



# PARKS, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, & TRAILS PLAN UPDATE 2021 - 2030

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**Conserve. Connect. Enhance.**

## Whitpain Township

**DRAFT**

May 14, 2021

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The Whitpain Township Parks,  
Recreation, Open Space and Trails  
Update 2021 -2030 is our blueprint for  
CONSERVING our open space and  
natural resources, ENHANCING our  
parks and recreation facilities along  
with their maintenance, and  
CONNECTING our community through  
trails, programs, and partnerships.

## Building Upon Success

This **Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan Update** builds upon the achievements of Whitpain Township since its previous plan in 2003. This Update calls upon the Township to undertake the same kind of audacious planning and actions used over the last 20 years resulting in notable accomplishments such the acquisition of land for Prophecy Creek, Centre Square Park, and Mermaid Lake; major new park developments; the expansion of recreation programs and services; and the launching of a sustainability initiative.

Moving forward with a strategy that recognizes parks, recreation, open space and trails as part of the Township's overall infrastructure serving environmental, economic, health, and social needs is essential. Enhancing the quality of life and the Township's resiliency and sustainability through parks and recreation in accordance with Best Management Practices and the expressed opinion of the public is the foundation of this plan. The Plan Update's implementation will protect our natural resources and open space; shape the beauty and character of our landscape; expand access for all; improve health; increase revenues; mitigate the effects of severe weather and climate change; help build a strong sense of community; and provide opportunities for our residents to create memories that will last a lifetime.

# Plan Update Summary

## Conserve. Connect. Enhance.

Whitpain Township is consistently recognized as one of the best places to live in the Delaware Valley. A convenient location, highly desirable quality of life, excellent schools, customer-oriented township services, safety – and a top-notch parks and recreation system all contribute to the people’s desire to live, work and play here.

Since the previous parks and recreation plan of 2003, Whitpain Township has made remarkable improvements community parks, recreation, open space, and trails. These improvements include:

- Development of Prophecy Creek Park and the Manor House
- Acquisition of 37 acres from St. Helena’s Church and development of Centre Square Park with creative financing arrangements resulting in the development of Centre Square Park at great cost savings to the Township with public private partnerships
- Acquisition of Mermaid Lake, opening the site to the public, and master planning a new community park
- Planning and development of 12.25 miles of trails
- Revitalization of Wissahickon Park transitioning it from a brownfields site to a park
- Partnering with the Boys & Girls Club to explore a new community recreation center near Wissahickon Park
- Partnering with community sports organizations to maintain ballfields
- Expansion of programs with a cost recovery rate double the national average

All these improvements were in response to public interests, support for parks and recreation close to home, and partnerships with community based organizations.

### *The Next Ten Years*

In updating the **Parks and Recreation Plan: 2020**, Whitpain Township is working to ensure that all of these investments are protected and continue to serve the residents in the most beneficial ways possible. This **Plan Update** establishes a clear and strategic direction to guide elected and appointed officials, township management and staff, boards, commissions and committees in their efforts to ensure the community’s sustainability by enhancing parks and recreation facilities, programs and services.

The **Plan Update** is strategic in positioning Whitpain Township as a leader in parks, recreation, and community planning by building the vision around sustainability. The plan calls for the Parks and Recreation Department to become a facilitator of environmental policies and actions that will lead to conservation practices resulting in environmental, financial, and social sustainability. **The Plan Update** provides strategic recommendations to:

- **Conserve** open space and natural resources through the preservation of open space along with effective maintenance and stewardship.
- **Connect** the residents to nature, community destinations, and each other through programming, increasing public awareness, and establishing a network of safe places to walk and bicycle.
- **Enhance** parks, recreation facilities, and trails with improvements supported by elevated design and management practices.

### *Moving Forward with the Community*

The strategy is built upon the opinions of residents and community organizations. The planning process included a Plan Advisory Committee, interviews, work sessions with the Township's management and staff, and two surveys. The online surveys of the public and the Parks and Recreation Department's "Best Customers" resulted in direct input from 2,778 residents. While some households may have had multiple respondents, these surveys engaged about 37 percent of the households. This is significant input in contrast to traditional public meetings in which a handful number of residents participate. Residents indicated the following:

- Top three priorities are: an indoor recreation center, conservation of open space, and making Mermaid Lake a public park.
- The most preferred improvements include safe sidewalk connections, open space and natural areas, an indoor recreation facility and a bicycle network.
- Most preferred activities in parks are walking/running, enjoying nature, and attending special events.
- Customer service from the Parks and Recreation Department rates as five stars.
- Residents rate programs as good to excellent and they would like these expanded especially youth programs, adult fitness, and special events.

### *Building Upon Success*

The Township implemented the majority of recommendations from the previous plan, demonstrating the importance to the Township of having a practical yet visionary approach to act upon. The **2020 Plan** focused heavily on parkland acquisition and facility development for a progressing park system. In carrying out these recommendations, the Township increased its parkland from 293 to 416 acres in nine parks, two preserves, and 12.25 miles of trails. The most recent acquisition of the 64 acre Mermaid Lake will result in the development of what should become the Township's signature park. When the last plan was adopted, bicycle trails were not even considered and Mermaid Lake was fully functioning as a private club.

While significant investment was made in land acquisition and development, this **Plan Update: Conserve Connect Enhance** is more challenging in a much different way. It is all about taking care of what we have in an era of great uncertainty. Climate change and a global pandemic are signaling the need not only to adopt sustainability plans but also to carry out actions to ensure conservation of open space, natural resources and environment. Parks, recreation, open space and trails have a crucial role in planning and carry out measures to make Whitpain Township a resilient and sustainable community. The recommendations include:

1. **Plan for changing maintenance needs and allocate resources appropriately.** To keep pace with an expanding and changing parks, recreation, open space and trail system, establish a formal written park maintenance management plan for the system as a whole as well as land management plans for each park and open space based upon workload cost tracking. Increase use of best management practices and natural resource management training. Ensure that workers have skills and understanding of environmental management practices or desirous of training in environmental management practices. Carry out the provisions of park maintenance agreements with partners.
2. **Focus on securing remaining open space and planning for the future conservation of large parcels that may change use in the future.** Continue to secure the right of first refusal on open space parcels of interest to the Township in accordance with the criteria in this plan. Continue to foster partnership and discussions with large land owners such as Wings Field in case their use would ever change in the future.
3. **Transition from the successful years of parkland acquisition and development into evolving sustainable land management practices.** This includes a land management plan for every park and trail; the addition of a shared position or independent contractor for Environmental Management and Outreach among Parks & Recreation, Public Works, and the Sustainability Coordinator in Engineering; the job would entail natural resource management, environmental education, programs, and marshaling private landowners to be land stewards. Such practices carry the added benefit of helping to achieve the goals in the Township's Pollution Reduction Plan, a mandate under the Clean Water Act.
4. **Elevate the design and quality of facilities.** Whitpain Township is a top notch township and the facility designs and quality of construction should reflect that.
5. **Carry out the Capital Improvement Program(CIP) to keep all the parks safe, clean, functional, fun, aesthetically pleasing, and in accordance with the recommendations of this Plan Update.** It is important to ensure upkeep and improvements to existing parks along with the development of Mermaid Lake. Striking a balance of facilitating a basic level of use at Mermaid while implementing the five year CIP is essential to ensuring the quality of the park system as a whole. Focus on providing places for residents to gather and socialize, especially tweens and teens. Also plan for facilities not available including fishing, winter sports, adult fitness facilities (in Wentz Run, then Mermaid Lake and Centre Square), a pickle ball hub, disc golf, a large amphitheater, a pump track, a bicycle playground, more loop trails in parks, and quiet areas with comfortable facilities and scenic beauty to just enjoy being outside and relaxing.
6. **Develop the Whitpain Township Trail Network.** Carry out the trail plans that have been established as well as the recommendations of this Plan Update. Make trails an official part of the Park and Open Space Board mission. Advance the recommendations of the Walkability Study.
7. **Phase in Mermaid Lake Park Improvements.** In recognition of the Township's \$8 million investment and in response to public sentiment as one of the top parks and recreation priorities, undertake a basic level of improvement in Mermaid Lake Park to enable people to use it in the short term and then implement a phased master plan.

8. **Conduct a feasibility study for an indoor recreation center.** While the ideal location would be near Wentz Run Park, the urgency to obtain indoor facilities may dictate using a portion of Mermaid Lake Park for this, especially the seven-acre triangular area across from the main site. Unfortunately, this location is at the far end of the Township near the Greater Plymouth Community Center. If a more centrally located site becomes available in the next five years, consider it instead. The indoor recreation center would be for recreation programs and not a membership based facility.
9. **Keep on going with programming and expand programming with additional resources and program partners** are available. Focus on underserved groups such as teens, seniors, and the Asian population. Programming will be easier to expand as more facilities become available.
10. **Re-strategize on partnerships.** Work with the Parks and Recreation Board and Shade Tree Commission to integrate their vision, mission, goals and action plans. Explore the establishment of the Whitpain Parks Conservancy. Pursue, cultivate, and strengthen partnerships with WRA, WissLAX, Ambler Whitpain Football, the Wissahickon School District, Montgomery County Community College, Wissahickon Trails, and others.
11. **Plan and develop the legacy transition of the Parks and Recreation Department Management.** Incorporate the knowledge, skills and aptitudes for future staffing to complement existing staff as well as branding, sustainability, environmental education, partnership building, and communication.

### *A Path Forward*

There are some aspects of community and economic life that we can all agree on. We want the clean air and water. We want to feel safe from crime and disorder. We want to leave our children a world that is at least as good as the one our parents and grandparents left us. Environmental, financial, and social sustainability is needed to achieve all of these goals.

The Township's role in providing quality parks, recreation and open space to residents cannot be overstated. This **Plan Update** positions the Township to address new uncertainties and challenges since the **2003 Plan** was adopted. The strategies, organized around the themes of Conserve, Connect, and Enhance call on the Township to embrace the stewardship and sustainability actions already underway and to fully integrate those efforts in the Township park system, both on the ground and through programming.

The anticipated results? Parks managed in a way that reduce flooding, improve water quality, showcase plants that thrive in this region, and serve as demonstration areas for residents to duplicate in their own backyards. Park amenities such as playgrounds and playing fields that contribute to the health and well-being of residents of all ages and walks of life. An interconnected system of trails, pathways and sidewalks that create more walkable neighborhoods, reduce traffic congestion, and connect residents to the park system. Programs that showcase plants for pollinators and birds and an appreciation of nature for all residents of all ages. This bold new approach mitigates the impact of development and redevelopment; offsets the impacts of climate change, alleviates the financial burden of reducing stream pollutants, and most of all, reflects the high standards for the quality of life that Whitpain Township residents expect.

# Introduction

Whitpain Township is one of the best places to live in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Township has worked to maintain a strong sense of unique character and identity amidst the fast paced growth of the area. The community's public parks, recreation, open space, and trail system is an important factor in this distinction. Since the previous plan was adopted in 2003, the Township has made great progress in parkland acquisition, recreation facility improvements, trail system establishment, conservation, and program expansion. The Township used innovative approaches to leveraging township funds through partnerships, grants, and creative planning in a mix of public and private funding for these accomplishments.

The Whitpain Township Parks and Recreation Department is widely respected across the state as an award-winning agency, as well as for its consistent standard of excellence and level of service for residents. This **Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Update** is designed to support the Department in concert with the Public Works Department, the Engineering Department, and Township Management in continuing to provide innovative and well balanced facilities and programs in the community as the Township evolves and the interests and needs of residents change.

## Updated Vision: Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails

Whitpain Township retained Toole Recreation Planning, Viridian Landscape Studio, and Natural Lands to assist with updating the **2003 Parks and Recreation Plan: Recreation 2020**. It was important for the Township to use a planning process that involved the public to understand the community's needs. Like the previous plan, it was essential that this **Update** provide realistic and implementable goals and recommendations for the future while supporting continued excellence in facility and service delivery.

In initiating the planning process, the project team met with the Parks and Recreation Department and Township Management to confirm the project's purpose and goals. These included:

- Assessing the interests and needs of general public and community based organizations for parks and recreation programs, facilities and services
- Identifying recreation programming needs and services
- Advancing connections for safe walking and cycling to establish a township wide trail network linking to the regional system
- Exploring consistent standards for facility and trail maintenance
- Determining a pro-active approach to conservation of open space with open space as a priority
- Increasing public awareness about parks, recreation, open space, and trails
- Assessing all facilities to determine how to optimize them in conservation, aesthetics, and functionality including exploration of an indoor recreation facility

- Creating an action plan that mirrors the previous one in its practicality, aspirations, and goals to complete

### *Intervening Circumstances*

Two events of major significance intervened in the planning process for this Plan Update. They included:

1. **COVID-19** – This global pandemic resulted in unprecedented changes in our way of life that impacted the planning process, parks and recreation operations, and public interests in parks, recreation, open space and trails that resulted in greatly expanded use of facilities. The planning team shifted its approach to the project by changing meetings and outreach from in-person, on-site to virtual in accordance with public health directives as well as to revise its survey methodology to focus on public input for Mermaid Lake and programming. Re-grouping required additional time and coordination to fit within the Township's operational procedures.
2. **Mermaid Lake Acquisition** – Whitpain Township acquired the 64 acre former private swim and golf club. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this acquisition for the future of the community. This site will expand public parks and recreation opportunities for the community exponentially.

Due to the magnitude of the COVID crisis and the Mermaid Lake acquisition, the project planning team adjusted the needs assessment, public engagement, advisory committee work, and the time line to create a plan that reflects the best action plan for the future. While the project was planned to be complete by the end of 2020, the three month hiatus in collective meetings and outreach required an extension into the spring of 2021.

## Accomplishments 2003 -2020

Since the **2003 Parks and Recreation Plan: Recreation 2020**, Whitpain Township has accomplished the following:

### *Parkland and Recreation Facilities*

- Acquisition of 101 acres of park land including 37 acres from St. Helena's for Centre Square Park and 64 acres for Mermaid Lake.
- Development of the Township's largest park at Centre Square as a state of the art sports complex with lighted turf fields. The Township negotiated the funding and donation of materials for the construction of this \$4.5 million park with a private contractor at no cost to the Township.
- Reconfiguration of the Prophecy Creek property as a nature-based community park along with a public/private partnership to operate the park building for special events and public recreation programs where possible.

- Expansion of Stony Creek Sports Complex.
- Remediation of Wissahickon Park at a cost of \$10 million managed and paid for by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency transforming the land from a brownfield site to land suitable for use as a public park. A master plan and LWCF and RACP grants are helping to advance the development of this park in an area of the community in need of a park.
- Planning and development of the first phases of an inclusive nature-based play area at Centre Square Park.
- Establishment of the Boys & Girls Club as a public/private partnership funded with a grant.
- Initiation of a park master plan for Mermaid Lake.
- Development of a Township Trail Master Plan.

#### *Connections and Partnerships*

- Establishment of 12.25 miles of trails to advance the development of the township-wide trail network.
- Fostering of a partnership with Wissahickon Trails in the management of township preserves.
- Creation of formal maintenance agreements with WRA (Whitpain Recreation Association) and WissLAX.
- Partnering with Wissahickon Trails and Montgomery County to preserve the Cheston Property.

#### *Programs, Services, and Public Awareness*

- Expansion of programs, camps, and special events.
- Increasing the Parks and Recreation Department's cost recovery rate to 67 percent, nearly three times the national average of 22.9 percent; for programs and administration and 37 percent if maintenance were to be included still exceeding the national rate by 62 percent. (1)
- Establishing an online presence to increase public awareness. Followed by more than 3,000 interested people, the Parks and Recreation Department regular generates thousands of "likes" on its postings on Facebook such as 11,000 "likes" for township programs and events that translate into increased program participation.

#### *Operations and Maintenance*

- Increased maintenance staff from four to six workers.
- Cross trained Public Works staff dedicated to parks, recreation, and trail maintenance.
- Working on a sustainable equipment replacement program in order to reduce the carbon footprint, fossil fuel use, and air and water pollution.

#### *Conservation and Sustainability*

- **Recognition in Sustainability:** Received "Conservation Champion Award" from the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (currently Wissahickon Trails) in January 2019. Tree City USA for 25 Consecutive Years. Recipient of National Arbor Day Foundations Prestigious Growth Award for 21 consecutive years. Only six other municipalities received the Growth Award in the entire commonwealth last year.

(1) NRPA. 2021. Park Metrics. <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/> Accessed April 28, 2021.

- **Sustainability Management:** Designated a Sustainability Coordinator as part of an engineering position.
- **Energy:** Moving to LED lighting in the parks. Facility improvements and energy efficiency included installation of solar scoreboards. Alternative energy vehicles for Public Works and Park Maintenance equipment replacement program.
- **Stormwater Management and Best Practices:** Incorporated BMP's (Best Management Practices) into maintenance at Wentz Run Park. Blue Bell Run Basin Retrofit. Constructed Centre Square Park with bioswales, two large cisterns to capture stormwater on site and irrigate fields, numerous stormwater improvements. Wissahickon TMDL & Wissahickon Watershed Underground stormwater system at Prophecy Creek Park for parking lot. Erbs Mill Park upgrades and stormwater BMPs coming soon. Public Works hired an engineering firm to conduct an MS4 "good housekeeping" audit and to ensure proper protocols.
- **Naturalization:** Parks and open spaces including Prophecy Creek Park and Wurtz Tract
- **Environmental Education:** Outdoor classroom and the Shade Tree Commission's tree planting at Prophecy Creek Park. Wentz Run Park interpretive signage on BMPs for environmental education.
- **Trees and Shade Tree Commission:** \$50,000 Pennsylvania Turnpike Reforestation at Wentz & Jolly Road. Shade Tree Commission's Native Species Tree Giveaway: for more than two decades the Shade Tree Commission has given away 300-400 trees each year to Township residents which are all now native species trees. Tree removal in parks due to Emerald Ash Borer for visitor safety. Hazard Tree study and removal over 6-year period. \$100K or more spend on removing dead, diseased, or damaged limbs.

## Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Today

Whitpain Township's commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all residents is evident in its 11 parks and preserves parks with 41 acres, 336 acres in protected open space, and 12.25 miles of trails. Not much land remains in Whitpain Township that has not already been conserved or developed. The total amount of undeveloped land that is not public or protected is 977.3 acres. Smaller parcels may provide critical trail links, expand an existing park, buffer a headwaters stream from the impacts of development, conserve settings for historic structures or specimen trees, and provide a much needed pocket park in a densely developed neighborhood.

The Parks and Recreation Department offers Summer Camps, Special Events, Pre-School Programs, Youth Specialty Programs, Youth Sports, Adult Programs, Dog Park events, Trips, and Discount Ticket that connect people to nature, foster health and wellness, and build a strong sense of community. Residents highly value the parks, recreation facilities, green spaces, and trails. With a Director, Assistant Director, and Program Coordinator, the staff provides more than 4,000 hours of public recreation programming. They work with part-time seasonal staff and independent contractors to provide an extended and varied range of recreational opportunities for the residents. The Department works in close collaboration with community based organizations such as the Wissahickon School District, WRA (Whitpain Recreation Association), WissLAX and Ambler Whitpain Football.

The Public Work Department has six workers that provide park, recreation facility, and trail maintenance. The Engineering Department dedicates 25 percent of an engineering position as the Sustainability Coordinator. The Sustainability Coordinator has been focusing on Best Management Practices related to storm water management, functioning of basins and stormwater management systems in parks as the Township moves more into other areas of sustainability such as alternative vehicles and reducing the carbon footprint.

## Integration of Related Planning Efforts

### *Comprehensive Plan*

Whitpain Township adopted the **Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan: Four Villages within a Community** in 2016. The plan's vision guided the recommendations for action as follows:

*Whitpain is a community that embraces the future while cherishing our heritage. We will continue to be recognized for our diversity, fiscal responsibility, and leadership in resource conservation. We shall never waver in our collective commitment to ensuring public safety and enhancing the quality of life of all our fellow citizens.*

The recommendations covered seven areas including transportation, land use, parks and open space, energy and resource conservation, economic development, community facilities and services, historic preservation, and compatibility with adjacent municipalities. Actions recommended that apply to parks, recreation, open space and trails include the following

- Protect and enhance Whitpain's natural resources.
- Continue to expand / enhance the Township's park and open space system to meet the recreational needs of residents.
- Continue to monitor the status of at-risk open space parcels and develop strategies for acquisition and/or preservation.
- Promote park, open space and trail facilities to inform residents of recreational opportunities in the Township.
- The Township should also encourage the development of small civic spaces in villages and throughout the Township where residents are not being served by neighborhood parks. The area south of Route 73 and east Route 202 is somewhat lacking in local park space as is the area of the Township north of Route 73 and west of School Road.
- Whitpain should enhance public outreach to inform and educate the community about the importance of open space and recreation. This outreach should also include a partnership with the three elementary schools in the Township to educate students about the importance of open space, parks, and recreation. This could involve the use of the Township parks and open space for field trips or after school programs, or outdoor classrooms. This

public outreach should also include the development of a map that designates existing and proposed Township open space, parks, and trails available to residents and visitors.

- Provide a wide variety recreational opportunities and facilities to residents.
- Whitpain should develop a Township-wide sustainability master plan with specific benchmarks for township-wide sustainability enhancements.
- The Township should continue to update its trail plan and provide connections that are not currently in place to create a Township wide trail network.

Other plans include the following:

- **Whitpain Township Open Space Plan, 2005**
- **Prophecy Creek Park Master Plan, 2009**
- **Centre Square Commons, 2015**
- **Boys & Girls Club Concept Plan, 2016**
- **Whitpain Township Walkability Study , 2019**

## Planning Process

The update to the **Parks and Recreation Plan** began with a strategic kick-off meeting with the Township's Core Team and the consultants in November 2019. The Township's Project Core Team consisted of the Parks and Recreation Director, Assistant Director, and Program Coordinator. An initial work session with Township Management informed the direction and outreach process for the project. A Plan Advisory Committee was formed and included 15 members representing the Park & Open Space Board, organized sports, conservation organizations, Township Engineering, Public Works/Park Maintenance Staff, and interested residents. The Committee met through presentations on questionnaire development; programs; organization and financing; parks and recreation facilities; trails; and open space. Together, the consultant team, the Township's Core Team, and the Plan Advisory Committee created this collaborative plan to seamlessly integrate industry knowledge and expertise of the consultants with institutional knowledge and understanding provided by the Township, key stakeholders and the residents. The following methodologies were used to develop the plan.

## Community and Stakeholder Engagement

An "Information Gathering" process, which included the Plan Advisory Committee, community input sessions, interviews, and work sessions with township department representatives followed. Two online questionnaires gathered feedback on citizen satisfaction levels, needs, and support for parks, open space, recreation, trails, programs, and services. Although the project was designed to include one public opinion questionnaire, the survey took on significant importance once Mermaid Lake became a possibility. The original survey evolved with questions being updated as the Mermaid Lake acquisition status changed from a possibility to a reality. The final survey provided questions specifically crafted to obtain input about Mermaid Lake from the residents. Consequently, the

consulting team undertook a second survey of “Best Customers” in order to address recreation programs and services. “Best Customers” were defined as anyone who had registered for a program, service, or permit in 2019 with Whitpain Township’s Parks and Recreation Department.

## Demographics and Trends

Important analysis explored the population of the Township as well as local, state, and national trends with regard to the services that the Parks and Recreation Department offers. Existing Township plans were reviewed to determine commonalities and to provide guidance to the outcomes of this Plan Update.

## Findings Compilation

In February 2021, a draft of findings and recommendations was prepared at the request of the Township to facilitate planning of Mermaid Lake Park. The Township held a work session with Township Management, Finance Department, Public Works Director, Parks and Recreation Director and Assistant Director. They provided comments to the consulting team. In a second work session, the consulting team met with the Township Management, Finance Department, Public Works Director, Parks and Recreation Director, Assistant Director, and Program Coordinator to discuss the findings and the preferred course of action for the Township.

## Plan Themes

Based on the analysis conducted and the findings determined, key issues were identified and compiled with Core Team members and presented in writing to the Parks and Recreation Department, Plan Advisory Committee, Township Management, and Public Works. Three key issues formed the theme for this plan. They provide clear areas of great importance to this community and serve as the foundation on which recommendations are based. The three themes are:

- **Conserve** – Conservation of open space and “taking care of what we have” emerged as a top priority of the community in the survey, interviews, and input from the Plan Advisory Committee. Continued traditional park maintenance of active recreation facilities combined with best management practices and stewardship for natural areas is vital for wild life, control of invasive species, clean air and water, and dealing with climate change.
- **Connect** – A connected trail network is important to the residents. They want to be able to safely bicycle to community destinations as well as to the regional trail system. The Walkability Plan offers recommendations for sidewalk connections. Trails are not the only connection in which the residents are interested. Recreation programs and services also enable the residents to connect with nature, health, and fun. The Parks and Recreation Department’s special events help to build a strong sense of community here and rank among the most preferred services they desire.

- **Enhance** – Making the best use of existing facilities, adding new facilities that are not currently available and exploring past opportunities, such as the pool and the par three golf course through Mermaid Lake are important. Pickleball, areas to gather and socialize, a place for teens to be, year round indoor recreation, outdoor fitness, performing areas, places to fish, a pump track, a bicycles park, interesting and comfortable seating, splash pad or spray park would greatly enhance the system in serving the public.

## Strategic Recommendations

Eight key strategic recommendations serve as the blueprint for the Township to follow in improving parks, recreation, open space, and trails over the next ten years:

1. **Sustainability.** Advance the focus of parks, recreation, open space and trails in Whitpain Township toward sustainability. Parks are key when it comes to addressing the effects of climate change. From protecting water resources via green infrastructure practices, to reducing weather effects through tree canopy and forest restoration, <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/> parks play a critical role in ensuring that our community can successfully adapt and thrive in light of a rapidly changing planet.
2. **Maintenance.** Develop a formal written plan for park and trail operations and maintenance that includes natural resource management, stewardship, best practices, training, partnerships, and inclusion of maintenance staff in park planning.
3. **Open Space.** Strive to conserve as much open space as possible that remains, especially parcels that are adjoin, are near, or serve as linkages to township parks and trails.
4. **Trails.** Continue work on connecting Whitpain with a township-wide trail network.
5. **Design.** Elevate design of the parks to include an orientation to nature, stewardship, and the provision of facilities that will allow for expanded recreation opportunities not yet available in the Township. These include but are not limited to gathering places of different sizes, comfortable and interesting seating, places for teens and tweens, fishing, disc golf, spray parks/splashpads, pickle ball, a larger performing area, and indoor recreation and sports facilities.
6. **Recreation Programs.** Develop a recreation program plan with three focus areas: Nature, Fitness and Wellness, and Community Building. Community Building can include a broad range of recreational and educational programs from day camps and special events to a Farmers' Market and community gardens. Include staffing in the program plan.
7. **Financing.** Continue to invest in parks, recreation, open space, and trail with a mix of public and private resources for both capital improvements and acquisition as well as operations and maintenance. Ensure that maintenance budget and staffing keeps pace with capital improvements and park system expansion.

8. **Branding.** Re-Brand the Parks & Recreation Department for 21<sup>st</sup> Century realities. The rapid expansion of the park system, changing recreation demands resulting from the pandemic, climate change with increasing public concern, necessity to organize a volunteer program, and the need to build an “enterprise culture” within the Department to generate revenue mandate that the Department create an identity that reflects these new directives. The Department should become the leader in creating a sustainable environment in the community using public lands and educational programs and outreach as methods to inspire private landowners

# Whitpain Township Profile

Whitpain Township is a 12.9 square mile township in Montgomery County. Founded in 1701, the Township is a vibrant community, which has been rated by Philadelphia Magazine and others as one of the best places to live in the Delaware Valley. The Township is a successful mix of residential and commercial development, with an emphasis on livable neighborhoods, passive and active recreation opportunities, respect for diversity, and commitment to each other

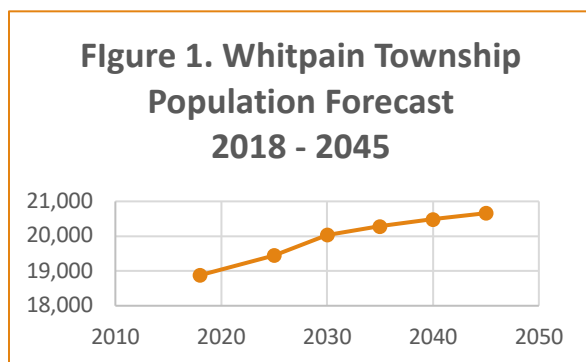
Township elected and appointed officials, managers, and staff charged with making important decisions about parks, recreation, open space, and trails must use credible information to guide resource allocation, staffing, policies, and programs. Demographic data offer a source of reliable data that provide valuable insights about Whitpain Township's needs for municipal services. The **Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan: Four Villages within a Community** offers a thorough demographic analysis that serves as the basis for this Plan Update for parks, recreation, open space, and trails. For the purposes of this **Plan Update**, the demographic profile is tailored to planning and service delivery for parks, recreation, open space and trails.

## Population

In 2019, the Whitpain Township population was 19,240 according to the U.S. Census. This is an increase of 362 residents from the 2010 population of 18,878.

### *Population Projections*

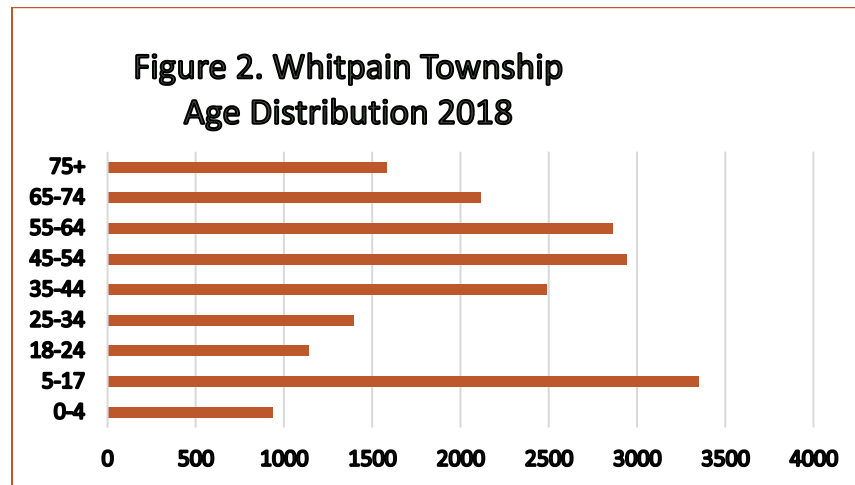
The Montgomery County Planning Commission forecasts an increase of 1,783 over the next 24 years. The population changes estimated through 2045 are shown in Figure 1.



### *Age Distribution*

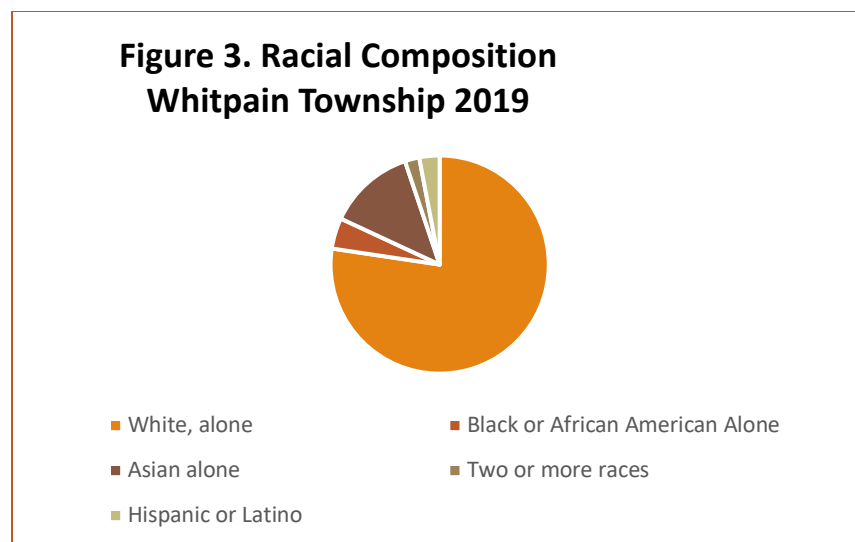
The median age in Whitpain Township is 44.8, among the highest in the County. The median age in Montgomery County is 41.1. The distribution of age groups in Whitpain Township shown in Figure 2 suggests that the Department, and the Township overall, serves people within a wide age-range. Looking toward 2030, the primary change to note is that people aged 60 and above is projected to

continue to increase. This is important for staff to be aware of with regard to the Department's programs, facilities, and amenities. Despite the higher median age, Whitpain is still a community of families with 4,289 children under the age of 18.



#### *Racial Composition Diversifying*

The 2019 racial composition of Whitpain Township is shown in Figure 3. Although the population is 77% White, it is diversifying. Since 2010, the Asian population has increased while the White and Black proportion of the population has decreased. Moving forward, the Parks and Recreation Department staff will be expected to work with, and have significant knowledge and understanding of, individuals from many cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. As communities like Whitpain Township experience population diversification, it is important to understand what motivators and barriers exist for various demographic groups in order to provide relevant programs and services.



### *Educational Attainment in 2019: High and Increasing*

About 98.1% of the population 25 years and older have a high school diploma, up from 96% in 2010. The percentage of residents over 25 years of age with at least a bachelor's degree increased from 56% to 65% since 2010.

### *Income: Affluent with Rising Poverty*

In 2019, the median household income in the Township was \$128,828, up from \$116,401 in 2010. In Montgomery County, the median household income was \$91,546 and the poverty rate was 6%. In Whitpain, the poverty level increased from 2.2% to 2.5% in 2019.

### *Housing Value and Rents*

The median value of owner-occupied houses is \$458,500. The median gross rent is \$1,749. In Montgomery County, the median value of owner-occupied housing was \$316,100 with rents at \$1,295.

### *Internet Access*

About 96 percent of households have a computer while 93 percent have broadband subscription.

### *Health*

About 4.4 percent of the population under 65 years of age has a disability. Inclusion of those with special needs is important and outreach to this group would help to advance planning services and facilities in collaboration with them. The new nature based playground in Centre Square Park is being developed as an inclusive public recreation facility. It is important to note that inclusion means more than barrier free access. Provisions in programming and facility design to serve those with autism and their families as well as though with sight and hearing accommodations is important.

## ESRI's Tapestry Market Segmentation

Lifestyle segmentation offers information that can be effectively used in advertising, planning, and program development as an alternative to traditional demographic factors such as age, education and income alone. **ESRI's Tapestry Market Segmentation** is a geodemographic system that identifies 68 distinctive markets in the United States based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. It offers an accurate, comprehensive profile of consumers in Whitpain. The three principal population segments of this Tapestry in place in the Township along with their characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Whitpain Township Market Segments			
Segment with Percentage of Households	Status	Activity	Traits
<b>Golden Years (30%)</b>	Independent, active seniors nearing the end of their careers or already in retirement. Primarily, singles living alone or empty nesters.	Actively pursue a variety of leisure interests—travel, sports, dining out, museums, and concerts. They are involved, focused on physical fitness, and enjoying their lives. This market is smaller, but growing, and financially secure. Spends about 24% more on entertainment and recreation than the typical USA citizen.	Median household income is high. Wages provide income to nearly 2 out of 3 households, earned income is available from investments. Well connected. Internet access is used for everything. Generous supporters of the arts and charitable organizations. •
<b>Savvy Suburbanites (25%)</b>	Well educated, well read, and well capitalized. Empty nesters and empty nester wannabes, who still have adult children at home.	Lifestyle includes home remodeling, gardening, and the active pursuit of sports and exercise. They enjoy good food and wine along with cultural events. Spends about 63% more on entertainment and recreation than the typical USA citizen .	Highly educated. Low unemployment. Higher labor force participation rate with proportionately two income households. Well-connected consumers. Appreciate technology and make liberal use of it for everything. Informed shoppers and focus on quality.
<b>Top Tier (20%)</b>	The residents of the wealthiest Tapestry market, Top Tier, earn more than three times the US household income. Purchasing power to indulge any choice..	Consumers select upscale fitness centers for their personal well-being and shop at high-end retailers. Frequent vacations. Residents fill their weekends and evenings with opera, classical music concerts, charity dinners, and shopping. Spends nearly three times the typical USA citizen on entertainment and recreation.	Highly educated professionals have reached their corporate career goals. With an accumulated average net worth of over 3 million dollars and income from a strong investment portfolio, many of these older residents have moved into consulting roles or operate their own businesses.

# What We Heard

The Plan Advisory Committee, interviews, work sessions, and two public opinion surveys generated information to guide the development of the **Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Update** needs assessment. The Parks and Recreation Department professionals used a variety of communication tools including direct emails, the Wire, the Marquee, newsletter, Facebook and other social media, and the websites of the Township and the Parks and Recreation Department. The goal of this outreach was to reach as many residents as possible to gather information to guide the development of the needs assessment for the **Plan Update**. The surveys generated 2,278 responses to the parks, recreation, open space and trails survey with the Mermaid Lake component while 448 “Best Customers” responded to the programming survey. Since COVID-19 led to people sheltering in place, these surveys provided critical opportunities for residents to provide their opinions for this **Plan Update**.

To balance the opinions of the general public, information from key stakeholders such as community based organizations including the Plan Advisory Committee, interviews with park visitors, sports groups, Wissahickon Public Library, Wissahickon Trails, Montgomery County Planning Commission, Wissahickon School District, Montgomery County Community College, Township Manager, Assistant Township Manager, Finance Department, Public Works Department, Engineering Department, and the Philadelphia Bicycle Coalition.

A great deal of qualitative information was collected during these input sessions. Collectively there were eight main themes that arose.

## Key Findings

The main findings of the general parks, recreation open space and trail survey are:

- Respondents rate Township facilities as good to excellent.
- The three most preferred improvements are safe sidewalk connections to parks, open space and natural areas, and the Development of an indoor recreation center.
- Respondents rate Township programs as good to excellent.
- The programs they’d most like to see in the upcoming year are sports, health and fitness, and special events and festivals.
- Overall priorities in parks, recreation, open space and trails are year round indoor recreation opportunities, open space conservation, and making Mermaid Lake a public park.
- Developing Mermaid Lake as a public park is very important to extremely important to the respondents. The most preferred way respondents would like to see the park developed as a community park with a mix of active and passive facilities and places to connect with nature. Respondents indicated that using existing township taxes, grants and user fees for programs were the most preferred ways to support Mermaid Lake by the respondents. As expected, new township taxes and partnerships ranked as the least preferred methods of park support.

- When asked how they would spend \$100, respondents would spend their money on developing Mermaid Lake as a public park, building and operating an indoor recreation facility, and creating the township-wide trail system.

The “Best Customers” survey targetted those who know programs through their direct experience. They expressed highly positive ratings for the Township’s programs, activities and events in the survey targeted at those who know the programs through their direct experience.

- Customer service rated five star ratings, arguably the most important factor in public recreation programming.
- The programs of most importance to them include youth camps and programs, adults sports and fitness, and special events.
- Programs for children and youth garnered the highest ratings while programs for pre-schoolers, teens and senior citizens rated only average. The reason for this is simply that there are not enough opportunities for these age groups.
- On the overall quality of programs, value, convenience, and customer service garnered the highest ratings of program qualities with five stars. The programs overall and instructors captured four star ratings.
- On the variety of programs, trips and special events rated highest. Environmental education and virtual programs rated the lowest in average ratings. Fitness rated primarily as good.
- Regarding schedule, weekends and evenings were rated as highest without surprise. The weekday and day time hours rated the lowest.
- On information access, the Township newsletter and the Parks and Recreation Department website rated the highest. The timing of information works well too. Social media is a developing source of information worthy of more attention if possible with staff resources.
- When asked how they would spend \$100, the respondents indicated that they’d spend most of their money on an indoor recreation facility, more game courts (with pickle ball frequently mentioned), and more varied programs.

## Stakeholder Input

Input from key stakeholders provided the following insights:

- While the Centre Square Park and Stony Creek Sports parks have many ballfields including state of the art lighted turf fields, there is a need for another football field. With lacrosse a growing sport, there will be a need for additional rectangular fields to accommodate the Township’s mix of soccer, field hockey and lacrosse play.
- Concern about keeping up with maintenance with the expansion of the parks and recreation system.
- Urgency in securing the remaining open space in the Township.
- Need for increased recreation opportunities for teens and seniors.
- Facilities in the School District and the Community College are generally limited and less available than in the past. The exception was in summer recreation programming in which the School District has expanded the facilities available for summer camps of the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Need for more stewardship of natural areas.

- Children, youth, and sports are the focus of parks and recreation – this needs to be expanded to more age groups and broader range of recreation opportunities beyond sports.
- Partnerships with conservation organizations are important and should be pursued.
- Volunteers are available in the community but no means is in place for managing them. There is a perception in the community that volunteers are free but they must be managed, supervised, trained and recognized.

# CONSERVE

The first theme of this **Plan Update** is “**Conserve**”. Our goal is to place Whitpain Township’s parks, open space, trails and recreation facilities at the forefront of conservation and environmental stewardship by facilitating and promoting leadership and sustainable practices through planning, stewardship, and public engagement.

Parks are key to ensuring the health of our environment because they play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, providing clean water and clean air, and enabling conservation of natural resources. As stated by the National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA), “parks and public lands serve an essential role in preserving natural resources and wildlife habitats, protecting clean water and clean air, and providing open space for current and future generations. Parks provide an essential connection for all ages and abilities to the life-enhancing benefits of nature and the outdoors.”<sup>1</sup>

## Benefits of Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails

Parks and open space are known to improve the quality of life as evident during the recent global health pandemic. Benefits of conservation and environmental stewardship are many, including:

- Providing carbon-reducing landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect wildlife habitat
- Offering the public access to safe, affordable, and healthy ways to experience and appreciate nature
- Contributing significantly to the economic well-being of the area through energy and resource conservation and providing many financial benefits to communities derived from outdoor recreation<sup>1</sup>

Managing and protecting open space, providing opportunities for people to connect with nature, and educating communities about conservation are exceedingly important. Parks and recreation can help the Township establish a climate resilient community through water management, green infrastructure, and sustainability. Since most open space in Whitpain is private, the Parks and Recreation Department can foster sustainability through public engagement, programming and education activities. The Public Works Department can modeling practices in open space, parks, and trail maintenance. Influencing the public can help to greatly expand the overall impact of the Township’s sustainability efforts. As we learn valuable lessons over time on how to sustainability manage the facilities and resources that make our parks, recreation, open space and trails system special, we look forward to implementing this Plan Update to care for our parks, open spaces, and trails far into the future.

# Open Space

**“LOOK DEEP INTO NATURE, AND THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING BETTER.”**

**Albert Einstein**

## Overview

Whitpain Township is a primarily residential, suburban community surrounding four villages – Centre Square, Blue Bell, Broad Axe and West Ambler. The Township bears the burden of heavily traveled Route 202, and Skippack Pike. The Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike punctuates the western corner of the community. The roadways that contribute to traffic congestion also make the Township a desirable community in which to live, enabling easy commuting to employers throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

Residents have access to the Township’s robust park system, programs, and trails, a source of community pride. Residents also have access to an extensive preserve and trail system owned and managed by Wissahickon Trails, a non-profit that conserves land in the Montgomery County portion of the Wissahickon Valley watershed. A collection of private golf courses, homeowners’ association open space, schools, and the Montgomery County Community College conserve open land, stream corridors, woodlands, and scenic views in an otherwise developed landscape.

### *Weaving Our Community Together*

Lacking a single downtown or “town center,” the four villages and the park system create a sense of place in Whitpain Township. This makes high quality open space all the more important for residents. During the planning process, A Plan Advisory Committee member observed that parks serve as the center of community in Whitpain Township. The survey conducted for this plan indicated that residents place open space and conservation in their top three priorities. Open space serves as the fabric that weaves together the four villages and surrounding community. The open space recommendations in this chapter aim to strengthen an interconnected open space network across Whitpain Township. Whitpain Township residents rely on open space, whether it is part of a park, trail, preserve, or village green. Open space creates a more ecologically sustainable place to live. By mitigating flooding and other impacts from severe weather; open space connects residents to the outdoors with parks, trails, and programs while also increasing property values and quality of life for residents.

## Assessment

### *Open Space Inventory*

Public and protected lands form the heart of the Township open space network. Public lands, not necessarily protected by conservation easement, are financed by public tax dollars and open to the

public. The Park and Recreation Facilities chapter that follows describes the types of activities and programs offered at the parks. Active and passive parks require very different maintenance regimes, the Organization, Staffing and Maintenance Chapter provides an overview of strengths, opportunities and challenges and suggests maintenance strategies. In addition, Appendix B of this **Plan Update** provides a stewardship plan for Armentrout Preserve, a model for managing natural areas. (See Public and Protected Lands Map)

Table 2. Whitpain Township Owned Parks and Preserves	
Public Parks	Acreage
Wentz Run Park	70
Centre Square Park	98
Prophecy Creek Park & Briar Hill Preserve	115
Armentrout Preserve	38
Stony Creek Sports Park	11
Erbs Mill Park	2
West Side Park & Courts	0.30
Wissahickon Park	18
Mermaid Lake Park	64
<b>Total:</b>	<b>416.3</b>

Whitpain Township and its authorities also own vacant land and small pockets of land devoted to retention basins and stormwater management.

Table 3. Other Township Owned Open Spaces	
Open Space	Acreage
Mt. Pleasant	2.00
Valentine Estates	.90
Valentine Estates	1.0
Streeper Karr III	3.97
Blue Bell Knoll	1.19
Blue Bell Knoll	1.21
Belfry Meadow	2.24
Yost Road	1.40
Blue Bell Estates	1.28
Blue Bell Run	1.03
Blue Bell Run	15.81
Blue Bell Run	3.59
Wurtz Tract	20.00
Village Circle	8.0
Blue Bell Crossing	8.83

Forest Creek	10.98
Longfield	7.26
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>90.69</b>

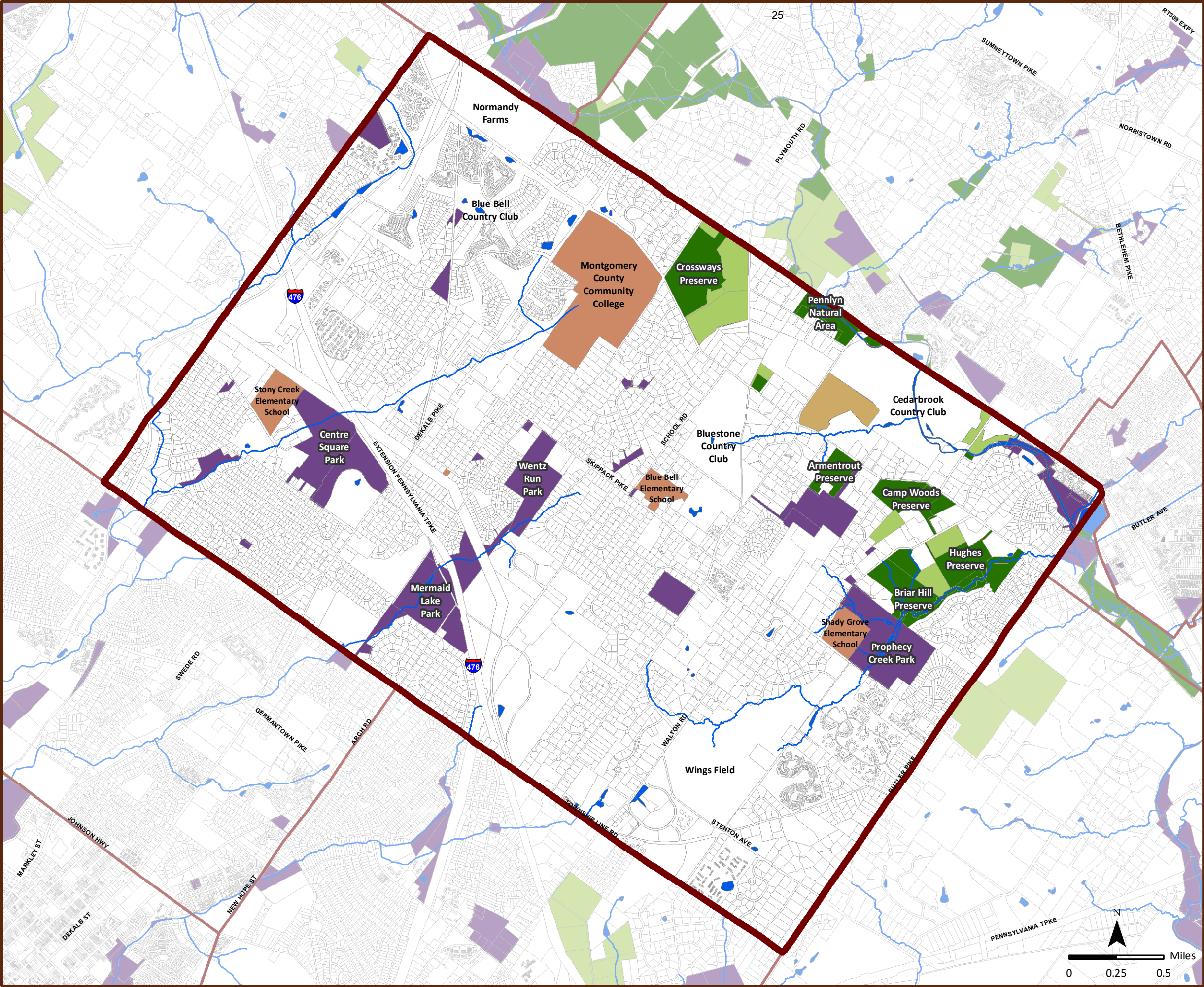
The three public elementary schools – Stony Creek, Shady Grove, and Blue Bell in addition to Montgomery County Community College provide a further 258 acres of open space. Protected lands may or may not provide for public access. In Whitpain Township, Wissahickon Trails own preserves open to the public at no cost enhancing the quality of life for residents and providing acreage nearly 50% again as large as the entire township park system.

Table 4. Permanently Protected Wissahickon Trails Preserve	
<b>Preserves</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Crossways	57.7
Armentrout	19.6
Penllyn Natural Area	23.2
Camp Woods	38.7
Briar Hill & Chester Family Farm	75.2
Hughes	31.0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>245.4</b>

Privately owned land can also be protected by conservation easement, without public access. This is especially true for agricultural easements, where public access would conflict with farming. It is also sometimes true for conservation easements with private residences. Where public funds are involved in purchasing conservation easements, public access may be required. In Whitpain Township, 43 acres of land are under agricultural easement and 222 acres are under conservation easement, noting some of the latter acreage includes the Wissahickon Trails Preserves, which are both under conservation easement and available to the public.




#### *Remaining Open Space*

Not much land remains in Whitpain Township that has not already been conserved or developed. The Conservation Opportunities Map identifies parcels ten acres or larger that are unprotected and relatively undeveloped. Open, developable land in Whitpain is seldom natural and undisturbed. The largest acreage consists of the combined Blue Bell, Cedarbrook, and Bluestone Country Clubs. Distinguished by manicured golf courses, it amounts to a total of 486.2 acres. Wings Field, cleared for a private airport, includes 196.2 acres. Nine private landowners own eleven undeveloped properties of more than ten acres, a total of 209.4. acres. Limited partnerships own an additional 85.5 acres. This brings the total amount of undeveloped land that is not public or protected to 977.3 acres. Smaller parcels may provide critical trail links, expand an existing park, buffer a headwaters stream from the impacts of development, conserve settings for historic structures or specimen trees, and provide a much needed pocket park in a densely developed neighborhood.




**PUBLIC AND PROTECTED LANDS**

**Whitpain Township**  
Montgomery County, PA

-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Parcel Boundaries
-  Waterways

**Public and Protected Lands**

-  Ag Easements
-  Conservation Easements
-  Township Owned
-  Conservation Owned
-  Schools



1031 Palmers Mill Road, Media, PA 19063  
610-353-5587 | [natlands.org](http://natlands.org)

1. Parcel boundaries, roadways, and waterways from Montgomery County.
2. Public/Protected lands from WeConservePA and Montgomery County.

Compiled By: MEB 02/11/2021

Disclaimer: This map is not a survey. The information imparted with this map is meant to assist Natural Lands Trust, Inc., describe the placement of certain retained, reserved, or excluded rights and to calculate acreage figures. Property boundaries, while approximate, were established using the best available information, which may have included: surveys, tax maps, field mapping using G.P.S., and/or orthophotos. Natural Lands Trust, Inc., makes no representation as to the accuracy of said property lines (or any other lines), and no liability is assumed by reason of reliance hereon. Use of this map for other than its intended purpose requires the written consent of Natural Lands Trust, Inc.

# Assessment

## What Works Well

### *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Conservation Communities*

Communities that are successful in meeting their open space goals seldom rely on one tool, such as land acquisition, to achieve those goals. Open space conservation requires applying a sophisticated set of conservation tools, adapted to the local circumstances ranging from ecological resource value, to financial capacity, to public will. The “characteristics” below, bring a municipality along a conservation continuum, from understanding what’s important to conserve, to implementation. Whitpain can attribute much of its success to date upon the successful application of many of the tools below. That success could multiply with further attention to several of the characteristics, noted below.

1. **Documented Community Resources.** Successful communities have a thorough understanding of natural, cultural and historic resources. They have inventoried and mapped information in a manner that displays suitability for conservation and development.
2. **An Understanding of the Future and Goals for Conservation and Development.** Successful communities have a realistic understanding of their future. They use information, such as growth projections to periodically review and adjust their goals for conservation and development. Successful communities establish reasonable goals for conservation and development that reflect the special resources in the communities, the land use patterns, and anticipated growth. The community engages the public in order to establish their conservation and development priorities.
3. **A Sound Zoning Framework.** Successful communities have legally defensible, well-written zoning regulations that meet their “fair share” of future growth, while providing for a logical balance between community goals and private landowner interests. The incorporation of resource suitability, flexibility, and incentives into their zoning regulations to encourage (and sometimes require) the inclusion of permanent conservation lands into new subdivisions.
4. **A Process for Designing “Conservation Subdivisions.”** Successful communities recognize that both design standards and the design process play an important part in conservation community resources. They work closely and expeditiously with subdivision applicants to develop mutually acceptable sketch plans, rather than using delaying tactics and relying solely upon the formal review of engineered plans.
5. **Good Working Relationships between Municipal Officials and Landowners.** Successful communities understand the importance of maintaining good working relationships between municipal officials and the owners of undeveloped lands. Open and ongoing communications enable municipal officials to introduce landowners to community concerns before they make irrevocable decisions regarding the future of their properties.
6. **Mechanisms for Acquiring Important Conservation Lands.** Successful communities acquire important conservation lands, such as those where development is most inappropriate, through gift or purchase. They identify and have access to public and private financing as

well as to the qualified individuals and non-profit entities that are able to undertake necessary transactions.

7. **Management of Dedicated Conservation Lands.** Successful communities have the skills necessary to properly maintain permanent conservation lands, as well as, providing for trails and other appropriate recreational uses. Such lands are often in mixed public, non-profit, and private ownership.

### *A Multi-Disciplinary Focus on Sustainability*

Whitpain Township already has staff and advisors dedicated to the topic of sustainability. Those components include a:

- Parks and Recreation Department, supported by the Parks and Open Space Board, that promotes quality parks and programs.
- Sustainability Coordinator, addressing a variety of sustainability topics from stormwater management to stewardship, and energy efficiency.
- Public Works Department charged with maintenance of Township public spaces.
- Shade Tree Commission that oversees trees in public ways, maintains a heritage tree registry and works to expand the urban tree canopy beyond the current 43% cover.
- Designation as a Tree City, for 25 years, by the Arbor Day Foundation.
- Planning Commission that oversees sound development practices in the Township and the land use ordinances that contribute to the conservation of natural areas.

## Challenges

The famed biologist and conservationist E. O. Wilson found that, “When people state the common belief that being in nature relaxes them, that it helps them recover from stress and tragedy, that it’s a healing process to be in nature”, we now know there is solid basis for that. The research has been done. It is true that it is good for the human mind to be able to live and experience in really natural situations.”<sup>1</sup>

In a township nearly entirely developed, with a high likelihood of seeing existing spaces redeveloped, how can an adequate supply of parkland and natural areas be provided? The recent acquisition of Mermaid Park illustrates the Township’s commitment to halting sprawl and land consumption. The Township responded to public support for trails by building eight trail segments over 12.25 miles. The Parks and Recreation Department also has plans on the books to build four more trails, which will add five miles of trail network. The Township will have to balance three substantial open space necessities:

- First, *conserving* open space by purchasing additional land as opportunities arise, while managing land in a sustainable manner.

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<sup>1</sup> Mooney, Chris. “E. O. Wilson Explains Why Parks and Nature Are Really Good for Your Brain.” *The Washington Post*, 30 September 30, 2015.

- Second, *connecting* people to open space by providing trails and programming that bring them to the parks.
- Thirdly, *enhancing* the existing park system through facilities repair, upgrades, and maintenance; along with staff training to keep state of the art practices in the forefront.

## Opportunities

**Take Sustainability to the Next Level.** Whitpain Township can draw on existing staff, advisory board members, and non-profit stakeholders who have professional knowledge of how to restore and manage natural areas. The Township already excels at sustainability efforts as evidenced by the appointment of a Sustainability Coordinator, a quarter century as a Tree City USA, National Arbor Day Foundation Prestigious Growth Awards for 21 consecutive years, and a 2019 Conservation Champion Award from Wissahickon Trails. Many departments are involved in current sustainability efforts from LED lighting, to stormwater basin retrofits, to outdoors classrooms, native tree species giveaways, solar scoreboard installation to the purchase of “green” equipment, involve staff from many departments. However, there are still opportunities to advance sustainability skills, such as providing training to staff in land stewardship and restoration. Rather than executing sustainability efforts from individual departments, an opportunity exists to integrate staff and advisory board expertise in a multi-disciplinary task force assigned to implement this **Plan Update**. A quarterly meeting involving staff from Parks & Recreation, Public Works, the Sustainability Director, combined with representatives from the Parks & Recreation Board, Shade Tree, Planning Commission, and Wissahickon Trails could advance plan implementation. This plan includes a stewardship assessment of Armentrout Preserve, illustrating natural areas, and identifying land management issues that could be addressed. Assessments such as these can guide land management at Township parks, ensuring a sustainable parks system.

**Beyond Parks: Expanding the Open Space Network.** The land management recommendations suggested for Township parks apply equally well to many private back yards. Such sustainable practices reduce the Township’s stormwater management obligations, increase tree canopy cover, restore habitat for pollinators and birds, and increase property values. The Parks Chapter of this plan explains several ways to advance backyard stewardship in Whitpain Township. Local organizations like Wissahickon Trails have ready-made examples of best management practices to showcase on preserve tours and in training sessions. Montgomery County Community College has a strong sustainability program and could also be a potential partner for programs and classroom space for Township educational sessions. Residents who don’t own their home or a private yard, can be encouraged to help by volunteering with plantings or stream clean ups in the Township.

**Continuing to Acquire Open Space.** With clear public support for open space and natural areas, Whitpain Township officials can add to the park system as opportunities arise, just as it did with Mermaid Lake Park. The Conservation Opportunities Map illustrates remaining undeveloped, unprotected lands. Several opportunities have been identified during this study and by building landowner relationships the Township may identify more. Those opportunities may include:

- The Township has an opportunity to purchase land adjacent to Wentz Run Park, the O & F Farm, potentially for the purposes of building an indoor recreation center.
- Not currently on the market, and operated as a private airport, the 196-acre Wings Field remains one of the largest undeveloped open spaces in the Township. The Township already

CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES  
Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, PA



1. Parcel boundaries, roadways, and waterways from Montgomery County  
2. Public/Protected lands from PAFTA, THCA, and Natural Lands  
3. Primary Conservation Lands are 100-year floodplains (FEMA), wetlands (National Wetlands Inventory), and slopes > 25%.

Disclaimer: This map is not a survey. The information imparted with this map is meant to assist Natural Lands Trust, Inc. describe the placement of certain retained, reserved, or excluded rights and to calculate acreage figures. Property boundaries, while approximate, were established using the best available information, which may have included: surveys, tax maps, field mapping using GPS, and/or orthophotos. Natural Lands Trust, Inc. makes no representation as to the accuracy of said property lines (or any other lines), and no liability is assumed by reason of reliance hereon. Use of this map for other than its intended purpose requires the written consent of Natural Lands Trust, Inc.

Compiled By: MEB 02/03/2020



Label	Owner	Acres	Class	Land Use Code
1	Ballenrose Golf Course Mgmnt Co	36.8	C	515
2	Ballenrose Golf Course Mgmnt Co	23.3	R	319
3	Ballenrose Golf Course Mgmnt Co	33.8	R	1108
4	Ballenrose Golf Course Mgmnt Co	41.9	R	2900
5	Ballenrose Golf Course Mgmnt Co	43.9	R	319
6	Berardelli Enterprises Llc	16.2	E	9970
7	Center Square Hotel Inc	17.8	C	515
8	Spacht David G & Carol A	11.4	R	319
9	Spacht David G & Carol A	16.4	R	319
10	Wissahickon School District	31.1	C	4244
11	Recreational Dev Corp	20.2	E	9950
12	Mermaid Realty Partners Lp	61.8	R	319
13	Blue Bell Land Lp	26.3	I	2311
14	Harris John R	40.9	C	4257
15	Bsk Meadows Realty Partners Lp	124.8	R	319
16	Garbose Family 2012 Trust The	24.3	R	319
17	Garbose William M & Lynne L Tr	22.8	R	319
18	Cedarbrook Country Club	181.7	R	319
19	Mathers Road Lp	10.3	C	4276
20	Nutt James N Iii & Elizabeth C	22.3	R	319
21	Irons Steven T & Heather H	23.2	R	319
22	Campbell Judith Marcia Aka Marcia W	14.8	R	2900
23	Maine Merchant Bank Llc Trustee	14.9	R	2900
24	Shoemaker Marcy Abramson & Wolfson Nancy Abramson Etal	10.1	C	4261
25	Wings Field Preservation Assocs Lp	196.2	C	4261
26	Wissahickon School District	25.5	C	4261
27	Korman Bradley J & Pamela C	10.9	C	515
28	Hillman John K & Jocelyn A	12.3	C	515

has a establish a relationship with the landowner in the development of the trail could and consider seeking a right of first refusal should the owners wish to sell. The healthiest creek in the Wissahickon watershed, Prophecy Creek already contains 220.92 acres of preserved open space, consisting of Briar Hill, the Cheston Family Preserve, the Township's Prophecy Creek Park, and several private conservation easements. This partnership with non-profit Wissahickon Trails and generous landowners illustrates the tradition of partnerships that can be continued to meet open space conservation goals.

- The non-profit Wissahickon Trails owns and manages six preserves in Whitpain Township, all open to the public. The organization's mission involves preserving land in Montgomery County in the Wissahickon Watershed. The Township should consider continuing the long, successful partnership with Wissahickon Trails, that has already resulted in preserves, close to home, for Township residents. The Township could provide funding, at least partially, for some of the conservation easement and/or land acquisition costs for the high priority lands in the Prophecy Creek area. Ownership by a conservation organization lends multiple Township benefits. Specifically, the Township is relieved of ownership and land management obligations and meets local demand for open space at low public cost. In addition, land conservation in the Wissahickon watershed contributes to water quality and can reduce the Township's MS4 obligations under the Clean Water Act.
- Dawesfield, a Colonial Era historic site, is a Township Class 1 resource listed on the National Register. The tract, an historic site near Briar Hill Preserve, holds both historic significance and open space near other conserved lands. Small (less than 4 acres), historic sites require special expertise in historic preservation and adaptive reuse in order to preserve both the historic integrity and economic viability of the structures. The Township can explore opportunities for grants to underwrite consultants with expertise in historic resource preservation.
- Private golf courses and country clubs comprise 486.2 acres of open ground in the Township. While there is no indication that these tracts will be sold for development in the short term, the Township would be well served to develop relationships with the landowners, seizing opportunities for conservation, or development that conserves natural areas, should the owners wish to sell.
- With so little remaining, undeveloped land, any opportunity to add to the open space network should be evaluated. The criteria included in this chapter serve as a starting point for those discussion.

A description of the methods for conserving open space and criteria follows.

### *Methods for Conserving Open Space*

Where public support and financial resources exist, conserve additional open space. Criteria for land to be conserved follows at the end of this chapter. Township officials have many tools available to conserve open space. The four most effective methods:

#### **1. Purchase or Fee Simple Acquisition**

2. Conservation Easement
3. Lease
4. Dedication required by Land Use Regulations

1. **Purchase or Fee-Simple Acquisition.** The most common means of conserving open space is usually measured in “bucks and acres” commonly referred to as fee simple acquisition or outright purchase. As the landowner, the Township retains full control over how the property is managed and is therefore, the most common means for acquiring new parks and recreation facilities and for expanding existing parks. Acquisition should also be considered when a parcel contains a sensitive use. Potential examples of this may be, a natural area with important features, or a historic site, which would benefit from buffering and Township oversight.

Sometimes, townships face opportunities to acquire parcels they do not wish to own or manage in perpetuity. In this case, the Township may acquire the land, place trail and conservation easements on the property; ensuring its protection and then sell the property to a private owner. These are rare instances that put townships in the real estate business. When critical trail connections or important resources are at stake, this option is worth considering.

Whitpain Township may wish to consider placing conservation easements on parks and open spaces that they own to prevent their sale for profit. This is most apt during a period of robust development pressure or times of financial struggle for the Township. As easements restrict land disturbance, the restrictions should be established as part of a master planning and public input process that determines the best uses and layout for each park.

**Conservation Easements.** In addition to purchasing land outright, townships can also purchase conservation easements to meet local open space goals. A conservation easement limits certain uses on a property (development) to advance conservation purposes while keeping the land under private ownership. Conservation easements relieve the municipality of the burden of managing the land and the cost of maintaining it. They are often used to prohibit future subdivision and enabling the landowner to live on and maintain the property. Conservation easements are also frequently used to protect sensitive natural resources such as woodlands, wetlands, floodplains, and streams. They also establish trails alongside or through the resources, thereby allowing public access to an interconnected trail network. The Township would want to ensure that these easements permit the Township (or group responsible for the trail) to maintain the trails. Because the land remains in private ownership, the cost of purchasing the conservation easement is lower than the cost of purchasing the property outright.

As an example, Newlin Township, Chester County decided to pay the conservation easement preparation costs (appraisal, baseline inventory and legal documents) for those landowners who wish to donate the conservation easement. Whitpain Township has a long partnership with Wissahickon Trails, a local land conservancy qualified to assist with conservation easements. Continuing this partnership and assisting Wissahickon Trails with the costs of conservation easements can further Township open space goals, at low public cost.

Conservation easements are worth pursuing as they can conserve land and provide public benefits without burdening township resources for long term maintenance. However, there is one major drawback – the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), one of Pennsylvania’s primary conservation funders, is less likely to fund conservation easements than the fee simple purchase of land. In the Newlin Township, Chester County example, where the Township has adequate parkland for the rural, low density population, the Township chooses to use its open space referendum funding to pay for the costs associated with preparing documentation required for donated conservation easements. Informing residents of the ability to leave a conservation legacy, through donated conservation easements, is another way that Whitpain Township may conserve land at low public cost.

2. **Leases.** Leasing a property can be a useful option for the Township if a more permanent solution is not possible. In this case, the Township would sign an agreement to use the property, typically for a specific purpose or for accessibility, such as leasing a recreation field from an office park that no longer uses it. The lease may be indefinite or may have a specified term. In either scenario, the long term utility may be limited as lease agreements may be terminated by the owner and a change in ownership often causes a lease to terminate. Nonetheless, leases can be useful in certain situations where it is difficult for the Township to acquire an interest in the land.
3. **Land Use Regulations.** Appendix A discusses how natural areas and open space can be conserved as development occurs. Because Townships can seldom afford to purchase all the land they wish to own, this **Plan Update** reminds Whitpain Township to “buy the best and zone the rest.” The Township could rely on land use regulations to conserve some of the natural areas that residents enjoy, even as development occurs. On larger, already disturbed landscapes, such as golf courses and the airport, conservation subdivisions can allow compact development on a portion of the property. This would retain all of the wet, steep, and flooded land, plus half of the developable land as permanently protected open space. When the ordinances contain strong open space standards, a conservation subdivision gives the landowner full economic value. The required Township investment in open space conservation would be minimized.
4. **Leverage Financing.** The adoption of park, recreation, and open space priorities positions the Township to receive funding from primary funding agencies - the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR), Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and Montgomery County. However, wise townships understand that a small amount of local funding can be leveraged multiple times. For this reason, townships pursue open space referenda, where residents vote to support an Earned Income Tax (EIT) or bond issue for the purposes of acquiring open space up to 25% of the acquisition funds may be used to maintain the parkland purchased with the referendum funds.

Townships that place a referendum question on the ballot seldom do so without first gauging public support. For example, a survey of “super voters,” residents who consistently vote in every election, can be used to determine public attitudes towards funding for open space conservation, prior to placing the question on the election ballot. Where support for the referendum is high in the survey, Township officials have confidence the referendum

will pass. In Montgomery County, Upper Pottsgrove, New Hanover, Perkiomen, Skippack, Franconia, and Whitemarsh have dedicated taxes for open space acquisition. Upper Dublin passed an open space bond and Upper Merion passed both a tax and bond. Lower Frederick Township passed a referendum as recently as November 2020.

### *Criteria and Guidelines*

Considering how little undeveloped land remains in Whitpain Township, it is easy to assume that the Township should conserve every parcel it possibly can. Because Townships have many competing interests for scarce public funds, a fiscally prudent approach will include public discussion around established criteria and guidelines as they apply to the subject parcel. In some communities, it makes sense to establish criteria that result in a ranked order of priority parcels. However, due to the limited availability of land, Whitpain Township's conservation efforts may need to be more opportunistic, based more on current availability, willing landowners, and available funding. Therefore, the following criteria should be applied as guiding information, rather than as a ranking system.

## **OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION CRITERIA**

1. **Size - How large is the parcel being considered for conservation?** In Whitpain Township, size may not always be a determining factor, as few very large parcels remain. However, when a parcel smaller than ten acres is deemed an important conservation priority, keep in mind that state and county funders seldom rank small parcels highly. Additionally, parcels less than ten acres fail to qualify for Act 319, preferential tax treatment. Smaller parcels may need to be bundled together as a single conservation project in order to compete for grant funds.
2. **Landowner Willingness - Is the property available for sale and how willing are the landowners to sell or agree to an easement?** A willing landowner is necessary for any means of conservation to move forward. The Township should engage in discussions with landowners to determine their willingness, focusing their efforts where landowners are most interested in conservation. A formal outreach and education program, with assistance from a Township Open Space Review Board, appointed staff member, or a land conservancy, can build landowner relationships. Doing so helps to increase chances that landowners will turn to the Township before selling to developers.
3. **Trails - Does conservation of this parcel advance the Township wide trail system?** Trails are a high priority in Whitpain Township and continuity depends upon acquiring critical gaps, either in fee simple purchases or as easement. Trails can often be coupled with land conservation, by establishing trail easement on protected lands.
4. **Ecological Value - Does conservation of this parcel protect water quality and wildlife habitat?** Protection of stream quality is especially important in a suburbanized community, as continued development could further degrade water quality and attenuate flooding. Conserving water quality involves protecting natural areas; especially those in the headwaters or farthest reaches, while also protecting a wooded swath, or "riparian buffer" adjacent to streams. Forests and stream corridors are home to birds, reptiles, and small mammals as well. Preserving natural areas and land adjacent to streams also reduces the Township's financial obligations under the MS4 program. The Township benefits from the

preserves owned and managed by Wissahickon Trails, an organization whose participation in a project could elevate it to high priority status.

5. **Adjacency - Does conservation of this parcel fill in or round out the existing parks and recreation system?** Expanding existing parks makes good sense in terms of mitigating new maintenance responsibilities for Township staff. Such expansions can provide much needed space for additional facilities, such as pickle ball courts or a trail connection to a populated neighborhood.
6. **Pocket Parks - Does the parcel fulfill a need, in one of the four villages, for a community pocket park or village green?** In the denser villages within Whitpain Township, even a small green space can provide respite. When new infill and redevelopment occurs, the zoning ordinance can require small open space set aside so acquisition may not be necessary.
7. **Rare and endangered species - Does the parcel contain, or have the potential to contain a significant, threatened, rare or endangered plant or animal species as indicated by a PNDI (Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory ) review? PNDI** is an online service which identifies sites which may be home to rare, threatened, or endangered species. The service charges a fee (currently \$40) to assess a site, nearly instantly online. The Township should consider the results and whether identified species would necessitate conservation, or conversely, whether identified species, such as bog turtles, would make the site undevelopable, and essentially conserved without any further action or spending.
8. **Historic and Cultural Preservation - Does the parcel contain historic or culturally significant resources?** The Township maintains an inventory of historic resources and their presence on potential conservation sites warrants special attention regarding their conservation. Finding viable uses and stewards of historic buildings is as important as finding stewards of the land.

### *A Land Ethic*

Few factors influence conservation success more than a willing landowner. The Township should focus on properties whose owners are willing to discuss conservation. While townships may employ eminent domain, this tool should be reserved for extreme situations where the importance of the land outweighs the potential litigation and controversy of the eminent domain process.

Whitpain Township, and most communities, would be better investing in building a community land ethic. Working to make residents become more aware of their land resources and adopting the planning, programmatic, and regulatory mechanisms needed to protect these resources. Building this community land ethic involves leading by example, which Whitpain already does by conserving land and adopting conservation-minded ordinances. Local non-profits also play a role in educating residents about streams, woodlands, wildlife, and how residents can contribute to the quality of life in Whitpain. Township recreation staff can offer programs to adults and children highlighting special places in the Township. Honoring those who have voluntarily conserved their land is another way to showcase good practices and build a local land ethic.

## Conclusions

In 2011, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) issued a report *Return on Environment: The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania*. That report shows how communities that conserve open space:

- Increase property values by being close to protected open space.
- Avoid spending money to artificially replicate the vital environmental functions provided by protected open space.
- Save money from free or low-cost recreational activities on protected open space.
- Create jobs related to the open space.

With a population that supports open space and conservation, Whitpain Township stands poised to become “twice green” – a community with an interconnected open space network managed in a sustainable manner, enhancing the economic vitality of the community. Most of all, residents experience a high quality of life, made all the wonderful by parks, recreation, and open space so close to home.

# Stewardship Model: Armentrout Preserve

The Armentrout Preserve is an approximately 65-acre property in Whitpain Township, comprised of multiple parcels. Whitpain Township owns and manages approximately 45 acres, while Wissahickon Trails owns and manages approximately 20 acres. This assessment relates only to the portion which the Township owns. The property features a range of vegetation covers including forests, a shrubland/woodland, terrestrial meadow, stormwater basin, and wet meadow. A small intermittent stream flows northeast to southwest across the property. Historical aerial photographs show that much of the property was cleared for agriculture sometime prior to 1937. The patch of forest that exists along the southern boundary and stretches into the center of the preserve predates that clearing. The preserve is used for passive recreation, like walking and birding. The preserve includes a trail network, which provides access to much of the property, including the 20 acres owned by Wissahickon Trails. The trail system also connects to another parcel owned by Wissahickon Trails, further south on Morris Road.

## Plant Communities

Five plant communities were identified at the preserve. These were delineated based on cover type, dominant plants, and hydrologic conditions. Map x: xxxxx shows the location of the plant communities as well as notable stewardship features and issues.

### *Tuliptree—Beech—Maple Forest (+/-13.4 acres)*

The tuliptree—beech—maple forest is the oldest plant community on the site. Historical areas show that it predates the clearing prior to 1937. Tuliptree is the dominant canopy species. Invasive plants exist in low to moderate quantities in this area and are mostly concentrated along the edge of the community. This is likely due to the fact that there has been no timbering or other large-scale disturbance for decades. If allowed to continue to grow undisturbed, this area can transition to old growth forest, which is characterized by mature trees, abundant dead and downed wood, with pit and mound features. Old growth forest provides many benefits including diverse wildlife habitat and high levels of carbon storage. Due to the historic widespread timber harvesting in Pennsylvania, most forests in the region are too young to be considered old growth.

### *Mixed Hardwood Forest/Hedgerow (+/-12.6 acres)*

The mixed hardwood forest/hedgerow is located in areas that were previously cleared for agriculture. They are dominated by black walnut and tuliptree. These areas are heavily invaded, particularly in the shrub layer. A significant number of ash trees within this community are dying due to the effects of the emerald ash borer. This invasive beetle feeds on the cambium layer, beneath the bark, ultimately killing the trees.

### *Shrubland/Woodland (+/-3.3 acres)*

The shrubland/woodland borders the Wissahickon Trails property and their shrubland/woodland. The plant community is heavily colonized by a variety of invasive plants in the shrub layer and the invasive Bradford pear tree in the overstory. This area was previously cleared for agriculture, which likely led to the predominance of invasive plants. These invasive plants could spread from this area into the adjacent meadows and forests as well as into the Wissahickon Trails' property. This invaded area puts the more pristine areas at risk of degradation. The shrubland/woodland currently adds to the habitat diversity of the preserve, providing dense cover and food for birds and small mammals. Acting to restore the area to a native shrubland by removing invasive species and cultivating more native species would offer even greater benefits to wildlife.

#### *Terrestrial Meadows (+/-13.6 acres)*

The terrestrial meadows add diversity to the landscape, providing varied habitat for wildlife and pollinators. A mix of native plants populates the meadows, with varying quantities of invasive plants. The meadow closest to the parking lot is heavily invaded by bush-clover. All of the meadows have been invaded by Japanese Stiltgrass, a problem species found throughout the region.

#### *Wet Meadow and Detention Basin (+/-1.7 acres)*

The wet meadow and detention basin are high quality areas due to the diversity of native plants and relatively low impact from invasive species. This is likely because these native species were intentionally planted here after construction of the stormwater basin. These areas will require ongoing maintenance, such as tending the planted trees and their shelters, while regularly mowing the meadow area, in order to sustain the rich diversity of native plants. Encroachment of invasive plants from the surrounding areas is a concern for this community.

## Recommendations

Through discussions with the Township, it was determined that the conservation priorities are **passive recreation and sustainable native plant communities**. Maintaining the diversity of the plant communities and plant species within them will benefit wildlife by providing an array of food, nesting, and shelter options. Attracting more birds and wildlife will enrich the visitor experience, as they bring movement, life, sights, and sounds to the preserve. A more diverse plant community will further enhance the visitor experience by beautifying the preserve and providing a variety of scenic views. Furthermore, maintaining intact plant communities can protect water quality, improve air quality, and sequester carbon.

The greatest threats to the preserve are deer and invasive plants, which together, can compromise the sustainability of the forests and edge out native plants from all the communities. Invasive species can frequently outcompete our native species. Deer contribute to the problem by primarily eating native plants. Once the deer decimate the native plants, the invasive species can thrive with little competition. Controlling deer and invasive plants should be a high priority at the preserve. Erosion along the trails is the greatest threat to continued passive recreation, along with hazard trees, including the abundance of dying ash.

# CONNECT

The second theme of the Plan Update is “**Connect**”. Community is all about “connection”. During the public engagement process for this Plan Update, the importance of connections emerged in two ways. The first way was the physical aspects of connection with safe places to bicycle and walk. The second way was the connection of the community through programs, services, and events.

## Trails

With 12.25 miles of trails in place and another twelve miles slated for the future, Whitpain Township is in the process of creating a township wide network of safe places to bicycle and walk. This Plan Update provides a roadmap to improving conditions for bicycling and guidance to help make Whitpain Township’s vision for a safe, convenient, attractive, bike-friendly community a reality.

## Programs and Services

Having a sense of community unites us. Being a part of a community can make us feel as though we are a part of something greater than ourselves. It can give us opportunities to connect with people, makes us feel safe and secure, and gives us a feeling of belonging.. It's important for every person to have a sense of community. Various studies have shown the importance of recreation on one’s life, specifically in three aspects- physical health, mental health and improved quality of life.

- **Physical Health:** Recreational activities, especially outdoors, improve physical health by maintaining lower body fat percentages, lowering blood and cholesterol levels, increasing muscular strength, flexibility, muscular endurance, body composition and cardiovascular endurance. Overall it increases one’s stamina and energy level.
- **Mental Health:** Mental health is essential for overall physical health. Recreational activities help manage stress. Recreation provides a channel for releasing tension and anxiety thus facilitating emotional stability and resilience. Such activities help participants to become more self-reliant, empathetic, and self-disciplined.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** People who make recreation a priority are more likely to feel satisfied with their lives overall. The global pandemic has underscored that close-to-home parks and recreation are crucial to a community’s quality of life. During this crisis, people have turned to parks and recreation like never before—for fresh air, exercise, meditation, and a sense of peace.

The social bonds that people create in recreation programs and events have strong benefits via the connections they create: They improve lives; help build strong, safe and inclusive communities, and foster social interaction, volunteerism, civic pride, and aesthetics.

# Trails

## Safe Places to Bicycle for Fun, Fitness and Transportation

Over the past decade, Whitpain Township has built the beginnings of an impressive trail network. As a heavily developed, suburban community it couldn't have been easy. Now, many communities require trails to be implemented in new developments. But Whitpain is already built out, making it difficult to establish new trails. Even so, the township has found ways to build trails in their own rights of way, along utility easements, and through natural areas.

Whitpain has improved their own lands with trails and encouraged others to do the same. The Township built nearly a mile of trails in Centre Square Park. The Parks and Recreation Department worked with institutions, such as the Montgomery County Community College, to install trails on their campus. They've partnered with private businesses, such as Henkels & McCoy, to host trailheads, connecting trails and parking at their office building.

Not only has the Township implemented an impressive quantity of trails, but they have also provided quality, along with a variety of trail experiences. Many neighborhoods include sidewalks which give residents a safe place to enjoy a quick evening walk or a way to visit neighbors. The nature trails through the Township's open spaces and preserves, many of which link to the Wissahickon Trails, provide a place to enjoy peace and quiet and to connect with nature. The wide, paved trails along the township roads let residents run or bike in safety. They allow for covering greater distances during active recreation, commuting, or the tasks of daily living.

Whitpain Township is achieving success in building a connected trail system because township staff is doing it the right way – by planning first. The Township has already completed many plans which include trails recommendations. These include the **Trail Network Plan**, **Trail System Master Plan**, the **Township Comprehensive Plan**, and the **Walkability Study**. These plans laid the groundwork for an ample trail system, while identifying gaps and obstacles. This **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Update** does not supersede those plans, but instead builds on them. The recommendations of those plans are still valid. The recommendations in this plan fine tune and add to them.

Whitpain Township has already built an impressive trail system, especially for a heavily developed suburban community. By planning ahead, the Township is making the most of their opportunities, and encouraging others to help. The Township has given the residents places to play, exercise, travel, and enjoy peace and quiet. By continuing to do these things, Whitpain can make their already very good trail system into something great!

## Existing Trails

The Township currently contains approximately 12.25 miles of trails; including paved multi-use trails, earthen paths, and nature trails. Sidewalks are not included in this mileage but provide even more connections and safe places to walk. Additionally, trails just outside of Whitpain, in Plymouth, Upper and Lower Gwynedd, and Worcester Townships also connect to the Whitpain Township trail system. In many cases, these trails in other townships are just across the street. Most residents wouldn't know they've left the Township.

The twelve miles of trails, in conjunction with neighboring trails and sidewalks, nearly provide a continuous loop throughout the southern 2/3 of the Township. The Green Ribbon Trail, which skirts the Township's boundary, provides a continuous route through natural areas. It connects into the Crossways Preserve and Montgomery County Community College trails. West of MCCC, pedestrians and cyclists can use lightly traveled neighborhood streets to bring them to Wentz Run Park. The paved trails in Wentz Run Park and the Wentz Run Trail bring visitors out to Union Meeting Road, where sidewalks and new trails await. Then heading south on Township Line Road, a collection of sidewalks, on both sides of the street, bring travelers south to sidewalks along Norristown Road. The trail then continues along Narcissa Road through Wings Field. Travelers eventually enter Prophecy Creek Park, which connects to the trails in the Briar Hill Preserve.

This loop is nearly complete, with only a few minor remaining gaps west of MCCC, at the Reformation Church, and a segment of Union Meeting Road. One more difficult gap exists between the Briar Hill Preserve and the Green Ribbon Trail. Whitpain is already planning to close these gaps. Once this loop is complete, residents will be able to continuously walk, run or hike nearly 11 miles through the Township. During their hike, they'd be able to watch planes takeoff, sit quietly reflecting at Prophecy Creek, or run and play at Wentz Run Park. This loop would also allow many residents to walk to work as the paths pass many office buildings and centers of business.

In the northern third of the Township, a similar process is playing out as another [large](#) loop slowly takes shape. Again, the existing Green Ribbon Trail could provide one side of this loop. Sidewalks along the northwestern side of North Wales Road, just over the boundary in Worcester, offer another long stretch of trail. While they do not match the Circuit's layout exactly, these sidewalks essentially provide a route for the Liberty Bell Trail. The Township has recently constructed a mile of trail within the new Centre Square Park. These three trail segments provide great places to run, cycle or walk. The Township already has plans to connect these trails to create another continuous loop.

## Planned Trails

Whitpain Township continues to plan for new trails and seek public funding wherever possible to build them. Currently, an additional 5 miles of trails are expected to be completed by the end of 2024. These include the Union Meeting Road Trail and the Reformation Church Trail, which will fill gaps in the large southern township loop. At .75 miles in length, the Union Meeting Road Trail will

provide an important and substantial trail segment. It will essentially connect the Wentz Run Trail all the way down to the existing sidewalk system along East Township Line Road. The Reformation Church Trail is much smaller at only a quarter mile in length but provides an important connection. It will allow the residents in a few nearby neighborhoods to safely walk to the Wentz Run Trail, Wentz Run Park, the Township complex, Centre Square Park, and Mermaid Lake.

Two longer trail segments are planned in the northern portion of the Township, each of which relies heavily on public utilities and agencies. As PennDOT rebuilds Route 202, they are providing 3 miles of multi-use trail alongside the new road. This will allow pedestrians and cyclists to safely travel across the entire width of the Township and beyond into neighboring communities. Additionally, Whitpain is working with PECO to establish the PECO Trail, which would follow the powerlines and connect Centre Square Park to Wentz Run Park. The installation of these two trails would nearly complete the northern loop.

Only a gap in the proposed Liberty Bell Trail and another in the northernmost corner of the Township would remain in this northern loop. The Liberty Bell Trail gap could be filled with another segment constructed within a PECO right of way. The northern gap could be closed with the addition of a sidewalk from Acorn Lane to Morris Road. This stretch is within neighboring Upper Gwynedd Township, but it would allow residents of Whitpain and Upper Gwynedd to connect to the Green Ribbon Trail; thereby granting access to all of the Whitpain Township trails.

## Assessment

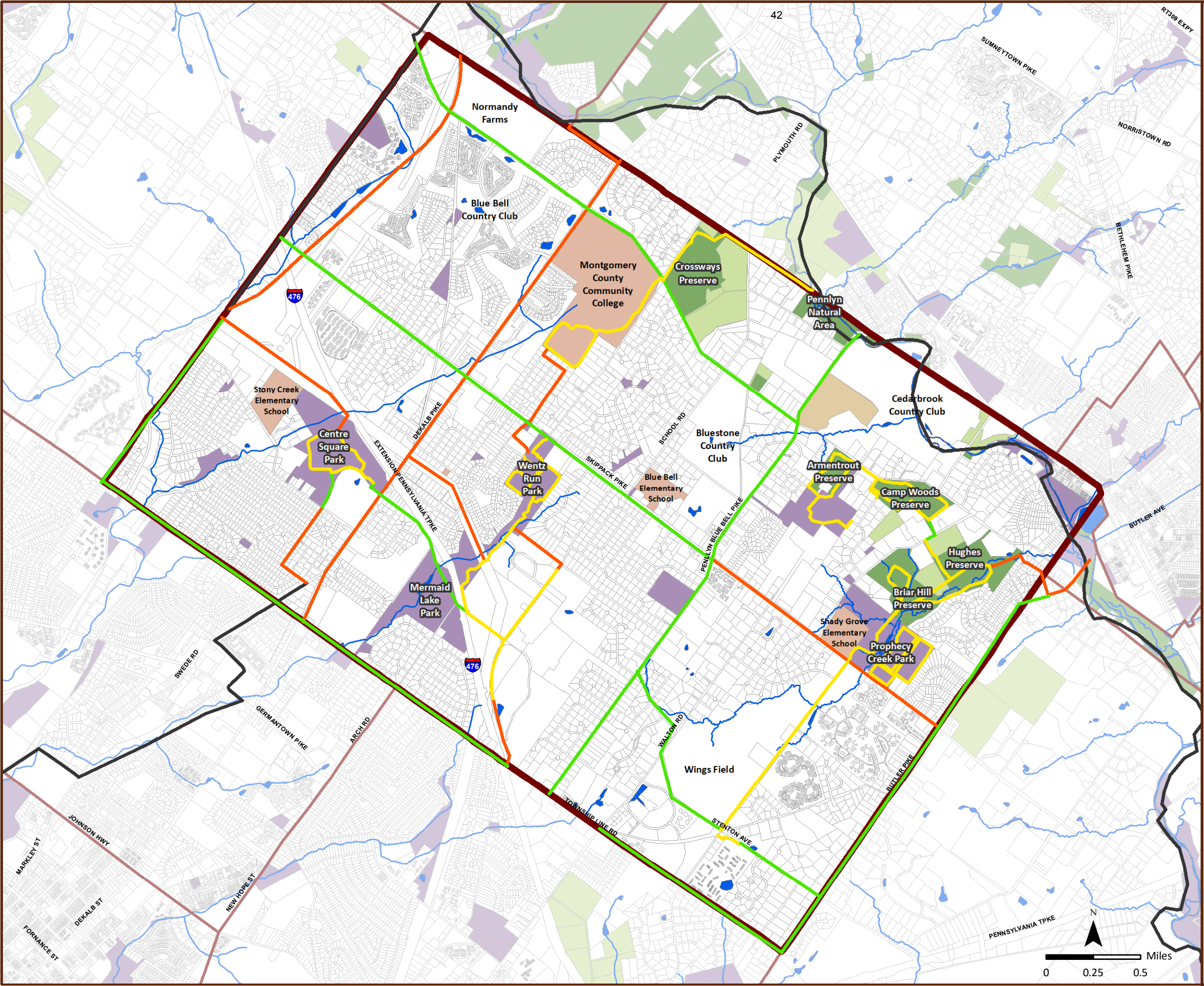
### What Works Well

A trail system being planned out and developed as well Whitpain's doesn't just happen by accident. Whitpain Township has used its strengths, determination, and partnerships to create a trail system that serves the residents well. It provides them with places to recreate, socialize, commute, and exercise. Whitpain should keep playing to these strengths in order to complete construction of its trail system.

#### *Planning: Expertise, Determination, and Dedication*

Planning and constructing trails is not easy. Municipalities must convince the public that these projects are worthwhile. They often have to deal with misinformation about crime and safety on trails. Once they convince the public, they have to figure out how to actually build the trails. Is there land available? Is that land suitable? Is it too wet? Is a trail feasible here? And once a new trail is designed, someone has to pay for it. The trail advocates must convince the leadership that the expense is worth it, and they likely need to apply for grants too. All of this takes hard work, dedication, and determination. Whitpain's Parks and Recreation Department has demonstrated these qualities in spades in their work planning this trail system.

#### *Partnerships and Relationships*



TRAILS

Whitpain Township  
Montgomery County, PA

Municipal Boundaries

Parcel Boundaries

Waterways

Regional Trails

Whitpain Trails

Existing

Planned

Newly Proposed

Public and Protected Lands

Ag Easements

Conservation Owned

Conservation Easements

Township Owned

Schools



1031 Palmers Mill Road, Media, PA 19063  
610-353-5587 | natlands.org

1. Parcel boundaries, roadways, and waterways from Montgomery County.
2. Public/Protected lands from WeConservePA and Montgomery County.
3. Trails from Montgomery County, Whitpain Township, and Natural Lands.

Compiled By: MEB 02/23/2021

Disclaimer: This map is not a survey. The information imparted with this map is meant to assist Natural Lands Trust, Inc., describe the placement of certain retained, reserved, or excluded rights and to calculate acreage figures. Property boundaries, while approximate, were established using the best available information, which may have included: surveys, tax maps, field mapping using G.P.S., and/or orthophotos. Natural Lands Trust, Inc., makes no representation as to the accuracy of said property lines (or any other lines), and no liability is assumed by reason of reliance hereon. Use of this map for other than its intended purpose requires the written consent of Natural Lands Trust, Inc.

Many municipalities feel that working with others complicates things too much. They choose to try to do it all themselves. But the truth is that most communities cannot do it all themselves. Whitpain has recognized this and created partnerships and relationships with local utilities, businesses, and non-profits. These relationships have led to the creation of trailheads, and miles of planned and existing trails. The strength of these relationships will continue to pay dividends to the Township's trail system and offer greater opportunities in the future.

## Challenges

Whitpain appears to have navigated these issues well in the past but will face three major challenges with the trail system in the coming years. These are maintenance in the face of increased use and changing conditions, the availability of funding, and the ability to implement difficult stretches of trails. Most communities that engage in trail building must face these challenges. Whitpain must continue to learn and build partnerships by staying active in the regional trail community.

### *Maintenance*

The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed us outdoors, not just to recreate, but also to exercise, socialize, and even work. Parks, trails, nature preserves, and other outdoor spaces, especially those open to the public free of charge, have experienced incredible increases in use and visitorship. This unexpected surge has gotten people out into nature, encouraged some to exercise more, and caused many to rethink how they get together with friends – all positive outcomes. However, all of these new visitors make it harder and even more important to perform proper maintenance.

More people means more trash. More dog walkers means more dog waste. More conflicts emerge, including those between cyclists and pedestrians. Increased use erodes nature trails and the sides of paved paths. Even when visitors behave responsibly, use leads to more maintenance and work for the Township. Trash cans fill faster and need to be emptied more often. It takes longer to mow trail sides when the trail is packed with people. Trailside amenities get more use and wear down more quickly. With an uncertain economy, also an effect of the pandemic, few communities or organizations are willing to hire more staff to maintain trails and other outdoor spaces. All of us who work to promote outdoor recreation and connections to nature hope that people will continue to keep getting outside, even after the pandemic is over, but we recognize that communities may need to recalibrate their needs and expectations for maintaining these spaces as more people continue to use them.

### *Sustainability*

Even if Whitpain Township manages to adjust to increased use and visitation, another longer term issue affects how to maintain trails, especially nature trails. Whether it is referred to as global warming, sea level rise, climate change or some other term, our natural conditions are changing. This is already evident at the Wentz Run Trail. The nearby stream has risen and become flashier, meaning that during storms the stream fills with much more water than usual and flows with greater power. This leads to more bank erosion and downstream sedimentation. More frequent flooding is causing the land around it to stay wetter for more of the year. Because of this extra moisture, portions of the Wentz Run Trail which were dry when it was created are now under

standing water for much of the year. Segments of the trail are in constant danger of being completely washed away in the next big storm. Destruction of the Wentz Run Trail would undo the hundreds or thousands of hours of hard work put in by Township staff and volunteers to create and maintain the trail, not to mention the tens of thousands of dollars spent on bridges, crossings, benches and other improvements. The Wentz Run Trail is a gem of a nature trail and an important link in the Township wide trail system. Losing it would be a tragic loss.

In general, the climate in the Philadelphia region is expected to continue to get warmer and wetter. Even minute changes in average temperature and rainfall can affect the native plants, which have evolved over thousands of years to adapt to our local climate. As many of our native species are pushed out, unable to adapt to a quickly changing climate, the gap is filled with aggressive, invasive species. The species of plants on either side of a trail may not seem important to trail maintenance at first glance. However, invasive species tend to grow more aggressively and spread more rapidly than our native species. Invasive species typically have few, if any, natural predators. Our native animals don't eat them. When these plants are allowed to establish and then spread, they encroach on trails more quickly, meaning that staff and volunteers need to spend even more time trimming branches and clearing plants just to keep a trail from becoming overgrown.

### *Funding*

Another outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic may be to make trail funding, which is already competitive and difficult to obtain, even more challenging. As communities grapple with the increased use and visitation, more will likely turn to county, state, and federal grants to support their efforts. Whitpain has successfully used grant funding in the past and is currently either using or pursuing funds from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and Montgomery County 2040. Other funding sources include PennDOT and the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. As Whitpain builds out their major trail corridors and establishes long stretches of trails, the Township may become a victim of their own success. Funders may be less willing to provide money for shorter segments and minor connectors. Whitpain may need to finance more of these projects with their own funds in the future.

### *Creating Connections: Developed Land and Physical Features*

Whitpain is doing a great job in establishing and connecting trails throughout the community. Residents can choose from multiple stretches of connected trails, paths, and sidewalks that reach over one mile. The combination of the Green Ribbon Trail, the Crossways Trail, and the MCCC trail give residents a three-mile trail. A wonderful community amenity! However, the Township is now faced with the challenge of connecting all of these segments to each other and providing more trails to allow residents to walk or ride to the trail system.

Every front door should be a trailhead! Residents want safe places to walk and bicycle. People should be able to access the local and regional trail system without getting in their cars. Some neighborhoods in Whitpain were built with sidewalks, but not all. Many residents can already walk to their local parks and trails, but certainly not everyone. Whitpain's greatest challenge will be to work within the confines of an already heavily developed community, where little open land remains, to make the remaining trail connections.

## Opportunities

Whitpain Township has already shown an impressive ability to work with other organizations, businesses, and utilities. They've also connected their own trail system to those of those in the surrounding municipalities. Their ability and willingness to work with others will continue to provide the greatest opportunities for planning and building more trails. Three obvious potential partners exist – Wissahickon Trails, PECO, and the local business community. Additionally, new parks have also provided opportunities for building out the trail system. Whitpain has already established nearly a mile of trail at the new Centre Square Park and Mermaid Park offers a similar opportunity.

### *Wissahickon Trails*

This local non-profit, dedicated to conserving natural areas and providing trails to connect people to nature, is Whitpain's greatest ally in creating a Township wide trail system. Their existing trails in the Briar Hills, Camp Woods, and Armentrout Preserves can provide connections to neighborhoods and other trails. But more importantly, Wissahickon Trails can provide a more accessible public face to the trail building effort. Through no fault of Whitpain Township, some residents may be more trusting of a non-profit than they are of government. Residents may be more willing to talk or meet with Wissahickon Trails. They may be more open to discussing trail easements with a non-profit organization, as they may view them as more worthy of their charity or their time. The general public can at times be fearful, or even resentful, of government and may hesitate to help.

For these reasons, Whitpain Township should continue to work with Wissahickon Trails and strengthen their relationship. The Township and Wissahickon Trails share the goal of establishing more trails and connecting residents to the outdoors. It's natural that they work together. As Wissahickon Trails is already well established in the community, it's likely that they have strong relationships with some of the residents, especially those who are neighbors to the Preserves. Whitpain should take advantage of these relationships and work together with Wissahickon Trails.

Continued collaboration would be mutually beneficial. Whitpain has control over rights of way and has access to technical services such as engineering. Wissahickon Trails owns land and has strong relationships within the community. This partnership could help to advance one shared goal in particular – connecting the Prophecy Creek and Briar Hill trails to the Green Ribbon Trail. It will be difficult to make this connection as homes and streets exist between the two trails. But together, Whitpain Township and Wissahickon Trails, likely with assistance from Montgomery County and PennDOT, can make the connection.

### *Local Businesses and Institutions*

Whitpain has already demonstrated its ability to work with local businesses, as they have successfully partnered with Henkels & McCoy to establish a trailhead, parking, and a connector trail on their property. These all serve the Wentz Run Trail. As the Township continues to build out the trail system, they will need to provide more trailheads and trail related amenities. The Township

parks provide obvious locations, but office buildings, churches, schools, and commercial areas offer additional opportunities.

The reconstruction of Route 202 provides a particularly interesting opportunity. PennDOT is currently reconstructing the road and providing an accompanying trail. Route 202 is lined with retail and commercial uses. These encompass national chains like CVS and Giant, intermixed with locally owned mom and pop restaurants, gyms, service providers, and other shops. All of these businesses would benefit from increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic, especially if that traffic is encouraged to stop at their location. Businesses here may be interested in sponsoring or donating amenities. This could include bicycle pump and mechanic stations, bottle fillers, vending machines catering to cyclists or runners, or even kiosks or signage.

CVS has provided a precedent in nearby Lower Merion Township. Constructed at the foot of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, CVS has provided parking dedicated to trail users, benches, bike racks, and attractive landscaping. The extra-wide sidewalk through the CVS site also serves as an extension of the trail. These improvements were implemented at the time of CVS construction. Whitpain should similarly work with developers to provide similar amenities. CVS, trail users and the township have all benefitted from this arrangement.

### *PECO*

Our local gas and electricity provider has necessarily created long stretches of undeveloped land across the region, housing the towers and electric lines which power our homes, schools, and businesses. While the towers and substations can be an eyesore, the linear properties are ideal for establishing trails and should be viewed as an opportunity. Whitpain has already planned trails within PECO owned lands and has plans to construct one segment promptly. In addition to the trails themselves, Whitpain could consider working with PECO to actively manage and program more of this land. The meadow within PECO's land provides a wonderful change of scenery for the Wentz Run Trail. Meadows and shrublands could be created in more of PECO's land, providing better habitats, greater beauty, and improved stormwater management, along with other benefits. These landscape improvements would also make these trail corridors into more of a place, rather than just remnant land.

### *New Parks*

It is rare for communities that are nearly fully developed to have the opportunity to create a new park. Whitpain, though, has managed to acquire land for not one, but three new parks in implementing the previous Parks and Recreation Plan. Prophecy Creek has two trails including the 2.75 mile Prophecy Creek Park Trail and the 1.25 mile Briar Hill Trail. Centre Square Park now includes nearly a mile of new trail and provides a link in the Township wide trail system. Mermaid Park is currently in the planning stage and can also accommodate loop trails and connections. The Township wide trail plan could be revised to propose trails along Jolly Road to connect the park to the nearby Union Meeting Road Trail to the south, and to Centre Square Park to the north. Trails, paths, and sidewalks can also be created to connect the park to the surrounding neighborhoods.

### *Overall Trail System Recommendation*

Continue to implement the existing trail plans, including the **Walkability Study** (2019), the **Trail Network Plan** (2013), the **Master Trails Plan** (2017) and the **Comprehensive Plan - Whitpain 2035: 4 Villages Within a Community** (2016). These plans contain maps and recommendations, which build the core of the proposed trail system and make connections between neighborhoods, villages, parks, open spaces, and recreation areas. Many of the recommended trails have been implemented, with more connections and trails in progress.

#### *Major Trail Addition*

Add a trail segment along the northern section of Skippack Pike to connect to the villages (comp plan theme) and provide a north/south trail. The Township currently has many east and west trails planned, but few north and south trails. The **Walkability Study** identifies this segment of Skippack Pike as a “missing link” (p.33). A trail here would signal to people entering the Township that Whitpain cares about trails and works to provide bike and pedestrian access to neighborhoods and commercial areas. A combination of trails and sidewalks along this stretch of Skippack Pike would connect currently isolated neighborhoods to parks, libraries, banks, restaurants, and other shops. Additionally, if landscaping and other improvements are included, implementation of a trail could become part of a streetscape beautification project.

#### *Implement the Liberty Bell Trail*

The Liberty Bell Trail is already shown on other township plans. It is also part of the Circuit, the regional trail system administered by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. Circuit level trails are typically intended to be multi-modal, serving pedestrians and cyclists for recreation and travel. They are usually a minimum of 10’ in width. Applications for grants for Circuit Trails often rise to the top of funders’ lists, as the Circuit is considered regionally important. By implementing a Circuit Trail, it may also be possible to unlock additional funding for connecting trails, as they would help bring more people onto the Circuit. In addition, the Liberty Bell Trail would provide a key east and west trail along the northwestern boundary of the Township. This would connect the community to two parks and two schools.

#### *Provide Additional Secondary Trails*

In plans and on the ground, Whitpain has a solid system of core trails that provide large trail loops. However, in order to create more access to the core connector trails for residents, more secondary trails should be planned. These segments may include:

- Stenton Avenue - from Butler Pike to Penllyn Blue Bell Pike
- Penllyn Blue Bell Pike – from Township Line Road South to the Green Ribbon Trail
- Butler Pike – from Township Line Road South to the Prophecy Creek Trail
- Township Line Rd South along the length of the Township (in partnership with Plymouth and East Norriton Townships).

Cursory field investigations along these roads reveal physical space for trails, but further study would be required to determine whether sufficient right-of-way exists and whether utilities or other existing features would create obstacles.

- Create neighborhood and township level trails to connect residents to township parks, with an initial emphasis on Mermaid Lake Park. Whitpain, like most developed, suburban communities is challenged to provide safe access to the township parks. By connecting parks to neighborhoods with trails, it allows residents to walk or bicycle, instead of getting into their cars. Mermaid Lake Park will be the focus of a robust public planning during the park master planning process. Now is the time to begin planning for trails that will provide access to the four different neighborhoods, which surround the park. Additionally, Mermaid Lake Park will be an important park for residents throughout the Township, so it is also necessary to complete the planned connection to the Wentz Run Trail and other township trails.
- Connect neighborhoods to parks. Residents would benefit from neighborhood trails connecting to parks. For example, the community directly southeast of Wentz Run Park, appears to have no direct access to the park. Residents would be required to walk out of the neighborhood, onto Skippack Pike and back into the park. A trail directly into the park would make for easier access and an overall greater likelihood that residents patronize the park and its trails.
- Work with the Wissahickon Trails Preserves to better connect the nature trails in the southeastern portion of the township. Prophecy Creek, Briar Hill, Camp Woods, Armentrout Preserve, and Walbridge Farm are beautiful protected natural areas. Many of which feature trails. Additionally, the Green Ribbon Trail is nearby. However, these nature trails are not connected and there are gaps between them, which could be closed to form a larger nature trail circuit. The Township does not have the ability to build or maintain more nature trails. But, partnerships with WVWA could include applying for grants together, coordinate planning for future trails and easements, or providing design services such as engineering for safe pedestrian crossings and stormwater management.
- Expand the nature trails beyond the Wissahickon Trails Preserves' lands and the Wentz Run Trail. The Township could coordinate with homeowners associations, private landowners, and semi-public landowners, like the school district and churches, to provide nature trails on their lands. This second layer of nature trails throughout the township would provide a different experience and more opportunities for residents to connect to nature closer to their homes.
- Match trail materials and character to surrounding aesthetics. Trail materials and amenities should first and foremost meet the needs of the proposed trail use but should also be tailored to match the character and aesthetics of the surrounding community. Where a trail is needed to extend an existing sidewalk, or connect to a typical suburban neighborhood, white concrete, or a traditional sidewalk might be most appropriate. Where the neighborhood is more wooded and has a more rustic character, natural materials such as crushed stone or decomposed granite may be more appropriate. The materials must meet the needs of the proposed trail use. There is enough variety in available materials that black asphalt should not always need be the default choice.

#### *Wentz Run Trail Maintenance*

Wentz Run Trail is an important link in Whitpain Township's wide trail network. It connects Wentz Run Park to nearby neighborhoods, businesses, parks, other trails, and nature preserves. Once it is fully built out, it will stretch all the way across the Township! This segment is really enjoyable and includes many features of good trail planning. It includes areas where the trail user can interact with others and be part of the action at the park, but also offers the quiet solitude of the woodlands. It features shade and enclosure within those woodlands, before leading hikers into the wide open and sunny meadows within the PECO row. The trail has interest along its circuitous route, showing hikers the Wentz Run, downed trees, a mix of woodland species, but doesn't meander so much as to make the walk tedious. Much of the trail is very wet, which makes sense as it follows a creek and winds between basins attached to the surrounding office complexes. Additionally, changes to weather which have brought more rain over the past few years have led to more saturated soil, more erosion, and more downed trees. This makes it an even greater challenge to maintain the trail. The following recommendations refer to the section of the trail which currently exists as a nature trail, between Wentz Run Park and the Henkels & McCoy parking lot.

- **Reroute (or close) the section of the trail which is frequently impassable due to pooling water.** It looks like an alternate route has been created by the Township or by users who want to bypass the wet area. This section of the trail should be formally rerouted so that visitors don't take it upon themselves to make more social trails, which can lead to erosion and destruction of habitat. The existing route should be formally and effectively closed, so that visitors do not continue to use it.
- **Install bog bridges over shorter wet sections, with wet tolerant plantings alongside.** Bog bridges are simple wooden structures that the Township public works department, boy scouts, or other volunteers could likely construct and install. (Photo to be included)
- **Consider rebuilding the trail as a turnpike for longer wet sections which cannot be relocated or crossed with bog bridges.** A turnpike is basically a raised stone path which keeps the trail above water and permits water to infiltrate the trail surface and the ground below it or is sloped to drain water off the sides of the trail. Turnpikes can also be built to allow for low volumes of water to flow through them, perpendicular to the trail, through pipes or stone specified for this purpose. (Photo to be included)
- **Replace the one mismatched bench.** Like in all parks, it is important to use consistent materials to demonstrate care and maintenance. If Whitpain doesn't have a standard bench specification for all of their parks, the bench used throughout Wentz Run Park could be used along the trail as well.
- **Create a more formal transition where the natural surface trail meets the paved trail.** Heavy foot traffic erodes this area and causes compaction of the soil. It may be beneficial to extend paving from the park loop section of the trail to the edge of the woods. This would better accommodate maintenance vehicles. Additionally, plantings could extend the woodlands into the park, making for a more comfortable transition from the manicured park into the natural woodlands.

## Conclusions

Safe places to walk and bicycle are important to the residents as evident in the public outreach findings for this plan update. In the survey, 1,704 respondents selected sidewalks and bicycle trails as the kind of improvements they would like to see. In addition to this Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Update, the Township will also be implementing the Walkability Study to expand and improve sidewalk connections,

Whitpain is constructing a township wide trail system that would make many communities envious. The existing trails connect neighborhoods to parks and more are planned or slated for construction. They let people run and bicycle safely. They bring people both into nature and to work. Soon trails will bring residents to their favorite restaurants and stores too. The trail system brings people together, giving them another way to socialize outside. People use them not just to exercise, but to get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The combination of quiet nature trails, recreational paths in the parks, and multi-use trails winding through the Township provide something for everyone. Whitpain is doing an excellent job connecting their residents with these trails. In order to finish the job and create a truly great trail system, Whitpain just needs to keep doing what they've been doing. Stay dedicated and determined, work with others, and explore creative possibilities to keep providing new trails and give the residents one of the best trail systems in the region!

# Programs and Services

## Recreation:

### Adds years to your life and life to your years

The recreation program assessment provides a perspective on township recreation programs and services by identifying strengths, challenges, and opportunities. As part of the plan update, the consulting team held work sessions with the Parks and Recreation Management and programming team. They reviewed program information collected by the Department, website content, program descriptions, and information provided by other recreation sources, such as community organized sports leagues. In addition, information from two public opinion surveys helped to advise the program analysis. These included both a general public opinion survey for the **Parks, Recreation Open Space, and Trail Plan Update** and a “Best Customer Survey,” in which, a data base of 4,300 people who registered for organized programs provided by the Parks and Recreation Department.

#### Excellence in Programming

The Department is a three-time winner in **Excellence in Programming**. This is statewide recognition from the Pennsylvania Recreation & Park Society.

## Recreation Program Framework

The Whitpain Township Parks and Recreation Department functions in four ways to ensure that the public has a variety of recreation opportunities available. Although the Department’s role in the provision of organized recreation programs is the most visible and recognized, all four roles require the expertise and diligent, ongoing commitment of staff time.

- Direct provider of organized programs and services.
- Facilitator of recreation programs offered by other providers.
- Provider of recreation facilities used by other organizations for community recreation.
- Source of information about recreation programs, services, facilities, and opportunities.

#### *Parks and Recreation Department Programs*

The Whitpain Township Parks and Recreation Department provides a broad range of recreation programs for people of all ages. About 4,000 program hours are totaled, annually. The Assistant Parks and Recreation Director and the Program Coordinator, with the Director pitching in where needed, are responsible for all organized township-sponsored recreation. The Department has seven core program areas based upon the following:

- The public expects these core recreation program areas to be provided in Whitpain Township.

- These core areas constitute the majority of the program staff's work on organized programs.
- They generate revenue and offset costs.
- They offer widespread appeal to the community at large.
- The programs are offered most of the year.
- Facilities are available to support these programs.

#### Core Program Areas

- Summer Camps
- Special Events
- Pre-School Programs
- Youth Specialty Programs
- Youth Sports
- Adult Programs
- Dog Park
- Trips
- Discount Tickets

#### *Summer Camps*

Summer Camps are a major program of the Department, running in the summer for seven weeks. Summer camp offers important opportunities for healthy living activities, and education during the "summer slide". Participants develop skills to last a lifetime including leadership, conflict resolution, cooperation, communication, self-confidence, and social competence.

#### *Special Events*

Special events are the signature community happenings rated highly by the public. They build a sense of community and pride for the people living in Whitpain Township. These events provide multi-generational experiences in a safe and fun environment. Also offering the opportunity for social interaction and experiencing the parks.

- Big Rig Round-Up - Big Rig Round-Up
- Community Yard Sale – Two events annually
- Daddy Daughter Dance – Waiting List with maximum attendance at 165.
- Hayrides at Prophecy Creek
- Stories in the Park
- Summer Concert and Movie Series – 10 major events. Movie attendance is as large as 1,000. Concert attendance ranges from 700 to 1200.
- Whitpain Community Festival – Signature community event
- Whitpain Golf Classic - Fundraiser
- Barktoberfest - Halloween Dog Costume Contest

#### *Pre-School Programs*

Preschool programs are important for both the preschoolers, experiencing their first socialization, as well as the parents and care-givers in reducing their isolation while forming new contacts and friendships. Includes:

- Basketball
- Jumpstart Sports: Soccer and T-Ball
- USSI Parent and Me Sports Squirts, Soccer Squirts, and Multi-Sports Squirts
- Age groups for 2-3 and 3-5 years of age

- Park N' Tots - Theme days, a variety of fun games, sports, and arts & crafts. Campers enjoy exploring the nature trail, playing in the sprinkler, and time on the playground. Excellent introduction to summer camp.

### *Youth Specialty Camps*

Specialty camps provide youth an important alternative to screen time with the opportunity to socialize, encouraging better physical, emotional, and mental health.

Youth Specialty Camps include:

- American Red Cross Babysitting Course
- Bricks for Kidz
- Engineering for Kids Day Camp
- Floral Workshops
- Mad Science Camp
- Spring Break Fun Days with Mad Science Camp
- Theater Horizon Drama Camp – Two week-long sessions
- GeoVentures – Adventure Squad Junior Camp and Geocaching Camp
- Super Heroes Camp

### *Youth Sports*

Participation in sports helps with the development of the body and mind, while promoting lifelong interests, teamwork, and positive self-esteem. Department sports encourage teamwork, learning, and fun first with competition second. The Department strongly supports children in trying a variety of sports, in a supportive and fun environment, to see what they like rather than specializing in just one.

- Basketball
- Sand Volleyball
- Lil Sports
- No School Fun Day
- Tennis – 10 Years and Under
- Tennis – Jr. Groups Lessons and Drill and Match Play
- Tennis - Jr. team
- USSI Multi-Sports
- USSI Soccer

### *Adult Programs*

Many of the adult programs are targeted to fitness and socialization. These activities help participants to be healthier, happier, less isolated, less stressed, and help with sleep too.

- Adult Softball League
- Essential Oils Workshops
- Floral Garden Workshops
- Gardening Webinars

- Hot Rocks Fine Art
- Meal Prep 101
- Medicare Seminar
- Tennis – 18 different programs up to eight weeks each: Individual Lessons, Fundamentals if Tennis Workshop, Tennis Intermediate Workshop, Round Robin Tennis, Tennis for Fitness
- Whitpain Walkers
- Weight Loss for Busy Women
- Yoga – Five, eight-week programs
- Zumba – Five, eight-week programs

### *Discount Tickets*

During non-COVID times, discount tickets to movie theaters, amusement parks, ski areas, aquariums, museums, and other venues are available. This enables families and friends to travel at their own discretion and convenience to entertainment venues with significant cost savings.

## Programs Offered by Other Providers

### *Independent Contractors*

The Parks and Recreation Department advances recreation opportunities for the residents exponentially, by facilitating programs offered by other providers. Collaboration with about 20 independent contractors enables the Department to offer 40 – 45 additional programs throughout the year. These are offered in township parks or located at the contractors' venues. The Department actively solicits proposals from independent contractors who offer a one-page description of their program. If desired, the Department enters into an agreement with the contractor, advertises the programs, provides registration, and arranges an agreed upon fee split between the Township and the contractor.

### *Organized Sports Leagues*

The Township partners with three organized sports leagues in the provision of community organized sports: WRA (Whitpain Recreation Association), Ambler/Whitpain Football and WissLax.

**WRA** offers baseball, girls' softball, basketball, field hockey, and soccer. Both recreational and travel sports are included.

Table 5. Sports Leagues in Whitpain Township		
Sport	Season	Players
<b>Softball</b>	Spring Softball	95
	Fall Softball	43
	Winter Clinics	21
<b>Soccer</b>	Fall Travel Soccer	468
	Winter Travel Soccer	200
	Spring Travel Soccer	200
	Fall IM Soccer	1360
	Winter IM Soccer	250
	Spring IM Soccer	252
	Top Soccer	20
<b>Field Hockey</b>	Indoor Field Hockey	147
	Outdoor Field Hockey	378
<b>Basketball</b>	Travel Basketball	138
	IM Basketball	850
	Summer Basketball	100
<b>Baseball</b>	Fall Baseball	155
	Spring Baseball	430
	Summer Baseball	225
	Buddy Ball	25
	Winter Clinics	65
<b>Total</b>		5,422

**WissLax** is the Wissahickon Lacrosse Club. The club serves families from the Wissahickon, North Penn, and Norristown school districts in their 3rd-8th grade programs. Participation includes:

- Spring Lacrosse: 222
- Summer Scrimmages: 45
- Fall Lacrosse: 105

**Ambler Whitpain Football** - Ambler Whitpain Trojans is a nonprofit organization that promote youth football and cheerleading for children ages 3-15. Participation includes:

- Football: 160
- Cheerleading: 60

## Other Providers of Recreation Opportunities

In addition to the recreation facilities and programs provided by the Township, the residents have many other choices for recreation close to home. These include the following.

### *Wissahickon Valley Public Library*

The Library offers a wide variety of programs in its facility. These include programs for all ages groups with activities such as chess club, book clubs, homework help, arts, crafts, and special events. The Parks and Recreation Department used this space at one time for public recreation programs, but library programming has grown to the extent that the space is no longer available.

### *Senior Adult Activities Center (SAAC) of Montgomery County*

People 50 years of age and older can purchase a \$30 annual membership. Located in Ambler and serving Whitpain residents, SAAC is open weekdays from 8:00 – 4:00. Activities include exercise, enrichment, games, special events, educational programs, and lunch.

### *Montgomery County Community College*

MCCC offers public events and programs in addition to educational degree and certificate programs. The College provides for the recreational use of its facilities such as the Montgomery County Senior Games and Whitpain Township's Festival.

### *Wissahickon School District*

The School District offers after school programs, senior citizen programs, and the public recreational use of school facilities by the Parks and Recreation Department and other community based organizations such as organized sports. The Wissahickon Natatorium, constructed in 2018 in the High School, has a ten lane 25 yard pool. The public can use the pool for lap swimming and the competitive swimming program.

### *Other Private, Non-Profit and Public Recreation Facilities*

Residents use other private, non-profit and public recreation facilities in the area. These include the Greater Plymouth Community Center, Boys & Girls Club, Ambler YM/YWCA, Cedarbrook Country Club, Blue Bell Country Club, Bluestone Country Club, Whitpain Greens Swim Club.

## Participation: Parks & Recreation Department Programs

The Parks and Recreation Department tracks its program participation via MyRec and observations during programs and events. Since 2020/21 were so impacted by COVID, the 2019 participation

figures are the most current available. The Parks and Recreation Department has about 15,000 program participants in 2,500 different program sessions totally 4,000 hours.

Table 6. Program Participation Metrics 2019			
Special Events	Participant Number	Core Programs	Participant Number
Big Rig	1,000+	Adult Programs	356
Drive in Movies	1,000+	Dog Park	217
Camp Carnival	500	Pre-School Programs	110
Daddy Daughter Dance	167 Waiting List	Trips	59
Golf	142	Youth Sports	258
Movies	800+	Youth Specialty Camps	89
Concerts	3,000+	Day Camp (Grades 1-5)	215
Festival	7,500	Tracers Grades 6-8)	100
		Park N' Tots	30 (Wait List)
TOTAL	13,981	TOTAL	1,434

### *Program Life Cycle*

Programs are stable in special events, summer camp, and youth specialty camps. The Department tries new programs every year in the dog park, adult programs, and pre-school programs. These new events result in about 10 -15 percent cancellation rate, which is right on target as the Department should be experimenting with new public recreation offerings. Cancellations are due to newness and perhaps other factors such as date, time, or price. Some programs have been retired and then returned to service with adaptations to meet new public interests. Space and location limitations force waiting lists such as Park N' Tots and the Daddy Daughter Dance. It is important for the Department to continue to innovate with programs and services in order to stay relevant in the community. The Department should monitor participation rates for programs that are introduced, growing, stabilized, and declining; in order to provide the right mix of new and treasured programs aligned with community needs and interests.

### *Age Group Analysis*

The Township's special events serve people of all ages. Multi-generation families are among the most avid participants in these events. In the other core program areas, the Township focuses on children ages five through 12, families, and active adults primarily in sports. Teens, young adults, and active aging seniors are most in need of additional recreation programs and services.

### *Program Classification*

The public opinion surveys found that the Department's "best" customers are generally satisfied with the programs offered but would like more opportunities if facilities were available for year-round, indoor programs. Additionally, park facilities for sports such as pickleball were also requested. Two major recreation program areas should be expanded and included as core program areas: nature and fitness.

### *Innovation*

The Department should be offering between 70 percent and 90 percent of programs that have been offered previously. About 10 percent to 30 percent should be new and innovative programs. Cancellation rates are an important tool to judge innovation and the program life cycle. For previously offered classes, the cancellation rate should be under 15 percent. The cancellation rate for new programs should be between 10 and 30 percent. The overall departmental program cancellation rate should be not more than 15 percent. The cancellation rate is a benchmark enabling the department to explore reasons for the cancellations such as location, time, day, price, and lack of interest. A cancellation rate of 15 percent should be regarded as a healthy measurement of innovation. The Department's cancellation rates fall largely in the Adult and Preschool program classes as expected. These are the two areas in which the Department focuses on innovative offerings. About 80 percent of Adult Program offerings are previously offered programs. About 20 percent are newly offered. Of the 40 program sessions, four were cancelled for a 10 percent cancellation rate. These numbers are all within the program targets of innovation, building upon previous programs and cancellations due to innovation related factors. Four of the ten pre-school programs were cancelled for a 40 percent cancellation rate. While higher this is still acceptable because pre-school programs are newer and operating within challenging legal restrictions and limited space availability.

### *Promotion and Presence*

The Parks and Recreation Department has a strong presence in social media. This is critically important. The Department's Facebook page has 2,661 followers. This presence is exemplified by more than 11,000 views just for the movie "Frozen". The social media work needs to continue and be an essential responsibility. The trend is toward having staff designated just for social media and promotion. In Whitpain, it is one responsibility among many for the program staff.

## Program Venues

Whitpain Township recreation programs are provided in Wentz Run Park, Prophecy Creek Park, Centre Square Park, Stony Creek Sports Park, Wissahickon School District schools, and Montgomery Community College. Aside from the building in Centre Square Park and the Manor house, which are primarily used for the WRA and special events, respectively, the Township does not have any indoor recreation facilities.

## Cost Recovery

The Parks and Recreation Department generates about \$520,000 annually in non-tax revenues through fees, charges, and rentals. The Program budget of \$388,434 combined with the Administration budget of \$407,425 equals \$795,859. This is a cost recovery rate of 67 percent from the Administration and Program budget. When the maintenance budget of 674,837 is added, the total operating budget is \$1,583,271. The cost recovery rate is 36 percent. This is higher than the national average of 22.9 percent. (2) It is important to note that the Department does not have any of the facilities usually associated with revenue generating such as camping, skating

(2) Ibid. NRPA.

rinks, aquatics facilities, or recreation centers. The operating budget also includes significant annual donations of \$60,000 to community sports organizations.

### *Pricing*

Pricing policies over the years have been stable leading to the high cost recovery rate; despite the facilities the Department has to work with. Cost recovery is the primary goal, which includes direct costs for instructors or recreation leaders, materials, and supplies. Cost recovery can also include factors such as the cost of advertising and outreach, facility maintenance, and administrative time. The program staff should continue to monitor pricing with the primary goal of cost recovery. Consideration for increasing prices should be in accordance with other factors such as, consideration of the program participants' ability to pay and competition in the area. This is particularly important should indoor recreation facilities be developed with respect to the nearby Greater Plymouth Community Center.

## Recreation Trends

1. **Sustainability** - Fun, socializing, health, and fitness cannot come at the expense of fresh air and clean water. Ideally, the township's parks, recreation facilities, trails, and open spaces will be developed, improved and maintained also to help nurture the environment.
2. **Accessibility** - Inclusive design and programming helps ensure everyone in the community feel welcome.
3. **Health and fitness.** Park and recreation programs have begun to take a more active role in community health and fitness.
4. **Generational Programming.** Park and recreation programs are more tuned in that other organizations to the specific needs of different age segments of the population. There has been a big increase in the number of offerings for families, with children of all ages. This is a departure from past family programming which often focused almost entirely on younger children and preschoolers.
5. **Stress Management and "Mommy Fitness."** An increase in classes for women during pregnancy is helping to respond to the needs of the Gen X and Gen Y generations, exercise and fitness classes for pregnancy—as well as stress management and healthy lifestyle are growing in popularity.
6. **Life sports.** Aimed at kids in particular in response to the childhood obesity epidemic, this refers to sport that's fun and an individual can participate well into their later years, e.g. biking, kayaking, tennis, swimming, jogging/walking, etc. The theory offer activities and facilities that people of all ages from childhood through adulthood enjoy and have fun with as they get exercise. Time management is a prime benefit.
7. **Virtual Recreation and Fitness Programs** – COVID sparked new ways of keeping residents active and engaged. Committed to ensuring that community members have resources

to maintain healthy lives while social distancing, recreation and parks departments started to bring programs and resources right to residents virtually.

8. **Outdoor Recreation Participation** – Like most Americans, Whitpain Township residents have flocked to parks and outdoor recreation facilities since the pandemic emerged. Running, bicycling, day hiking, bird watching and camping participation all rose noticeably.

## Program Evaluations

**Program evaluation** is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about projects, policies and **programs**. **Program evaluations** can involve both quantitative and qualitative methods. The program evaluation should also consider marketing and promotion, photos, and capturing testimonials for use in promotions. Based upon these evaluations, program staff can then develop a “business plan” for each core program area that would include pricing and promotion for the next program year. This information would also be used for decision-making in staffing, marketing, budgeting, pricing, and even facility design and capital improvements. The “Best Customer” Survey provided important insights to how participants view the programs offered by the Department.

## Best Customer Survey Findings

As part of this Plan Update, the consulting team and the Department conducted a “Best Customer” Survey. Best customers were defined as participants who registered to participate in organized scheduled programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department. From a list of 4,300, 414 responses to the survey provide insights for future directions in the township’s recreation programs.

### High Ratings for the Department’s Programs

On a scale of one to five, the Department’s customers rate their experience in programs as 4.28. This includes programs, instructors, customer service, convenience, and overall value.

### *Customer Priorities*

Youth sports camps and programs, adult fitness, and special events are the top three priorities of the “Best Customers”. Walking programs, trail maps, and anything related to trails is also of interest to the respondents. Programs and advertising targeted to the following should be considered:

- Households without children
- More special events
- Increasing the variety of programs
- More programs, especially special events, related to pets
- Programs for people with disabilities
- Opportunities for preschoolers, tweens and teens
- Facility improvements to expand programming such as indoor recreation facilities, gyms, fitness and pickleball courts

## *Facilities*

The influence of the Township recently acquiring Mermaid Lake played into the survey findings. The “Best Customers” expressed opinions about the opportunities the site offers. Of highest importance to the respondents was an indoor recreation facility. More game courts, more varied programs, and programs offered at more times was important to the respondents, too.

### *Facilities for More Community Recreation Experiences*

- **Indoor Facilities.** The lack of indoor recreation facilities limits recreation opportunities for pre-schoolers, active adults, the arts, sports, and year round recreation. While it is important not to replicate the Greater Plymouth Community Center where many residents go, having a non-membership-based indoor facility with two gyms and program spaces designed for active indoor recreation and “messy” activities such as art and cooking would be of great service to the community.
- **Pickleball courts.** A pickleball hub should be created in Mermaid Lake Park. This should be more than a couple of courts constructed. The design should include four to six courts with room for expansion, be oriented toward a high quality visitor experience with interesting seating, beautiful landscaping, convenient parking, nearby restrooms, and cooling features, to foster a welcoming atmosphere for socialization that will encourage friendships, fitness, and enjoyment of township parks. With the focus on children, youth, families and organized sports, the pickleball hub will create a facility that provides opportunities for a community group in need of more recreation opportunities.
- **Tween and Teen Socializing Areas.** Tweens and teens need a place to spend time with friends. Facilities should be designed in collaboration with these age groups. The facility should be designed to attract their use, be easily supervised yet clearly a space for them. Facilities such as a bicycle playground, a pump track, and skate plaza should be considered.
- **Community gathering areas.** Township parks are designed now for organized sports, individual sports, trail use, children’s play, and some connections to nature. An important recreational experience to be addressed through facilities that include pavilions designed for food service for groups of varying sizes, with support facilities such as restrooms, game courts, play areas for children.
- **Adult Fitness.** Adult fitness facilities should be provided starting with Wentz Run Park. Essentially “outdoor gyms”, these facilities should be designed as hubs for fitness and socializing near but separate from existing playgrounds. The Township can program these facilities and/or work in partnerships with a commercial provider or independents contractors as a revenue source.
- **Lacrosse Fields.** As participation in Lacrosse grows, additional fields will be needed.

### *Ways Residents Obtain Parks and Recreation Information*

In the public opinion survey for this project, residents had the opportunity to identify the ways they most prefer to get information about parks and recreation. The three most preferred ways were email, the township website, and the township newsletter. Fliers, the township marquee, and the township’s Wire were the least preferred. Respondents ages 25 – 44 were the largest age group of survey respondents. Younger age groups may prefer social media sources.

The Department has monthly meetings of the Parks & Open Space Board. Committees are formed for special projects such as this Plan Update and park master plans. These offer opportunities for the public. Virtual meetings have produced an uptick in public participation.

### *Social Media Trends*

Most people spend a good part of their days on social media. It has become an integral part of people's lives and daily routines. Given the importance of social media in the lives of the residents, keeping pace with social platforms to connect with the Department's target customers is of critical importance. Due to content overload and competition on social media, it can be challenging for the Parks & Recreation Department. It lacks a clear social media marketing strategy. Developing a social media strategy and staying updated on social media trends can help build a presence for the Department in the community. The following social media trends are likely to prevail 2021 and beyond<sup>2</sup>.

- Influencer marketing will continue to soar.
- Ephemeral content will keep gaining popularity.
- Traditional social platforms will continue to perform well.
- Social commerce will continue to expand.
- Video content will dominate.
- Live streaming will become the new norm.
- Technology adoption will be at an all-time high.
- Higher adoption of augmented reality.
- More regulatory control and legal scrutiny.
- Increase in the use of social media for customer service.
- Personalization will be paramount.
- User-generated content will continue to be popular.
- Local targeting will become more prevalent.
- More brands will incorporate social listening into their strategies.
- Rise of social media communities.
- Brands will re-evaluate the metrics they consider important.

While it is important for the Department to generate more user engagement; it is equally important to recognize that the demands on the small staff already exceed staff capacity. It would be essential

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<sup>2</sup> Social Media Trends for 2021 and Beyond. (2021). Accessed February 15, 2021.  
<https://influencermarketinghub.com/social-media-trends/>

for the Department to undertake the development of a marketing plan. This should start with a professional assessment of the Department's social media presence and website, in addition to current outreach and feedback methods.

## Branding

Creating a distinct identity for the Parks & Recreation Department is essential in today's world. The process for this update found public confusion between the Township's Parks & Recreation Department and WRA (Whitpain Recreation Association). It's easy to understand the confusion because of the similar names, purposes, and presence in the community. It's important for the Department to distinguish itself as an essential public service. The Department is the steward of public parks, open spaces, and trails, as well as the provider of programs and services for residents of all ages, abilities, and interests.

### *Marketing Budget*

The benchmark standard for exceptional parks and recreation systems is to spend two to three percent (2% - 3%) of the operating budget on marketing. An estimate that approximates the Department's budget for marketing is challenging because many of the costs are folded into a line item purpose other than direct marketing. For example, the Township has an outside marketing company to promote township matters while the Program Coordinator and Assistant Parks and Recreation Director spend significant time on social media, posting on the Wire, newsletter development, the Marquee, and fliers. The only direct advertising line item in the budget is \$200, down from \$500, assuming this is because of reduced printing costs. Consideration could be given to creating an intern slot with a commitment to fill it on an ongoing rotating basis.

## Assessment

### What Works Well

The Department's "best customers" rate all aspects of programs as good to excellent. Customer Service, an overall township goal, got a five star rating in what is arguably the most important question on this survey. With limited indoor recreation facility access by design, hours and ownership, the Department still offers a full slate of programming year round. Through program fees and charges, the Department recovers 33 percent of the overall administration, programming, and park maintenance budgets. The Department provides organized schedule programs, facilitates programs conducted by others, provides facilities which other community organizations offers recreation services, primarily youth sports, and is the "go to" organization for information about programs, facilities and other providers.

## Challenges

The Department is small with limited staff. Providing more programs, especially evenings and weekends, is not possible with the current staffing level. It would be easy for this Department to become over-extended so a focus on program and service “business planning” is key. This will ensure that the staff continues to deliver programs and services that garner high marks with the public and largely recover costs.

- Facility limitations affect programs and recreation opportunities in the community.
- As programming changed with the pandemic, more focus on virtual programming needs to be made in the immediate situation. This can then be adapted to be included as public gatherings and face-to-face contact is safe and sanctioned by health authorities.
- Small staff size with traditional weekday hours limits program expansion, along with weekend and evening programs. The demand for staff time exceeds capacity, especially on weekends and evenings.
- Programs are traditional in being directed toward children between the ages of five and 12, families, sports, summer camps, and special events. While this is important, expansion to other ages groups especially preschoolers, tweens, teens, and active seniors and the development of new core areas of nature and fitness will be the key to future success. Current offerings max out staff time.
- Virtual recreation programming has been challenging for parks and recreation departments across the country. Outreach to other departments and internet research is important to energize this unique method of community recreation services. With the current pandemic appearing to be waning, it is likely that virtual recreation programming will become a staple and needs to be addressed in Whitpain.

## Opportunities

To remain relevant in a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty, the Department must evolve in services and programs. Moving into more core program areas including nature and fitness is important and will be a niche market for the Department. This has implications for staffing and the need to increase expertise in these areas; especially, as the Township expands its focus on natural resource management and sustainability, develops Mermaid Lake, and considers the establishment of an indoor recreation facility.

- **Address staffing level.** The “Best Customer” Survey found a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of programs, instructors, leaders, convenience and location. With one full-time programmer and an assistant director responsible for programming and other department matters, demand on their time is high especially in peak months. As much flexibility in scheduling for these positions is key to productivity, customer service, and staff dedication and health.

- **Keep the focus on youth programs, sports, camps and community special events for the foreseeable future.** With many existing programs and high quality ratings, don't risk expansion for quantity of programs at the sacrifice of the quality of programs.
- **Make tweens, teens, adults and seniors next in priority.** Try to make park facility improvements for these groups that will not necessarily require extensive organized recreation programming. Focus on service to these demographic groups facilities and information about recreation opportunities they can do on their own. Strive to create youth advisory groups for tweens and teens but in the meantime, hold some focus groups with them to determine reasonable practical things that can be done with existing resources. Most definitely include them in all park master planning and improvement processes.
- **Refine and Strengthen the Core Program Areas.** Move into Nature/Stewardship and Fitness as two core program areas. Establish a maximum of five to seven core program areas. Continue to focus on customer service as the primary driver of defining core program areas rather than having a "cafeteria style" list of programs to offer. This focus has contributed to the high customer service ratings of the Department. These core areas can be Children & Youth, Families, Adults with the prime topical areas of Fitness, Nature, Sports and Special Events. It is important to note that the core program area of Nature/Stewardship extends to public/private partnerships with landowners and private homeowners on how to manage their own properties sustainably. The Parks and Recreation Department can lead the charge in outreach and education to help make every land owner a land steward.
- **Create a New Brand for the Department and Continue to Promote Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails.** Focus on the Department's important focus on stewardship and sustainability. Increase public awareness about this role through promotion and programming. Focus on emails and social media while continuing to use the township newsletter for the short term. Consider giving up the use of fliers.
- **Recognize that most comments about programs are related to facilities.** Residents desire more safe places to walk and bicycle, indoor recreation facilities, more game courts such as pickle ball. To support fitness, health, and sports, indoor facilities are needed for year round training, practice, games, and self-directed pursuits. In recognition of the sustainability goals of the Township and the Parks and Recreation Department, the and the addition of "Nature" as a core program area, consider the establishment of a Nature Center in Mermaid Lake Park by re-purposing one of the existing buildings. Make this the hub of programs, training, information and public outreach on sustainability.

## Enhance

**Enhance** is the third theme of the Plan Update. Clearly, the public expressed the message of taking care of what we already have and adding facilities that are not now part of the Township's parks and recreation system. The residents are interested in an indoor year round recreation and sports center; pickleball courts; safe places to walk and bicycle; places to gather and socialize; area(s) for teens and tweens; spray ground/splash pad; and making Mermaid Lake a community park with active and passive recreation facilities and connections to nature. Equally important is the development and implementation of a formal maintenance management system that supports decision-making, resource allocation and staffing commensurate with facilities, Best Management Practices, and the Township's sustainability plans and goals.

## Elevating Design

When considering the overall goal of elevating park design, one must think of the beautiful, iconic, and durable designs of treasured places like the Grand Canyon or Central Park. One immediately sees that these park designs are built of the culture, traditions, and materials of the place and they are built to last. One sees a grand celebration of ideas and talent. Iconic places celebrate the distinct and unique character of the region including its beauty and environmental importance. These iconic parks offer a respite from our daily lives that we are sure will endure. They elevate the conversation about who we are, where we live and what is important not only to us today as well as our legacy for our children.

Whitpain Township has been hard at work in successfully acquiring and developing its premier public parks and recreation system. Still, through the selection of world class designers, long-lasting materials, and the implementation of strong ecological management that emphasizes a total ecosystem approach that protects and enhances soils, water and vegetation you will elevate your park resource. Whitpain will deliver beautiful, sustainable legacy parks and open spaces that are unique to this community making it distinct among Pennsylvania's municipal park systems and available for generations to come.

## Management and Maintenance

Whitpain Township's parks, recreation, open space, and trail system is a defining asset and a key natural resource. The value of the park system is a key element in Whitpain's status as a "best place to live" in the region. Currently, Township parks are generally in good condition and the Township is committed to supporting maintenance as evident in the addition of a maintenance position this year, the introduction of Best Management Practices, cross training of staff, and a sustainable equipment replacement program. The rapid expansion of the park system in recent years, climate change, and the high level of public support and concern for park maintenance all combine to foreshadow the need for advanced maintenance practices. This includes the development of a formal park maintenance management system with workload cost tracking, maintenance management plans for each park, involvement in all park planning projects, and expansion of the management of natural areas, features, and resources. If implemented, maintenance management planning, broadening of Best Management Practices, and natural resource management will improve not only the park and recreation system as a whole, but create an even more efficient and effective service delivery model that is financially more sustainable. The key is to align the goals for Whitpain Township's parks system with current and future resources as well as the expectations, values, and recreational desires of the community and the future overall municipal Sustainability.

# Parks and Recreation Facilities

## About the Parks and Recreation System

Whitpain Township has nine parks and two preserves. The 453 acres of parkland are well-distributed throughout the Township. They range in size from less than an acre to 132.1 acres. Map 1 shows the park locations in the community. Wissahickon Trails Preserves owns 17.1 acres adjoining Briar Hill Preserve and 19.6 acres by Armentrout Preserve.

Table 7. Whitpain Township Parks		
Park	Acreage	Type
• Wentz Run Park	70	Community
• Centre Square Park	98	Sports
• Prophecy Creek Park	132.1	Special Use and Nature
& Briar Hill Preserve		Nature
• Armentrout Preserve	57.6	Nature
• Stony Creek Sports Park	11	Sports
• Erbs Mill Park	2	Nature
• West Side Park & Courts	0.3	Sports
• Wissahickon Park	18	(To be) Community
• Mermaid Lake	64	Community
Total	453	

## Assessment

### What Works Well

Parks are safe, clean, and litter free. The modern facilities provide a variety of recreational opportunities including formal sports and picnic places complete with pavilions, walking trails, traditional children's play elements and even a dog park with a well-managed dog waster septic system.

Facilities upgrades in the pipeline include a five year capital improvement program, the planning of Mermaid Lake Park, the Wissahickon Park Master Plan implementation, the nature play pods at Center Square and as small as tree planting at the dog park.

Table 8. Whitpain Township Parks by the Number	
Whitpain Township	National Comparison
453 acres of parkland in Whitpain	437 Acres
Location within 10 minutes of every household	Parks within ten minute walk
27 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents	9.9 Acres
1,300 residents per park	1,300 Residents
12.25 miles of trail	3 Miles
No Indoor Recreation Center	61% of agencies have one

Source: NRPA Park Metrics 2021.

## Challenges

Whitpain's greatest challenge is elevating park maintenance beyond *standard* maintenance to *ecological* management. It is critical to elevate the Township's park care to the level of ecological management to fight climate change, provide clean water and air, and protect pollinators by improving their habitats. The development of ecological management plans for all of the park's departments holdings will not only enhance the ecological health of the Township, but also the health of neighboring communities, and of course, the state, nation, and world.

## Opportunities

Whitpain is well positioned to ecologically enhance their parks. Their ecological management program does not need to be built from scratch, rather it can leverage existing township positions, programs and data collection resources including:

It is important to understand that the Township cannot transform the ecological health of Whitpain through parks and open space alone. It must engage large and small private land-owners in the mission. Here, too, the Township already has some connections in place, like its long-standing relationship with the [Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association](#). Other partnerships and programs worth investigating are:

- Audubon at Home <https://pa.audubon.org/audubon-home-13>
- Homegrown National Parks: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org>
- Pollinator Partnership: [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org)
- National Wildlife Federation: <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife>

Ecology must not stop at township borders. To develop critical impact the Township must collaborate with like-minded neighboring municipalities and organizations to develop plans and share management resources. There are partnerships and resources available at the local, regional and national levels:

### Local

- Temple University Ambler Campus Sustainability Council
- Montgomery County Parks: <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/caring-for-our-parks/sustainability/>

### Regional

- PA DCNR Green and Sustainable Community Parks: <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Communities/GreenCommunityParks/Pages/default.aspx>
- NRPA Parks and Recreation Sustainability Practices: <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/sustainability-survey-report.pdf>
- High Performance Landscape Guidelines 21st Century Parks for NYC: [https://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_about/go\\_greener/design\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_about/go_greener/design_guidelines.pdf)

### National

- National Park Service Call to Action : [A Call to Action \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/)
- National Parks Service Green Parks Plan: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sustainability/upload/NPS-Green-Parks-Plan-2016.pdf>

**The following Park Recommendations sheets provide overall Park recommendations and recommendations for each existing Whitpain Park.**

# SYSTEM WIDE UPGRADES

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND EXPERIENTIAL UPGRADES

CONTINUE WITH SCHEDULED MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADES AS OUTLINED IN THE 2021 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM OPEN SPACE FUND 5 YEAR PLAN

### ELEVATE PARK DESIGNS AND MATERIALS

- Upgrade material choices moving beyond asphalt and concrete to include materials that reflect Whitpain's location like indigenous stone. Look to park design at the local, state, and federal level from the 1940s and 50s for inspiration
- Develop a township wide park signage plan including the entire range of signs necessary to celebrate the park system from park signs to wayfinding signs to special features signs

### ADD PERIMETER WALKING TRAIL WITH INTERCONNECTING LOOPS WHERE POSSIBLE

### DEVELOP SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

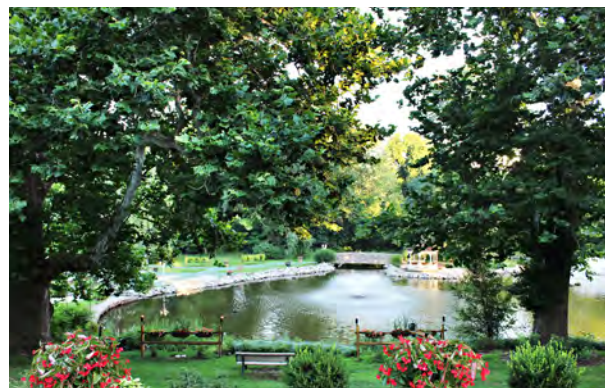
Develop sustainability goals for the park and open space system that are measurable and achievable over 1, 5, and 10 years. At a minimum goals should include:

- Protection and enhancement of scenic beauty
- Habitat protection and enhancement with a focus on healthy pollinator habitat
- Increase healthy tree canopy
- Improve township-wide stormwater management by reducing run-off and improving water quality in waterways, streams and aquifers employing strategies that move beyond grassed swales to native vegetations swale systems, increase stormwater collection for reuse, and showcase stormwater as a vital resource
- Foster sustainability beyond Whitpain's park and open space boundaries

### ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT PLANS

Develop ecological management plans containing processes and instructions to manage a site and its operations in such a way as to protect and enhance the biodiversity and ecology of each park and open space in the system and the surrounding area. Plans should include at a minimum:

- Invasives management
- Deer management
- Tree assessment (build on the recently completed township tree survey) and replacement
- Native shrub and perennial plantings as deer are controlled
- Maintenance tasks and schedule
- Educational opportunities from pop-up signage to programs
- Partnership opportunities for like-minded organizations and citizens



# EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

Parks	Acreage	Baseball Field	Tennis Court	Soccer Field/ Multi purpose field	Football Field	Basketball Court	Hockey Rink	Playground	Pavilion	Restroom	Trails	Concession Stand	Community Building	Other
Wentz Run Park	70	5*	4	1		2		1	2	1	3 mi.	1		Multipurpose field, Horseshoe pit, Tot lot Batting cage, Gaga court
Centre Square Park (L)	98			Lawn(5) Turf(2)**							.75 mi.		1	Dog Park, Nature based park to be built in next 3 yrs
Prophecy Creek Park	84										2.75 mi.			5 acre rental space
Briar Hill Preserve	48.1***										1.25 mi.			
Armentrout Preserve	57.6****										2.5 mi.			Picnic facilities
Stony Creek Sports Park (L)	11				1		1	1	1	1		1		Bleachers
Erbs Mill Park	2													Master Plan in place
West Side Park	0.13							1						
West Side Courts	0.17					Half court (2)								
Wissahickon Park	18													Master Plan in place
Mermaid Lake	64													Master Plan in process
Total	453	6	4	7	1	Half court (2)	1	3	3	2	12.75 mi*****	1	1	

## Notes

L=Lighted

\*Baseball field sizes: 50/70(2) , 49/60(1) , and 90(1) ; softball field size: 60(1)

\*\*Turf Fields lines painted as lacrosse and soccer

\*\*\*17.1 acres owned by Wissahickon Trails

\*\*\*\*19.6 acres owned by Wissahickon Trails

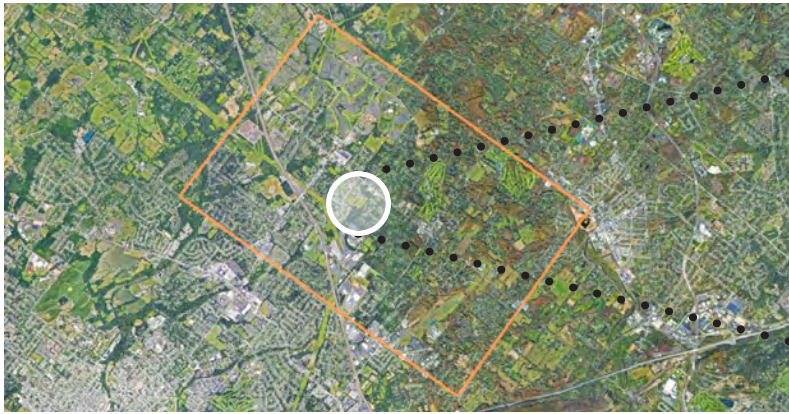
\*\*\*\*\* Trails not included=Narcissa Road Trail (1.25 mi) Oxford Village Trail (.25 mi)



# WENTZ RUN PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 1000 ANVIL LN



70 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Community

**ACTIVITIES:** Fitness, sports, play, social, gatherings, and special events

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike, drive

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** Pavilion, picnic pavilion, baseball fields: 50/70(2), 49/60(1), and 90(1), softball field: 60(1), tennis courts (4), basketball courts (2), multipurpose field, playground, tot lot, horseshoe pits, gaga court, batting cages, 3 mile Wentz Run trail and nature trail, restrooms

### CHARACTER



Multi-use park with a playground, sports fields, and a pavilion. Very open, woodland to the south, and trees buffer most of the site.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

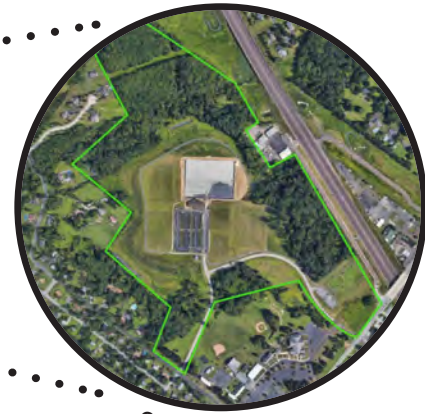
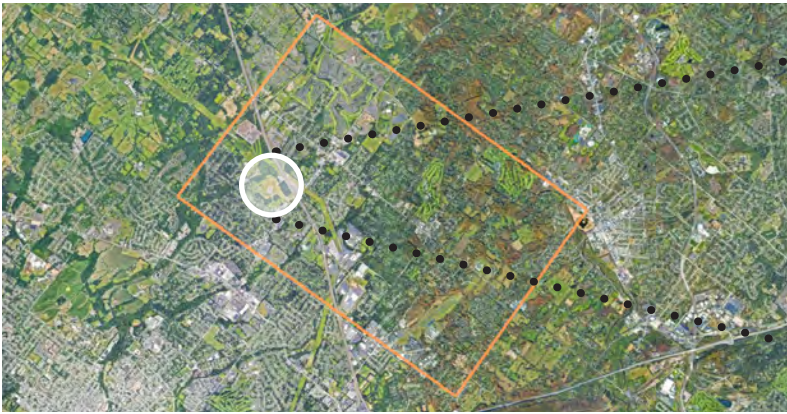
- Upgrade children's play area to incorporate the latest thinking in creative and nature play
- Add young trees in the playground and picnic grove to replace the aging canopy
- Consider an upgraded pavilion to yield a better performance value
- Incorporate multi-generational play features like outdoor exercise rooms
- Acquire adjoining land for park expansion and consider this combined area for an expanded park that includes an indoor recreation center



# CENTRE SQUARE PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 1527 YOST RD



98 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Community

**ACTIVITIES:** Fitness, sports, dog park, special events, walking, Coming soon: Nature Play

**ACCESS:** Drive, walk

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** Soccer fields: lawn(5), turf(2)(turf fields also painted for lacrosse), dog park, recreation/community building, 0.75 mile paved trail, great stormwater management, Nature based park to be built in the next 3 years

### CHARACTER



Meadow plantings, Eastern woodland, and land/stormwater management through vegetated systems that acts as a parks prototype.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

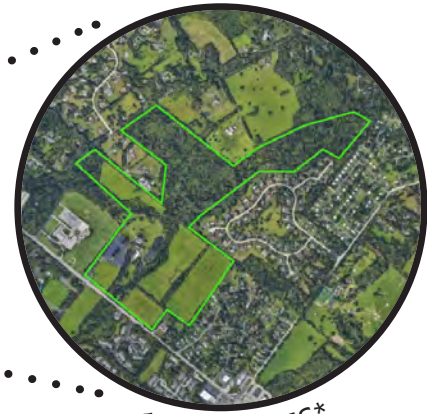
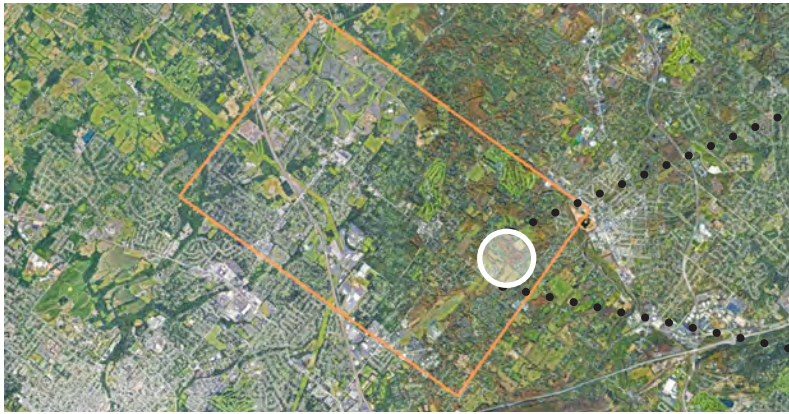
- Add trees and shrubs in groves along walking paths to increase visitor experience
- Integrate children's play elements into interstitial spaces between fields to allow more activities for younger children during game days
- Integrate exercise room(s) to allow more activities for caregivers during game days
- Integrate multi-generational play features like outdoor exercise rooms into interstitial spaces between the fields to allow care givers activities during game days and other days
- Add more seating opportunities- these can include benches, or natural seating elements like carefully placed boulders or tree trunks



# PROPHECY CREEK PARK AND BRIAR HILL PRESERVE

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 205 W SKIPPACK PK

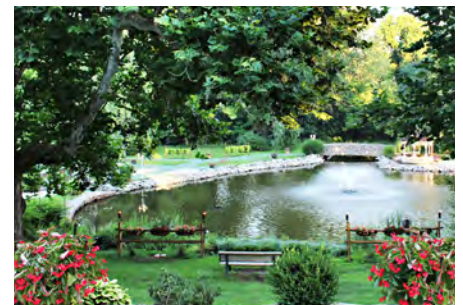


732.1 ACRES\*

### OVERVIEW

- TYPE:** Special use/nature preserve
- ACTIVITIES:** Special events, nature
- ACCESS:** Drive
- COMFORT:** Satisfactory
- FEATURES:** 5 acre rental space (Manor House),  
2.75 mile Prophecy Creek Park Trail,  
1.25 mile Briar Hill Trail

### CHARACTER



Formal plantings/ design at rental space including invasive plants. Naturalized meadows and woodlands elsewhere.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Depending upon rental direction, consider unique programs and activities like model boat sailing on the lake or kite flying days
- Replace invasive plants in formal plantings with native plants over the next five years being careful to maintain the look/feel of the site required by rentals
- Add more seating opportunities in naturalized areas- these can include benches, or natural seating elements like carefully placed boulders or tree trunks
- Consider adding informal picnic areas in naturalized areas through carefully placed boulders and tree trunks

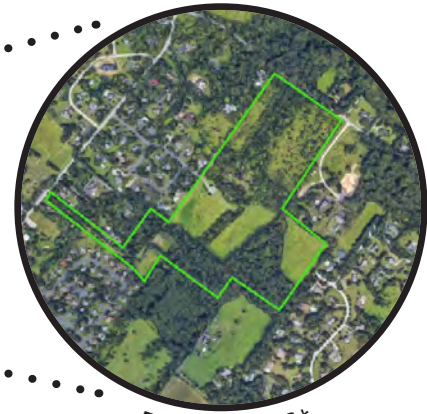
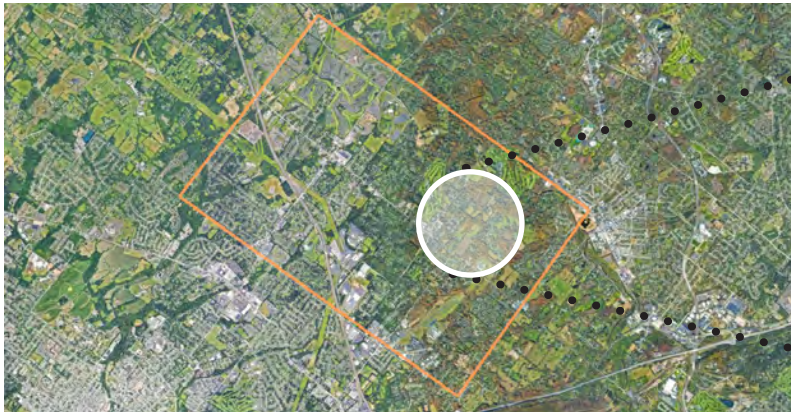
\*17.1 acres owed by Wissahickon Trails



# ARMENTROUT PRESERVE

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** BEALE RD AND PENLLYN BLUE BELL PK



57.6 ACRES\*

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Nature Preserve

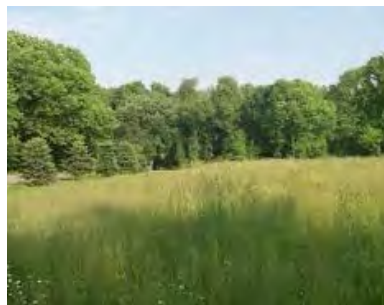
**ACTIVITIES:** Nature, fitness, social gatherings

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike, horseback, drive

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** 2.5 mile trail, picnic facilities

### CHARACTER



Natural open space preserve with walking / riding trails through wooded land & open fields.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Repair erosion on trails
- Add features like corduroys to keep trails maintained and passable at wet areas
- Add more seating opportunities- these can include benches, or natural seating elements like carefully placed boulders or tree trunks
- Consider adding informal picnic areas through carefully placed boulders and tree trunks

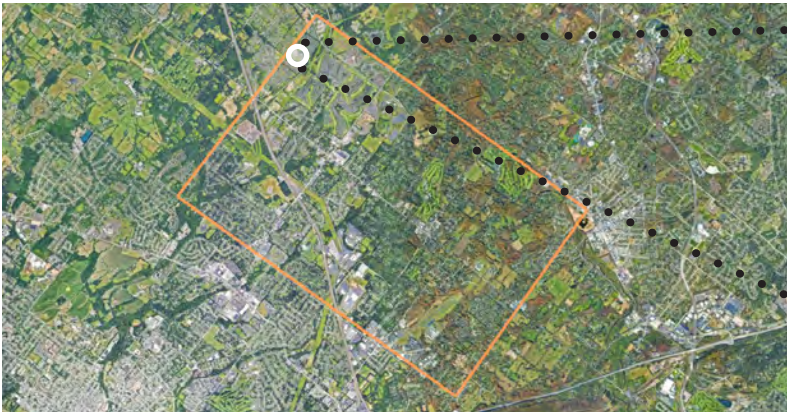
\*19.6 acres owed by Wissahickon Trails



# STONY CREEK SPORTS PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 500 N WALES RD



71 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Sports Park

**ACTIVITIES:** Sports, playground

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike, drive

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** Hockey rink, basketball court, football field, playground, bleachers, concession stand, pavilion, restrooms

### CHARACTER



Sports park that offers a hockey rink, basketball court, and the only football field in the township.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Add trees and shrubs in groves along walking paths to increase visitor experience
- Add walking loop trail
- Convert some lawn to meadow for added ecological benefit and wildlife viewing opportunities and to provide better walking experiences
- Upgrade children's play area to incorporate the latest thinking in creative and nature play
- Add more seating and a picnic area
- Finish and construct final phases of park plan



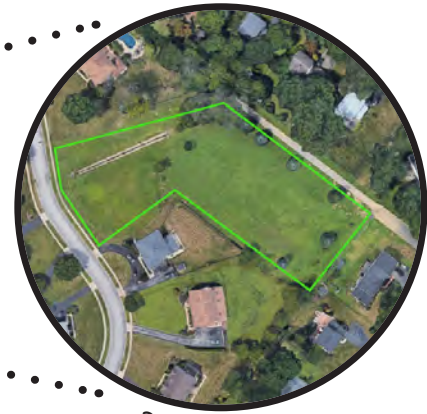
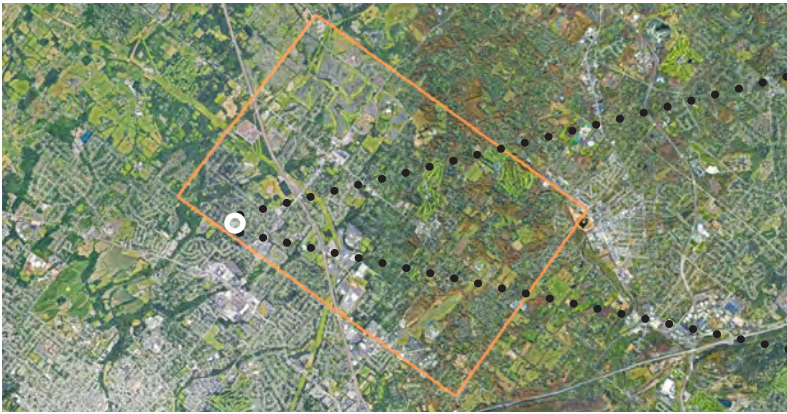
WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP: PARKS RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE UPDATE

VIRIDIAN LANDSCAPE STUDIO | ANN TOOLE RECREATION | NATURAL LANDS

# ERBS MILL PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 1608 ERBS MILL RD



2 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Neighborhood

**ACTIVITIES:** Neighborhood gatherings

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** None

### CHARACTER- PROPOSED



Site Master Plan

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Construct proposed park plan
- Add nature play elements



# WEST SIDE PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** 280 MAPLE ST



0.13 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Mini

**ACTIVITIES:** Play

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** Playground equipment

### CHARACTER



Mini park used by the neighborhood children. Site is fenced in and contains one shade tree.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Add more shade through additional trees or a shade structure
- Add a picnic table



# WEST SIDE COURTS

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** W MT PLEASANT AVE AND MAPLE ST



0.17 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Mini

**ACTIVITIES:** Sports, basketball

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory

**FEATURES:** Half court basketball (2)

### CHARACTER



Mini park used to play basketball.

### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Add more seating
- Consider more varied plantings to reduce lawn



# WISSAHICKON PARK

## PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** AMBLER ALLEY AND MAPLE ST



18 ACRES

### OVERVIEW

**TYPE:** Community

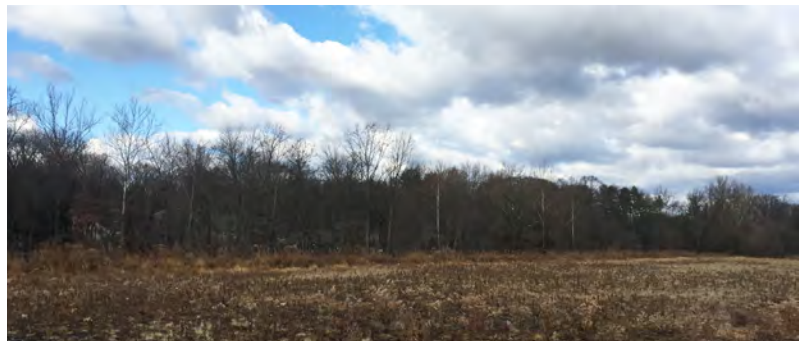
**ACTIVITIES:** Bird watching

**ACCESS:** Walk, bike, drive

**COMFORT:** Satisfactory (for the water fowl preserve)

**FEATURES:** Water fowl preserve pond

### CHARACTER



Park is currently closed due to asbestos contamination. Water fowl preserve to the south has a naturalized landscape.

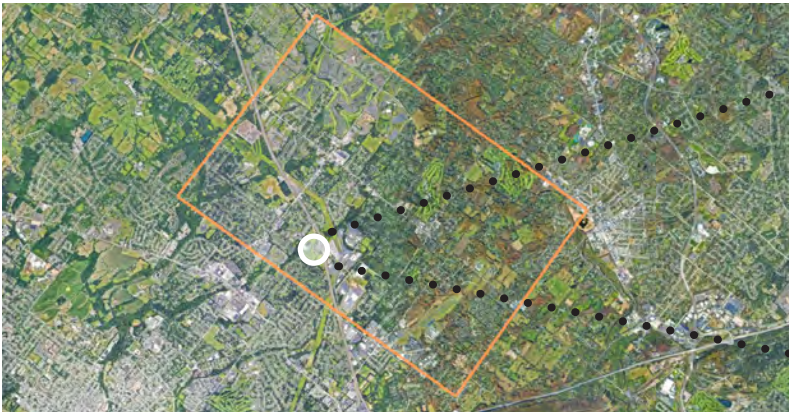
### UPGRADES AND FEATURES TO CONSIDER:

- Identify project as a priority project and build according to the existing master plan



# MERMAID LAKE PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

**LOCATION** JOLLY ROAD



64 ACRES

## OVERVIEW

**NOTES:** Recently acquired and master plan is underway



# Organization, Maintenance, and Partnerships

Whitpain Township has a highly functional team of individuals that operate and maintain the community's parks, recreation facilities, trails, and programs. They provide an exceptional level of service to the residents and community based organizations. This was made evident in their "Five Star" rating on customer service by participants in a public opinion survey.

Tremendous growth in Whitpain Township's parks and recreation system since the last plan, in 2003, has placed a strain on the system. This adds challenges to the township's operations in Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Administration, and Engineering to keep pace. A goal of this Plan Update is to ensure that this high level of service continues as the parks and recreation system evolves.

This operational analysis largely focuses on maintenance as the Township's largest ongoing cost in parks, recreation, open space, and trails. This analysis looks at current operations and organization to define any opportunities to enhance overall operations and the township's capacity in implementing the Plan Update.

## Organization

Parks and recreation functions are split among several departments with the Parks and Recreation Department as the pivotal responsibility. The Township's Organization Chart, shown on page \_\_\_\_, shows the relationships among the various entities and departments with a hand in parks and recreation. These include the Board of Supervisors, Township Management, Engineering, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation. [\(Insert Township Organizational Chart\)](#) Township boards and committees that relate to parks, recreation, open space, and trails; comprise the Parks & Open Space Board, the Shade Tree Commission, and the Planning Commission.

The Organizational Chart, shown on page \_\_\_\_, shows the structure for departmental operations. The management team works toward providing a high level of satisfaction among all they serve and receives a high degree of approval in return for delivering high quality services offered by the Department. Despite the growth of the system, staff in both Parks and Recreation and Public Works find it very difficult to say no to anything or to stop providing any service, even with their limitations. Parks and Recreation and Public Works have a strong level of commitment in supporting one another as well as in responding to township needs and directives. They operate with alacrity in meeting changing circumstances, going out of their way to do whatever is needed. The COVID crisis and the recent acquisition of Mermaid Lake are perfect examples of how all township forces pitched in to do the right thing in serving the community.

### *Parks and Recreation Department*

The Department has three full-time professionals, about 46 part-time and seasonal workers, and 20 – 25 Independent contractors. The Assistant Director and Program Coordinator are both Certified Parks and Recreation Professionals (CPRP). The Director, Assistant Director, and Program Coordinator operate

with a strong sense of teamwork stepping up where and when needed to fulfill the operational responsibilities of the Department. The Department relies heavily on part-time/seasonal employees and independent contractors. Despite the significant part-time and seasonal staff support, peak times throughout the year, especially in the summer, mandate long hours, heavy workloads, and non-traditional work schedules. These may include both weekends and evenings. Community involvement with elected and advisory boards for ongoing functions as well as for special projects, such as this Plan Update and park master plans, require evening work hours by the Director and Assistant Director. The Township has been very fortunate in retaining this management team with continued passion for the job and no turnover in decades.

The part-time and seasonal staff, includes both recreation program leaders and Park Attendants. The Park Attendants provide a presence in the parks during peak seasons, dates, and times for park visitation.

### *Public Works Department*

The Public Works Department has just under 30 employees. Related to Parks and Recreation, Public Works staffing, includes the Director, Assistant Director, Parks Superintendent, and five workers for parks. In the summer, three part-time maintenance workers provide support for the heavier workload during peak use and the growing season. The Township recently approved another position for park maintenance. In addition to staff, the Department contracts out mowing for difficult areas, such as the berms in Centre Square Park and Wissahickon Park. The Public Works Department uses all workers strategically in accomplishing their responsibilities. For example, once the workers complete road milling and repairs, they move into park maintenance projects.

## Maintenance

The Public Works Director has been working diligently in cross-training maintenance workers in park maintenance to ensure that the needed expertise is in place for the care of the parks, recreation facilities, and trails. Open Space is left in its natural state except for addressing hazardous conditions. With its long history of taking care of the parks and recreation system, the Public Works Department operates based upon a routine schedule adapted to the seasons, park usage, and emergent opportunities, projects, and demands. In an effort to streamline maintenance and make the best use of every dollar, the Department contracts out tasks that require special equipment such as steep bank mowing and high tree work. The Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department collaborate in ensuring that park programming and maintenance are in sync. Together they have developed a partnership with community sports organizations in which the organizations maintain athletic facilities.

Looking to the future, Public Works has been joining with the Engineering Department's part-time Sustainability Coordinator to institute best practices in maintaining stormwater management areas in the parks, primarily Centre Square Park which was designed to meet the Township's MS4 requirements. Public Works has also instituted an equipment replacement program that is sustainable by eliminating powering with fossil fuel.

# Partnerships

## *Park Maintenance Agreements*

Whitpain Township has agreements with WRA to maintain the ballfields at Centre Square. WRA has a sub-agreement with WissLAX to pay for their percentage of the field maintenance. An agreement with the Ambler Whitpain Trojans Youth Football club will be established in the future. These agreements have a value of about \$80,000 annually in maintenance cost savings.

## *Community Support*

Partnerships have been a staple of parks and recreation operations for decades. Partnerships include the following:

- Wissahickon Trails and Montgomery County on Cheston Property
- WRA (Whitpain Recreation Association)
- WissLAX
- Ambler Whitpain Trojans Youth Football, and Cheer
- Wissahickon Valley Boys & Girls Club
- Wissahickon School District
- Wissahickon Valley Public Library
- Montgomery County Community College
- Montgomery County Senior Games
- Einstein Health Center
- McCaffrey's Food Market
- Cubby's Castle
- Land owners involved in creating trail linkages, such as Henkles and McCoy, Aetna, Korman Suites, Reformation Church, Rotary Club of Blue Bell, Grace Baptist Church, Boy Scouts/Eagle Scouts, and PECO.

## *Volunteerism*

Contrary to public perception, volunteers are not free. They require recruitment, training, supervision, and recognition. With a small staff, volunteerism is nearly impossible. The exception is the volunteer service that the organized sports leagues provide. In that case, the Township works with league representatives instead of directly with the many individual volunteers involved in the sports programs. Scout troops also provide volunteer support for park projects, especially Eagle Scout Projects. Given the staffing levels, volunteerism should be vested in organizations that have the capacity to carry out the volunteer functions themselves.

## *Related Township Departments, Boards, and Commissions*

The Township has assigned the Engineering Department the responsibility of sustainability to the Assistant Engineer. The current focus of the Township's efforts is storm water management, the

functioning of basins throughout the Townships, and integration of the storm water management systems with township parks. Other things in progress, include increasing public awareness about practices that can be done on their own properties to help keep air and water clean. Another action the Township would like to take is a review of township ordinances that would lead to recommendations on how to make these ordinances more supportive of environmental efforts, such as the use of solar energy.

Township boards and commissions address natural resource management and practices, independently. These include the Parks & Open Space Board, the Shade Tree Commission, and the Planning Commission. Each of these committees addresses open space and natural resource management, land use planning, and landscaping. Overlapping functions affect parks and recreation including land use planning of trails and safe places to walk and bicycle, street tree canopy and park trees, and the relationship of parks and recreation services to future development and redevelopment. There is no EAC (Environmental Advisory Council) .

## Assessment

In addition to Township information and reports, benchmarking offers a way to gain perspective on managing Township assets such as parks and recreation. A benchmark simply provides a frame of reference that can be used in making comparisons. Benchmarking is a common practice and reasonable exercise to establish a baseline, define best practices, and identify opportunities to improve. Integrating benchmarking helps to generate valuable data that encourages discussion and sparks new ideas and practices. At its best, it can be used as a tool to help parks and recreation departments and maintenance organizations to identify, evaluate and prioritize improvement opportunities. The best source of information on parks and recreation benchmarks is the National Recreation and Park Association that is used in this plan. Because of the variety of municipalities and parks and recreation departments, there are no national standards for anything in parks and recreation. The best practice is to develop a unique level of service that reflects community goals and resources. Having information about workload and cost tracking helps to form the foundation upon which to base informed decisions and projections. The **2020 NRPA Park Metrics** helps to inform conversations with internal colleagues, external consultants, partners and policymakers about the role, operations and support of parks and recreation. The combination of insights from this report with information about Whitpain Township's specific circumstances will help identify the optimal operating standards and level of support unique to Whitpain Township.

### *Benchmarks*

Between the Parks and Recreation Department and the Public Works Department, Whitpain Township has ten full-time positions. These positions, include three in Parks and Recreation Administration and Programming, five maintenance workers with another position approved, and a quarter to half the time of the Public Works Director and Assistant Director.

One way to view agency staffing is to compare it relative to the population that the agency serves. According to the National Recreation and Park Association's Park Metrics<sup>3</sup> collected in 2020, for municipalities with a population under 20,000, the typical parks and recreation agency has 9.3 workers per 10,000 residents. This metric translates into for Whitpain Township. Even if the part-time staff hours were translated into full-time equivalent (FTE) staff that would be about another four to five FTE's. Using this benchmark, Whitpain staffing in parks and recreation would need 3.6 to 8.6 workers. A typical parks and recreation agency manages:

- One park for every 2,281 residents. That would be eight parks in Whitpain Township. However, the Township has 13, including the recently acquired Mermaid Lake.
- 12 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. In Whitpain, that would be 240 acres. But, the Township has 492.3 acres to manage, which is more than double the number of acres in a typical agency.
- 19 diamond and rectangular fields compared with 11 in Whitpain Township. Whitpain's multi-purpose turf fields and field lighting address the difference, except for a shortage of softball fields.
- Whitpain Township spends \$1,554 per acre on maintenance overall for the 492 acres without trails. However, the Township leaves open space in its natural state with maintenance only to remedy hazardous conditions. If cost projections for the acreage include only the estimated 183 acres of active recreation areas, park maintenance costs would be about \$3,688 per acre. Since the Public Works Department also maintains the 12.25 miles of trails, the \$3,688 is actually lower on a per acre basis. WRA maintains the sports fields in Centre Square Park at a value of about \$80,000 annually. NRPA Metrics found park operational costs to be about \$8,208 per park acre in the country.

This plan recommends that open space be managed and maintained as a natural resource consistent with sustainability goals and dealing with climate change. The Armentrout Preserve Stewardship Plan can serve as a model. Natural Lands manages 42,000 acres of preserves and estimates a per acre cost of \$\_\_\_ for maintenance. Research from the Environmental Protection Agency on open space found the cost at about \$170 per acre with a range of \$9 to \$2,924 per acre adjusted for inflation<sup>4</sup>. Anecdotal information based upon the maintenance management work of this team has found that \$500 per acre is a solid estimate for planning purposes. Maintenance tasks to be performed on open space include:

- Increased monitoring and community engagement efforts.
- Invasive species control.
- Erosion control.
- Habitat restoration or other wildlife-oriented projects.
- Educational and recreational programming.

<sup>3</sup> National Recreation and Park Association (2020) NRPA Park Metrics. <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/ParkMetrics/> Accessed February 1, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Center for Land Management (2004) Natural Lands Cost Analysis [https://www.spk.usace.army.mil/Portals/12/documents/regulatory/pdf/LandManagement\\_CostAnalysis.pdf](https://www.spk.usace.army.mil/Portals/12/documents/regulatory/pdf/LandManagement_CostAnalysis.pdf) accessed March 20, 2021.

- If appropriate, construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation of trails, trailheads, parking lots, signs, and other features.

## What Works Well

- The management team and staff in Parks and Recreation and Public works are passionate and committed to their service in Whitpain Township. Team work is very strong. Together, they find a way to accomplish all their directives.
- Each department responsible for parks and recreation functions is dedicated to optimal customer service, protection of township property, and outstanding park visitor and program participant experiences.
- The Township is focusing on sustainability and has appointed the Assistant Township Engineer as the Sustainability Coordinator as one of his official functions.
- Programs garner ratings of excellence from the best customers of the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Residents rated the parks and recreation facilities as good to excellent in the public opinion survey. Their comments indicated wishes for new or expanded facilities with no comments about maintenance and cleanliness. If there were public concerns about maintenance, these would have been noted in the survey responses.
- Customer service and responsiveness to township elected and appointed officials and township management are hallmarks of the Parks and Recreation and Public Works staff.
- The synergy between the departments is great as each department values both full and part-time staffs and the relationship between the departments.
- Contracting out tasks is a tool used to the Township's advantage. Playground equipment inspections and selected mowing tasks are provided by private contractors.

## Challenges

- Survey respondents ranked the quality of facilities and maintenance of parks highly. Additional staff may be needed to keep up with growing demand.
- In 2003, there were four full-time maintenance workers, plus a Park Superintendent and seasonal part-time workers. Today, there are six full-time maintenance workers, including the current five and the newly created position. Although the park maintenance budget has increased significantly, it has not resulted in increased number of positions. This is primarily the benefit cost increases. However, since 2003, the Township has added 243 for the current number of 492 acres of parkland with significant facilities:
  - Prophecy Creek with 85 acres, including the Manor House.
  - Centre Square with 95 acres with a major state-of-the-art sports facility.
  - Wissahickon Park revitalization.
  - Mermaid Lake with 64 acres that will become the Township's signature park.
  - 12.25 miles of trails
- Priority needs change requiring staff to be reactive as service demands arise.
- Staff hours are the traditional "nine to five" weekday schedule when recreation hours are primarily evening and weekends with peak use in the summer and holidays.

- Although information is collected, the workload cost tracking system is not easily accessed or used for decision-making, resource allocation, and pricing.
- Park security is provided by police patrols and one park attendant at Wentz Run Park.
- Making the case for parks and recreation financial support and staffing needs is difficult among the many competing priorities of all departments.
- Volunteerism is not a viable option as management staff to recruit, train, supervise, and recognize volunteers requires significant time that is beyond the capacity of existing staff. This is counter to the public perception that volunteers are free.
- Sustainability is a critical management function of government in addressing climate change. The Township has made a firm commitment to advancing sustainability in Whitpain by designating a portion of an Engineering Department position as the Sustainability Coordinator. The Sustainability Coordinator works collaboratively with the Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments in planning and designing sustainable facilities and carrying out the Best Management Practices. Township parks play an important role in the Township's MS4 requirements for storm water management. At present, the Township maintains the 183 active acres of parkland but not the 309 acres of open space.

Table 9.. Whitpain Township Public Works Department's Sustainable Equipment				
Item Description	Quantity	Year Purchased	Power Source	What it replaced
Hydraulic Air Compressor	1	2019	Hydraulic	Diesel tow-behind compressor
Hydraulic Air Compressor	1	2018	Hydraulic	Diesel tow-behind compressor
John Deere TE Gator 4x2	1	2021	Electric	Gas powered 4x2 Gator
John Deere TE Gator 4x2	1	2020	Electric	Diesel powered 6X4 Gator
John Deere Zero Turn Mower	1	2020	Propane	Gas powered Grasshopper mower
John Deere Zero Turn Mower	1	2020	Propane	Gas powered Grasshopper mower
Stihl TSA230 9" Demo Saw	3	2019	Battery	Gas powered demo saw
Stihl FSA90R String Trimmer	4	2019	Battery	Gas powered string trimmer
MSA 200 14" Chainsaw	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered chainsaw
MSA 160 10" Chainsaw	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered chainsaw
BGA 100, Hand held blower	2	2019	Battery	Gas powered blower
HSA 94R Hedge Trimmer	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered hedge trimmer
HLA 85 Pole Trimmer	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered pole trimmer
HTA 85 Pole Pruner	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered pole saw
RMA 510 Push Mower	1	2019	Battery	Gas powered push mower
KMA 130R	2	2019	Battery	Gas powered Kombi head unit

# Opportunities

- Sustainability<sup>5</sup> is the emerging theme for the future direction of the Parks and Recreation Department. The Department is in a period of transition from the development of the parks and recreation system toward its stewardship and management as part of the Township's vision of a sustainable future. As Whitpain Township strives to be more resilient to climate change, the parks and recreation system can be on the forefront of the multitude of issues that the Township from health and wellness to, conservation and fiscal management. Increasing trail access benefits the residents' health and wellness. Conserving and managing open space and increasing the tree canopy provides the physical and mental benefits of direct access to nature. The use of water diversion tactics changes parks from places of fun and relaxation to a major agent of change in the community including to help to meet MS4 requirements. By harnessing the disparate actions of various municipal departments into a cohesive effort on sustainability the Township will be able to make faster gains at less cost. This will help the Township obtain certification as one of Pennsylvania's Sustainable Communities.
- Incorporating maintenance into all park planning will help to establish the staffing, budget, partnership and pricing needs to ensure the protection of the township's investment and public safety.
- Establishing an Environmental Resource Specialist via a contract with an outside professional or firm or consider a shared position for this post among the Departments of Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Engineering will enable the Township to make gains in sustainability, stewardship of township resources, and land owner partnerships for conservation. This specialist can help with sustainability planning, development and training of best management practices, and environmental education. An independent contractor or the shared cost of a position along with the potential to generate revenue, could save money by implementing effective storm water management and maintenance practice. Securing grants would help to ameliorate its cost as well.
- The Township needs to undertake a systemwide park maintenance system along with management plans for each park and the trail system. These plans will calculate staffing and skill needs based upon workload and cost tracking. Use this information for planning, decision-making, and the allocation of resources.
- As the management team in the Parks and Recreation Department evolves, future skills desired should focus not only on organizational development and team building but also on environment and technology.
- As facilities are added, begin to plan new programming via part-time recreation leaders and contractors in fee based offerings.
- Use the implementation of this Plan Update to re-brand the Parks and Recreation Department with its own distinct image as the steward of public spaces, conservation and programming for healthy, active lifestyles for residents of all ages and interests.

## Sustainability...

*...meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.*

<sup>5</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987) Our Common Future aka Brundtland Report. United Nations; New York City, NY.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, Whitpain Township has a strong and dedicated management team and staff that provides an exceptional park system and five-star customer service. The Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments are at an important transition point evolving from land acquisition and facility development into stewardship and sustainability as key aspects of facility management. It is important to identify the resources needed to support this excellent level of service. Workload and cost tracking are of vital importance in helping officials to understand and support the true cost and needs required by Whitpain Township's excellent parks and recreation system. With Mermaid Lake Park on the docket, there is no better time for the Township to examine the real costs and resources needed to support stewardship, maintenance, and programming. Park maintenance is the single most challenging aspect of operating a park system. It is relatively easier and more popular to build a new park or improve an existing one but much harder to secure the resources to protect that investment through effective maintenance. This becomes ever harder in a system like Whitpain Township has with dedicated staff who try to keep pace with additional responsibilities without commensurate staffing and budget. This is not an unusual scenario as state and national park systems attest to major maintenance backlogs in their own systems. As the Whitpain Township parks, recreation, open space and trail system continues to grow, capacity issues could result in decreasing facility quality and visitor experiences.

## Financing

Whitpain Township has a budget philosophy rooted in a deep sense of responsibility to the taxpayers and a strong commitment to excellent public service. The Township supports parks, recreation, open space, and trails as evident in undertaking this plan update, the recent acquisition of Mermaid Lake, notable improvement of township parks, undertaking the trail network, and the successful pursuit of grant funding for park improvements.

While Whitpain Township's economic conditions have been very strong, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21 on municipal operations is yet to be determined as officials grapple with ramping up to the community's "new normal". With the economy largely closed for a portion of 2020, officials are being more cautious regarding budgeting than ever. Prioritizing competing goals to achieve a balanced budget in 2021 was a major accomplishment as there has been no tax increase since 2010. The Township has forecasted the need for adjustments over the next years.

## Local Tax Bill: A Township Bargain

Township taxes are the lowest proportion of a resident's tax bill. Based upon an average residential assessment of \$227,000, the homeowner pays:

- \$4,794 or 74.9% to the Wissahickon School District
- \$873 or 13.7% to Montgomery County
- \$726 or 11.4% to Whitpain Township

## Budget Process

In Whitpain Township, the budget planning is a collaborative process among the Board of Supervisors, township management and department heads with input from advisory boards and commissions. The Township advertises all budget meetings and opens them to the public. Township administration reviews the five-year capital improvement plan with input from department heads and makes revisions as needed. The Township holds budget workshops with staff in the fall. The preliminary budget is established for review and discussion. The Township advertises the preliminary budget for public review. In December, the Board of Supervisors considers and approves the budget for the next fiscal year.

## Capital Improvements and Operating Budget

The two major financing categories are capital improvements for open space, parks, recreation facility and trail improvements and the operating budget for administration, maintenance, and

programming. The capital improvement budget includes all projects estimated to cost more than \$10,000 and planned to last more than five years. The operating budget should include the costs of daily operation of the parks and recreation system and include things like personnel, salaries, wages and benefits.

## Capital Reserve Fund

The capital reserve fund is used for improvements that cost more than \$10,000 and last more than five years. The Township's Capital Improvement Program is the scheduling of selected physical plans and facilities for the Township over a certain period of time. These improvements are based on established priorities, according to the need or desire for such improvements, and according to the Township's present and anticipated financial resources from a variety of sources.

Table 10. Whitpain Township Improvement program for Open Space 2020 - 2025						
Park	2020 actual	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Stony Creek	7,500	82,500	37,500	67,500	110,000	40,000
Mermaid	7,045,000	1,618,000	40,000	190,000	0	0
Master Trails Plan	71,000	1,156,000	365,000	260,000	15,000	0
Wentz Run	749,000	970,000	245,000	180,000	85,000	10,000
Narcissa Road trail	0	50,000	0	0	0	0899,000
Centre Square	104,730	899,000	454,000	454,000	4,000	4,000
West Ambler	0	125,000	7,500	0	0	0
Prophecy Creek	8,199	40,000	115,000	100,000	0	0
Erbs Mill	15,000	135,000	25,000	0	0	0
Shade Tree Commission	47,550	20,000	15,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,482,872</b>	<b>5,200,050</b>	<b>139,550</b>	<b>1,307,050</b>	<b>269,550</b>	<b>86,250</b>
Vehicle Replacement				35,000		
<b>Related Township Improvements</b>						
Walkability	\$100,000					
Boys & Girls Club		1,200,000	2,600,000	100,000		

### Centre Square Park: How to Do More with Less

Whitpain Township opened Centre Square Park in 2015. This park includes seven sports fields, walking trails, and a sophisticated stormwater management system. The 95-acre park, located at 1527 Yost Road off of DeKalb Pike is near the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The idea for the park first surfaced in 2011 when the Township explored transforming two open space parcels into a community park with athletic fields. At this time the Northeast Extension widening project was under way. Walsh Construction, the project contractor, proposed placing 450,000 cubic yards of clean fill from the turnpike project onto the park site. In return for this accommodation, the Township formed a public - private partnership with Walsh Construction that resulted in the construction of an approximately \$4.5 million park at no cost to the Township.

# Operating Budget

## Revenues

The Parks and Recreation Department generates 67 percent of the administration and programming budget from non-tax sources. Non-tax revenues have increased 251percent while the general fund support has increased by about five percent. With inflation, the value of \$202,000 in 2001 is \$298,529 in 2021. If the Township's park maintenance budget were to be added to administration and recreation programs, the cost recovery rate would be about 36 percent, which is higher than the national average of about 33 percent.

Table 11. Parks & Recreation Revenue Sources 20 Year Comparison*				
Source	2001	2019 Actual	2020 Budgeted	2021 Budgeted
General Fund	202,000	230,833	227,574	212,854
Program Fees & Charges	211,981	521,500	529,000	533,000
TOTAL	413,981	752,333	756,574	745,854

\*Does not include Sports Organization Contributions

## Expenses

Table 12. Parks & Recreation Budget - Administration			
Line Item	2019	2020	2021
Salaries	201,073	206,099	212,078
Longevity Pay	4,000	3,500	3,900
Overtime Pay	1,911	5,000	5,000
FICA Employer	17,869	16,417	16,905
Unemployment Compensation	540	1,050	1,050
Workers Compensation	14,625	14,625	14,625
Group Health Benefits	75,052	60,450	62,868
Office Supplies	295	500	500
Printing & Forms	2,121	3,000	3,000
Computer Consultant Fees	4,190	4,500	6,000
Telephone & Internet	6,806	8,700	8,700
Travel	985	1,500	1,500
Advertising	645	500	200
Dues, subscriptions & Memberships	760	800	1,300
Uniforms	54	250	250
Conferences & Seminar Fees	3,080	4,000	4,000
Misc. Equipment & Supplies	2,255	2,500	2,750
Office Equipment	362	1,449	750
Equipment Replacement Funding	0	1,800	2,050
WRA Contribution	50,000	50,000	50,000
Ambler/Whitpain Football	5,000	5,000	5,000
WISLAX	0	5,000	5,000
	418,815	396,640	407,425

Table 13. Parks & Recreation Budget - Programs			
Line Item	2019	2020	2021
Salaries Seasonal Staff			
Salaries Park Guard	16,010	18,000	18,000
Salaries Kids Club	5,721	4,500	4,500
Salaries Park N' Tots	3,927	8,000	8,000
Salaries Stony Creek	69,655	68,000	68,000
Salaries School Day Off	0	300	300
Salaries Program Supv.	0	0	0
FICA Employer	7,292	7,535	7,535
Unemployment Comp	1,694	3,098	3,098
Concerts/Movies	10,670	14,000	20,000
Contracted Programs	57,105	50,000	57,000
Events	44,958	70,000	60,000
Community Festival	30,536	30,000	35,000
Softball League	230	500	500
Kids Club Expenses	4,000	2,000	4,000
Park N' Tots	426	5,000	5,000
Stony Creek Camp	81,189	80,000	80,000
Discount Tickets	31,779	30,000	30,000
Trips	6,375	5,000	5,000
Dog Park Maintenance	1,996	4,000	4,000
Program Admin. Fees	9,015	10,000	10,000
TOTAL	382,578	409,934	419,934

Table 14. Parks & Recreation Budget – Park Maintenance				
Line Item	2001	2019	2020	2021
Salaries	98,892	280,400	281,079	304,837
FICA Employer	General Fund	0	0	0
Unemployment Comp	General Fund	0	0	0
Public Works Supplies	24,700	17,188	28,327	25,000
Leaf Collection & Contracted Mowing	3,500	40,296	78,740	80,000
Tree Maintenance	0	15,324	46,000	40,000
PW/Park Maintenance	0	73,835	114,950	115,000
PR/Park Maintenance	0	107,429	95,132	110,000
TOTAL	159,092	(15,000)	644,228	674,837

## Funding Comparisons

Municipalities in Pennsylvania spend about \$38 per capita on parks and recreation annually. The national average is \$81.19<sup>6</sup>. Whitpain Township invests \$76.40 annually. The Township allocates 3.7 percent of the operating budget to parks and recreation. PA DCNR recommends at least five percent. In addition to township funding, WRA provides \$80,000 annually in ballfield maintenance at Centre Square Park.

<sup>6</sup> NRPA. (2021). NRPA Agency Performance Review. Accessed February 18, 2021.  
<https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>

## Supporting Park System Improvements

The Township has been investing millions of dollars annually in capital improvements ranging from land acquisition and park development including major projects. These include Prophecy Creek, Centre Square Park, Wissahickon Park, a new inclusive nature-based play area, and the Mermaid Lake acquisition and park planning project. The view to the future in terms of facilities is the development of Mermaid Lake, exploration of an indoor recreation center, and the study of the feasibility of a pool at Mermaid Lake. All of these improvements require operation and maintenance support as well as security.

## Assessment

### What Works Well

The Township significantly supports parks, recreation, open space, and trails as evident in its investment in land acquisition, facility development, and its annual appropriation of tax dollars. The Parks and Recreation Department has worked diligently in generating non-tax revenues increasing the percentage of its budget from non-tax sources two and a half times over since the last plan. The Township has been successful in securing grant funding totaling \$4,205,764 since 2012. The Township has generously supported community based organizations that provide important recreation services to the public including WRA, the Boys & Girls Club and on a smaller scale Ambler Whitpain Football and WissLAX. The Township has moved forward with instituting park maintenance agreements with organized sports leagues which should help to reduce maintenance tasks demands on staff. The Township also contracts out mowing as well as recreation programming that provides an alternative to direct staffing. In addition to the operating budget shown the budget tables, the Township also contributes support in the form of assistance from other departments for planning, security and administration.

## Challenges

The major challenge facing the Township is the ongoing maintenance of the parks, recreation facilities, open space and trails. While the park maintenance budget overall has increased from about \$159,000 in 2001 to about \$674,000 in 2021, the Township's parks and recreation system has expanded from 293 acres of parkland in 2003 to 492 in 2021. This includes major facility development as well as the addition of 12.25 miles of trails. Maintenance staffing levels have increased from four to six, but the addition of two workers for parkland that has increased by about 200 acres is insufficient. The staff works diligently at performing traditional tasks such as mowing and trash removal. However, they are not able to manage natural resources or carry out Best Management Practices as part of the Township's movement toward sustainability.

## Opportunities

- **Partnerships** – Pursue more partnerships such as with Wissahickon Trails. Wissahickon Trails would be a good source of natural resource management training and a potential management partnership with perhaps shared staffing. Reach out to other non-profit land management organizations such as Natural Lands for assistance with training and planning for natural resource maintenance management.
- **Stewardship** – Implement the Stewardship Plan for Armentrout that was created during this plan as a model for natural resource management.
- **Collaborative township efforts on sustainability.** – Coordination of several departments with functions related to environmental conservation can help advance a strategic township program of sustainability. Creating a shared staff position for Parks and Recreation, the Sustainability Coordinator, and Public Works would enable the Township to have a dedicated person with expertise in environmental science and programming to advance natural resource management practices, environmental education, outreach to private landowners to become land stewards with the Township, and to support the Township’s efforts to become certified as one of Pennsylvania’s Sustainable Communities.
- **Consider the establishment of a Whitpain Parks Conservancy.** Model it after successful conservancies in the cities of York, Pittsburgh, New York, and following the establishment of the parks conservancy underway now in Harrisburg. Successful conservancies raise funds, serve as advocates, and often provide programming and maintenance via their fund raising.

### Sustainable Pennsylvania Community Certification

A project of the Pennsylvania Municipal League the certification is a voluntary performance recognition program designed to help municipalities achieve sustainability goals, which in turn will allow them to save money, conserve resources, and encourage innovation. The program is intended to bring recognition to municipalities that are applying the policy and practice of sustainability; municipalities that incorporate sustainable practices into their operations also foster community prosperity.

## Recommendations

- Continue to invest in open space conservation, park improvements, trail system expansion.
- Explore public sentiment for additional capital funding methods of support.
- Continue to direct operating funds to park, open space and facility maintenance and a basic level of support for programming and administration used to leverage revenue from a mix of resources such as fees and charges, grants, gifts, foundations, partnerships and

sponsorships. Recognize that parks and recreation is an essential public service and the limitations of a small department and limited facilities that produce income. Investment in additional staff could generate more private revenue.

- Continue to monitor benchmarks on revenues and expenditures in light of the importance of parks and recreation evident in increased use and value during the pandemic.

## Conclusion

Whitpain Township has successfully invested significant funds in parkland acquisition, recreation facility development, and the initiation of the township's trail network that now stands at 12.25 miles. The Township has successfully secured grant funds for acquisition and development. The Township operates with a talented and dedicated work force that maintains and programs these facilities. The current level of staff and budget requires the staff to focus on highly visible maintenance tasks to ensure that the parks are safe, clean, and functional. Tasks are primarily mowing and trash removal. To achieve a greater and greener appearance for the Township, additional staffing and support is needed for park maintenance. With weather conditions producing extreme conditions, flooding, and storms, applying sustainable maintenance practices is critical to the township's resilience. The use of Best Management Practices will result in cost savings, cleaner air and water, and a healthy landscape with woodlands and streams. Despite the Township's annual increases in the park maintenance budget, Whitpain is actually spending less per acre for park maintenance than 20 years ago. This is because park land acreage has increased from 293 acres to 492. The Parks and Recreation Department has been diligently working on increasing revenue generation through program fees and charges that help to offset operating costs while providing high quality public service. Working with financial advisors to determine logical strategies beyond the annual appropriations budget through a combination of a revised revenue policy, partnerships, maintenance agreements, natural resource management, and the possible establishment of a parks conservancy will be vital in supporting a park system of the quality desired by the residents.

# Recommendations and Action Plan

## Conserve Connect Enhance

Based upon community input, demographics, trends, work sessions with township management and staff, the following core values, vision and mission and recommendations were identified.

### CORE VALUES

- Sustainability: environmental and fiscal
- Exceptional customer service
- Memorable visitor experiences
- Innovation
- Service to all

### VISION

The Department's vision is be recognized as a leader in sustainability and exceptional recreation experiences.

### MISSION

Conserve. Connect. Enhance. The Department's mission is to conserve our open space and natural resources, enhance our parks and recreation facilities with elevated design and comprehensive maintenance, and connect our community via programs, services, and safe places to walk and bicycle,

### PRIORITIES AND DECISIONS

The parks, recreation facilities, programs and services provided by the Whitpain Township Parks and Recreation Department and its partners form a high- quality park and recreation system enjoyed by the entire community. This system offers broad social, environmental and economic benefits to Whitpain Township. Community members highly value these facilities and programs. Uncertain social circumstances, sustainability, evolving activity interests, demographic trends and economic considerations all pose challenges to Whitpain Township.

The Department's new mission and vision statements provide a framework for addressing these needs. They provide the Department with a renewed focus on providing for the community's overall well- being, protecting township resources, and working collaboratively with partners. The outlook

for the future suggests that the Township will face challenging trade-off decisions about how to prioritize limited resources to maintain the tremendous park, recreation, and trails system advanced over the last 20 years while meeting the needs of the community.

## PLAN THEMES

The recommendations are described for the three inter-related elements of this Plan Update to **Conserve, Connect, and Enhance**.

- **Conserve** means to focus on protecting remaining open space, sustainability, and stewardship of open space, parks and trails, as well as inspiring all private landowners to become land stewards in Whitpain Township.
- **Connect** is focused on connecting the community to schools, neighborhoods, nature, and each other via safe places to walk and bicycle as well as through programs, services, partnerships and collaboration that strengthen the sense of place in Whitpain Township.
- **Enhance** positions the Township to complete the park improvement projects planned over the years, elevate the quality of design.

All of these elements fit together to form a parks, recreation, open space and trails system that advances the Township's efforts in sustainability and that are enjoyed by the entire community. Whitpain Township's green open spaces, park and recreation facilities, trails and programs provide broad benefits to the community including individual, social, economic and environmental benefits. Residents place a high value on these facilities and services and have grown to expect high standards from the Township. The local economy benefits through attracting and maintaining an educated and healthy workforce; homeowners benefit from enviable property values, and local businesses benefit with increased sales producing tax revenues for the Township to use in providing essential community services.

## Action Plan – What Happens Next

This Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Update is designed to serve as a decision-making tool for Whitpain Township. The following chart summarizes the recommendations including actions, funding where appropriate, and timing.

Whitpain Township continually strives to keep up with the expectations, opportunities, and needs of the community. Parks, especially Wentz Run, Prophecy Creek, and the trails are heavily used by the general public. Organized sports groups are major users of Centre Square Park, Stony Creek Sports Complex, and Wentz Run. Most programs have high participation rates, some with waiting lists. The Township's sports facilities are also in great demand. All organizations that partner with the Parks and Recreation Department to supply recreation opportunities to the community have numerous positive impacts including encouraging healthy lifestyles, promoting social well-being, providing enjoyment, and enhancing the quality of life. The Action Plan focuses on:

- Consistently meeting and exceeding citizen expectations,

- Innovative ideas and methods to successfully meet challenges posed by budgetary, facility and staffing limitations,
- A system that benefits residents by increasing services to all age groups and providing diverse opportunities,
- The Parks and Recreation Department established as a trusted partner in providing community services,
- A stewardship approach to providing high-quality facilities, existing and future, through excellence in design, incorporation of maintenance in facility planning and judicious use of public funds,
- Collaboration and partnerships among the Township, public, private and, non-profit , organizations in providing recreational services and facilities, and
- A proactive planning process guided by community needs and implementable strategies; and a process for reviewing and updating this document annually.

## Timing

This **Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Update** is intended to be a 10+-year Plan. It offers a guiding mechanism for continuing to meet existing and future community needs and expanding the positive impacts of this portion of Whitpain Township's public services. The strength of this Action Plan stems from the extensive research, community involvement, analysis of needs, and public review that form the basis for the recommendations it contains. The implementation schedule follows that of the previous plan as it was successfully implemented via practical yet visionary actions on the following time frame. It is important to note that opportunities and needs emerge that compel moving recommendations around based on the circumstances such as grant opportunities, real estate acquisition, land development, partnership opportunities, new program venues, or emerging recreation programs.

- Ongoing
- Immediate: immediately or within one- year
- Short-Term: within two to five years
- Long-term: within five to 10+ years • Ongoing

**Table 15. Implementation Schedule for the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan Update: Conserve. Connect. Enhance.**

**CONSERVE**

**Element 1. Conserve.** Move into the next era of parks, recreation, open space, and trails. Advance the Township's work in sustainability in which the Township works toward conserving, managing and maintaining the open spaces,

Foster the Township's transition from successful years of parkland acquisition and development with continued and expanded sustainable land management. This includes creating a land management plan for every park and trail; the addition of a shared contractor or position for Environmental Management among P&R, PW, and the Sustainability Coordinator in Engineering; job would be natural resource management, environmental ed, programs, marshaling private landowners to be land stewards.

Action	Responsibility	Resources & Concepts
<b>Ongoing</b>		
Work toward conserving as much of the remaining open space as possible.	Parks & Recreation Director with Parks and Open Space Board	Township funds and partnership with a land trust to help facilitate urgent opportunities for open space conservation when properties go up for sale and preferably before that.
Incorporate maintenance planning in every park planning project and involve the maintenance staff in design.	Parks & Recreation Director in partnership with Public Works maintenance staff.	Township includes maintenance plan in each master park plan (see below for initial approach). Staff track costs and tasks and adjust based on field experience.
<b>Immediate</b>		
Develop pilot maintenance park maintenance plan.	Recreation Director in partnership with Public Works maintenance staff.	Engage with outside professional advisor for several maintenance plans. Include staff training with goal the pilot informs the ongoing use of maintenance plans. Consider a \$2,500 DCNR RECTAP grant to offset training costs.
Review and revise Township ordinances to advance sustainability practices on private lands.	Planning Commission	Retain and AICP certified planner. Cost estimate for review, \$2,500, ordinance amendments in the \$7,500 to \$20,000 range

Short Term		
Retain Sustainability contractor or employee to be shared by Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Engineering.	Township Engineer as manager, in collaboration with Parks and Recreation, Public Works	Township funds, some revenue captured through programming, land management savings and MS4 compliance. Long term benefits of stormwater infiltration, reduced flooding and public education.
Develop a plan to pursue certification of the Township as one of Pennsylvania's Sustainable Communities	Involvement of all departments with Sustainability Coordinator as lead	Pennsylvania Municipal League program
Long Term		
Develop land management plans for every park and open space.	Parks and Recreation Director and Public Works Director	Staff time. Include open spaces and natural areas in maintenance management as the Township moves forward with sustainability efforts.
Carry out the Pennsylvania Sustainability Certification	Sustainability Coordinator as lead	All departments to be involved.
Support open space acquisition by maintaining ongoing relationships with owners of critical open space.	Parks and Recreation and Open Space Board	Maintaining landowner relationships minimizes unexpected sales and development plans. Wissahickon Trails and other land conservancies can assist with this effort. To the extent they are already doing this work, there may be no cost.

<b>CONNECT</b>		
Element 2. Connect. Continue to develop the Township's trail network. Work on connecting the community through programs and services that foster the sense of community, enable residents to live active healthy lives, connect with nature close-to-home, and celebrate together through special events in township parks.		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Resources &amp; Concepts</b>
Continue to implement the Township's Trail Plans. Work in partnership with landowners and community based organizations on trail development and maintenance.		
<b>Ongoing</b>		
Carry out recommendations to improve Wentz Run Trail	Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments	Volunteers and Township Funds
Continue to implement the recommendations from the Walkability Study.	Township Engineer	Township funds and potentially grants
<b>Immediate</b>		
Work with Wissahickon Trails to connect nature trails	Parks & Rec/Wiss Trails	Twp: Funds, technical ability, access to design consultants Wiss Trails: Land ownership and community relationships
Add trail segment along northern section of Skippack Pike to connect the villages and provide a north-south trail	Parks & Rec, Planning Commission, BOS, PennDOT	Township funds, technical assistance from consultants
<b>Short Term</b>		
Implement the remainder of the Liberty Bell trail	Parks & Rec	Township Funds, grant funding-DCNR, DVRPC, PennDOT, etc.,
Provide secondary trails along major roads	Parks & Rec, Planning Commission, BOS	Township funds, technical assistance from consultants
Expand the nature trails beyond Wissahickon Trails into semi-public lands	Parks & Rec, Planning Commission	Twp: Outreach Others: Semi-public land, volunteers
<b>Long-Term</b>		
Create neighborhood level trails to connect residents to parks with emphasis on Mermaid Lake.	Park & Rec, PC, BOS	Twp: outreach, technical abilities, funding, land ownership
Match trail materials and character to surrounding aesthetics. Continue to improve trails as part of streetscape upgrades.	Park & Rec, PC, BOS	Twp: technical abilities, access to consultants, land ownership, township and grant funding

Programming		
<b>Ongoing</b>		
Address changes in programming resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.	Parks & Recreation Management Team	Staff time. Monitor programming trends in other departments to generate ideas for changes.
Refine and strengthen Core Programming Areas.	Program Staff	Keep the focus on youth programs, sports, camps and community special events for the foreseeable future.
Continue to have a social media presence	Recreation Coordinator	Track information and promote the successes in outreach.
<b>Immediate</b>		
Explore transition to new “Core Program Areas” to focus on connecting people to nature, fitness and wellness, youth programs, family programs, and special events.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	
Work on adjusting hours to reflect “real time” programming.	Parks and Recreation Management Team with support from Township Management	Weekend and evening programming requires flexibility in hours. Future hires should be assigned to peak recreation programming hours including staff rotation to prevent burnout.
<b>Short Term</b>		
Plan for the development of a sustainability program to “make every land owner a land steward”.	Parks and Recreation Management Team and Sustainability Coordinator	Create an advisory group of Wissahickon Trails, Community College and School District Sustainability Point Staff, and others to brainstorm and advise on development of this program
Make tweens, teens, and seniors next in priority	Program Coordinator	Form a teen advisory council
Develop a program management plan that includes provisions for innovation such as goals for the introduction of new programs and services.	Parks and Recreation Management Team with support from Township Management	Weekend and evening programming requires flexibility in hours. Future hires should be assigned to peak recreation programming hours including staff rotation to prevent burnout.
Include programming as a component in all master planning and feasibility studies	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Ongoing practice in all planning. Include revenue generation and exploration of new revenue sources.

## ENHANCE

Element 3. **Enhance.** Enhance visitor experiences and resource management in the completion of the improvements planned for existing facilities and undertaking phased in development of Mermaid Lake by elevating the design, equipment, and materials in the public spaces, using sustainable elements, and ensuring the maintenance of built and natural features. Ensure ongoing support to protect the investment in parks, protect natural resources, and provide excellent visitor experiences.

Action	Responsibility	Resources
Carry out the CIP to keep all the parks safe, clean and functional. It is important not to sacrifice the existing park conditions for the development of Mermaid, Striking balance of facilitating a basic level of use at Mermaid along with the implementation of the five year CIP is essential. Focus on providing places for residents to gather and socialize, especially tweens and teens. Also plan for facilities not available including fishing, winter sports, adult fitness facility (in Wentz Run, then Mermaid and Centre Square is successful.) a pickle ball hub, disc golf, a large amphitheater. a pump track, a bicycle playground, and quiet beautiful areas with comfortable facilities and scenic beauty to just enjoy being outside and relaxing, more and wider loop trails in park.		

### PARKS and RECREATION FACILITIES

#### Ongoing

Continue with scheduled upgrades as outlined in the 2021 Capital Improvements Program and Open Space Fund 5 Year Plan	Parks & Recreation and Public Works	Continue to seek DCNR and DCED grants. Prepare “shovel ready” projects in anticipation of federal infrastructure programs.
Continue to work with the Shade Tree Commission to increase the health of Whitpain’s trees and forests, and to also continue to increase the overall tree canopy	Parks & Recreation, Shade tree commission, Sustainability Director or contractor	Tree Vitalize grants.

#### Immediate

Complete the construction of the nature based playground in Centre Square Park.	Parks & Recreation Director	Township funds. Seek grants for future phases.
Develop sustainability goals for the park and open space system that are measurable and achievable over 1, 5, and 10 years	Sustainability Coordinator	Sustainability contractor
Evaluate the Capital Improvement Program in light of the recommendations of this plan for each park and revise it accordingly.	Parks & Recreation Management Team with Park & Open Space Board	Determine costs, potential partners, and funding sources.

Undertake a feasibility study for an indoor recreation and sports center.	Parks & Recreation Management Team	\$35,000 – 50,000
Phase in Mermaid so that the public can make use of the most recent land acquisition made by the township	Parks and Recreation	Focus on trails, pickleball, and gathering areas.
<b>Short Term</b>		
Assess the potential to establish recreation facilities not available in township parks at present: teen facilities, social gathering areas, pump track, bicycle park, pickleball, a larger amphitheater	Parks & Recreation Management Team and Park and Open Space Board	Staff time. Costs to be determined upon advancing the concepts..
<b>Long-Term</b>		
Develop land management plans for every park and open space.	Public Works and Sustainability Coordinator	Staff time. Consider getting outside help. Work with Wissahickon Trails on stewardship planning.
Continue to construct and finish existing park projects: Wissahickon Park, Erbs Mill Park, Stony Creek Sports Park, Nature Play at Centre Square, and Mermaid Lake	Parks and Recreation and Engineering	Cost to be determined. Work to get phases fleshed out to the point of having shovel ready projects to take advantage of grant opportunities.
Develop a township wide park signage plan including the entire range of signs necessary to celebrate the park system from park signs to wayfinding signs to special features signs	Parks and Recreation	\$75,000 for design of a comprehensive signage system.
Upgrade material choices moving beyond asphalt and concrete to include materials that reflect Whitpain's location like indigenous stone. Look to park design at the local, state, and federal level from the 1940s and 50s for inspiration.	Parks and Recreation and Public Works	Costs to be determined during design phase.
Revitalize playgrounds as warranted using state of the art design based on the science of children's play and intergenerational activity.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Use designers with imagination, expertise, and experience to achieve designs unique to Whitpain.
Add perimeter walking trails with interconnecting loops where possible in all parks.	Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Engineering	Retain a Landscape Architect to design the pathways. Cost on case by case basis.

Management		
<b>Ongoing</b>		
Continue with scheduled maintenance and upgrades as outlined in the 2021 Capital Improvements Program and Open Space Fund 5 Year Plan	Parks & Recreation and Public Works	Continue to seek DCNR and DCED grants. Prepare “shovel ready” projects in anticipation of federal infrastructure programs.
Incorporate maintenance planning in every park planning project and involve the maintenance staff in design.	Parks & Recreation and Public Works	Staff time. Consider retaining a contractor with expertise in maintenance to assist in this work.
<b>Immediate</b>		
Develop a maintenance management plan for Mermaid Lake in accordance with the Park Master Plan.	Public Works	Incorporate into Park Master Plan process
Collect testimonials and photographs for use in promoting Whitpain Township’s parks, recreation, open space, trails, and sustainability projects.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Hire a photographer in a contract basis to capture images in parks and programs. Allocate \$10,000/year.
<b>Short Term</b>		
Plan for management considerations such as legacy planning for Director’s retirement; adapting staffing hours for public recreation service rather than traditional 9-5 office hours; management of Mermaid Lake and facilities such as pickle ball which tend to require enhanced management and oversight.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Organizational support for re-configuring staffing and hours. Consider knowledge, skills, and aptitudes of future position to balance existing staff. Strive to secure skills in environment, sustainability, partnerships, and public relations.
Develop ecological management plans containing processes and instructions to manage a site and its operations in such a way as to protect and enhance the biodiversity and ecology of each park and open space	Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Sustainability Coordinator	Sustainability contractor
Expand park maintenance training to include more work on stewardship and natural resource management	Public Works, and Sustainability Coordinator with support from, Parks and Recreation Management Team	1-2 percent of the maintenance budget for training. Partner with a conservation organization to advance the Armentrout Stewardship Plan to other open space and natural areas.

Long Term		
Develop a formal written maintenance management plan with workload-cost tracking and quality standards for parks and work tasks. Not everything has to be maintained at the same level. Incorporate tracking, reporting and communication system using mobile devices and cloud software.	Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Sustainability Coordinator	Form partnerships with the School District, Community College and Wissahickon Trails to discuss resources at hand. Consider securing outside assistance via a contract to complete the plan. Network with other departments to share ideas.
Use the Armentrout Stewardship Model to begin the maintenance of all open spaces.	Parks and Recreation and Public works Departments.	Use a target range of \$170 to \$500 per acre for open space maintenance. Strive to partner with Wissahickon Trails on developing the open space maintenance program.
Base staffing decisions on township goals, written quality standards for parks, recreation facilities, open space and trails and information generated through workload cost tracking.	Public Works Director, Township Manager, and Board of Supervisors.	Staff time to monitor and project staffing needs or alternatives. Consider more contracting of functions and expanded partnerships. About \$100,000 per employee for additional staff with salary and benefits.
Partnerships - Re-strategize on partnerships.		
Continue to foster positive relationships with common interest including WRA, WissLAX and Ambler Whitpain Football , Wissahickon School District and Montgomery County Community College.		
Work with the Parks and Recreation Board and Shade Tree Commission to re-invigorate their vision, mission, goals and action plans		
Work with Wissahickon Trails on exploring a stronger partnership.		Draw upon their land management expertise for staff training; assist them with acquiring land and conservation easements, especially in the Prophecy Creek area, which also assists with meeting stormwater obligations while providing passive recreation lands the Township does not have to own and maintain

Explore the establishment of the Whitpain Parks Conservancy.		Seek a Peer Grant of \$10,000 with a \$1,000 match to undertake this study.
<b>Financing</b>		
<b>Ongoing</b>		
Continue to invest Township funds in parks, recreation, open space and trails commensurate with Township resources and the program or project sustainability.	Board of Supervisors	Continue to use benchmarks and tap public opinion about to gauge support and comparisons for considerations in township budgets for parks and recreation.
Continue to seek outside support for parks, open space and trails through partnerships and sponsorships.	Parks & Recreation Management Team	Staff time. Continue to seek DCNR and DCED grants.
Continue to use the five year Capital Improvement Program with its financial information to plan strategically over a five year period rather than a year to year basis.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	A five year planning framework facilitates holistic improvements that ensure total project completion.
<b>Immediate</b>		
Work on adjusting hours to reflect “real time” programming.	Parks and Recreation Management Team with support from Township Management	Weekend and evening programming requires flexibility in hours. Future hires should be assigned to peak recreation programming hours including staff rotation to prevent burnout.
Prepare “shovel ready” projects in anticipation of federal infrastructure programs.	Engineering and Parks and Recreation	Have design and construction documents ready to proceed with construction or bidding when funds become available
Establish cost recovery goals for all programs.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Include direct and indirect costs from all sources involved in the particular programs.
Make financial decisions about system wide improvements and completion of all park master plans.	Board of Supervisors	Given the magnitude of Mermaid Lake, work to ensure that improvements continue to be made in all parks and not only Mermaid Lake.

Short Term		
Designate “Partnerships” and “Sustainability” as key management functions.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Staff time. Set realistic goals with percentage of work hours dedicated to each functional area to ensure mainstreaming and dedication of these areas as main component of the Department.
Work with the Parks and Open Space Board and Shade Tree Commission to re-invigorate their vision, mission, goals and action plans	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Staff and volunteer time. Consider having a retreat using this plan to formulate future roles and direction for these boards.
Support parks, open space acquisition and trails by determining public sentiment for a dedicated fund for open space, parks, recreation and trails.	Parks and Recreation with Open Space Board	The Trust for Public Land conducts feasibility studies that determine public support and achievable financial goals for open space referenda. Cost typically \$15,000 to \$20,000. When parkland is purchased with referendum funds, 25% can be set aside for maintenance. If public sentiment favorable, pursue referendum.
Develop a revenue management plan for parks and recreation.	Parks and Recreation Management Team	Staff time.
Long Term		
Pursue enhanced revenue opportunities.	Parks and Recreation, Management Team	Monitor how parks and recreation departments and conservation organizations nationwide are generating revenues to get ideas.
Implement the recommendations of feasibility studies regarding funding programs via public referenda.	Board of Supervisors	Township finance team supplemented by outside counsel if needed.
Explore establishment of the Whitpain Parks Conservancy. Carry out the recommendations.	Parks and Recreation, Management Team	Apply for a \$10,000 Peer grant from PA DCNR to carry out this project.

# Conclusion

## Conserve, Connect, Enhance...*Commence*

The adoption of this **Plan Update** is not the end of the process but rather the beginning of the successful implementation of its recommendations.

Guided by this **Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan Update 2021 - 2030**, the Whitpain Township community will strive to cultivate creativity in implementation of the plan's recommendation in conservation of our open space and natural resources, connecting our community through trails and programs, and enhancing our parks and facilities through elevated design and effective management and financing practices.

In pointing the way for the Township to achieve the goals identified in the planning process, this **Plan Update** represents the convergence of our aspirations and the imperative to push the boundaries of creativity, imagination, and partnerships. Just as the successful implementation of our previous plans demonstrated, the Township is known for the fruitful development of innovative alternative methods to government "as usual". The COVID-19 crisis that occurred during this planning process underscored just how important parks and recreation is to our community.

The goals and action plan of this **Plan Update** set out a ten year vision for the Township. During this time, the action plan will serve as a living document designed to address emerging needs and seize opportunities as part of ongoing strategic thinking—especially in the process of developing an annual Action Work Plan for parks, recreation, open space and trails as well as in a formal review every year prior to budget discussions.

But at the heart of this **Plan Update** stands Whitpain Township's ongoing commitment to excellent public service and engagement of the whole community. The core values of environmental and fiscal sustainability, exceptional customer service, memorable visitor experiences, innovation, and service to all animate our mission. They drive our decision-making and allocation of resources towards excellence, continuing to make Whitpain Township one of the best places to live in Pennsylvania.

# Appendices

**A. Land Use: Putting Conservation into Codes**

**B. Armentrout Preserve Maintenance and Plant Communities**

**C. Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Public Opinion Survey**

**D. Best Customer Survey**

## Appendix A

### Putting Conservation Into Local Plans and Codes.

This review examines how Whitpain Township currently conserves natural areas and provides community open space, through the two primary land use regulations - the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance. When these two documents contain standards for new development that conserves land as development occurs, the Township open space goals can be partially met, at low cost, while still providing a landowner an equitable financial return on their land.

Whitpain Township has many state-of-the-art land use regulations that help to conserve natural and cultural features in the Township. The Township also hires professional staff to review development plans and to enforce local codes. The suggestions in this chapter are intended to fine-tune the existing land use regulations. More important, land use regulations augment scarce land acquisition dollars by conserving land through the development process.

The 2016 *Whitpain Township Comprehensive Plan: Four Villages Within a Community* sets the stage for updating land use regulations. During the plan update process, residents identified the top five areas where they would like the Township to allocate resources:

1. Traffic. The Township is undergoing other traffic management initiatives. Increasing non-vehicular opportunities, such as connecting parks, schools and neighborhoods with trails, can help reduce the number of local vehicle trips. The Zoning Ordinance can require and encourage trail connections.
2. Crime/public safety. Zoning plays a smaller role in addressing crime and public safety. In addition to good park design, ordinance standards for open space that position new homes to face the open space puts “eyes on the landscape” and makes these areas safer and more inviting.
3. Recreation/parks/open space. The SLDO ordinance contains a public land dedication and fee in lieu requirement that can augment existing parkland. In addition, the cluster provisions can be updated to maximize the amount of open space in new developments. Village zoning standards can require “greens” or plazas on redeveloping sites.
4. Environmental Protection. Both Zoning and SLDO establish standards for minimizing the impact of new development on natural features. The Township is fortunate to have a Shade Tree Commission that conducts ongoing evaluations of tree canopy cover and works to expand it.
5. Redevelopment/Revitalization. The Comprehensive Plan establishes the priorities for and character of the four village areas. In Center Square, a new Community Shopping Center Overlay District has already been adopted. The strategy for Blue Bell would be to increase walkability; for Broad Axe to become a community gateway and for West Ambler to revitalize following environmental remediation. Zoning influences how these areas will evolve, including the degree to which they include parkland, trails and conservation of existing natural areas.

#### SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

##### I. RECREATIONAL AREAS; COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Township is to be commended for requiring public land dedication when new development occurs. Section 129-18 requires dedication of one acre of park and recreation area for each 25

homes. An equivalent contribution is also permitted based on the market value of the land. Both are excellent practices. This section would benefit from updating:

- a. Based on the outcomes of this plan and determination of the desired amount of parkland, the acreage per new dwelling unit may change;
- b. We recommend specific standards for the land that qualifies as park, playground and recreational areas, so that new residents can actually use the dedicated open space. The current code calls for “due consideration” which may not be enough direction for a developer; and
- c. Some communities, including Plymouth Township in Montgomery County, require non-residential development to contribute land or a fee in lieu, an approach that Whitpain Township may wish to consider.

## II. SUBDIVISION PLAN REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

The recommendations in this section are based on the model subdivision ordinance provisions developed by Natural Lands in partnership with PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) under a statewide program *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design*. Model SLDO and Zoning ordinances are available to the Township, for adaptation into ordinance amendments.

- a. **Context Map.** Section 129-58. Preliminary Plan, would benefit from a requirement for a *Context Map* showing natural features on both the proposed development site and on adjacent properties. Such maps show reviewing officials the location of natural features and development patterns on adjacent properties and within one-half mile of the development site (just five inches at the 400-foot scale).

To make this information easy to provide, and to minimize the cost involved, such data can easily be taken from existing published sources such as aerial photographs (from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, formerly Soil Conservation Service) showing patterns of vegetation and development, USGS topo sheets, FEMA floodplain maps, and USFWS wetlands maps. These maps and photos should then be reproduced by the applicant’s engineer to the same scale (1” = 400 feet).

The value of such an enhanced *Context Map* would be to help reviewers understand the relationship of resources on the subject property to natural and cultural features, to greenway and trail systems and to possible development patterns on adjacent and nearby lands. This kind of understanding is critical to planning for improved open space and trail connections.

- b. **Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan.** The Township already requires this kind of drawing in Section 129-58. C. *Existing features of the land*. Given the strong emphasis on tree preservation and requirements for screening and planning, it is surprising that the Township does not require much more information on natural features compared to those currently on the book. The natural features inventory would typically be prepared by a landscape architect or physical planner for the developer and would sometimes be based on recommendations from historic preservation specialists and/or conservation biologists. It would tell reviewers virtually everything they need to know about the property in terms of its noteworthy natural and cultural features.

An increasing number of developers are beginning to understand that preserving trees -- whether they be notable individual specimens, hedgerows, or woodlands, enhances the value of their projects, because buyers appreciate such amenities. Specifically, Section 129-58. C. could be amended to require that the *Existing features of the land* plan show ponds, streams and natural drainage swales, the species and size of trees over 12 inches diameter, vegetative cover types and condition, soil series, types and phases, ridge lines, watershed boundaries, views from public lands and roads, and existing easements and encumbrances.

The *Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan* is the most important document in the subdivision design process, as it provides the factual foundation upon which all design decisions are based. If one can agree that this information is required to enable the township to render a fully-informed decision, one can also agree that it should be submitted very early on, before any design work is conducted, so that the design process itself may be informed by this data.

- c. **Site Visit.** Because it is impossible to completely understand a site only by examining a two-dimensional paper document inside a municipal building, it is essential that Township officials and appropriate staff walk the property with the *Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan* in hand, to take the full measure of the proposed development site. With the *Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan* in hand, Township consulting staff and officials would walk the property with a view toward offering suggestions about the recommended location of features to be conserved, whether open space in a cluster development, a specimen tree to be conserved in a parking lot, or a stream corridor to be replanted. Without the benefit of experiencing the property in person it is extremely difficult to evaluate the proposed layouts.

Such visits also provide a much better understanding of the best locations for potential conservation areas on the subject parcel, and their potential linkages to natural or cultural features on adjacent properties that might be developed sometime in the future. Most Townships treat *Site Visits* as publicly advertised “outdoor work sessions” at which no decisions are reached. They should be scheduled either soon before or soon after the *Sketch Plan* is submitted (more on Sketch Plans, below). Once the *expensive Preliminary Plan* has been drawn up, the layout hardens and is extremely difficult to change in any meaningful way.

- d. **Sketch Plan.** Whitpain Township does not offer or encourage a voluntary Sketch Plan review in the SLDO Ordinance. Pennsylvania Townships may only require two formal submissions, subject to the 90-day review period. However, offering and strongly encouraging a voluntary Sketch Plan permits discussion and modifications before large sums are spent on engineering and developers become understandably reluctant to make changes. In our experience, when Township staff who accept development applications make it known that the municipality encourages Sketch Plans, developers seldom decline the opportunity.

The *Sketch Plan* should be prepared as a useful “overlay sheet”, imposed on the *Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan*. This format enables reviewing officials and staff to see clearly how well (or how poorly) the proposed layout avoids impacting the underlying resources, and what opportunities have been taken (or missed) to enhance site conditions such as by restoring stream buffers. Trying to evaluate how well a *Sketch Plan* has been laid out, without this kind of very basic site data, is like trying to play a game of cards with an incomplete deck. Put another way, relying on an incomplete data set, having only part of the information that is needed to

render a truly informed decision, the only kind of decision which can be made is a poorly informed one.

The combined influence of the *Context Map*, *Existing Resources/Site Analysis Plan*, the *Site Visit* (by the entire Planning Commission and relevant staff), the *Sketch Plan*, the *four-step design approach*, and the various zoning recommendations that follow would all make a significant difference in Whitpain Township's ability to conserve open space, parks and natural features.

- e. **Four-Step Design Approach.** Where subdivision layouts require open space, such as the current rural cluster and open space design options, the open space should be determined first. If this is done, and if the ordinance requires that a significant proportion of the unconstrained land be designated as open space, it is nearly impossible to produce a truly inferior layout. In fact, to the extent that the property contains elements of the trail network or adjoins other conserved lands, the plan is likely to be fairly good. The logical second step, after locating the open space areas, is to select house locations, with homes positioned to take maximum advantage of the open space in neighborhood squares, commons, greenways, or forest preserves. The third step involves "connecting the dots" by aligning the streets and trails to serve the new homes. Drawing in the lot lines, Step Four, is the least significant part of the process.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the existing cluster regulations is that the open space is not defined in this manner, and therefore tends to become a collection of whatever bits and pieces of land that have proven difficult or challenging to develop. The other common failing of such provisions is that they often require deep perimeter buffers around the proposed development (as if it were a gravel pit or junkyard), a practice that inadvertently leads to very poor layouts in which a substantial percentage of the total open space is consumed by this excessive separation (particularly needless when new single-family developments are being "buffered" from existing single-family developments).

- f. **Additional Observations on Design Standards.**

**Section 129-19, Buffers and landscaping for parking areas.** The Township is to be commended for rigorous attention to greening new parking areas with both buffers and internal planting. Such practices not only provide aesthetic benefits, but also improve microclimate by shading parking lots and improving stormwater infiltration. Section 129-19. D. (5) requires planting areas to be raised in order to prevent road salts from seeping into the planting area. This is an important issue however, more current standards would allow these areas to serve as stormwater infiltration areas, with notched curbs and depressed planting areas that infiltrate stormwater and serve the multiple purposes of improved water quality, cooling and aesthetics. The pair of photographs below shows this type of system, that both filters pollutants and infiltrates stormwater.



## ZONING ORDINANCE

Whitpain Township has only 28 remaining open parcels of ten or more acres. The relatively developed nature of the Township makes the last remaining land all the more valuable. Second, the four villages offer opportunities for redevelopment of more compact mixed-use development, addressing needs to manage growth without consuming “greenfield” sites. The Township has already taken measures to improve the aesthetics of village redevelopment, as evidenced in the Shopping Center Overlay District. Taking a similar approach in other village and commercial areas can improve the aesthetics of the Township and offer urban “greening” as redevelopment occurs.

### I. CONSERVING OPEN SPACE IN NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT A FEW SUGGESTED CLUSTER REGULATION UPDATES.

Inasmuch as the Township is looking for ways to achieve interconnected greenways that link parks, schools and neighborhoods, we suggest that the current cluster provisions be fine-tuned to make them true “conservation subdivisions” compact residential developments with an emphasis on open space design.

- A. **Density Issues:** The R5 and R6 zoning districts permit “rural cluster” by Conditional Use (more on the latter, below). In both districts, there is a slight density bonus from one dwelling unit per 80,000 square feet, to one dwelling unit per 65,000 square feet. We question whether this density bonus is necessary and encourage you to consider the rural cluster at one dwelling per 80,000 square feet of developable land. Developers experienced in conservation design recognize that their development costs often decline due to less site grading, and also to shorter and/or narrower street pavements. They also recognize the premiums they can charge for lots that abut or face onto protected open space (similar to golf course developments).

- B. Conditional Use vs. By-Right.** The “rural cluster” or conservation design option should not require review under the Conditional Use process, a common practice among townships that effectively discourages many developers from ever proposing this kind of design approach, Whitpain included. When adopting such flexible approaches, it is not necessary to designate open space developments as Conditional Uses because they can be made to “perform” well through a set of detailed and strict “performance standards” relating to the quantity, quality, and configuration of the protected open space. Conditional Use designation, which many townships use to classify non-conventional developments with smaller lots and greater open space, typically produces a chilling effect upon many applicants, frequently discouraging them from opting for this flexible design approach.
- C. Density dis-incentives.** Townships can reverse the usual dynamic of offering a density bonus for cluster and subjecting it to Conditional Use approval. Because open space in new developments is desirable, the rural cluster option should be treated as the “path of least resistance” – a by-right, full density option of one dwelling per 80,000 square feet of developable ground. In contrast, a developer who chooses *not* to set aside open space would be penalized and obtain half or fewer building lots.
- D. Calculating Open Space Areas.** Whitpain’s rural cluster ordinances do not fall into a common flaw of requiring too little open space, often in the 35% to 30% gross tract area range. The Whitpain Township rural cluster provisions require 55% of the developable land and additional constrained land as open space. We commend the Township for this approach. The codes could benefit from a little more guidance, preferably in the SLDO ordinance, regarding the configuration of the open space.

It is important to set minimum open space requirements as a percentage of the *net* buildable land area that is not constrained by wetness, flooding, or steepness. Said another way, in addition to certain percentages of lands that are inherently unfit for development (wetlands, floodplains, and slopes >25%), at least 50% of the remaining land should be earmarked as permanent open space in the lower-density districts, with an underlying density of one to two acres. where conventional lot size is 40,000 sq. ft. This would ensure that a good part of the total open space is usable by more than ducks or mountain goats.

- E. Design Standards for Open Space.** The Township’s current rural cluster option sets high standards for development. In addition to the few suggestions in this section and the SLDO section, a few critical updates to the codes would ensure better open space design. Specifically, when 75% of the homes face the open space across a street or greenspace, the open space becomes more usable and accessible to residents. If this standard had been in place when Phipps Way, a higher density “Traditional Neighborhood Development” was proposed, the central court might have been designed as a village green, instead of being occupied entirely by homes. Other critical design standards include requiring trail linkages, connecting to other protected land on adjacent parcels and disqualifying long, narrow strips of land from the open space requirements.

- F. Open space design option.** Similar to rural cluster, the Township offers an open space design options in the R1 district on 25 or more acres and in the R7 district with 3 or more acres. Given the very few large tracts remaining in the Township, the 25-acre threshold could be reduced to five acres, in order to take advantage of open space opportunities.

## **II. VILLAGES, COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS AND MIXED-USE DESIGN**

The four villages provide opportunities for mixed-use development that can both rejuvenate the Townships' commercial services and provide housing for new residents without consuming scarce open space. As the Township plans for village redevelopment and expansion, district plans can help identify the form that can then be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance. The following considerations should guide the village planning and zoning:

- Replace single-story, single-use structures with multi-story, mixed use development, including residences.
- Ensure safe pedestrian walkways, integrated with the Township trail network.
- Integrate with existing and future transit, including trails.
- Where new street networks make sense, have the system included and pre-determined on an Official Map.
- Establish minimum (versus maximum) height standards to encourage mixed-use, multi-story buildings.
- Establish maximum building setbacks, with parking relegated to the rear of buildings.
- Provide for affordable housing, if desired by the Township.
- Design around natural and historic features, incorporating them into the new development.
- Require shade trees.
- Provide places for stormwater infiltration, within and under parking areas and in natural areas retained as part of the redevelopment.
- Require internal village greens in denser mixed-use developments, providing open space for residents and for stormwater infiltration.
- Continue to specify use of native species as areas are landscaped.

In a March 2011 article in *Urban Land*, Edward T. McMahon, Senior Fellow writes, "Commercial strips are not going to disappear overnight, but it is becoming increasingly clear that strip retail is retail for the last century. The future belongs to town centers, main streets, and mixed-use development." Whitpain Township can embrace that future, combining new revenue-producing development, with community amenities.

## **III. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION.**

- A. Natural Resource Protection.** Whitpain Township values trees! The 2016 Comprehensive Plan contains an inventory of significant trees and Township regulations require their preservation. While many Townships in Montgomery County limit development on steep slopes, those in excess of 25% slope, Whitpain does not specifically limit their development. The tree preservation standards in both the Zoning and SLDO ordinances provide de facto steep slope protection, as the steep slopes in the Township are also wooded. In spite of strong tree preservation standards, the Township might still consider a more comprehensive Natural

Features Overlay chapter in the Zoning Ordinance. Such overlay chapters set maximum clearing limits and setbacks from sensitive natural features, as a means of conserving water quality, habitat and microclimate as development occurs.

The combined updates to the rural cluster and open space options; standards for greening the four villages as redevelopment occurs and additional design standards for open space can ensure that Whitpain is “twice green” both environmentally and economically, as it continues to be a desirable place to live and work.

<b>Conservation Priorities:</b>	Passive recreation
	Sustainable native plant communities
<b>Top Strategies:</b>	Control deer
	Control invasive plants
	Remove hazard trees
	Maintain public access

Priority <sup>1</sup>	Stewardship Recommendations	Season	Who could implement? <sup>2</sup>	WP	MXD	TBM	SW	TM	WMB
<b>Forest Communities</b>									
1	Manage for old-growth forest by limiting tree cutting to hazard trees	Year-round	Staff						
2	Plant tree seedlings as needed in canopy gaps; protect seedlings from deer	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Increase understory diversity by planting shrubs; protect seedlings from deer	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
4	Explore options for participating in the Old Growth Forest Network or similar programs	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Terrestrial Meadows</b>									
1	Mow meadows once annually	Nov-March	Staff						
2	If bush-clover or other invasives persist, mow 1/3-1/2 of the meadow in July, rotating areas each year	July	Staff						
3	Increase diversity of plants by adding plugs of native plants	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
<b>Terrestrial Shrublands</b>									
1	After invasive plant control, increase plant diversity by planting shrubs and tree seedlings. Protect plantings with fencing or tree shelters.	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Coordinate efforts with Wissahickon Trails	Year-round	Staff						
2	Allow to transition to forest, controlling invasive plants	Year-round	Staff						
<b>Wet Meadow and Stormwater Basin</b>									
1	Avoid disturbance within the wet meadow and stormwater basin	Year-round	Staff						
1	Maintain planted trees	Spring through Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Mow meadows once annually when ground is frozen	Nov-March	Staff						
1	Monitor stormwater basin for proper functioning	Year-round	Staff						
2	Maintain plant diversity, adding new species or plugs of existing species as needed	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
<b>Deer Management</b>									

WP - Whole Preserve

MXD - Mixed Hardwood Forest

TBM - Tuliptree-Beech-Maple Forest

SW - Shrubland/Woodland

TM - Terrestrial Meadow

WMB - Wet Meadow and Stormwater Basin

1	Implement a deer management program utilizing a hunting program and/or a deer cull with professional sharpshooters	Dependent on approach chosen	Staff						
2	Protect new plantings and natural regeneration as needed	Year-round	Staff						
2	Monitor Preserve for deer impact by assessing impact on plants (browsing evidence and level of regeneration)	Spring/Summer	Staff or Volunteers						
2	Coordinate efforts with Wissahickon Trails	Year-round	Staff						
<b>Invasive Plants</b>									
1	Monitor for and prevent colonization of new species	Year-round	Staff						
1	Control invasive plants and prevent their spread. Community prioritization: 1. Wet meadow and stormwater basin 2. Terrestrial meadows 3. Tuliptree-Beech-Maple Forest 4. Mixed Hardwood Forest/Hedgerow 5. Shrubland/Woodland	Based upon the vegetation communities habitat value priority ranking, begin focused invasive removal using techniques described below.	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Mow meadows twice annually if invasive plants are dominant - the full meadow once in Nov-March and 1/3-1/2 of the meadow once in July. Recommendations related to meadows below are for more targeted treatments and can be used in tandem with a second mowing if needed.	Nov-March and July	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>Norway maple</b> through mechanical girdling, manual removal, or a cut stump treatment. A basal bark application can be used for trees with 6" dbh or smaller.	Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>Callery pear</b> through mechanical girdling, manual removal, or a cut stump treatment. A basal bark application can be used for trees with 6" dbh or smaller.	Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>mimosa</b> through girdling followed by an herbicide treatment or through a cut stump treatment. Seedlings can be hand pulled.	Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>Japanese honeysuckle</b> by cutting vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground, treat the stumps with herbicide	Anytime - cut vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground; Fall - cut and herbicide stumps	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>oriental bittersweet</b> by cutting vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground, treat the stumps with herbicide	Anytime - cut vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground; Fall - cut and herbicide stumps	Staff or Volunteers						

1	Control <b>English ivy</b> by cutting vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground, treat the stumps with herbicide	Anytime - cut vines at ground level and at 5 feet above the ground; Fall - cut and herbicide stumps	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control grape by cutting vines at ground level and 5 feet above the ground	Anytime	Staff or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>winged euonymus</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
1	Control <b>garlic-mustard</b> by hand pulling in the early spring before flowering or with an herbicide treatment for larger populations	Early Spring and summer	Contractor or Volunteers						
1	Control <b>purple loosestrife</b> by hand pulling prior to flowering or control with an herbicide	Spring	Staff or Volunteers						
2	Control <b>autumn-olive</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>shrub honeysuckle</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>privet</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>barberry</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>linden viburnum</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>jetbead</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>wineberry</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment	Fall	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>Chinese silvergrass</b> with an herbicide application - do not remove manually which will cause regrowth from rhizomes	Spring	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>bush-clover</b> with a foliar herbicide application or by annual mowing in spring before flowering	Herbicide - summer; Mowing - Spring	Staff or Contractor						
2	Control <b>common reed</b> by applying an herbicide directly to the stalks or by a drip application into cut stalks	Late summer-early fall	Staff						
3	Control <b>teasel</b> by mowing annually	Spring	Staff						
3	Control <b>mugwort</b> by applying herbicide	Spring	Staff						
3	Control <b>joint head grass</b> by applying herbicide	Late summer	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Control <b>Japanese stiltgrass</b> by applying herbicide	Late summer	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Control <b>princess-tree</b> with a basal bark application	Fall	Staff or Volunteers						

4	Control <b>multiflora rose</b> through a basal bark application or cut stump treatment. Alternatively, multiflora rose can be killed naturally by the rose rosette disease if present.	Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
2	Revegetate as needed after invasive control	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Educate visitors through interpretive signs about ways to prevent the spread of invasive plants.	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Exotic Pests</b>									
1	Monitor for emerald ash borer	Year-round	Staff						
1	Identify and remove potentially hazardous ash trees	Year-round	Staff						
1	Follow quarantine requirements for emerald ash borer and spotted lanternfly	Year-round	Staff						
2	Replant as needed to replace ash trees	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Scrape spotted lanternfly egg masses	Fall - Winter	Staff or Volunteers						
<b>Water Quality</b>									
1	Maintain current extent of riparian buffer around stream	Year-round	Staff						
2	Restore current riparian buffer by controlling deer and invasives	Year-round	Staff						
<b>Erosion</b>									
1	Consult the Conservation District about remediating large erosion channel	Anytime	Staff						
1	Reroute or modify trails to eliminate erosion	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Wildlife Enhancement</b>									
1	Prevent fragmentation of forest	Year-round	Staff						
2	Leave dead wood and snags for wildlife habitat	Year-round	Staff or Volunteers						
2	Leave brush piles for wildlife	Year-round	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Install additional bird (kestrel, bluebird) and bat boxes	Year-round	Volunteers						
<b>Hazards and Debris</b>									
1	Monitor for and remove hazard trees	Annually and after severe storms	Staff						
3	Remove old farm debris	Anytime	Staff or Volunteers						
<b>Boundary Encroachment and Illegal Use</b>									
1	Mark boundaries with vinyl markers and maintain as needed	Anytime	Staff						
1	Address encroachment issues along boundaries with private residences	Anytime	Staff						
1	Monitor preserve regularly for encroachment	Year-round	Staff						
1	Remove outdated boundary postings from internal parcel lines	Anytime	Staff						
2	Recruit trail ambassadors and preserve monitors	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Passive Recreation</b>									

1	Install additional signage, blazes, or other markers to identify trails and boundaries	When trees are in leaf, to identify sight lines and assess visibility.	Staff						
1	Close trail that leads off property	Anytime	Staff						
2	Reduce duplicate/social trails within the TBM forest	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Climate Change</b>									
1	Increase plant biodiversity, especially in areas predicted to be vulnerable to climate change	Spring or Fall	Staff or Volunteers						
3	Monitor changes in precipitation and temperature, noting effects on plant or wildlife health	Year-round	Staff or Volunteers						
<b>Volunteers</b>									
2	Recruit regular volunteers to help with preserve management	Anytime	Staff						
<b>Preserve Connections</b>									
1	Coordinate management efforts with Wissahickon Trails, including deer and invasive plant control and volunteer projects	Anytime	Staff						

\* Volunteers should not be used to apply herbicide unless they have proper certification and personal protective equipment

## Tuliptree-Beech-Maple Forest

### Canopy Trees

red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>
pignut hickory	<i>Carya glabra</i>
mockernut hickory	<i>Carya tomentosa</i>
American beech	<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>
ash	<i>Fraxinus</i> sp.
blackgum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>
bird cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
white oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>
red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>
black oak	<i>Quercus velutina</i>
tuliptree	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>

### Understory Trees

<b>Norway maple</b>	<b><i>Acer platanoides</i></b>
hornbeam	<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>
flowering dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>
blackgum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>
sycamore	<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>
black cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>
black locust	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
sassafras	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>

### Shrubs and Vines

<b>barberry</b>	<b><i>Berberis</i> sp.</b>
<b>oriental bittersweet</b>	<b><i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i></b>
<b>English ivy</b>	<b><i>Hedera helix</i></b>
<b>privet</b>	<b><i>Ligustrum</i> sp.</b>
spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>
<b>Japanese honeysuckle</b>	<b><i>Lonicera japonica</i></b>
<b>shrub honeysuckle</b>	<b><i>Lonicera</i> sp.</b>
<b>jetbead</b>	<b><i>Rhodotypos scandens</i></b>
<b>wineberry</b>	<b><i>Rubus phoenicolasius</i></b>
poison-ivy	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>
<b>linden viburnum</b>	<b><i>Viburnum dilatatum</i></b>
blackhaw	<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>

### Herbaceous

<b>garlic mustard</b>	<b><i>Alliaria petiolata</i></b>
jack-in-the-pulpit	<i>Arisaema triphyllum</i>
<b>Japanese stiltgrass</b>	<b><i>Microstegium vinimeum</i></b>
Virginia-creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>
New York fern	<i>Thelypteris noveboracensis</i>

## Mixed Hardwood Forest/Hedgerow

## Canopy Trees

**Norway maple**

silver maple

ash

black walnut

tuliptree

bird cherry

black cherry

black locust

***Acer platanoides****Acer saccharinum**Fraxinus* sp.*Juglans nigra**Liriodendron tulipifera**Prunus avium**Prunus serotina**Robinia pseudoacacia*

## Understory Trees

**Norway maple****mimosa**

flowering dogwood

osage-orange

crabapple

**princess-tree**

white pine

**callery pear**

willow

American elm

***Acer platanoides******Albizia julibrissin****Cornus florida**Maclura pomifera**Malus* sp.***Paulownia tomentosa****Pinus alba****Pyrus calleryana****Salix* sp.*Ulmus americana*

## Shrubs and Vines

**oriental bittersweet****autumn-olive****winged euonymus****common privet****Japanese honeysuckle****shrub honeysuckle****multiflora rose****wineberry**

brambles

**linden viburnum**

grape

***Celastrus orbiculatus******Elaeagnus umbellata******Euonymus alatus******Ligustrum vulgare******Lonicera japonica******Lonicera* sp.*****Rosa multiflora******Rubus phoenicolasius****Rubus* sp.***Viburnum dilatatum****Vitis* spp.

## Herbaceous

**jointhead grass**

jewelweed

**Japanese stiltgrass**

goldenrod

***Arthraxon hispidus****Impatiens capensis****Microstegium vinimeum****Solidago* spp.

## Shrubland/Woodland

## Trees

black walnut

**Callery pear**

white oak

*Juglans nigra****Pyrus calleryana****Quercus alba*

## Shrub and Vines

<b>oriental bittersweet</b>	<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>
<b>Japanese honeysuckle</b>	<i>Lonicera japonica</i>
<b>multiflora rose</b>	<i>Rosa multiflora</i>
brambles	<i>Rubus</i> spp.
grape	<i>Vitis</i> sp.

## Herbaceous

Indian-hemp	<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>
jewelweed	<i>Impatiens capensis</i>
<b>Japanese stiltgrass</b>	<i>Microstegium vimineum</i>
goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> sp.

## Terrestrial Meadow

## Woody Plants

eastern red-cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>
sweetgum seedlings	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>
<b>Japanese honeysuckle</b>	<i>Lonicera japonica</i>
<b>Callery pear seedlings</b>	<i>Pyrus calleryana</i>
<b>multiflora rose</b>	<i>Rosa multiflora</i>
brambles	<i>Rubus</i> spp.

## Herbaceous Plants

broom-sedge	<i>Andropogon virginicus</i>
Indian-hemp	<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>
<b>jointhead grass</b>	<i>Arthraxon hispidus</i>
common milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>
asters	<i>Asteraceae</i> spp.
thistle	<i>Cirsium</i> sp.
Queen Ann's-lace	<i>Daucus carota</i>
fleabane	<i>Erigeron</i> sp.
<b>bush-clover</b>	<i>Lespedeza cuneata</i>
<b>purple loosestrife</b>	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>
<b>Japanese stiltgrass</b>	<i>Microstegium vimineum</i>
<b>Chinese silvergrass</b>	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>
panic grass	<i>Panicum anceps</i>
jumpseed	<i>Persicaria virginiana</i>
cool-season grasses	<i>Poacea</i> spp.
little bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>
foxtail	<i>Setaria</i> sp.
horse-nettle	<i>Solanum carolinense</i>
goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> sp.
purpletop grass	<i>Tridens flavus</i>

## Wet Meadow and Detention Basin

## Trees

red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>
river birch	<i>Betula nigra</i>
pin oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>
black locust	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
Shrubs and Vines	
shadbush	<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>
<b>Japanese honeysuckle</b>	<b><i>Lonicera japonica</i></b>
<b>wineberry</b>	<b><i>Rubus phoenicolasius</i></b>
brambles	<i>Rubus</i> spp.
Herbaceous	
Indian-hemp	<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>
<b>mugwort</b>	<b><i>Artemisia vulgaris</i></b>
<b>jointhead grass</b>	<b><i>Arthraxon hispidus</i></b>
common milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>
asters	<i>Asteraceae</i> spp.
sedges	<i>Carex</i> spp.
thistle	<i>Cirsium</i> sp.
mistflower	<i>Conoclinium coelestinum</i>
rushes	<i>Cyperus</i> spp.
Queen Ann's-lace	<i>Daucus carota</i>
<b>teasel</b>	<b><i>Dipsacus sylvestris</i></b>
fleabane	<i>Erigeron</i> sp.
boneset	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>
sunflower	<i>Helianthus</i> sp.
soft rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>
<b>bush-clover</b>	<b><i>Lespedeza cuneata</i></b>
<b>Japanese stiltgrass</b>	<b><i>Microstegium vimineum</i></b>
bee balm	<i>Monarda</i> sp.
<b>common reed</b>	<b><i>Phragmites australis</i></b>
pokeweed	<i>Phytolacca americana</i>
coneflower	<i>Rudbeckia</i> sp.
horse-nettle	<i>Solanum carolinense</i>
goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> sp.
Indian-grass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>
New York ironweed	<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>

## Whitpain Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Update Public Opinion Survey Report

The online Public Opinion Survey for the Whitpain Township Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan Update was undertaken in fall/winter of 2019 and 2020. The Parks and Recreation Department made an exceptional effort in promoting the survey to the public. The survey was adapted several times: first without Mermaid Lake, then when Mermaid Lake was being considered for acquisition, and finally after the Township officially acquired Mermaid Lake. The residents were greatly interested in Mermaid Lake and expressing their ideas, concerns, and opinions about this site and its potential as a public park.

### Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to determine the opinions, ideas, and concerns of the residents regarding parks, recreation facilities, open space, trails, level of support, and Mermaid Lake. Due to the Mermaid Lake acquisition and the importance of addressing it in this questionnaire, the planning team developed an alternate strategy in order to secure all of the public input that the Parks and Recreation Department wanted. That strategy was to undertake a separate program survey among the Department's "best customers". While a few program questions were included in this Plan Update survey, the majority of public opinions research devoted to programs was the Best Customer Survey. This information captured in both surveys will be used by the Department to improve programs and services.

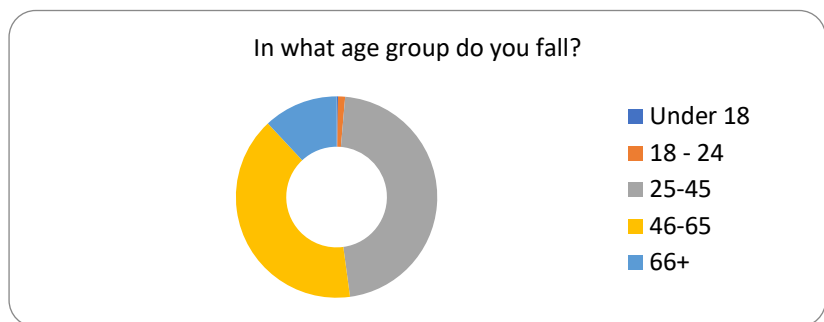
### Content

The survey included questions on park use both in and outside of Whitpain Township, blocks to park use, facilities used, facilities preferred, ratings of facilities and programs, improvements desired, level of support, and how respondents would spend \$100 on parks, recreation, trails and open space. They also had the opportunity to provide open ended comments.

### Response

The survey generated responses from 2,278 people with 87,414 data points. Residents were the major responders at 85%. About 66 % of the respondents had children under the age of 18 living in the household. This is higher

than the percentage of households with children under 18 at 56%. People over the age of 65 are underrepresented with 12% of the survey response compared with 32% of the population in the Township. Also underrepresented are people ages 18 to 24. Respondents are assumed to be the highest users of the parks and recreation system in Whitpain Township as families with children combined with the focus of recreation programs, services, and community based sports on school age children, sports and special events.



## Findings

Findings include:

- Sidewalks and safe connections, open space and indoor recreation facilities were the top three most preferred improvements that the respondents would like to see in the Township.
- The priorities of the respondents were year round indoor recreation opportunities, making Mermaid Lake a public park, a pool at Mermaid Lake, and open space conservation.
- The three parks most used were Wentz Run, Centre Square and Prophecy Creek. Respondents generate township parks and facilities as good to excellent.
- 99% of the respondents reported using township parks, recreation facilities and trails. About 100 respondents reported that they liked having parks in the community even though they did not use them.
- While state park use was the highest reported facility used outside of the township, about forty percent of the non-township parks and recreation facilities used were indoor facilities such as the Greater Plymouth Community Center, the Ambler Y, and private fitness and sports facilities.
- Walking/running, enjoying nature, and attending special events were the top uses reported for township parks.
- Respondents generally rate Township programs as good to excellent. Sports, camps and special events were the programs that respondents would be most likely to participate in during the upcoming year.
- 67% of respondents rated developing Mermaid Lake as a public park very important or extremely important. The top improvements were making Mermaid Lake a community park, indoor recreation facility and restoring the pool. Including connections to nature was also important.
- As expected, new Township taxes were the least favored way to support Mermaid Lake. Using existing Township taxes and grants were the most favored ways to support Mermaid Lake improvements. User fees and existing Township taxes were the most favored ways to support operating and maintaining the park.

## Interpretation and Implications

**Responses.** The survey response of 2,258 was high. The strategic outreach plan, major outreach effort of the Parks and Recreation Department, and the acquisition of Mermaid Lake helped to prompt the response. The respondents were primarily households with school age children. Responses from young adults and seniors was limited and merits more targeted outreach to these groups for planning facilities and services that would serve these age groups well. The questionnaire did not request the ethnic or racial group of the respondents. Further exploration of these questions and findings should be considered especially in the Asian community.

**Safe Connections and Open Space.** Since safe connections including sidewalks and open space were the top two preferred future improvements in the Township, making open space a priority is important. It is important as there is limited open space remaining. Open space can potentially help to establish critical linkages for trails and pathways.

**Support for development of Mermaid Lake –** Development of Mermaid Lake as a community park with a mix of active and passive facilities and connections to nature is preferred. Given the fact that most

park uses were walking, running, hiking, and enjoying nature, facility improvements at Mermaid can be focused on master planning with first priority on pathways and connections with nature as the first phase of improvements, This would get the most visitation at a lower cost than major big ticket cost facilities. This would enable the Township to advance improvements in other Township parks as well.

**Mermaid Lake Pool** – Responses indicate an interest in a pool at Mermaid Lake, Further study needs to be conducted regarding the feasibility of a pool on this site related to site conditions, existing pool conditions, facility purpose, cost of development and most important potential operating costs and revenues.

**Indoor Recreation Center.** With about 40% of the survey respondents using indoor recreation and fitness facilities outside the Township, conducting a feasibility for an indoor center in Whitpain Township merits consideration. With close proximity to the Great Plymouth Community Center and the Ambler Y also nearby, a recreation center in Whitpain needs to serve Township residents without duplicating these centers in proximate communities.

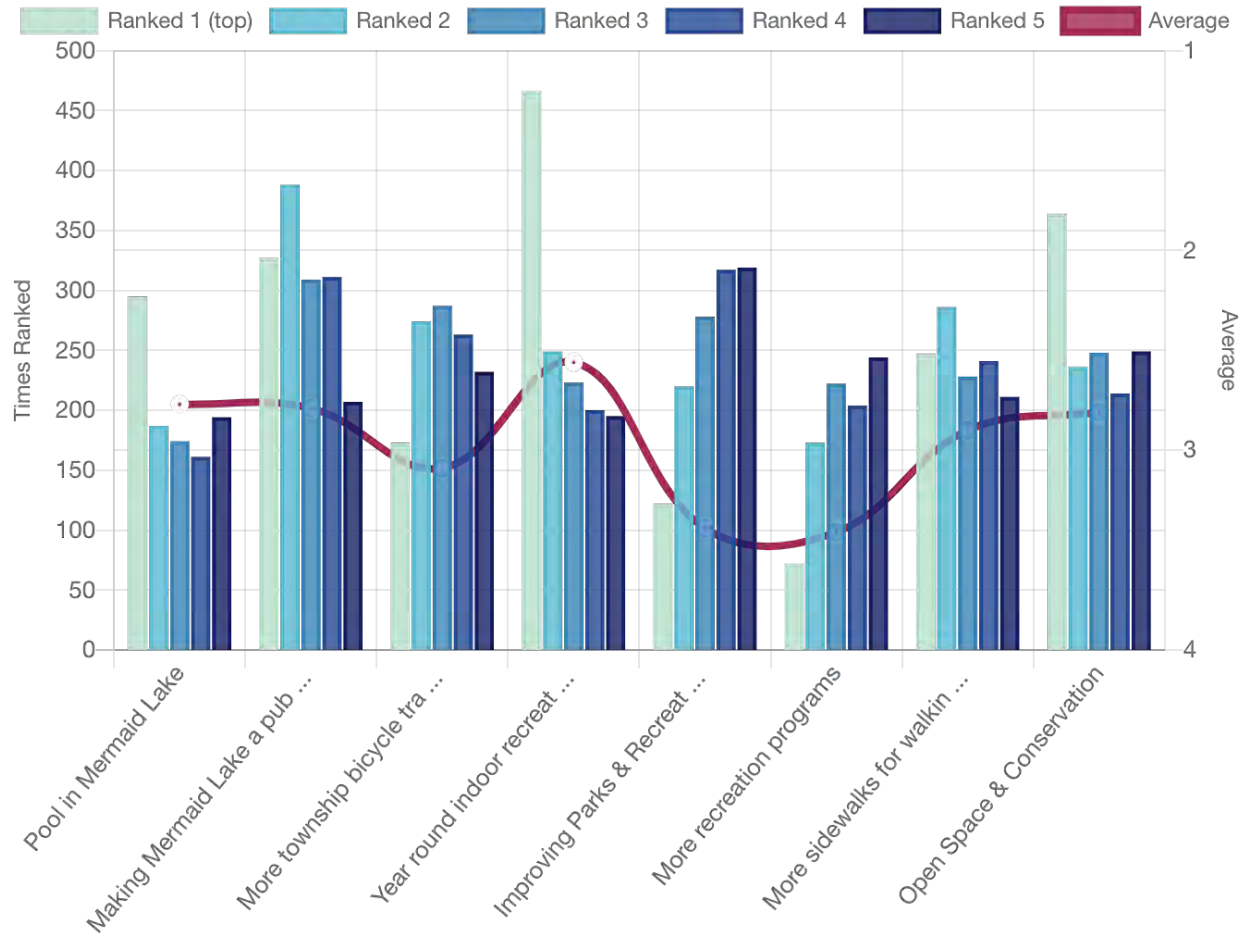
**Financial Support.** As expected, the respondents prefer to use existing tax dollars as opposed to using new tax dollars. Except for new tax dollars, public-private partnerships was the lowest preferred means of supporting Mermaid Park development and operation. User fees and charges were an acceptable means of support for Mermaid Lake.

**Program Directions and Facilities.** Continue to deliver programs and services sports, camps, fitness and special events for the foreseeable future with an emphasis on quality. Move into other areas such as nature based upon resources including partnerships. Bring underserved groups into discussions including teens, seniors and Asians and formulate how to move forward with programs and services with them. Many of the interests are related to facilities such as pickle ball, trails, indoor recreation, fitness and so on and can be provided for use by residents on a self-directed basis..

**Management and Staffing Considerations.** The findings of this survey serve to enlighten township parks and recreation planners and Township management about public opinion preferences. Responding to community needs and interests must be done with consideration of Township resources such as staff and budget along with creative alternatives via partnerships, contracting, pricing policies and others to be determined. Since special events are of primary importance to the community, staffing days and hours should be considered as special events are during peak recreation hours of weekends and evenings. Future positions warrant consideration of hours oriented toward weekends and evenings – these could rotate among staff but sure ensure coverage for the department.

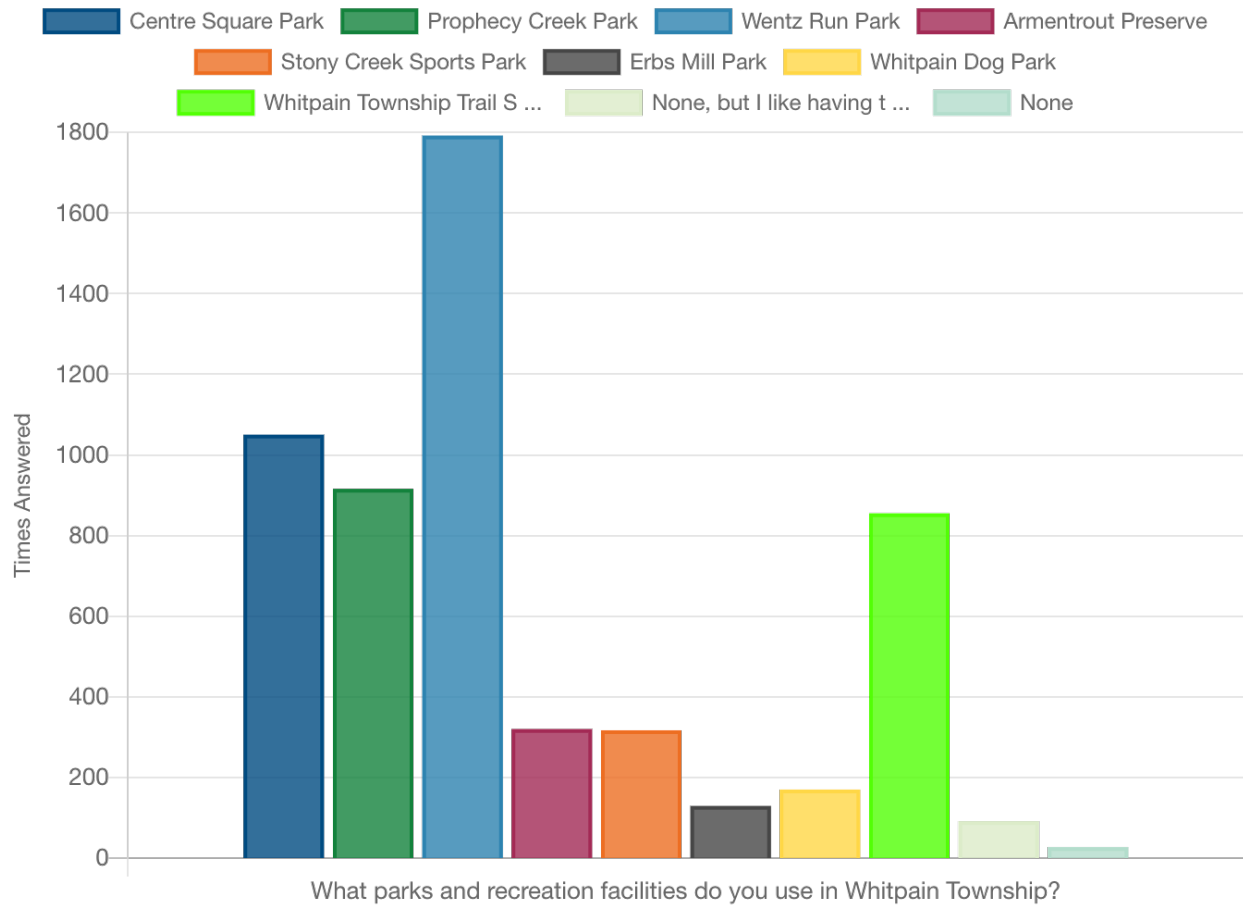
**Questions.** Response to the quesitons are shown in detail as follows.

## What's important to you?

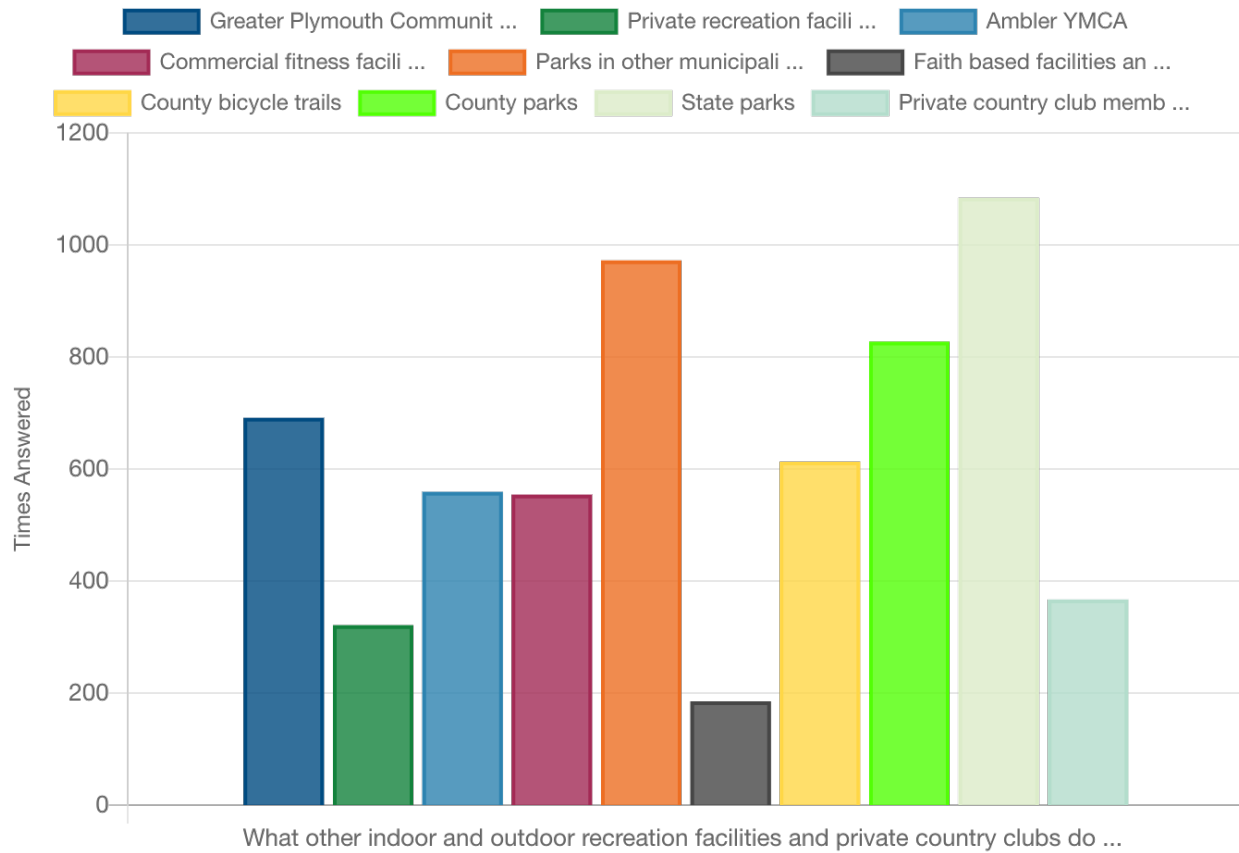


Priorities of Respondents	
Item	Ranking Average: the lower the number the higher the priority
Year round indoor recreation opportunities	2.55
Pool in Mermaid Lake	2.77
Making Mermaid Lake a public park	2.79
Open Space & Conservation	2.8
More sidewalks for walking	2.9
More township bicycle trails	3.08
Improving Parks & Recreation Facilities	3.39
More recreation programs	3.4

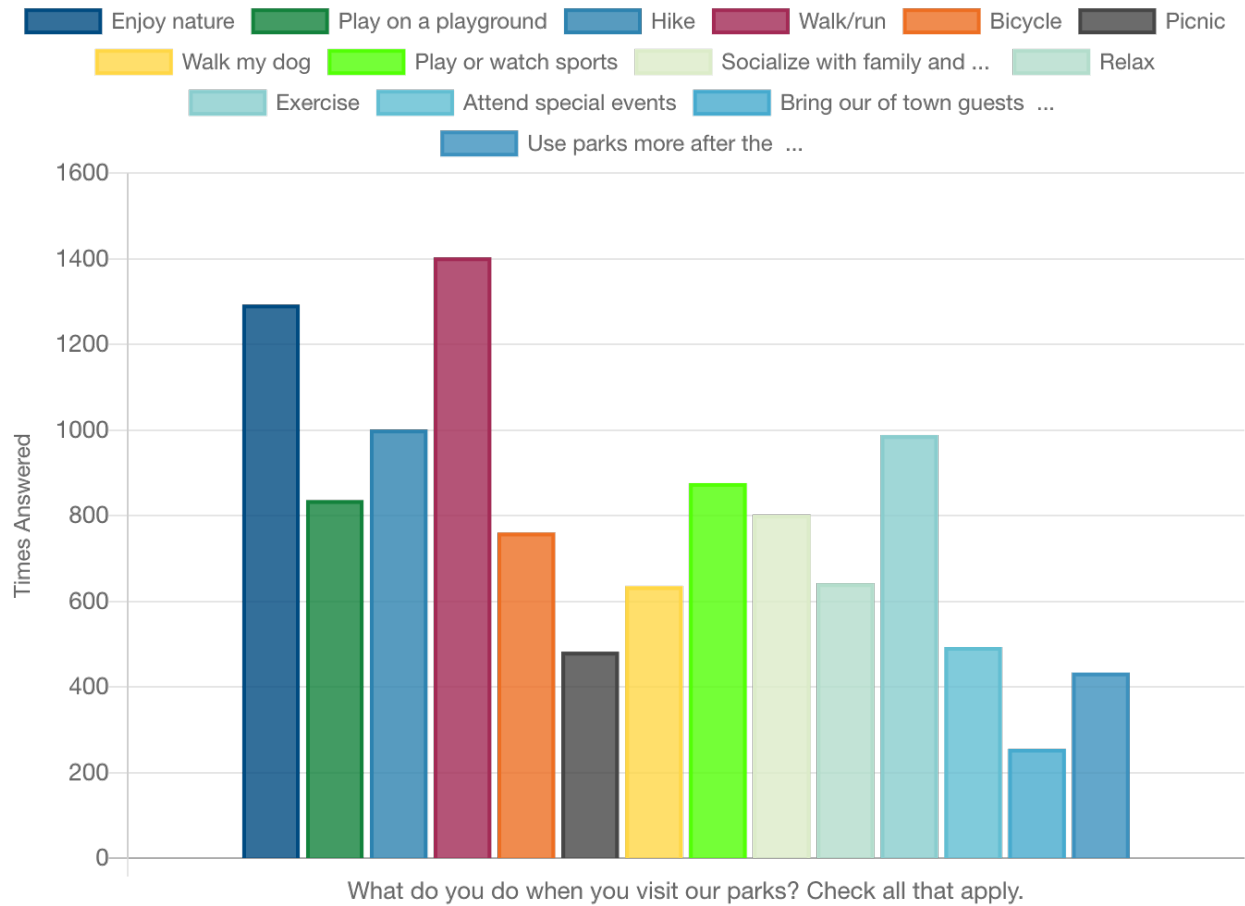
## What parks and recreation facilities do you use in Whitpain Township?



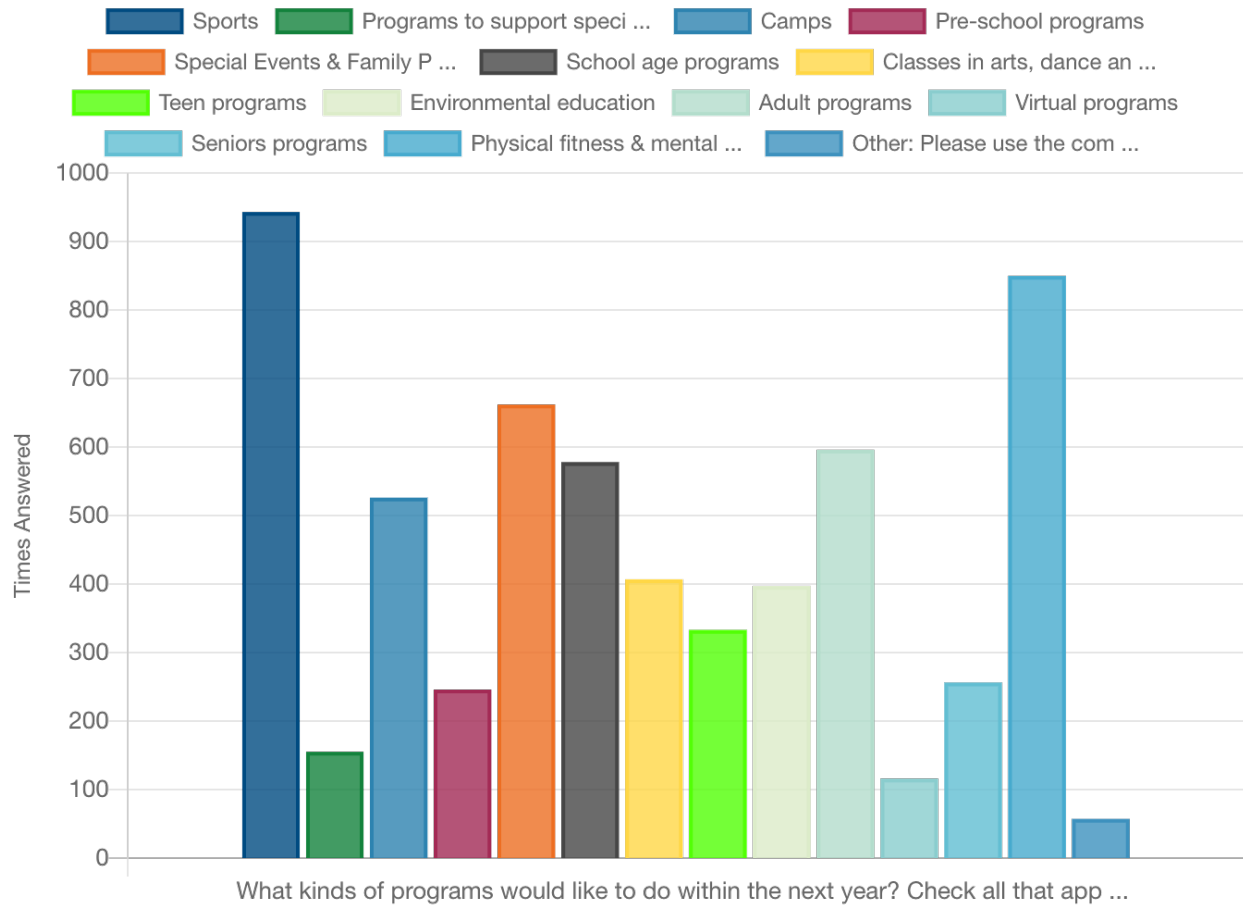
## What other indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and private country clubs do you use? Check all that apply.



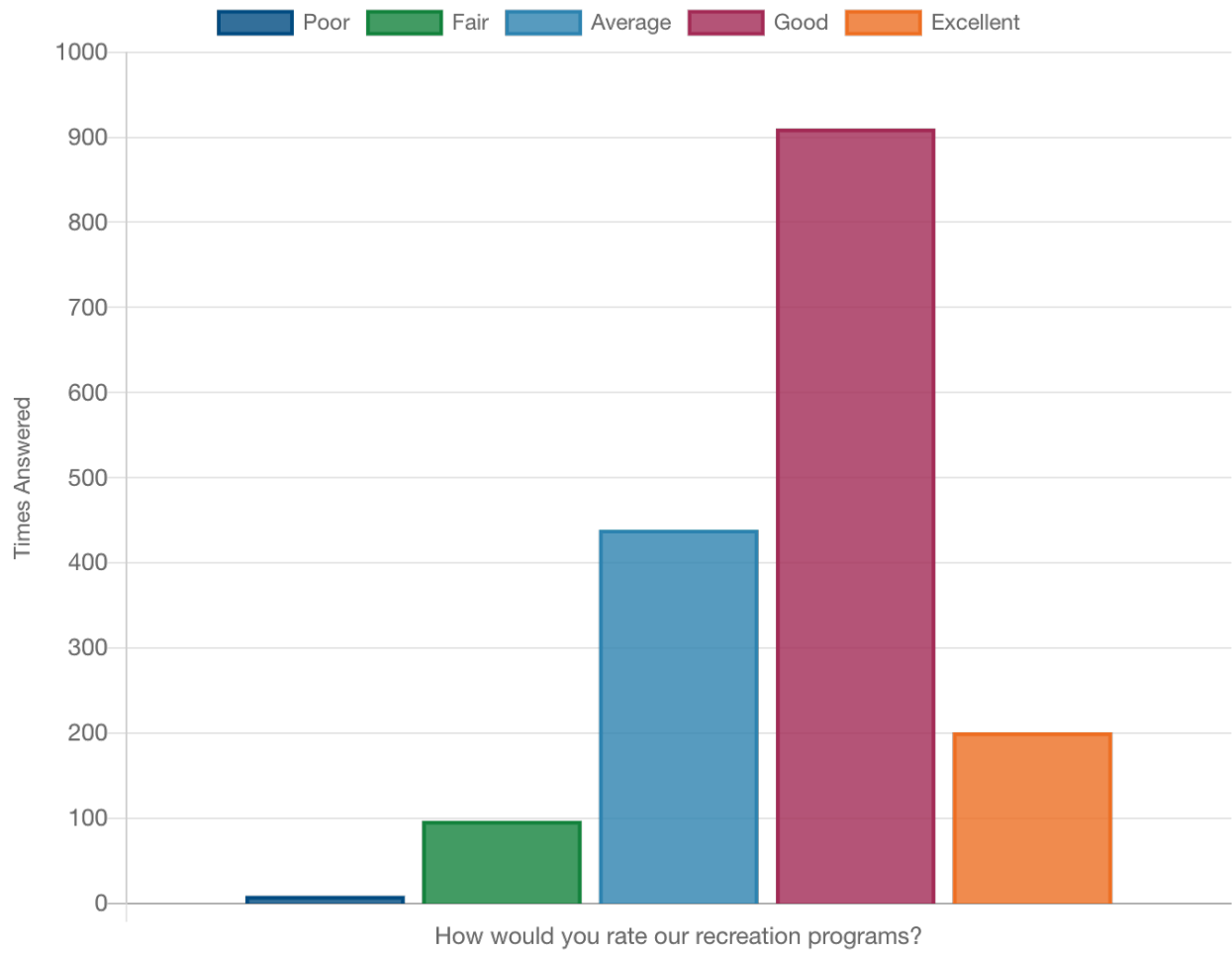
## What do you do when you visit our parks? Check all that apply.



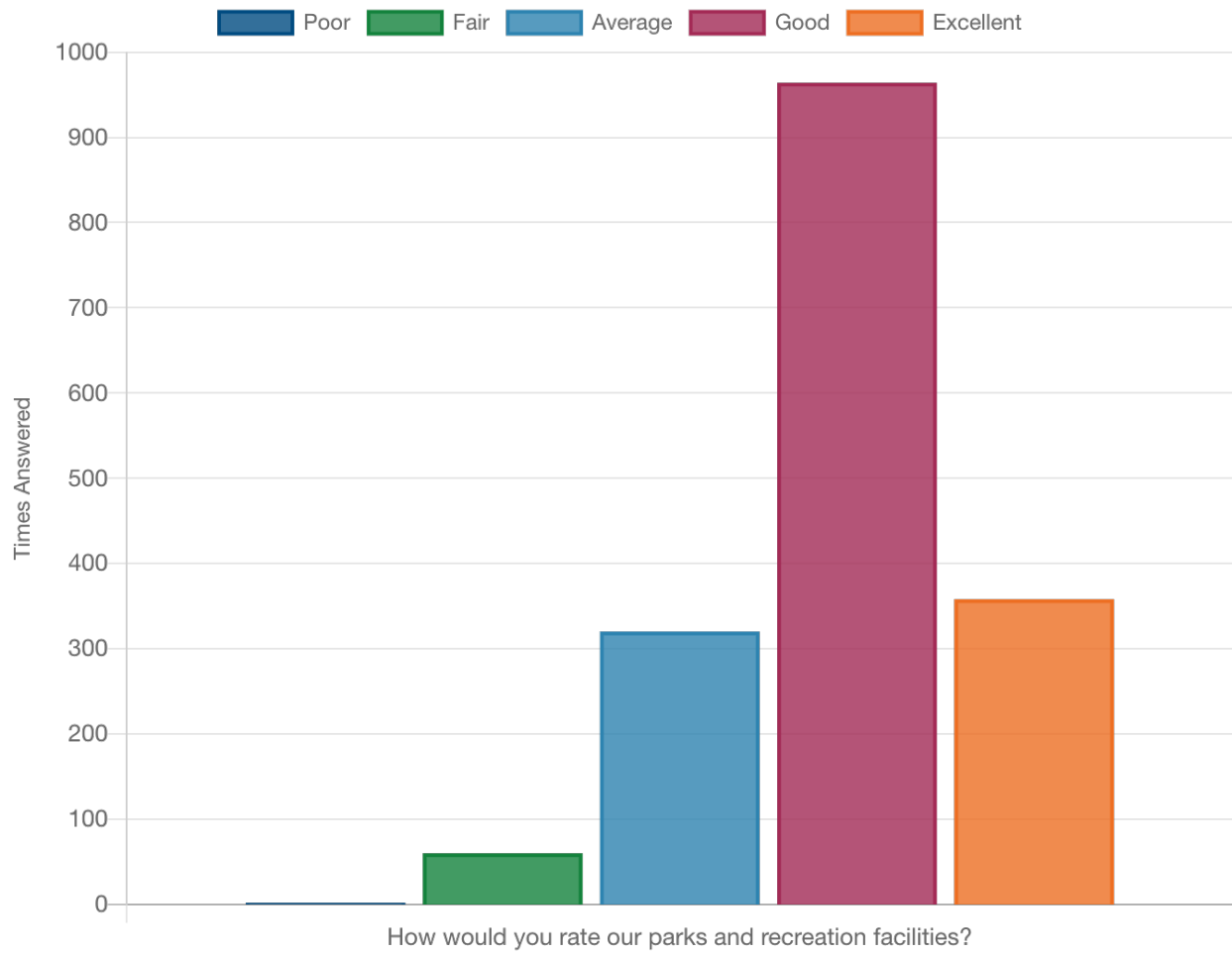
## What kinds of programs would like to do within the next year? Check all that apply



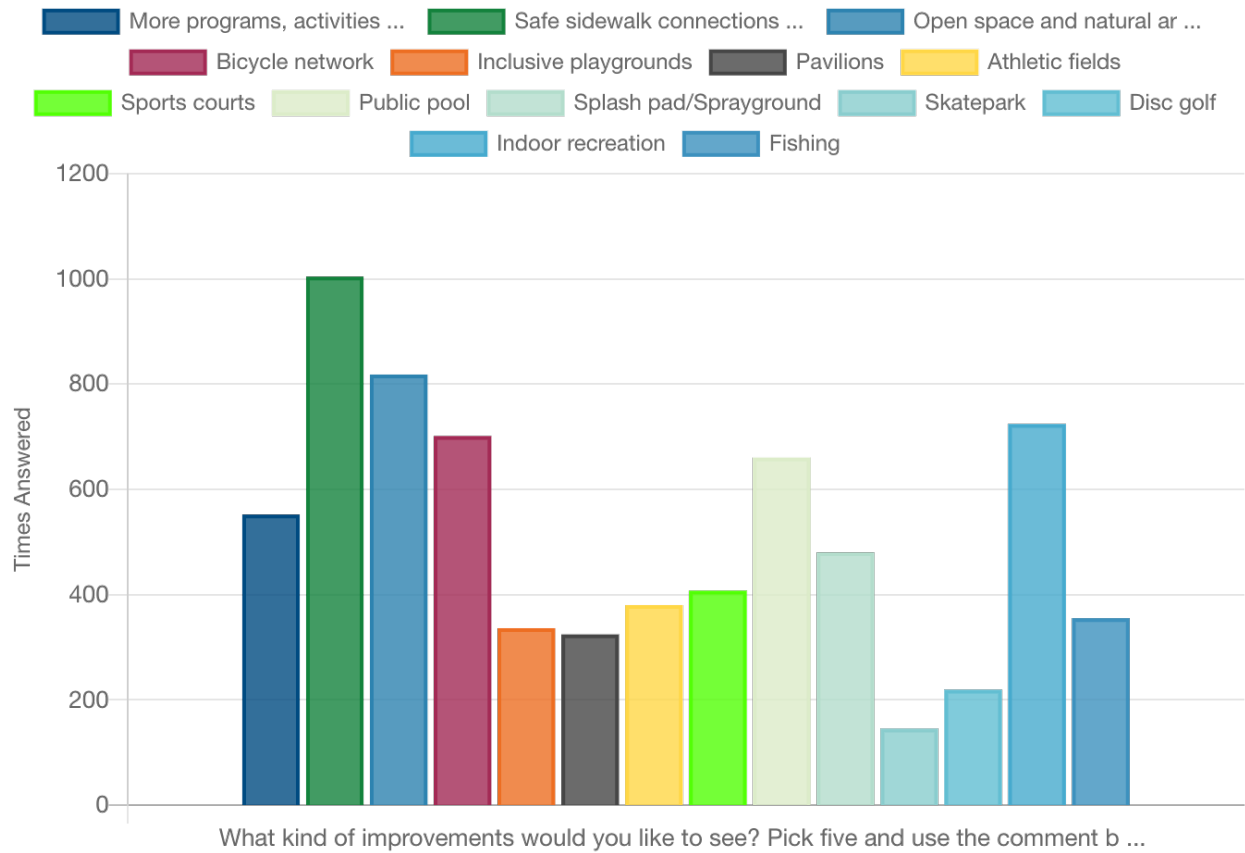
## How would you rate our recreation programs?



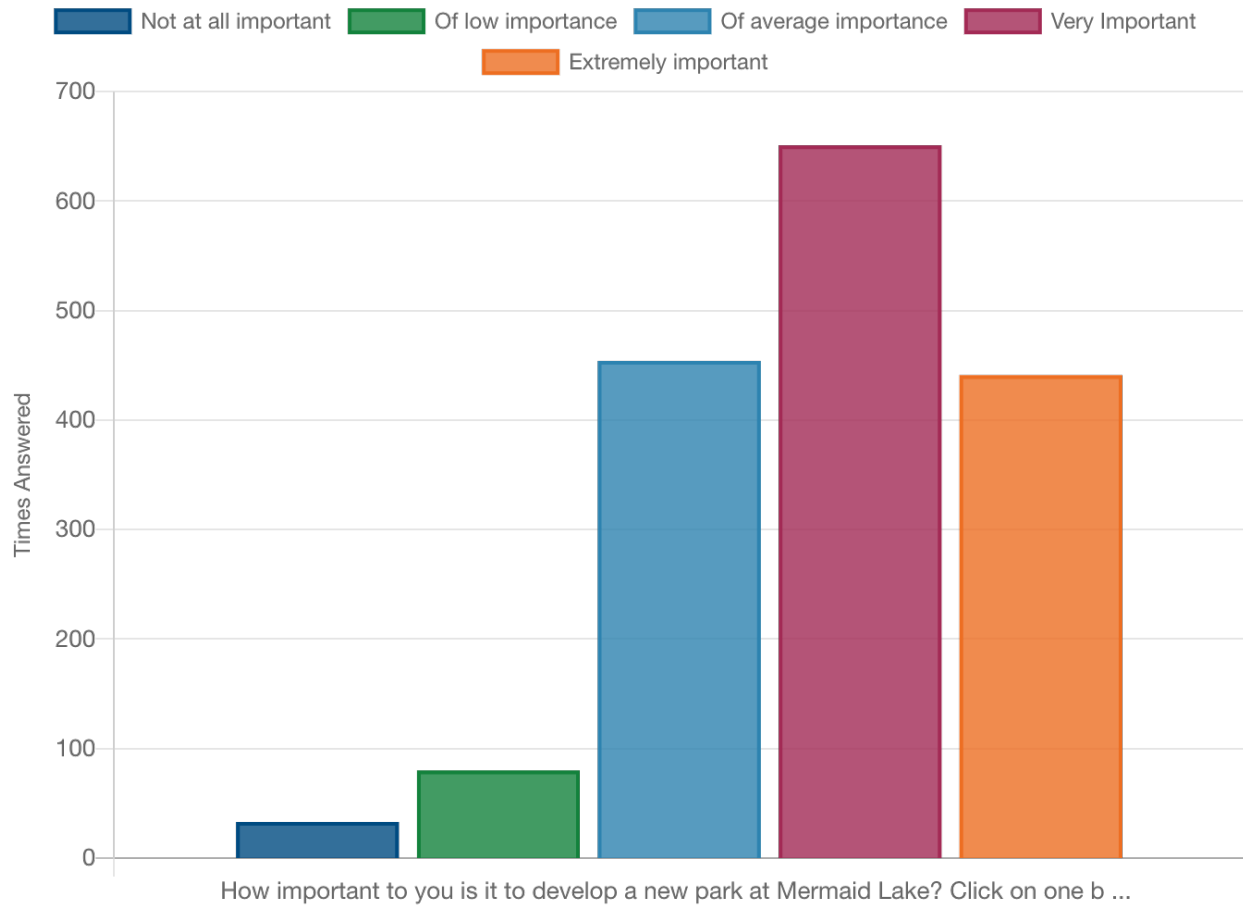
## How would you rate our parks and recreation facilities?



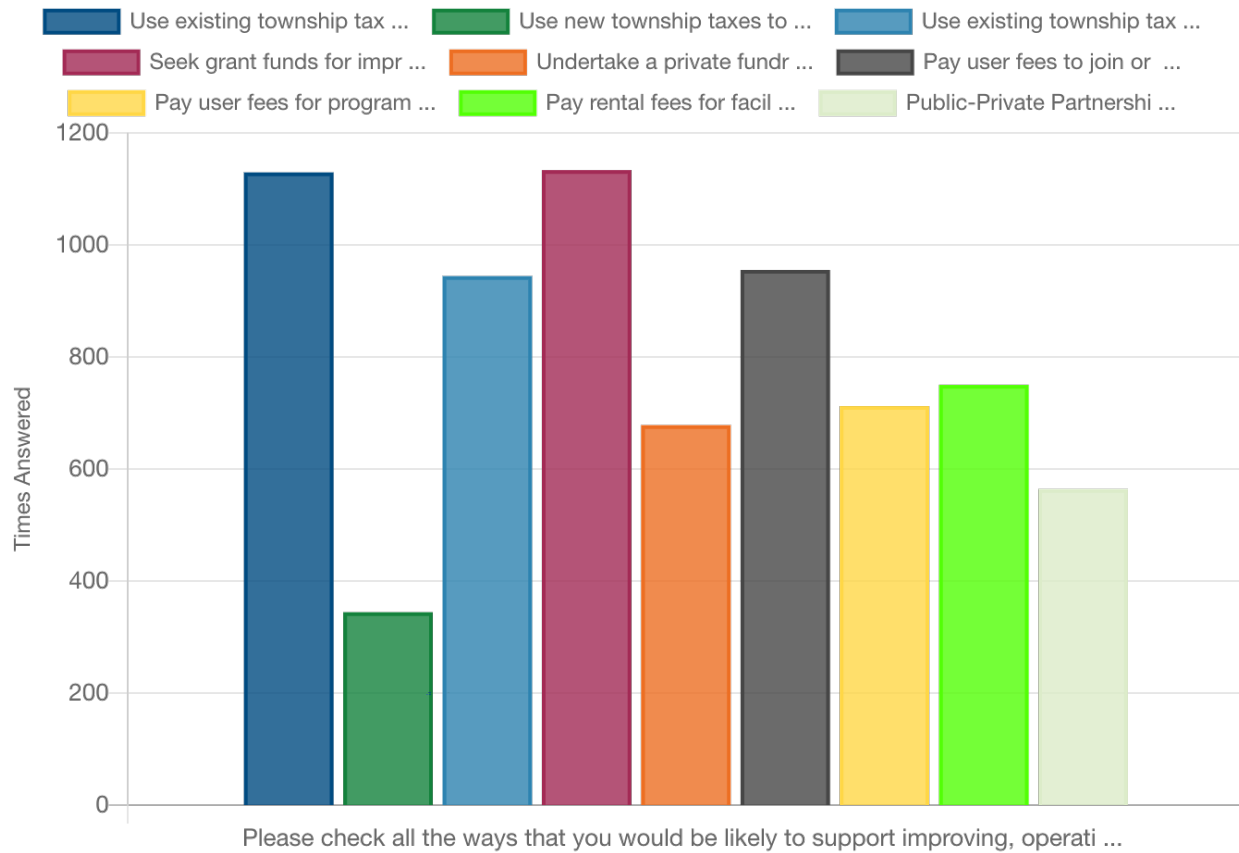
## What kind of improvements would you like to see? Pick five and use the comment bubble if you want to add anything else.



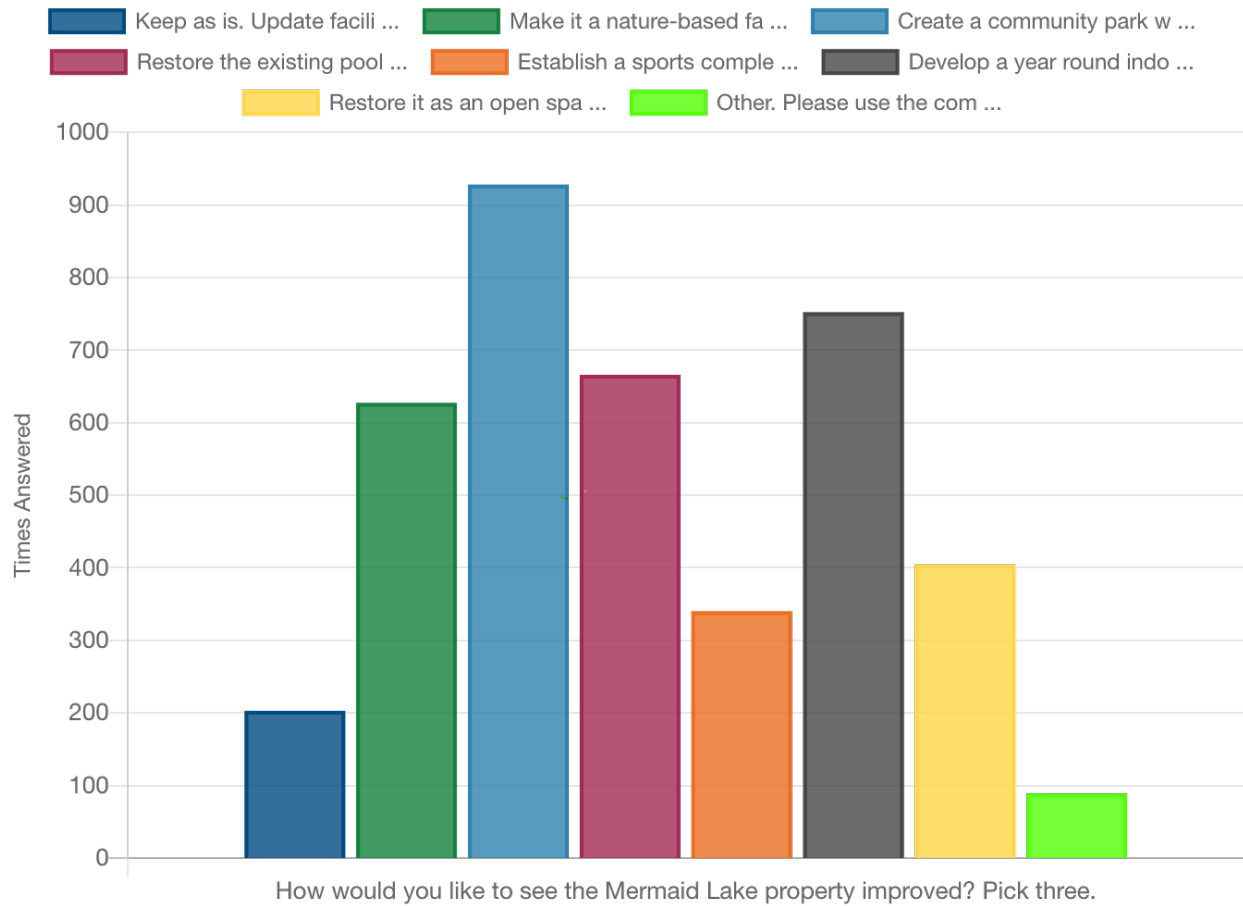
## How important to you is it to develop a new park at Mermaid Lake? Click on one button.



**Please check all the ways that you would be likely to support improving, operating, maintaining, and programming our newest park at Mermaid Lake.**

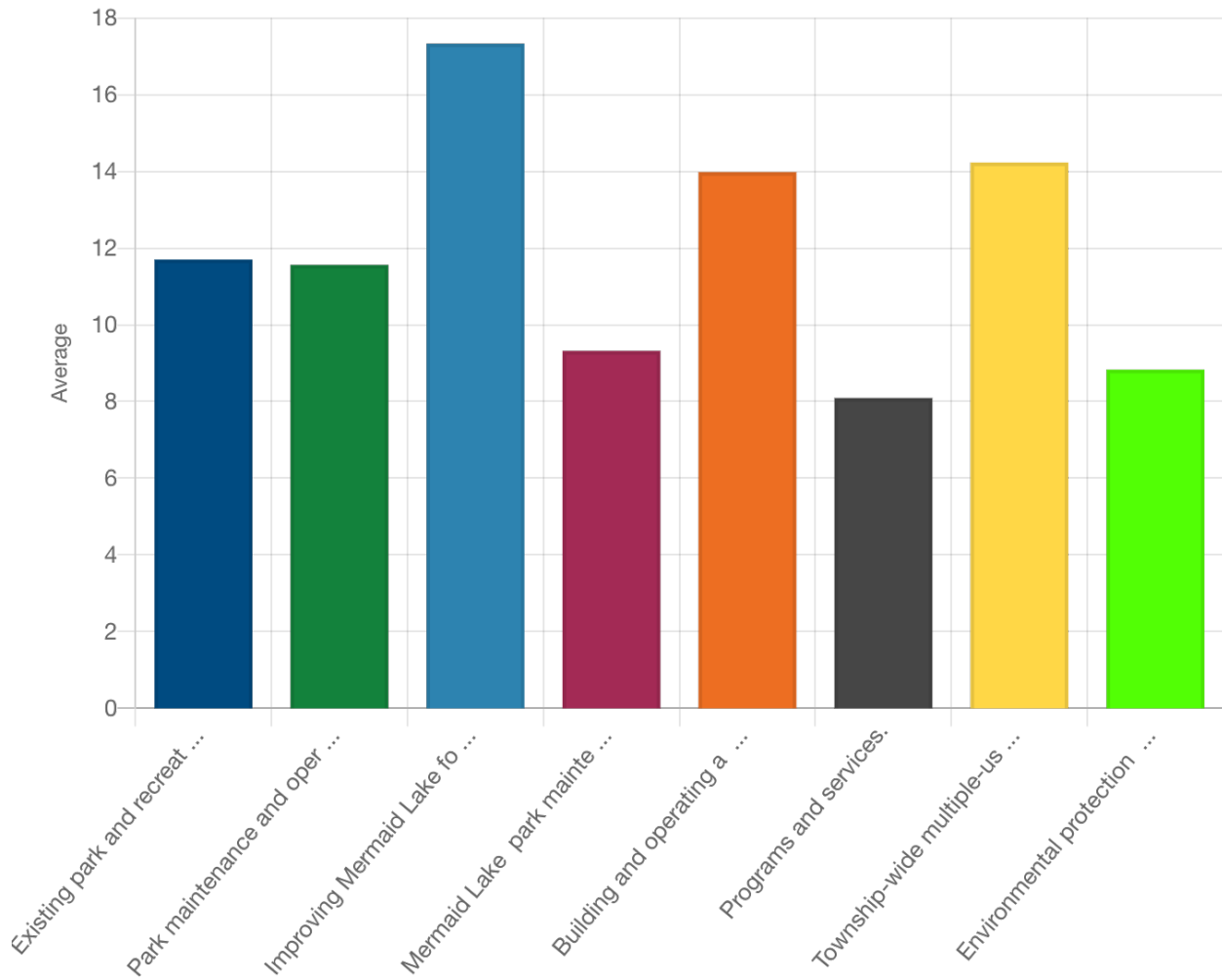


## How would you like to see the Mermaid Lake property improved? Pick three.





## How would you spend \$100?



Item	Average Amount
Improving Mermaid Lake for use as a public park.	\$17.37
Township-wide multiple-use trail network.	\$14.26
Building and operating a public pool at Mermaid Lake.	\$14.00
Existing park and recreation facility improvements.	\$11.72
Park maintenance and operations.	\$11.58
Mermaid Lake park maintenance and operations.	\$9.33
Environmental protection improvements	\$8.85
Programs and services.	8.1

### Comments on what is important to the respondents.

Please keep the pool at Mermaid. A community based pool is a huge asset and something for kids and families to do.

I think it would be great to use as a day camp for kids as Mermaid was a mainstay for this purpose for years. I think Seaside Rockwood has also gone away and now our area really does not have any nice summer camp options. I also think the Stony Creek Camp that was at the school would be much better suited to be held at the Mermaid location as the facilities are already set up for camp and would provide a much greater experience for the kids than just at the Stony Creek location.

Definitely want a pool!!! (this is Robert Marcy performing a test survey)

I think mermaid lake would be a great area to house town camp. It is a natural fit and would make town camp more enticing. It would require fixing the pool but I think it would be great added value for the residents

We actually own our own pool but I think this is important. Having a municipal pool for residents would be a great value and it would also help with my previous comment about town camp.

Indoor/outdoor Rec center on mermaid lake property would be great

I'd like for the summer camp to be able to have their own space.

Is there an option to continue it as a golf course?

A community center for residents including indoor and outdoor pools

Need spaces for multigenerational use, meditation and wellness classes outdoors, sports and exercise programs for adults.

The Plymouth community center is great, having something similar in Whitpain would be amazing.

Whitpain Township is in need of a township run community activity pool center and/or summer swim club similar to NorGwynn in North Wales.

Whitpain Township has done an outstanding job with all its parks, walking trails and Athletic fields. What's missing is a pool

Continue where Mermaid left off. Picnic areas and cabanas to accommodate small and medium sized groups. Using the barn as a year round venue for events

Having a pool is not important to me.

...for all ages, interests, AND ABILITY LEVELS/CHALLENGES

Would like to see this public park contain and maintain the golf course, pool, trails, and playground equipment accessible for all abilities.

#1 Keep some of the land untouched in it's natural setting.

we've really enjoyed biking in the community these past few months, we've loved the interconnectivity between them between, lower gwynedd to whitpain. further development would be fantastic

#2 Walking trails are a must have. Everytime the township makes one it's built through and around ball fields and sporting events. Multi generational groups and with a broad range of abilities enjoy walking trails. Separated, strictly enforced Dog Parks are also needed.

I think Whitpain has an excellent selection of parks and recreation facilities.

adding more adult options

Teen related events - I grew up in the middle of the state, we always had dance/dj/movie events at the town park..(no parents needed)...it seems most events are geared to sub 12 and there is a fear of giving teens independent options to grow

I think developing a better 9 hole golf course would, many people have been missing this

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

The new fields at Wentz are tremendous. Please prioritize 'finishing' the work with infrastructure needed electric for scoreboards/lighting, storage, and water.

great opportunity for mini-golf, a clubhouse that can be used for events/raise funds for community, walking paths, picnic space, pickle ball courts

Provide indoor space for a variety of needs. Access to indoor space for our youth programs is a significant challenge and cost for WRA.

Sidewalks on R73!

it would be great to connect this path through the beautiful parks that are in the area - with so much construction and depletion of open space in blue bell, we really need to protect the ability to walk/ride safely

Definitely need more crosswalks - with so much construction and depletion of open space in blue bell, we really need to protect the ability to walk/ride safely

Make 202 safe to ride or cross

It would be really cool to use a small portion of the Mermaid property to create a bike pumptrack. Great activity for kids and adults - see how the Philly Pumptrack (<https://www.phillypumptrack.org/>) has grown tremendously since its creation. In addition to being a fun way to exercise, it is now a huge part of the community in that area.

It would be great to model Mermaid after a park I visited in Montgomery County, Maryland - <https://www.gaithersburgmd.gov/recreation/parks-fields/bohrer-park-at-summit-hall-farm>.

This includes paved path great for walking, jogging, in-line skating, and biking. Also located within Bohrer Park is the Miniature Golf Course, the Activity Center, Skate Park and the Water Park.

It would be wonderful if our township had public Pickleball courts. Presently, if I'm not mistaken, North Wales has the closest public Pickleball courts.

Nearby townships support a public pool. With climate change upon us, sweltering summer days are more and more frequent.

No more ball fields!

it would be great to have an open area where families can picnic, walk, ride bikes.

Indoor walking track. Walking is popular but most people cut back or stop completely in the cold winters and humid summer days. Charge a small fee for residents and more for non-residents.

So glad that this is now a park

Would like to see restroom facilities

Not so much sidewalks, but maybe more cleared trails

Preserving open space within the township is most important to me

More programs like guided tours through the woods and creeks

I would like township to start with swim school (outdoor as well as indoor) for young kids.

I would like to have indoor badminton courts, tennis courts, swim school for kids, gymnasium.

This would be amazing!! Less dependent on renting and borrowing Jim space from the local schools, making it multi purpose depending on the sport or the season

Horrible idea, lots of lawsuits

More walking trails... Not necessarily sidewalks. Something a little more natural that fit in with the beautiful space at mermaid

Sell it

They are fine as it

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

No one will use this

No one wants this

We have enough sidewalks

Fill in pool at mermaid, bulldoze buildings, make a park

Affordable swim club and park avoiding sports fields

Traffic is ridiculous- stop building houses!

Love to see a large open-air multi-purpose pavillion type lighted structure that could be used year-round for basketball, soccer, tennis, street hockey and other activities. Nothing fancy needed just something with a roof and lights - could be blacktop even with open sides but boards around the perimeter to keep snow and rain out and keep hockey pucks in!

Something like greater Plymouth community center with indoor pool, tennis, volleyball, gym . It has everything for families, senior citizens, singles. It will fulfill most my wants and needs and will make blue bell from a very good place to ideal place to live.

HIGH PRIORITY: specifically along Wentz Road to allow access between Wentz Run Park and Mermaid Park

For Whitpain residents only

Not sure about this one. My kids are older and may not use it but we may have when they were younger. Maybe find out how the Nor-Gwyn Pool does in Upper Gwynedd?

We have had a pool membership at NorGwyn for the past 5 years because of lower cost. We avoided Mermaid because of high fees and large groups from camps/private events. We would love to have a "Local Community Pool" for our family. Even though our children are teens, my husband and I definitely take advantage of the pool ourselves and would continue to as we get older. I also think having a pool would provide many jobs for the local teens in the area.

YES PLEASE. We live in the Blue Bell Run neighborhood and find it difficult to walk to even the closest places on skipack or 202 due to lack of sidewalks.

My teenagers LOVE to ride their bikes but are frustrated sometimes because there are not safe paths they can take to connect with neighborhoods or areas along 202 and skipack pike.

Yes I would like it to be a public park versus a for-profit facility that hosts LARGE camp groups and events. Camps and events open to townships residents or outside groups within reason would be good to generate some funds but it would have to be within reason. (For ex. just this past week I was walking through Wentz Run park and there was an exercise class on the gazebo lawn and the woman had her music and microphone blaring so loud - not very peaceful for a walk. )

It would be nice to have that kind of access and not have to go to another township (like plymouth or ambler Y)

Indoor space like Plymouth Community Center for multi-purpose activity would be great

Having a place to have picnics, medium to larger gatherings, trail connected to other parts of Township would be an asset and relationship ely low cost.

It would be nice to have an affordable swim club nearby. I grew up going to Mermaid and have the best memories. Just need to focus on cost as it got quite expensive over the years.

The biggest issue with development of Mermaid was traffic and water management. Need to be careful not to put use in place that would actually be higher traffic use than ~60 homes without necessary traffic improvements and water management solutions

It would be nice to have a community pool to bring Blue Bell residents together. The grounds offer so much promise and additional revenue can be garnered from renting out the pavilions and other entertainment spaces at Mermaid.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

No pool

No

We have enough

Fill in pool

No

An indoor facility with outdoor trails and parks would be great - similar to Montgomery Township or Plymouth.

It's an important part of the community. A must have.

Open space is a urgent concern and a necessity.

We need a pool in the area in the warmer weather since most of the pools have closed. Would love to see the pool re-open.

I personally, do not agree with the use of eminent domain under any circumstances. Although I was not pleased that the property owner was selling to a developer, the township using the "heavy hand of government" to prevent property owners from doing what they want with their land sets a dangerous precedent in which none of us really own our own property. You can't just make someone do what you want simply because you disagree with their decision. I think y'all should be ashamed.

My husband and I recently retired. We were Mermaid members for many years and dreamed of the day when we were retired where we could golf at a local (and not difficult) golf course like Mermaid. Unfortunately, we retired just as it closed. :-(. We would love to see a local small golf course remain. Maybe a mini golf course, too, to take the grandchildren??? Thank you!!!

Living near Erbs Mill Park, would like to see it developed with a walking trail and more trees

Resurrect the golf course. Establish a public/private partnership to help offset the cost of acquisition and operation.

Indoor and outdoor pool for residents with a yearly membership. Available for rental for non resident

Splash or fountains for kids

A community center with activities , pool , birthday party space . Work out area . Miniature golf and or par 3 for residents

Mermaid provides an invaluable opportunity to establish a first class community center that encompasses all of the offerings of its previous incarnation and more. Would like see after school programs added to its rostrum of programs.

Activity center with more hours then just during the day

Pedestrian and jogging activities are important. This would include sidewalks as well trails to are more natural. Regarding Mermaid Lake property, a large portion should be devoted to a natural/passive setting

One priority to make wentz Run patk Etrance/Exit on Wentz road and Anvil safer the park sign is a huge saftey issue and needs to be addressed and moved for sighting !!!

Frisbee golf or a pickle ball or tennis courts.

This would be great but I wouldn't want to take over the whole property for this

Would love to see a bike trail all around mermaid!

We want lots of trees planted.

If it can be operated profitably to offset some of the cost of maintaining the property, this should be seriously considered, along with other revenue-generating aspects of this former 9-hole golf course, mini-golf course, day camp, pool club, and private corporate event hosting site with indoor and outdoor venue options.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Would love to play on the 3 hole course

Bring back a 9-hole golf course same level of play. Please!! It was such a convenient location.

More cut trails, fewer sidewalks! Less pavement and more open space.

Sidewalks leading to mermaid would be helpful in utilizing what the space ends up to be used for in the future. The entire length of Wentz all the way up to Jolly. Perhaps a crosswalk or small bridge.

We would love an outdoor Township pool but only if it is affordable. (Like the Nor Gwyn pool located off of sumney town pike. pool, playground, basketball courts)

Community center

More playgrounds and parking

Preserve and maintain Mermaid Lake

Create Pickle Ball courts

I would really like a public place to swim in in this Township.

Would love to see a bigger more modern playground. Other townships have really big and new playgrounds and ours are terrible. We go to other townships for their better facilities.

Community pool!

Walking trail

Keep the view

It would be nice to have a pool and municipal 9 hole golf course at mermaids and well as playgrounds, basketball courts, and tennis courts like we have at wentz

It would be nice to have something like the Plymouth community center

Maximize green space, fishing pond, nature trails, native plants/garden, a sort of nature refuge. Playground area, walking trails.

Add a bandstand for a music venue and with future pandemic concerns, add more outdoor options for beer gardens, food and entertainment

Playground area would be nice. Baseball field across from mermaid. Open fence to have entrance to park from Shepard drive.

Putting in a spray ground for the kids. Duck pond. Outdoor ice skating rink

Would love to have an indoor track. Similar to the indoor track at the Ambler YMCA.

Would really like SAFE biking trails. My kids like to bike and hike but our trails are VERY isolated and not safe for young girls to go alone.

Would really enjoy that as hiking or biking as well as dog friendly.

A public lake would be awesome! Public lakes are few and far between.

A Community Center with gym and exercise classes like the Plymouth Community center.

Public swimming pool with daily rates as well as seasonal,rates. Not a provate pool that you must join.

More sidewalks to walk to Mermaid from the local neighborhoods as well as walking trails within the park.

I'd like to see a pool at Mermaid Lake Park but only if it can be supported by membership fees and daily use fees.

Allow for parties etc. maybe with own caterer?

Better space for the Whitpain camp program that could utilize the pool and grounds

No more developments with high priced housing. More trees and foliage

More programs for seniors

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

More indoor classes

Please make Mermaid into a facility like Plymouth CC where it can be used year round and fees by users to support the operation. Just maintaining it as a park and upgrading the pool duplicates what we already have in the other park system. Make it a place for residents to gather that doesn't have to be centered around only physical activity and the outdoors. We already have that. Thanks.

Additional sidewalks across the township is my first priority by far. There are areas with partial sidewalks (Cathcart by MCCC) and areas that could really use sidewalks to connect homes access to waking trails and parks or public transport (bus stops near Normandy Farm/MCCC have no sidewalks, sidewalks on Plymouth Road to connect to the Crossways or other trails, sidewalks to connect neighborhoods near Centre Square). The list goes on and would make a hug difference in our community

I really appreciate the acquisition of Mermaid Lake and ensuring it did not have more residential or commercial development. The amount of development in the township and nearby really surprises and disappoints me, especially as schools are already overcrowded and the town is already very developed and busy with traffic. I'm open to Mermaid become a park at some point but I would rather the town focus on acquiring and preserving open space as a first priority

I grew up going to Mermaid Lake and they were the best memories. I'd love to see the pool open to the public that live in Whitpain Township and for summer camp use. The lake cleaned for fishing, the pavilions open for use, playground refurbished. Walking and bike trails there. There was so much to do there and there can be again.

With access for all activities for persons to include those with disabilities

Township pool to bring community together and have additional sports activities outside

Maintaining equestrian trails

Our community needs a public pool. Since the district no longer does elementary swimming lessons, it is important.

Safety and being able to walk from street to street.

I think the Mermaid property could meet this need.

And running! Would love to be able to walk and bike to close businesses and parks.

Critical To open a public pool mermaid.

Buildings at mermaid could be used for dance, yoga, arts, etc. look use of glen echo park in glen echo, md.

Need to increase interconnectedness and have a community accessible without cars.

Make part of it a large more natural dog park

Equestrian trails would be great!

Similar to the Plymouth Community Center.

Would love a family pool for Whitpain residents.

Also preservation of the beautiful network of equestrian trails that traverse Whitpain Township.

i would certainly pay to join a pool in mermaid lake. there are not many outdoor swim clubs left. This would be by number 1 item. i think this was wonderful for the township to save this property even without the pool.

Allow the Stony Creek Day Camp to use a Whitpain Township Indoor Facility.

Can not wait for the new recreation center! Of course I am just hoping...please?

It would be great to have in coordinated with the new rec center's indoor pool and gym

We desperately need a new recreation center

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

All native plants, minimal grass. Trails

Before and after school activities and games

A bike trail with bikes to rent.

Very good idea with discount days and movie nights for all to enjoy ❤️

1 free day a week a example: High School on Mondays, Middle School Tuesdays, Elementary School Wednesdays, Preschools on Thursday's

Parents volunteer for games... example: organize ball tossing, bean bag toss, tag, hot cold butter beans, dodge ball, Simon Says

Walking Party's 5pm 6pm 7pm... start with Name Game get to know one another. You say I say game, right to left game toss, story tellers.

Excellent idea

Neighborhood Garden and challenges

Open space for walking, hiking, and horseback riding

It would be great to see walking trails and outdoor activity and picnic areas here.

It wasn't listed here, but I would like to see more walking and equestrian trails in addition to bicycle trails.

Would like to see the 9 hole golf course stay and be improved. We have lost so many nearby golf courses. Nine hole is perfect for families and novices and seniors.

Many area roads have no shoulder and so much traffic. It would be nice to have a place to ride bikes off the street.

Why weren't these questions asked before the money was spent? Center square park needs play equipment. Since the township has it, make it more adult focused. I think the kids have enough in the township.

With regards to conservation, maintain Mermaid Lake as is or increase its surface area.

A pool would be nice, however with no increase in taxes. That's are several close alternatives to a new Mermaid pool.

Blue bell NEEDS a public pool!

More walking trails are needed as there are none within short walking distance of Mermaid and surrounding neighborhoods

A community center at Mermaid (with indoor pool?) similar to Plymouth would be great. Funds to pay for the center could be raised by selling memberships, with a discount for residents of Whitpain and higher prices for non-residents. This would help keep any additional taxes down and help cover the costs of maintaining and staffing any new facilities.

Possibly an outdoor pool in lieu of/in addition to a community center pool

Have paved bicycle trails adjacent to walking trails

Children's play areas.

Build new sidewalks that connect and lead to various points of interest, parks, etc. in the township

Leave a percentage of park and recreation space as open, non-developed space.

Swim team needed because it seems one needs to join a country club to have kids be on a swim team

It would be great to walk along Cathcart to get to Wentz park. Currently just not safe to walk there.

Continue to allow equestrian activities

Pool, 🏐 volleyball sidewalk

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

The trail that ends at Henkels and McCoy should extend to a connecting trail through Mermaid. Right now, it abruptly ends. It would be great to connect it to Shady Grove

I live in Mermaid Estates and would like a sidewalk to get to Mermaid Park. Arch/Jolly do not have any. A pool would really be a nice to have.

Pedestrian bridge across route 202 at Jolly Rd.

Need dedicated bike lanes or off road trails to link the parks together. Nowhere for kids to ride. Maybe a kids Mt. Bike area at Mermaid Lake?

township needs more bike lanes and/or wide shoulders for bike traffic.

N/A

Would be nice to connect this area to the Wentz trail system and trails behind Aetna

Public pool for a few for Whitpain residents Only would be nice.

Refurbishing the 9 hole golf course would be nice as there are limited public options available and would be a good place to learn to play for younger kids

shooting range for residents.

I would like for the pool to be used as a community pool with a lower membership cost.

It is very important for me to have a pool at an affordable membership cost. I would love to see the pool open!

We have wonderful parks for walking, but need to jump in a car to get to them. We would love to see sidewalks particularly on busy roads.

Connecting the upper part of Jolly Road, closer to 202, to the new Mermaid Lake Park.

Making a sculpture walk with works of art that integrate aesthetics, history, science, languages and geography.

Artisan trades sustainable local made goods.

Transform the pool into a Japanese water, and rock garden with tea houses.

Sculpture walk in the open spaces and the urban connected and that all lead to the Schuylkill River Waterfront.

Create a sculpture festival

pickel ball courts, golf course

township public pool

I would like to see the 9 hole golf course Stay and be revamped- we have lost so many golf courses. It would be great for families and seniors.

Many of our township roads are not safe for biking. Would be great to see some trails just for bikes.

Your programs are great. Maybe outdoor exercise area for classes under a protected roof.

Would be nice to have something like Plymouth township has

Perhaps as part of an indoor facility. Outdoor pools are not used that many months of the year although it could be fun to have one available to township residents.

my desire is less for sidewalks than for trails that connect to each other rather than being dangling pieces

i'm also interested in broad bike-ability around the township-traffic signals that respond to bikes, shoulders wide enough to bike on safely.

we need connected trails, not little pieces that go nowhere

Possibly have a mini golf area for families. Have outdoor playground equipment for toddlers & elementary children. A Chip n Put course would possibly be good.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

When I was young, we sometimes went to Mermaid Lake to swim/ it was reasonably priced for families who could not afford swim club memberships. I always looked forward to going & had a wonderful time. There was also a food concession I believe or picnic tables where we could eat if we brought our own food. ( again modestly priced food concession, nothing fancy).

Think Whitpain needs a facility for indoor sports and recreation

This might help get kids/ young adults, off their couches, away from laptops, computer games, etc. to socialize in person while exercising muscles.

This is good for all ages! Our bodies need to move & for some, walking is best; for others running is part of keeping their bodies moving & tuned up.

Possibly a trail around perimeter of the park for those beginners & or families. Again muscle movement w cycling helps keep certain ailments at bay.

Possibly keeping the golf aspect

Would be nice to have our own indoor facilities instead of always traveling so far to use others for league games or practices

Indoor or turf facilities for sports

Along with indoor sports facilities

A new indoor multi use sports training facility would benefit not only our youth athletes but also the entire community.

This should be the priority. In order to keep up with youth development, the indoor facilities are crucial.

Bike trails s/b multi-track, not Wings Field size.

Indoor sport facilities for WRA

Public pool with membership options.

Indoor soccer

Indoor training facility (basketball, soccer, etc.)

Would love to see a public swimming pool facility like Hatfield.

Please keep the nine hole golf course!

Tieing the communities around Mermaid and up Jolly and Wentz together with safe sidewalks would be a game changer for countless citizens across age groups.

Community Ice rink

Community ice rink

Community ice rink

The turf investment allows for this for outdoor sports. I believe we have enough indoor courts via our school district or rentals that this shouldn't be a priority. But it's more important than the rest of the choices so I made it #5.

It would be nice to have access to a pool since beachcomber was sold for development. Mermaid was a nice club when it was being maintained and improved.

It would be nice to have a state of the art facility similar to the community center in plymouth township with rentable space for clubs and groups.

With the new shopping center and all the traffic on Cathcart it would be super nice to have sidewalks for safety. It would also be nice to be able to walk to wentz park rather than walking through the grass.

Would love a community center like Plymouth

Really need indoor sports spaces for the kids to be able to play year round

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Idea: Sell small lots where community members can own and manage a little garden space

we need to continue to expand our bike trails so that families can continuously travel throughout the township and beyond. too many trails just come to stop and then have to continue on dangerous roads.

I wish all of the township bicycle trails connected. I run and Bike almost weekly along Arch Street Road to get to the wentz run trail and it is tight running along and crossing over Arch and Jolly roads. In order to avoid cars, I have to move off to the side of the road. I'd there were sidewalks or trails that connected wentz run to the sidewalks on Cooper and Shepherd roads, it would be much safer for us all.

Indoor sports complex. It would be nice to have indoor soccer and basketball.

Keep it a public golf course and pool

Put lights on the baseball fields so kids can play at night

And a golf course

Waste of money

Keep it up

Indoor recreation opportunity would be great!! Especially, Indoor tennis and pickelball and basketball. More outdoor basketball would be great so there can be an outdoor basketball league in the spring, summer and fall for kids who want to play year round but outside when its nice.

There are not nearly enough walkable places in the township. Connecting neighborhoods with additional sidewalks would be amazing. For example, I would love to walk to Mermaid Lake but it is not safe to do so with the way traffic flies down Arch and Jolly Roads.

it would be lovely to have a township run community pool. Nor Gwyn is a fantastic place for families in the summer. So is Plymouth Community Center. Summer camp programs could be amazing for the kids if there were township facilities to take advantage of besides at SCE

I'd like to see a nice park with a great playground, then indoor sport facility nest to it if possible.

Swimming is such a vital skill for children to practice and also great exercise for all that having a pool that is reasonably priced so nearby would be amazing. We have been members of Nor-Gwyn instead of Whitpain Greens because of how it is affordable for a family of five.

Not at all important to me or my family

We need parks! they are always crowded and good for families!

We have to pay more to use Plymouth, would love something in our township!

Not necessarily more trails, but bike friendly roads would be terrific. Skippack Pike #1. Such an easy ride to many things, but scared to death to ride a bike on that road. It is wide enough to make bike friendly lanes.

Maximize the current parks and facilities for public use.

Whitpain could really use a high quality indoor community and recreational center. Similar to Plymouth Township or Ambler YMCA. The Wentz park location would be ideal as it is central to Whitpain and perhaps some land at the O and F Farmer's Market is available creating access from Rt. 73 and Wentz Rd. A secondary location could be the Mermaid Lake property.

Make Whitpain more of a walkable Township. Several large busy roads really separate the township reducing the community feel.

Kids and Adults

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Lots of opportunity to create a great community space from scratch. Could be a mix of indoor and outdoor recreation. Maybe the current "Lake" could be a stocked fishing lake for Whitpain families. Incorporate the current lake and stream in whatever is done.

A multi-pool swim facility with 6-lane competition pool, zero entry kiddie pool, large 3.5 ft activity pool and a resort-class splash structure complete with multiple slides and tipping bucket. outdoor open dining and firepit. see Bellewood Country Club for an example of these proposed improvements.

No interest in preserving the pool

Keep, but improve the par 3 golf course primarily for the benefit of township residents

I would like to see a township building like Plymouth meeting for swim and indoor activities.

Mermaid should be open space. You denied development so nothing additional should be built.

Enough with recreational fields.ENOUGH!

Light use preserving open space is good.

As open as possible for conservation purposes but light (walk/ bike) public use.

This is a great idea.

This will give a community a place to use and repurpose flat land.

Yes

Softball fields for intramural use

I DO NOT WANT TO HAVE MY TAXES RAISED!!!. IF THE RESULT OF THIS SURVEY IS TO RAISE MY TAXES, PRESERVE THE OPEN LAND!!!!!!!!!!

Keep the pool and recreation Area charge for admission one Level for residents and a higher rate for non-residents also run a summer camp for kids. The whole area needs improvements

Definitely a safety issue not having enough sidewalks. I feel like my life is in jeopardy walking to a park or store in blue bell

Whitpain township is already too congested. Any additional open space that is conserved is a huge plus. It is also important to conserve the native plants/trees and native wildlife or re-establish it where non-native and invasive species have taken over. Perhaps environmentally minded students/faculty at MCCC or Temple Ambler could partner with Whitpain to achieve this.

I think this is important too even though not top 5.

This is important too even if not in top 5.

I wish we had a general use indoor facility, maybe similar to GPCC? Ideally it would have low membership rates if it were a gym, or just have large open gym/basketball facilities and be free.

Add indoor facilities and/or a township pool

An indoor pool like the pool at the Greater Plymouth Community Center.

Some fields and pavilions would be awesome. Not interested in something that becomes a big rental site and brings lots of traffic to the area.

It would be wonderful to have space for a community garden,& open space with trails for walking.. A community pool would be great, but probably very expensive to maintain for tax payers.

Obviously, cost might make it prohibitive, but if the pool can be updated & improved and then properly maintained, I believe that a community pool is a good addition to any township parks & recreation plan.

If a long-term plan for Mermaid is developed, then this would be the natural place for that.

Preserve the golf course for public use.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

If you decide to remove the 9-hole course, than you might want consider a driving range. It would ABSOLUTELY generate revenue and you have the amount of land needed to install one. Perhaps even a public/private relationship should be considered. Either way, this could generate revenue for the township.

Would love to keep the golf course as a source of revenue and open space.

Preserving and expanding equestrian trails is very important to me.

do not raise taxes to develop

just keep it simple. dont jack up our tax dollars because the township thinks they're a business now. I as little and as simple as possible. dont turn our township into a tax hole like the rest of montgomery county.

i love the easygoing manner of our summer parks programs, so unlike our neighbors Keep that spirit, but more pick up leagues would be fun

hard to say you can't exercise when it's walking distance. Indoor flag football, soccer, floor hockey would all be fun

i love the idea of a community pool, but the cost could be eyebrow raising.

Walking trails, basketball courts, baseball field and golf course and possibly a pool

We need indoor health center like Plymouth meeting has and ambler , With classes like Zumba, yoga etc

We need to preserve land and not allow any more overbuilding. We are running out of space and going over the capacity.

Crossing Union Mtg Rd near Hoover is dangerous. Need a crosswalk and sidewalks. Sidewalks along Penllyn Blue Bell Pike from Hoover Rd to Township Line Rd

How long would it take to build an indoor facility?

Would a tennis court be included?

Thus would be nice to have a biking trail on Mermaids grounds - too many bikers on dangerous roads.

Yes we have parks in the area, perhaps a scenic park with tiny bridges and beautiful flowers and nature.

Maybe an indoor pool ?

My child plays rec spirts. A youth tennis team?

Yes- more people need to get outside, good for mental and physical being.

It's always nice to preserve wildlife. Everyone loved the 9 hole golf course, wish it stayed !

More outdoor workout classes advertised to the public for adults and kids.

Golf course 9 joke pleasssse

maintaining a pool within the community should be a priority - it would provide the opportunity to host learn to swim programs, life-saving/cpr courses and summer camps

I would like to see a facility for golfing. With the loss of Woody's, Center Square Golf Course and now Mermaid's small golf course closing there is no where in the area to practice golf. We don't need any more soccer fields. Golf is a sport the entire family can enjoy together.

Our area does not have a community run pool and this site would be perfect. We all joined Nor Gwyn at a good price. Now is our chance to compete with a wonderful community pool at a good price.

An indoor facility should be the primary focus and goal to match the outdoor facility in Centre Square Park. This would also allow training year round.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Sidewalks should be mandatory during any redevelopment project. There is simply not enough sidewalks right now.

Make this into another park possibly housing the indoor facility.

living near Mermaid Lake, it would be nice to have sidewalks on Arch Street Road and Jolly Road for safe walking from surrounding neighborhoods to Mermaid.

We need to keep open space in Whitpain. Our infrastructure and current schools cannot support anymore people/kids/cars, etc.

I am not sure if the flood plain would support a new swimming pool, but, I think this would be great for the community. NorGwynn has a very successful park and community pool. we should be able to do the same.

we love the access to Mermaid Lake as a new park system. This property has so much potential. Great place for Stoney Creek day camp, great facilities for private parties. You could bring bands into the stage at the screened in large building pr have movies and serve snacks. dredge the creek/pond so that the fishing is even better. My kids have loved fishing there. DO NOT bring in any large facilities that would bring traffic and late night noise!

Having serene space to sit and read not just walk. Connecting both sides

Other communities near whitpain township have a public pool. it's important to offer an aquatics programs to the whole community.

As our community grows we need more public parks for the health of our community.

we need to keep and maintain our open space!

Picnic, rest scenic, open space

Indoor and Outdoor space for Scout meetings, activities, camping.

A partnership opportunity to strengthen with Troop 98 to help maintain Mermaid Lake property and use it for Scouting activities

Too expensive to maintain. Better to fill it in and use the open space for other recreation activities

Strengthening partnership opportunities with groups like Troop 98 is a win-win. The buildings at Mermaid Lake could be co-shared with different groups for various uses - meetings, volunteers for conservation and maintenance projects, help to maintain specific buildings that are used for these specific groups...

Maintain and re-open the 9-hole golf course. It was always a fun way to spend a few hours without great expense.

If the pool can be salvaged, it would be great to keep it as a Swim Club with a portion of the property devoted to a public park.

It would be great to create indoor recreational programs at the Mermaid Lake property to benefit the senior citizens in Whitpain Township

If it is at all possible to rehab and keep it, please do so but if it will cost the Township (and the taxpayers) too much money, get rid of it.

Would encourage community bonding, especially as people with younger children move to the area

Golf

Whitpain is such a beautiful place to walk around, but it can be very challenging and unsafe in some circumstances. Completing sidewalks around the area could provide a more safe environment to walk.

This would be made even better if there was a dedicated walkway with sidewalks that patrons could walk to the park.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Other communities have indoor facilities and it would be nice to be able to offer it for camps, rec leagues, etc.

Having a public pool in the community would be great for families in the summertime.

The parks in the area are well used and I'm sure could use further investment in the upkeep.

On 73 between parkwood and 202 we have the promise of a sidewalk at the traffic lights. Then nothing! Would love a sidewalk

Gee a public pool at mermaid? That would be cool

It would be nice to have bird watching and talks from naturalists

This is interesting to me if the plan is to make it a public pool

Would like a 9-hole golf program for all ages, particularly age 50+.

A new township pool would add to the appeal of Whitpain. The Nor-Gwyn pool in Upper Gwynedd a thriving and healthy activity.

Renting out the barn at Mermaid for company picnics and weddings would generate income to pay for the upkeep at Mermaid. Also, it would be nice to somehow connect the walking trail at Wentz Run park to Mermaid Lake.

Would love to have a safe, dedicated township bicycle trail.

Sidewalks to various shopping & recreation areas would be a great way to reduce traffic and encourage a healthy activity.

There is enough land at Mermaid Lake to build an indoor recreation building. It could also be rented out for special events.

no

Mermaid swim club is a site that should be preserved for its pool and recreational facilities that can be used for residents to maintain active lives and benefit for the acquisition using tax dollars to make this affordable for all residents including seniors

Build a community recreation center offering opportunities for senior programs, exercise classes, indoor swimming, child care center, event room for speakers, parties, etc.

Repair the pool and make it a community pool with a swim team. Community members especially our child need to have the opportunity to learn how to swim along with water safety steps. There is currently only one private pool in the township that provides this opportunity.

Making Mermaid Lake a public park will provide community members the experience to view the many interesting wildlife habits. Like the idea of the catch and release fishing the township is currently allowing. I also feel that bringing back the nine-hole golf course will provide our community families the opportunity to share in the joy of teaching their child how to play golf.

Repair the buildings on the Mermaid Lake to provide for social gatherings. Leave the historical content of these buildings intact. The history of this township is very important.

Having open space and conservation provides an educational opportunity to our residents. Having more acres to explore is an asset to the community.

More trails for biking and walking will provide a safe way for community members to travel throughout the township.

Pickleball courts

Would love to see a pool at Mermaid Lake and a 9 hole golf course. I believe this would be a great asset for the community and could generate some income to offset expenses. Corporate and family parties have been a tradition for many years, and hopefully could be maintained.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Pool would be nice. Not sure if too costly to repair and to run, and how managed? But it should be considered and investigated. Fees to use pool, residents different than non residents. Limit usage? Redesign pool, smaller. Overall do think it would be valuable, much appreciated. Also to consider with pool snack bar.

We are not interested in a pool, but it would be nice for kids and youth. We need more activities for older adults. We would love a community center like the Ambler Y or like the one in Plymouth Meeting. We have enough dog parks and walking trails.

Need to make Armentrout Park assessable from Morris rd TWP has sign in woods along Morris Rd but no turn off or parking to walk the park. Not well defined as to parks property lines to walk especially if walking in from Miles dr. You can see backs of houses abut not sure what is park land to walk. Need public pickle ball courts and tennis courts and nice center for indoor activities with concession stand or vending machines

I'd like to see more environmental education areas in Whitpain's parks, similar to what Plymouth Township did w/Harriet Wetherill park: have a pollinator garden that educates about the value of native plants to our local ecosystem.

I'd like to see Whitpain develop a program where they only plant native plants and trees in its parks and conservation areas. I think it's so valuable for Parks and Rec to lead the way and educate the public about invasive species (such as bamboo) and how planting native helps our local ecosystem.

If the roads are not wide enough in neighborhoods please consider sidewalks to connect the neighborhoods to our parks and open spaces as well as shopping centers. If residents could walk to shop we could cut down on road traffic and would promote healthy lifestyles option of walking.

Build Recreation Center with 2 full basketball courts. With indoor track like Montgomery Township Center.

I don't anticipate that Mermaid will be just as it was. I never joined Mermaid but had occasion to use the pool a number of times. I think it would be something to think about since you could recoup any costs that you incur. You already spent \$8 million.

Connect the Wentz Run Trail to Wentz Road via the PECO Power Lines Right of Way.

can the township continue to gain revenue from this source? A subsidized day camp for needy kids would be a good use.

Construct a sidewalk along Jolly Road to connect Mermaid Lake Park to Wentz Road. The trees planted this year are a waste and poorly maintained.

A public use would bring the township together. Would be good for the day camp. Could it be a pool or a lake for boating? Could it be an all year round pool? What would be the impact of a public pool on local swim clubs? Would they be sold for more housing?

It's very important to me. I think it should be repaired and opened and be part of the community's recreation department.

Swimming availability should be for all ages, with summer programs ranging from lessons and free swim/play time in the pool. There should also be blocks of time for older adults, when it's adult only time, too.

This would be great also. Perhaps there could be some naturalist and historical museum - like exhibits about the area, which would be user- friendly with please touch learning and quizzing.

Walking trails and kids' playground equipment!

I love living in Whitpain but I wish it was a more walkable township.

I'd like to see more programs for high school age children

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Model the pools after Plymouth Rec Center.

Indoor pools with areas for kids, lap lanes, PT classes, water aerobics, senior swims, etc.

Swimming lessons for all ages.

Model after the Plymouth Rec Center.

Indoor pools like Plymouth Rec Center.

Indoor walking track, basketball court, weight room, gym with machines, studio for aerobics/yoga, pools, sauna, hot tub, locker rooms.

Indoor and outdoor tracks.

Stock the existing waterways for catch and release fishing.

Benches placed around the area near the paved trails for PD use.

Ample parking.

Try not to duplicate all activities from other recreational facilities.

Make sure that the spaces are reserved for township residents who pay taxes to fund these parks and rec spaces. Township ID required.

Allocate time at different activities for all sectors of the township.

Provide security to new Mermaid Lake area to keep non-residents and vandals out.

Offer courses such as yoga, aerobics, etc.

Refreshment stand during high season.

Machines with healthful snacks indoors.

The Tennis courts need to be maintain more often and would be nice if there were a few more courts and possible a net between courts for stray balls.

lesser of 4 choices...

I think this would be great, especially given our current reliance on the school district for space

While I think an indoor rec space is great, I believe you need to balance that with open space. The property is large so I believe it can accommodate this

I think this would be a nice to have but would also depend on the cost.

Is it possible to create a fishing pond in the park?

It would nice be nice to have a pool but not unless you can keep the pool that's already there period I would not want to spend any money relocating it I would prefer the entire space remain open

I am disappointed in the dog park period it is hard to get a license to use it and it is hot in the summer and cold in the winter.

It would be a shame to destroy that beautiful pool. I have wonderful memories of that swim club in my youth. My family joined NorGwyn Pool as it was and is a very nice, affordable township pool and that is what Mermaid should become as we do not have a township pool that is affordable for all.

Provide all year indoor/outdoor facilities for pick-nic area, concerts, entertainment with stage settings, circuses, and other sport's activities, etc.

Especially during the winter seasons we need indoors facility for convertible activities!

See comments made for indoor facilities

See comments made previously for indoor recreation

Utilize the open space for additional walking space while using other activities!

With the pool activity provide maybe water slides, etc

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

The outdoor pools need to be removed and a new outdoor facility needs to be built to replace it. In addition, as a part of a public/private partnership and additional indoor swimming facility should be built. In order to accomplish this these facilities should be made available to Township Residents at one Fee Level and to others outside of the Township as paying customers at a different Fee Level. Looking forward to discussing the details of this concept with you! Geoff Meyer

I feel that the Township should consider various options for the Residents and the area as it relates to creating basketball, volleyball, tennis, paddle tennis, pickleball and related activities. Creating a Master Plan that incorporates all of this should be considered. This is a one time opportunity to do something on a long range basis where you have the land and could incorporate a public/private partnership to maximize the opportunity for the Township Residents and the regional community.

Please see my previous comments that I have submitted for your review and consideration. You could start with a water babies program to senior programs and everywhere in between. A phased Master Plan for the site is what I would suggest that you create Master Plan and realize that a public/private partnership is perhaps the best way to accomplish this in the near term!

Create walking trails as a part of the Master Plan for this site

Mermaid I believe would be great for a blue bird trail as there are already blue birds in the habitat this is very low cost/low upkeep. It could have a disk golf course. I can also see a seasonal flea market/farmers market in existing indoor and outdoor facilities. Summer concerts .

The pool at Mermaid is fantastic. I miss their diving boards. Would like to have had the diving area deeper. Sectioning the pool into one or more pools may be an option, as it is desirable for different age groups, but may involve more funding than is available . I belonged there for 25+ years, but always felt comfortable and family oriented.

Because of COVID-19, making Mermaid a public park with a swimming pool may not be possible. Because it is on a "Flood Plain", it is most certain to keep the pool functioning in order to encourage a place for family and summer camp activities. The wooded area is fantastic; the stream, where my children and their friends explored was a real delight. Maintenance and conduct is solely at the proprietor's discretion.

A good public pool would be a benefit to our community.

our township could really use an outdoor pool; we miss the use of the pool at mermaid lake so much!!!

we also miss having a summer camp at mermaid lake!!! a summer camp would be great!!

a percentage of this land should be under a land trust--need to keep some things natural to make up the law violation as a result developing the land trust behind St. Helena church.

also, would it be possible to make the water way there into a pond? Would residents be able to ice skate on this pond? we need a place for outside ice skating when we have a solid winter. This would be so cool to have a place for outside ice skating sort of like what Green Lane park does.

Please NO MORE sports fields--we already have plenty of those

For those without a pool this would be nice

Provide opportunities for increased partnership with service-oriented organizations in the Township like Scouts Troop 98, Girl Scouts, and others. Allow these organizations use of the facilities on an ongoing basis to increase their and the Township's success vis-a-vis this property.

As with Mermaid, seek partnership with other community organizations who have a focus on providing community service themselves. This multiplies their effectiveness as well as that of Whitpain Park & Rec's.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

I suggest speed bumps on arch street ,as cars drive very fast, so it is risky to walk to the park from our house on slayton drive. Thanks.

I would like to see a Rec Center like Plymouth Township has. I spend a premium to use their facilities for working out in the pool

More speed limit signs!!

Township center with indoor pool

Safety issue. Please add more sidewalks.

Preserve nature please.

Please have more outdoor exercise programs offered at Wentz Park.

Keep the golf course!

Would be good to have indoor place when weather is cold and it's raining or snowing.

We would love to add more local options to our weekly biking-we are a family of 4 - 2 adults and two elem aged kids.

In BBCC so pool isn't high priority for me

No more sports fields needed. Plenty of those are available and dedicated to sports. Would much rather see mermaid turned into a more of a park like setting. Open space, use the existing building for party rental, business BBQ rental space as mermaid used to do. Have more of a family orientated space, trails, wild flower gardens, allow fishing, add water features ponds or fountains. Maybe a disc golf course. Restore the mini golf and bball courts.

I would love a local public pool. There could be resident & non-resident charges to cover maintenance costs.

Like an area where families can all go an feel safe with parents enjoying time while children are enjoying time

Miniature golf course, ropes courses, roller skating, barbeque. All at a low cost to residents but open later hours summer evenings. Plus day time hours with paid attendents

We currently use the Norgwyn pool each summer in North Wales. However if Mermaid Lake pool offers similar pricing (~\$300 per family for the summer) we would consider switching to Mermaid which is closer.

A community pool would be great as part of a community center like Plymouth,

Golf

More STOP signs and speed limit signs.

Whitpain Township is too heavily populated at this point. I think we need to stop development of what little acreage is left in the township to maintain quality and the aesthetics.

Good spot for an affordable township summer camp for children of Whitpain township residences and neighboring communities.

Green color to demarcate the lanes please!

We need sidewalks to be able to walk to parks, stores, have kids walk to school etc. this is critical for the community, recreation, better health

Keep the tennis courts up to date, improving the surface regularly, adding wind screens, replacing nets when holes cannot be fixed.

Add wind screen to Wentz Run tennis courts on side facing walking path.

Would love it if Whitpain township had a building for swim, sports, fitness, kids activities (like the greater plymouth community center, but for Whitpain residents and more updated)

It would be so great to have a township indoor and outdoor pool.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

More programs for the kids would be great

Fishing pond for kids

The opportunity exists to have this space be multi use for many community groups! eg. Scouts and Girl Guides

I'd love to have trails connecting the different shopping zones within Whitpain.

Public pool with membership would be amazing.

Providing learning opportunities within our community for open space conservation and the importance of habitat connectivity across our parks is important to me.

The less cars we have on the road, the better. I would bike more places if it felt safer to do so.

I agree with the indoor recreation area as long as it is for all sports like football

I think it would be a good thing but alot of people have pools. I think it would be a good idea to talk with the owners of the Green pool to see if they would be interested. It would give them more space for swim meets and room for more families

Drive in movie on the open field

Drive in movie theater

Open Space & Conservation

Pool in Mermaid Lake

More sidewalks for walking

Par 3 golf course

Keep 9 hole golf course or chip and putt

Par 3 golf course

It would be nice to revive the 9-hole course to its once pristine playing condition.

I truly would relish the opportunity to swim outdoors in the warmer weather. I would agree to paying a membership fee, which would be based on a member's residency and age.

NO POOL. Liability too high and like a private swim club for local neighborhood only.

We do not want the township to have the liability associated with an outdoor swimming pool.

We have enough open space and facilities now.

I would like to see the pool at Mermaid fixed or replaced. I would be willing to contribute money to the project

We do not want the cost and liability associated with a public pool. We do not want our township to acquire more land. We have enough open space, parkland, and facilities.

We would like pickle ball courts.

More bathrooms at our parks, like Prophecy Creek. We would like outdoor pickle ball courts

We would like our township to be more bicycle friendly especially along Penllyn Blue Bell Pike between Stenton and Township Line Rd by adding a trail or sidewalks along the west side of the street.

We would like a sidewalk or trail along the west side Penllyn Blue Bell Pike from Stenton Avenue to Township Line Rd to allow pedestrian and bike access to the Blue Bell post office, the bus stop, and Wentz Run Park. Our neighborhood just does not safely connect to any parks or facilities except by car. It's dangerous as it is.

Trails, trails, trails, and sidewalks. Connect more neighborhoods to parks and local facilities.

More trails, sidewalks, and bike paths connecting the whole township.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Prophecy Creek and Armentrout need bathrooms or port-a-potties. The bathrooms at Wentz Run are locked too often. Deer ticks are a problem.

No more taxpayer supported facilities and increased maintenance! Preserve Mermaid Lake as a natural area with trails and gold course. Fill in the pool.

I would like to see Whitpain offer a Community Center, similar to Plymouth Meeting's, that includes an indoor pool for year-round use, meeting rooms, gym and other space in addition to fields that can be used for everything from pick-up games (various types) to kite flying and picnics. Also a walking trail loop, similar to the one behind St. Helena's. The outdoor pool may be too costly for a seasonal option. I wonder if paddle boat rental on the lake might be an option during the summer?

I love what was done with Center Square park. Now we need a place with fields that can be used by anyone and year-round opportunities (and bathrooms).

If the cost of replacing the pool is prohibitive then it should be scrapped. It would be nice to see some playgrounds at Mermaid Lake, just like the ones at Wentz Run, for the local residents to use.

It would wonderful to have, but if the cost is prohibitive then it should be done.

It would be nice for some playgrounds to be added for local residents to use, like the ones at Wentz Run.

This park would be less than a mile from the Greater Plymouth Community Center, which provides great facilities for year round indoor recreation and a beautiful aquatics center. Leaving generations of Whitpain taxpayers on the hook for redundant facilities would be completely irresponsible.

We are the only township without a community center. Plymouth, Montgomeryville, and upper Merion all have community centers that serve the residents.

We are one of the few townships that don't have Pickleball courts which is more popular than tennis right now.

All surrounding community centers have indoor Pickleball for year round Pickleball.

Would like to see the golf coarse back

Township residents only.

No bicycles, no skate boards.

Pavilions with picnic tables and grills for residents only. Availability to schedule use with fees for scheduled events. Refundable fees if usage did not cause any damage, and park rules abided.

Residents only.

Residents only access

Residents only, outdoor only , no need to create more cost for building maintenance.

We are interested in a Spray Park for Children at Mermaid Lake. We prefer no pools and lakes because we have a child with a disability. Pools and lakes can be drowning hazards.

Mermaid was purchased with public funds or the Twp. Incurred debt to purchase it so it should be public. But We do not need nor want a pool at Mermaid. A pool will be a money pit and the Twp. Should not compete against the other pools in the Twp. Especially ones like Whitpain greens but also those at country clubs. Even the private country clubs preserve open space in the Twp. No Pool at Mermaid!!

Do not create a public pool for Whitpain!!

Walking trails are very popular and a great way to get kids and adults in shape.

Exercise classes like zumba are fun.

Nature walks are great with a plant and wildlife specialist .

Drive up family movie night similar to program at wentz park and community college are fun also.

**Continued. Comments on what is important to the respondents.**

Provide income for use by annual membership fees, cost on a per use basis, scholarships for those in low income brackets, volunteer organizations and individuals to recover and maintain the property and a citizens board to direct the process

Public pool with membership or per use fees. Free access for those who qualify based on financial situation

Having lived in Abington Twp. prior to moving to Whitpain, a community pool was a true benefit to living in that township, and I feel it would be well worth it to seriously explore developing one.

Make the bike trails an asphalt roadway to eliminate mud and hazards during nasty weather.

Make mermaid the outdoor equivalent of what Plymouth Twp has with the GPCC. You can use this as a rec space for lap swims, swim lessons, water exercise, etc. And rent out the facility to WCAC for swim team and water polo team practices, meets, games, camps and clinics. The area has no such outdoor space and you could have amazing utilization with one. You'd also provide a ton of lifeguarding jobs for teens in the area.

Along with the pool usage I commented on, fix up the 9-hole golf course. Offer \$5 rounds to township residents and \$10 for non-residents. Have WRA start up a youth golf league. Offer local lessons for kids and adults. Without Mermaid, the closest similar golf facility is 30min away.

I strongly believe we need to follow the "less is more" rule.

Provide opportunities for increased partnership with service-oriented organizations in the Township like Scouts Troop 98, Girl Scouts, and others. Allow these organizations use of the facilities on an ongoing basis to increase their success and the Township's success with this property.

Making sure trails are multipurpose for walking, biking and hiking. Adding a volleyball court and updating basketball courts.

Safe access to stores specifically Centre Square. Perhaps even a Shuttle Bus service.

i think the only thing the township needs is an indoor facility especially for basketball teams and rec leagues, all the other sports have top notch places to play, this is probably the last piece to having the best facilities around for kids rec leagues

doing a great job with conservation, build the indoor rec facility and conserve the rest at mermaid, the property already looks great going natural with trails and maybe a bike path

Comments on Facilities and Programs
Blue Bell CC (Robert again - test) I like to ride my bike really fast on the township trail - FYI
Did an amazing job with summer camp during a pandemic. Really missed the haunted hayride at prophecy creek this year.
Pickleball Courts
Lighted Tennis Courts
More tennis courts
Implement online scheduling for tennis courts to avoid long wait time
We belong to Blue Bell Country Club
North Hills Country Club
I would love to see a skate park that requires protective gear to be worn and a separate bike or scooter park also with required protective gear. Amble skate park is way too crazy with skateboards, scooters, rollerblades, etc. all together
Whitpain Greens Swim Club
Keep the golf. Do year round like Plymouth does with their facility. Tired of paying another township for these activities. If I have to pay someone would rather pay whitpain. Too many fields in this township! Let's do other sports bocce, pickle ball, after school programs for kids, golf for all ages.
Use the space for Township camps .. Provide more open spaces also indoor outdoor some covered spaces for events or gatherings places to have cookouts ,picnic tables. We don't need more sports fields let's make mermaid more of a park they can come to just to relax have a barbecue have a picnic enjoy the openness. A township pool could bring in some money. And dog friendly you should be able to walk your dogs through the park on a leash
Nor-Gwen Pool
WOuld LOVE to have an indoor recreation community center in this community.
Make a really neat playground, similar to the new lion park in chalfont. Great for older kids and new. Maybe add a skate park for older kids too.
The only disc golf course in the area is fort washington, i believe. my husband would be there EVERY DAY if you out a disc golf course in. thanks!
Would keeping it as is also mean preserving the golf course for public use? If so, I would support that. Otherwise, it would be great to preserve a majority and include trails/nature-based activities. In my opinion there is an abundance for sports fields already in the area. I would also support using a portion to create a bike pumptrack as noted in my previous comment ( <a href="https://www.phillypumptrack.org/">https://www.phillypumptrack.org/</a> see Philly Pumptrack for potential community impact & benefits this could bring to Whitpain)
mini golf, batting cages
Pickleball courts
We belong to Whitpain Greens Swim Club
Currently, we take our kids to Goldfish Swim school in Fort Washington for swim lessons. It would be great i we can have close by in our own township.
Also, we have to take them to Frog Hollow Tennis club in winters since they have indoor courts. My family loves to play badminton but we do not have any badminton courts nearby.
Nor-gym pool
Philadelphia Aviation Country Club
Whitpain Greens Swim Club
Whitpain Greens Swim Club

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

Two things I will add -

1. It would be great to have some more "classes" or activities for teens/adults involving nature or art/crafts, cooking, books etc. (not necessarily exercise-related)
2. I don't think we need any more sports fields - there are so many already and it would be great to have Mermaid has a place that everyone can exercise, swim and be fit - not just for sports teams.
3. POOL and safe walk/biking paths are very important to our family.

Keep 9 hole golf course public charge reasonable fee- great for kids to start golf

Would love a frisbee golf course at Mermaid!

Blue Bell CC

Restore the chip and putt course

Make a disc golf course

Blue Bell Country Club

and inclusive playgrounds!

Our township NEEDS an indoor fitness recreational center like Plymouth

Safe clean bathroom facilities, e.g. at Cebtre Square Park

H.

Sidewalks are important

I've been a member of Talamore for 20+ years, and am an avid golfer.

Pet friendly activities

Blue bell country club

The township could run a camp similar to what Mermaid had before. We could have a township swimming pool. The pavilions could be rented out for picnics and activities. The Barn could be used to cater events as they did in the past, as a moneymaker for the township. The golf course could also be used since there are so few public courses in the area. It seems like a waste not to make use of these already existing options.

Community Garden

Talamore for the pool but would drop that for township pool.

Not disc golf - actual golf

Would like to see a nice municipal golf course at mermaid.

Please finish the connector trail from Montco over to wentz

Improve trail maintenance, especially at the Armentrout. Some trails desperately need to be regraded. Mermaid lake would be a great location for a spray park. Spray parks are much less expensive to operate than swimming pools. Consider a private park for Whitpain residents only (similar to Alverthorpe park in Abington). For programming in the next year, consider social distancing options, e.g. story walk.

9hole golf course was great to have and would be a great fit there

Golf!

Outdoor fitness and yoga

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

We use nearby indoor tennis facilities. We'd really like to have pickleball courts in Whitpain Township. Parkside Place in Upper Gwynedd has 4 courts and they get a ton of use. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport and is played by the young and old.

Would like to see game courts added but please no more ball fields. We have spent more than enough \$ on fields. I was sorry to see courts and fields grouped together.

Would love to have 9-hole golf course or driving range. (Pay fee for use.)

Outdoor ice-skating rink, like they have in the city. This would give adults/children an great way to remain active throughout the colder weather.

Golf

continue to support the preservation of equestrian trails

Manufacturers Country Club

Manufacturers G&CC

Equestrian trails are important. Mermaid Lake could be openspace naturalized with native plants, and no human activity

I don't use them because I live at Willow Lake farm and the preserve is my back yard.

Love what the community association for Blue Bell Country Club has done for our home owners - tennis courts, pickle ball, pool, fitness center, we use all the time! Makes for a great community vibe while creates home value appreciation. Beautiful job they did for us!

Open a gym on mermaid lakes property for residents

Equestrian trail riding

Philadelphia Cricket Club.

Blue Bell Country Club recreational facilities

Equestrian trails

Environmental conservation programs, perhaps in conjunction with Wissahickon Trails (Watershed).

Golf course (9 hole)

Nor-Gwynedd Pool

Preferred improvements: Pickle Ball courts. Fishing and angler programs to educate youth to fishing.

More picnic areas

9 hole golf course

I wasn't even aware that there's a Whitpain Township Trail System. I wish some of these facilities are better advertised.

Ride horses. Maybe some programs to educate people on being around horses on the trails.

Blue Bell Country Club

Other Suggestion: Indoor lacrosse fields/soccer fields

Whitpain Greens Swim Club

Another dog park on east side of 202

WRA is amazing. I feel we need some adult leagues such as pickle ball, boce, or horse shoes. The township is well equipped with soccer and baseball now. I believe other sports like Lacrosse and field hockey need to be supported. Both these programs are the top in our community, but do not get the respect of soccer and baseball does. The girls and boys lacrosse need a home and not the hammy downs of fields that are not conditioned well. small nature center along the pond would be a great feature

Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs
Philadelphia rock gyms
Create similar membership program as Plymouth meeting community center. Or building Blue bell community center. Resident / non resident fee base
Union League at Torresdale
Cedarbrook country club
Sculpture, architecture and mosaic history and technique education that lead to an annual sculpture walk festival that connects all the parks and open spaces. A percent for art sales tax.
I just moved to Blue Bell in the last few weeks, so I have not had a chance to explore all of the options below, but I plan to over the next few months.
Blue Bell Country Club
We use the Upper Gwynedd pool and playground
Park usage to support BSA Scouting activities and programs including Camping.
certain parts of Mermaid must be wetlands but have been mowed as if they were not. i think that it is important to restore appropriate wetland vegetation (and perhaps introduce other appropriate changes) to these areas. flooding is a growing issue with climate change, development and loss of trees in the township. the acquisition of Mermaid gives us an opportunity to restore its wetlands to mitigate other negative water trends in the township.
Restore Mermaid to wetlands. Use a demonstration area for how to plant wetlands for use by pollinators and wildlife. Should build wetland compatible walk ways (maybe some board walks)
This township needs pickleball courts and a community center to serve its residents.
Indoor sports facility should be township's priority!
Cedarbrook
Cedarbrook Country Club
Unfortunately all my swimmers now are in and out of college but I would love to see Mermaid become a community facility. My kids swam there in the mornings for years and there really isn't any good pools for kids to train in around here.
Golf
Old York Road CC
Cedarbrook
Blue Bell Country Club
Restore the chip and putt golf course.
Love the idea of an indoor recreational center. At the same time i think it should be a balanced plan that keeps as much open space on the mermaid lake property as possible.
If you selectively update existing facilities and eliminate the rest and the pool, you basically do most of the things referenced on this list.
Blue bell cc
We live across from the new parking lot area at the end of Normandy drive. You can't imagine how disturbing this area has become. People are loud early on weekend mornings. They park EVERYWHERE, they leave odd trash as a dumping area at times, people park there late at night for unknown reasons (it's dark there...why are they parking?)We never received any survey asking how we felt about a parking area there. On some weekends they park all along Normandy Dr inhibiting a safe flow of traffic.
We are members at BBCC. Our family would love to see a skatepark and pool at Mermaid. It would be great to have a township rec center with equal access to all of the community not limited to WRA.

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

I don't belong to a club, but my kids take private lessons at Worcester Golf club and golf there 2 xs/mth. I'd love to see a YOUTH golf program. My son would like golf camps and youth play in tournaments. Could a WRA golf be an option at Mermaid?

Could the Mermaid pool run a township water polo program? That would be great! I'm not sure what "public park" at Mermaid means. I'd love to see a 9 hole course back there, a community pool, maybe a driving range and an ice cream stand. mini golf?

we belong to Cedarbrook CC

#### Outdoor Archery facility

You should explore making exercise stations around the space for intermittent exercise - ex pull-up bar, etc. Or, make it American Ninja Warrior style activity zones.

#### More tennis courts and indoor tennis facilities

Please consider: 1) better maintenance of trails during the pandemic, especially the Armentrout which is very steep and hard to walk with stroller in parts, 2) policing and considerable fining to deter off-leash dogs which have become a huge issue, 3) recreational programs that are socially distanced (e.g. outdoor movies, story walk, fireworks)

#### Stopped private fitness when COVID hit

large multi-pool swim facility. see comment on prior question

Indoor soccer facilities, NorGwyn pool,

Cedarbrook

#### Softball fields

Rent out the Barn area for companies to have employee picnics etc like Mermaid use to do. Bring back golf course area and charge fee to play golf. Keep tennis courts and basketball courts. Get rid of the pool and use that land for expanded golf course area.

Want to walk to the trail system on 73 and 202. Also please require new communities to have a path along the major roads so we can walk safely to parks and not have to drive.

#### Bluestone Country Club

Belong to Blue Bell CC

We belong to Blue Bell Country Club

There needs to be more softball fields. There is 1 softball field vs several baseball fields. And the softball field is unuseable after any rain storms for days!

Over the past 30-40 years, Whitpain parks and recreation programs and facilities have developed and improved to become one of the finest in the county, if not the state. My advise would be to continue to invest in them and develop them with an eye on the future. Use public/private partnerships where possible.

Regarding the Support....I checked all of them. The bottom line is that we purchased Mermaid. Now, we need to figure out what to do with it. Use all possible ways to pay for it.

I would love to see a safe, yet child appropriate playground that includes "Ninja Warrior" style course. I also like an inclusive playground for all kids, plus it is safer for the little ones usually too. I would prefer playground surfaces surrounding the playground that are rubber or deterrents of ticks.

I would love to see an indoor facility created in Whitpain for recreation sports - either on the grounds of Mermaid Lake or elsewhere. I do not see the need for an outdoor community pool.

I use the Horseways equestrian trail network

## Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

### Blue Bell CC

I would like to see mermaid use the existing bldg for bbqs, family/company picnic rentals and township events. A walking bridge over the pond, Wild flower garden patches, bird houses along the trail. Update into a Public pool, update the basketball court and mini golf. Make it a family friendly open space with outdoor themes for use. Picnic area, maybe add some bocce ball courts. Could also host seasonal themed events like model train exhibits, environmental classes.

Would love to have an ice skating park.

Open, connecting, maintained equestrian trails are very important. Whitpain has quite a large horse-rider population.

keeping open space open preserves the nature of our township, and keeps our taxes low. we do not need more soccer fields or skateparks or the traffic that they bring !!!!!

With the pandemic, using outdoor space for an escape is great.

Mermaid Aquatics should be improved. They have been the foundation of mermaid for many years.

again, living by Mermaid, it would be nice to have sidewalks on Arch Street Road and Jolly road to connect neighborhoods to the park. Our adult programs could be much better. NorGwynn has some much better programs.

Whitpain has lost several public pools which also had a competitive and learn to swim program in the summer. Whitpain would definitely benefit from both an indoor and outdoor pool/facility similar to Greater Plymouth Community Center. As a swimmer myself as well as a parent to 2 Olympic trail swimmers, we spend lots of time and money on other memberships outside our community. As a coach, I would be happy to help establish a USA Learn to Swim school for infants through adults.

Plant new park with native plant species and remove invasive plants.

Plant a butterfly garden and create a ecological functioning wetland / and or stream where the current pond is now.

Plant a new riparian buffer around the creek.

Outdoor environmental classroom for community schools.

Concerts like at Wentz

### Cedarbrook Country Club

I think that the current condition of Mermaid Lake and Wentz Road at the turnpike overpass is a disgrace as it looks overrun and unkept.

Check out the pools at Bellewood Country Club, Whitpain would thrive with this type of chargeable amenity.

Splashpad for kids! Nothing like that in the area

A sidewalk/crosswalk connecting the Blue Bell Knoll neighborhood to Wentz run park would be great!

Public-Public Partnerships with groups like Troop 98 to help defray costs for certain aspects of maintenance of the grounds and buildings. It would be great to see a Scout Troop housed in the existing buildings at Mermaid Lake. And the partnership opportunities that can continue, such as the current Wentz Run trail and Eagle projects done in the Township.

GP Community Center is a wonderful model for providing top-notch facilities. We have used the pool, the exercise classes and the outdoor walking trail. It is always a pleasure to see all of the activity.

Sell Prophecy Creek Park to pay for Mermaid lake improvements.

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

Live in Blue Bell Country Community and use the homeowners' community amenities

I am a resident of Blue Bell Country Club and have access to their several recreational facilities.

I think that Whitpain Township is doing a good job in terms of programs

would love some more fishing options

Why did this desirable property sell at such a low cost per acre? Back taxes? I believe there enough kid-friendly venues in the twp. I'd like to see this property be brought up to par and turned into a rev-producer offering to groups, Corp America; etc. Personally, I hoped a reputable builder would have turned this into an "Over 55." I'd also like to see it turn into a fun place for pop-up flea market or craft show venue. Would have really preferred a MINI Towne Center (ala KoP.) Good luck!

I am have mobility issues that would benefit from water activities like aerobics. Optimizing this facility for residents of all ages Andy physical abilities would greatly enhance the offerings to the residents.

Enhancing the wellbeing and health of residents should be a goal of the park and rec offerings

I only met up in one park once due to an organizer explaining/handing out information. Lack of use primarily was due to working 12 hour shifts during employment and my dogs were not used to socializing with other dogs. Since I am now retired, I desire to check out some of the available parks. The Plymouth Community Center charges Whitpain Township members more, so Whitpain should have their own center. The Zumba class offered was too late in the evening for me. Offer earlier evening class.

Bocce pits like Palmer Park in Skippack.

Pond for fishing like Hillcrest, kids and seniors

Fishing pond like Hillcrest for kids and seniors.

Bocce pits like Palmer Park in Skippack

I would love to see a well designed championship level disc golf course developed in the area and Mermaid Lake may be a great opportunity. The sport has been growing rapidly over the past year and this region in particular could benefit from a large challenging course.

We have lived in Whitpain for 19 yrs and been impressed with the programs and parks. Proximity to awentz Run was a major factor in choosing our neighborhood. Greatly appreciated the youth sports programs when kids were young and now the walking and hiking options with dogs are Very important to us.

There is a very critical need to cull the deer in the township. The very large and growing deer population is causing devastation of the woodlands which is not reversible. This also impacts all natural habitat and birdlife. This needs to be immediately addressed, not take years of discussion and debate which usually results in no action.

just want to thank the township for hosting Hocus Pocus movie on 2 nights recently. It was so nice of Tp to come up with an idea to let kids have some fun during Halloween even during the pandemic.

Thanks so much. :)

Manufacturers Country Club

Senior softball and basketball programs.

Philadelphia Cricket Club

I'm at a point where I'm not looking for organized programs but I approve of the need to have them primarily for children and those with special needs.

I'm at a point where I don't participate much in programs but I think it is good for the township to conduct as much as possible especially for children and those with special needs.

Increased park maintenance of existing facilities and trails.

A park security program for evenings and weekends

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

I am concerned that a pool would be a severely negative cash flow operation and a liability to the township

The pool is KEY to a successful Mermaid Lake experience.

Concerning Mermaid lake and Arch Street entrance and Blue Bell Crossing neighborhood. We would love to be able to walk to park but once Arch Street gets to fenced area it becomes unsafe to walk . Any possibility of moving fence back to provide for sidewalk. The grass area narrows there and the constant traffic at high rates of speed make it difficult to walk there.

pickleball

Keep the 9 hole golf course

The 1912 Club

Add programs like painting in the park, wildlife programs, use an existing building for a concession stand to earn money for the mermaid park. Add a bocce ball court or two something different from your everyday prototypical park setting. Add benches and picnic area. Add some art structures, plant trees, promote a natural wild habitat for animals. Hold events like a model train exhibits during Thanksgiving and Xmas. Think differently than the parks we currently have.

Playground area for toddlers& older kids

Whitpain greens swim club

it would be great to have the golf course restored at Mermaid Lake into a public golf course

Blue Bell Country Club

The Mermaid Lake property should be transformed to include: a community recreational center with indoor and outdoor pool, facilities, and also outdoor park and rental spaces too.

Blue Bell Country Club

Cedarbrook country club

Philadelphia Aviation Country Club (Wings Field Pool)

Please consider facilities for Scouting activities and meetings. There are multiple Scout Troops (Boys & Girls) in the township that provide very active programs.

Scout Troops will be willing to provide voluntary assistance with appropriate work projects, especially at the Mermaid facility.

Whitemarsh Valley Country Club

Love the Outdoor Concerts, Township Sponsored Events such as The Hayrides at Prophecy Creek, Fire Expo, Summer Camp for Kids. I think that Whitpain Township offers a wide variety of family friendly activities for all ages. I would love to see Mermaid as a community pool. Also, I would like to see the Barn as a venue for corporate events. It could be leased out to a business that would provide catering like the Manor House at Prophecy Creek for informal events.

Would like an outdoor bocci court, like one at the Plymouth Community Center.

The lack of sidewalks in the township cuts off neighbors and neighborhoods.

Would love to have indoor township pickleball courts.

We need more senior activities year round. Bocci, pickle ball, golf. We have MORE than enough baseball and soccer fields and dog parks. I am tired of paying other townships for activities we could be doing here. Would like to see 9 hole golf course reinstated at mermaid. This is a great sport for ALL ages. Nit sure what you mean by having a park at mermaid, there is so much we can do with that property . Golf, fishing, indoor year round activities.

### Continued: Comments on Facilities and Programs

I would like to see the various trails in the township linked to each other, and also recommendations and information about all the trails that currently exist including up to date maps in an easy to access format

Paying fees would be appropriate for a community center or private rentals of space but not for every program offered. Discounted memberships for community members should be offered with discounted and/or free use of various services. Perhaps a menu of options for different levels of membership and size of family/household. Using Mermaid Lake as a true community center would be wonderful.

Have to go to Pickleball courts in Ambler (Whitpain Township) because we have no Pickleball courts would love to see dedicated grassy and/or sand areas for volleyball activities--there is nothing in the area-have to go all the way to Bucks County for this.

No Pool at Mermaid! We don't need it and don't want it. Don't compete with other clubs with pools in the Township!! It will be a nightmare to manage and be a financial disaster. Return the stream and lake to its natural state.

We need a pickle ball court(s).

#### Safety 1st

We need a slightly larger bridge in Mermaid Park. This would help to create a footpath from the Arch St. side to the Jolly Rd. side. A sidewalk needs to be added from Mermaid Park to the trail near Henkels and McCoy.

Most of our great facilities are focused on the youth. When our children and grandchildren were young we used them regularly. Now that i am a senior citizen my activity is limited to walking, spectating and the dog park. I would love to see the par three golf course at Mermaid part of planning. It is something that could be used by the youth and the adult community. Since Center Square became a Toll Development and Woody's became a hospital Mermaid is our only public golf available nearby.

social member at Blue Bell Country Club

### Comments on question regarding how the respondents would spend \$100.

Keep the Tennis and Basketball courts at Mermaid.

Build it! (Robert - Test)

More softball fields and better maintained softball facilities. There are several baseball fields throughout Blue Bell but only 1 softball field. How is that even possible???

Since Whitpain doesn't have a 'Main Street' much of the community involvement happens at township parks through youth sports programs and other activities. Capitalize on the active engagement and partnership with WRA to provide best in class facilities. The top priority would be to finish the work at the ballfields at Wentz to include infrastructure needed for the next few decades.

Depends....are environmental protection improvements needed??

This part is not working. Spend money to upkeep and improved existing parks

This is misleading. Is this a theoretical budget just for next year?? I'd like to see a pool at Mermaid Lake Park but only if it can be supported by membership fees and daily use fees. It'll need a building fund but hopefully not operating \$. I'm guessing you have or will talk to Upper Gwynedd about the Nor-Gwyn pool. I see Parks&Rec planning programs & services but people should have to pay for them, thus its low allocated budget.

NO PUBLIC POOL.

Continued: Comments on question regarding how the respondents would spend \$100.
Resident and non resident fee for pool use if township keeps pool
connected trails will promote use
There is not a category to spend money on building/maintaining an indoor facility at Mermaid. I would put all dollars there. Not as a park, and not for a pool. But for indoor sports complex.
Would liked to have seen the building of an indoor sports/rec facility listed here. That would have received the majority of my asset allocation
Do NOT build a huge building/building to take up full mermaid lake property. Should be a mix of open space and building (building on turnpike side only)
I would like to see an indoor facility. I have been coaching/ my daughter playing indoor field hockey for years. An indoor facility of WRA's own would be a huge benefit to the young athletes.
Pickle ball courts indoor and outdoor. Fastest growing sport
Don't want taxes raised to build new facilities. Fund raise privately
I would put half to building an indoor facility but this is not listed.
Need pool with time for adults to train along with competitive swimmers and divers combined with recreational use. This community is sorely lacking in aquatic facilities. The high school pool has extremely limited adult lap swim times at very inconvenient times.
Would advocate the Barn area become a privately run venture for events to defray costs
I don't really know cost, but I'd like to have Pickleball courts and nets available for free public use. This game is fast growing and appeals to a multi-age constituency. It also can be played outdoors and indoors. I believe these courts would be very popular year round and used by many people in this community.
I spread the money out over all programs. The only reason that I put so much on the pool development is that I know how expensive pools are. Regarding environmental protection improvements...This is a perfect example of where we should apply for federal and state grants.
i didn't see the difference in 3 and 4
the township should NOT be in the business of operating a pool. leave that to the private sector. pools bring lawsuits and traffic and non-residents
Township funds should be used to maintain properties. The preservation of mermaid should pool and facilities should be prioritized and continued with routine maintenance schedules. Reasonable residential membership fees could be used to assist in these goals. Better maintenance would encourage more utilization and be a standard to uphold for optimal use of public tax dollars
50 general park maintenance; 50 environmental preservation and protection.
I really would like the existing pool to be restored and not to waste money on building a new pool. Also refurbishing the Barn for recreation.
Environmental Protection Improvements - get phosphates (laundry detergents) out of stream water.
Any new projects/maintenance/operations should include environmental conservation/preservation and development, including planting native trees that will grow large, improve habitat for native species, and provide shade.
I do not understand what the "coins" represent. Am I committing myself to huge tax increases? I DO NOT WANT THAT!
Please do not use pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides in our parks, for they pollute ground water and damage the environment and are harmful to people.
also request no sanitizing of any children's playground equipment during COVID-19, because children put their hands in their mouths. I personally go to parks with my own sanitizing items (hand wipes, antibacterial hand spray, etc.) in order to keep my son safe.

## Best Customer Survey

The online Best Customer Survey included 4,424 participants registered for programs provided by the Whitpain Township Parks and Recreation Department in 2019. This was the most recent year of program participation pre-COVID-19.

### Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to determine the opinions, ideas and concerns of the people most familiar with township organization programs and services. This information will be used by the Department to improve programs and services.

### Content

The survey included questions on program, priorities, ratings on services to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, program schedule, availability of information about programs and services, program variety and schedule.

### Response

The survey generated responses from 414 people with 9.704 data points.. Residents were the major responders at 89%, About 39% of respondents were ages 24-44 and 40% were 45-64. Respondents 65 years of age and older comprised 20% of the responses. Only one person under 18 responded and no one in the age groups pf 18-24 did.

### Findings

Findings include:

- Programs of most importance: Youth sport camps and programs, Adult Sports and Fitness; and Special Events. The top three ways that respondents would spend \$100 is on and indoor recreation facility, more game courts and fields, and more varied programs.
- Availability of programs for school aged children rated the highest while availability of program for teens, pre-schoolers and seniors rated lower.
- Customer service, convenience of registration and value of programs garnered primarily five star ratings.
- Quality of programs and instructors capture four star ratings leaning to five star.
- Special events rated the highest in variety of programs. This is an important finding as it shows that the programmers are directing their efforts to the programs that matter the most to the respondents. The variety of programs scored average ratings for the most part in the three star range.

- As expected on scheduling, weekend and evening schedules ranked highest while seasonal and weekday program schedules scored lowest.
- The Township's newsletter and website continue to be the preferred sources of information according to the survey findings.

## Interpretation and Implications

**Celebrate positive customer ratings.** The Best Customer Survey verified that the Best Customers rate township programs and services favorably. Nearly the highest and most important rating went to the Parks and Recreation Department on their customer service. With this high rating, it is possible to make many changes that would advance programming as the public views the staff with positive regard. A positive public image such as this is enviable.

**Focus on quality and staff considerations** - While the natural reaction to these findings is to provide more programs and services specially to expanded demographic groups, a few words of caution are in order. The first is to continue to focus on high quality services rather than on quantity of offerings. The second consideration is that some of the lower ratings are due to limitations of staff and facilities. How much more the staff can do is a major consideration especially for special events that are held on weekends and evenings. Additional program staff and rotation of hours should be considered. Facility limitations block the addition of many year round programs, The principle limitation is the lack of indoor recreation facilities for which there is public support.

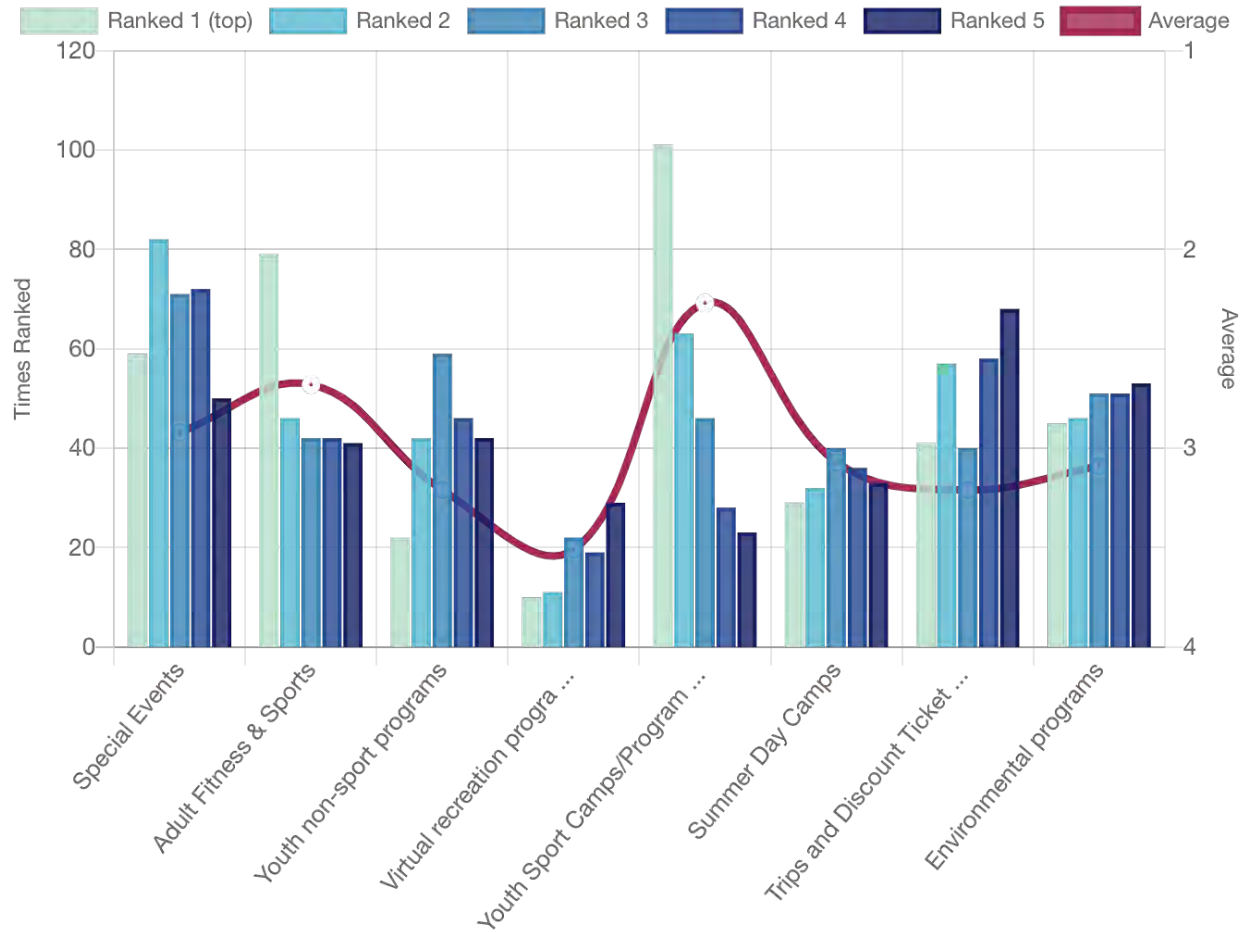
**Where to go next.** With customer satisfaction high on programs for school age children, the next areas to work toward increasing service are teens, pre-schoolers and seniors. Forming an advisory group for teens would help to advance services for this group now and long term.. Outreach to families with pre-schoolers and seniors via interviews and focus groups would facilitate service planning for these groups. While not asked in the survey but services for a diversifying community are important. The demographics show that 13.3% of the population is Asian yet Asian representation on parks and recreation related planning committees appears to be lacking. Focus groups and interviews with representatives of the Asian population.

**Value.** Consider the high ratings on value and strive to maintain that. However, it does show that there is room to adjust pricing for higher cost recovery. Explore the pricing structure and develop a plan for cost recovery and fees.

**Information.** While it seems counterintuitive in the information age, keep the newsletters going. Do direct outreach to citizens. Figure out how many households the Department serves as that number will be higher than any other group reaches and is important in making the case for department support. Continue to increase outreach through social media as the generations are swiftly changing in terms of digital use and knowledge.

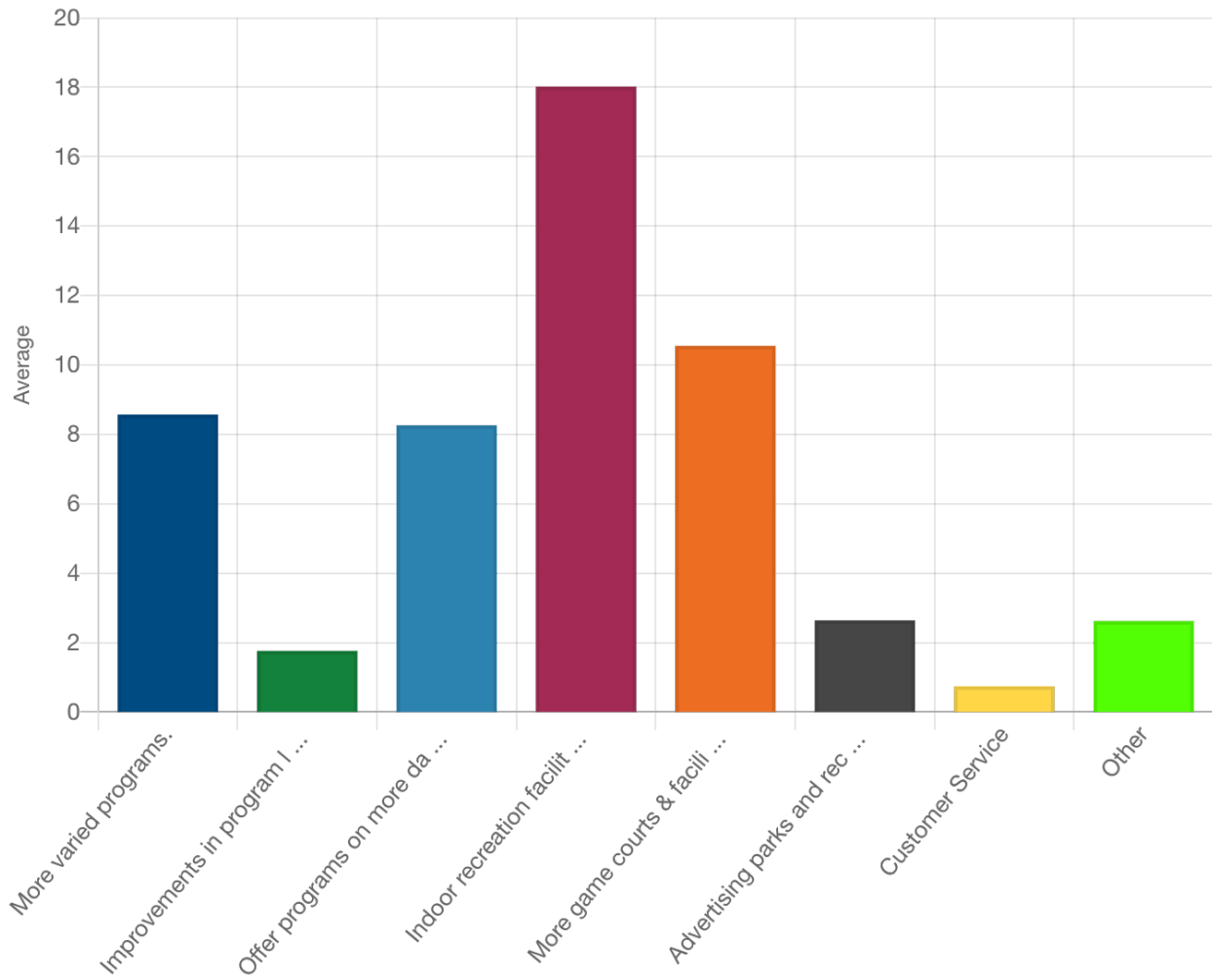
**Questions.** Response to the questions are shown in detail as follows.

## What's important to you?



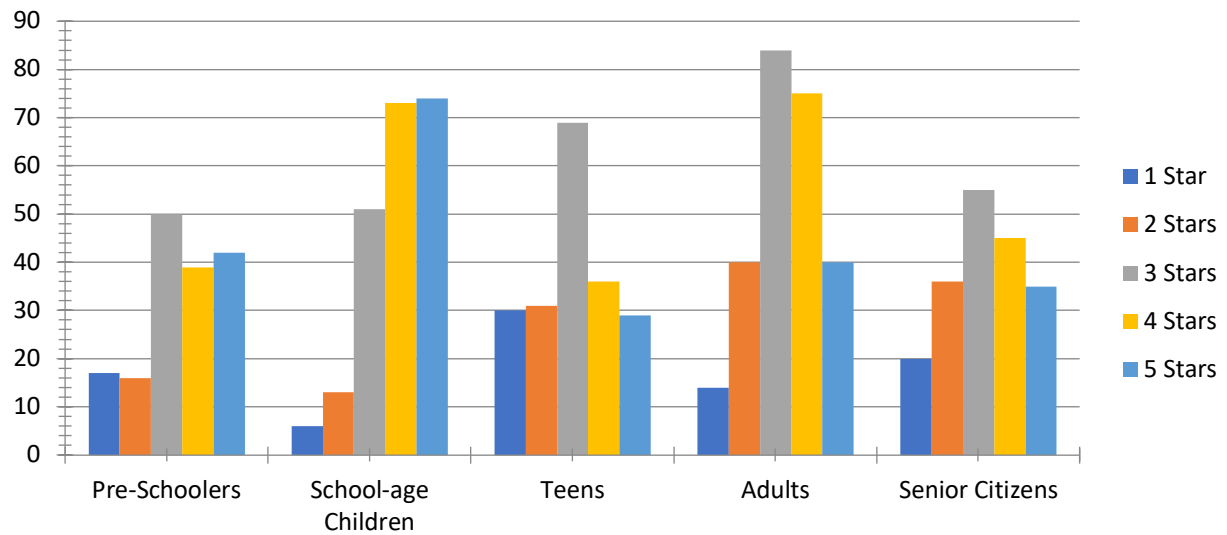
Item	Ranking Average – Scale of 1-5 The lower the number the better the rating
Special Events	2.91
Adult Fitness & Sports	2.68
Youth non-sport programs	3.2
Virtual recreation programs.	3.5
Youth Sport Camps/Programs	2.26
Summer Day Camps	3.07
Trips and Discount Tickets	3.2
Environmental programs	3.08

## How Would You Spend Your Money?

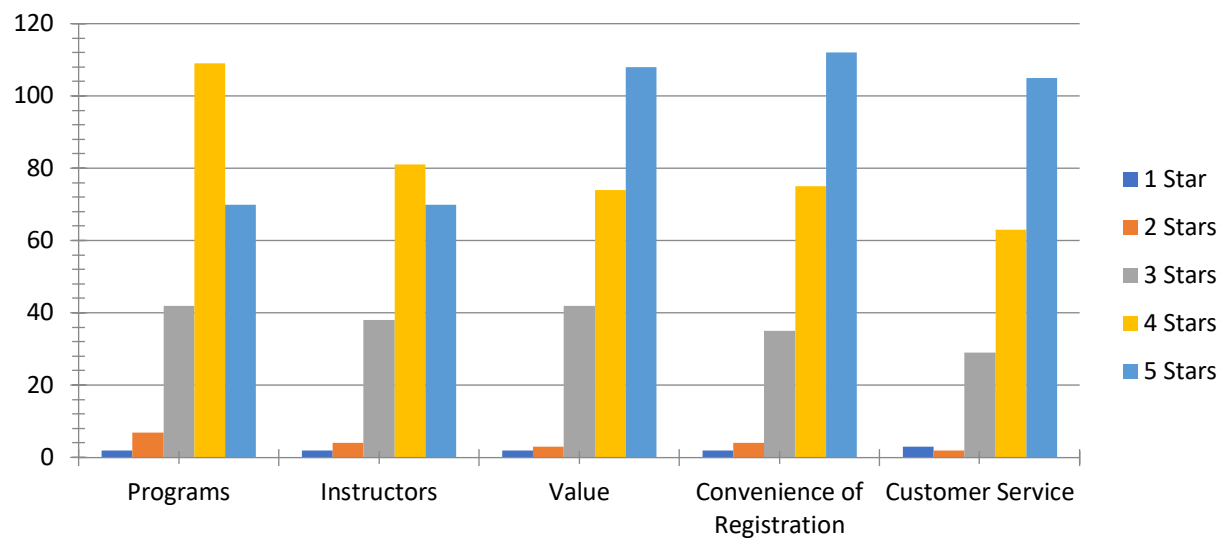


What respondents could spend \$100 on.	Average Amount spent by Respondents
More varied programs.	\$8.6
Improvements in program leaders.	\$1.76
Offer programs on more days & times.	\$8.29
Indoor recreation facilities	\$18.08
More game courts & facilities	\$10.58
Advertising parks and recreation	\$2.64
Customer Service	\$0.74
Other	\$2.62

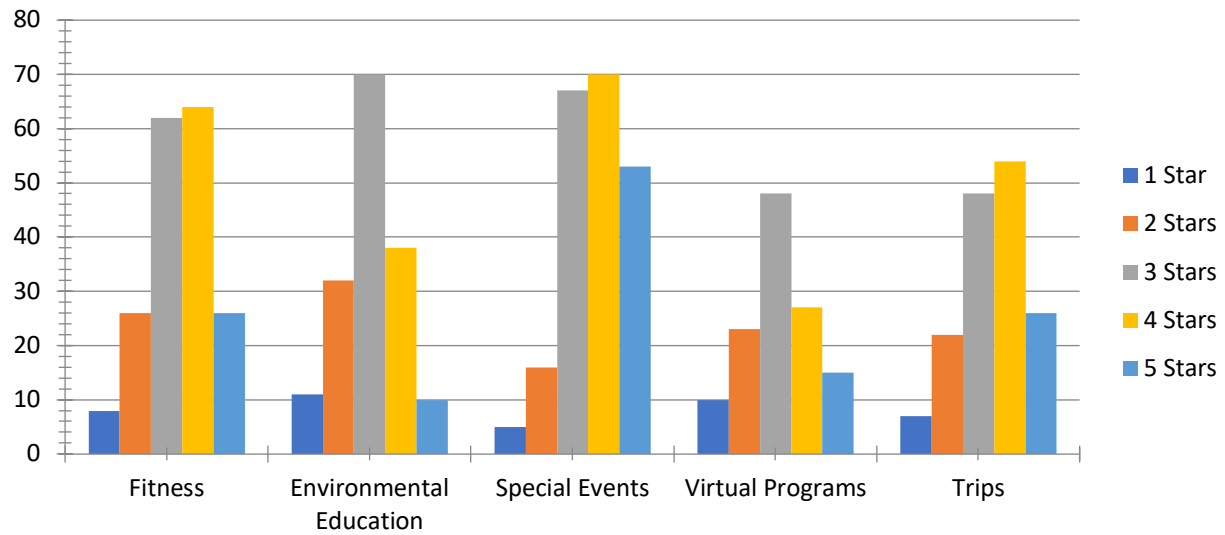
### Program Availability for Age Groups



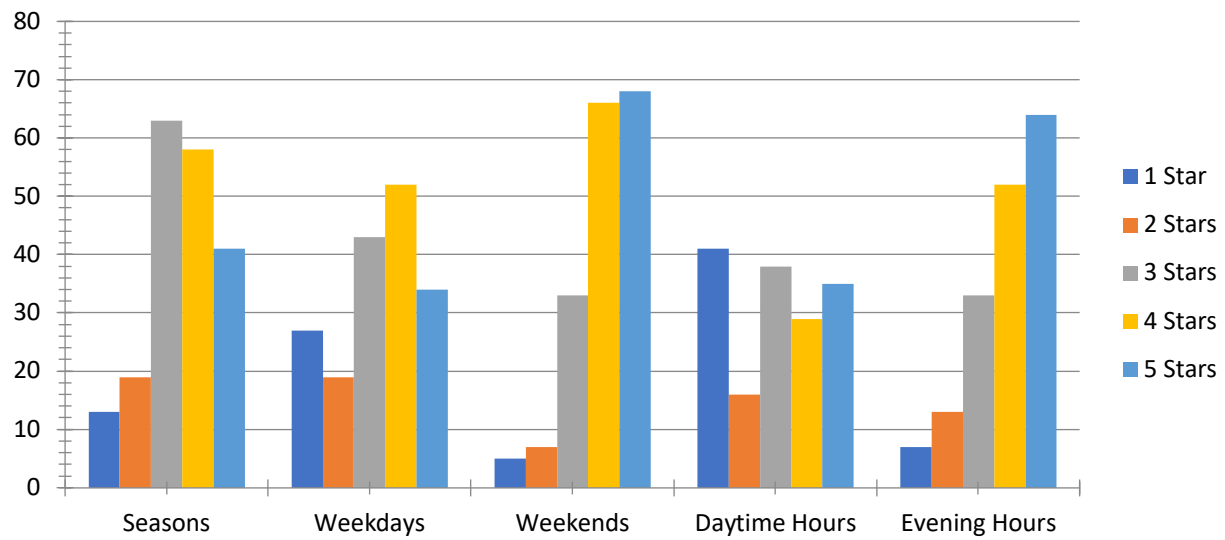
### Quality of Your Experience

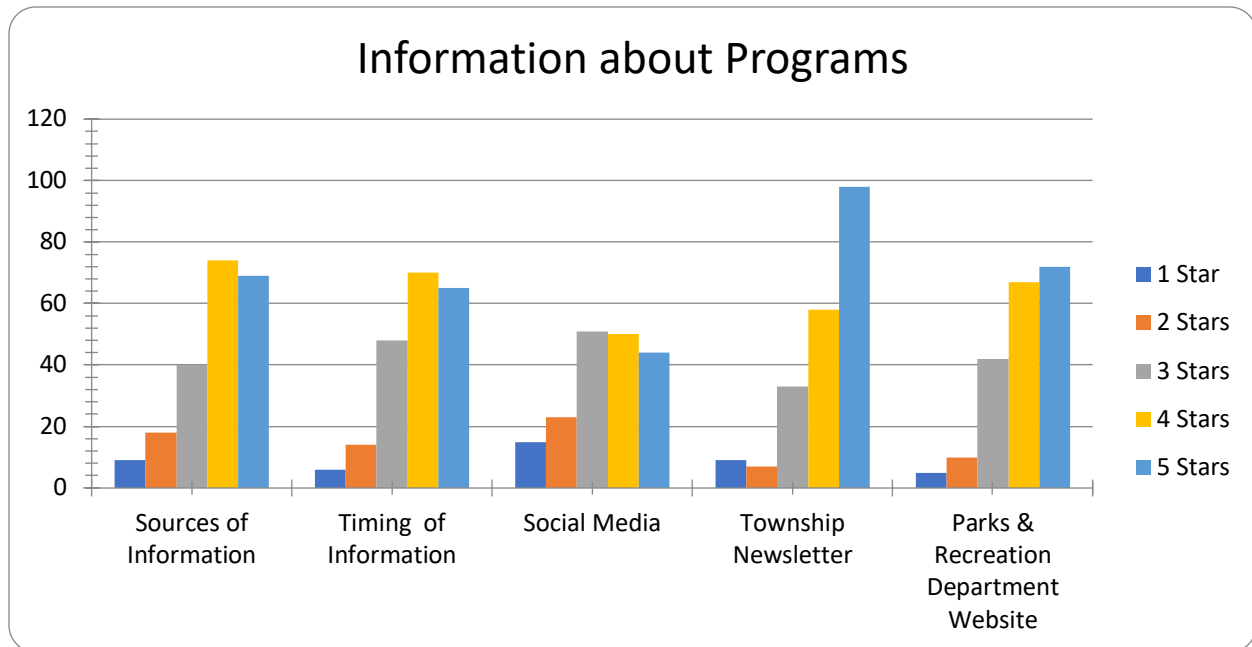


## Variety of Programs



## Program Schedule





The following tables include the written comments made by survey respondents. They are important in providing specific ideas on program planning.

#### Comments on Program and Service Priorities.

Would love to see a summer outside basketball league from tweens through teens

the township is not a private enterprise and such, not a business. stick to special events and trips/discounts. Let WRA and other organizations do your job for you.

Would love to see more programs in ANY category for people with disabilities

We do not have young children, and thus such programs do not interest us specifically, but they are important nonetheless for our community.

As for special events, I suggest that you increase those relating to pets.

Possibly I missed it, but I was unaware of a Trails to Tails 5K for many years. Did this event occur?

One thing I would add that falls both into adult fitness and environmental is to continue to have nature spaces for walking

Walking trails map that show how they connect -maybe this is already available but I don't know about. Also better signage to mark path at Mermaid- its difficult to follow mowed path and know how they connect within mermaid

Summer activities

Better maps of all the walking trails and Green ribbon trails would be appreciated

Would really like to see swim club where kids swim classes can be organized.

Thayer sports trips and tickets eg phillies 76ers

**Comments on program features such as service to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, variety of programs, program schedule, and availability of information about programs.**

Pre school programs are great!

Township needn't be in the pre-school business.

Programs for school aged programs with more time options

Sports has been great!

Since Covid restrict visits and the phone is rarely answered....

Not aware of teen programs

Don't waste paper and tax dollars. Make it digital

I see some adults doing yoga from time to time at Wentz Run so that's good - i'd keep that up and anything exercise related, including mind exercises.

Not aware but hopefully you do a bingo night every now and then.

I'm very happy with WRA sports and that it provides year-round and quality options.

I don't recall seeing any programs for teens, but I know that's a tough audience

Thankful the sports fees are reasonable.

I would like to see more daytime summer activities for young children

More facebook events to announce new events

I'd welcome a Pilates class! I've been taking classes @ GPCC as well as Whitemarsh Twp.

Some events are posted late or without enough info

Checked in error

Not applicable.

Not applicable.

Not applicable.

I haven't been interested in many of the Twp's offerings, so I can't really comment on my experiences.

I do not remember receiving a biannual publication...

I do not participate in social media.

It would be nice to have more zoom options available due to the pandemic and social distancing.

Would like to see more

Don't use

Haven't used

Haven't used

Haven't used

Haven't used

Haven't used

I would love to see more programs for seniors.

If there is to be a township pool at Mermaid, I would be interested in programs there.

Very happy with trips and guidance from the township. Looking forward to future trips

Very pleased

As a senior it is easy for us to register or stop by to get information

**Continued: Comments on program features such as service to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, variety of programs, program schedule, and availability of information about programs.**

We find them very helpful

I never get it on time

Looking forward to some outside programs in the spring and summer

Looking forward to wellness and the townships' special events

Washington DC, NYC, are our favorites

Utilizing email and social media are really nice. I'm not sure if you have the ability to sign up for specific events to get texts about, but that would be nice. For instance, sign up for text reminders about special events, discount tickets, or summer camp registration would be really cool

Being retired weekdays mornings works best for me

No pickle ball courts!

Please offer a wide variety of programs for children.

Unfortunately the interest in some activities (tennis) make it that 17/18 year olds have to play against 13/14 year olds, when they would be better matched with adults.

I haven't experience with teen programs or senior programs since I have an elementary school age child; however, seeing the programs listed in the township guide that is mailed it seems that we have fewer programs for teens than surrounding townships. We could also offer more for school age children from ages 10-13.

Not interested in the trips per se, and have not taken them.... so no information to provide here

Bring in i9Sports

Bring in i9Sports

Bring in i9Sports

My children are teenagers now, but we have taken advantage of the summer camps, youth sports, and enjoyed using the parks and trails and playground equipment.

My teenage son is participating in WRA Soccer and Centre Square park is a beautiful world class facility

I haven't participated in group fitness classes but I like that it is available. I do take advantage of walking on the trails in the township.

We love the park n tots program but you literally have to register at midnight to get a spot. Wish you could provide more spots

My kindergartener is not into sports. It would be nice if there was more nonsport options

Na

I'm not sure

Na

Some art programs would be nice as well as sports. What about over 50 soccer, male and female?

Could be more

Evenings are best

I am sure without the pandemic this would be different.

The problem here is that I have to go to the website to find information. I guess what I am looking for are intro emails that'll inform me to find information on the website.

I no longer have pre school age children

**Continued: Comments on program features such as service to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, variety of programs, program schedule, and availability of information about programs.**

I am not a senior

only after 4:30 p.m.

Summer camp was amazing. They did a really great job and my son and niece looks forward to it every year.

Would love to see more programs. That's why I like the idea of an indoor recreation center. My children are grown.

Would love to see an indoor recreation center at mermaid . Love the Zumba classes. There would be more room for classes, craft lessons, entertainment etc.

Would like to see more classes available on different days or nights.

Don't know if the programs offered just are not in my area of interest or fit into my schedule, but I feel like there could be more adult programming

More day trips available year around.

Interesting. Didn't know there was education on this.

I did mention an indoor recreation center so there could be more programs throughout the week.

The Zumba classes worked out well at night. Other classes would too

I like the emails sent. Also the newsletters with all year events.

Love reading these. Keeps me in touch with everything Whitpain.

I miss them sometimes when they go to spam.

During "non-covid" times- It would be great to have a drop off movie night at the club house... give kids time for fun- and parents a break

events like big rig round up for kids are some of the special, unique events the township has done best

I thought Whitpain missed a big opportunity this year to do easy, no-cost, COVID-friendly activities.

Other townships did scavenger hunts like Clue, find the Poker cards, find the elf/snowman/pictures in a park. This was so appreciated, and I wish Whitpain would have done this as well.

Need more sports programs for kids 8 and older. (flag football, basketball)

Would like a few yoga teacher choices

n/a

n/a

n/a

We have always had a great experience throughout the years.

There are a variety of great options for schoolage children throughout the year!

I haven't attended something with an instructor.

Have not attended.

Appreciate having something printed that my whole family can refer to and hang in our kitchen for reminders

Love summer camp price but would be willing to pay more for better program (i.e. better day to day activities, ban on electronic devices)

**Continued: Comments on program features such as service to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, variety of programs, program schedule, and availability of information about programs.**

I cannot remember the last township run activity I signed up for. Other than my son playing wra bball, nothing was really ever offered that interested me. The fitness classes were not at convenient times, too costly and/or they were not of my interest. And as for WRA, intramural sports was supposed to be something fun to do, non-competitive, teams equally distributed- but every year, teams were stacked with the best players possible leaving extremely unbalanced teams. Continued below...

Obviously coaches were picking their players yet denying it if confronted. Yet dividing the community even more. Each year we were involved I walked away with a bad taste in my mouth of WRA and those that ran it. We need something that brings our community TOGETHER rather than dividing us further.

Don't have social media

No experience with these

No experience or requirements for theses

No experience or requirements for these

Would like to see more selections

Would like to see more

Have had limited experience recently to rare

Ditto

Ditto

Sometimes the websites are not clear where to click to get additional info. A bit unorganized or not clear in first place on where to find info.

Ditto

Over past few years have been a full time caregiver so limited contact with rec secs. However, I hope to have more contact in future

Please include some indoor programs for children in winters.

Birding, walking

Haven't done any yet

There is a need for more youth and older adult programs and activities.

Senior programs are severely lacking

Increase frequency

I would like to see pickleball offered both indoor and outdoor. I never see the tennis courts full at Wentz Run Park.

Can't comment on quality, never been on one but always remember seeing them advertised pre covid wishing I could go (had to work)

I work full time still so during the day doesn't work for me yet, but will soon I hope!

I like keeping this as a reference so I don't have to use my phone or computer

I do not know - this is a tough age group as many parents will want to understand how close of supervision there is for this age group

We have attended various summer camps by the township. good mix ages 7-10

I am not aware of what programs are available for this age group

Programs were enjoyed. When it is a third party, it is sometimes difficult to get information though

**Continued: Comments on program features such as service to age groups, quality of programs and leaders, variety of programs, program schedule, and availability of information about programs.**

Parks & Rec staff are great - third party the communication could be better.

Typically signed up for summer programs and WRAt through the year.

This is helpful but is not often enough

The staff is always helpful and nice.

Not familiar but have observed great exercise program at Wentz Run Park for preschoolers.

Not familiar

Not familiar

Not familiar.

Not familiar.

Not familiar.

Not familiar

available for evenings only

N/A - Don't have any info on preschool programs in the township

N/A - Have never participated in any of these programs

Late afternoon/evening for timing of programs

Weekdays - no; Weekends - yes

Never look, doesn't come up

**Comments on how respondents would spend \$100.**

An intramural summer outside basketball league from tween through teenage years

Investing in staff = an investment in the future! Good fitness instructors build followings; participants tell their friends, etc. "Grow your staff; grow your programs"!

We need more diversity!!!!

For other I would like to see more biking trails (not on road shoulders) in the parks. Also connecting the parks in some fashion would be great where possible (eg Mermaid Park and the Wentz Nature Trail). More efforts to clean & maintain Nature Trails.

I would find walking educational tours very valuable, in horticulture, related to exercise, or aspects towards the public good... e.g. environment, rain capture or management, pollution, bike tours--tiered towards capability, or even academic indoor presentations on current events.

As for the dog park, I think you should have placed the gazebos within the park, not outside. Very often, we, the patrons, want to be protected from the sun and rain. I do not know why they were placed outside. No one uses them there.

My son loves pickleball!! It would be nice to have a court available. Also would be interested in using the pool at Mermaid Lake. I'm not sure how that is going to work.

We would really like a township pool, which is very much needed in our township. Either summer or both summer and winter facilities.

For other - improvement of nature trails and connecting trails - bike paths

More wheelchair accessible programs / friendly.

Continued: Comments on how respondents would spend \$100.

I would spend my \$100 on Indoor RecreationFacilities

other: Use Mermaid Lake to create an outdoor pool facility where our school district children could be on a summer swim team together.

Gym for basketball, batting/pitching tunnels for baseball/softball, pickleball, etc.

Pickle ball courts

Other - continue improvements on Mermaid Lakes' walking trails.