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INTRODUCTION

The Northern Federation is in itself a model of public participation. Since its inception nearly 40 years ago, the Northern Federation has brought together nine municipalities, the Owen J. Roberts (OJR) School District, and numerous conservation and related private organizations to work together on projects of common concern in the areas of land conservation and natural resource protection.

The Northern Federation has long recognized that important issues and opportunities transcend municipal boundaries and that a great deal can be accomplished through collaboration. This Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is another example of the Northern Federation harnessing a multimunicipal partnership, with public involvement by citizens representing various interests. Federation leaders sought state support, state and county grant funds, municipal funding, and participation by many citizens during the course of this plan. No doubt, much of the Northern Federation’s success is due in part to its commitment to partnerships and public involvement.

The public involvement process for the Northern Chester County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan was based on the belief that those who are affected by the plan have a right to be involved in the planning process. The public involvement process included the promise that the public's contribution would influence the plan’s recommendations. To that end, a six-part public participation process served as the foundation for the 10-year plan. The process included the following:

- Coordinating Committee
- Steering Committee
- Public Opinion Survey
- Sports Organization Survey
- Focus Groups
- Key Person Interviews
- Project Web Site

COORDINATING AND STEERING COMMITTEES

The Coordinating Committee included 10 members representing the Townships of East Coventry, East Nantmeal, East Pikeland, East Vincent, North Coventry, South Coventry, Warwick, West Pikeland, and West Vincent, and the Chester County Planning Commission. The mission of the Committee was to provide municipal input to the plan's inventory, assessment, goals, and recommendations on behalf of their communities. Their challenge was to represent the communities overall and not any single interest. Participation in the Coordinating Committee actually increased and expanded during the course of the project to include more people and organizations. This is a testament to the level of interest, openness to new partners, and sense of collaboration within the Northern Federation.

The Steering Committee comprised 140 organizations and individuals who were invited to an initial issues identification workshop and subsequently invited to milestone public presentations. The organizations included federal, state, and county park managers; Chester County program managers; private facility owners/managers; community sports leagues; sportsmen's clubs; municipal commissions, boards, and committees; regional land trusts and conservancies; natural and cultural landscape initiative leaders, i.e. Hopewell Big Woods, and Schuylkill Highlands; and regional health and wellness foundations.

These organizations and individuals represented the vast array of potential partners in improving and expanding opportunities for active, healthy living through parks, recreation, and protected open space in Northern Chester County.

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

The Federation of Northern Chester County conducted a public opinion survey in 2010. The survey was distributed to a random sample of 2,008 households in the Federation's service area. The purpose of the survey was to determine the opinions, ideas and concerns of the residents regarding parks, recreation, and open space and to provide a foundation for decision-making. By understanding citizens' needs and interests, the Northern Federation along with its municipal and private sector partners would be able to direct planning and resources for the benefit of the region.

The process produced statistically reliable and valid survey results. Of the 1,920 successfully-delivered surveys, 514 were completed and returned – a return rate of 27 percent, exceeding the typical direct mail return rate of two to four percent. The 88 non-deliverable surveys (due to people moving or other reasons) equaled four percent, within the normal range of three to five percent. A detailed survey analysis report is presented in Appendix 10.

FINDINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Regional Perspective – Respondents appear to view parks and recreation regionally more than as an effort by any single municipality. The respondents prefer continuing regional parks and recreation efforts.

High Level of Park Visitation – The respondents are major visitors to parks. The most-used parks include Valley Forge National Historic Park (84 percent), French Creek State Park (79 percent), township parks (73 percent), local creeks (63 percent), Warwick County Park (61 percent), and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site (58 percent). Township parks should figure prominently in developing a parks, recreation, and open space strategy for the next 10 years.

Nature First – Respondents clearly indicated the importance of nature-based parks and recreation with nature reserves, trails, and greenways being important or extremely important among park types. Written comments of the respondents echoed strong sentiment regarding the preservation of the region’s scenic rural character.

Balancing Conservation with Recreation – Smaller parks close to home, trails for cycling and walking, and achieving a balance of recreation facilities of game courts, ball fields, and picnic facilities with nature-based recreation and conservation is key.

Indoor Recreation – Indoor recreation was listed as important/extremely important by 56 percent of the respondents with another 29 percent reporting a neutral posture. Only eight percent said that indoor recreation is not needed.

Adults and Families – Based on reported interests, these appear to most likely be target groups for future recreation services.

Public Awareness and the Region – One of the most important findings was that three out of five respondents identified the need for more information about parks and recreation including facilities, programs, and where to go to get information. Their most preferred way to get information was from a Web site. Their most preferred location for a Web site was *one single Web site for all of the townships in Northern Chester County*. More people favored one single Web site to a Web site for each township or a school district Web site. A Web site is only one way to increase public awareness about parks and recreation opportunities and their benefits. More outreach of all types to promote parks and recreation opportunities would be a most valuable public service.

Support for Parks, Recreation, and Open Space – Respondents indicated their willingness to support parks and recreation through a variety of means, from user fees and friends groups to taxes. Fifty-four percent of the respondents stated that they were willing to consider paying an additional amount annually to support parks and recreation. The amounts ranged from two to five dollars more per person every year. Those willing to support parks and recreation financially outnumbered those who were not willing by a margin of nearly 11 to 1. Only five percent were not willing to support parks and recreation at all.

SPORTS ORGANIZATION SURVEY

Fourteen of the fifteen sports organizations serving Northern Chester County residents participated in a sports survey. They provided information on participants, participation trends, field use, issues, opportunities, and ideas. They also provided information on field maintenance and financial support. The participants included: Glenmore Eagle Youth Athletics, Kimberton Youth Athletic League, Norchester Red Knights, Coventry Little League, Penn Premiere Lacrosse, Phoenixville Babe Ruth League, Springford Youth Athletic League, Norchester Youth Athletic Association, DARC (Downingtown Area Recreation Consortium), Coventry Soccer Association, Lionville Youth Athletic Association, Wildcats Football, and Coventry Girls Basketball.

FINDINGS

- Total participation in area leagues was 16,143 in 2010.
- Participation in leagues serving Northern Chester County was 10,619 in 2010.
- Participation in the municipalities within this plan was 4,051 in 2010.
- There are not enough ball fields to support games, practice, and field maintenance.
- Ball fields are overused, overscheduled, and not rested. As a result, field conditions are generally less than desirable.
- Sports leagues are increasing in participation and new leagues have been emerging.
- Leagues rent facilities outside of the region.
- Field lighting would help spring and fall sports.
- Both the leagues and the municipalities have invested in sports fields; there is a mutual understanding of the value of this partnership.
- While it appears that there are many fields in the area, a significant number are not permanently protected and in public ownership, such as fields on Fire Company grounds and on Ludwig's Corner Horse Show Grounds.
- Volunteers in leagues also schedule practices at private homes, which is cause for concern from a safety and liability perspective.
- There are no adult leagues; there is a sense that adults no longer even ask for facilities because none are ever available.
- There appears to be a disconnect between how much school facilities are used and how the public perceives that they are used. The Owen J. Roberts School District facilities are completely booked to the extent that they cannot even accommodate all school events and activities. Yet there appears to be a public perception that they are underutilized.
- No turf management programs are in place on municipal athletic fields.
- No gradation of sports facilities from recreational play through tournament-quality play is in place. However, the turf fields on the Owen J. Roberts campus do convey the sense of being premier fields given their lights and synthetic turf surface.

- If more sports fields are developed, the sports organizations would like to see a centralized sports complex for flat field sports and for diamond sports. Centralized locations provide better public service in terms of limiting the need to drive around to drop players off at multiple locations; storage of equipment; maintenance; and sense of community.
- The school district properties offer the potential to become community hubs for sports.
- There are not enough gyms to accommodate uses such as basketball or indoor sports training in the winter months for baseball and softball.
- The organizations invest in facilities and services and expressed a willingness to continue in partnering to increase field numbers and capacity.

FOCUS GROUPS

In focus groups, people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward certain topics, services, concepts, conditions, or ideas. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members and with the focus group leaders. For the Northern Chester County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, more than 250 participants engaged in seven focus groups: Heritage and Culture, Sports (two), Trails, Conservation and Stewardship, Parks and Recreation Boards, and Youth. Summary responses regarding how to move ahead with the plan are presented for each topic below.

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

What's your organization's "bumper sticker" (short phrases that would best describe its purpose, goals, or mission)?

- Land Matters
- Preservation (Sense of Natural Resources, Culture, Place, Heritage)
- Funding Preservation, Making Parks Permanent
- Keep West Vincent Green
- Quality Environment = Quality of Life (Note: Suggested three times.)
- Water Quality = Quality of Life
- Promote Fly Fishing Fun
- Explore Nature, Heritage, and Community
- Continue Expanding Trails
- Preserve, Promote, and Protect Land Conservation and Use
- Preserve and Protect Our Natural and Cultural Heritage for enjoyment of current and future generations: "We're making it in America"
- Connect to Nature, Heritage, and Community
- Protect Our Watershed
- Preserve Hopewell Big Woods

What conservation and stewardship programs are already in place?

- Hopewell Big Woods is 72,000 acres. Nearly the whole region lies in the Hopewell Big Woods designated area. The problem is that people don't know what Hopewell Big Woods is. Groups agreed that it would take time and successes along the way to advance the identity.

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- French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust staff conducts annual inspections of easements. They talk with the landowners about steps they can take to protect and conserve their land with the easement. The Trust conducts trips and tours for landowners such as to Longwood Gardens. They do special events and education in a fun and casual way. Parties are hosted by landowners that have eased their properties, inviting others to attend who might consider easing their own land. It is a casual, informal educational strategy that works. They show maps of preserved properties and relationships. Examples exist of property owners who are actually buying property to preserve (West Vincent). The outreach method is high touch and very community-based, with a “show and do” philosophy.
- The Chester County Heritage Program manages land and partners with other organizations. It provides educational programs, examples of best management practices, and consultation. Program it, practice it, and demonstrate it. The County Parks Department conducts education and outreach.
- We need to come up with numbers to prove what we do works and has value.
- Have some demonstration areas or projects.
- Have great signage.
- Warwick Township coordinates with Chester County, other municipalities, and organizations in its conservation efforts. Coventry Woods project, in conjunction with North Coventry and South Coventry, will result in 600 acres preserved.
- The Hill School and the Bentley tract are important land conservation projects.
- Need to educate new residents and elected officials about the value and assets of Northern Chester County.
- Crow’s Nest helps to get young participants involved in nature-based experiences and fun activities.
- Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site has a host of programs for a range of ages. NPS staff has made a concerted effort to engage youth and diverse ethnicities in park activities and use. Engagement of the Latino community has resulted in participation among participants with ties to 13 Latin American countries. Programs include afterschool activities, summer camp, and art projects with high visibility to park visitors. As a result, there is now a Latino historical aspect of Hopewell in place. Programs range all the way to a nationally-important stonewall conservation education program in conjunction with a school in western Kentucky. Getting rid of fees really helped to increase park visitation and program participation. Important to consider the demographics of the area. Eagle Scouts have helped on park projects including a health and fitness trail.
- Chester County provides grants and technical support through the Chester County Open Space Program. This supports acquisition and development. The agricultural preservation program has helped to protect farmland. The county also is active in supporting trail planning and especially construction. Different partners take leads on various initiatives. The county is looking into the ability to change passive parks into active recreation areas. Chester County is undertaking a strategic planning process.

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- West Pikeland did a survey that found overall support for open space preservation. The township has been a model of outreach. Supports and advocates discussions with all interests, not only with like-minded conservationists. Communication with all interests is vital. The soccer field recently built helped to relieve pressure in the township. Their Open Space referendum provided the “war chest” that the community needed to preserve land. Recommendations for success include the following steps: talk with the community, pursue and secure funding from a variety of sources, and network with groups such as the Natural Lands Trust (especially). Focus on connectivity. Use trails to show that they are community-based connectors. There is a concerted effort in West Pikeland to get people to serve on multiple boards – works for communication and coordination of effort.
- Defining our constituency: Landowners, Residents (major groups), Supervisors, and various Township Committees. Have very focused outreach. Focus on use and users, such as kids being a major group. Let’s try to think bigger and beyond just things like soccer – how can you use soccer as their entree to other interests?
- West Vincent has TreeVitalize grants. Goal is to use signage to inform the public. Youth helped to clear trails, which was a highly visible project and result. The township has a trails committee. Passed two referenda on the Earned Income Tax and the property tax to support open space.
- People do recognize a split between new residents and long-term residents in terms of understanding about the nature of the area, land use, level of services, and expectations. Politics and political action indicate different philosophies are in place.
- Need to inform people about what is going on and where to do the activities. One stop shopping about what is available regionally. Coordination is needed. Engage the OJR School District, the Cable Station. Engage people in educational and awareness-building efforts about the value, history, and resources of the region. The heritage landscape is vital. Need to make the case of the economic value of the region. Need to show people visually what they have and what the alternative would be. Need to promote opportunities and get more visitation to important areas.
- Keying in on kids was a common theme throughout this discussion.
- Dame Juliana League Fly Fishers are champions by example. The organization makes improvements and mobilizes forces for initiatives such as stream bank stabilization. 120 members including 40 who are active. They provide labor to spread fish about the streams. Their home stream is French Creek and they are branching out to Pickering Creek. All programs lead to stewardship. Concern about losing many young anglers! The YMCA in Phoenixville teaches fly-fishing and also stream ecology.
- Community sports are a lot of work and require multiple partners and volunteers.
- Need to work out the parking issues at parks, especially where there are sports fields.
- Green Valleys Association has taken on big issues successfully such as the Perrier case in which over 700 people turned out for a public meeting. Envirofest is a unique event in northern Chester County that brings together businesses and nonprofits from the areas of sustainable watershed practices, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, land conservation, green

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building, energy efficiency, and environmental education. Educational and entertaining for adults and children. This year will feature live music, local microbrew tasting, fishing, workshops, demonstrations, and much more. In 2009 over 1,100 people attended. Stream Day Celebration generated over 40,000 pounds of trash. Will do the Schuylkill Scrub from the headwaters of the Delaware to Bartram's Garden from mid-April to mid-May as a media event.

- Programs at Welkinweir: summer camp with 500 campers, school district outreach, pre-school programs, and library programs.
- Look into how to educate municipal officials and landowners on how to treat their land.
- Recognize that there is power through participation – getting people involved will connect them with efforts.
- South Coventry is focusing on Woody's Woods and the master plan is under way. Will be working on the trail link to Hopewell Park and the Schuylkill River Trail. The township would like to see the school district do a program on recycling as part of the curriculum. Was once part of the curriculum and gave 125 kids outdoor experiences annually. Its Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Oversight Board conducts an annual Clean-Up Day, Community Day, and Recycling Day. A native plant exchange is part of the Community Day celebration.
- French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust does the annual Iron Tour through open space preserved properties. Earth Day in Warwick Park. Hopewell Big Woods Teaching Trunk.

If the participants could get one thing out of this plan, what would that be?

- The area has a strong history of success and support for conservation and stewardship. Many people and organizations are involved in this important cause and it shows with the continued scenic beauty and measures in place for conservation and collaboration. Northern Chester County has more heart than anywhere – just witness all that has been protected, studied, and enjoyed.
- The success of the plan will be rooted in its execution. Special interest groups and leaders need to be involved. The Plan needs to be rooted in community cooperation, connecting citizens to the land, providing continuous connections, and being persistent over time. Never give up: look at how Dick Whitlock turned 12 acres into 300 acres of preserved land as Woody's Woods. Work smarter not harder. Be seamless in goals and engagement. Use a variety of means of networking from the Internet to meetings, from socials to educational events. Make things fun to participate in. Develop and foster a regional brand: need a good name for Northern Chester County. Maintain Momentum. Capture the children as a way to reach adults. Do adult education and outreach too. Have concrete steps to work on. Use Best Management Practices. Have intermunicipal committees. Get message out to all groups: not just like-minded people. Conduct outreach to parent teacher organizations and newcomers. Offer community-building events and educational programs that encourage citizens to build your family's roots here and appreciate and understand our legacy. It is essential to convey the message of Northern Chester County and its special nature. It is not like anywhere else and we need to work to keep it special with its own unique identity.

HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Opportunities and Assets of Northern Chester County's Heritage and Cultural Features:

- The Centennial Powder Works Historic Park in East Pikeland has the potential to become a major heritage park and a tourism destination. The gunpowder mill served George Washington's army during the Revolutionary War. Plans are underway for archeological studies, master planning, and coordination with the Schuylkill River Heritage Area and the Valley Forge Area Visitors Bureau. This could become part of a Reading to Philadelphia area historic tour. The story of George Washington's race for the forges in the Revolution is an important and compelling story.
- Steel and Iron Heritage Interest. Support in interest for the Iron Furnace. Interest by East Nantmeal in this aspect of heritage.
- Parker Tavern in East Vincent Township.
- Pennhurst.
- West Pikeland has historic Yellow Springs. Arts tradition is unique in Northern Chester County and very different from Southern Chester County's Brandywine/Wyeth tradition. Here we have the art school. It would be important to identify this in our plan. First military hospital.
- North Coventry Township has Pottstown Landing, Iron Boar History - Franklin Stove heritage. Charcoal hearths, streams for fire control and to support drinking for mules used in industry. Auto tour in planning stages. Pottstown Landing is very interesting.
- East Coventry - Frick's Lock that is on the National Register.
- East Nantmeal has Welkinweir.
- Historic books and postcard books by local author.
- Need to preserve what we have in Northern Chester County.
- Old Houses/New Neighbors would be a useful theme.
- Many old churches including the oldest continually-operating Brethren Church in the USA.
- History is a major economic driver.
- Hopewell Big Woods.
- Iron & Steel Heritage area.
- Largest contiguous agricultural field (300+ acres) in Northern Chester County is the line between growth and development. (Alice's property)
- Iron Heritage tours are in planning.
- Five national register historic districts are in Warwick Township. This is a little-known fact among the general public and in terms of tourism recognition.
- Haycreek Festival.

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- Need to get the stories out: connecting the story of Northern Chester County with its incredible history and resources is most important to get out to the newer residents. This was a focal point discussion.
- Stories about many aspects of the history such as the colliers are important.
- For the arts: the Black Box Theater is an unusual asset that merits exploration.
- Nature Camps and Arts Camps: Welkinweir, Crow's Nest, Sakanac, Anadba, Warwick Woods, and Warwick County Park.
- Camp Fernbrook may have been an Underground Railroad stop; is the gateway to a 600-acre park, filled with charcoal.
- New types of agriculture are extending the heritage: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), cheese and wine making, specialty farms.
- The locks on the Schuylkill River are important and interesting.
- Towpath Park.
- Our mission: heritage tourism, show Northern Chester County as a destination. We need to have "enough" destinations.
- Should there be some type of umbrella organization or mechanism for trail use groups?
- Karen Marshall indicated that the first Iron & Steel Heritage Task Force meeting on marketing would be held in March.
- History just seems to focus on the end event of Washington's winter in Valley Forge, but there is so much more to tell about that story in Northern Chester County. It is the story of freedom.
- The Schuylkill River Trail is coming to the area all the way to Pottstown.
- Rail service (R6 line) may be coming to the area.
- Need to be prepared for visitors; how do you get ready for them?
- Need to capitalize on the agricultural heritage that we may be losing. It is at least changing and evolving from large farms to smaller organic and specialty farms. Laurel Locks Farm is open for tourism. Christmas Tree farms. Harvest time visitation. St. Peter's Oktoberfest. All provide events and destinations.
- Water as a theme: French and Pickering Creeks, Schuylkill River.
- Coordination is important. A lot is going on.
- "Come Home to Iron Country" as a theme
- In the 1700s and 1800s the forests were managed very well to support the iron industry.
- Sites where programming occurs: Ludwig's Corner, St. Peter's, Historic Yellow Springs, Anselma Mill, Welkinweir, Hopewell Big Woods, Marsh Creek, Towpath Park, Fern Brook, Black Box Theater.

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- Everyone is broke. No supervisors are willing to take on major new projects. There is no connection to revenue generation.
- Example: person buys baked goods from local specialty bakery. Sells them at Conestoga High School. Then the buyers of the products become interested and then go to visit the specialty baker and the area.
- Capitalize on what we have: the big sky, woods, farms, and streams. Don't want to build new things.
- How do we get to the school districts? Suggestion to teach a class on Northern Chester County as part of OJR Evening School. Note: The importance of working with and using school district programs and coordination was of major importance and discussion in this group. Work on connecting kids to nature. Concern about school district ending important nature-based programs such as Stream Watch.
- Public investment is lacking in things like historic and recreation sites and facilities as well as marketing.
- Community Service projects: trail clearing, stream bank stabilization. Historic committees offer tours. Use villages and sites as locations for tours.
- How can the Federation transform into a catalytic role? Become the mobilizers, do the outreach, connect with Environmental Advisory Councils (EACs), unify key stakeholders to galvanize them into action. How can we partner with municipalities?
- Historic cemeteries in East Pikeland.

If the participants could get one thing out of this plan, what would that be?

- Establish programs for heritage- and nature-based recreation.
- Coordinate with municipalities on programs.
- Add signage to area to highlight what is here and build an identity.
- Showcase difference between northern and southern Chester County with respect to the arts and other factors.
- Establish a means of communication among the entities involved in common efforts to advance a unified vision.
- Self-tours are important.
- There are all these things out there but no connections or way to connect them.
- Have the Visitors Bureau develop a focus.
- Continuing education class about Northern Chester County at OJR Evening School.
- Outreach to new residents about the area.
- Tourism information in strategic locations and in creative methods. Rack sheets. Outreach to groups like German tourists.
- Figure out who will do all this!

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- Get people together. Get them used to working together.
- Do events like “Washington’s Ride to the Schuylkill” which was held in 2002.
- Do small efforts to achieve success rather than large-scale things that are harder to accomplish. Perhaps identify two to four projects each municipality could do. That would be 18 to 36 projects.
- Develop an ordinance to protect historic towns and villages including buffers to protect the landscape heritage. Concern about properties behind the historic towns or districts that could get sprawl.
- Programs that are fun and inspirational: SPARK Discovery. Pughtown special community festival on town streets and roads.
- Educate residents about assets of Northern Chester County, especially newcomers.
- The Federation needs to change its role. Become more organized and formalized.
- What is most important about this heritage is that the cultural lands still have the historic landscape attached. Seeing the history within the context of the same landscape is very unusual. We need to make this point in the plan. People don’t want to hear about some event – they want to see things and experience them. Northern Chester County needs to create the lure as part of tourism efforts. Create both the experience and the emotional connection. Focus on the integrity of the landscape. How do we get history into recreation and the plan?

TRAILS

Critical Issues

- Hunting on state-owned lands precludes trail use. Questions were raised about the closure of state game lands trails emanating from state game lands in Lancaster County. Ingrid Cantarella of the Horse Shoe Trail Club provided information on how that policy is changing. The Horse Shoe Trail was grandfathered and not affected by the Game Commission regulations. It has always been open.
- Multi-use trails need accommodations for horses.
- Running trails desired. Preferred surface is wood or gravel, not asphalt. Trail running is becoming an activity of interest.
- Horse parking including trailers is needed. Horse-friendly parking needed. Welkinweir does offer horse trailer parking. Good to call ahead to make sure it is available and that no special events are going on.
- Public education about trail use is critically needed. Courtesy among trail users is vital. Desired goal is for the hierarchy of trail use to be observed: wheels → feet → hooves
- Use common sense: don’t ride when trails are muddy. Keep off wet grass. Using muddy surfaces damages them for future use.
- Suggestion: Look into providing mounting blocks along horse trails. This would facilitate riders dismounting to clean up after their horses. Suggested distance was a block or boulder every half mile. (Note: Look into this to establish a standard.)

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- Accurate records and monitoring is needed for easements. Easements have been lost that were essential trail segments. Adjoining property owners took over the eased properties in some areas.
- The area includes many trails on privately-owned property that are used by local residents. These trail segments are provided by the owners through their own goodwill. Trail club members described their outreach efforts to show appreciation and gratitude in a formal way annually. The recognition includes a personal visit, expression of thanks, and the presentation of a gift such as a home-baked pie, a birdhouse, birdseed, and other thoughtful items. Property owners in the forum stated how they like to have this type of trail use on their properties and, as horse riders themselves, value these trails. There is no desire to advertise the trails but to continue their use through goodwill. Discussion included the potential for having discussion with willing landowners about the potential for easements on these trail segments. The turnover of property from landowners willing to accommodate trail use to future property owners who may close their land to trail use is of concern.
- Bicycle speeding is prevalent and dangerous, especially on the Schuylkill River Trail. How can speed limits be established and enforced?
- A hierarchy of trails needs to be incorporated into a regional trail system: in parks, loops, on-road, off-road, destination, and long-distance and local commuting. Include recreational, fitness, and transportation as uses. Include range of users from those learning to ride to expert cyclists.
- Evaluate road shoulders for accommodating cyclists and pedestrians.
- Keep trail chip areas for horses (Struble Trail as an example).
- Find appropriate areas for mountain bikers. Various participants provided a range of perceptions and experiences about the effect of cyclists on horses ranging from no effect at all to dangerous close calls.
- ATV use is evident in the area and is a problem. The plan is dealing with non-motorized trail use only. Enforcement of ATVs is an issue that needs to be dealt with at the local level.
- Safety issues such as adequate sight lines required on multi-use trails needs consideration.
- Restricting the use of horses on trails was raised as a concern. There appears to be a need for information about trail construction and improvements in trails. Public perception about trail improvements in Chester County appears to be different from what is actually happening in the southern end of the county in the Downingtown area.
- West Vincent Land Trust is working on eased trails on pipelines. The organization has already made some calls about this and it appears that creating trails on pipelines has potential.

How do organizations conduct trail outreach?

- Based upon a resounding theme of the need for education on a host of topics, the participants explored ways to do outreach.
- Trail riders talking with other trail users.

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- Peer-to-Peer – when there is a problem or issue with a particular trail, organize trail users to undertake a positive, organized, friendly outreach to inform trail users about issues and to enlist their support in taking corrective action as well as in getting the word out to make the trail work well for everyone.
- Signage – The topic of signage emerged as a critical need. A regional signage system needs to be planned, installed, and maintained. A regional identity system appeared to be important.
- Have trashcans, waste receptacles. (Note: explore pack it in/pack it out policy.)
- Talk to the hunters about how to enlist their outreach support. They know everybody and use much of the region for their sport.
- Educate landowners about liability especially to educate them about the methods of protection through the state Recreational Use of Land and Water Act.
- Use township newsletters to feature articles on education and outreach. Newsletters are read extensively and residents value them.
- Communicate through all open space, recreation, and other related township committees.
- Communicate through trail clubs and committees.
- Explore “Adopt-A-Trail” and Trail Watch programs.
- Have theme days and events such as Historic Trails Days.
- Unite trail, historic, and heritage events and facilities.
- Develop a welcome strategy for newcomers that fosters residents’ identity of living in Northern Chester County as a special place.
- Education was mentioned numerous times with specific suggestions that broadly ranged from informing people how to act around horses, trail users talking to the horses, and trail projects, to newcomer socials and materials, trail etiquette, private property rights, and respect for property owners.
- Should there be some type of umbrella organization or mechanism for trail use groups?

If the participants could get one thing out of this plan, what would that be?

- Build rapport with private landowners for public access for trail use.
- Widen shoulder on Pughtown Road from Rt 113 to Rt 23.
- Provide trails from residential developments to parks, commercial centers, schools, and other destinations.
- Connect to the Trenton Cutoff.
- Provide something for everyone with respect to a range of trail types.
- All townships should connect via a regional trail system – not just trails within single municipal boundaries.
- Provide maps on the Internet – not paper maps. Let trail users print out their own maps. Keep the Internet maps up-to-date.

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- No trespassing enforcement is key.
- Notify people when trail maintenance projects are underway; people would like to join in but just do not know about the opportunities.
- Provide trails as an alternative transportation mode.
- Provide share-the-road signs.
- A most important point: There is a major difference between trail planning and trail construction. Trails that can actually get built need to be built. Certain trail projects have the property ownership or easement, design, construction documents, funding, political will, and citizens' support (maybe even a partnering group for trail maintenance and management). While other trails might look good on paper, they may not have the elements necessary to actually get built. Trails that can be built should become the priority. The plan needs to be focused on that in order to be competitive for grant funding. Some trails can theoretically be more important or make more sense on paper but if they can't get built, it is more important to move on to the trails that can actually get built. Successful trails will create the momentum for more trail development.
- Participants from municipalities in southern Chester County expressed interest in a similar regional trail planning effort in their area. All communities have an open space plan—just as those in the northern portion of the county, so do the southern municipalities.

PARKS AND RECREATION BOARDS

Challenges

East Coventry Township:

- No money

South Coventry Township:

- conflicts between active recreation facilities and quiet neighborhoods (lights, noise, traffic/parking)

Warwick Township:

- Vocal minority as small as one person while silent majority is absent.

West Pikeland Township:

- Tension between active and passive recreation advocates
- Getting trails through the development process

- No ordinance in place today per planning commission, e.g., 50 percent open space as required in West Vincent Township

West Vincent Township:

- Trails - private use only
- Trail users who feel/act entitled to trail use
- Is a purchased easement the solution?
- Quantifying needs for fields, etc.
- Evaluating best location for various facilities

Green Valleys Association:

- Perception of criminal delinquent behavior on trails
- Some get the concept of "community policing" by trail users
- Perceived needs for tournament-quality facilities

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Successes

East Vincent Township:

- Park Design for Community Park on the Ridge
- Many facilities
- Well integrated
- Connected trails
- Demonstration meadow – award from Philadelphia Horticultural Society
- Community Day with friends

North Coventry Township:

- Upgrades to Kenilworth Park (1970s design)
- Expansion of Coventry Woods
- Streambank/riparian better restoration projects

South Coventry Township:

- Bought land to connect Woody's Woods to Coventry Woods
- Planning for Woody's Woods
- Connie Batdorf Park – well used by residents and non-residents

West Pikeland Township:

- Bridge to Bridge Trail
- Along 113, 2 bridges, equestrian use
- Signage, parking still in progress

Warwick Township:

- 90-acre passive park (field and woods)
- Adding new open space in partnerships
 - South Coventry Township, East Nantmeal Township, and French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust to add 30 acres to Warwick County Park
 - North Coventry Township to add land to Coventry Woods toward 620 acres

- Active in Hopewell Big Woods – trail links, economic development potential
- Schuylkill River National Heritage – economic development
- Re-use of 100-year-old truss as a park feature; locally made with plaque pedestrian bridge
- Last stop on the Iron Heritage Trail
- 1990s community survey reported passive recreation need; trails needed; survey findings are still used today

West Vincent Township:

- Collaboration with township organizations
- Recent citizen survey
- Community Day – Walking survey; Raffle
- Town Hall Meeting
- Township newsletter
- Fire Department
- Receive/request survey
- Separate sports league poll

Chester County:

- Schuylkill River Trail
 - 1982 – easement
 - Segment from Spring City to Cromby in East Pikeland is complete and in use with parking trailheads at both ends
 - 5.4 miles from East Pikeland Township to Parker Ford – currently under construction
 - \$406,000 in DCNR grant
- Research, interpretive signage plan for Iron Heritage Trail

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If the participants could get one thing out of this plan, what would that be?

East Coventry Township:

- Fee-in-lieu

East Vincent Township:

- Complete, current inventory

South Coventry Township:

- Inter-community coordination

West Vincent Township:

- Facility sharing

- Appropriate citing of criteria standards
- Capital reserve fund for park maintenance from facility fees – 4%? 10%?

Chester County:

- Identify gaps in recreation facilities in the region, e.g., general or specific facilities
- Today, community parks are similar in design and audience; identify the need for diversity

What vision should be cast for parks and recreation in 2020?

- Lifetime recreation/community center/senior center
- Phoenixville Homes Proposal for community center: Library, senior center, computer, trail amenities, child daycare, police station; seeking funding
- West Vincent Township – approved for YMCA at Weatherstone, developer dependent
- Informational materials – brochure, calendar produced jointly via Federation
- Completion of trails/connections from Schuylkill River Trail to French Creek Trail, Iron Heritage Trail, Horse-Shoe Trail, and Boars Back Trail; and signage for trailheads and resource interpretation
- Forge to Furnace Trail/Morgantown to Manayunk
- Horse-Shoe Trail moved off-road
- Publicity of trails as a system
- Best location for park sky/stargazing and protection
- Fitness Trail with exercise stations
- Regional Web site with interactive map
- Examples of passive recreation suitable to natural resource context
- Best practices for recreation development
- Facilities
- Support: parking, restrooms
- Infrastructure: water, stormwater/drainage
- Other services: repair, food, lodging, medical care/first aid – economic development opportunities

Collaboration/Working Together: What about Joining Forces?

The participants were united in their desire to continue collaborating and improving the collaboration in parks, recreation, and open space. Areas of collaboration include the following:

- Sharing information
- Sharing facilities, e.g., sports fields
 - Possibly acquisition, development, and maintenance?
 - Willing to advocate to elected officials
- More coordinated special events

- Program/Management Staff/Communication/Maintenance - Equity! Equitable cost-sharing
- Scheduling of events/field use and rest

SPORTS FORUMS

Two sports forums were held. The first was to initiate discussions about needs and opportunities regarding organized sports in Northern Chester County. The second was to go over the findings of the fieldwork, questionnaire results, and questions that arose during the research and inventory phase of the project.

Sports Forum 1

What Works Well in Community Sports

- Use of fields without charge.
- New soccer fields going in at the Catholic church in East Vincent.
- Communities such as West Pikeland have open space funding programs.
- Lots of volunteers.
- Soccer is willing to do outreach to all other organizations to share in field development and operation.
- Leagues and sports organizations are willing to travel but usually “not across the river.”
- Sports programs are local and kids want to be able to play with their friends.
- Youth sports organizations serve as the feeder for high school sports.

What Does Not Work Well in Community Sports

- Out of season sports: fall baseball, spring soccer, year-round sports all need fields. While some sports were once only played in traditional seasons, such as baseball in the spring and summer, the prevalence of sports played for multiple seasons increases demand for facilities. If baseball is played in the fall, then the outfields can't be used for fall soccer.
- Four-season sports place high demands on facilities.
- School district fields are limited.
- Phoenixville baseball field is used by multiple school districts, schools, the community, and Catholic Youth Organizations (CYOs). The fields are lighted and of championship play caliber. A road is being planned to go through these fields, which will eliminate them. While the league will be paid for the land, there is nowhere to buy replacement land in the Borough of Phoenixville.
- Only three 90-foot diamonds in the area.
- Could the former steel plant lands provide space for more fields? There are liens on several of the parcels.
- Coventry Little League: maintenance is a major problem. The electrical system is deficient. Bellwood Golf Club owns adjacent lands; do these lands have potential for additional sports fields?

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- Can fields be centralized by type to locate them in one place? Would be convenient for residents in terms of driving to one location. Could have tournaments and schedule better.
- Parking is a problem at many field locations.
- Municipalities operate in the dark. There is no database about sports participation and field use.
- Indoor facilities are needed. The schools charge a lot of money to rent out their facilities.
- Weather causes delays and the need to reschedule, which compounds field demand.
- Sponsorships are down in 2010 over 2009 by over 50 percent. For example, last year at this time Coventry Little League had 48 sponsorships compared with the 20 in place this week. That could change with additional sponsorships going into place in the upcoming weeks.
- Divisions and teams in most sports are growing and expanding.
- Volunteerism is harder with fewer people willing to step up.

Ideas for Improvement

- Consider regional recreation. Look at how the costs and benefits can be shared and supported. Consider how municipalities working together could benefit in cost sharing. Partnerships could lower maintenance costs and improve quality.
- Easier to raise capital and get grants as municipal partners.
- Evaluate municipal- and school district-owned properties for active recreation use.
- Look at Pennhurst property.
- Needs to be partnerships; educate the townships.
- Downingtown Area School District has the old SMS property that has a couple of hundred acres.
- Sports Complex: maintenance would be easier and less expensive, amenities could be provided, advantage for tournaments, less travel for parents. Need to consider the important factor that kids want to play with their friends.
- Can we show the demographics in a way to attract private business? Example: USTC has 14 fields including outdoor, indoor, and turf.
- Make sure we have recreational sports fields such as through homeowners associations (HOAs). Provide practice areas. Consider multi-use fields.
- Adult Leagues: Leagues for adults include Bradford, Tredyfrinn, Rocket, and USTC.
- Lighting is of concern because the night skies are very important here.
- Need to make the case through photos.
- People think sports fields are just utilitarian places – make them more park-like. Include shade, nice clean restrooms, and many uses beyond sports such as playgrounds, trails, picnic and sitting areas. Wilson Park has concerts, sports (Old Chesterbrook). Make the case for this through photos.
- Pool resources and make responsibilities equitable.
- Consider having sports organizations run for public office. Use the political process to influence support for recreation facilities.

- Use ordinances such as mandatory dedication as a means to acquire land and raise revenues. Provide sample ordinances? How can we use the land development and planning process as a means to increase recreational opportunities?

Sports Forum 2

Participants provided clarification on their field needs, participation, and issues. Findings included:

- Not all fields are permanently protected.
- School district fields are not guaranteed and can be pulled at any time, thereby making scheduling difficult.
- Field lighting is needed but participants recognize the challenge of lights in Northern Chester County.
- The 90-foot Desanno baseball field in Phoenixville will be relocated to a local college campus.

YOUTH FORUM

The Owen J. Roberts School District assisted the Northern Federation in planning and holding a youth forum with fifth graders. Participants included 98 fifth-grade students. They participated in an interactive question and answer session and also completed a questionnaire. All those completing the questionnaire were entered in a drawing to win a prize.

It is important to note that in the interactive discussions and in the questionnaires, the youth were focused on being outside, engaged in active healthy play, in an unstructured format. There was very little discussion about organized sports. There was a great deal of discussion about playing outside in nature with trees, flowers, and shade. Regarding facilities, their emphasis was on pools, skate parks, and indoor recreation facilities for year-round use. There was consensus on the youth wanting to spend time with parents and siblings – this was of great importance to them.

Things They Like to Do

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| • Swim | • Play with family and friends | • Listen to music |
| • Kickball | • Be with parents | • Write stories |
| • Dodge ball | • Ride four wheelers | • Take pictures |
| • Jump rope | • Video games | • Play with my little brothers and sisters |
| • Walk | • Play tag | • Go camping |
| • Ride scooter | • Volleyball | • Go to new places |
| • Ride bike | • Basketball | • Build stuff |
| • Play with dogs | • Football | • Fishing |
| • Play games | • Baseball | • Karate |
| • Hula hoop | • Soccer | • Skateboard |
| • Sports | • Climb trees | • Hang out with friends |
| • Use playgrounds | • Read | |

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What they would like in a new park

- Swimming pools with a slide and other fun things
- Zip line
- Baseball field
- Playground
- Basketball courts
- Stage for performances
- Benches
- Rock walls
- Swings
- Spinning tire swing
- Laser tag
- Pond for fishing
- Soccer goals
- Tons of water rides
- A little bit of everything so that lots of people would use the park
- Kickball fields
- Tennis courts
- Trampoline
- Sand boxes
- Sand volleyball
- Places for nature lovers
- Playgrounds for both big kids and little kids
- Bathrooms
- Places to park cars
- Bicycle paths
- Lots of trees and flowers
- Monkey bars
- Lots of colorful things to play on
- Water games
- Food court so I could stay long and play and eat when I'm hungry
- A place for bands to play and have them play all the time
- An orchard
- Pavilions and picnic places
- Recreation center so I could go all year round and play inside and outside
- Petting zoo
- Nature center
- Water Fountains

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

More than 150 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, citizens, and organizations in Northern Chester County. These groups included:

- Officials from the nine municipalities in municipal outreach meetings held in every jurisdiction including supervisors, planning commission members, parks and recreation board members, and EAC members, depending upon the preferences and availability of the townships.
- Chester County Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Department, Historic Preservation Division, Open Space Department.
- Conservation organizations such as the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, Green Valleys Association, Natural Lands Trust, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Open Space Alliance, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Schuylkill River Greenway Association, Hopewell Big Woods, Schuylkill Highlands, Dame Julianna Fly Fishers, Binky Lee Preserve, Maysie's Farm, Milky Way Farm, the Creamery, the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities.
- Recreation providers such as the township parks and recreation board members, sports organization officers, area hunt clubs, Camp Saranac and Camp Anabba, French Creek State Park, Marsh Creek State Park, Valley Forge National Historic Park, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, DARC (Downingtown Area Recreation Consortium), Phoenixville Parks & Recreation Department, Chester County Parks and Recreation Department, Crow's Nest

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Preserve, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, Ludwig's Corner Horseshow, Northern Chester County Sportsmens Clubs, Horse-Shoe Trail, Freedom Valley Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Freedom Valley YMCA, St. Joseph's CYO.

- Spring City officials.
- School Districts including school board members, superintendents, business managers, athletic directors, health and wellness coordinators, coaches, and teachers.
- Health and Wellness: Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation and Phoenixville Community Health Foundation.
- Arts & Culture: Chester Springs Surrounds, Historic Yellow Springs, West Pikeland Arts & Culture Committee leaders.
- Private businesses such as the Mill at Anselma, Anselma Farmers' and Artisans' Market, J. Maki Winery, outfitter businesses, bicycle shops, Pottstown Visitors Center for the Schuylkill River Greenway, Pottstown Bicycle rental, Phoenixville theater committee, St. Peter's Village businesses regarding tourism, Brandywine Valley Visitors Bureau, Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau.

FINDINGS

The interviews dealt with the specific needs, interests, ideas, and concerns of the respective interviewees. However some common themes emerged that were highly similar to the findings of the direct mail survey. These include:

- Northern Chester County is a very special place. So far, many organizations have pitched in to preserve the landscape as we see it today.
- Many, many people and organizations are involved and interested in doing whatever they can to conserve Northern Chester County.
- The flip side is that these efforts are diverse, fragmented, duplicative, and sometimes wind up in gaps in services or efforts.
- There is a lot of information out there combined with a need for information but no way exists to manage and provide information in an organized, timely, and visible manner.
- A go-to place for information is needed on a host of topics related to parks, recreation, and open space.
- A strong sense of the benefits of collaboration and a desire to collaborate exist in the area.
- The Federation of Northern Chester County Communities appears to have a great deal of respect and recognition in the community. It serves as the common denominator among a host of organizations in the area. Many throughout the outreach process described the potential for the Federation to become more organized and focused on implementation.
- There is frustration that so many plans have been done yet implementation of these plans is perceived to be minimal and scattered.
- A sense of urgency and strong desire to get things moving ahead through implementation is in place. "Do something."

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- Conserving the rural scenic character is vital communitywide. There is some concern about how to do this while accommodating the changing population and perceptions of people who have lived here for quite a while as well as newcomers.
- There is general consensus that there are not enough places for people to play sports.
- Recreation is youth-oriented and focused on sports, summer, and holidays. There is a need for services for adults and families. The focus should be on nature and active healthy living.
- There is a need to get more people outdoors enjoying nature. Providing people with information on where and how to do this will help.

WEB SITE

A Web site, www.northernfederation.com, was designed for the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan project. The intent was two-fold: to inform and keep the public informed about the project and to establish a Web site for continued Federation use once the plan is completed. The site posted the project's purpose, public meeting announcements and summaries, milestones in the planning process, and contact information for the planning team. During the planning process, site visitors were able to sign up for a project email distribution list for direct notification of upcoming meetings.

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