

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**



**Parks, Recreation, and
Open Space Plan
2012**

**THE FEDERATION OF
NORTHERN CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITIES**

The Federation of Northern Chester County Communities

East Coventry Township
East Nantmeal Township
East Pikeland Township
East Vincent Township
North Coventry Township
South Coventry Township
Warwick Township
West Pikeland Township
West Vincent Township

The Plan Outlines Strategies to:

1. Protect open space that defines our region's natural, historic, and scenic character.
2. Foster active, healthy lifestyles through parks, trails, and programs.
3. Manage parks, recreation, and open space to convey the best possible benefit to the public.
4. Establish a sustainable financial support system of public and private resources.

Our planned investments in parks, recreation, and open space are intended to:

- Encourage active, healthy living
- Foster environmental conservation
- Preserve scenic beauty
- Increase property values
- Spur business
- Connect people to people, to nature, and to local heritage
- Deter crime and antisocial behavior
- Make Northern Chester an even better place to live

Collaborating to Multiply Benefits

Together, we've developed this plan as a guide for providing parks, recreation, and open space protection in the interest of public health and wellness along with conservation of our natural resources and scenic beauty.

Municipalities, school districts, land trusts, and health and wellness providers are seeking to improve services to Northern Chester County residents. The plan's vision and strategies build upon the foundation of places, programs, and protected lands that has been laid by a variety of public and private entities.

In the past, our municipalities have worked independently, and sometimes cooperatively.

Through the planning process and transitioning into plan implementation, separate efforts are beginning to merge into collaborative initiatives that expand our services and effectiveness in promoting the health and wellness of both residents and the environment in Northern Chester County.

Working together, we can more effectively publicize recreation activities, coordinate trails and conservation across municipal lines, promote partnerships, and compete for project funding. Collaboration enables us to develop new parks and trails, engage our youth in conservation and heritage, and expand recreational programs for adults.





Five Core Values Expressed by Residents

Community

Northern Chester County is a special place in which to live. Community involvement has sparked important achievements in parks, recreation, and open space. Building and strengthening the sense of community here is essential.

Health

The physical health and wellness of our residents are paramount. Providing opportunities to live active, healthy lives through community recreation facilities, programs, and services will benefit us individually and as a community.

Scenic, Rural Character

Our beautiful landscapes, dark night skies, and distinctive way of life need to be protected and treasured for present and future generations.

Sustainability

Making the best use of all resources to steward the environment, support human and financial resources, and provide a legacy for future generations is vital.

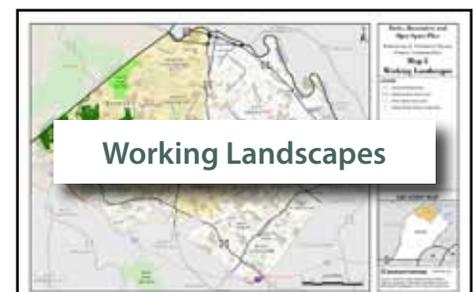
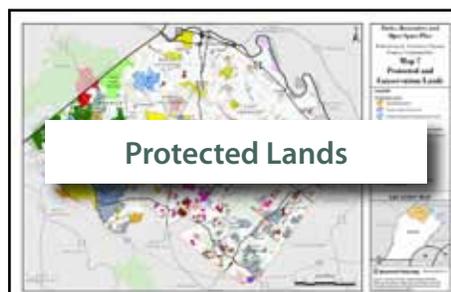
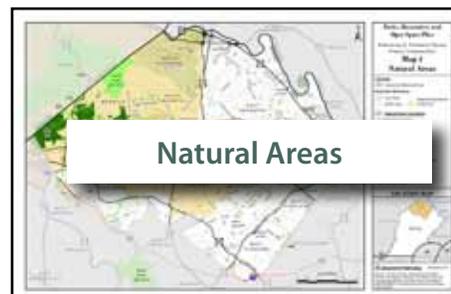
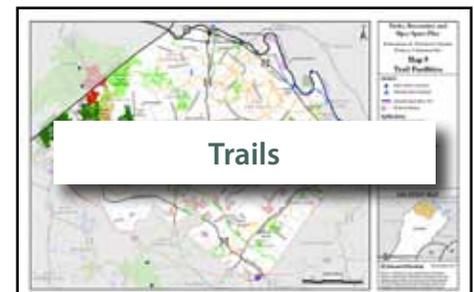
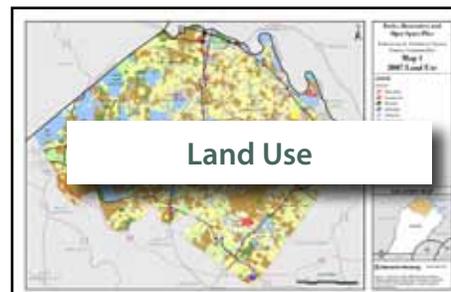
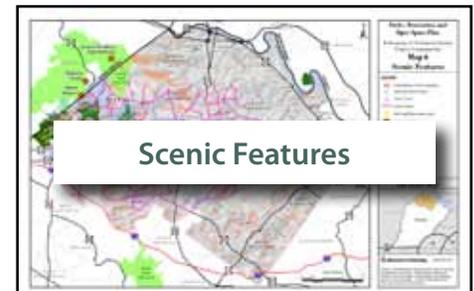
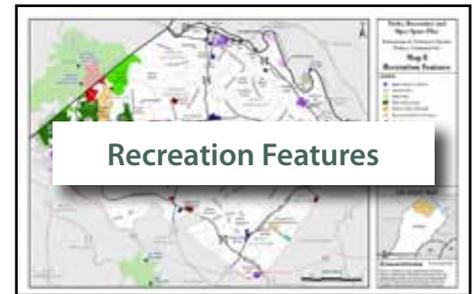
Heritage

Northern Chester County has a globally significant history. Recreational and educational opportunities can help residents celebrate this unique heritage and introduce it to our young people.



A Customized Plan for Our Region

The region's natural and man-made resources were studied and mapped to inventory resources and help identify opportunities for additional preservation, conservation, and recreation. Maps are available for download at northernfederation.com.



A **Coordinating Committee** of the nine participating municipalities and the Chester County Planning Commission guided the direction of the plan, assisted in data collection, helped to organize public participation activities, and provided review and feedback on the plan.

A **Steering Committee** representing a broader range of recreation and conservation interests served as a sounding board for issues, strategies, and recommendations at milestones in the plan's development.

Additional **public participation** included:

- Interviews with municipal officials, school districts, county agencies, state and federal land managers, land conservancies, and trusts, among others.
- Focus groups with sports leagues, park and recreation boards, trail developers and user groups, conservation and heritage organizations, and 5th graders.
- A citizen survey that achieved a statistically valid and reliable response for the region.
- Public meetings at milestones in the plan's preparation.



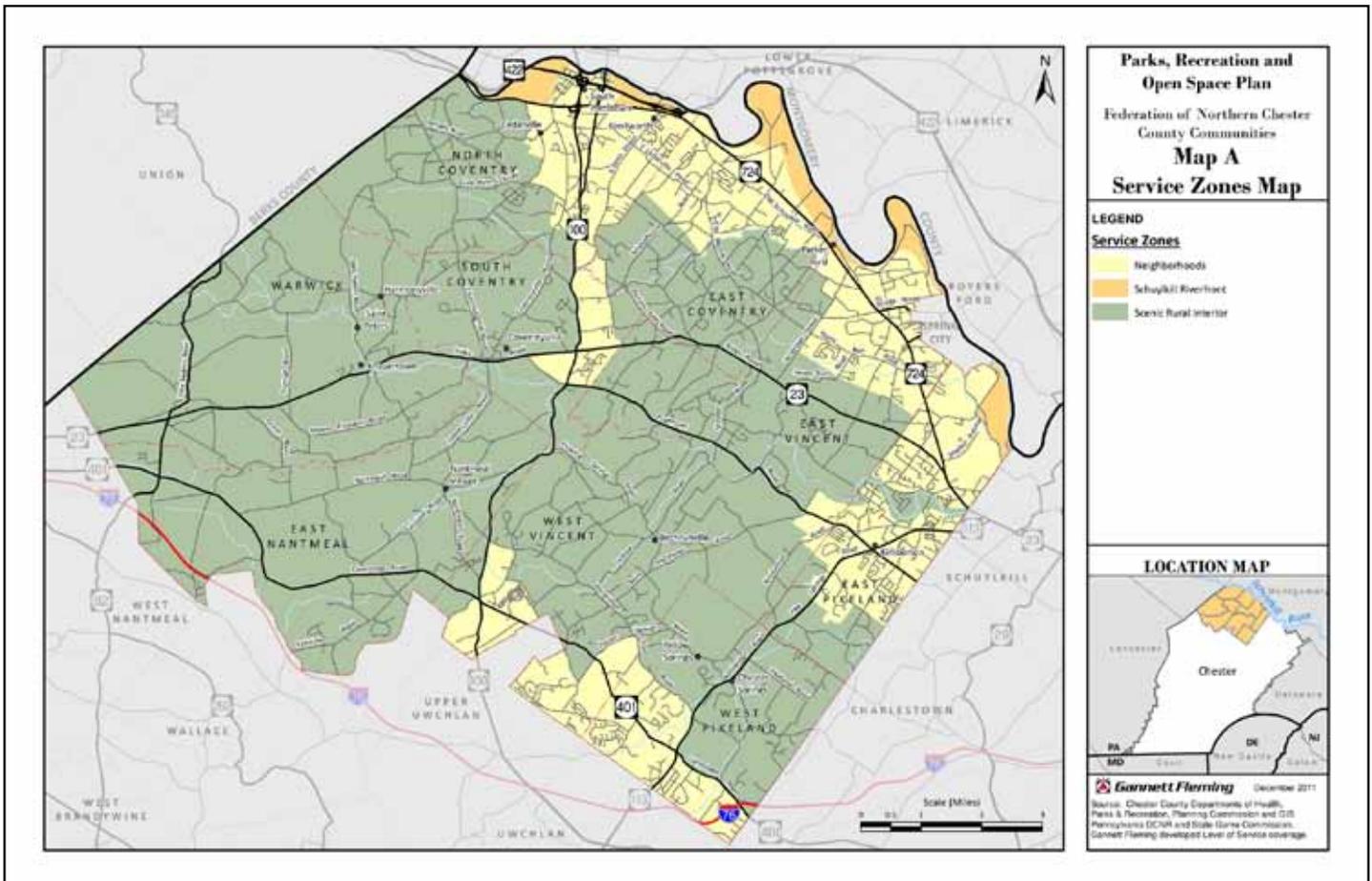
Public Involvement Findings

1. Three out of four residents visit local parks regularly.
2. Safe places to walk and public sports fields are the most needed recreational facilities.
3. Nearly everyone supports conservation.
4. Local history and cultural heritage are important.
5. Residents view the Federation region of northern Chester County as their community, not only their home municipality.

We asked our residents what was important to them about parks and recreation, sports, trails, history, and conservation. Our surveys, interviews, focus groups, and public meetings reached five significant findings:

In response, our plan outlines:

- A park, recreation, and open space standard based on real needs for recreational facilities, not just a standard acreage per 1,000 residents.
- Three service zones (see map below) to guide new parks, by type, to locations that can feature natural and cultural resources or close-to-home recreation in residential areas.
- Suggestions to integrate arts, history, and culture into every park and trail.



Strategies and Recommendations



Places and Programs

In 2009-2010, more than 4,000 of our youth played sports as 253 teams in 18 leagues on 12 public fields and many borrowed fields. Our region needs many more public ballfields and playing fields to support youth and adult sports leagues.

Strategies

1. Enrich parks as a regional system of multi-faceted destinations.
 2. Expand close-to-home recreation opportunities within the regional park system.
 3. Develop more sports facilities within the regional park system.
 4. Develop trails as a regional network.
 5. Expand and diversify recreation programming.
- Master-plan and develop future parks.
 - Explore support for an indoor recreation center.
 - Complete planned regional trails.
 - Improve and expand existing trails and networks.
 - Strengthen municipal mandatory dedication of parkland provisions to address trail development.
 - Sustain private social trails through partnerships and stewardship.

Sample Recommendations

- Acquire and develop additional park land for sports fields for both community leagues and general community recreation.
- Develop school-parks.
- Acquire additional parkland or fees-in-lieu of parkland through mandatory dedication of parkland.
- Enhance existing parks as unique recreational destinations.
- Focus programs in two areas: active healthy living and cultural heritage.
- Expand adult lifelong learning programs.
- Engage youth in the region's natural and cultural heritage.
- Coordinate special events and activities.
- Continue community sports league summits.

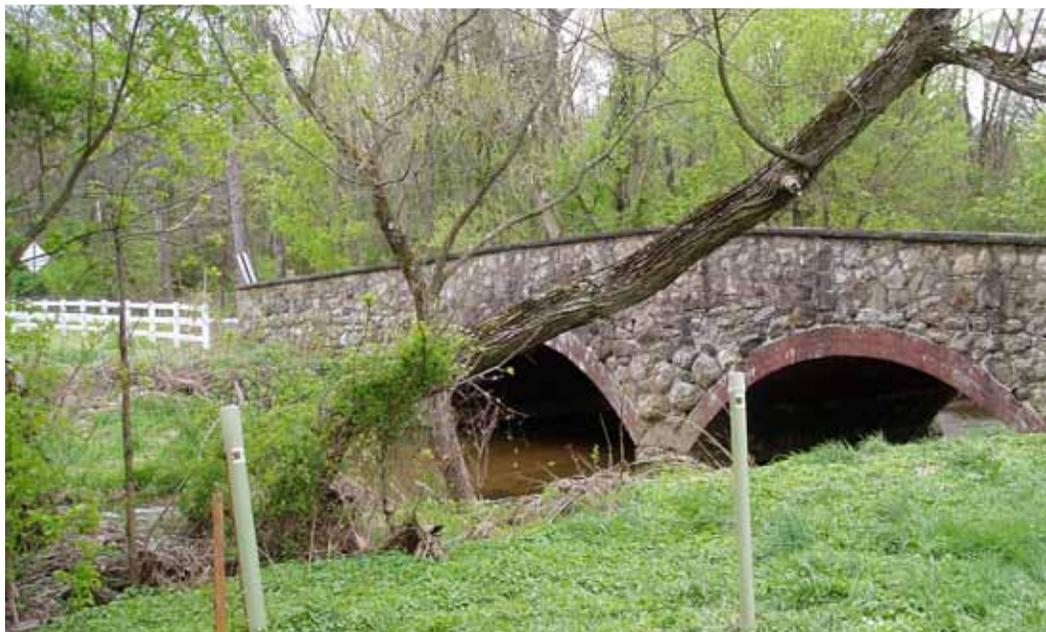
Conservation

Strategies

1. Integrate open space protection with growth management and recreation planning.
2. Protect and interpret landscapes that define the region's character.
3. Demonstrate and encourage resource stewardship.

Sample Recommendations

- Establish a goal to protect half of the remaining region—13,000 acres.
- Publicize progress toward the open space goal.
- Focus conservation on the riverfront, primary stream corridors and the scenic rural interior.
- Use mandatory dedication of parkland provisions to protect open space for passive recreation.
- Evaluate outdoor lighting of parks and fields for opportunities to minimize light pollution and consider new lighting proposals on a case-by-case basis.
- Practice resource management on public lands; encourage it on private lands.
- Interpret open space and regional character.





Public Awareness

Strategy

1. Increase participation through awareness of parks, trails, and recreation and conservation programs.

Sample Recommendations

- Encourage individuals, families, and small groups of friends to experience the natural, cultural, and recreational assets of Northern Chester County.
- Provide a parks and recreation guide for the Northern Chester County region in print and online formats.
- Provide a website for parks and recreation in Northern Chester County.
- Enhance the Northern Federation's relationship with the news media.
- Explore the use of social media to share information.



Partnerships

Strategies

1. Organize a regional commission to coordinate the development and delivery of parks, recreation, trails, and open space services.
2. Increase operating and capital support for parks, recreation, trails, and open space.
3. Leverage the knowledge, skills, and resources of partner organizations that share the region's core values.



Sample Recommendations

- Consider addressing sports facilities as two sub-regions.
- Continue to work with sports leagues in the planning, development, operation, and maintenance of athletic fields.
- Keep park maintenance expenditures a function of each individual municipality.
- Explore the benefits and costs of a Northern Chester County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Commission and staff to support, coordinate, and/or expand services.
- Establish a central clearinghouse for technical information about parks, recreation, and open space.
- Actively develop and manage partnerships:
 - ◇ School-parks with the Owen J. Roberts, Phoenixville, and Downingtown School districts.
 - ◇ Active, healthy lifestyles with the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation.
 - ◇ Other partnerships in conservation, trails, and open space preservation.
 - ◇ Strategic marketing of special destinations and experiences with conservation and heritage partners.
- Adopt a financial support policy that sustains parks and recreation over time:
 - ◇ Increase municipal investment in the daily operation of parks and recreation to enhance quality of life.
 - ◇ Consider a capital improvement program for each municipality.
 - ◇ Consider pooling funding for regional parks and recreation efforts.

From Plan to Action

The lull in the economy, during which development has slowed, presents an immediate opportunity to advance strategies to conserve open space and expand recreational resources.

First Steps toward Implementation

Plan development was invaluable for strengthening partnerships, refining a shared vision, and formulating strategies to achieve that vision. We now must maintain that momentum as we shift to the exciting and often challenging work of implementation.

As the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan recommendations were drafted, it was apparent that many ideas had community support. However, as shown by the management and financing assessment, our nine municipalities have limited staff and budgets.

To advance our highest priority recommendations, we have identified and begun working on the following recommendations:

- **Organizing committees** of municipal and other interest group volunteers to lead implementation in each of the plan's subject areas: land conservation, school-parks, trails, sports, heritage, events and programs, and public awareness.
- **Exploring municipal partnerships** to improve existing parks and build new parks and school-parks.
- **Identifying potential sports complex locations** to scan and screen sites prior to a site feasibility study; the Potential Sports Complex Locations Map (available at northernfederation.com) provides a starting point for site identification.
- **Extending trail systems** to focus support for the completion of trails under development, thereby interconnecting the region with trail spines for a future network.
- **Creating a common calendar of activities** to prevent scheduling conflicts and coordinate opportunities for shared advertisement and other costs; if publicized, it may also provide a single source of "things to do and see" for residents.





Taking an Active Role in Making this Plan Reality

Success in achieving our parks, recreation, and open space goals depends upon the active support of many facets of our community. Elected and appointed officials, staff, volunteer boards and committees, and volunteer citizens all have a role to play. As a Northern Chester leader, you are in a prime position to make tangible contributions to advancing the plan and helping make real progress toward our shared vision.

What you can do now:

- Become familiar with the plan, especially areas of personal interest, influence, and leadership.
- Put the plan to use; reference it in your decision-making.
- Support cooperation and collaboration. Through productive partnerships, ask questions, provide input, and offer resources.
- Stay in touch with the Federation— through municipal representatives, partners, or personally— on the status of priority recommendations.
- Encourage citizens to become involved.
- Join in celebrating successes as each one occurs!

The U.S. Surgeon General encourages communities and local governments to play a significant role in preventing obesity by providing services (such as recreation opportunities) that increase physical activity.

Acknowledgements

This Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan was prepared for the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities, a longstanding intergovernmental partnership devoted to community development and resource protection planning efforts. It was prepared as a guide for providing parks, recreation, and open space protection in the interest of public health and wellness and environmental conservation. It was adopted as a supplement to each municipality's comprehensive plan as an affirmation of their intent to continue cooperative efforts.

Public and private sector organizations in our region share our vision for a comprehensive parks, recreation, and open space system that fosters active, healthy living and environmental conservation through land protection.

Additional planning participants included:

- Chester County and the Chester County Planning Commission
- French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust
- Green Valleys Association
- Natural Lands Trust
- Owen J. Roberts, Downingtown, and Phoenixville School Districts
- Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation

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