

# CHAPTER 1

# PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN INTRODUCTION

## **Reader's Guide to the Plan**

Chapter 1 – Introduction discusses the plan purpose and goals, planning process, and relationship with other planning efforts.

Chapter 2 – Community Profile provides information about the Whitemarsh Township population, trends, public opinion, and an overview of parks and recreation.

Chapter 3 – Parks and Recreation Facilities presents the inventory of township parkland and recreation facilities, an assessment and analysis of these areas, and recommendations for improvements.

Chapter 4 – Programs and Services discusses the existing departmental functions and presents recommendations for directions in service delivery.

Chapter 5 – Administration describes the current operational framework and lays out guidelines for future management and operations.

Chapter 6 – Financing outlines current budget and revenue sources, discusses implications for the Township based upon the planning recommendations and offers direction for future parks and recreation development and enhancements.

Chapter 7 – Goals and Recommendations outlines the proposed actions for plan implementation based upon the goals developed.

Chapter 8 – The Action Plan outlines a ten-year strategy for the implementation of the primary recommendation outline in the plan.

The *Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Plan* sets forth a vision for how the Township can provide a premiere parks and recreation system reflective of the quality of life here. The Plan responds to the public's expressed opinions and draws upon a public participation process bringing together elected and appointed officials, township management, community organizations, and the citizens.

A changing population and growing demands on parks and recreation programs and facilities have prompted the development of a new strategy for enhanced community service. Planned improvements requiring time, commitment, and public and private investment can be phased in as resources allow.

This plan serves as a blueprint for action, enabling the Parks and Recreation Department to evolve with the changing needs and interests of Whitemarsh Township residents.

## **Planning Process**

Whitemarsh Township retained Gannett Fleming and Toole Recreation Planning, a team of community and recreation planners and landscape architects to work with the Township in the development of this plan. The plan consisted of an assessment of Whitemarsh Township's parks and recreation system; development of conclusions and recommendations; establishment of goals and implementation strategies; and an action plan with a time frame. The planning process addressed five areas:

1. Community recreation needs
2. Park land and recreation facilities

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3. Programs and services
4. Administration and maintenance
5. Financing

## Public Participation

The public participation process included a Plan Study Committee that served in an advisory capacity for the project, key person interviews, public forums and a community public opinion survey. The process provided valuable information from those in the community who are involved in various parks and recreation related efforts as well as the general public. This process ensured that general citizens and community organizations that provide recreation services were heard.

The planning process focused on how to achieve a balanced park and recreation system with the resources and opportunities available in Whitemarsh Township. A balanced park and recreation system provides:

- Opportunities for citizens of all ages, interests, and abilities throughout their lifetime.
- Services and facilities for both the general citizenry and organized groups.
- Programs that include a range of interests, such as: the arts, culture, music, drama, dance, social activities, volunteer opportunities, fitness and wellness, intellectual stimulation, and individual and team sports.
- Year-round recreation.
- Both active and passive parks and recreation facilities.
- Safe and convenient access to parks and recreation throughout the Township.
- Connections for non-motorized access to parks, schools, neighborhoods and other community destinations.

## Planning Goals

The planning goals included the following objectives:

1. Establishing the parks and recreation facilities as a true parks and recreation system, not merely a discrete number of individual sites.
2. Assessing the needs and desires of the public for recreation services and opportunities.
3. Coordinating recommendations with the Township's Open Space Plan.
4. Assessing facility maintenance and maintenance needs for a planned system.
5. Evaluating facilities with respect to improvements, additions and priorities.
6. Determining how to maximize collaborative efforts with organizations in support of a shared vision for Whitemarsh Township.
7. Basing decisions on public opinion, resources, and alternatives.
8. Developing a broader vision and plan for Whitemarsh Township's parks and recreation system to enable the Parks and Recreation Department to operate proactively rather than reactively, thus creating a great public park and recreation system, not just a quick fix for current issues.

## The Plan as a Guide

The *Whitemarsh Parks and Recreation Plan* will help to guide township decision-making about parks, open space, recreation facilities, and programs. The recommendations do not have the force of law but instead reflect the direction in which the Township desires to move forward in enhancing the quality of life for the people of Whitemarsh.

## Uses of the Plan

The plan functions in both a legal and an advisory capacity. It may help Whitemarsh Township to acquire future funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; federal and county grant programs including the Montgomery County Open Space Program; and foundations. The standards support the Township's Mandatory Dedication of Land Ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinances by providing standards for community parks and recreation.

## Advisory

This plan serves as a reference document for overall Township planning and management. It provides a vision for Whitemarsh as a green and connected community with year-round recreation opportunities for people of all ages, interests, and abilities – not just the maintenance of existing conditions. The recommendations of this plan are based upon an investigative and educational process to identify recreation initiatives and opportunities that are important to Whitemarsh Township.

The plan is intended to be a living document that will assist Township decisions about parks, recreation, financing, management, open space preservation, and related planning efforts. The plan should be reviewed annually prior to budget season. Through this review, accomplishments, needs, and emerging opportunities should be determined. Actions should be adapted to changing circumstances in the Township's pursuit of the goals identified. Budgets should then be based on the formulation of an action plan for the upcoming fiscal year. This proves to be a sound way of targeting resources to community needs.

## Benefits of Parks and Recreation

- Increased property values
- Deterrence of crime and substance abuse
- Establishment of strong family bonds, the foundation of our society
- Environmental protection and preservation of natural resources
- Fostering of healthy lifestyles that add years to life and life to the years

## Grant Assistance

State grant programs are in place to provide grants for plan implementation if the Township wishes to pursue grant funding. By adopting a plan that reflects public participation and sets forth a clear vision of the future, Whitemarsh Township will be able to undertake the actions recommended and seek the financial support of various grant programs. The principle sources of funds for parks and recreation include the following:

**Growing Greener** is the largest investment in Pennsylvania's environment in modern history. This fund is being supported through state funds including funds from tipping fees at landfills. Growing Greener addresses the environmental challenges of the 21st century: loss of open space and farmland, tainted waterways, abandoned mines, aging sewer systems, and repair of state parks and forests. Growing Greener 2 has been re-authorized and each county in Pennsylvania has received an allocation.

**Keystone Community Grant Program** provides funding for projects related to local park, recreation

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and conservation; river conservation; rails-to-trails, land trust acquisition and planning projects; and - heritage parks.

**The Transportation, Community, and System Preservation (TCSP) Program** is a program administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) comprehensive initiative of research and grants to investigate the relationships between transportation, community, and system preservation plans. Communities are eligible for discretionary grants to carry out eligible projects to integrate transportation, community, and system preservation plans and practices that specifically reduce environmental impacts of transportation and examine community development patterns and identify strategies to encourage private sector development patterns and investments that support these goals. The Federal Highway Administration has not solicited applications for the TCSP Program. To date the TCSP Program has solicited only those applications for projects specified by Congress in the Conference Reports accompanying the 2005 and 2006 Omnibus Appropriations Acts.

**The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFTEA-LU)** authorized the TCSP Program through FY 2009. A total of \$270 million is authorized for this Program in FY's 2005-2009.

**Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP)** and other community-scaled transportation and trail projects are funded under the (SAFTEA-LU) and are administered by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). These programs typically have a 20 percent local matching funds requirement. Projects which can receive funding include the construction of new trails and other trail

related facilities, water trails, parking, bridges, signage, etc.

In addition to the programs described above because of their underlying park and recreation missions, there are other grant programs that the Township could pursue such as Community Development Block Grants and Pennsylvania Arts Commission grants.

## *RecTAP*

Technical assistance grants are available through the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society for short term consultations on topics related to municipal parks, recreation and open space. The grants provide for the time of a park and recreation professional for a three day duration including the development of written report with recommendations. No match is required.

## *Legal*

Once adopted by the Township, the plan can serve a legal function. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) provides planning requirements that can be adopted by municipalities. The MPC stipulates that the municipality provides a defensible basis for sound decision-making regarding land use. The municipality must adopt planning documents and ordinances. MPC Section 503(11) provides municipalities the authority to require a developer to dedicate public land for park and recreation purposes. In order to obtain the dedication, that is requiring the developer to turn over common open space as a condition of final approval, the municipality must first meet general conditions. According to township officials,

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Whitemarsh Township will have met these conditions and established the requirements for mandatory dedication of parkland. These conditions include:

- Adopting a recreation plan that defines principles and standards for determining developer obligations.
- Providing direction in the Parks and Recreation Plan to ensure that the amount and location of land or fees bear a reasonable relationship to residents of the proposed development.