

## Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan

Manheim Township in concert with Plan Study Committee and the community has developed this Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan to guide future decision-making regarding parkland, recreation facilities, programs and services, facility management, and the allocation of financial resources. As the community continues to grow and the Township faces increasing community needs in a challenging economy, making decisions based upon solid information is more important than ever before. This plan provides current operational information and demographic data, identifies critical issues and trends, and establishes strategies and recommendations for making Manheim Township's good parks and recreation system a great one.

### A Framework for Decision-Making

The plan is not law or a regulatory document. It is a recommended approach to achieve a parks and recreation system that serves our citizens throughout their lifetime, close to home, with diverse recreation opportunities year-round. It suggests management strategies and policies to protect our natural resources and provide quality recreation opportunities. The plan will be used as a reference by township officials, management and advisory boards; community organizations; the Manheim Township School District and other interested parties. The plan is a guide for future actions and decisions.

### The Community Supports Parks & Recreation

Manheim Township residents treasure their parks and recreation opportunities as well as the community's scenic character, heritage and natural resources. Through a robust public participation process, hundreds of people participated in voicing their ideas, concerns and suggestions regarding the kinds of facilities and services that are important to them as well as their ideas for supporting the parks and recreation system in the future. The public participation process included a public opinion survey, key person interviews, focus groups, and public meetings. The Manheim Township is very active and involved and places a high value on the parks, recreation programs, and conservation. About 73 percent of the survey respondents reported using Township parks – and even infrequent park users reported how important parks and recreation are in this community. The core values expressed by the citizens include the following:

- **Community** – Manheim Township is a special place in which to live. Strengthening the sense of community here through parks and recreation is important.
- **Sustainability** – Making the best use of all resources in ways that steward the environment, support human and financial resources and provide a legacy for future generations is vital.
- **Health** – The health and wellness of citizens of all ages is paramount. Recreation fosters active healthy lifestyles through facilities, programs and services that benefit individuals and the community.
- **Community Character and Scenic Beauty** – Manheim Township’s rural foundation, scenic beauty and distinctive way of life need to be preserved and protected.

Survey respondents stated that the conservation of open space and natural resources and *Achieving a balance* of programs, park improvements, providing indoor recreation, enhancing park maintenance and developing trails should be the focus of parks and recreation over the next five years. The majority of survey respondents indicated that they are willing to support parks and recreation by paying fees for programs, facility rentals and maintenance of special use facilities. A fairly high rate of 41 percent of the respondents indicated that they would even be willing to pay an additional \$2 to \$9 per person annually to the Township to support parks and recreation.

## Vision and Mission

Through the planning process, the Township established the following vision and mission statements for parks, recreation, greenways and open space. These statements are the synthesis of the findings from public outreach. They will be used as the basis for decision-making for recreation programs, facilities, conservation and management in the future.

### Vision Statement

*Manheim Township’s first class parks and recreation system enriches the community through the conservation of natural resources, recreation opportunities that support active healthy lifestyles, and community connections that bring together people, places and our heritage.*

### Mission Statement

*Our mission is to help our citizens engage in active healthy lifestyles, enrich lifelong learning and to conserve our natural resources. We do this by providing public service that is friendly, convenient and exceeds community expectations and by working in collaboration with public and private partners.*

## Parks and Recreation Facilities

Manheim Township has parks and recreation facilities that are the envy of most communities in Pennsylvania. The 16 parks with 567 acres of parkland host two swimming pools, a roller skating rink, regulation golf, disc golf and miniature golf, restaurants, historic buildings used for public recreation, a destination playground, river access, lighted synthetic turf athletic fields, places for fitness and relaxation, a skate park, and safe pathways for walking and bicycling.

The expected population growth through 2030 of 8,000 more residents indicates the need for additional parkland of about 181 acres. While parkland acquisition in a community that appears to have so much parkland is a daunting task, exploring ways to add land to meet future recreation needs can be done creatively and with respect to community resources. Continuing to work through the land development process in securing parkland and trail connections is key as is securing land that is contiguous to existing parks.

The main challenges with recreation facilities found through onsite field work and the public participation process fall into three areas: completing projects holistically rather than piece meal, planning in a formalized systematic manner, and maintenance. Park improvement projects tend to be started but not completed to the degree that would establish the facility as premier. The amenities for park improvement such as shade, restrooms, and landscaping are what make good parks great parks. No formalized planning process is in place for parks and recreation facility improvements. A park system needs a considered planning process for all major improvements and ongoing operations. A plan is more than an intention. It is a document that is built upon a process, demonstrating specific actions, professional expertise, research and a clear outcome with specific factors defined. It should be rooted in public participation. Every plan should spell out the implications for long-term management, maintenance and operation of the improvement including staff, budget and alternative method of support. Effective planning builds public support and ensures the likelihood that the Township can successfully afford to operate the project over the long term. Park maintenance is the single biggest expense of public parks and recreation systems. At present, no written formalized workload cost tracking system or park maintenance management plan is in place. Having a formalized maintenance management system in place is essential for the efficient and effective allocation of funding and staff.

## **Programs and Services**

Manheim Township offers over 451 organized recreation programs annually. Over 9,000 people participate in them, a percentage higher than typically found in public recreation systems. The Recreation Department serves people of all ages and interests and is organized in a way that demonstrates that service to the citizens is key. The divisions of Youth Services and Sports, Family and Adult Services, and Facility Programs both target and cover a wide range of customer services. The program managers have found creative ways of providing programs through partnerships and contracting with private sector recreation providers. An important program goal is to recover the cost of the program through fees and charges. In fact, programs recover 88 percent of the Recreation Department budget, nearly double the national average of 45 percent. In addition to township programs, community sports leagues offer opportunities for athletic participation and youth development through soccer, football, baseball, basketball, lacrosse and swimming.

Future directions include focusing on adult and family recreation, fitness and nature-based recreation. Providing information about what people can do in the parks at their own discretion will be important in working to foster active healthy lifestyles. Providing ideas how citizens can engage in recreational pursuits on their own for fitness, family bonding and socializing with family and friends can have a positive impact on engaging people in healthy lifelong recreation activities outside or organized scheduled programs.

## Organization and Management

Manheim Township is fortunate in having managers and staff that are passionate and committed to working for the community, especially so in parks and recreation. Managers and staff have chosen to make serving Manheim Township their professional career. The Township consistently looks for ways to operate effectively, efficiently and professionally.

Over the years, the Township has explored various organizational approaches to parks and recreation. In 2006, parks and recreation were separated as a cost saving and efficiency measure. The responsibility for parks was transferred to the Public Works Department while programs and services remained in the Recreation Department. The Overlook Golf Course became a separate operation. The six years of experience under this organizational structure has found that the expected cost savings were not realized. The park planning function was lost and is conducted informally without a structured process that includes public involvement, key stakeholders and planning for long-term operational costs or alternative strategies for the Township doing the work with its own forces. Over the lifetime of a park, 75 percent of its cost is in maintenance. No system of communication is in place that the public or staff can use in a clearly understandable way. There is no single point of contact to provide clear, consistent direction to ensure that all parties are working consistent with township parks and recreation policy toward the same goals. Consequently many people are involved in making decisions, answering questions and permitting facility use that may be counterproductive to township goals of maintaining facilities as premiere in a safe, clean and ready to use condition. Without an orchestrated communication system, the coordination of facility readiness and scheduled recreation programs is very difficult to achieve.

This plan is recommending that parks and recreation be re-configured as the Parks and Recreation Department with parks being transferred out of Public Works. This will facilitate closer coordination between facilities and programs, a clearer interpretation of the parks and recreation system to the public and community organizations and potential cost savings as the anticipated cost savings from the transfer never materialized. This can help to improve services at all levels including programs, personnel, and the maintenance and appearance of facilities. This is especially important for rental facilities and their income generating potential based upon quality of facilities. Centralization of responsibility and authority for parks and recreation will improve efficiency overall. This will also restore the park planning function as a specialized function dealing with public use of parks as important public spaces as distinct from other aspects of Public Works. At the very minimum, designate the function of Park Planning the responsibility of the Recreation Department.

### Benefits of Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Enhances the quality of life in a community. Increases property values. Spurs economic vitality. Deters crime and substance abuse. Adds life to your years... and years to your life. Improves the fitness and wellness of the residents. Reduces the isolation of the elderly. Helps children grow up great. Builds strong family bonds. Fosters a sense of community. Protects the environment. Conserves natural resources. Preserves land.

## Key Recommendations

The Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan provides recommendations to improve the quality of life in Manheim Township through parks and recreation over the next ten years. It strives to conserve our precious natural resources, take good care of what we have, expand parks and facilities, enhance recreational services, and increase public awareness about recreation opportunities. The plan recognizes that Manheim Township cannot do all of this on its own or all at once – partnerships, time, and funding are essential. Collaboration with others and an approach to funding that continues to use public and private support will be crucial in carrying out this plan successfully.

The plan develops the broad vision for parks and recreation into goals and recommendations. The four goals include:

- Goal 1: Establish parks and recreation facilities as community destinations where residents can have fun, experience nature, socialize and exercise in harmony with nature and environmental conservation.
- Goal 2: Connect our community through a system of greenways and trails.
- Goal 3: Engage the citizens in recreation opportunities to enrich their lives.
- Goal 4: Provide operational excellence and financial sustainability that will garner widespread public support for parks and recreation.

In order to accomplish these goals, the following strategy summarizes the actions recommend in each of the four goals.

- 1. Take care of what we have.** Develop a formalized maintenance management system for parks and recreation facilities. Transfer parks back to the Recreation department reestablishing the Parks and Recreation Department. At the very minimum, establish Park Planning as a function of the Recreation Department creating the Department of Recreation and Park Planning. Continue to work with our partners in the parks including the community volunteer groups, youth sports organizations, the boy scouts and others.
- 2. Improve our existing parks and recreation facilities.** Prioritize projects that would improve the parks through professional design and high quality features.
  - Complete master plans for Jaycee Park, Municipal Park, and key portions of Manheim Township Athletic Complex and Overlook Community Campus. Complete master plans whenever a major park renovations is undertaken and to solve problems and incorporate new opportunities into parks.
  - Strive to undertake improvements that are holistic and achieve completion of the project as a premier facility.

- Provide passive recreation facilities. Consider Perlman Park as a priority as a nature based park.
- Continue to add facilities designed to generate park use such as a Splash Pad, in-line hockey rink, sand volleyball courts and walking areas.
- Explore ways to enhance rental facilities through enhanced maintenance, landscaping and other features.
- Create ADA access in all parks.
- Add pathways for safe and scenic walking in all parks.
- Protect natural resources. Provide a public informational program to increase awareness about the benefits of naturalization. Use maintenance techniques that demonstrate that the site is being maintained such as signage and mowing narrow boundary areas. Protect natural resources, engage citizens with nature and reduce maintenance costs through naturalization where possible and through a strategic natural resource management program.
- Include public participation as part of all park-planning projects.

- 3. Implement the Capital Improvement Program for parkland acquisition, park improvements and facility additions.** This enables sound multi-year planning to make the best decisions regarding the allocation of resources. The Township has been investing about \$245,000 annually on park improvements. Consider a bond issue to undertake major improvements when the Weaver Road debt is closed.
- 4. Acquire another 181 acres of parkland by 2030.** Consider land that is contiguous to existing parks and public land. Work with the School District to establish School Parks in which existing school sites could be made more park-like for extended use beyond traditional school hours and serve more people. Also continue to secure land through the land development process for both parks and trails.
- 5. Develop the township-wide trail system.** Add pathways for recreation and transportation. Continue to coordinate trail planning with township planning. Connect parks to neighborhoods, schools, shopping areas, town centers, public facilities, and other destinations.
- 6. Provide more year round indoor recreation opportunities.** Conduct a study of the Overlook Activity Center to determine how it could be re-designed for more indoor recreation space. Consider the potential for covering the pool for year round use .
- 7. Re-organize parks and recreation.** Transfer parks out of Public Works into the Recreation Department creating the Parks and Recreation Department. At a minimum, designate Park Planning as an official function of the Recreation Department establishing the Department of Recreation and Park Planning. Add an Overlook Advisory Committee as a sub-committee to the Parks and Recreation Board. Conduct a study of the Overlook Golf Course

to develop a five to ten year operating plan to ensure the sustainability of the golf course as a public recreation facility over time.

8. **Continue to work towards increasing public awareness about the parks and recreation opportunities in Manheim Township as well as the benefits of parks and recreation.** Continue the four direct mailings of the activity guide to township residents. Include testimonials from citizens in the guide as well as the benefits of parks and recreation to individuals, families and the community. Use more photos of citizens engaged in recreation activities in the publication. Design and manage a parks and recreation WEB site as the “go-to” source about real-time parks and recreation information. Include parks and recreation facilities on the Recreation Department WEB site.
9. **Expand programs and services to reflect changing demographics and the way of life of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Focus on services for an active aging population and programs in fitness and wellness, nature, and self-improvement would be important here. Schedule programs and support around the reality of the hours of working households as well as stay-at-home parents. Develop a program management plan to ensure a common focus among the recreation program divisions.

## Implementation: Moving Forward

While it might appear that the job is complete because the plan is written, the work has only begun. Implementing the Manheim Township Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan is not one step, but more of an ongoing process of planning, doing, assessing effectiveness, and beginning the process anew over the next ten years to bring Manheim Township ever closer to its potential as a nationally recognized parks and recreation system. To implement the Plan, an operational plan is needed. An operational plan will describe the specific actions that will be taken to accomplish each objective identified in the Plan. The operational plan will identify timelines, responsible parties, resource allocations and sources, and an evaluation plan that will identify specific outcomes to be achieved. The Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan focuses on the **what**. The operational plan focuses on the **how**. The operational plan should include the following:

- **Action Items** – Identify the specific tasks that should be done to achieve the identified objective.
- **Responsible Parties** – Designate the staff members, committees or others who will be accountable for accomplishing each task.
- **Schedule** – Create the exact dates in months and years for accomplishment of the task. Set milestones for important accomplishments by specific date.

- **Resource Requirements and Sources** - List all of the funds, materials, equipment, facilities and so on required to accomplish the task. Provide the source of these resources including Manheim Township, partners, sponsors, fees and charges or others.
- **Outcomes** – Specify the anticipated results to be achieved by the specified timeline.
- **Evaluation Measure** – Establish indicators to show if the effort has been successful.

## Ensuring Success for the Operational Plan

Generally, the Recreation Director prepares the bulk of the operational plan that is used for an annual work program in consultation with the Township Manager. The Parks and Recreation Board provides overall guidance, review and approval of the plan, and recommends it to the Board of Commissioners.

To get started, consider having a “retreat” for the parks and recreation management and staff as well as the Parks and Recreation Board to identify how to kick-start this plan. Include the liaisons to the Board of Commissioners. Plan this ahead thoroughly to get the maximum benefit.

Based on the outcomes of the retreat, the Director would create the operational plan for the next fiscal year. It should address all of the functional areas of parks and recreation including programs, management, maintenance, parks, recreation facilities, marketing, and financing. The operational plan links the work of the Parks and Recreation Department and Advisory Board to the recommendations of the Recreation, Park, Greenways and Open Space Plan.

Establish two review meetings to keep implementation and use of the plan front and center. Use the first year of the Capital Improvement Program for the first fiscal year of this project.

Keep this plan before key stakeholders. The plan should be out and used regularly. All outcomes should refer to plan implementation. It is easy to get distracted in routine activities but the Plan needs to be in use in all township planning and decision-making. Boards such as the Commissioners, Township Administration, Planning and Zoning, and the Parks and Recreation Board all need to have the Plan and refer to it regularly so that there is an on-going link to this plan.

As an adopted plan, it serves as a guide; it is not carved in stone. It is intended to seize opportunities and meet emerging needs as circumstances warrant. The *process* of implementing the plan is ongoing and continuous, not a one time event, as set forth in the operational plan.

Manheim Township should move ahead with the plan as adopted, but be prepared to let go and switch strategies as necessary. **Flexibility, patience, and adaptability** will be essential in creating a parks and recreation system that suits a community the caliber of this community. With a tangible plan and a sound implementation process in place, Manheim Township is likely to create a parks and recreation system that will continue to be a community treasure, a source of economic vitality, and a reason to live, work, and play here.