

CHAPTER 5 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

It is important to consider trends and to identify special issues and opportunities relative to them as a step in the planning process. Trends can highlight certain conditions or factors that are expected to become more pronounced in the future and, therefore, help to shape how the Township should respond to the changes. This chapter takes a look at the implications that patterns of change in society may have on parks and recreation services in the township.

Trends applicable to Pennsylvania Communities were recently addressed in a handbook titled “*Community Recreation and Parks*” published by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society, Inc. Trends are summarized under five categories:

- demographic;
- activity;
- park and facility;
- environmental; and
- management.

The trends are presented first, followed by an explanation of their relevance to Horsham Township. Commentary is provided to clarify issues and identify opportunities.

Demographic Trends

These are changes in the population characteristics of the township.

- Population Growth – The population of the township is forecasted to grow throughout the planning horizon for this report – to the year 2025. With a greater number of people, the demand for parks and recreation will be more pronounced. Increased recreation demand will also result from growth in the employee base through 2025.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Aside from needing to offer parks and recreation services to serve a greater number of people, the services will need to be equitably located to correspond to shifts in the geographic distribution of customers.

- Aging Population – People are living longer. In the long term, this will cause a higher proportion of the population to be in the “seniors” age sector. Growth of the senior population will be most significant after the year 2010.

LOCAL CONTEXT – More emphasis will ultimately need to be placed on offering facilities and programs tailored to meet the needs of seniors and the elderly.

- Household Characteristics – The family structure has changed in recent years. Households tend to contain fewer married couples and fewer children. Households

with single people living together, single heads of households and single parent families have increased.

LOCAL CONTEXT – It is uncertain whether trends in household characteristics have yet altered community-wide recreation needs in the township. Monitor these factors and use future surveys to judge when and how the parks and recreation delivery system should change and respond to emerging social patterns.

- Cultural Diversity – Minority populations are growing, resulting in increased cultural diversity.

LOCAL CONTEXT – As different cultures become more represented in the township's customer base, demand may increase for new and unique activities. Keep abreast of cultural needs and make accommodations for innovative facilities and programs, as appropriate.

Activity Trends

Recreation activities that command interest and participation for more than five years produce lifestyle changes in a community.

- Family Fun – Members of households value being able to recreate together as a family. Families build healthy bonds by sharing fun experiences, either by participating in self-directed activities or organized programs.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Aside from assuring that indoor and outdoor recreation facilities are managed as attractive places for family outings, special family-oriented activities should be offered year-round through programming efforts.

- Wellness – Recreation is good for the body and soul. The personal health benefits of physical activity cannot be denied. Engaging in recreation for health reasons is becoming more common, and there is a growing demand for programs aimed at exercise and fitness. Public policy is focusing on achieving improved levels of wellness for people of all ages through recreation.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Adequate facilities (outdoor and indoor) and sports and recreation programs to accommodate increased fitness-oriented activity will be needed. In addition to fulfilling the needs of customers who already embrace physical fitness, strive to educate and encourage those who are inactive to recreate for health benefits.

- Preventative Recreation – Just as recreation can improve a person's physical being, it too can have a positive impact on the emotional and attitudinal aspects of one's life. Recreation can influence behavior and inhibit destructive tendencies and lifestyles. A wide range of societal concerns, such as improving education, preventing drug abuse, and deterring vandalism, juvenile crime and underage drinking, can be addressed through recreation activity.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Structured recreation activities for youth should instill a sense of personal accountability and self-respect as well as respect for others. Be innovative at making park and recreation services deal with the community's social concerns. Recognize the P&R Department as a dual-purpose agency that also helps to confront social service issues.

- Education – Many people choose to spend their leisure time broadening their base of knowledge and learning about subjects of interest either for personal

enrichment or professional growth. Attending educational forums (i.e., classes, workshops, seminars, etc.) and simply reading is a common passive recreational pursuit. Structured presentations and activities that enhance people's appreciation for nature and the environment are increasingly popular.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Ensure that opportunities are available for people to stimulate their minds and learn. Accessible library facilities as well as programs, including adult education classes and outdoor education, are important components of a well-rounded approach to meeting public education needs.

- Girls in Sports – Today, a far greater percentage of girls compete on sports teams than had in the past. Girls' interest and participation in sports is expected to remain and perhaps even grow to higher levels.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Recreation programming should adjust, as needed, to better meet the needs of girl-oriented sports. Balance recreation opportunities for boys and girls in accordance with the respective program demand for each gender.

- Action Sports – Mountain biking, in-line skating, skateboarding, and rock climbing on indoor/outdoor walls are increasingly popular activities that appeal to persons looking for action, risk, and thrills uncommon in traditional sports.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Participants of all ages, but particularly the youth and others who were widely engaged in these activities at a younger age, are likely to remain interested in these activities. As the demand for any action sport becomes acute, react to the need using community-sensitive approaches. Consider safety, liability, and environmental issues associated with such activities in assessing whether they can be accommodated within the parks and recreation system.

- New Community Sports – Field hockey, in-line hockey, lacrosse, and rugby are emerging as popular community recreation activities.

LOCAL CONTEXT – The Township will need to react to the need for these activities as their demand increases. Consider coordination and collaboration with other recreation providers to satisfy such needs, either in whole or in part.

- Year-Round Sports – Youth sports are becoming seasonless in that they are being played during times of the year that do not correspond to their traditional seasons. For example, soccer and basketball are being played year-round while baseball is being played in the spring and fall.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Providers of emerging seasonless sports programs will need to keep pace with public demand. Facility expansion may be necessary. Providing lighting for outdoor facilities, reconfiguring facilities for multi-use, and scheduling fields and courts to maximize playtime could reduce/eliminate construction needs.

- Senior Activities – Improved health, higher educational levels, and financial security are giving seniors the ability to be active older adults. Their mobility and interests allow them to engage in a wide variety of recreation activities. Traditional senior centers are less appealing to seniors because they prefer to be integrated with the rest of the community.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Offering seniors interesting recreation opportunities at convenient times in recreation centers rather than in stand alone senior centers will be important in the future. Joint programs that combine the senior population with other age sectors, particularly older adults, may increase participation and foster a greater sense of community.

Park and Facility Trends

Communities are focusing on serving customers best by locating parks and facilities so that they meet unique local recreation needs and are convenient, accessible, and connected to greenways and trails.

- **Trails** – Trails of all types are in high demand. Current levels of use and the results of surveys support this trend.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Offer multi-purpose trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, in-line skaters, cross country skiers, and equestrians. A community-wide network of trails can connect neighborhoods, parks and schools; thereby serving as a system of corridors for alternative transportation access to recreation areas as well as for linear recreation activity. Interconnected trails throughout the township will also support pedestrian and bicycle travel to other community destinations, such as retail, business, and employment centers.
The Montgomery County Planning Commission has goals for the creation of a network of regional trails. The Power Line Trail is one such corridor that is proposed to follow the PECO Energy electric transmission corridor. The Township has already constructed a 2.5-mile section of the trail.
- **Community Parks** – Community parks are being designed with a mix of active and passive facilities so that customers can use a range of facilities during a single visit and to accommodate the concurrent activity interests of family members. Trails, picnicking, and natural areas complement ball fields and game courts to provide a varied outdoor experience. Comfort facilities such as restrooms, shade and sitting areas are important features for visitors of older and younger ages.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Consider improvements at community parks that would achieve a balance between active and passive recreation facilities, especially if passive recreation opportunities are insufficient in the community overall. Examine whether expansion of community parks is possible and if adjoining land is capable of offering passive facilities.
- **Skating Facilities** – Facilities for in-line skating, in-line hockey, and skateboarding are being built in communities in response to public demand.
LOCAL CONTEXT – A logical place for the construction of a special roller sports facility is at a community park or central location in the community.
- **Indoor Recreation Centers** – Communities are recognizing the importance of providing year-round recreation, outdoors and indoors. A recreation center building with a gymnasium, aquatics facilities, activity rooms, and a fitness center allows customers to maintain active lifestyles regardless of weather.
LOCAL CONTEXT – If feasible, a centrally-based, full-service community center geared to community recreation is a good approach to serve customers of all ages.
- **Community School Use** – School districts are recognizing the importance of serving the whole population of the district and not just residents with school-age children because it helps to advance their overall educational program and to generate citizen support for school endeavors.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Promote collaborative efforts between the school district and the Township in the planning, construction, use, and management of indoor and

outdoor facilities and services.

- Aquatic Centers – Traditional tank-type pools for lap swimming are an outdated concept for aquatic activity. The new norm for water-based recreation now involves creating a complex that includes a typical lane pool supplemented by other aquatic amenities like a therapy pool, a family play pool, water toys, fountains, moving water, and slides. LOCAL CONTEXT – If the construction of community swimming pool is pursued, the value of a full-blown aquatic center should be considered. By offering a diversity of facilities of interest to a wider spectrum of customers, a larger base of support will be generated to better sustain the fiscal operation needs of a swimming pool.
- Destination Playgrounds – Even with the ongoing need to provide playground apparatus at neighborhood parks for close-to-home recreation by children and youth, there is a growing public interest in having access to a large playground that can accommodate larger groups with varied equipment to retain the interest of users for longer periods of play.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Everybody’s Playground at Lukens Park at Dresher Road serves as a destination playground for the community.
- Ball Fields – To ensure an adequate supply of quality ball fields for the number of players, teams, and leagues, customized sites for different sports are being developed. The basic benefits of individual fields for specific sports are safer, more enjoyable play and improved maintenance. The provision of separate training areas for players to practice and develop skills also complements the game fields and helps to alleviate field overuse.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Youth sports organizations in the Township have been allocated areas within the municipal park system to fulfill their facility and programming needs. As the popularity of sports and the subsequent demand for ball fields grow, accommodating the space requirements of the programs may become a challenge. It may be worthwhile to consider strategies that could offset facility expansion needs, such as lighting outdoor facilities for night use, reconfiguring facilities for multi-use, sharing of facilities, and creative scheduling of play time.
- Complexes – There is a growing public interest for “one-stop recreation” complexes where multiple community-type facilities are combined and integrated on one campus. Complexes can be for sports, the arts, indoor recreation or even community hubs with an aquatics center, recreation center, municipal building, school, and library.
LOCAL CONTEXT – The limited supply of developable land of adequate size will hinder efforts to establish a complex in association with an existing strategically-located community park. There are already quite a few sites within close proximity to each other (i.e., Kohler, Deep Meadow, and Carpenter parks; Dorothea H. Simmons Elementary and Hatboro-Horsham High schools; the future Township Library; and the Hearne Property open space site). The Hearne Property may offer potential as the site for a complex to accommodate unmet recreation facility needs.
- Nature Centers – Facilities for environmental education are becoming more important at the local level.
LOCAL CONTEXT – An ideal location for a nature center would be where

opportunities to experience and interpret nature and natural processes are prevalent. Access should be available to extensive areas that are actively managed for environmental quality and wildlife benefits or where unique natural features are present.

In a 1995 report prepared by The Nature Conservancy for Montgomery County, two locally significant natural areas in the township were identified. One site is the habitat of a grass species “of special concern” found within the Willow Grove Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base. The other site is a good quality forested area along Keith Valley Road. These may offer unique opportunities for interpretation as part of an environmental education program.

Environmental Trends

Initiatives to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance natural, historic and cultural assets are increasingly popular.

- **Greenways** – Conservation priorities in recent years have been focusing on the development of a network of greenways – connecting corridors of open space, trails, natural landscape features, and recreational sites. The State is encouraging local greenway projects to be planned as an integral part of municipal planning efforts and park and recreation systems.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Greenways benefit a community by protecting natural, cultural, and scenic resources, providing recreational corridors, enhancing natural beauty, contributing to the quality of life, and stimulating economic development. Current Township recreation and park planning efforts can incorporate a greenway component, providing a framework for implementation.
The Montgomery County Planning Commission has goals for the creation of a regional greenway network. The proposed Pennypack Greenway extends into the township along the Pennypack Creek.
- **Growing Greener** – The State is promoting “Growing Greener: Conservation by Design” as a program to assist communities achieve open space preservation through residential design. The program teaches approaches and tools that can help shape communities and govern the type of land set aside through the land development review and approval process.
LOCAL CONTEXT – It is important for municipal decision makers to be aware of the specific lands that should be reserved as open space as development occurs within the community. An understanding of how development can contribute to an interconnected network of conservation lands will ensure that open space is built into development plans.
- **Brownfields** – The practice of cleaning up polluted and contaminated Industrial sites and reusing them as open space and park areas is becoming more common.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Polluted and derelict properties may offer unique opportunities to create green space or to develop parks in areas that otherwise are too built up and in which no clean land is available. The costs and benefits of taking on the challenge of acquiring title to a contaminated property need to be closely studied in making a decision.
- **Alternative Transportation** – In the 1990s and now into the 21st century, transportation policy has made significant shifts toward planning, funding, and

construction of non-motorized forms of transportation. Bicycling and walking are being emphasized and promoted as an environmentally responsible way to travel. Short close-to-home trips, such as visits to the nearby parks, are especially conducive to travel by bike or on foot. Furthermore, the nature of these activities goes hand-in-hand with the purpose of recreation and exercise.

LOCAL CONTEXT – In order to entice people to bicycle or walk instead of drive an automobile for their local trips, a safe and complete network of sidewalks, paths, trails, and on-road bicycle facilities is needed. Discontinuous sidewalks need to be linked.

The Montgomery County Planning Commission has goals for the creation of a regional on-road bike facility network. Many roads (those classified as arterials and collectors) are targeted for improvement to better accommodate bicyclists.

Management Trends

There are several practices that have been receiving increased attention in planning, financing, implementing, operating, and maintaining parks and recreation services.

- **Partnerships** – The importance of working together and cooperating with other providers of parks and recreation is more widely recognized and practiced than ever before. Coordination and collaboration can result in mutually beneficial results, such as avoiding the duplication of services, offering joint facilities and programs, and reducing costs.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Explore opportunities to cooperate with other governmental, nonprofit or other public and private organizations to improve the delivery of cost-effective parks and recreation services. Reinforce long-standing relationships and forge new partnerships in support of a team approach.

- **Multi-Municipal Planning** – There is a trend towards neighboring communities taking the partnership concept to a more formalized level by preparing multi-municipal plans. Such a plan typically outlines the strategy that partners agree to follow in providing a regional park and recreation system. Another official way of confirming a collaborative venture is to execute a written agreement that spells out the fiscal, operation, and management relationships, roles, and responsibilities of the partners.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Multi-municipal or regional collaboration may be a practical way to serve customers, particularly for meeting the demand for specialized and expensive services that have a broader regional interest.

- **Financing** – Governments are floating bonds and dedicating special taxes to achieve their local open space, park, and recreation goals before opportunities are lost. This is particularly true for land preservation programs as well as other big-ticket projects that are too expensive to undertake using general revenue resources. Municipalities are also trying to rely less on their general funds for the money required to provide park and recreation services. They are trying to generate more non-tax money through grants, gifts and donations, user fees and charges, sponsorships, partnerships, and fundraisers.

LOCAL CONTEXT – Assess the full array of creative financing approaches and maximize their application to offset the impact of services on the municipality's tax revenue. More of the recommendations of this report may be accomplished and

in a more timely fashion with the use of outside funding and assistance.

- Public Participation – Parks and recreation agencies are increasingly trying to engage the public in decision-making. A host of techniques, including surveys, public forums, interviews, newsletters, websites, e-mail, and electronic town meetings, are being actively used to gather citizen input. Outreach.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Utilize a mix of approaches for public outreach. It is important to keep customers informed and to solicit their comments and suggestions.
- Accountability/Benefits – Accountability is an emerging issue for parks and recreation departments. An effective way to build and maintain a base of citizens who support recreation and parks is to demonstrate the value of these services to the community. How does the community benefit from these services and are they worthwhile for the dollars spent are questions that are answered. Additionally, what “level of service” is being provided, and are adopted goals being met?
LOCAL CONTEXT – Evaluate the cost effectiveness of the services offered relative to the benefits received. Emphasize good management, fiscal responsibility, and serving the public interest efficiently.
- Electronic Technology – Computers continue to enhance customer service. E-mail is a convenient and fast way to communicate. Software programs are simplifying internal administrative tasks like fiscal management, program planning, league scheduling, facility reservations, and maintenance scheduling. The internet is providing ways for customers to learn about recreation opportunities, register for programs, reserve facilities, and pay fees.
LOCAL CONTEXT – Keep on top of innovations in computer technology and maximize use of the computer as a management and public relations tool.