

## Chapter 9 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

### INTRODUCTION

#### ***Overview***

Development of the Township creates pressure on environmental resources, while exacerbating demand for recreational amenities. Communities that plan inadequately degrade the quality of the environment and the quality of life of the citizens. Although development resulting from growth pressure is unavoidable, it can be accommodated within a context of natural resource protection and in a manner that meets increasing recreational needs.

The proposed park, recreation, and open space areas contained in this plan are coordinated with the Future Land Use Plan, the Natural Resources Plan, and the Historic Resources Plan. Active recreation is proposed in proximity to population centers, open space coincides with natural resource protection areas, and trails provide links to historic resources and other significant destinations. The overall goal of this plan is to create a contiguous network of open space, greenways, and trails that provides recreational opportunities while achieving environmental protection. This network could be linked to regional or countywide system.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### **Goal #1**

Provide adequate recreation facilities to serve the community.

*Objectives:*

- Establish a town center to create a community focal point and to serve as the nexus of government, emergency, and recreational services.
- Analyze and address the need for additional sports and play facilities.
- Establish a youth activity center.
- Create a plan for municipal park and recreation facilities that is responsive to current needs and to additional demands created by future development.

### **Goal #2**

Establish a trail network that would provide connections between public lands, township identified open space, scenic and historic areas, and trails in adjoining townships.

*Objectives:*

- Inventory and map existing trails.
- Promote new hiking trails that link existing trails with landmarks and community focal points, historic sites, neighboring townships, and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation area.
- Encourage pedestrian connections between developments, while addressing concerns with trespassing.
- Create a marked and mapped system of bikeways and bike trails.
- Evaluate needs for other trail users, including equestrians, mountain bikers, cross country skiers, snowshoers, snowmobilers, and ATV enthusiasts.
- Design trails to minimize conflicts between different users and with adjacent property owners.

### **Goal #3**

Create a contiguous and inter-connected system of protected greenways and open space.

*Objectives:*

- Preserve natural lands from development.
- Prioritize areas to be protected based on natural resources, historic resources, potential trail connections, and proximity to existing conservation areas.

- Utilize open space to protect habitat and water resources.
- Provide for passive recreational uses within open space areas.
- Identify opportunities to link open space and greenways to adjoining townships to create a regional open space system

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### **Overview**

Much of the areas in the eastern and western parts of Delaware Township are protected state and federal lands. Of the remaining lands, approximately half is potentially developable. Given the growth pressures projected for the Township, most of the unprotected lands are likely to be developed unless the land use and conservation policies of this Comprehensive Plan are implemented. At the same time, the current publicly available recreation facilities would become increasingly inadequate for a growing population.

### **Existing Parks/Open Space**



Township Baseball Field

A large portion of Delaware Township is occupied by federal- and state-owned land devoted to open space and passive recreation (low-impact activities such as hiking, fishing, canoeing). The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area occupies 7,044 acres in the township, and the Delaware State Forest occupies 3,842 acres.

Active recreation (high-impact activities such as baseball, basketball, soccer, skating) is provided at the municipal complex on Wilson Hill Road. The complex is approximately 130 acres. Recreational facilities include four baseball fields (1 field for the senior league, 1 short field for kids, and two full-size fields for adults), a half tennis court, a skateboard park, a playground, a pavilion, a fitness trail, and a walking trail.

Private camps also contribute to the open space and recreational system in the Township. These camps are as follows:

- The Log and Twig Girl Scout Camp, located in the southern part of the township and in adjoining Lehman Township
- Camp Akenac, located on Route 739.
- Camp Speers/Eljabar is on Nichecronk Road adjacent to Dingman Township and is operated by the YMCA.
- Camp Massad is on Silver Lake Road opposite Marcel Lake Estates.
- The Minks Pond Rod and Gun Club occupies land in Delaware and Lehman Townships.

Trail connections are needed to meet the increasing recreational demands of this growing township. Opportunities exist to create a regionally networked trail system that is accessible to neighborhood and community association residents. This trail system would connect to



Trail. (Courtesy Lisa Whiteman)

those in adjoining townships and the Pocono region, including the National Park Service's McDade Trail and the Appalachian Trail. Over 39 miles of existing trails have been established as isolated systems within the township, primarily in the Delaware Water Gap and in the State Forest, as follows:

- The Conashaugh View Trail in the north of the township and primarily in the Delaware Water Gap is a marked, 11.7-mile equestrian and hiking trail.
- The Dingman's Falls Trail, in the Delaware Water Gap, starts in George Childs Park and runs approximately 1.7 miles to the waterfalls.
- Trails in the form of jeep roads and unmarked paths traverse the Delaware State Forest lands and adjacent private properties.

According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), neighborhood parks serve as the recreational and social focus of the residents of a particular neighborhood. They provide both active and passive recreation, and their service areas encompass a one-quarter to one-half mile radius. Neighborhood parks currently exist in the form of recreation areas within the township's community associations. Operation and maintenance of these recreation areas is the responsibility of the community associations.

## PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

### **Summary**

Delaware Township should act now to preserve its current open space attributes, to promote interconnected open space networks, and to accommodate increasing future needs for recreational amenities. The 2002 Comprehensive Plan Survey of Township residents found that 72% supported planning for future additional parklands and recreation fields.

- The open space and park system should promote pedestrian and bicycle access to significant destinations, such as parks, historic resources, scenic resources, regional trails, commercial areas, and should relate to growth areas and population centers as indicated on the future land use plan.
- Active recreation facilities will be needed to serve the proposed growth areas in the northern part of the Township. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, the service area of a community park encompasses a 3-mile radius. The proposed town center and moderate density residential growth areas in the northern part of the Township are beyond the service area of the existing community park on Wilson Hill Road. Thus, an additional community park will be needed to serve this area of proposed growth. The community park could include a picnic area and playground, a multi-purpose playing field, baseball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, a walking/nature trail, a community center, and an amphitheater or outdoor performance area.

- Neighborhood parks will be needed in any new residential subdivisions to meet the recreational and social needs of neighborhood residents.
- Open space should be used to maintain the rural character of the Township and provide for passive recreational pursuits.

## FUTURE PLANNING POLICIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Overview**

Planning policies and recommendations are embodied in the Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plan to advance the goals and objectives for an integrated, networked system to protect resources while meeting the increasing demands of a growing municipality (Map A-7). These policies are intended to promote an open space system that connects the community and establishes the continued identity of Delaware Township as a scenic rural home for its residents.

### **Recommendations**

Planning policies and recommendations to promote parks and open space are as follows:

- Establish large, contiguous open space areas that augment the State Forest and Delaware Water Gap lands. These areas are intended to provide additional passive recreation opportunities and facilitate the establishment of trail connections. They are also intended to provide protection for habitat and natural resources. These considerations—contiguity to existing parkland and the presence of critical natural features, including Natural Areas Inventory sites—were taken into account when designating potential conservation/open space areas on the Park, Recreation, and Open Space map.
- Provide a second site for active recreation in the northern portion of the Township, adjacent to the proposed Town Center. This central location is intended to maximize accessibility from the surrounding proposed Town Center and Moderate Density Residential area. The proposed future park at Camp Akenac on Route 739 consists of approximately 140 acres, including 30-40 acres of active recreation area and over 100 acres of conservation lands. With its 3-mile service area, this future community park is intended to serve recreational needs for the majority of the Township's anticipated growth.
- Establish neighborhood parks, with services areas of one-half mile, in new residential developments.
- Encourage continuing operation of the private camps and promote their conversion to open space and passive recreation if their uses should change in the future.
- Provide access from existing neighborhoods and community association developments to the trail system.

- Expand the trail system to connect existing communities and resources with future proposed development, parks, and conservation areas. This plan anticipates the need for over 15 miles of new trails to serve increasing recreational needs as the Township grows.
- Ensure that trail access is provided in future subdivision and land development plans.
- Provide links to trail systems in adjoining townships and the Pocono region.
- Utilize unimproved roads for trail connections.
- Establish greenways along streams that would accommodate trails and trail connections. The proposed riparian buffers would form the greenways.
- Utilize locally and historically significant sites as destinations along the trail system. Route trails in a manner that promotes the preservation of these sites as destination points.
- Evaluate the need for ATV and/or snowmobile trails. If provided, trails shall be designed to avoid conflicts with different users and adjacent property owners. If not provided, the Township should provide information on regional private and public facilities promoting such uses.
- Establish a system of bikeways on or alongside public roads.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### **Overview**

Implementation of the parks, open space, and recreation plan can be accomplished through the following initiatives:

### **Zoning Ordinance**

Zoning Ordinance Amendments are as follows:

- Parks and active recreation can be implemented by expanding the PP-Public Parkland District to include the existing municipal recreation facilities, and to designate proposed new active recreation in the northern part of the Township.
- Parks for conservation and passive recreation shall be implemented by expanding the PP Public Parkland District to include all of the land within the Delaware State Forest and all DCNR land. The regulations of the PP Public Parkland District should be amended to prohibit uses not consistent with recreation and conservation, such as residential development.

In order to protect the rights of landowners, private lands should remain in the RR Rural Residential zoning classification until the

Township and landowners reach agreement to place properties in conservation easement. At that time, those lands could be included in the PP Public Parkland District. Tax incentives for easements and Transferable Development Rights could be used to facilitate the conservation of the private properties.

- Enact a Transferable Development Rights Ordinance.
- Create open space area and performance requirements for cluster developments.

### **SLDO**

Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance amendments are as follows:

- Prepare and adopt an ordinance to require developers to provide for recreation within the development, or to pay a fee in lieu of recreation facilities to help fund active and passive recreational needs in the Township.
- Require trails and recreational amenities in open space subdivisions.
- Prepare and adopt a trail protection ordinance.

### **Additional Measures**

Additional measures are as follows:

- Form a Township Open Space Committee to conduct education and outreach to encourage landowners to conserve land through conservation easements, TDR, and other available means.
- Establish a Township trails and greenways committee.
- Consider use of an Official Map for acquisition of parkland.
- Acquire easements for greenways and trails.
- Coordinate with neighboring municipalities, Pike County, conservation organizations, the National Park Service and Pennsylvania DCNR on trails, greenways, and open space initiatives.
- Consider financing options such as an earned income tax to generate funds for township acquisition of open space and conservation easements.
- Explore funding opportunities through the PA DCNR and the Pike County Preservation Program.
- Work with PA DOT to include bikeways in transportation improvement plans.
- Investigate TEA-21 funding sources for trail and bikeway projects.

### ***Prioritize Open Space***

To pursue open space preservation in a logical and systematic manner, the Township must set priorities for open space acquisition. Such a system of prioritization not only gives the township a logical framework within which to work, but is often a requirement of state laws and open space funding programs.

Prioritization can be accomplished through a weighted scoring system, whereby any property in the township can be evaluated for its merits as an open space or recreational resource based on its characteristics and the features it contains. Under this system individual characteristics are assigned a weighted value based on the township's expressed priorities for recreational needs and resource protection. For any given property, the weighted values of each individual feature it contains can be totaled to yield a final score representing that property's value (priority) for open space/recreation.

Under the scoring system, individual characteristics are assigned a weighted value ranging from 1 to 3. Assigning a weighted value acknowledges that some characteristics are more important than others. The weighted values reflect township's goals for open space, recreation, and resource protection. They are as follows:

<u>Weighted Value</u>	<u>Characteristic/Feature</u>
3	Addresses an active recreational need in the township
2	Contiguous to municipal, state, or federal land
2	Contains rare, threatened or endangered species
2	Lies within an exceptional value watershed
2	Facilitates a trail link
1	Contains a historic resource
1	Contains sensitive environmental features, including wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes
1	Contiguous to a conservation easement
1	Contiguous to privately-owned open space (such as a camp or gun club)
1	Contains or abuts a stream or surface water body

Based on this system, for example, a property that is contiguous to state forest land, contains a threatened species, lies within an exceptional value watershed, facilitates a trail link, and contains a wetland, would receive a score of 10. This score can then be used to provide a rationale for the township's desire to protect a particular property and obtain funding to do so.

Although this scoring system can be a useful measure in determining the appropriateness of a property for open space acquisition, it should not be the sole determinant. Non-quantifiable considerations unique to the property or the township's immediate needs may also weigh heavily in the decision to acquire open space.