maintenance and then in return expect exclusive use for the respectful facility. Given the fact that the parks as part of the public estate, care must be taken in the formation of partnerships and the terms of agreement so that all parties benefit, especially the community at large.

## **Administrative Services**

The Parks & Recreation Department is headquartered in the Recreation Building on Joshua Road at Miles Park in the former township building. The Department works with the Township Manager and the Finance Department in financial management. The day-to-day contacts with citizens are covered through the Administrative Assistant and the program managers. The Director pitches in with this as well to insure that the office is covered.

The Parks & Recreation Department has been working diligently to bring its data management into the 21st century. The Department is computerizing all of its administrative functions, accepting credit card payments, and moving into internet registration. This is a most important initiative that will have long term payback in terms of excellent customer service, accountability, real time information production.

## **Parks & Recreation Policy**

The Parks & Recreation Department is in the process of developing policies to cover all situations that could be encountered in this public service

arena. These include volunteerism, gifts, program polices, fees and charges, roles and responsibilities of various volunteer boards, recreation staff policies. The Department has an underlying commitment to excellent public service and already has a system of unwritten policies in place such as immediate response to citizen requests and complaints, and effective procedures for handling business transactions. Formalizing policies is time intensive and needs to be scheduled over a reasonable time frame in order to be accomplished.

## **Public Relations & Promotions**

Public relations and informing citizens about parks and recreation is one of the major challenges of the Department. About 63 percent of the survey respondents reported having a good to excellent impression of township recreation services. This approval rating goes up to 79 percent when only those who are familiar with the programs are counted. About one in five survey respondents indicated that they did not know about the Township's recreation opportunities, a favorable finding. Three out of four respondents get their information from Recreation News, which indicates the importance of this newsletter. In the future about 62 percent would like to continue to receive the newsletter and another 21 percent would like to be able to download it. The implications are that the newsletter needs to continue into the foreseeable future while the Parks and Recreation Department cultivates the web site and e-mails as a means to promote community parks and recreation opportunities. While most of the survey respondents know about Miles Park and Cedar Grove, the majority did not know about Leeland, Kline and McCarthy Parks, which are smaller

neighborhood parks. The most important reason to undertake a strong public relations program in the short term is to promote the importance of parks and recreation as a key factor in the quality of life here. Miles Park with its location and intensive recreation facility development presents a misleading image in this community: that the Township has a lot of parks and recreation facilities. The findings of this study indicate that the Township does not have enough park land or recreation facilities. Providing more park land and recreation facilities will require significant investment. The reality of existing conditions along with the benefits of parks and recreation needs to be promoted aggressively as the township moves into major funding programs.

1. **Recognize that there are three major areas for promotion: the parks, recreation programs, and the Recreation Building.** Continue to support an effective internal communication system so that all departments and boards are aware of what Parks & Recreation is doing.
  2. **Develop a strategic written marketing plan.** Develop a three year marketing strategy with a general approach and goals. Establish a very specific marketing program for the next fiscal year. It should include:
  3. **Incorporation of the Department's logo (the Gecko) for parks and recreation on every possible surface of the parks and recreation operation in order to build identity.** Consider having a gecko mascot as a way to promote the department's recognition. Mascots create awareness and favorable public response.
- Regular evaluation and needs assessment. Conduct program evaluations on all programs. Undertake a public opinion survey every three to five years. Use the survey conducted for this plan as the baseline to measure how public opinion evolves over time.

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- Promotional methods and pricing of fee-for-service programs.
  - Advertising in various media should be strategic as well. It could include “blitzes” rather than an ad here and there; creation of a mascot, targeted use of the logo, working with people to figure out how to make the WEB site the “go to” place for information about parks and recreation.
  - Join LERN and phase in LERN guidelines for marketing and program management. Submit the department newsletter to LERN for a review on how to strengthen it.
- 3. Build the data base of people who use programs as well as those who cease use.** Detailing who the customers are along with their preferences and interests will help the Department to plan services as well as to promote them. This component should include program evaluation, information from registrations, quick surveys, and outreach. Outreach should include focus groups on various topics to find out what the customers want. A focus group should consist of about six to ten individuals sitting around a table with a facilitator asking a set of directed questions. Ferreting out this kind of feedback will help in the planning and delivery of programs and services.
- 4. Investigate how to promote programs to teen using state-of-the-art technology such as instant messaging, e-mails, cell phones and the Internet.** Recognize that not every citizen will use public recreation and parks but that even if they don't, citizens still value township parks and recreation. Excellent parks and recreation services provides a “halo effect” to overall township services. It is important to focus on the customers the Department has and to get them to participate more in other programs. Retaining customers and getting them involved in other activities is most important.

## **Future Services: Environmental Education and Fitness**

By September of 2007, every school district will have to have a fitness plan in place. Whitemarsh Township is perfectly positioned to establish a partnership with the Colonial School District in these areas based upon the township's natural resources, the parks that are located near the schools and the Recreation Building. Developing such a partnership will position the Department to be at the same table with the School District in joint forces rather than the Department only being a supplicant to request the use of school facilities.

Every school district has to have an environmental education plan in place now. About 82 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they prefer natural areas with trails and scenic features.

- Approach the Colonial School District to become a part of the development of the fitness plan by 2007 carving out a role for Whitemarsh Township as a partner in creating active healthy lifestyles in the community.
- Approach the Montgomery County Parks & Heritage Services to determine how the two organizations could partner in the area of environmental education particularly at Spring Mill and along the riverfront. Try to include a Colonial School district representative in the earth sciences in the discussion and potential program development.
- Continue to involve groups such as the Morris Arboretum in nature based programming. Consider expanding nature programming to all age segments.
- Expand the partnership with Fort Washington State Park in the area of nature study and environmental education. This would be a prime partnership given state objectives to



have parks become more community based and the Township's need to provide more nature based experiences.

- Work with the Open Space Board in pursuing properties for open space conservation with an eye towards using these areas for environmental education.

## Maintenance

The Public Works Department is responsible for planning, controlling and evaluating park and recreation facility maintenance. Currently, the Public Works Department is responsible for daily maintenance for about 43 acres of the Township 117 acres of total parkland. These lands maintained by the Public Works Department are primarily active recreation areas with a focus on sports facilities. A sports turf management program should be created in order to keep the fields in top condition. Some sports turf programs have been launched such as winter seeding on soccer field trouble spots. The Township takes care of park building maintenance and tasks such as litter/trash pick-up and setting up for special events and programs, particularly the large scale programs such as Township Day.

Volunteers also play an important role in park and recreation facility maintenance. The sports groups conduct some field maintenance tasks to a limited extent (not a true sports turf management program).

While routine maintenance has been the focus in the township parks, a broader view of park care should be considered. A holistic perspective on the parks would incorporate park planning, use policies, maintenance, and facility management. In order to do this, a formal, written maintenance management system should be developed and put into place.

Potential areas for consideration for maintenance in the future include the following:

1. **Develop standards of care for the facilities, parklands and natural areas.** Not all park areas should be maintained to achieve a manicured appearance. Naturalization is better for the environment, less costly and in accordance with public preferences in Whitemarsh Township for natural resource conservation. Standards can and should vary within parks as well as among parks. To advance the standards of care concept, public education is required in order to inform the citizens that the township is adopting a more naturalized approach. Otherwise, citizens misperceive the naturalization as reduced maintenance.

## *Suggested Maintenance Modes for Park Care*

Because of the wide variance in park systems, a standard maintenance classification system does not work. The National Recreation and Park Association has suggested a system of maintenance modes that provide guidelines for ways of maintaining parks from intensive to least intensive . Table 5-1 shows maintenance modes that can be used to describe approaches to a park as a whole or for selected components within parks. These can help Whitemarsh Township set up a standardized approach to park maintenance to further understanding and expectations about the level of care of township parks.

**Mode I:** State of the art maintenance. High quality diverse landscape such as public squares, government grounds or high visitation parks.

**Mode II:** High level maintenance. Well developed parks with reasonably high visitation.

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**Mode III:** Moderate level maintenance. Locations with moderate to low development and visitation. Agencies with budget restrictions that cannot provide a higher level of maintenance.

**Mode IV:** Moderately low level of maintenance. Low level of development and visitation, undeveloped areas, and remote parks.

**Mode V:** High visitation natural areas. Size and importance of park as well as frequency of visitation may dictate a resident maintenance or management staff. Trails and roads well developed. Buildings, trail heads and other facilities may be on-site.

The challenge in Whitemarsh Township is to insure that modes are actually applied at varying levels. Not every park or facility in the parks should be designated as Mode I maintenance. Each park and its amenities should be designated as a particular mode in order to prioritize maintenance tasks better.

2. **Develop standards of time for accomplishing tasks.** At present the Township is spending about \$1,805 annually per acre for maintenance of active areas. This figure includes salaries, benefits, wages, materials and supplies for park maintenance divided by the total park acreage in the Township. This does not include costs of the passive acres, which are negligible. Maintenance costs generally range from about \$1,500 to \$3,000 per acre in similar

communities to Whitemarsh Township. For natural resource-base park lands the per acre maintenance costs range for \$200 to 500 per acre. This plan recommends developing a formalized maintenance management plan with standards of time for accomplishing tasks as a way of insuring that Whitemarsh Township gets the most for its maintenance dollar. Time standards and written goals could result in the Township being able to achieve more in terms of park maintenance than it presently does. This could result in very much improved park appearance. Most importantly, restrooms should be serviced seven days a week with multiple servicing per day during peak use or when special events are underway.

3. **Create a written maintenance management plan for both the parks and for the Recreation Building.** The importance of maintenance in terms of protecting the Township's investment in the parks and the Recreation Building cannot be overstated. The most effective way to ensure that maintenance is at a level commensurate with investment and that it is accomplished at the most efficient level possible is through a written formalized maintenance management plan. Computerizing data to produce real time information will enable the Township to allocate labor and materials to where they are needed most and to get the most value for its maintenance investment.
4. **Consider applying for a Peer-to-Peer Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to bring in a parks professional to help in designing the formalized maintenance management system.**
5. **Develop a Maintenance Impact Statement for all capital improvements and park master site plans.** Look for alternatives to providing the maintenance with township forces and resources where possible.

Maintenance is the single largest recurring expenditure in park and recreation operations. Over the lifetime of a park, about 75 percent of its cost is in maintenance while only about 25 percent is in acquisition, development, design, and construction<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Lay, Francis. (1978). Management of Grounds and Site Maintenance Operations. Manual of Site Management, Environmental Design Press. p.4.

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6. **Develop master park plans for all parks.** Use a professional design team with experience in park planning and park management. Incorporate a public participation process in the park planning process. Involve the Public Works Director in the park master planning process.
7. **Computerize the maintenance workload/cost tracking system.** Use the reports for planning, scheduling and allocating resources as well as in setting policies such as

fees and charges. Use grant funds to purchase computer software for maintenance tracking. Insurance carriers might be a good source for grant money for the software program as effective maintenance management reduces risk and exposure to liability as well as support when litigation occurs. Network with other park maintenance managers elsewhere to determine how they use computer software for effective maintenance planning and management.

TABLE 5-1  
MODES AND TASKS FOR PARK MAINTENANCE

Task	Mode I	Mode II	Mode III	Move IV	Mode V
Turf Care	Mowed every 3-5 working days. Aeration four times annually. Weed control to achieve 99% weed free turf.	Cut once every 5 working days. Aeration twice a year. Weed control with 5% weeds. Re-seeding when bare spots present.	Cut once every 10 working days. Not aerated. Weed control at 50% weeds. Re-seeding with major bare spots only.	Periodic mowing to meet local requirements or reduce fire danger. Weed control only for noxious weeds.	Not mowed except for parking lots and along pathways. Weed control on noxious weeds.
Fertilizer	Adequate fertilizer applied to achieve even supply of nutrients for entire year.	Adequate to insure turf and plants are healthy & growing vigorously.	Only when turf vigor is low.	None	None
Irrigation	Sprinkler irrigated.	Some type of irrigation available.	Climate dependent. Usually not done in PA.	None	None
Litter Control	Minimum of once daily seven days a week.	Minimum of once daily five days a week.	2-3 times weekly maximum.	Once a week or fewer.	Based on visitation.
Pruning	Dictated by species for high quality well maintained appearance.	Once a season.	Once every 2-3 years when health or appearance warrants.	No regular trimming. Safety may dictate pruning requirements.	For safety only.

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TABLE 5-1 CONTINUED  
MODES AND TASKS FOR PARK MAINTENANCE

Task	Mode I	Mode II	Mode III	Move IV	Mode V
Disease/Insect Control	Preventive to control disease so that a problem is not evident.	Done when disease is noticeable.	Only on epidemic or serious complaint basis	None except if epidemics threaten resources or the public.	Only for safety or for public use.
Snow Removal	Same day after ½" snow accumulates.	Removed by noon day after snow fall.	Based on local requirements usually within one day of snow.	None except where major access is required.	One day service on roads and park areas.
Lighting	Repaired as soon as problem discovered.	Repaired when reported as not working.	When there is a complaint or an employee notices.	On compliant or discretionary basis.	On compliant or discretionary basis.
Surfaces	Sweeping, cleaning and washing so that at no time does dirt detract.	Cleaned and swept when appearance has noticeable deteriorated.	Cleaned on complaint basis.	When safety is a concern or budget is available.	Cleaned on complaint basis if budget is available.
Repairs	Immediately done upon discovery of problem.	When safety, function or appearance is in question.	When safety or function is in question.	When safety or function is in question.	Same year service when appearance is poor.
Inspection	Daily.	Daily when staff is scheduled.	Once per week.	Once per month.	When staff is available, once daily.
Floral Plantings	Extensive and unusual. Multiple blooming seasons.	Some plantings present. No more than two blooms per year.	Only perennials or flowering trees and shrubs.	None, just wildflowers, perennials, flowering trees.	None except at special locations like buildings.
Restrooms	Multiple servings daily.	At least once a day. Maybe more in high use areas.	Minimum of 5 times per week. Seldom more than once daily	5 times per week.	Geared to visitor level, once a day usually. More if visitation is high.
Special Features	Highest possible maintenance for flags, fountains, art, parking etc.	For safety, function and appearance.	Minimum – only for safety and function.	Minimum – only for safety and function.	For safety, function and appearance.

## Volunteerism

Volunteers fall under the Director. Given the size of the department, the director's efforts should be on group volunteers and not on individual volunteers. One concern that emerged in the planning process for this plan, was that there is a tendency in the community to think that volunteers can do so much for parks and recreation and that they are a readily available source of labor without cost. It is important to note that volunteers are not free. They require recruiting, supervision, training, recognition, coordination and time. A small staff cannot undertake extensive volunteer efforts.

## Employee Development and Training

The Department of Parks and Recreation does not have a line item in the budget for conferences, seminars, annual meetings, memberships, dues, and subscriptions. The Director attends workshops held in Pennsylvania. While extensive training opportunities are available, there is no formal employee development program. A training program would assess the current levels of skills, define core competencies that the Department would like to build upon, and outline the development program for the staff over the next five years. This would be beneficial from two perspectives: it would be a sound approach to investing in labor, the township's largest expenditure in parks and recreation, and it would provide a career development benefit for the staff.

Consideration should be given to the following actions for employee development:

1. **Conduct a training needs assessment within the Department from the perspective of departmental needs and employee development.** Identify the objectives of the training for the Department and the

employee. Training needs should include both required certifications and programs that will enable management and staff to keep up with trends, identify new opportunities for revenue generation and learn new methods for limiting exposure to liability. Prioritize the training. Set the employee development for a five-year time frame, each year implementing the first year of the program and adding the fifth year.

2. **Budget about one percent of the operating budget annually for maintaining certifications and licensure that are essential to department operations and for employee development.** Phase in the training budget over the next five to ten years in order to reach the target allocation and investment.
3. **Include a variety of training modalities.** The employee development program can include in-service training; self-directed improvement through participation in seminars, conferences and so on; orientation for new and seasonal employees; rotating employees through jobs other than their own; brown bag lunch discussion sessions and networking with other parks and recreation departments. The idea is that training can be low cost and does not always have to be conferences.
4. **Institutionalize the training by scheduling department training sessions or "pizza lunches" for this purpose.** The trainee would use this forum to present summary information of how the training could be applied in the Department as well as to distribute materials or other media obtained at the training program.
5. **Send the Parks and Recreation Board to the Pennsylvania recreation and Park Society Conference for the citizen board training session.** Monitor PRPS, PA DCNR and PSATS for potential citizen board training programs and seminars.

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## **Partnerships and Sponsorships**

Partnerships with other organizations in the community enhance public service at reduced costs. The Department works with area businesses and organizations on events and activities.

## **Arts Center**

The Whitemarsh Arts Center was formed more than 50 years ago and operates in a former farm house in Cedar Grove Park. It is a private non-profit organization that operates independently from the Township. In 2005/06, the Township paid \$50,000 to have the building assessed to determine the improvements that are needed from both a health and safety perspective as well as in how it could be renovated to maximize its function as an arts center. Over a half million dollars in improvements would be needed. The Center operates with a part time staff and an advisory board. Collaboration between the Arts Center and the Parks and Recreation Department could result in better all around services and make the best use of limited resources. Consideration should be given to exploring a potential merger between the two entities and how both could benefit by an organizational change. Consideration could be given to retaining an arts center professional to assess the situation and make recommendations on how to successfully unite the two organizations in a way that would enable the Arts Center to retain its unique identity and benefit from township support. Together, both organizations would be stronger, provide more of a presence in the community and be able to take the operation to the next level of a true regional presence as a key player in the arts in the Delaware Valley.

## **Colonial School District**

Three areas present possibilities for school district partnerships: sports fields, nature/environmental education and fitness, and the Sitewatch program, a program designed to monitor park use during peak hours in order to ensure proper and safe use of township facilities. Under Sitewatch, Park Watch staff patrol the township parks to check on park use, direct park visitors to comply with township policy regarding the use of facilities, and assist park visitors with their questions. The salaries and vehicles for the Sitewatch staff are supported through user fees and charges. Exploration of this partnership should be planned out to determine effective approaches.

## **Sports Organizations**

The sports organizations are important allies in community recreation. Since there are numerous organizations in Whitemarsh Township, they should continue to operate on their own but the Department should continue its recent work on the creation of a centralized umbrella organization that would bring them together to work on items of mutual concern and benefit. The Parks and Recreation Director should continue to assume the leadership role in establishing this organization. One of the goals should be to prevent splintering of these organizations into new groups. Additional sports groups offering the same sports place additional and competitive demands on limited fields and gyms. The Township should consider developing a league sanctioning system in which the sanctioned leagues get preference on facilities. The current leagues would all be sanctioned leagues. New leagues would have to go through a sanctioning process in which the Township would develop and apply league

sanctioning criteria. This will help to control the use of limited township facilities and ease the permitting process.

## **Fort Washington State Park**

Further partnership opportunities with the state park should be considered. Programs such as the 5k run work well. Other potential areas should include nature study, environmental programming and potential use of state park land for active facilities should the two entities be able to come to terms on that.

## **Montgomery County Parks & Heritage Services**

Three areas for collaboration include trail development, riverfront recreation opportunities and connections and joint efforts at Spring Mill historic site which is in the township but owned by Montgomery County.

## **Sponsorships**

Developing sponsorships in Whitemarsh Township is especially challenging given the nature of land use in the community. There is limited business and commercial development here thus producing a small pool of potential business supporters. The Department has worked diligently over the years to generate corporate sponsorships and partnerships with the private sector. As a result, the Department has a good number of sponsors for community events and programs. The challenge with sponsorships is that most business partnerships have already been identified and most sponsors appear to be giving as much as they can. Whitemarsh Township by nature of the community has limited businesses

to tap. Unless new partners come along, it appears that sponsorships have leveled off.

## **Risk Management**

The most effective measures that a municipality can take in reducing exposure to liability is to design and construct facilities properly and the have an effective maintenance management system supported by written documentation. It is important for Whitemarsh Township to have a written formal maintenance management system for both the parks and for the Recreation Building r for this purpose.

## **Management Analysis**

In a time of increasing accountability for all levels of government, decision-makers, staff and citizens alike, expect efficient and effective operating systems. Whitemarsh Township has a professional management team that is committed to responsible, accountable, creative and quality public service through parks and recreation.

Whitemarsh Township's Parks and Recreation system is configured by three administrative areas: township executive division, Public Works Department, and the Parks and Recreation Department which also manages the Recreation Building. This configuration is typical of smaller parks and recreation systems in which park maintenance is housed within the Public Works Department.

## **Management: What Works Well**

- The Executive Division is very supportive and works closely with the Parks and Recreation Department.

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- The Parks & Recreation Department has a professional parks and recreation director. The Township has demonstrated its commitment to having a qualified professional in this position for well over three decades. Furthermore, the Township has made a commitment to supporting the growth of this department by adding staff in recent years to fill important program and customer service positions. .
- Non-tax revenues to support operating costs have steadily been increasing in leaps and bounds. With over 320 programs and sponsorships, the management team has increased non-tax funding to support public recreation programs.
- The Park & Recreation Board is newly energized with a whole new membership. The members offer on-going public support and input to parks and recreation at a high level of discussion based on the broad expertise of the members.

## **Management: Challenges**

- The Recreation Building has the potential to be a community treasure. The Township is fortunate in having such a center when other communities can only dream of having one. The physical configuration in terms of size and function has enabled the Department to expand recreational opportunities. However, the building is small and was not designed for recreational use. The staff has been most creative in using the space but inevitable conflicts and difficulties arise from this configuration,
- The Township does not have enough parkland or recreation facilities to support community recreational needs. Delivering the range, number and caliber of programs desired by this community requires incredible creativity on the part of the management team.
- Parks maintenance is housed in Public Works. The challenge is to insure that parks and recreation facilities work requirements are addressed at the right time to the right level.
- There is no formal maintenance management plan or a sports turf management plan.
- Developing a partnership with the Colonial School District would be advantageous to both the District and the Township in terms of public service, fitness and wellness, environmental education and facility use.
- An employee development program is needed and should be included in the budget. Advances in technology and recreation facilities as well as major social changes such as demographic trends, family structure, issues and other events that impact recreation services mandate continual, on-going education and networking. This is crucial to both conveying the goals and expectations of the Township to part-time and seasonal staff and protecting the township's largest annual investment: staffing.



- Forming and enhancing partnerships for future endeavors such as the sports organizations, the School District, and other departments in the region is important for expanding the service capacity of the department.
- Managing public perception to educate the public that the Township's goal is to provide a balanced system for parks and recreation is crucial. The Township needs to protect its natural resources and provide active recreation for people of all ages throughout their lifetime. This means facilities for both organized recreation and self-directed drop-in recreation. The key is *balance*.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations could guide the future management directions in Whitemarsh Township:

1. Formalize the maintenance management system for parks and recreation facilities. Establish and implement park maintenance standards. Establish a computerized information tracking system to generate information about cost centers. This will enable the Township to make real-time informed decisions about planning, directing, controlling and evaluating maintenance in much the same way that the GPCC is managed. Consider seeking a Peer Grant to formalize the system.
2. Develop a sports turf management program.
3. Follow through with eliminated contract mowing to perform all park maintenance in-house.
4. Create the umbrella sports organization for community sports leagues.
5. Participate in the development of the Site Watch program with the Colonial School District.
6. Develop a strategic partnership plan. Partnerships need to be forged over time. A plan would set forth a logical plan of action that would allow time for the Director to undertake this aspect of managing the parks and recreation system.
7. As the system is growing the role of the Director needs to evolve from a hands-on day-to-day manager into a long-range strategically oriented manager. About 60 percent of the Director's time should be allocated to partnerships, medium and long range planning, promoting parks and recreation and its benefits, and essentially being the face of parks and recreation in

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the community and the region. About 20 percent of the Director's time should be spent on empowering the front line managers for parks and recreation including maintenance management, and the remaining 20 percent on insuring that daily operations and financing are flowing by anticipating problems before they arise.

8. Work with the Arts Center collaboratively in planning a future together under the auspices of the Whitemarsh Township. Develop an action plan and a schedule to complete the identified tasks setting a goal of accomplishing the re-organization within one year.
9. Create a grantsmanship position in the Township that would serve all departments including the Parks and Recreation Department.
10. Work to achieve a balance between active recreation and nature based recreation.
11. Develop an Operations and Management Plan for the Recreation Building. Develop guidelines for staff, job descriptions, and operating procedures. Incorporate citizen participation into the process for management planning. Incorporate the recommendations for physical improvements in the building.
12. Prior to undertaking additional projects, create a Management Impact Statement (MIS) as shown on page 5-21. Projects would include park and recreation facility improvements. Do not add projects or programs for which it would not be possible to maintain the high level of quality now provided or that would negatively impact other existing programs, facilities and human resources.
13. Place reasonable expectations regarding workload and projects for management team and staff. Recognize the need to avoid overtaxing our resources especially staff. Provide a professionally rewarding work experience. Offer competitive compensation, flexible hours fitting a recreation mission, training and professional development opportunities. The Township needs to take steps to retain high quality staff and managers. Consider the potential to add part-time seasonal positions for customer service to handle walk-in traffic during peak seasons. Create a five year employee development plan and allocate one percent of the operating budget to fund it.
14. Develop a strategic marketing plan based upon a written statement of outreach goals and results for identified target areas. Major focus should be on the community center in terms of improving its public image. Consider involving a professional marketing firm funding be available.

## MIS Management Impact Statement

### **Purpose**

To assess the impact of a proposed project in terms of capital and operating costs including cost, human resources required and effect on other parks and recreation facilities and services.

To use this information to make an informed decision about moving ahead with the proposed project.

### **Method**

Determine:

1. Capital cost of the proposed project.
2. Operating costs for the proposed project. Include:
  - Number of staff hours required
  - Cost of the staff hours
  - Cost of materials and supplies
  - Miscellaneous costs
3. Impact on other facilities and programs should the proposed project/service be implemented.
  - Will the project/service require funds needed for other facilities/programs?
  - Will the project/service require staff time needed for other services/programs?
  - How will the project impact the quality of service that Whitemarsh Township has set as a goal?
4. Revenue Sources
  - Grants
  - Donations
  - Township funds – additional appropriation
  - Township funds – within current budget
  - Non-tax funds to be generated from the project/program

### **Decision-Making**

Based upon the above information, does Whitemarsh Township have the resources to move ahead with this project?