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## **PARK AND RECREATION PLANNING**

### **IMPORTANCE OF TOWNSHIP RECREATION AND PARKS**

The provision of recreational facilities is recognized as a function of local government. Because most people spend a large portion of their leisure time in the area where they live or work, the opportunity for recreation within the local community becomes important.

Park and recreation planning to meet the needs of residents continues to be an important role for the township. For the 2003 Master Plan Update, residents were asked about their recreation preferences in a public participation survey. The five most popular activities, in descending order, were hiking, bicycling, exercise, concerts, and the arts, followed by senior programs, jogging, gardening, tennis, and teen activities.

Since completion of the last master plan in 2003, major additions to the township's park and recreational facilities and land include the Makefield Highlands Golf Course, the Lower Makefield Township Dog Park, and Phase 1 of Memorial Park which features the Garden of Reflection memorial and various playgrounds, athletic, and recreation facilities. The township has also expanded and enhanced park and recreational programs and opportunities that are offered to the community which include hosting various summer camps and selling discounted tickets to amusement parks and zoos. The Lower Makefield Township Park and Recreation Department is headed by a full-time director who is assisted by a staff of three full-time employees who maintain the parks and facilities, supplemented by a seasonal staff at the community pool. The Department Director coordinates programs and oversees use of the township facilities.

Complementing township actions to provide facilities and programs are active athletic associations that operate programs for area residents. Some of the primary organizations are Yardley–Makefield Soccer, Pennsbury Athletic Association, Pennsbury Regional Basketball League, and Lower Makefield Football Association.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 1988, a "Pool and Park Facilities Plan" was prepared to help the township identify future recreation needs and to establish guidelines for meeting future needs. The plan focused on large-scale community facilities for active recreation rather than small-scale neighborhood parks and open space for conservation or passive recreation. This study contained a detailed inventory of open space and recreational facilities and described each area in terms of the size, use, access, natural features, recreational use, recreational potential, and maintenance responsibilities.

A second study was completed in 1990 and became known as Volume 2 of the Park Plan. It was prepared largely in response to the changes in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, but it also updated the list of township facilities and revised the statement of need for new land and facilities to meet community recreation needs.

The township amended its Subdivision/Land Development Ordinance following the completion of Volume 2 of the Park Plan. This amendment set these requirements for dedication of recreation land:

1. Land in the amount of 2,200 square feet per dwelling unit must be set aside for recreational use as part of any new residential development. This land must meet location and site requirements so that it is suitable for its intended recreational purpose.
2. If the township and the developer agree, a fee in lieu of recreational land can be substituted for the dedication of land.

The township has been divided into three recreation fee districts—northern, central, and southern. The intent is to use fees collected within a district to meet the recreational needs of the residents of that district. Both the northern district and the southern district overlap to some degree with the central district so that some portion of fees can also be used for centralized facilities if needed.

The Park Plan has been periodically updated by means of Park and Recreation Action Plans; one was prepared in 1995, and the most recent in 1997. The 1995 and 1997 Park and Recreation Action Plans inventoried facilities and addressed in detail projected need for land and facilities, possible directions for future park and recreation programs and administration, and fee requirements for new developments.

In 2018, Lower Makefield conducted an inventory and needs assessment of the existing recreation facilities owned and operated by the township. The Lower Makefield Township Recreation Inventory and Needs Assessment analyzed demographic trends in the township, compared the current township school district facility inventory to the standards of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and administered a user matrix to gather details from user groups including participation rates, township participants, total hours of use per field, and the extent of scheduling issues for in-demand fields.

## **PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

Lower Makefield’s park and recreation system consists mostly of township-owned facilities which serve residents from the township and surrounding area. Table 23 provides an overview of municipal park and recreation sites in the township.

Approximately 176 acres of County-owned land within Lower Makefield between the canal and the river is intended to be developed with township-owned land for the Falls of the Delaware River Park. State-owned park land includes a portion of the Delaware Canal State Park which crosses through the township parallel to the Delaware River. Important as a recreational amenity as well as for its historical and cultural significance, the canal state park occupies 38 acres within the township. Also, a boat ramp, owned by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, provides access to the Delaware River from River Road in the township.

**Table 23**  
**Lower Makefield Park and Recreation Sites\***

Park and Recreation Sites	Facilities	Acreage
Community Park (includes Stoddart Fields)	Pool, tennis courts, basketball court, softball fields, baseball fields, volleyball court, Kids Kingdom Playground, picnic area, natural trail, batting facility	30.7
Veteran's Square Park	Tot lot, picnic area, benches	2.8
Makefield Glen	Dog park	3.7
Heacock Meadows	Tot lot, tennis courts, volleyball court	4.5
Macclesfield Park	Baseball fields, soccer fields, multi-purpose fields, playground, volleyball courts, bike path & exercise trail, picnic area	94.7
Fred Allan Softball Complex	Softball fields, bocce court, play pieces, picnic area, batting facility	22.75
Revere Road Tennis Facilities	Tennis courts	1.5
Schuyler Road Tennis Facilities	Tennis courts	1.5
Memorial Park	Garden of Reflection memorial, volleyball courts, basketball courts, tennis courts, community gardening, softball field, inclusive playground, walking trails, arboretum	63.5
Peak Farm (along Twig Lane)	Pocket park containing tot lot playground	1.7
Snipes Tract	Currently undeveloped. Future development considerations include fields for football, lacrosse, soccer, as well as covered pavilions, a tot play area, and installation of skate park pieces	36.2
Greg Caiola Baseball Complex/Community Center (Samost Tract)	Currently includes baseball fields and related structures, batting facility, a community center	26
Toll Brother Regency age-restricted Community (former Matrix site)	Land that will contain a picnic pavilion	2
Five Mile Woods Nature Preserve	Nature trails, environmental programs, nature center	298
Makefield Highlands Golf Course	18-hole municipal golf course with practice facility and a clubhouse	168
<b>Total</b>		<b>757.55</b>

\*The Snipes tract is currently an undeveloped municipally-owned tract. Park and recreation improvements, as noted on page 81 of this chapter, are planned for this tract.

Map 7 shows the location of the larger park and recreation resources within Lower Makefield Township.

## **WALKING AND BIKE PATH SYSTEM**

Walking and bike paths are important recreational facilities which provide residents of all ages with the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors while exercising. Recognizing the benefits of a walking and bike path system, municipal officials formed a township Bikeway and Greenway Committee in the mid-1990's to help plan for a walkable community in Lower Makefield. The Committee developed a trail and greenway concept plan and mapped a township-wide trail system. Adopted in 1997 as part of the township's official map, the Bike Way Map indicated existing and proposed locations of bicycle paths, lanes, and routes. Construction of the bike path and walking path system began to take shape as development occurred in the township. Without cost to the township, developers completed links as developments along proposed routes were constructed.

Today, the township's bike and walking path system is a well-used amenity which links many neighborhoods, schools, and public facilities. The township has had a goal to provide bike path connections to recreational facilities and shopping centers. According to information in the Lower Makefield Township Park and Recreation Road Tour (July 2013), there are approximately 25 miles of existing bikepaths/walkways throughout the township. Existing paths connect nearby neighborhoods with park and recreation facilities such as Memorial Park, Schuyler Road tennis facilities, Heacock Meadows facilities, and Community Park, which includes the pool complex. However, due to the difficulty in obtaining area to construct bike paths along already developed lots, there are areas throughout the township with existing gaps in the bikepath system. Map 8 shows the township's walkway/bikeway network.

## **BUCKS COUNTY BICYCLE MASTER PLAN**

The Bucks County Bicycle Master Plan, was adopted by the County Commissioners in early 2012. The Plan identifies a network of major spines which provide connections between transit centers, activity centers, tourist destinations, central business districts, recreation destinations, and municipalities.

The plan maps two primary onroad connections within Lower Makefield Township. One primary onroad connection, identified as State Route 0332, crosses through the center of the township along Langhorne-Yardley Road from Middletown to Yardley before connecting with the towpath along the Delaware Canal and further to Delaware Avenue (River Road). A separate primary onroad connection, identified as State Route 0532, crosses through the northwestern corner of the township along Washington Crossing Road (Route 532) between Newtown and Upper Makefield. Both of these routes connect with the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor as well as other bike routes along the Route 413 corridor.

According to the township's Walkway System Map, a walkway & bicycle path are planned and do exist along much of Yardley-Langhorne Road, however, the township map does not show any planned or existing bike/pedestrian facility along Route 532. Given the location of the planned routes, the potential exists to provide linkages between the township bikeway/walkway system and the planned county bike path system.

## **GREENWAYS AND TRAIL PLANNING**

A greenway is a linear open space area established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley or ridgeline; or along an abandoned railroad right-of-way, a canal, scenic road, or other route. In addition to preserving natural resources, greenways may also provide safe, nonmotorized transportation routes to schools, commercial centers, neighborhoods, and recreational areas.

By linking parks and other open space areas together with existing sidewalks, greenway trails can create a connected pedestrian system throughout a municipality and even beyond its borders. A good pedestrian network provides the opportunity for walking and biking versus driving to destinations which not only encourages a healthy lifestyle but also helps the environment by reducing carbon emissions.

The Bucks County Open Space and Greenways Plan (2011) was adopted by the County Commissioners in June of 2011. The primary purpose of the Plan is to guide decision making and provide recommendations related to protecting and creating linkages between the county's natural resource areas, open space and farmland, recreational facilities and historical and cultural resources. The Plan identifies potential greenway corridors that could host trails for public recreation, wildlife viewing, lessons in history, and alternative transportation.

The Plan identifies four greenways that cross through Lower Makefield Township: the Delaware River Water Trail Greenway; Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Greenway Middle Delaware (Morrisville to New Hope); Brock Creek Greenway; and the Mill-Neshaminy-Core-Dyers Creeks (Cross County) Greenway.

The Delaware River Water Trail Greenway, categorized as a recreational greenway, extends along the township's entire border with the Delaware River and includes the river's surrounding riparian zone. Coinciding with the Delaware River Water Trail Greenway within the township is the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Greenway Middle Delaware, which extends from Morrisville to New Hope. These identified greenways are part of the Delaware River Conservation Landscape that has been identified in the Bucks County, Pennsylvania Natural Areas Inventory Update (2011).

The Brock Creek Greenway connects Core Creek Park in Middletown Township to the Delaware River at Yardley Borough, primarily following Brock Creek within the township and Yardley Borough. The Mill-Neshaminy-Core-Dyers Creeks Greenway, also known as the Cross County Greenway, extends from the county line in Upper Southampton Township and runs along four different streams to ultimately reach the Delaware River, via Dyers Creek, in the northern portion of the township. A path is proposed for this greenway.

Within and nearby Lower Makefield Township, the county greenways plan identifies Macclesfield Park, Memorial Park/Garden of Reflection, Morrisville Borough, and Yardley Borough as Nodes, which are larger outdoor recreation areas (typically over 40 acres) and places having natural, cultural and historic interest. Nodes are places of destination and are significant elements that should be connected within greenway networks.

According to the Lower Makefield Township Open Space Plan Update (2009), township policy is to provide and support linkages that connect open space and park facilities, to connect open space along stream corridors to create greenways, and to connect the township with neighboring Yardley Borough by way of bike paths or parkland.

## **GOALS FOR PARK AND RECREATION PLANNING**

Future park and recreation plans are guided by the following goals outlined in the 1997 action plan. Specific programs and activities are subject to the financial capability of the township.

1. Provide adequate parkland to meet the needs of the township based on complete build-out of the community.

2. Protect treasured natural resources.
3. Provide a balance of active and passive recreation facilities to meet the needs of citizens of all ages and interests.
4. Offer recreation programs and services that enrich the lives of citizens.

## CURRENT PLANNING PRIORITIES

1. *Addressing changing needs*—The township should continue to be open to new suggestions and ideas in planning for recreational programs and facilities. New ideas should be considered based on the needs and wishes of township residents.
2. *Natural resource protection*—A variety of measures may be undertaken to coordinate natural resource protection with recreation planning. They include preparation of a site and management plan for Five Mile Woods; acquisition of greenway land and land with natural resources located next to parks; adherence to natural resource protection ordinances; and coordination of township planning with related regional planning.

The possibility for coordination and enhancement of park and recreation land along the canal and the river exists through the proposal for the Falls of the Delaware Park. Located to the south of Yardley Borough, this regional park will provide river access from the Delaware Canal State Park. The county has acquired 176 acres for this park; the township owns 38 acres.

3. *Facility needs*—The township should pay particular attention to the needs of organized sports groups as recreation facilities are designed, and continue its efforts to complete the pathway/trail system.
4. *Year-round recreation opportunities*—The township’s 1997 Park and Recreation Action Plan Update recommends exploration of ways to expand year-round recreation programming. This would require the use of gyms and other indoor space. The township completed construction on the community center in 2017, and started programming of the facility.
5. *Facilities maintenance*—Growth in facilities brings increased maintenance responsibilities. Outsourcing of selected maintenance work and preparation of maintenance impact statements for new facilities or improvements are among the methods of providing and budgeting for ongoing maintenance.
6. *“Pocket parks”*—Encourage provision of recreation land in residential developments that are not close to existing parks.

## FUTURE NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. *Locations for future recreation lands*—As the township approaches full development it is even more essential that the township update its planning to identify any gaps in facilities and opportunities for desired acquisitions. Consideration should be given not only to major site acquisitions, but also to the possibility of recreation facilities at nonresidential developments.

- a. *Available land*—Although the pace of residential development has slowed as the community approaches build-out, there are developable parcels located both above and below I-295, although the bulk of vacant land remains in the northern sector.

Based upon calculations made for this master plan, it is estimated that about 514 dwelling units could be accommodated on currently uncommitted vacant lands.<sup>10</sup> Under current standards, this level of development would result in the mandatory dedication of a total of approximately 26 acres of land (2,200 square feet per dwelling unit).

Each individual development would be responsible to meet its recreational needs, so this 26-acres will not necessarily be located in one place but will be distributed at various locales within the township in each new development. If fees are collected in lieu of land, then this acreage will be reduced but the fee can be used for land or development of recreational facilities elsewhere.

- b. *Criteria for land selection*—Land to be set aside for recreational use should meet the standards set forth in the township Subdivision/Land Development Ordinance for recreational suitability. It is recommended that land be acquired through the development process where feasible and where it meets township park goals. Other guidelines to consider in selecting recreation land are:

- suitable topography for recreational use
- access by way of a main road
- site size adequate to meet the needs of the area
- proximity to other open space areas or potential for combination with areas of open space.

The Park and Recreation Board has been reviewing and commenting on all subdivision and land development plans to evaluate recreational use and site design.

- c. *Methods of acquisition*—The options for acquisition of land include the use of the mandatory dedication provisions of the subdivision/land development ordinance; combining land dedication with fees collected in lieu of dedication; or use of lands already preserved for open space for recreation use. Land can also be purchased by the township. Second-class townships, including Lower Makefield, are permitted to use eminent domain or condemnation to acquire land for recreation or open space, although this is sometimes an expensive approach. Recent editions of the Parks and Recreation Action Plan Update encourage creative acquisition strategies.

2. *Bicycle/walking path*—The plan and the implementing ordinance are in the process of being reviewed to determine: where the missing links are in the path; if there are problems with the general alignment suggested by the township ordinance that need to be revised; and how the completion of the bike/walking path can be implemented. The bike/walking path should be linked to the towpath along the Delaware Canal to establish a township trail system. Where applicable, bikeway connections as indicated in the Bucks County Bicycle Master Plan should be considered for inclusion in the township’s plan.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix C for methodology used to calculate the number of potential additional dwelling units.

Moving forward, an important aspect that needs to be considered is maintaining the condition of the existing bike/walking path system.

3. *Recommendations regarding specialized recreation facilities*—The township’s park and recreation plans have stated the need for specific types of recreational facilities, based upon the needs of the township population and the use of and demand for present facilities. This list of community recreation facilities serves as the basis for recreation planning and, more importantly, for the requirements of developers for mandatory dedication of land or recreational fees.

Township residents or groups have made requests for specialized recreation facilities. Examples include a senior citizens center, a community center, gymnasium space and athletic fields for community sports leagues, and pickle ball courts. It is recommended that the township consider these requests to determine how they help to meet overall specialized facility recreational needs of the community.

Specialized recreational facilities should be financed through user fees or through other methods independent of township funding. Long-range planning for recreational facilities and financing of recreational improvements has been based upon a recommended list of general facilities to meet overall community needs. Resources (either land or money) allocated to specialized facilities would take away from the resources available for overall community needs, resulting in the need to identify other funding sources.

4. *Changing preferences and needs*—The township should be attentive to changing recreational preferences and needs and to the needs of all population groups. Current needs may change as the population of the township ages. The national aging trend has begun to touch Lower Makefield’s population and will affect facility and program needs. There are signs of increasing demand for “lifetime” sports facilities, senior activities, fitness activities, and leisure time activities, and this may be coupled with lessening needs for facilities such as playing fields. The township should consider the potential for developing multipurpose recreational buildings and space-sharing arrangements that can serve different user groups or accommodate changes in use over time.
  - a. *Community Center*—The township has built a community center on a portion of the Samost Tract fronting along Oxford Valley Road. The center is designed to provide meeting space for all members of the community, including the local senior citizens group.
  - b. *Arts and culture*—The plans for recreation programs should recognize the recreational preference of those residents interested in the arts, cultural activities, and educational trips. The township has supported the Bucks County Performing Arts Center, previously known as the Lower Makefield Society for the Performing Arts. Established in 1978, the Performing Arts Center held concerts and visual arts displays in the municipal building before moving to the Yardley Community Center about 10 years ago. The township’s recreation program should continue to support arts and culture as part of a well-rounded community program such as the Artists of Yardley currently located on a portion of the Patterson Farm.
5. *Planning for new recreation areas*—The township, advised by its Park and Recreation Board, should continue to move forward with concept plans and plan implementation for major recreation areas that have been identified and acquired since the last master plan was adopted.



Recreation facilities planning should take into account site topography, access, environmental characteristics, funding, and proximity of other recreational facilities in the area. The recreation areas are:

- a. *Samost Tract*—A 26-acre tract at Oxford Valley and Edgewood roads, next to the Roelofs Road Park and across from the township complex. Land development plans were prepared and two baseball fields and related facilities have been completed. The site also houses the township’s newly completed community center.
- b. *Snipes Tract*—A 36.2-acre tract at Quarry and Dolington roads in the northern section of the township. Planned park and recreation improvements for the site include athletic fields, a tot play area, a skate park, covered pavilions, and bikepath connections along Quarry and Dolington roads.
- c. *Memorial Park*—A tract of 63.5 acres on Woodside Road in the northern section of the township. This park has been envisioned to be a community-oriented park that embodies the past, present, and future. Intended to become a gathering place for all members of the community, the park will contain facilities for both active and passive recreation, as well as elements intended to contribute to community spirit and pride.

Phase 1 of the park has been constructed and contains walking trails, athletic courts, community gardens, and the Garden of Reflection memorial to Bucks County residents lost in the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. Phase 2 of the park will contain various athletic fields and courts, tennis courts, naturalistic ponds, picnic areas with pavilions, an arboretum, a walking/running track, additional trails and parking facilities. An all-inclusive playground, which is part of Phase 2 of the park, has been constructed.

6. *Pool facilities*—The township in 2001 completed a feasibility study for rehabbing and improving the community pool, which is more than 20 years old and heavily used. The feasibility study included Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) modifications, which are necessary to make the pool and its adjunct facilities accessible to the disabled. Since that study, the township has completed recommended ADA modifications to the pool and has made other improvements such as the installation of WIFI, and the completion of various maintenance recommendations. Any remaining recommendations from the feasibility study should continue to be carried out in stages as proposed.
7. *Plan revisions*—Update the action plan and other key planning documents to reflect current population, development, program conditions, and recent major parkland acquisitions.
8. *Recreational programs*—Determination of recreational programs should be made by the Park and Recreation Board in response to citizen requests, past program success, and park and recreation board assessment of needs. Programs refer to activities planned by the township, including trips, educational programs, arts and crafts classes, or special recreational events.

The organization and operation of programs will be dependent on the availability of manpower (either volunteers or township personnel). Fees should be charged for most programs in order to cover the actual cost of the publicity, staff, materials, and township staff time.

9. *Gift and concession policies*—Gifts of land, services, equipment, etc. and revenue from concession operations can help support recreation programs. Establish policies and terms for accepting gifts and granting concessions.