

Forums Report

Great Participation!

- 5 forums in 5 locations
- 130 Participants representing 50 municipal, county, national and private, non-profit organizations
- No forum less than 2 hours
- Pages and pages of suggested success and strategies

Key Findings from 5 March 2010 Forums

Sports Forum: 13 Participants

- League participation growing: older and younger players, new leagues emerging, year round play.
- No data base is available with the facts and figures of sports participation and facility use. No documentation on trends is available.
- More fields needed. Not only is regular field scheduling a challenge but weather delays really create havoc.
- Fields are overused and maintenance is not in keeping with use. No fields are ever rested to their knowledge.
- Great relationships with the municipalities that are doing as much as they can to support sorts.
- Consider regional recreation. Sports organizations are willing to work together. Participation is across jurisdictional boundaries.
- It is important to remember that volunteers support league sports.

Municipal Park and Recreation Boards Forum: 20 Participants

- Participants expressed desire to work together. Would be good to have a regular time for the representatives of all the parks and recreation boards to get together – perhaps annually.
- General need for technical assistance kinds of information on a range of topics from funding to design standards and dealing with opposition.
- Information on topics such as the mandatory dedication of parkland is important. This is especially important because municipalities already set aside open space in the land development process.
- Having a complete inventory of what is available in the area in parks, recreation facilities and programs would help boards in planning and decision-making.
- Issues: tension between active and passive recreation; trail misperceptions; vocal minorities drive decision-making, not enough expertise within the municipalities regarding parks and recreation while they are trying to do the best job possible;
- A YMCA is sited at Ludwig's Corner.
- Promotion and awareness building about recreation opportunities is a pressing issue.

- Would like to coordinate special events.
- Would like to coordinate sports fields, scheduling, maintenance and field rest.
- Regional recreation requires equity and fairness in both responsibility and benefits. Townships that do not have or want parks may be able to join forces with this that do as a way of providing recreation for all fairly.

Building Stewardship and Conservation Forum: 15 Participants

- Collective mission: Protect quality, connect to people and place
- Northern Chester County as a region is significant to national history, industrial history, and natural heritage; without protection, these places will become history, not places of experience
- Much, much, much has already been accomplished
- Community-based outreach is compelling
- Show and do education connects people of any age to place and purpose, e.g. land conservation, stonewall restoration, etc.
- One-time events are very popular; programs, too, but take more time and resources to sustain
- More information/publicity about stewardship activities and conservation efforts is needed
- Outreach to all; leverage other active interests toward stewardship and conservation
- Be persistent in creating a legacy

Trails Forum: 74 Participants

The forum was held on the night of a regular meeting of the equestrian club. While there were many equestrians, a significant number of other trail interests were represented. Because of the size of the crowd, the level of understanding and experience ranged from those who have never done trail planning or development to well-known experts in the trail building field. The comments tended to focus on the issues that trail users experience and public perceptions about trails that generally focus on negative aspects of trails that are not in keeping with actual trail use. Following the meeting, people involved with trail building made important comments about focusing on getting segments built, establishing successes and promoting successful trail usage.

- Concern about the loss of informal trails used by equestrians on private property through “gentlemen’s agreements.” Important to build rapport with landowners. Several clubs are already doing this through annual thank-you programs.
- Public education about trail use is important, especially with respect to trail etiquette.
- Explore ways to involve trail users as “adopt-a-trail” support.
- Look at different kinds of trails from off road to on-road for recreational, distance, and fitness riding.
- Have trails for different kinds of uses.
- Provide trail maps on the Internet so that they can be updated. People can leave comments on them too. This would help people who do not know where trails are where parking is and so on.

Heritage and Cultural Resources Forum: 18 Participants

- Local historic sites are significant themselves and many are part of a larger story.
- Kinds of history: industrial heritage (steel, iron, and supporting forest management), military history, transportation history, Underground Railroad.
- Themes: Old and New – old homes, new neighbors; old lands, new economies (specialty agriculture; tourism).
- Without the land, the landscape or the place, history is just a story. Northern Chester County has the physical and visual places to immerse yourself in the historic experience.
- Programs are available at state, county, and private sites. Local efforts have been limited to one time events – large or small.
- There is little to no recent local investment. Historic sites are not well connected to revenue generation to sustain them.
- Access from outside the region is improving – by rail, by trail.
- Marketing efforts are recently underway.
- Preserve the places; tell the stories (through programs, events, activities, and signage), create a memorable experience.
- Northern Chester County could set its landscape and history apart:
 - With new or renewed programs
 - Signage of places
 - Education and outreach to new residents
 - Coordination among municipalities, county, school district, visitors bureau on projects, programs, and marketing
- Is there a new role for the Federation in heritage and culture among other areas related parks and recreation?

Common Themes

- Organizations, including parks and recreation boards, are willing to cooperate – to share efforts, to share costs.
- Organizations are like-minded in their intent to connect people to one or more aspects of the landscape in memorable ways.
- See and do outreach is effective for sports, fishing, conservation and other purposes.
- Northern Chester County as a region is significant to national history, industrial history, and natural heritage; without protection, these places will become history, not places of experience.
- More publicity is needed for events/activities, locations/directions, etiquette and instruction, and progress reporting.
- Interest in making more local investments is hindered by a lack of revenue return.
- How are we going to do all this?