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Lower Makefield Township

Parks and Recreation

1997 Action Plan Update

December 1996

Lower Makefield Township

Parks and Recreation:

1997 Plan of Action Update

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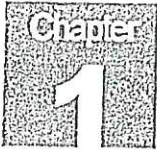
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Introduction

Lower Makefield Township is committed to parks, recreation, and open space to maintain a high quality of life for the citizens. As a part of on-going planning efforts, the Township developed a Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan in 1990. The plan set forth a series of recommendations dealing with park land, recreation facilities, programs and management of parks and recreation. In 1995, Lower Makefield updated this plan with the Parks and Recreation Plan of Action. The plan assessed park land, recreation facility and program needs, and operation of the system.

Based on the recommendations of the 1995 Plan of Action, the Township undertook an extensive program of plan implementation with projects ranging from land acquisition to trail planning, park improvements, and citizen involvement. In keeping with Lower Makefield's planning commitment, the Township evaluated the 1995 Plan of Action for an update in 1996 for implementation in 1997. The 1997 Park and Recreation Plan of Action reflects the significant accomplishments of 1995 along with the Township's focus on creating an outstanding park and recreation system in a rapidly developing community.

Update Goals

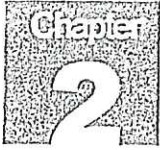
In order to forge ahead with building a park and recreation system to meet present and future recreation needs, keep pace with significant annual accomplishments, and stay ahead of pressing development trends, the Township established the following goals for the annual plan update:

1. Assess parks and recreation and the 1996 accomplishments
2. Evaluate community needs
3. Develop recommendations for 1997-2001 time frame.

Planning Process

Implementation of the plan reflects a true grass roots effort. Lower Makefield Township exemplifies the finest example of citizen participation. The Board of Supervisors exponentially increased their capacity to get the job done through citizen involvement. Lower Makefield Township organized committees to address specific recommendations of the 1995 Plan of Action. Throughout 1996, the committees worked on addressing their particular topic. Committees included Programs and Services, Golf Course, Community Center, Open Space, Edgewood Village, Bikeways and Greenways. The Township advertised to solicit resumes from interested citizens to participate on the committees. The response was positive. Many people sent in resumes to get on the committee of their choice. Resumes exceeded the available slots on several committees. The committees set in motion a host of actions to implement the recommendations.

The Township retained a Recreation Planner to work on assessing accomplishments, needs and opportunities in order to update the parks and recreation Plan of Action. The Recreation Planner met with the Township Manager and Recreation Coordinator, conducted key person interviews, and consulted with related municipal departments and community organizations about associated planning efforts. The 1997 Park and Recreation Plan of Action was adopted by the Township Board of Supervisors.



Assessment

1996 was a year in which elected officials, Township management, and the citizens joined hands, rolled up their sleeves, and got to work in implementing the Plan of Action for Parks and Recreation. Accomplishments included land acquisition, grant funding, development of a trail plan, a golf course initiative, establishment of a massive citizen participation effort which included six issue-oriented committees, hearings on park planning, development of park master plans, recreation facility improvements such as addition of lighting and new playing fields, and management improvements for Five Mile Woods.

Lower Makefield in 1996

Lower Makefield Township continues to be one of the most desirable communities in which to live in the Delaware Valley. Parks, recreation, natural resources, and scenic features are key factors in the quality of life equation. Because of its quality of life and convenient location, development continues to be a pressing issue. While growth in the housing industry is down elsewhere, it continues to boom in Lower Makefield. The Pennsbury School District is discussing the construction of new schools for the increasing population.

The assessment of parks and recreation in Lower Makefield focuses on the accomplishments of the Township in terms of the implementation of the recommendations of the Plan of Action of 1995. The assessment is organized around five major elements: park land, natural resource protection, recreation facilities, programs and services, and management. Each section includes a description of the accomplishments of Lower Makefield in 1996.

Park Land

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Acquisition of 62 acres of park land on the Vargo Tract
2. Initiation of negotiations for 168 acres of land for open space preservation and use as a revenue generating golf course
3. Identification of a 25 acre parcel near the Township Building park complex for the establishment of a greenway

Land acquisition continues to be a high priority given the extensive development underway in Lower Makefield. The Township has a limited window of opportunity in which to purchase land before it is developed. Acquiring pieces of land to connect parks and community areas by greenways as well as parcels large enough for community parks needs to be a high priority.

Resource Protection

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Establishment of a Committee on Five Mile Woods, hiring of new naturalist, and development of plan for improvements.
2. Development of greenway concept plan
3. Participation in Countryside Exchange program
4. Establishment of Edgewood Village Committee to focus on cultural resource protection.

Resource protection is of premiere importance to Lower Makefield Township. The Township has significant resources: river front, woodlands, steep slopes, and unique geological formations. Advancing work on greenway planning and linking efforts with other planning initiatives in the County would be important.

Open Space Preservation

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Acquisition of 62 acres of land at the Vargo Tract
2. Negotiation of 168 acre land acquisition of farmland
3. Identification of key parcels for future acquisition

Protecting the rapidly disappearing open space is critical in Lower Makefield. Farm land has been lost at an alarming rate over the past twenty years. In order to preserve land as open space, the Township has been looking into options such as acquisition, partnerships with the County (Falls on the Delaware), and greenway planning. One of the major achievements of 1996 was developing the concept of a public golf course as a way to both preserve land and generate revenues to offset municipal costs. The Township established a Golf Course Committee. The Committee interviewed and hired a consultant, assessed land that would be desirable as open space and suitable for development as a golf course, and initiated negotiations for acquisition.

Five Mile Woods

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Improving management by establishing Five Mile Woods Committee related to overall township planning and hired a new naturalist.
2. Developed plan for improving the facilities
3. Enhanced the programs and services

Five Mile Woods is a jewel in the crown of Lower Makefield Township. A nature preserve covering 285 acres near the Delaware River, the site is a treasure for the entire region. Over the past ten years it has been underutilized. Many people do not even know that it exists. Developing a plan for both resource protection and public use is important. Actions the Township implemented in 1996 have begun the process of achieving both of these goals.

Greenways

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Establishment of Bikeway and Greenway Committee
2. Development of trail and greenway concept plan and identification of key parcels for greenway system
3. Planning for capital improvement program by developing conceptual cost figures for trail development

As part of the trail planning initiative, land to develop greenways was identified. In mapping a trail system, parcels were identified that would be important in establishing linkages of open space and public facilities throughout Lower Makefield. Buckhill Farm, a twenty five acre parcel near the municipal park complex was identified as an important piece of a future greenway.

Planning

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Township launched a full scale planning process to implement park and recreation recommendations of the Plan of Action
2. Plans were initiated for land acquisition, facility improvements, golf course development, Five Mile Woods, trails and greenways
3. The 1995 Plan of Action was updated in 1996 for 1997.

The National Park Service sponsored a Countryside Exchange Program. Landscape architects and planners from Great Britain came to Lower Bucks County to work with local organizations in devising strategies to create more river access for the citizens and how to make the best use of resources. As part of the study area, Lower Makefield Township will benefit by using the information produced. The National Park Service is also developing a trail plan that would be on both the New Jersey and Pennsylvania sides of the Delaware River. Connections to the canal are important to establish in Lower Makefield. The Township should continue to work with the Delaware & Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor Commission and pursue grants that may be available for project implementation related to heritage park and greenway efforts.

Facilities

Accomplishments of 1996

1. Macclesfield Park: development of rear 30 acres for football and soccer field expansion; expanded parking created for about 200 cars; two fields were lit with a third to be done in 1997. Field lighting will help both football and soccer get more playing time through extended hours. Landscaping was added to screen the park from neighboring homes.
2. Development of master site plan for park at Oxford Valley and Roelofs Roads. This will address the most pressing facility problem in the Township: the need for softball fields for the girls.
3. The Parks and Recreation Board held public meetings to determine public interest in facilities to be developed on the Vargo tract. Based upon comments and the identified needs of the community, the Township is having schematic plans drawn up by the township engineer.
4. Development of a trail plan. The concept plan shows that the highest priority is for trails near the park complex by the township building and connections to the tow path and to municipalities neighboring Lower Makefield.
5. Initiation of planning for a public golf course, identification of a site, and start-up of negotiations for the property.

Given the growing participation in recreation activities including organized sports, existing facilities are over-used and unable to accommodate all requests for use and scheduled maintenance. The following list summarizes findings regarding facilities:

- There is only one field for girls softball. Participation growth indicates the need for six additional fields. The league doubled since 1991 to 600 players. It is projected to double again by the year 2001 given the Township's rate of growth.
- Ball fields, especially for soccer and football are overused. Bare spots around goal and scrimmage areas are prominent. Teams play on wet fields. The public is not receptive to the fact that fields should be rested in order to perform maintenance tasks for safe play.
- Football and soccer have overlapping needs for fields in the same time slots. There are not enough fields to accommodate players in both

sports at present. Emerging sports such as field hockey and lacrosse will create additional demands in the future.

- The Senior Citizens need more space for their growing club membership.
- There is a severe shortage of gymnasium time. Existing and emerging programs are being turned away by the School District in their request for gym use.
- Kid's Kingdom is crowded, exceeding the capacity for which it was developed. Another playground similar in scale is needed.
- Additional tennis courts are needed. Tennis in Lower Makefield is constant, not cyclical as in other areas.
- Trail use is extensive especially for use by children in getting to the park and pool complex near the Township Building. Since the trail system is only piecemeal, connecting the paths is important. Making connections with the Delaware Canal and the tow path with community pathways is needed.
- The Township's request for participants on a committee on a community golf course turned out more people than slots on the committee. An informal assessment indicates that there is support in the community for a golf course by both players and non-players. Currently, there is no public course in the area, requiring people to go to New Jersey or farther away in Pennsylvania. The Yardley Country Club has a waiting list of several years for golf privileges. Non golfers appear to be interested from an open space preservation perspective. Since the Township wants to run it as a revenue generator, support is generally positive.

Programs and Services

Accomplishments of 1996

1. The Township focused on finding more facilities to accommodate the increasing participation of league play.
2. Program improvements were planned for Five Mile Woods.
3. The Township expanded aquatics opportunities the pool addition in 1996. More people can now use the pool.

Program participation continues to grow. Recreation trends show greater participation in organized sports, self-directed activities such as bicycling and roller blading, and more senior adults involved in the Township's programs. Participation among females is particularly notable: softball participation is expanding while field hockey and lacrosse are emerging as major sports. Football is enjoying a resurgence. Soccer is dealing with growth and new national standards requiring smaller teams to give children more opportunity to play resulting in the need for more but smaller fields. All leagues continue to graze for any open area to have practice time, the most important time in the development of children participating in sports. 1996 and 1997 brought competition for already scarce gymnasium space to an all time high; youth groups that had permission to use gyms for more than a decade found themselves without permission to run their programs on the scale as in past years. Permission has only been granted for minimal time resulting in the canceling of established programs.

Administration and Management

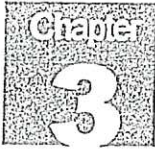
Accomplishments of 1996

1. The Township initiated a major citizen participation program in which six committees were formed to address issues in parks and recreation. A very successful effort, the committees achieved the goals or got the ball rolling on directives established by the Board of Supervisors.
2. The Township explored alternatives to financing recreation through tax support alone. The Township obtained a Keystone Community Grant for acquisition of the Vargo Tract. Lower Makefield is looking at the development of a golf course designed as a revenue generator. The Township is seeking further grant assistance for park development.
3. The Township is discussing a referendum for land acquisition and park development.
4. The addition of fields and lighting at Macclesfield Park will enable the Township to rest fields for improved maintenance.

Administration and management of parks and recreation is one of the township's toughest challenges. Typically a township of this size has a full time recreation and parks department. In Lower Makefield, the recreation staff is part time and supervises full time park technicians. The resignation of a recreation staff person resulted in a net loss of staff hours even though

the present Recreation Coordinator's hours increased. Consideration needs to be given to creating a full time department.

As the Township developed its recreation and park system, responsibility for it was spread out among various entities: the Parks and Recreation Board, Five Mile Woods, the Community Pools, and maintenance in Public Works. 1996 brought additional committees to work on specified topics. It is imperative that all of these committees are working towards a common vision of the overall good of the community. Fragmentation can lead to fiefdoms and tunnel vision related to particular issues. Consideration should be given to charging an oversight committee such as the Parks and Recreation Board with the responsibility of insuring that all efforts are focused upon the overall community goals.



Park and Recreation Needs

Lower Makefield Township is a community with high participation levels in all forms of recreational activities ranging from organized sports to self-directed activities such as biking and enjoying the outdoors in scenic areas in the community. As in the 1995 Plan of Action, three themes continue to resound:

1. There is a need for a balance of recreation facilities to accommodate all ages and interests.
2. Additional facilities for organized sports are needed, both indoors and outdoors.
3. Preserving greenways and linkages is essential.

Need for Park Land

Lower Makefield Township adopted a standard of 10 acres of park land for every 1,000 citizens. This standard is for "Core Recreation Land". Core recreation land is active recreation land and land that is suited for passive recreation adjoining active recreation areas. The 1995 Plan of Action forecasted a deficit in core recreation areas ranging from 105 acres in 1995 to 255 acres in about the year 2010 with a projected population of 42,000. Because of development pressures in the Township, land acquisition emerged as a high priority. In 1996, Lower Makefield Township acquired the Vargo tract for future development as a community park. This 62 acre property in the northern end of Lower Makefield helps the Township in meeting its park land goals. Table 1 reflects the adjusted core recreation land needs with the acquisition of the Vargo tract.

Table 1 Core Recreation Land Needs: 10 Acres per 1,000 Citizens			
Core Recreation Lands	For 1995 population: 27,000	For 2000 Population: 35,000 estimated	For 2010 population: 42,000 estimated
Core acres that should be provided	270.0	350.0	420.0
Existing Core acres	227.2	227.2	227.2
Additional core acres needed	42.8	122.8	193.6

Table 1 indicates that the Township will need an additional 193 acres with build-out. Land acquisition is a high priority because of development pressures. Communities that do not purchase park land soon lose the opportunity to obtain the land and find themselves pressed to buy already developed land to re-cycle into park land with a big price tag.

While the potential acquisition of the golf course mitigates the need for open space, the golf course will not meet the need for active recreation lands and trails. Golf course acreage needs to be viewed apart from the Township's standard of 10 acres of park land per 1,000 citizens.

Recreation Needs

Organizations ranging from girls softball to the Senior Citizens Club in Lower Makefield are literally bursting at the seams for more space. The following points illustrate community recreation needs:

1. Girls softball under the Pennsbury Athletic Association has doubled since 1991 to 600 players. With the rate of growth in the Township, the league is expected to double over the next five years again. There is only one Township field available for girls softball.
2. While soccer needs appear to have stabilized, other field sports are growing including football, field hockey and lacrosse. Overall, all leagues are expected to continue to grow with all of the new development bringing in more citizens who expect to play sports.
3. The Senior Citizens now have over 300 members. The Township meeting room is no longer adequate to serve their needs.
4. One of the most pressing needs is for indoor recreation space. Needs range from public meeting rooms to gymnasiums. The need for gymnasiums is especially keen. Requests for gym space exceed the

permits granted by the School District. Groups that had been using school gyms are no longer getting permits to use them. Problems with use of school gyms range from high demand to security issues.

5. Trails and paths are needed for walkers, bikers, runners, and roller-bladers. Although these forms of recreation are the most popular and are life-time activities, there is usually no organized constituency for them as there is for team sports. In balancing recreation needs, it is important to address these interests on behalf of the general citizenry.
6. There is a need to develop a sense of place for Lower Makefield Township. The Edgewood Village Committee is working towards this end in addressing cultural resource protection in this area of the Township. This concept should be expanded to all planning efforts that incorporate excellent, thoughtful design into the planning process. An example of a successful effort in this direction is the new sign at Macclesfield Park. A township-wide signage system would unify the parks conveying the message that Lower Makefield has a premiere park system.

Management and Operations

Recreation Operations

As Lower Makefield expands its park system to meet community needs, the Township needs to continue to support its investment. Over the lifetime of a park, 85 percent of its cost is in operations and maintenance.

At present the Township operates with a small staff: a part time Recreation Coordinator. The Recreation Coordinator is responsible for recreation programs, ticket sales, field scheduling, assigning maintenance tasks to the Maintenance Technician and coordinating with Public Works, and clerical functions. The scope of work exceeds the capacity of a part time staff in sheer volume alone. The potential addition of new parks, trails, golf course and indoor facilities will require increased management and staff.

Maintenance Operations

Park maintenance demands are increasing as the park system expands. Additional staff, equipment, and materials will be needed to protect the Township's capital investments. Looking at alternatives such as contracting out tasks such as grass mowing should be considered.

A maintenance impact statement should be developed when park improvements are planned. The Township would then be able to allocate the required resources for maintenance.

Public Participation

Lower Makefield Township is doing an admirable job in the arena of public participation. Not only does the Township have an active Parks and Recreation Board but also six committees to address specific topics. The committee's performed a yeoman's job in accomplishing a long list of goals for 1996. This should continue because it vastly increase the capacity of the Township to get things done; creates stewardship among citizens for parks and recreation; and builds a senses of community among citizens working together towards common goals. To some extent, their work substitutes for the work normally done by a park and recreation staff. While this is good and should continue, care must be taken in insuring that the committees are working towards the common end of effective public service and not the creation of territorial bodies.

Financing

Lower Makefield Township has been progressive in financing parks and recreation. Generally the users pay fees to support programs in which individuals and the public as a whole benefit. The swimming pool is self-supporting. Players in sports pay a field maintenance fee. Recreation programs are supported by fees and charges. The golf course is proposed to be a revenue generating facility that can be used to offset its own costs as well as have the potential to offset other parks and recreation costs. Tax dollars are used to support parks which benefit the community as a whole.

For capital improvements the Township uses fees derived from developers in lieu of the donation of park land as required under the Mandatory Dedication of Land Ordinance. The Township will have about \$800,000 in such fees in 1997 to be used for park development and land acquisition. Under discussion is a referendum for a bond issue of about \$4 million for the 1997 primary election. Half of the bond issue would be used for land acquisition and half for park development. The Township is also going to pursue grant funding under the Keystone Community Grant Program.

Conclusions

Lower Makefield Township is making a strong commitment to parks and recreation. As needs emerge the Township addresses citizen requests as a priority. This is evident in the addition of new fields, field lighting, the

expansion of the community pool, and helping the Senior Citizens find more space. The Township's "can-do" attitude, public involvement, and great support by the Board of Supervisors in parks and recreation has produced significant accomplishments. The Township needs to keep moving forward in this manner.

Needs are pressing and are projected to increase in the future for all types of recreation facilities ranging from indoor space to playing fields and trails. The Township will need about 193 acres of active recreation land with ultimate build-out. As the Township expands its park system, it is imperative to support this investment through the allocation of resources for operation and management. The use of fees and charges, grants, and other alternatives to tax dollars should be continued. How the system will be managed looms large in the future. With the addition of major facilities and the increasing demand for services, the Township needs to consider the establishment of a full time parks and recreation department.



Recommendations

1996 proved to be a year of great achievement in parks and recreation in Lower Makefield Township. The Township should continue in the same direction in 1997 toward completion of these projects including land acquisition, facility development, planning, and improved client service. The goals of the Township are ambitious, yet achievable. Achievable not in one year or even five years, the recommendations must be phased in over the next two decades using the projects jump started in 1996 as the launching pad..

Overall, the most important issues are continued land acquisition in the face of tremendous growth and facility development to meet pressing community needs generated by this growth. The Township must simultaneously acquire land and develop recreation facilities in a balanced way to sustain the key support of the citizens. The Township has positioned itself to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge such as building a golf course that will sustain itself and perhaps generate additional revenues. Fortunately, the Township has a supportive Board of Supervisors, a committed Township management, and an involved citizenry, a combination that makes tackling a host of issues possible. The following goals provide a framework for the recommendations the Township should consider in the development of the park and recreation system for the twenty-first century. The goals are centered on:

1. Park land and Resource Protection
2. Recreation Facilities
3. Programs and Services
4. Management and Operations

Goal 1 Provide adequate park land to meet the needs of Lower Makefield Township based complete build out of the community and to protect treasured natural resources.

Objective

Obtain 193 acres of land for active parks and trails before the Township is built out.

Recommendations

1. Purchase at least 25 acres of land near the park complex at the Township Building to connect parks in the area for a greenway with trails.
2. Develop a land acquisition plan to identify parcels park land. Emphasis should be placed upon property that can be used to build a greenway and trails. The Bikeway Map developed by the Bikeway and Greenway committee should be used as the reference to guide decision-making.
3. Continue with negotiations to purchase land for the golf course as an open space and resource protection measure.
4. Look at alternatives to fee simple purchase such as easements, bequests, donations, bargain sales, and life-estates.

Objective

Protect natural resources for appreciation by present and future generations

Recommendations

1. Develop a master site and management plan for Five Mile Woods.
2. Develop a greenway connecting areas of significant natural resources.
3. Acquire parcels of land suitable for resource protection adjacent to parks.
4. Follow land use ordinances regarding natural resource protection
5. Coordinate township planning with related regional planning efforts.

Goal 2: Provide a balance of active and passive recreation facilities to meet the needs of citizens of all ages and interests.

Objective

Develop parks and recreation facilities so that needs of organized sports are met as well as the needs of the general citizenry

Recommendations

1. Develop the park at Oxford Valley and Roelofs Roads. Development should include softball fields, picnic and play areas, rest rooms, trails, and parking.
2. Continue the field lighting program to extend league play.
3. Develop the Vargo tract as a community park.
 - Create a park master plan using the citizen participation process
 - Determine phases for construction and place in Capital Improvement Program
4. Continue the planning of the Development Committee to address facility development issues.
5. Add facilities to keep pace with trends such as roller blading, street hockey, and sand volleyball.

Objective

Develop a township pathway and trail system.

Recommendations

1. Continue the Bikeway and Greenway Committee's work on the township trail plan.
2. Complete the trail plan map
3. Identify priorities for trail segmentation and development
4. The highest priorities should be a trail connecting the park complex at the Township building with the Oxford Valley Roelofs Road Park and a

Goal 3: Offer recreation programs and services that enrich the lives of the citizens

Objective

Support the efforts of organized community groups

Recommendations

1. Continue to work with the leagues to identify ways to provide safe and attractive playing areas.
2. Continue to work with the senior citizens in supporting their program efforts.
3. Facilitate the programs offered by other providers as an effective alternative to the direct provision of programs by the township.

Objective

Determine the Township's role in recreation programming: facilitator, direct provider, combination of the two.

Evaluate the direct services provided now to determine if the Township can continue to offer the programs with respect to the small staff. With the small staff, the role of the township should be as a facilitator of services rather than a direct provider. The Township now does direct programming but the workload is growing and staff time is decreasing.