

GUIDE TO APPENDIX 10

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LEVEL OF SERVICE

The conventional approach to level of service, i.e. the land needs for parks and recreation, calculates a land acreage based on the total population figure (e.g. 10 acres per 1,000 residents). This approach was outlined by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) in its first Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines published in 1983 alongside a provision for regional parkland (and open space), which was grossly ignored. Its 1996 update of these guidelines recommended a shift from an absolute national parkland standard toward a community-based determination of the amount, distribution, and development of specific facilities that suit local recreational needs and interests. This determination would consider factors beyond total population, such as: recreational activity interests, participation, and facilities/environments required; special environmental features, including natural areas, cultural and historic elements, and scenic views; trails; age cohorts; and population distribution. This analysis could suggest needed parkland location in addition to needed acreage. Ultimately, the locally tailored analysis returns to a population-based ratio of parkland to residents in support of mandatory dedication of parkland, and fees-in-lieu of parkland dedication, where provided. (Fee-in-lieu of parkland dedication may be permitted as an alternative but cannot stand alone in municipal ordinances in Pennsylvania.)

THE NORTHERN CHESTER COUNTY-BASED APPROACH

It is important to underscore the need to develop the rationale for the level of service first before converting the standard to population-based figures for use in fulfilling the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code regarding mandatory dedication of land ordinances. Partners in the Northern Chester County region (the Region) aimed to define a level of service in parks and recreation that would be tailored to the unique resources and landscape of the Hopewell Big Woods, Schuylkill River corridor, French Creek corridor and sports, fitness, social and cultural activity interests of residents. This locally-defined level of service would help the Region plan for the development and maintenance of parks, recreation facilities, and trails, and the protection of additional scenic, rural open space, as participation and population continue to grow.

Through a robust public participation process, community organizations and citizens provided input regarding area resources, values, participation, and facilities in terms of location, numbers and quality of conditions. The public expressed its interests and needs in a regional parks, recreation and open

space system. Proposed facility and service needs were explored in tandem with the crucial goal of preservation of the natural resources and scenic rural character of the area. The proposed needs were added to existing facilities according to both quantitative and qualitative features. This was divided by the projected population for 2020 and expressed per 1,000 citizens for the purposes of supporting Mandatory Dedication of Parkland Ordinances.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

In the Region, there are a total of 24 existing parks and future park sites totaling 624 acres. The parks include ballfields, game courts, trails, picnic areas, playgrounds, seating areas, and landscaping. Another 1,162 acres is included in 11 park reserves. Facilities for walking, cycling, nature enjoyment, and other informal recreation activities will be available in the park reserves. No active recreation development is to be undertaken in the park reserves.

CONSERVATION FIRST

At the outset of this plan, it was clear that the conservation of natural resources, preservation of the scenic rural character and protection of the cultural heritage landscape would be the foundation of the plan. All nine municipalities, Chester County, and conservation organizations have worked diligently and successfully since the 1970s to preserve the stunning beauty and resources of the Northern Chester County landscape. About 82 percent of the respondents of the citizen survey indicated that achieving a balance of conservation and recreation is important. To that end, the location of parks and recreation facilities needs to fit the region in a way that supports ongoing conservation efforts and provides convenient access for people to enjoy and care for nature.

ACTIVE HEALTHY LIVING

Three major groups provided input to the active healthy living Level of Service Analysis: the general public, the school districts, and organized interest groups.

GENERAL PUBLIC

Assessing the needs of the community at large was conducted through a statistically valid and reliable direct mail survey, interviews, public meetings and focus groups. The findings included the following:

- **Activities:** the top activities in which over half the residents engage are walking, nature enjoyment, playing/socializing in the parks, enjoying the dark starry skies, participating in special events, fitness, and bicycling.
- **Types of Parks:** About 82 percent stated that a balance of all types of parks is important. The rank order of types of parks preferred was nature reserves, trails systems, smaller close to home parks and greenways. Access to large parks in the region is adequate – it is the smaller closer to home parks and trails that are insufficient.

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- **Outdoor Recreation Facilities:** Respondents stated that there are not enough bike paths (58%), walking paths (55%), outdoor pool (48%), multi-purpose trails (47%) or dog parks (46%)
- **Indoor Recreation:** More than half of the survey respondents indicated that an indoor recreation center is needed in Northern Chester County.
- **Target Groups:** Adults and families need more parks and recreation opportunities. The strong focus on children and youth in the area is important but adults need opportunities as well. Providing facilities and services in which families can enjoy time together is very important.
- **Children and Youth:** Research with a large group of fifth graders found that they most want to enjoy the parks and nature in unstructured unorganized play.
- **Senior Adults:** There is no facility for senior adults in Northern Chester County. They must go to Pottstown or Phoenixville for recreational clubs and activities.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The Owen J. Roberts School District serves seven of the nine municipalities in the Northern Chester County region. The Superintendent, School Board President and Vice President and the Wellness Coordinator participated were members of the Coordinating Committee for the Plan. The Wellness Coordinator is funded by the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation. The District has been participating in discussions with the Northern Chester County Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan Core Committee, the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, the Pottstown Area School District and others in a regional active healthy living initiative. The district has integrated Northern Chester County's active, healthy living initiative with the school district's **Feasibility Study for the Future of the Owen J. Roberts School District**. When the public opinion survey found that residents were interested in close to home parks, discussions with the school district explored the potential for school campuses to expand to serve the close-to-home recreational needs of a broad base of citizens throughout their life time including families in order to cultivate active healthy living as a way of life here. The District is now exploring the potential to establish community school parks based upon the findings of the planning process.

The Phoenixville Area School District serves East Pikeland Township. In addition to school district facilities, East Pikeland residents also use Borough of Phoenixville parks and recreation facilities. Interviews found that the East Pikeland residents are oriented toward their school district and the Borough for sports, trails and recreational services. They play mainly in the Kimberton Youth Athletic League (KYAL), Phoenixville Babe Ruth League, and a few on the Norchester Red Knights Football Team. Regarding open space, the residents are more oriented toward Chester County.

The Downingtown Area School District serves West Pikeland Township. West Pikeland is also a member of the Downingtown Area Recreation Consortium (DARC). West Pikeland residents are oriented toward the Downingtown area for sports and recreation programs. Residents mostly play in Lionville Youth Athletics and Glenmore-Eagle Youth Association and enroll in DARC programs. Just

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as East Pikeland residents are oriented toward Chester County in terms of open space preservation, so too are West Pikeland residents.

ORGANIZED SPORTS

Organized sports leagues in Northern Chester County include baseball, softball, soccer, football, lacrosse, basketball and swimming and diving. Organized sports play is youth oriented primarily serving participants ages four through 18 but primarily ages six through 12. Due to the heavy use of facilities by youth leagues, there are no adult sports leagues. Leagues for adult sports are common throughout Pennsylvania but very limited in areas without sufficient sports fields. In Northern Chester County, research found that adults do not even bother to request field or gym use as all available facilities are used almost exclusively for youth athletics.

FINDINGS

The current park acreage of 624 acres in the existing parks and future park sites includes 26 parks. The total acreage of future park sites is larger overall than existing parks providing extensive opportunities to develop true community parks. Along with the 167 acres needed to accommodate sports facilities for the existing organized sports, another 40 acres will be needed for fields and supporting facilities for adults (see Appendix 8). The total acreage needed for parks to support active healthy lifestyles for today's citizens is 831 acres. This yields a population based standard of 19 acres per 1,000 residents.

In tailoring this standard with best practices, this plan recommends a previous Chester County policy of setting aside 30 percent of parkland for 50 years as a legacy for future generations to program and develop. Incorporating this yields a population based standard of 25 acres per 1,000 residents.

This locally-derived standard will enable the Northern Chester County communities to revise or establish mandatory dedication of parkland provisions in line with needed recreational land for present and future residents.

Table A10.1 Level of Service Recommendation

| Methodology and Calculations | | |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Municipal parkland (developed and future) | | 624 acres |
| Parkland for youth sports fields, passive facilities, parking/support facilities | | 167 acres |
| Parkland for adult sports fields, passive facilities, parking/support facilities + | | 40 acres |
| Recreation land acreage to support needs | | 831 acres |
| Level of service expressed as the needed recreation land acreage in relation to current population (acres per 1,000 residents) | $831 / (43,907 \times 1,000) =$ | 19 acres per 1,000 residents |
| Additional 30% to be acquired as legacy parkland for future generations to program and develop | $19 \times 0.3 =$ | 6 acres per 1,000 residents |
| Locally-determined level of service | $19 + 6 =$ | 25 acres per 1,000 residents |

Source: Gannett Fleming