

CHAPTER 8 MAINTENANCE PLAN

STRATEGIC GOAL: Deliver attractive and safe parks and facilities.

OVERVIEW

Maintenance is a factor affecting the usability and desirability of a park, and is an on-going, day-to-day requirement for a municipal park system. The present level of maintenance varies from park to park and is generally good. As more parks and recreation facilities are developed, it will be necessary to expand the maintenance operation commensurate with the increase in park care needs.

Park maintenance is a significant element of the P&R Department's day-to-day operations. Consider the size of the system alone – 805 acres distributed among 44 sites throughout the township, 16 of which are classified as “parks” containing some type of improvement or facility. The remaining 28 sites are officially classified as “open spaces.” Although parks typically receive a higher degree of care and attention than open spaces, most open spaces also require some level of maintenance in a year.

The P&R Department currently employs four full-time maintenance positions: one Lead Worker and three Maintenance Personnel. Temporary, seasonal maintenance personnel are also hired when the Township is faced with higher operation and maintenance demands (from Memorial Day through Labor Day when park usage is greatest) as well as sporadically as the persons are available during other times of the year. The department is responsible for:

- job planning and maintenance work schedules;
- record keeping of task completion;
- budget and cost analysis;
- grounds maintenance – shrubbery, trees, lawn, specialized turf areas, etc.;
- facility and structure maintenance – play apparatus, pavilions, restrooms, specialized buildings, fencing, signs, etc.;
- vehicle and equipment maintenance – mowers, trimmers, trucks; and
- miscellaneous – trash and snow removal.

The P&R Department maintenance operations are based out of the Township's Public Works garage, but will be moved to a new location adjacent to Kohler Park when the existing garage is converted to the Community Center. Maintenance tasks are decided as a cooperative effort between the Director and the Lead Worker. The maintenance crew strives to keep the parks and open spaces in a well-kept condition free of safety hazards, but it is not directed by a formal set of standards tailored to the unique needs of the park system or land management objectives.

It is important to point out that youth sports organizations offset the overall need for

P&R Department maintenance by helping take care of their respective ball fields and complexes, including associated buildings.

The P&R Department contracts with private landscape maintenance company to cut the grass at some of its open space sites, such as the stormwater management basins. This practice allows the Department’s maintenance crew to focus on taking care of the parks and recreation facilities.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Operate and maintain the park system in partnership and cooperation with the community.

Recommendations

1. Integrate questions evaluating parks grounds maintenance on public input surveys, the P&R Department web page through an online feedback form, and comment cards for suggestion boxes. Taking into account and responding to customer opinions can foster community stewardship of the parks and lead to volunteerism.
2. Use community volunteer resources to the P&R Department's advantage not only in planning upgrades to the parks, but also in carrying them out. This approach to park renovation is particularly applicable to small-scale improvements and park beautification, such as installing landscaping, fencing, and signs. It can also be appropriate for new playground structures to be built by customers. (This was recently done for Everybody’s Playground in Lukens Park at Dresher Road, albeit that project was an entirely new facility at a new park.) An important aspect of involving community or neighborhood-based interest groups in park improvements is that it helps instill a sense of ownership and establishes a relationship that can be carried through to ongoing care and long-term maintenance of the facility.
3. Several parks currently benefit from volunteer maintenance activities. The nature of the services provided by volunteers should be acknowledged so that equity is established among the various organizations that help to maintain park areas and facilities.
4. Create a volunteer recognition program whereby persons are acknowledged and awarded certificates of accomplishment for exemplary dedicated service.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Supplement maintenance activities through “adopt-a-park” and “adopt-a-facility” programs for volunteers.

Recommendations

5. In order to assist in the job of maintaining the 805-acre park system, a volunteer base should be established. Volunteerism can save the P&R Department money. Numerous individuals and organizations have already offered their support. Others should be called upon to participate, including

nonprofit organizations, youth groups, clubs and fraternal organizations, and persons required to provide community service hours.

- 6. The P&R Department should offer a program whereby volunteers can “adopt” a specific park or facility to maintain. Such a program can effectively channel a stronger commitment from volunteers than system-wide maintenance projects because they focus their energies and take pride in being responsible for a designated area.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Develop a “park watch” program to monitor and support park safety and security.

Recommendations

- 7. Vandalism should be deterred with the aid of neighborhood groups. The P&R Department should partner with the Township Police Department’s Chats Program to collaborate with citizen volunteers.
- 8. A park ambassador program whereby volunteers spread goodwill to park users should be created. Aside from keeping an eye on what is going on within the parks and alerting security officials of troublesome situations, the ambassadors should educate customers regarding park rules and regulations and the proper use of facilities. Insuring that park users are familiar with park policy should help to alleviate risky behavior and hazardous situations. This approach is likely most effective at community parks or other specialized facilities with high visitation.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Establish baseline standards for the proper maintenance and care of parkland and park amenities.

Recommendations

- 9. Staff should periodically survey the physical condition of the parks so that they can effectively and efficiently schedule routine maintenance projects. This allows maintenance needs to be detected and corrected before they become major problems, resulting in minimal disruptions in service and lower costs for repairs.
- 10. The Township should institute a systematic maintenance program designed to evaluate the annual manpower, equipment, and supply needs for the park system and set a productive and efficient means of keeping the parks orderly:
 - Identify the minimum, standard, and optimum levels of maintenance appropriate, including the labor, supply, and equipment costs involved.
 - Develop specific daily, weekly and monthly maintenance routines sufficient to ensure at least the minimum level of maintenance.
- 11. The P&R Department should prepare a Maintenance Plan for the park system, which could be used to justify future budget requests and ultimately lead to a more efficient and effective park delivery system. A maintenance plan defines maintenance objectives for each facility and area of every park.

The objectives are measurable expectations for the quality of park care. For example, five categories could be designated: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. Each category should specify guidelines for appropriateness of quality, aesthetic value, and safety issues.

A maintenance plan also establishes maintenance standards as tools for achieving the objectives. Drawing upon the success and experience of existing maintenance staff, a set of standards should be formulated for each maintenance task:

- Time – How much time does it take to deliver the standard? Include estimates of frequency, such as once a week, twice monthly, etc.
- Personnel – How many people does it take to meet the standard?
- Equipment – What equipment is needed to complete the task to the standard prescribed?
- Materials – Are any materials needed?

The maintenance plan should be prepared by involving not only the maintenance personnel but also others, such as youth sports associations, who are also responsible for parts of various parks. The purpose of cooperative planning is to foster a shared understanding of what it takes to accomplish tasks and to coordinate decisions on what resources are needed. This will establish a comprehensive database available for an objective assessment of maintenance practices and how best to remedy park deficiencies.

The maintenance plan should be revised as conditions change and better ways of accomplishing maintenance tasks are found. It will need to be updated as parks are expanded, new facilities are constructed, and public expectations shift.

12. Workload cost tracking should be used to translate how much money it costs to do certain things. Much of the data for this exercise can come from the maintenance plan database. A cost/benefit comparison model can reveal relationships between expenditures and everyday maintenance responsibilities, thereby serving as a tool for in-house maintenance decisions that allocate financial and staff resources in the best and most efficient manner.
13. The maintenance crew should develop an annual maintenance calendar for all recurring tasks done seasonally. A work order system should be established.
14. Contract labor should perform their maintenance tasks to the same degree of quality as is expected from departmental maintenance staff. The baseline standards should be applied uniformly to comparable sites regardless of whether maintenance is conducted by in-house staff or by a contractor.
15. Areas that are maintained by contracted labor should be performed to the same degree of quality as comparable sites that are maintained by departmental staff. also be held to the same set of standards as departmental staff.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Protect and manage open space, parks, and facilities to ensure customer safety and protection of structural integrity with attention to appearance, cleanliness, and security.

Recommendations

16. Rehabilitation of parks involves major repairs or replacement of deteriorated or outdated facilities. It goes beyond the scope of normal maintenance and involves extensive and costly renovation work, sometimes to upgrade facilities to current standards. Rehabilitation is an important part of maintaining a safe, usable, park system. Figure 50 presents the facilities that should be replaced or renovated in the next eight years. These projects are incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program in Chapter 11.
17. Periodically survey the parks to identify major maintenance needs and special capital improvement projects. Annually, the Park and Recreation Board should tour the park system to identify remedial maintenance measures that should be taken to keep the parks in good condition.
18. Inspections and loss control audits should be conducted to identify safety hazards and liability problems requiring corrective action. By regularly inspecting and maintaining parks and their facilities, the physical well-being of park visitors is enhanced, and municipal liability against personal and property damages is reduced.
 - The loss control program through which the Delaware Valley Insurance Trust annually visits the Township's parks and submits a risk management report for the facilities should be continued.
 - A risk management program should be instituted for playground safety to insure compliance with ADA and CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) requirements and guidelines.
19. To further prevent liability problems, all parks staff, especially maintenance personnel, should be properly trained to recognize, mitigate, and correct safety hazards at recreation areas and facilities.
 - Training should be received both through attendance at seminars and formal instruction at maintenance management courses.
 - Worker training also plays an important role in promoting the safe and proper use of equipment and machinery during the actual maintenance of parks, thereby reducing the likelihood of on-the-job injuries or equipment/facility damage.
20. The P&R Department should prepare park master plans for each park to:
 - identify historic and natural resources of outstanding value to the public;
 - promote recreational uses complementary to site features; and
 - define future land management goals as well as facility development for the sites.
21. Develop recreation facilities in a manner that will not result in an adverse impact on the natural and cultural resources of the site or of the area.
22. The P&R Department should properly protect and manage the resources of

parks by dealing with issues like forest restoration, invasive plant control, water resources management, and wildlife habitat protection. Open space sites within the park system should not be ignored simply because they fail to serve customers the way that parks do. The role of open space properties should be assessed and those that possess features worthy of some form of active land management practice rather than simply be left alone to grow wild should be identified:

- A nursery should be established somewhere within the park system, preferably at an open space site that has adequate slope, solar orientation, water supply, and access for park maintenance vehicles. The purpose of the nursery would be to plant and passively cultivate appropriate trees and shrubs in order to be removed after they have grown to sufficient size for transplanting at other park and open space sites. This approach would likely save the Township money in park landscaping costs and would also provide plant stock on hand to support replanting needs or restoration efforts.
- Designate “managed natural areas” within open space properties that are characterized by prominent natural resources and warrant management to control or encourage desirable ecological changes. Management activities may include steps necessary to mitigate the influence of passive recreation use as well as non-native and undesirable species.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Adopt a preventative maintenance approach to facility maintenance.

Recommendations

23. The Township should protect its investment in parks by keeping facilities attractive and usable with a preventative maintenance program. In this way, facilities can be upgraded before they become unusable.
24. Enact temporary closures of facilities to give turf areas time to recover, if activities can be rotated to alternate sites. Schedule preventative maintenance closures as far in advance as possible so as to minimize interruption of programs.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Use measurable maintenance objectives to evaluate day-to-day facility and preventative maintenance needs.

Recommendations

25. Conduct a thorough staff needs assessment based on new operations and maintenance guidelines. Use the Maintenance Plan objectives and task data to estimate the number of maintenance positions required in the future based on the timing of proposed park system growth.
26. Maintain acceptable levels of park maintenance personnel and equipment to properly care for the park system as it grows and expands.

Page Reserved for

Figure 50
Park Rehabilitation Needs
(11x17 front side)

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Figure 50
Park Rehabilitation Needs
(11x17 reverse side)

Consider the use of more temporary, seasonal help during the peak period of park use (i.e., May through October).

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY: Design and construct parks and facilities to facilitate maintenance but in a manner that is sensitive to customer health and comfort.

Recommendations

27. Evaluate existing parks and activity areas to determine whether any changes in equipment, design, or programming could reduce maintenance needs.
 - Apply design guidelines to prevent vandalism and other negative activities.
 - Maintenance staff should be involved in the planning process of park improvements to insure that the plans are designed for ease of maintenance.
 - Encourage retention of natural vegetation and passive design features to reduce operation and maintenance needs.
 - Install security lighting, as appropriate.
28. Develop park maintenance guidelines that align closely with recreation program needs and meet community expectations.

