Borough Council Meeting Public Hearing
February 18, 2026 @ 6:30 PM
This meeting is recorded for public record.

Nicole Scimone, President	Member, 4th Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/27
Bernie Flynn, Vice President	Member, 6th Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/27
Bryan Travis	Member, 2nd Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/27
Brian McGinnis	Member, 3rd Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/29
Stephen Marvin	Member, 5th Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/29
Lisa Kearns	Member, 7th Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/29
Jerome Szczepaniak	Member, 1st Ward	Term Expires: 12/31/29

Mayor: Lillian L. DeBaptiste **Borough Manager:** Sean Metrick

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Borough Council Meeting:

I. Public Hearings

II. Resolution - Recreation and Parks Master Plan Update

A. Resolution

B. Notice

C. Plan

Visit www.west-chester.com for access to all attachments.
Agendas are posted to www.west-chester.com by noon 3 business days prior to the meeting.

BOROUGH OF WEST CHESTER

CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

RESOLUTION NO. _____

WHEREAS, on April 26, 2024, the Borough entered a Vision Partnership Program Grant Contract with Chester County for the purposes of preparing a Recreation and Parks Master Plan Update ("Plan Update");

WHEREAS, the Borough retained Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson, Inc. in association with Toole Recreation Planning to act as the planning consultants to assist in the preparation of the Plan Update;

WHEREAS, the Borough appointed a Study Committee who worked with the planners and prepared the Plan Update titled, "Parks for All: the West Chester Borough Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan";

WHEREAS, the Borough intends to adopt the Plan Update as an Addendum to the Borough's Comprehensive Plan which was adopted on February 15, 2017;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 301(c)(2) and Section 301.3 of the MPC, on October 23, 2025, the Borough delivered a copy of the Plan Update to the Chester County Planning Commission ("CCPC") and the CCPC issued its recommendations to Borough Council in a review letter dated December 3, 2025;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 301(c)(2) and Section 301.3 of the MPC, on October 23, 2025, the Borough sent copies of the Plan Update to the governing bodies of contiguous municipalities and the West Chester Area School District for review and comment;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 302(a) of the MPC, on January 12, 2026, the Borough of West Chester Planning Commission conducted a duly advertised public meeting and considered the Plan Update and voted to recommend that the Council approve the Plan Update;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 302(b) of the MPC, the Borough Council for the Borough of West Chester conducted a public hearing on the Plan on February 18, 2026, pursuant to public notice, at which it considered and voted to approve the Plan Update;

WHEREAS, Borough Council for the Borough of West Chester desires to adopt this Resolution approving and adopting the Plan Update.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT AND IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, as follows:

1. The Background to the Resolution is incorporated in and fully made a part hereof.

2. After considering the recommendations and comments from the Borough of West Chester Planning Commission, the CCPC and the public, and following notice to the School District, adjacent municipalities and the public, Borough Council hereby resolves to adopt the Plan Update attached hereto as Exhibit "A", incorporated herein by reference and made a part hereof, and the said Plan Update is hereby adopted as an addendum to the Borough of West Chester Comprehensive Plan.

RESOLVED AND ADOPTED this ___ day of_____, 2026.

ATTEST:

BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR THE BOROUGH OF WEST CHESTER

_____
Sean Metrick, Secretary

_____
Nicole Scimone, President

_____
Bernie Flynn, Vice-President

_____
Brian McGinnis, Member

_____
Bryan Travis, Member

_____
Lisa Kearns, Member

_____
Jerome Szczepaniak, Member

_____
Stephen Marvin, Member

NOTICE IS GIVEN that on **February 18, 2026 at 6:30 p.m**., prevailing time, Council for the Borough of West Chester, Chester County, Pennsylvania, will hold a public hearing as part of the regularly scheduled public meeting at the Borough of West Chester's municipal building located at 401 East Gay Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania, to consider the adoption of an addendum to the Borough Comprehensive Plan by adopting a Recreation and Parks Master Plan Update prepared by Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson, Inc. in association with Toole Recreation Planning titled, "Parks for All: the West Chester Borough Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan".

A copy of the Plan is available on the Borough's website at www.west-chester.com.

Those individuals with disabilities and ADA accommodations for effective participation in the hearing should call 610-692-7574 at least two days prior to the meeting. All attempts will be made for reasonable accommodations.

Kristin S. Camp, Esquire
Borough Solicitor

PLEASE ADVERTISE ON FEBRUARY 3, 2026 and FEBRUARY 10, 2026

Parks For All: the West Chester Borough Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parks For All: the West Chester Borough Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan was made possible through the generous funding, shared knowledge, expertise, and dedication of the organizations and individuals involved with this project. All of this would not be possible without the resounding community support and involvement as well.

Study Committee

Keith Kurowski	West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Director
Lilian DeBaptiste	West Chester Borough Mayor
John O'Brien	West Chester Business District Executive Director
Katie Walker	President, Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce
Cassie Shankweiler	Resident
Susan Sabo	Resident
Tait Organt	Resident
Robert Burkholder	Resident
Charlot Barker	Resident
Amy Theorin	Resident
Mike Reese	Resident
Chantale Fieldhouse	Resident

Special Thanks To

West Chester Borough Council

Patrick McCoy, Ward 1
Bryan Travis, Ward 2
Brian McGinnis, Ward 3
Nicole Scimone, Ward 4
Sheila Vaccaro, Ward 5
Bernie Flynn, Ward 6
Lisa Dorsey, Ward 7

Funding For This Master Plan Provided By:

This Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan was funded in part with a grant from the Chester County Vision Partnership Program administered by the Chester County Board of Commissioners.

Master Planning, Landscape Architecture, & Engineering:

Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson, Inc.
220 St. Charles Way, Suite 200
York, Pennsylvania 17402

In Association With:

Toole Recreation Planning
6081 Honey Hollow Road
Doylestown, PA 18902

How to Use This Plan

This document is comprehensive and contains detailed information because it's both a vision and a reference manual. To assist in navigating critical areas, the consultant team has provided the following framework:

1. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is the "plan in a nutshell." It gives you the big picture—what we heard from the community, the Six Big Moves that drive the plan, and the top priorities. If you only read one section, this is the one. It tells the story of where West Chester Borough's parks and recreation system is headed.

2. The Plan

The Plan is the action section. It lays out the recommendations in detail—what should happen in parks, programs, operations, and funding. Each chapter builds on what residents said and shows how the Borough can make progress in the next 10 years. If you want to understand the strategies and ideas in depth, this is where to go.

3. The Foundation

The Foundation is the evidence and backup. It includes all the data, assessments, and comparisons that support the recommendations in the Plan—park-by-park evaluations, survey results, financial analysis, and operations and management information. Think of it as the "reference library" for those who want to dive deeper or check the numbers. It ensures the recommendations aren't just aspirational, but grounded in facts and realistic paths forward.

A Simple Reading Guide

- Skim the Executive Summary for the big picture.
- Read The Plan for the specific actions.
- Use The Foundation when you want details, numbers, or background.

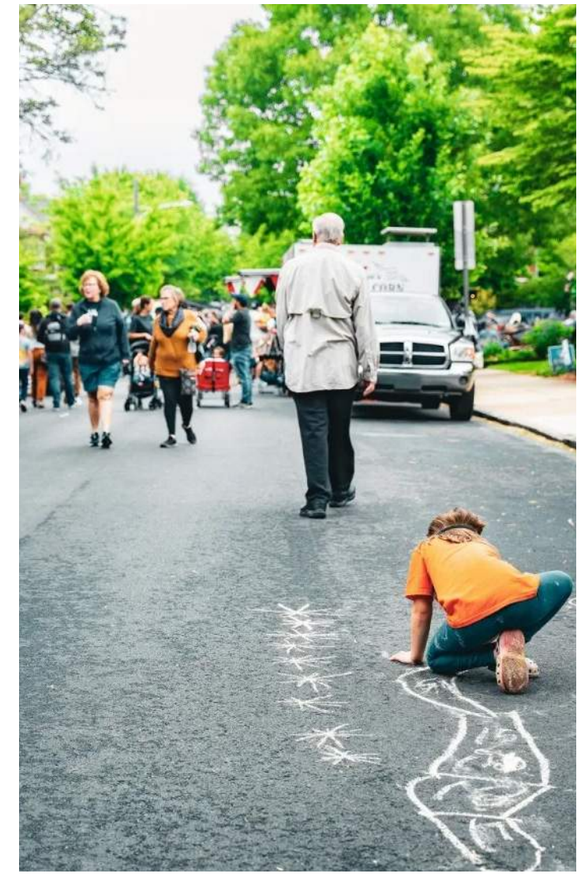
Executive Summary

West Chester Borough is a highly desirable, walkable, and vibrant community in the heart of Chester County. With a thriving downtown widely regarded as one of the region's best, a strong sense of place, and West Chester University anchoring its cultural and intellectual life, the Borough continues to attract new residents, businesses, and visitors. It's known for its historic charm, tree-lined streets, diverse population, and an engaged citizenry that values quality of life. Over the next three years, the Borough is projected to grow by approximately 18%—a remarkable figure for a community that is already densely developed. This growth presents both opportunities and challenges for maintaining and enhancing parks, recreation, and open space.

The Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan builds on these community strengths and anticipates the growing need for accessible, high-quality public spaces, recreation programs, and active transportation. Developed through robust public engagement, the plan reflects the priorities, hopes, and lived experiences of residents who want a park and recreation system that is equitable, vibrant, and responsive to evolving needs.

A Plan Grounded in Equity and Opportunity

West Chester's 12 parks offer significant value, but not all neighborhoods are served equally. Some enjoy well-maintained signature parks and active Friends Groups, while others have fewer amenities, less investment, and limited events. This plan addresses those disparities, committing to elevate all parks and ensure that every neighborhood has access to quality recreation and green space.



Six Big Moves

To deliver on the promise of a more equitable, connected, and vibrant West Chester, this plan organizes its key recommendations into Six Big Moves—clear, actionable priorities that respond to what residents said they value most. These moves are designed to optimize limited parkland, enhance community connections, expand access to recreation, and position the Borough for long-term success through thoughtful stewardship, effective operations, and sustainable funding. Together, they offer a bold but practical path toward a park and recreation system that meets the needs of today and rises to the challenges of tomorrow.

1. Parks for All

With only 43.5 acres of parkland across 12 parks—most within a ten-minute walk of residents—optimizing every park is essential. The Plan recommends reinvesting in parks with outdated or limited facilities, improving maintenance, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring equitable distribution of programming and amenities across the Borough.

Initial Priorities Include:

- *John O. Green Park* – Develop, and implement, a master plan based on community input that helps to redefine John O. Green Park as a downtown destination to visit.
- *Hoopes Park* – Develop a master plan that helps to make Hoopes Park a true community park! Playground and tot lot improvements should be complimented with natural play areas, improved parking, and a full loop trail that makes the park accessible to all.
- *Horace Pippin Park* – Currently the only park in the Borough without any true direction. While well-loved, it needs a master plan process including community input to determine what should go here and how it should be defined.
- The Borough should consider a three park master plan for these parks, combining efforts to create a system-wide approach. This would ensure community input at both the neighborhood level and across the borough.

2. Go West Chester: Safe Walking and Bicycling

A major initiative of this plan is to connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, and the downtown with a safe, inviting network of trails, greenways, and on-road bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Walkability and bikeability are essential to the Borough's livability.

The plan includes a vision for West Chester Borough to become a designated Bike Friendly Community, recognized by the League of American Bicyclists. With parking already a major challenge, making it safe and practical to use bicycles for everyday transportation could relieve pressure on parks and downtown while promoting health, sustainability, and access.

Initial Priorities Include:

- Exploring the *Turk's Head Trail* as a Rails-With-Trails option along the former SEPTA line.
- A *north-south and east-west bicycle-friendly corridor* through the Borough, as defined by the Bicycle Focus Group in Chapter 5 - Go West Chester.
- *Bicycle parking* downtown and at every park in the Borough.

3. Active Together: Recreation Programs

The Borough is renowned for its special events and programs that attract people from across the region. Partnerships with the Business Improvement District (BID), Chamber of Commerce, sports leagues, and others make events like the Food Festival, parades, and music festivals possible.

Residents want more cultural events, youth opportunities, family programs, and wellness activities. The Plan calls for expanded offerings that reflect West Chester's diversity. Recreation should be distributed throughout the Borough—not just in signature parks. Collaborating with the Melton Center for programming in both the center and adjacent property is a key strategy.

4. Sustaining What We Love

West Chester's parks, natural areas, and green spaces are deeply valued—and they need thoughtful care to thrive. This Big Move focuses on maintenance, environmental stewardship, and climate resilience.

Key priorities include:

- Preserving tree canopy and stream corridors
- Managing stormwater
- Keeping park facilities in good working order

This ensures that the parks we love today will remain healthy, resilient, and meaningful for future generations.

5. Operational Excellence: Borough Ready for the Future

West Chester Borough's park and recreation system is professionally led by a capable Director and Program Coordinator. Park maintenance is handled by the Public Works Department, which works diligently to care for park grounds and facilities despite limited staffing.

The Plan recommends:

- Expanding staffing and training in both departments
- Continuing to foster effective interdepartmental coordination
- Investing in equipment and technology systems for better service delivery

6. Investing in Our Community

To support these goals, the Borough must grow and diversify its revenue sources. The Plan recommends:

- Aligning local investment with National Recreation and Park Association benchmarks and peer boroughs
- Updating the Mandatory Dedication and Fees-in-Lieu ordinance
- Exploring an increase of ¼ of 1% to the Earned Income Tax (EIT)
- Pursuing grants, sponsorships, and equitable user fees

A fair and forward-looking financing model will ensure that parks and programs keep pace with rising expectations.

Community Voice and Collaboration

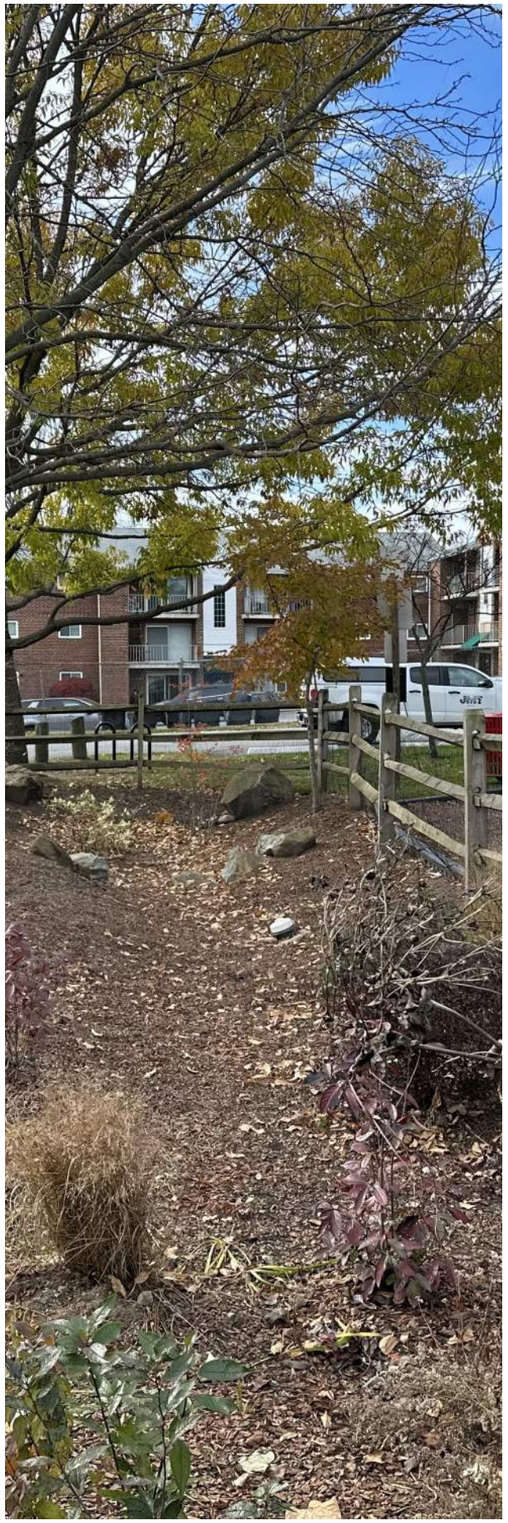
Public involvement shaped this plan—and it must continue. A Park Friends Alliance is proposed as a collaborative network of Friends Groups that shares resources and advocates without creating a top-down structure. Sustained community engagement and civic leadership will be vital to achieving the plan's vision.

Implementation with Intention

Chapter 10 - Implementation outlines clear priorities, cost estimates, and phasing over the next ten years. It highlights early-action items for visible progress and builds the foundation for long-term success through collaboration and smart investment.

A Call to Action

West Chester Borough has all the ingredients for an exceptional park and recreation system: a passionate community, a thriving downtown, a respected university, and professional leadership. This Plan is a blueprint for leveraging those assets—expanding opportunity, fostering equity, and enhancing quality of life for all who live, work, learn, and play in West Chester. The Borough's growing momentum around walkability and cycling offers a powerful opportunity to transform mobility, relieve downtown congestion, and earn Bike Friendly Community designation while advancing health and sustainability for all.



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Part 1

The Plan

Detailed recommendations for parks, recreation, open space, programs, operations, management, and financing

Chapter 1
Introduction

Small Town Vibe, Big Possibilities

A New Era for Parks and Recreation in West Chester

Tucked into the heart of Chester County, the Borough of West Chester is a place where historic brick streets meet vibrant public life; where people walk, bike, meet friends in the square, and find green space around every corner. It's a compact community with an outsized spirit. And now, it's time for our parks, public spaces, and recreation opportunities to rise to the moment.

This Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is about more than playgrounds and pathways (though we love those too). It's a bold vision for a Borough that thrives on connection, between neighbors, nature, neighborhoods, and next-generation ideas. Our parks can be places for kids to play, for elders to stroll, for artists to perform, for local sports to flourish, and for the community to come together in new, creative, and healthy ways.

With limited space but limitless imagination, West Chester is ready to make every inch of green count. This plan reflects the voices of residents, the legacy of our history, and the excitement of what's ahead. It lays out the steps to create a resilient, inclusive, and joyful parks and recreation system that's built for the Borough we are and the one we're becoming.

Let's get into it.

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the West Chester Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is to guide the future of public parks and spaces, recreation opportunities, green infrastructure, and operations and maintenance in a way that reflects the Borough's values, character, and ambitions. The Borough is committed to:

- A resilient future as a vibrant, walkable town.
- Protecting and realizing the full potential of its rich historic and architectural character as a defining characteristic of its identity.
- Highly livable and safe neighborhoods.
- A strong and stable economy.
- A diverse population that functions as a cohesive community.
- Citizens who are inspired to be valuable partners in creative problem solving.

West Chester Borough's Mission

West Chester Borough is committed to a healthy, sustainable, and inclusive community - supporting clean air and water, walkability, transit, access to healthy food, and economic opportunity. It will remain a regional hub for business, education, and the arts, while promoting innovation, volunteerism, and collaboration. The Borough values historic preservation and protecting natural resources as key parts of its future.

Rooted in Community: Growing Toward an Equitable, Connected, and Greener West Chester

As West Chester continues to grow and evolve, this plan sets a framework over the next ten years to ensure that parks, recreation, open space and trails remain essential to our quality of life. It provides clear direction for how the Borough can:

- Protect and enhance its existing parks and open spaces, ensuring they remain beautiful, accessible, and welcoming to all.
- Expand equitable recreation opportunities for residents of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds in all our neighborhoods.
- Make the most of limited land and resources by thinking creatively, collaborating with partners, and designing for multi-use, year-round enjoyment.
- Support healthy, active lifestyles and social connection through a well-rounded network of programs, public places, and safe places to walk and bicycle
- Preserve natural assets and historic character, while adapting to future needs and challenges — including climate resilience, development pressures, and changing demographics.

This plan is both a vision and a practical tool. It includes short-term wins and long-term strategies for decision-makers, community groups, and every day residents who care about how West Chester looks, feels, and functions. It's a call to action — to dream big and work together — so that parks and recreation in West Chester continue to be a source of pride, well-being, and shared joy.

How This Plan Was Developed

This **Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan** was developed through a comprehensive planning process that combined professional research, on-the-ground assessment, operations and policy review, and broad-based community engagement. West Chester Borough retained the team of JMT and Toole Recreation Planning to collaborate with West Chester Borough on developing this plan with the support of Chester County's VPP Program. The team included landscape architects, recreation and community planners, transportation specialists, engineers, and community engagement specialists.

The process began with a detailed inventory and field assessment of all parks, trails, open spaces, and recreation facilities in the Borough. This included examining physical conditions, identifying gaps and opportunities, and observing how spaces are used.

The planning team conducted extensive data analysis, including population trends, land use patterns, equity indicators, and redevelopment projections. Peer comparisons and national metrics, such as those from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and similar Pennsylvania boroughs, were used to evaluate West Chester's parkland and facility offerings in relation to similar communities.

In addition, the team reviewed existing municipal plans and ordinances, including the comprehensive plan, SALDO, and park-related policies. A focused analysis of the Borough's Mandatory Dedication of Land Ordinance Report—prepared by AICP-certified planners—provided guidance and the parkland standard for the Borough for future land acquisition strategies.

Best practices and insights from national park planning consultants, state and regional agencies, and respected nonprofit organizations (including WeConservePA) informed the recommendations. This ensured the plan aligns with both local realities and forward-looking industry standards.

Together, this professional foundation—paired with insights from residents and stakeholders—ensures that the plan is both strategic and grounded, ready to guide the Borough in creating a more equitable, connected, and resilient parks and recreation system.

Community Engagement: The Foundation of the Plan

This **Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan** is grounded in the voices, values, and experiences of West Chester Borough residents. Community engagement formed the foundation of the planning process, ensuring the Plan reflects real needs, aspirations, and opportunities.

A robust and inclusive engagement strategy reached far beyond a traditional comment period. The **Plan Advisory Committee** guided the effort from start to finish, bringing together a diverse cross-section of the community—including residents, BID, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, neighborhood representatives, Park Friends Groups, the Recreation Commission, and voices reflecting the full demographics of West Chester.

To broaden input and build trust, the planning team implemented a wide-ranging public outreach campaign:

- A borough-wide public opinion survey yielded nearly 600 responses, offering a glimpse into community priorities.
- Three public meetings provided forums for sharing ideas and feedback
- Three pop-up events at major Borough gatherings met people where they were. These included the Food Festival, Santa on the Square, and the Halloween event.
- Focus groups were held with Park Friends and Bicycle & Trail advocates, diving deeper into key themes.
- More than 25 interviews were conducted with individuals, organizations, and an EMT Group —from formal stakeholders to casual park-goers approached during intercept interviews in parks.
- An onsite work session at the Melton Center provided a dedicated time for engagement with Center staff serving this historically underserved neighborhood.
- Targeted outreach efforts helped promote the survey and public meetings to ensure broad awareness and access.
- Work sessions with Borough leadership, departments, and staff helped align community insights with operational and implementation realities.

Key Findings:

The West Chester community places a high value on parks, recreation, open space, and safe walking and biking routes as essential components of quality of life. These resources are seen as vital to attracting and retaining residents, businesses, and visitors. Community input revealed the following priorities and perspectives:

- Strong Support for Investment: Residents overwhelmingly believe that investing in parks and recreation over the next five years is important or very important.
- Safety and Welcoming Spaces: Feeling safe and welcome in every park is a top priority for community members. Many travel to other communities to use parks and recreation facilities not available here.
- Equity Across the System: There is strong support for ensuring that all neighborhoods have access to high-quality parks, not just signature parks (Everhart, Marshall Square, and Hoopes Park), but every park in every part of town.
- Expanding Programs Borough-Wide: While signature parks, remain popular venues, residents want programs and events extended into neighborhood parks as well.
- Desired Facility Improvements: Community members identified a need for safer bicycle pathways, indoor year-round recreation spaces, and deeper collaboration with the Melton Center.
- Willingness to Pay: A remarkable 96% of public opinion survey respondents expressed willingness to contribute more financially to support parks, recreation, open space, and trails; whether through program fees, facility use fees, additional Borough contributions, donations, or Friends Group involvement.
- Top Funding Priorities: The top three areas the community wants to see funded are maintenance and operations, enhancing parks to be regional standouts, and beautification efforts.
- Clarity in Project Roles: Residents called for more transparency around park improvement processes, specifically the planning and decision-making involved, and the respective responsibilities of the Borough and Friends Groups.
- Deep Community Appreciation: There is strong, widespread appreciation for West Chester's parks, recreation programs, and facilities.
- Trusted Leadership: The Parks & Recreation Department and its management team are well-known, respected, and trusted by the community.

These findings form the foundation of the **Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**. They are woven throughout the plan as "What We Heard": guiding the recommendations, priorities, and actions to ensure the final plan reflects the voices and values of the West Chester community.

Chapter 2
West Chester Today

Community Profile

West Chester is a lively, historic, and forward-looking community where people come together to enjoy an active downtown, rich heritage, and vibrant public spaces.

A Vibrant and Historic Hub: Nestled in the heart of scenic Chester County, Pennsylvania, West Chester Borough is a vibrant, walkable community just 25 miles west of Philadelphia. With a population of 19,658, it serves as the county seat, home to West Chester University, and is known for its charming downtown, strong schools, and high quality of life.

Small Town Feel, Big Community Spirit: West Chester blends historic charm with a forward-thinking, engaged community. Its compact size, just 1.8 square miles, includes distinct, walkable neighborhoods connected to a lively downtown filled with shops, restaurants, and cultural destinations. The Borough hosts parades, festivals, and events year-round that bring residents and visitors together to celebrate civic life.

Parks, Green Space, and Public Life: The Borough offers a diverse mix of public spaces, including three major parks, Everhart, Hoopes, and Marshall Square, as well as nine neighborhood parks, providing places to play, relax, and connect. The award-winning tree program and commitment to sustainability make green spaces a core part of community life.

Historic Character Meets Modern Living: West Chester's Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, features over 3,000 buildings built before 1935. Its streetscapes reflect a strong architectural identity and a community committed to preservation through education and thoughtful design review.

Connected and Accessible: With a well-connected grid of streets, alleys, and sidewalks, getting around West Chester is easy and could be made even easier and safer for those on foot or bicycle. The Borough is served by five parking garages, public transit options, and an active Public Works Department that maintains roads, infrastructure, and public facilities.

Public Services and Safety: West Chester is a council-manager government with a dedicated Borough Council and a professional manager overseeing operations. Public safety is supported by a full-service police department, volunteer fire companies, and emergency medical services. The Borough also offers services in trash collection, sewer management, recycling, and stormwater management.

Community-Centered and Future-Focused: West Chester is defined by its active citizen engagement, volunteer spirit, and strong public-private partnerships. From its Recreation Department and environmental programs to its housing partnerships and community policing, the Borough puts people first - making it not just a place to live, but a place to belong.

WEST CHESTER BOROUGH DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SUMMARY

LAND AREA

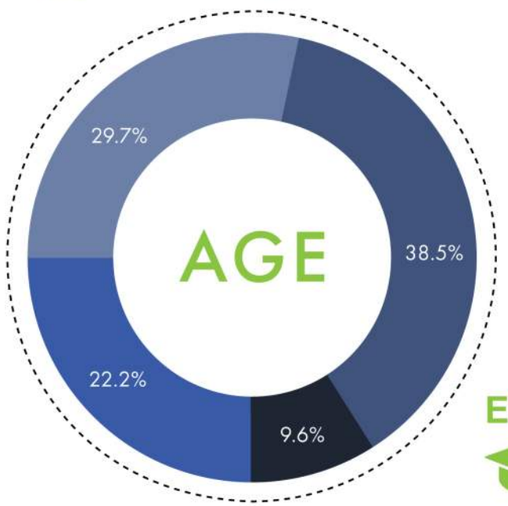
2.0 Sq. Miles
9,829.0 Population Per Sq. Mile

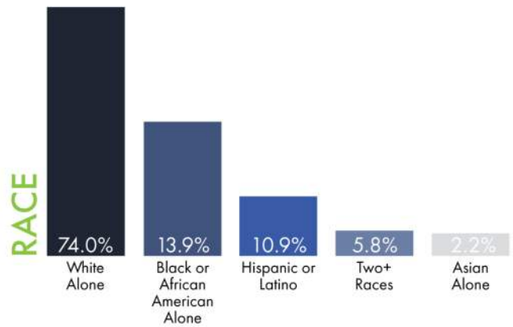
81,492
Median Household

Total Population:

19,658

45.5%
54.5%





EDUCATION

94.0%
High School Grad

60.1%
Bachelor's Degree

Source: data.census.gov

*All data is per the US Census and includes students attending West Chester University.

Our Foundation: Values, Vision, and Mission

OUR VALUES

West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation System is guided by values in Parks, Recreation, and open Space that reflect the heart of our community:

EXCELLENCE

We strive for high standards in design, programming, and service to reflect the pride of West Chester.

EQUITY

Every person, in every neighborhood, deserves access to welcoming, high-quality parks and programs.

CONNECTION

Parks and trails should link people to each other and to the places they live, learn, work, and play.

VITALITY

Recreation, events, and everyday activities are essential to a healthy, joyful, and active community.

STEWARDSHIP

We care for our parks and natural resources today to ensure they thrive for future generations.

COLLABORATION

Residents, volunteers, staff, and partners all have a role in shaping and sustaining great public spaces.

Our Vision: A thriving, connected, and inclusive parks and recreation system that enriches daily life, reflects West Chester's vibrant character, and strengthens community health, happiness, and resilience.

Our Mission: To provide high-quality parks, trails, recreation programs, and public spaces that are safe, inclusive, and accessible to all. We deliver services that support health, connection, and lifelong enjoyment while aligning with community resources and partnerships to amplify impact and serve the diverse needs of West Chester.

Chapter 3

Six Big Moves

Six Big Moves

To create a parks and recreation system that truly reflects the values, needs, and aspirations of the West Chester community, this plan identifies *Six Big Moves*: bold, transformative actions that set the course for the future. Rooted in what we heard from residents, these strategic moves are designed to expand access, elevate quality, promote sustainability, and strengthen the connection between people and place. Together, they provide a roadmap for meaningful progress, ensuring that parks, public spaces, and programs continue to enrich lives, build community, and shape a stronger West Chester for generations to come. The Six Big Moves are presented on the following pages:

1 PARKS for ALL

Ensure great Parks and Recreation opportunities in every neighborhood.

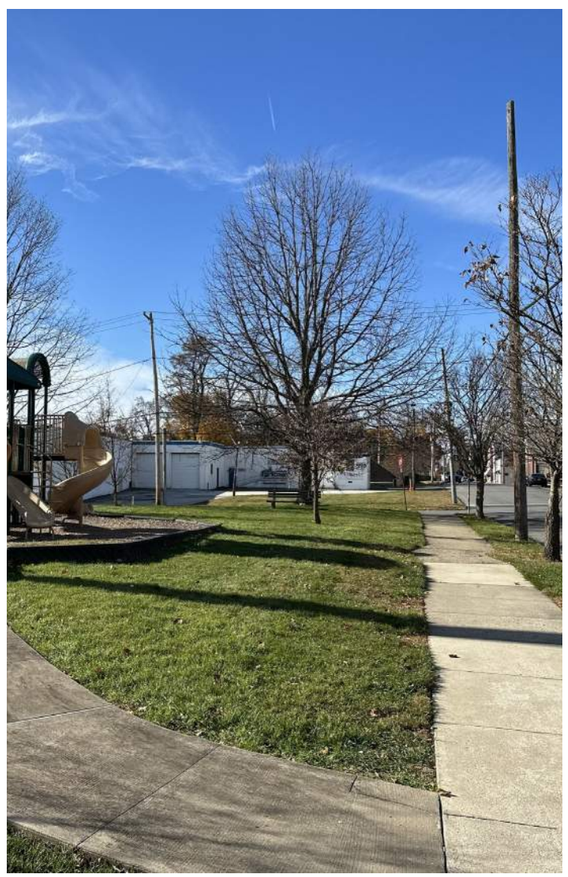
In an inclusive and close-knit borough like West Chester, everyone should have a nearby park or public space that feels safe, well cared for, and welcoming—regardless of income, race, age, or ability. Parks for All is about eliminating disparities in park quality, access, and investment by focusing resources where they're needed most and ensuring every resident has a voice in shaping their local parks.

This Big Move prioritizes:

- Revitalizing under-resourced parks, starting with John O. Green Park
- Establishing minimum standards for park access, amenities, and maintenance
- Using equity-focused criteria to guide transparent investment decisions
- Engaging communities in the design and future of their neighborhood parks
- Balancing active and passive uses and ensuring accessibility for all ages and abilities

This is a commitment to fairness, dignity, and inclusion—making sure that every neighborhood park is a source of pride, comfort, and connection.

2 GO West Chester

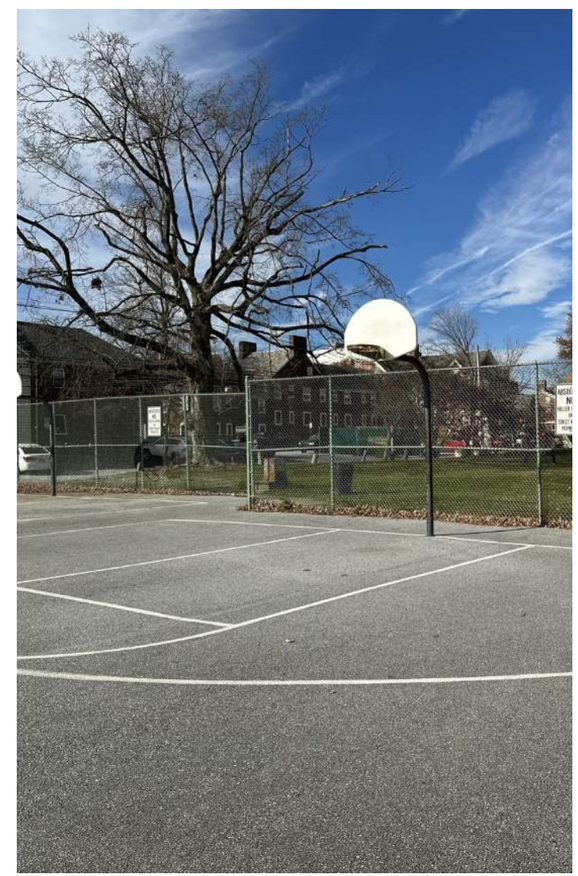


Easy and safe access anywhere in the Borough.

In this vibrant borough full of energy and charm, people should be able to walk or bike safely to parks, schools, downtown, and beyond. Go West Chester is about building a connected, comfortable network of people-friendly streets that make everyday movement easier—whether you're heading to work, grabbing a coffee, or exploring your neighborhood. This is about mobility, safety, and pride in a borough that moves together.

- Safe and accessible infrastructure for people of all ages and abilities
- Connections between neighborhoods, parks, schools, and business districts
- Greenways, trails, and streetscapes that are welcoming, shaded, and well-marked
- Community input to identify key routes and barriers
- Partnerships with advocacy groups, schools, and public health leaders to promote walking and biking

3 ACTIVE Together



Parks and public spaces come to life when people use them.

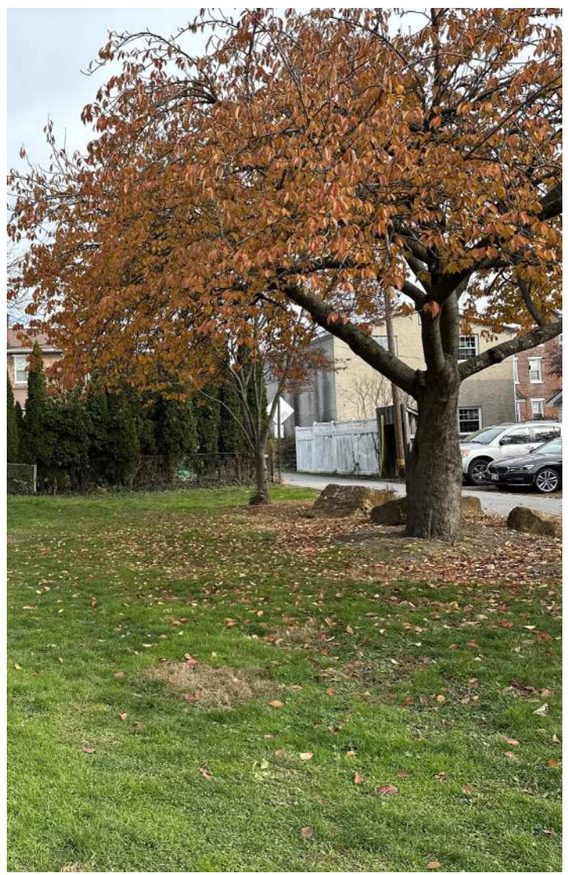
Whether it's for fitness, fun, learning, or just being together. Active Together focuses on expanding programs, events, and everyday opportunities that support physical and mental health, build community, and bring people of all ages outside and into motion. From yoga in the park to festivals, games, and nature walks, this move is about making West Chester's parks places where life happens.

This Big Move prioritizes:

- A diverse calendar of events and recreation programs for all ages and interests
- Everyday activity opportunities like fitness stations, walking clubs, and pickup activities
- Health and wellness partnerships with local organizations, schools, and public health providers
- Activation of underused parks with pop-up events, mobile programming, and seasonal activities
- Community leadership and volunteer support to bring programs to life and reflect local talents

This is about creating a parks and recreation system that's not only beautiful, but dynamic—filled with opportunities to move, connect, and thrive.

4 Sustaining what we LOVE

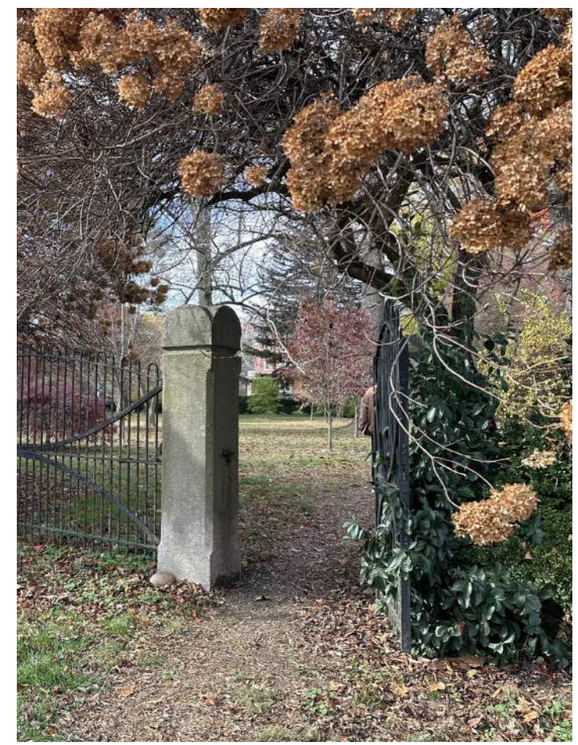


West Chester's parks, natural areas, and green spaces are deeply valued—and they need thoughtful care to thrive. Sustaining What We Love is about protecting these community assets through strong maintenance practices, environmental stewardship, and climate resilience. From preserving trees and stream corridors to managing stormwater and keeping facilities in good condition, this move ensures the parks we love today will be just as meaningful tomorrow.

This Big Move prioritizes:

- Consistent maintenance practices that keep parks safe, clean, and welcoming
- Environmental stewardship to preserve trees, stream corridors, and natural habitats
- Green infrastructure and climate resilience, including stormwater management and native landscaping
- Volunteerism and community involvement through Friends Groups, clean-up days, and stewardship programs
- Clear standards and schedules to guide park care and ensure transparency

5 A BOROUGH ready for the FUTURE



A well-supported department will turn big ideas into action—and ensure that West Chester's parks continue to grow with the needs of the people they serve.

Build the organizational capacity needed to deliver high-quality parks and recreation services.
This includes staffing, training, partnerships, funding strategies, and policies that position West Chester for long-term success.

This Big Move prioritizes:

- Strengthening the Parks and Recreation Department to lead planning, programming, and operations
- Hiring and training staff with the expertise to support inclusive programs, safe facilities, and community engagement
- Creating policies, procedures, and maintenance standards to guide day-to-day operations and long-term planning
- Pursuing partnerships with nonprofits, schools, Friends Groups, and regional agencies to expand impact
- Engaging the community as collaborators and champions in shaping the future of parks and recreation

6 Investing in our COMMUNITY

West Chester's Parks are beloved community assets and need to be invested in as such.

Places to play, recreate, see live music, and more, all twelve parks in West Chester are neighborhood gems. But these parks require maintenance, and sustainable maintenance requires sustainable funding. Investing In Our Community is a guide to investing in the Borough's parks so that they can continue to be great!

This Big Move prioritizes:

- Supporting Parks and Recreation through continued, proportional funding
- Expand access to quality recreation opportunities through ensuring equal investment across all parks
- Spreading the love by focusing on those parks that need it the most first
- Leveraging outside funding to ensure that parks see their fair share
- Boost public morale by showing that West Chester cares about what they care about through investing in these important community assets

Chapter 4
Parks For All

Parks For All Equity and Access in West Chester's Parks

Overview: West Chester is a Borough to be proud of! It is an inclusive, diverse Borough steeped in a rich history of activism and action where 95% of all residents are lucky enough to live within a 10-minute walk of a park. In a place like this, everyone deserves to have a park nearby that uplifts and inspires them!

However, while all of West Chester's parks are cherished by the community, some need additional maintenance, care, and updating. The goal of Parks for All is to provide the foundation for identifying which parks need the most love most immediately through a series of universal park standards and equity-driven criteria.

A Transparent Process: People are passionate about their parks. It is no surprise, then, when they feel their park's needs are the most urgent. Establishing a rigorous, transparent process for allocating funds allows the Borough to provide clear rationale for their decision making while concurrently assuaging public anxiety.

A communicable, consistent process empowers the public and representative groups, such as Friends Groups, as well. If petitioning Borough Parks and Recreation for improvements or maintenance, they now have a tool kit for communication. Everyone wants West Chester's parks to be the best they can be, and transparency affirms that while opening the door for positive, productive communications.

Park Design Guidelines

To enhance the overall recognizability and branding of West Chester's parks, recreation, and open space system it is important to develop a set of design guidelines. These guidelines are both aesthetic and functional, acting as a means to ensure that, while each park has its own identity, it is immediately recognizable as part of the Borough system and is upheld to a high standard as such.

Park Design Guidelines are an exercise in equity as much as branding. Uniform signage, bench, and lighting standards, for example, guarantee that there is a uniform investment in these amenities across all parks. Likewise creating sustainability, accessibility, and planting standards establishes that all Borough parks will be a welcoming, comfortable experience for everyone. Park Design Guidelines should target the following areas:

- *Landscapes and Natural Resources*
- *Architecture*
- *Site Amenities (Benches, Lights, etc)*
- *Connectivity*
- *Accessibility*
- *Signage*
- *Sustainability*
- *Historic and Cultural Interpretation*

Landscapes and Natural Resources: Landscape Standards target the preservation and conservation of natural resources to maintain the park's aesthetic quality and create welcoming places. Guidelines include plant selection, habitat protection, and maintenance practices to enhance West Chester's natural environment. These standards compliment Sustainability standards, meet the Borough's sustainability goals, and preserve its ecological character.

Architecture: West Chester is home to beautiful architecture! These guidelines ensure that any and all new structures within the Borough's parks present a uniform aesthetic that makes the parks instantly recognizable. Developing materiality, durability, and efficiency standards promotes aesthetically pleasing, sustainable structures throughout the park system.

Site Amenities: Site amenity guidelines ensure a high standard and equitable investments in all of West Chester's parks. Pre-determined amenities guarantees the same investment and quality for all parks. Similarly this standard can support Accessibility, Connectivity, and Sustainability by guaranteeing the inclusion of accessible bench pads, bike racks, and more.

World Landscape Architecture - Felton Discovery Park. March 22, 2021.

Landzine - The Ohio Field Interpretive Signage. November 23, 2018.

Landzine - SC Bike Racks by Maglin Outdoor.

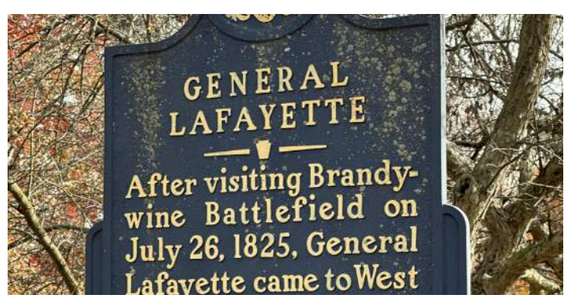
Connectivity: Connectivity Standards should be made with outside access to the parks in mind. Do, for example, all parks have adequate connections to sidewalks from surrounding neighborhoods and perimeter pathways so that anyone, regardless of ability, can safely and easily enter?

Accessibility: Park Accessibility Standards ensure equal opportunity regardless of ability. They are a framework for designing and maintaining accessible environments. Through advocating for Parks and Recreation-specific Accessibility Standards beyond required ADA standards the Borough demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and social responsibility.

Signage: Signage is an important part of establishing a distinct identity for West Chester's parks system. Unified design for entry signage identifies individual parks as part of the system, while simultaneously ensuring an equal level of investment per sign. An entrance sign, after all, is the first impression of the park!

Sustainability: Sustainability Standards assure equal investment in stormwater infrastructure, tree-planting programs, and resource conservation across the park system. Infrastructure will vary by park so it is important to create actionable guidelines that respond to the specific demands of each. The key is respecting those differences and developing targeted sustainability plans by park.

Historic and Cultural Interpretation: Parks are communal storytellers. In West Chester, all parks but Green Field are named for dedicated civil servants, notable activists, and pioneers in their fields. An interconnected, uniform signage program tells these stories and instills a sense of civic pride in the Borough.



PARK NAME	PARK NAMESAKE	CONNECTION TO THE BOROUGH
WARD 1		
Marshall Square Park	Humphrey Marshall	West Chester born-and-raised botanist; first botanical essay published in the Western hemisphere
Barclay Woods Park	Joshua Hartshorne; The Barclay Home	Historic Quaker boarding house and West Chester's original town green space, donated by Mr. Hartshorne
WARD 2E		
Fugett Park	Named for Notable Activist	Former West Chester Teach and Principle, Civil Rights Activist
Melton Center	Charles A. Melton	Civil Rights Activist
WARD 2W		
John O. Green Park	John O. Green	Former West Chester Police Chief
WARD 3		
Kathy McBratnie Park	Kathy McBratnie	Former West Chester Parks and Recreation Director
WARD 4		
Bayard Rustin Park	Bayard Rustin	Civil Rights and LGBTQ+ Activist
Green Field	N/A	N/A
Mosteller Park	James Brownback Mosteller	West Chester Entrepreneur, helped to bring business downtown
WARD 5		
WARD 6		
Everhart Park	The Everhart Family, William Everhart	During the 1840s to1860s the park was used for abolition and temperance meetings, and was home to a civil war camp for union soldiers
Horace Pippin Park	Horace Pippin	Notable Painter and Sculptor, Civil Rights Activist
WARD 7		
Hoopes Park	Josiah Hoopes	West Chester's Original Park Supervisor
Veteran's Memorial Park	West Chester World War II Veterans	Opened in 1949 to honor West Chester's returning World War II Veterans

Figure 1: Table depicting each park within the Borough, its namesake, and their significance to West Chester.

What We Heard

Friends Groups Focus Group:
A focus group was held with the leadership from each park's Friends Group ahead of the second study committee meeting. Representatives unable to attend were contacted separately. Conversation was constructive as they explained they often felt lost regarding funding, maintenance, and park updates. The Parks and Recreation department was viewed positively, though all in the room felt that they did not have the proper staff or funding to fully address issues regarding maintenance and were, in general, stretched too thin. A dedicated superintendent to handle maintenance concerns as to not overburden the Parks and Recreation director was noted as their primary desire.

There was hesitancy around utilizing the Friends of West Chester Parks 501(c)(3) to raise and disperse funds for all the parks as maintenance money from the Borough was already limited and doing so would limit private, dedicated funds. Some smaller parks expressed difficulty in raising funds and inspiring stewardship, while larger parks pointed to lack of new leadership emerging from within. Both expressed concerns that, without dedicated, private volunteers there would not be the money or maintenance to keep the Borough's parks functioning at a high level.

All expressed a desire for better communication with the Parks and Recreation Department, Council, and the Borough at large to foster cooperation.

Study Committee Meetings and Homework:
The Study Committee was asked to visit each of the Borough's twelve parks and identify their strengths and weaknesses for review at the second Study Committee Meeting. These results are compiled in Chapter 12 - Park Assessments. The Study Committee noted accessibility issues throughout several of the parks as well as a lack of clear definition or identity for others. They felt extremely positively about West Chester's "Big Three" of Hoopes Park, Everhart Park, and Marshall Square Park, but noted that several of the smaller, neighborhood parks felt like an after-thought. John O. Green was noted as "not an inviting place" due to the height and presence of the chain-link fence and lack of adequate vegetation or bed maintenance.

Public Meeting:
A Public Meeting was held on November to present the Consultant Team's findings so far and to hear the public's concerns. People primarily felt pride in their parks, but felt that they were not properly maintained. Parks such as John O. Green were noted as feeling unwelcoming, a sentiment consistent with the Study Committee and the community survey, while other parks, such as Barclay Woods, lacked a clear use or direction.

Young families mentioned accessibility as a concern as it was difficult to get around many parks with a stroller while a coalition of skateboarders presented the case for a skate spot within the Borough. In general people wished for their parks to be diverse, green, well-maintained, and accessible by bike and on-foot.

*'Money and financing was noted as the largest issue, with one council member stating the Borough was "**expecting everything to run at a high level on a 1995 budget.** "*

*Another member similarly mentioned that **two people were not enough to run a dense, urban Parks and Recreation Department.**'*

West Chester Borough Council Key Person Interviews:

The Consultant Team interviewed all available members of the Borough Council to understand issues facing their ward-specific parks and the decision-making process. Several key themes were re-iterated from the Study Committee and Public Meeting, such as the lack of investment in smaller parks, particularly John O. Green Park feeling left behind. Council Members stressed the importance of taking a holistic view of the Borough when approaching the parks as well as the need to actively engage the community, local neighborhoods, and the Friends Groups before making any, final decisions regarding the parks.

Money and financing was noted as the largest issue, with one council member stating the Borough was "expecting to run everything at a high level on a 1995 budget." Another member similarly mentioned that two people were not enough to run a dense, urban Parks and Recreation department. All council members felt strongly that West Chester was a strongly motivated community that wanted to help, but lack of investment in the parks may have left people feeling disenfranchised. They feel that all it would take to get people involved and contributing would be a consistent, clear, and overarching plan they could then interact with.

Finally, Council Members expressed a desire to see the Central Business District used as a recreational space. Suggestions included shutting the streets down more regularly for pedestrian use, more publicly-owned spaces similar to 44 West, and more fluid boundaries for restaurants and businesses wishing to utilize the street. Bicyclist and pedestrian connectivity among the parks, business district, and trails was mentioned as a popular sentiment in the community and one that felt realistic to achieve.

Borough Staff Key Person Interviews:

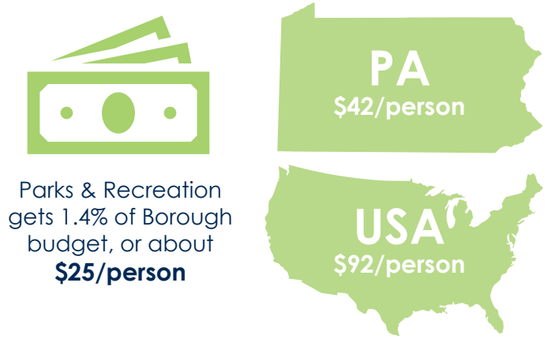
The Consultant Team interviewed select, non-Parks and Recreation employees to understand where, if any, responsibilities overlapped.

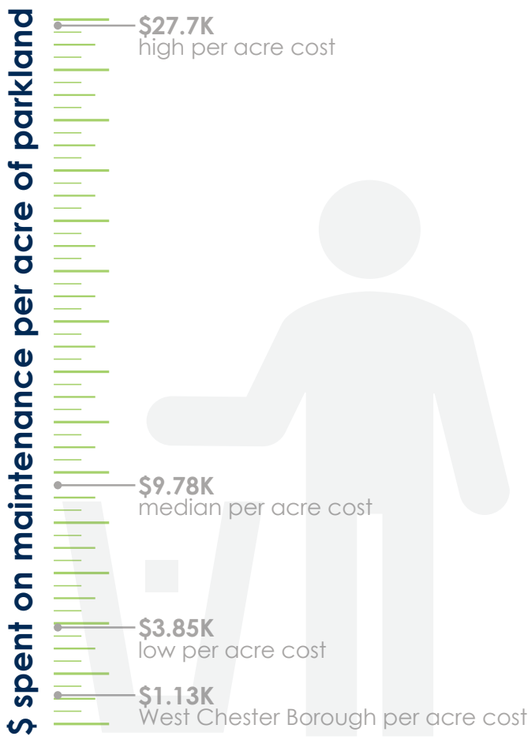
2018 Comprehensive Parking Study:

The Comprehensive Parking Study revealed previous plans for a parking garage that was put on hold due to the COVID-19 epidemic. If this parking garage were to be constructed, the study recommended that several surface lots owned, operated, and maintained by the Borough could be decommissioned as they would no longer be needed, freeing them up to serve as potential, additional parks and recreation land.

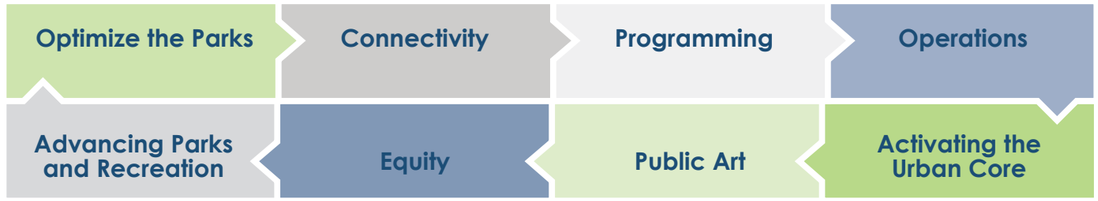
lives within a 10 minute walk to and from a park

Borough Budget





Overarching Goals



Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- People are passionate! It will be easy to garner public support and inspire action.
- The public and Friends Groups trust the Parks and Recreation Department and feel comfortable talking to them.
- People are generally on the same page about which parks need the most immediate attention.

CHALLENGES

- Borough Parks and Recreation is understaffed and stretched thin.
- The Parks and Recreation Budget is low and needs adjustment.
- Some amenities, such as a skate spot, are needed and desired but controversial with the wider public.
- West Chester is small and landlocked, but needs more park land.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The public is already active and involved via Friends Groups; investment will spur further stewardship.
- John O. Green Park is generally agreed upon as the park in the most need. It can act as a pilot project that inspires confidence and generates excitement!

THREATS

- Budget is always controversial, but will need to be discussed and approached realistically.
- Proper maintenance is essential. Without it parks feel neglected and people feel disenfranchised.

Recommendations - Near-Term

Maintenance: Parks are a long-term investment and return long-term results. Maintaining a high standard of parks requires upkeep beyond installation. As it stands now West Chester Parks and Recreation lacks the maintenance staff to maintain each park, leaving staff, residents, and Friends Groups alike feeling frustrated.

Communication: West Chester loves its parks! Numerous Friends Groups advocate and fundraise for their parks, but often feel as if missing information. The Borough, Friends Groups, and Borough Council must work together to define a clear, transparent decision-making process. This will help the public stay informed and active as well.

John O. Green Park: Throughout the engagement process John O. Green Park was consistently identified as the park most in-need of immediate investment. Properly master planning John O. Green Park can inspire confidence and generate excitement that reverberates throughout the entire park system!

Hoopes Park: Of West Chester's "Big Three" parks Hoopes is the largest with the most potential to act as a true, community park. As such Hoopes Park requires a master plan update to improve its trail systems, amenities, and playground.

Horace Pippin Park: Facilities here are limited and it is largely undefined space. Horace Pippin is most in-need of a dedicated master planning process including community input to see what residents desire.

Recommendations - Long-Term

Opportunity Sites: West Chester Parks and Recreation is taking aggressive strides in finding potential parks, recreation, and open space sites. While 95% of Borough residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park or open space, well above the national average of 33%, West Chester currently lacks adequate total park land.

At only 1.8 miles across and entirely land-locked expansion is difficult. Creative thinking will be required to acquire sites suitable for potential park land that simultaneously fulfill gaps in existing facilities and amenities. To this end West Chester Parks and Recreation reached out to the consultant team with several sites they were investigating to determine suitability and potential uses.

It is important to stress here that these sites are not currently owned by the Borough. All information on the following pages is purely speculative and cursory, intended only as a thought exercise to consider how West Chester may begin to approach filling in gaps within its park system.

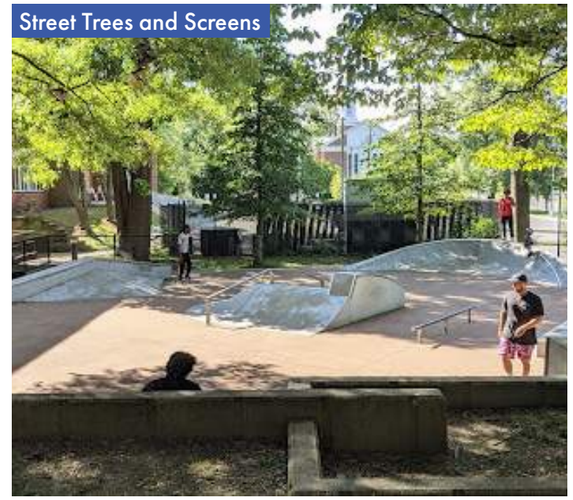
Dog Park: Throughout the planning process many residents highlighted the need for a dog park. Identifying a suitable dog park location requires evaluating community interest and mapping regions with high dog ownership and limited green spaces. Consider existing public lands, vacant lots, and underused park corners that are accessible and safe, then access potential sites based on size, compatibility with neighboring areas, and environmental factors. Engage local stakeholders early in the process to build support and address any concerns. Prioritize the top sites for feasibility studies, concept planning, and cost estimates.

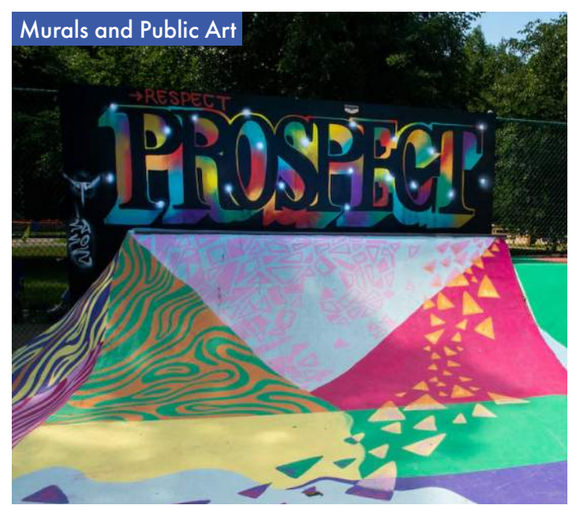
Davis Oil Property

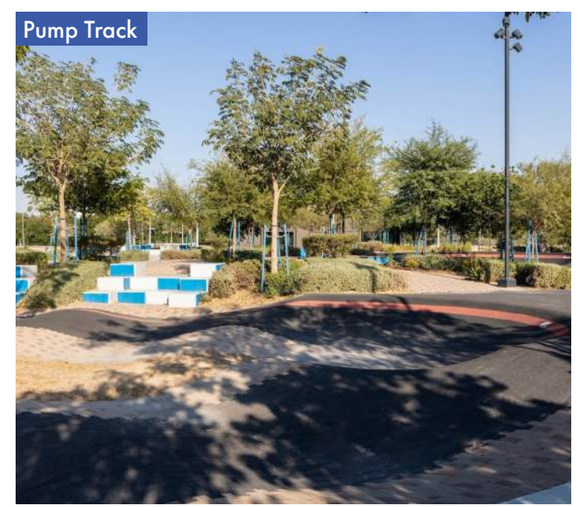
The Davis Oil Property is a 1.9 acre site composed of three parcels and located at the intersection of East Barnard and South Worthington Streets. A former gas station, the site is centrally located near downtown West Chester and close to a bus stop. As it is surrounded by businesses on three sides, the site has high potential to fulfill the current gap in the Borough's parks and recreation system as a small, urban skate spot while causing minimal disturbance to nearby residents.

Similarly it could a host a small park or tot lot facility, though these are already adequately covered in other parks throughout the borough. A pump track for bikes, scooters, skateboards, and rollerblades would be an alternative for this location.

It is important to note that, as a former gas station, that environmental assessments must be considered as part of the planning and development process.



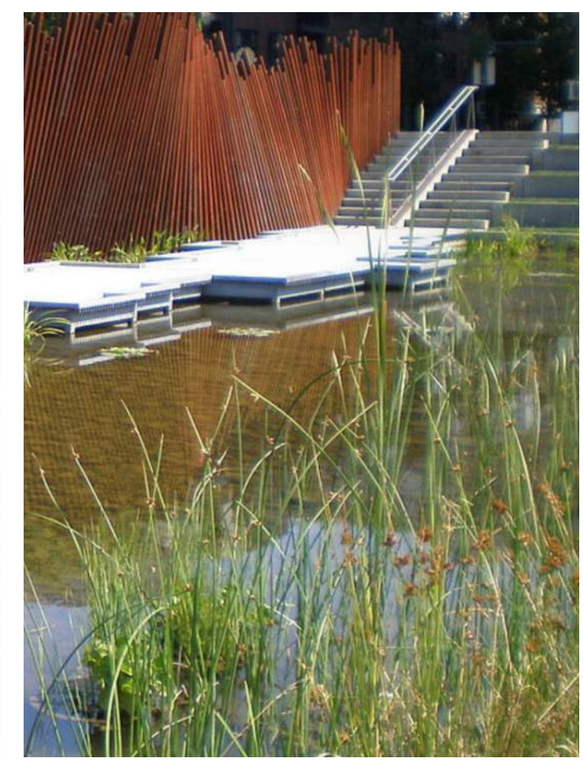




Goose Creek Floodplain Sites

There is regular flooding within the 100-year floodplain associated with Goose Creek. As such there are several parcels that could be investigated as potential sites for stormwater management purposes while simultaneously opening the door to an urban wetland and floodplain park.

Additionally these parcels could provide a connection between Mosteller Park, Green Field, John O. Green Park, and even the aforementioned Davis Oil Property via a tie-in to the proposed Turk's Head Trail. This would add valuable, critically needed recreation land to the Borough's total acreage while simultaneously achieving goals associated with expanded trail networks and diversifying parks, recreation, and open space assets. It is important to note that this is merely an option to be further studied and has in no way been confirmed or pursued by the West Chester Borough as of now. A functional, attractive wetland park was provided to the right as a precedent image.

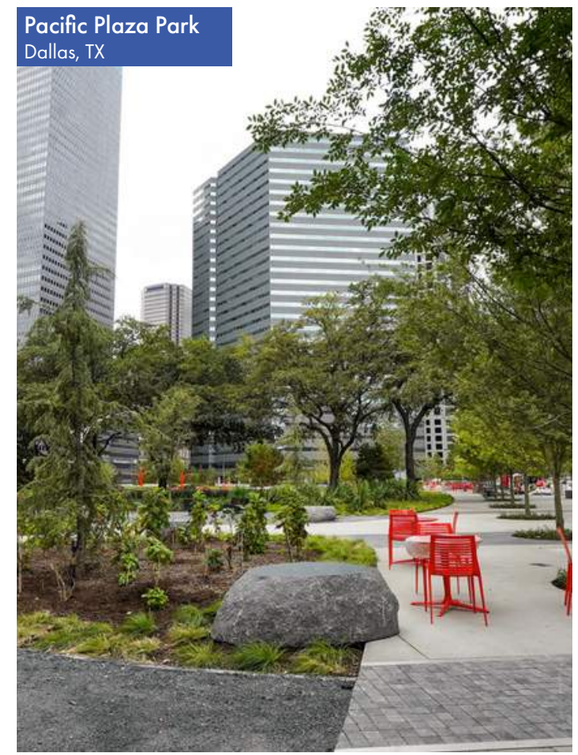


Borough Owned Surface Parking Lots

As part of the 2018 Comprehensive Parking Plan it was noted that, if West Chester were to implement the proposed 50 West Chestnut Street Parking Garage on what is currently Lot 10, the Borough could cease operations at several surface lots. As such Borough staff asked the consultant team about re-purposing those lots as public parks. The consultant team strongly supports this idea due to the difficulty in finding new park land within West Chester and to help bolster their current park acreage deficit.

Furthermore, as part of Goose Creek floodplain parcel investigation, the Magnolia Street lot could be re-imagined as park parking or adapted and re-surfaced as part of the total park acreage. Any future parking garage structure could additionally support park land on top of or have it incorporated around it. Due to the park land deficit within the Borough any and all available space is precious and should be considered. Several successful parking-to-park projects are provided for reference.

The Oval
Philadelphia, PA



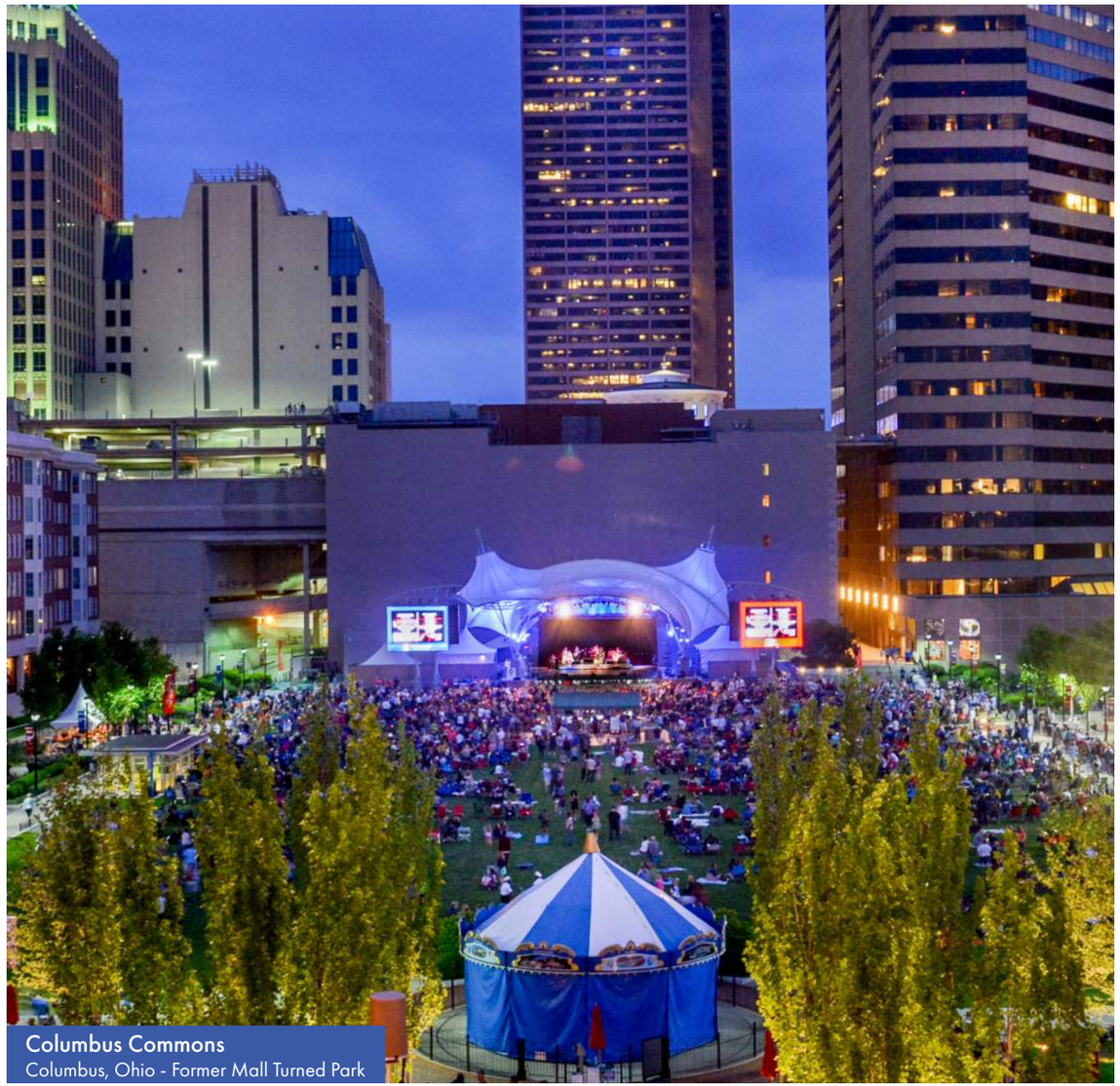
Pacific Plaza Park
Dallas, TX

Tongva Park
Santa Monica, CA

Monitoring Large Land-Holdings

Over the past few years golf courses and country clubs around the country have closed down as demand has plummeted. Savvy, space-starved municipalities took this opportunity to acquire this land and add significant acreage to their park systems.

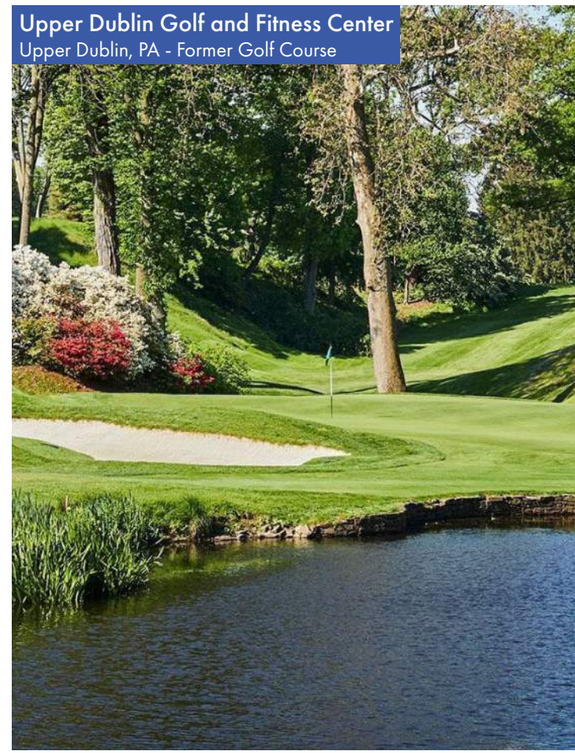
This is but one example of large land-holdings that landlocked borough's such as West Chester should be on the look-out for. Already lacking park acreage and desperately in need of more as the population continues to grow, the Borough should consider and monitor any and all large land-holdings within or along its boundary. Everything from golf-courses to big box stores to former brown-field sites offer unique opportunities to add to West Chester's total park acreage and add a true, community-scale park; something the Borough is currently lacking. This is not to say that the Borough needs to be actively making offers but rather that it should monitor any and all possible opportunities in-and-around West Chester.



Columbus Commons
Columbus, Ohio - Former Mall Turned Park

Rolling Hills Country Club
Peters Township, PA - Former Country Club

Rolling Hills Park
Peters Township, PA - Former Country Club



Upper Dublin Golf and Fitness Center
Upper Dublin, PA - Former Golf Course

Twining Valley Park
Upper Dublin, PA - Former Golf Course

How This Big Move Supports Our Vision

EXCELLENCE

Diverse, accessible, and equitable facilities ensure that, no matter what park you visit, it will be a great one. West Chester should aim to have twelve, unique, stand-out parks that make moving throughout the borough a pleasure for visitors and residents alike.

EQUITY

As it stands now all parks within the borough are not equal in terms of investment and maintenance. A system should be established that supports equitable investment and maintenance across all parks.

CONNECTION

Beautiful, vivacious parks extend beyond their borders and into the surrounding neighborhoods. Parks are not just parks, but way stations for the community to reference, visit, and cherish.

VITALITY

Energetic parks energize West Chester! Through ensuring equitable investment across all parks West Chester ensures that there are twelves, happening places for people to visit, socialize, and recreate.

STEWARDSHIP

People are more likely to go-to-bat for their local park if they see it is a priority for the borough as well. Stewardship means working with, not around, the communities that make these parks so special.

COLLABORATION

The Friends Groups are impassioned individuals looking to make a difference in their parks and in their home. Working with them leads to exciting, new opportunities that may have otherwise been missed.

Chapter 5
Go West Chester

Go West Chester From Car to Bicycle.

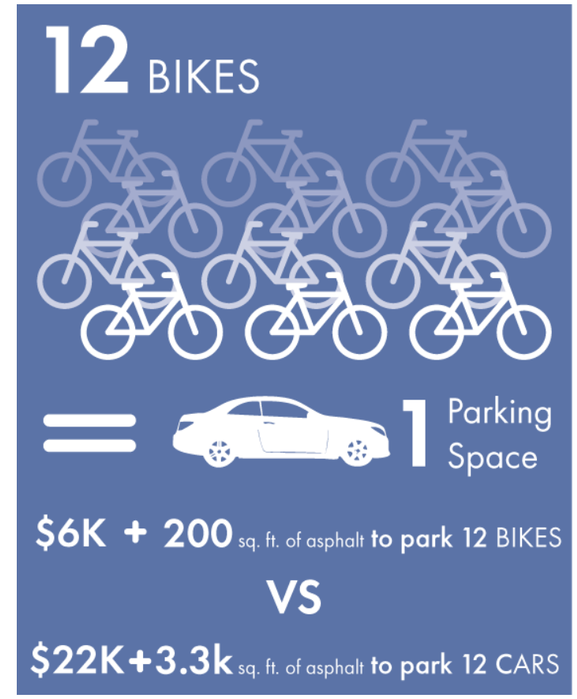
Image from Hello, West Chester - "West Chester Cycling Club Turns 20"

Overview: It is no secret that Downtown West Chester is where people want to be. Host to numerous businesses, restaurants, and even the Chester County seat, residents, college students, and visitors alike flock there whenever possible. This, however, is a double-edged sword.

While the borough is undeniably popular, its lack of adequate pedestrian and cyclist friendly circulation leads to a car-centric culture. Residents clash with college students over what little parking there is while both lack adequate means to traverse the borough on foot or by bike.

This problem is only exacerbated as the weekend rolls around and visitors from Chester County and beyond are added to the mix.

Entirely landlocked and only 1.8 square miles wide, all space within West Chester is precious. Additional parking encroaches on what little there is to work with, severely limiting the ability to develop further parks, recreation, and open space. Similarly the lack of parking and safe, pedestrian and cyclist friendly routes to the borough's parks dissuades visitors.



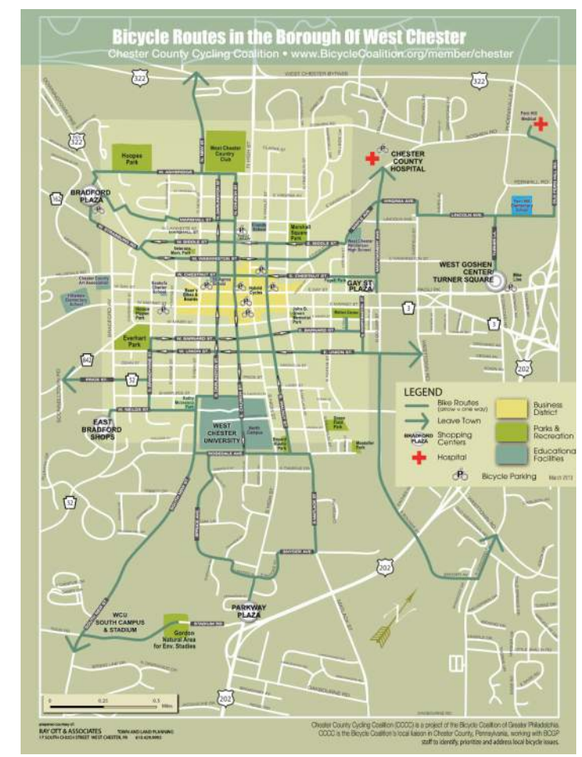
Small But Mighty: West Chester may be small, but its size can also be its strength. As a compact, urban borough it offers a range of recreational opportunities within an accessible distance. Low-speed limits and a slew of one-way streets also make for seemingly easy access, though anyone who has tried to commute via active transportation will tell you otherwise.

As it stands now the car is king in West Chester. Cyclists have reported often feeling pressured via traffic on-road. A lack of bike lanes, markings, or clear bicycle routes leads to motorists behaving erratically while destinations, such as parks and businesses, do not provide bicycle parking.

Luckily West Chester does not need to start from scratch to address this problem. Several studies have already been completed by the Borough and private groups with the aim of supporting cyclists and pedestrians alike.

What We Heard

Bike Friendly West Chester Plan: In 2013 West Chester created a Bike/Pedestrian Friendly West Chester Subcommittee slated to meet quarterly. As part of their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within West Chester Borough they sought to replace cars with "more bikes and pedestrians". As part of this effort they produced three primary documents, including the "Bike Friendly West Chester Plan" with the Chester County Cycling Commission, a map of safe bike routes within the Borough, and a compiled inventory of all bicycle parking within West Chester Borough including existing racks, capacity, and where there should be more parking. Finally the committee identified six streets to act as "Candidate Streets" for bike boulevards, or shared streets where bikers are encouraged to ride "in lane" with drivers. These streets include Biddle and Washington on the north side, Barnard and Union on the south side, and Church and Darlinton on the West side of High Street.



What We Heard

Share the Road Initiative:

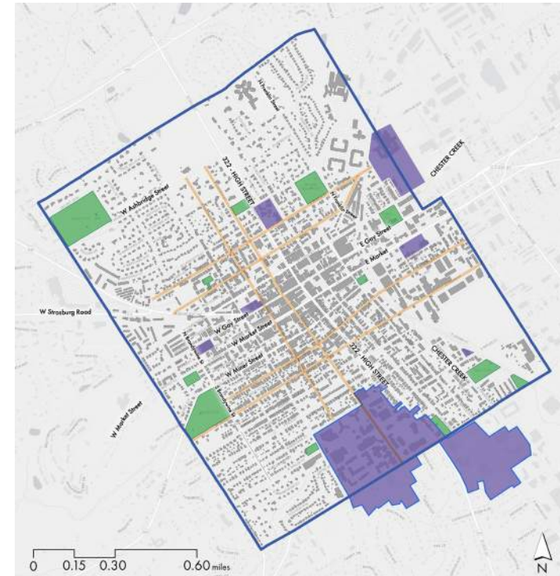
In 2014 the West Chester Borough Leaders United for Emission Reduction partnered with the Chester County Cycling Commission to launch the Share the Road campaign. As part of the campaign a brochure was produced and distributed to motorists and bicyclists alike with tips and laws applicable to both parties. Two events were also held including a Bike to Work Day beginning at 7:30am where residents were invited to escort Mayor Comitta to work from the Mayor's house via bike and the official Recognition Event beginning at 8:30am.

2016 West Chester Borough Comprehensive Plan:

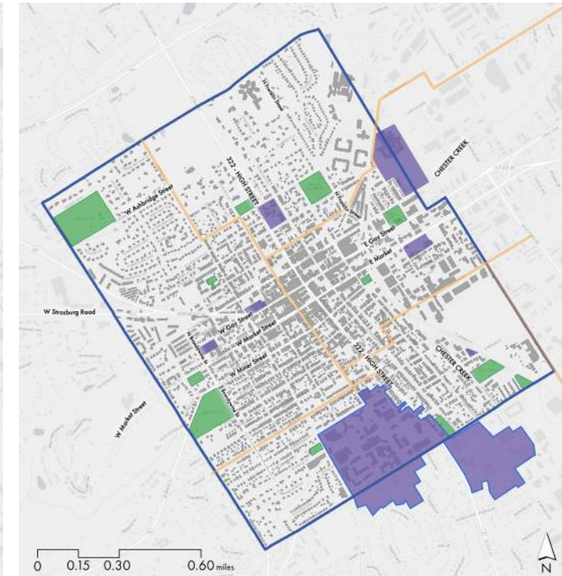
As part of the most recent Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan update West Chester Borough identified several gaps in sidewalks along "high traffic streets" that needed to be filled as well as potential bicycle routes with signage through the borough. These bicycle routes remained largely consistent with previous recommendations from the 2013 Bike Friendly West Chester Plan. Further recommendations were made to put special emphasis on tying into the routes identified in the Central Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan.

Bicycle Focus Group: The consultant team held a Focus Group meeting with local cycling stakeholders ahead of the fourth Study Committee meeting. These stakeholders helped to identify critical, local roads within the borough where they felt comfortable cycling. The group also identified which roads from the 2013 Bike Friendly West Chester Plan where they did not feel safe bicycling or otherwise felt would be overwhelming for new bicycle commuters. The consultant team additionally tasked the stakeholders with identifying a primary north-south route and east-west route for cyclists to move easily, and safely, through the borough Comprehensive Plan update, West Chester Borough identified several gaps in sidewalks along "high traffic streets" that needed to be filled as well as potential bicycle routes with signage through the borough. These bicycle routes remained largely consistent with previous recommendations from the 2013 Bike Friendly West Chester Plan. Further recommendations were made to put special emphasis on tying into the routes identified in the Central Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan.

What We Heard

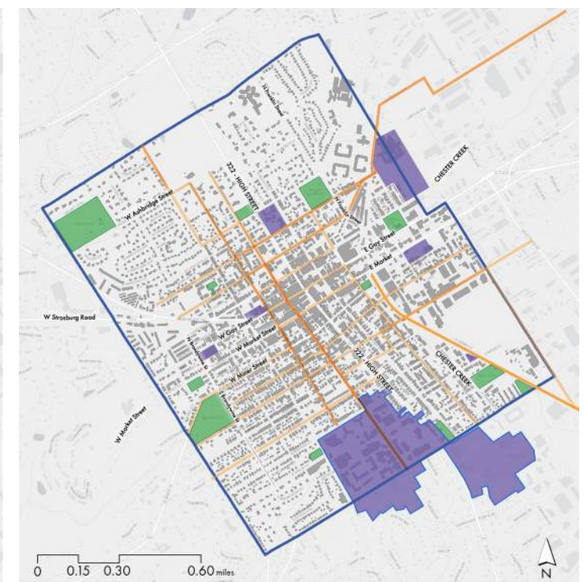


Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee Identified Routes



October Focus Group Recommended Routes

Strava Data - Most Commonly Cycled Streets in the Borough



Composite of all Previous Maps

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- At only 1.8 square miles, West Chester is easy to get around.
- Alleviate parking stress by cutting down on the number of cars on the road.
- Helps West Chester to reach its emissions and health goals.
- 8 to 80 Community: Helps to make the borough more accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

CHALLENGES

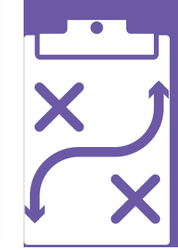
- People feel unsafe riding on road.
- Signage, bicycle parking, and designated shared roads are lacking in the borough.
- Even West Chester Cycling Club drives with their bikes, meet in a parking lot, and then ride outside of the borough.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Turk's Head Trail proposal could provide safe, off-road bicycle commuting opportunity as people acclimate to the practice.
- Past studies, Bicycle and Pedestrian Study Committee, and cycling focus group have all already identified streets as candidates for shared streets.
- Students at West Chester University and residents alike can commute via walking or cycling, reducing the need for parking.

THREATS

- Need to provide resources beyond the physical. Cycling is a change, how do you engage and encourage people?
- Up-front investment.
- General reluctance to commute without a car.



Recommendations

Near Term - Turk's Head Trail:
Even as a cyclist-friendly infrastructure is introduced within and along roadways it often takes time for new cyclists to build the confidence to use it. As such, it is never a bad idea to identify an off-road option that allows new, active commuters to acclimate before hitting the shared road. Within West Chester Borough, the previously proposed Turk's Head Trail offers such an opportunity.

Proposed by a group of private citizens within West Chester Borough, the Turk's Head Trail would be a multi-use, paved trail that runs alongside the historic, currently unused, rail line between West Chester and Thornbury.

The trail head would begin in downtown West Chester at the eastern end of John O. Green Park and offer additional connections to Mosteller Park, Green Field, and West Chester University's northern campus.

The trail would require private funding via grants and inter-municipal collaboration with West Goshen, Westtown, Thornbury (Chester County), and Thornbury (Delaware County). SEPTA would also need to approve as it would be built within their Right-of-Way, though this proposal would not impede their ability to re-activate the train line if they ever chose to as it would run alongside the tracks and not on it.

THE PROBLEMS

HIDDEN GEM
Beautiful, natural stretch of land only used by a tourist train a few times a week.

SCARCE OPEN SPACE
Most parcels are privately owned and space is scarce.

DANGEROUS CONDITIONS
Streets are busy and dangerous for residents to run, bike, or walk in.

DISCONNECTED COMMUNITY
Residences and parks are disconnected with no pedestrian links.

THE SOLUTIONS

BE ACTIVE
Get outside and enjoy a run, walk, or bike ride on a safe and fun trail within walking distance.

RELAX & ENJOY NATURE
Take in the natural beauty the area has to offer.

GO GREEN
Use the trail and leave the car at home.

THE BENEFITS

ECONOMIC
Property value of homes and foot traffic to businesses along the trail will increase.

QUALITY OF LIFE
The trail helps residents reconnect to nature and improve their moods.

HEALTH
Trails encourage exercise and improved health for users.

Information and icons taken from the Turks Head Trail Concept presentation made and presented by Nick Rickards.

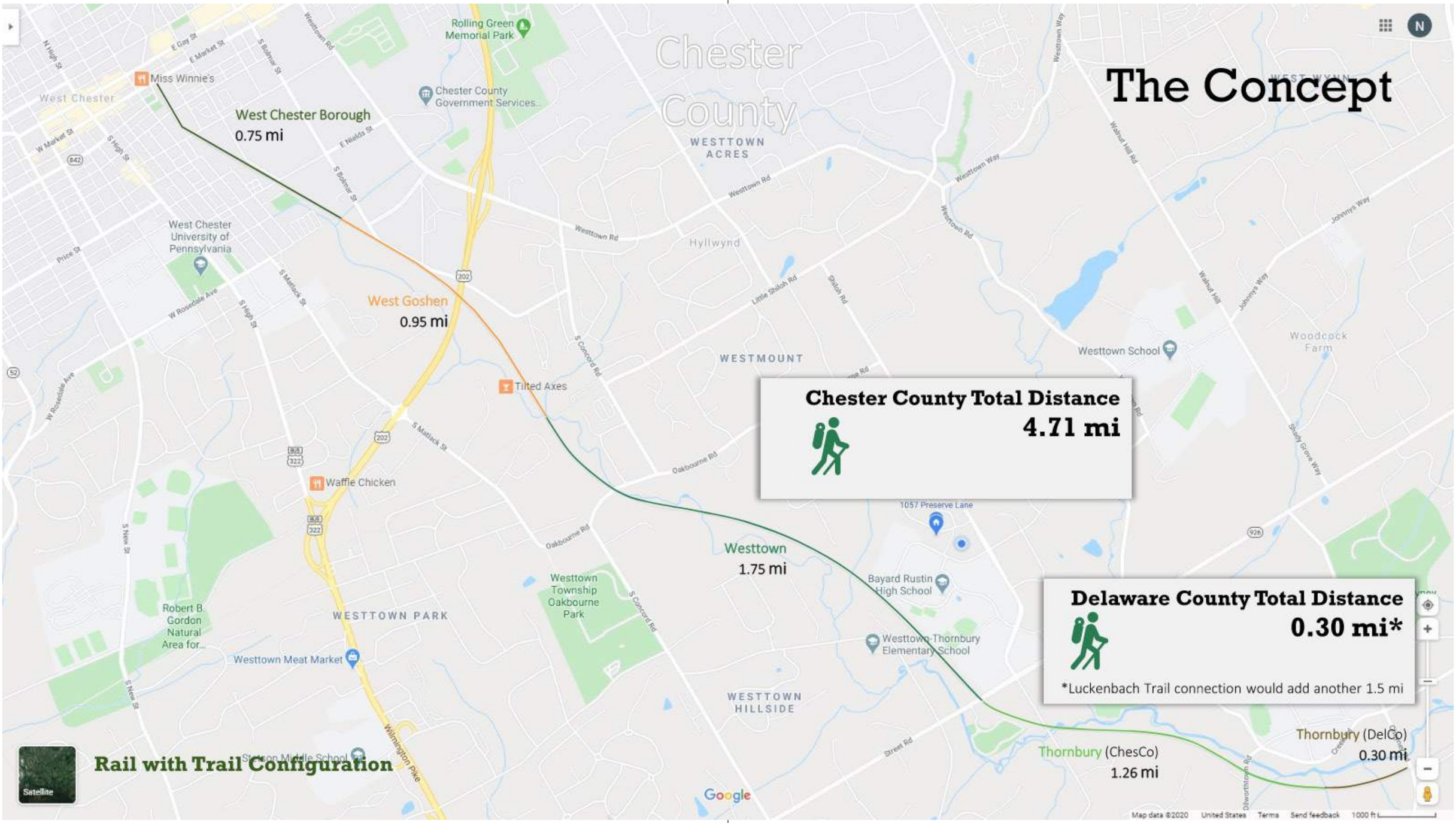


Figure 1: Map of the proposed Turk's Head Trail as presented by Nick Rickards to the Committee to Reestablish Rail Service to West Chester.

Recommendations

Long Term - West Chester as a Bicycle Friendly Community:

In the long-term West Chester should strive to become a Bicycle Friendly Community as defined by the League of American Bicyclists. These recommendations go beyond planning and look at how Bike Friendly Communities have successfully created a biking culture. Their guiding principles are the 5 E's: Equity & Accessibility, Engineering, Education, Encouragement, and Evaluation & Planning. The focus is on continued efforts in the community to strengthen a bicycling culture and build confidence in riders alongside infrastructure improvements such as bike lanes, signage, and trails. This creates a positive feedback loop in which community members have a positive correlation with bicycling and support further accommodations, opening the door for continued improvements and maintenance. Bicycling is seen as a priority and integral part of the community identity rather than an alternative to using a car.

Figure 1: Information on Bicycle Friendly Communities as defined by the League of American Bicyclists. Further information can be found at https://bikeleague.org/bfa/

The 5 BIG for an

E's Bicycle Friendly Community

BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

1. EQUITY

- Create conditions where EVERYONE can participate and prosper
- Accessibility: Accessible to all, regardless of ability

2. ENGINEERING

- Infrastructure must WELCOME and SUPPORT bicycling
- Aim for NETWORKS of well-connected streets, bike lanes, and trails

3. EDUCATION

- Offer a LOT of ways for people to get the skills and confidence to ride
- Involve communities, businesses, and campuses who can offer options

4. ENCOURAGEMENT

- Communities, businesses, and universities play a critical role: encourage and provide incentives to ride
- Produce community bike maps, signage, and bike-based celebrations.

5. EVALUATION

- A dedicated, COMPREHENSIVE bicycle master plan is essential
- Collect Data on how people are using bicycles and infrastructure

How This Big Move Supports Our Vision

EXCELLENCE

Making West Chester an exemplary bicyclist and pedestrian friendly community will continue to solidify its reputation as a gem of Chester County.

EQUITY

When a car isn't required to get around the borough, everyone has equal opportunity to access West Chester's Parks and Recreation opportunities. Anyone, from age 8 to 80, should be able to safely explore as they please.

CONNECTION

When you can bike or walk instead of taking a car it creates more intimate connections with the parks and the borough as a whole. People engage on a personal level instead of whizzing by!

VITALITY

Active Transportation means an active population, both physically and mentally! When passing on a bike or on foot people see, and interact with, their neighbors with proven benefits to their mental and physical health.

STEWARDSHIP

Slowing down means seeing more of the borough on a more personal level! A bicycle friendly community inspires care as residents notice new and exciting parts of West Chester.

COLLABORATION

To complete projects like the Turk's Head Trail or achieving Bicycle Friendly Community status requires collaboration. This opens up lines of communication that can carry over to future projects!

Chapter 6
Active Together

Active Together

Image from West Chester Times - "Turk's Head Music Festival". June 1st, 2022.

Overview: West Chester Borough's recreation system is thriving, thanks to the ingenuity, dedication, and community-centered ethos of a Parks and Recreation Department that has made the most of limited staffing and resources. As the Borough plans for the next decade of parks and recreation investments, it has a unique opportunity to grow and sustain programs that bring people together, support health and wellness, and reflect the full diversity of the community. This chapter lays out a clear vision for expanding access to meaningful recreation opportunities across the Borough.

Why Programs and Services Are Important: Recreation programs and services are essential components of a healthy, connected, and vibrant community. In West Chester Borough, these offerings do more than fill leisure time—they foster social inclusion, support public health, stimulate the local economy, and strengthen community identity. Recreation activities bring together residents of all ages and backgrounds, bridging generational and cultural divides while encouraging lifelong learning and personal growth.

Well-designed programs improve mental and physical health, help reduce crime by positively engaging youth, and offer vital support to families, seniors, and individuals seeking connection. In a walkable, compact community like West Chester, recreation programs activate parks, public spaces, and downtown streets, transforming them into hubs of civic life. From early childhood enrichment to senior wellness, from fitness classes to cultural festivals, recreation services are not a luxury—they are a public good that supports the Borough's goals of inclusivity, livability, and resilience.

What We Heard: Throughout the planning process, residents consistently expressed appreciation for the diversity and energy of West Chester's recreation offerings—especially signature events and health-focused programs like pickleball, yoga, and community festivals. However, community feedback also highlighted critical gaps and opportunities for improvement. Many participants shared concerns that recreation opportunities are not reaching all neighborhoods equitably, particularly youth, families with limited incomes, and residents living outside the town center.

There was strong support for bringing back summer camps and expanding school holiday programs for children and teens. Several respondents voiced a desire for more programming in underutilized parks and at the Melton Center, with some citing this as a necessary step to address past exclusion and ensure future equity. Participants also suggested better promotion of existing programs, more evening and weekend options for working families, and improved access to indoor spaces for year-round use.

This feedback clearly indicates that while West Chester's recreation system is beloved, residents are ready to see it grow—strategically, equitably, and inclusively.

Strategic Priorities: In the public opinion survey, service to children and youth and feeling safe and welcome in parks were the top priorities .To turn ideas into action, West Chester Borough should pursue a phased approach that prioritizes equity, access, and sustainable growth. Recommendations fall into four priority areas.

1. Broaden Access and Inclusion

Programs should reach every neighborhood. The Borough should begin by phasing in events at underutilized parks and partnering with the Melton Community Center to create Borough-wide access to indoor programming. Priority should be placed on serving children, teens, and working families through expanded after-school, school holiday, and summer options.

Program Expansion Priorities

- Hold events in more parks across the Borough
- Integrate the Melton Community Center with the Borough's programming system via a collaborative partnership
- Increase evening and weekend options for working families
- Plan for capacity expansion for high-demand activities (e.g., pickleball, camps)
- Develop a plan to reintroduce youth summer camps and school holiday programs. Address concerns related to youth programs sponsored by the Borough. Position this as a public service and revenue generator with support for disadvantaged residents.

Track What Matters

- Who is participating?
- What neighborhoods are being served?
- Are programs full or waitlisted?
- Where is the program in its lifecycle?
- What is the user satisfaction rate?
- Where are the gaps?

2. Strengthen Operations and Evaluation

The Borough should adopt a centralized program evaluation and tracking system to assess participation trends, identify gaps, and guide resource allocation. Demographic, geographic, and equity-related data will inform continuous improvement and support future grant requests.

3. Increase Staffing and Build Capacity

A phased staffing plan is essential. The Borough should use national benchmarks and workload data to advocate for added staff positions. Partnerships with contracted providers and nonprofit collaborators should be expanded to maintain program quality and reach.

4. Leverage Success for Greater Investment

Signature events demonstrate the Borough's capacity to deliver impact. Use high participation rates, strong volunteerism, and positive community feedback to build the case for increased Borough funding, sponsorships, outside grants, and philanthropic investment.

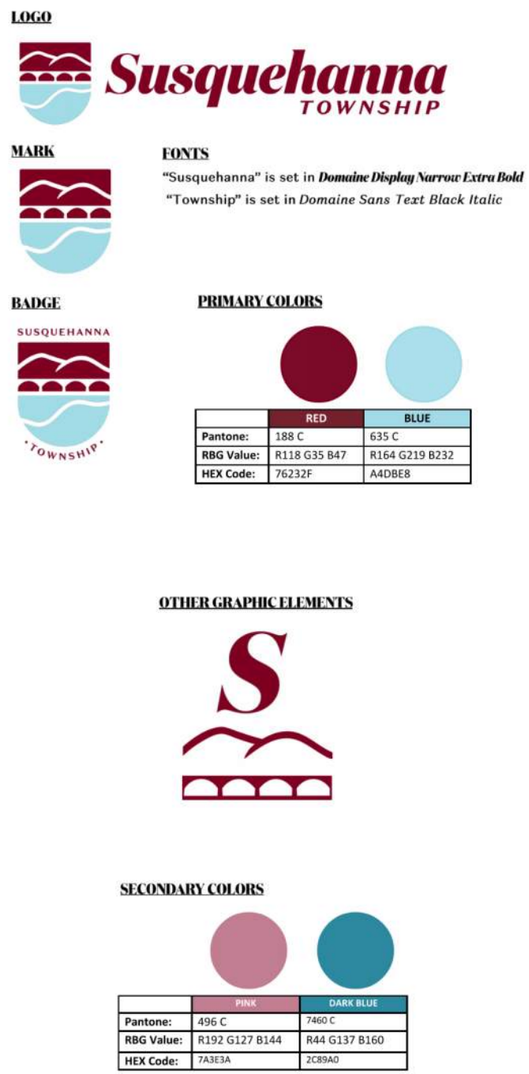
Build a Borough Recreation Brand

- Create a Borough-wide brand and seasonal marketing campaigns to boost program awareness.
- Use print, digital, and social channels
- Highlight inclusive, welcoming imagery
- Promote events in all neighborhoods

Conclusion

The Borough of West Chester has proven what is possible with passion and partnership. The time has come to match that passion with the investment and infrastructure needed to make recreation programs accessible, equitable, and sustainable. By embracing data-driven planning, increasing capacity, and strengthening community relationships, the Borough can ensure that every resident has the opportunity to be active, connected, and thriving—together.

Susquehanna Township Style Guide as provided by Susquehanna Township Staff.



Allentown City Park Design Guidelines by Merje Design.

Chapter 7
Sustaining What We Love

Sustaining What We Love Protecting What Protects Us.

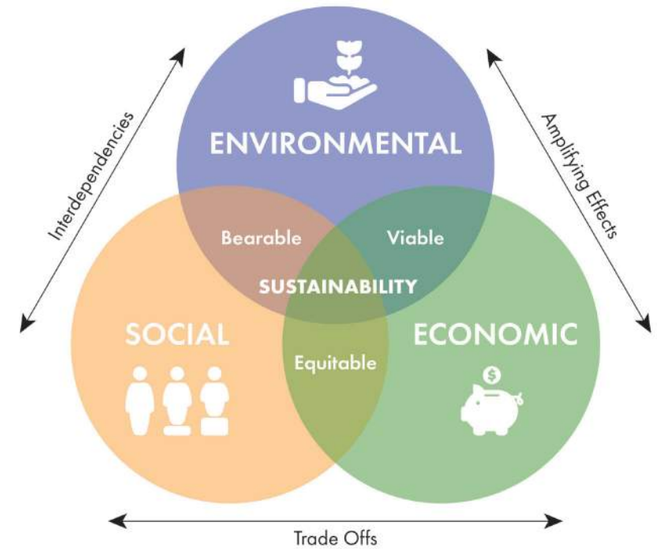
Overview: West Chester's parks, natural areas, and green spaces are oases among a dense urban core. As traffic whizzes by and the borough bustles, they are places to disconnect, relax, and recreate. However, this is not the only role they play.

As climate change intensifies and places additional stress on urban areas such as West Chester, parks, natural areas, and green space become a critical network of green infrastructure that protects the Borough. Parks can serve as cooling centers, stormwater management, or even wildlife habitat, protecting our physical and mental health even when they are seemingly unused.

Our parks, however, need us as much as we need them! Strong maintenance practices help us protect these community treasures just as they protect us. Sustainable practices, meanwhile, lessen the load on maintenance, working with nature to bring costs down via all-natural infrastructure.

Three Dimensions: The three core dimensions to sustainability: Environmental, Economic, and Social. Different but always interconnected, considering them together is essential when developing and implementing sustainability strategies. To be truly sustainable West Chester must carefully balance present-day concerns against the needs of the future. Effective practices are only as strong as their advocates, and people that feel disenfranchised or excluded will not be advocates.

The Three Pillars of Sustainability



Environmental: The pillar people are most familiar with, Environmental Sustainability focuses on protecting and preserving the natural environment through practices such as resource management, pollution reduction, and conservation. West Chester's own Sustainability Advisory Committee generally tackles those issues most tied to Environmental Sustainability within the Borough at large while the Parks and Recreation Department and Friends Groups deal with park-specific issues.

Economic: People are generally concerned about money, and sustainability is no exception! While most people are happy to see more trees planted or a rainwater garden installed, they are often more hesitant about the associated cost. Economic Sustainability highlights how upfront costs are offset by return on investment. Parks, for example, are economic engines, driving local tourism and increasing property values while stormwater maintenance initiatives help to reduce total park and street specific maintenance costs in the long-term.

Social: Sustainability does not work without people! Passionate, dedicated advocates are always required to speak up for their parks and greenspaces. West Chester's local Friends Groups are an excellent example of Social Sustainability as their hard work and determination has helped their parks to thrive! Likewise those parks that lack Friends Groups often do because they are perceived as underfunded or under-cared for. If people feel disenfranchised or removed from the process they will not step up as stewards, volunteering their time, effort, and resources to help keep the Borough's parks world class.

Why It Matters: West Chester is fired up about its parks! In an active, engaged community like this approaching sustainability as a one-dimensional, environmental issue would not encompass all the excellent, socially and economically sustainable practices the Borough, and its residents at-large, are already exploring.

As such, and with respects to their pre-existing efforts, sustainability is explored here as a multi-faceted system with recommendations and actionable steps aimed at supporting all the great work they already do.

What We Heard

Friends Groups Focus Group: Maintenance was easily the Friends Groups' largest concern. As it stands now, they feel that it is unclear what is expected of them maintenance wise and what they can expect the borough to handle. They expressed trust in the current Parks and Recreation administration, highlighting that they felt they were easy to approach and work with, but were frustrated with what they saw as budgetary and administrative restraints. There was a suggestion that a dedicated Parks and Recreation maintenance manager would be beneficial as it would off-load some of the responsibility from the Parks and Recreation Director and create a dedicated role to help with maintenance concerns.

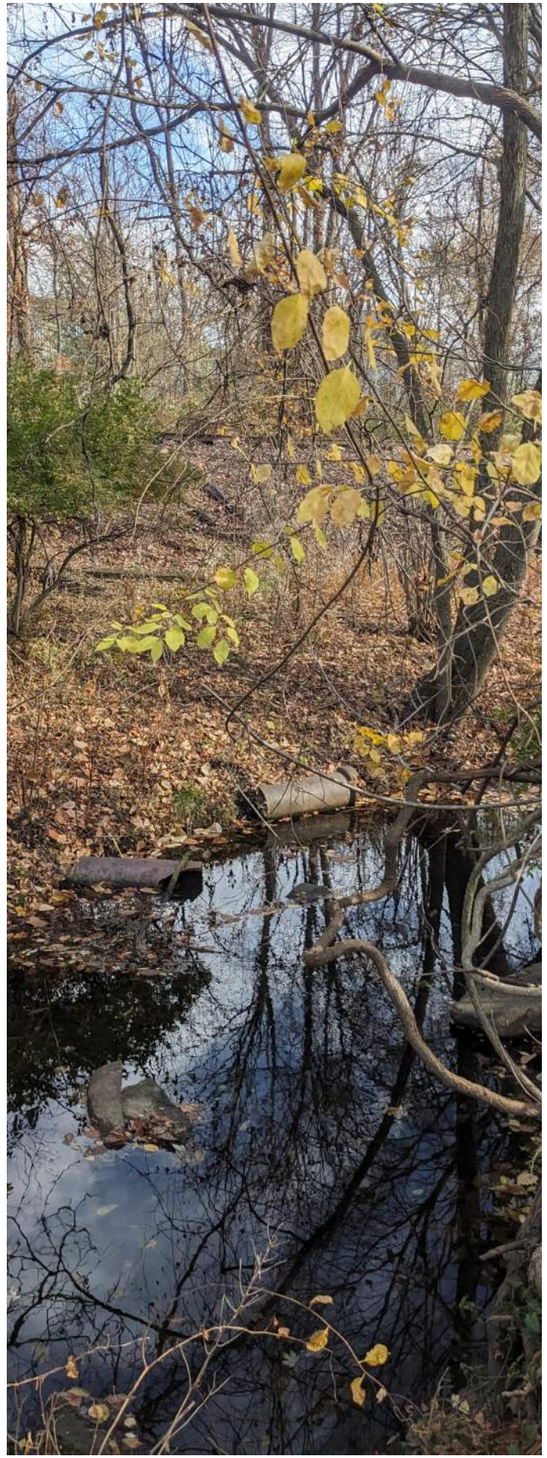
Similarly, they felt that they understood their parks on a more intimate level that was often ignored. The example was brought up where the borough hired the cheapest possible tree service to attend to specimen trees that were hundreds of years old and needed specialized care, despite the protest of the local Friends Group. This resulted in the Group spending money set aside for another project to ensure the critical element of their park received proper care. This highlights another issue as the borough is currently drastically underspending on parks as a whole and needs to be realistic about maintenance costs per park, especially those that regularly bring in visitors from outside the borough.

Study Committee Meetings: A member of the Study Committee provided the Consultant Team with the Turk's Head Trail plan initially, stating support for the initiative as someone who wished to bicycle within the Borough. Other members of the Study Committee, expressed support for active transportation initiatives within the Borough as a way to encourage more foot traffic and regular visitors within the Central Business District as well as cut back on emissions within the Borough. There was hesitancy about bicycle commuting from a safety perspective.

Concerns around overall park maintenance were expressed, as many felt that those parks without extremely active Friends Groups often fell by-the-wayside.

Bicycle Focus Group: While all adamant bicyclists, the Focus Group suggested that commuting via bike within the Borough was "taking your life into your own hands." They expressed that they often drove to a surface lot to meet for their group rides, leaving their cars there, before cycling outside the Borough. Many expressed that they, as experienced riders, would not feel comfortable bicycle commuting in West Chester as of now and didn't believe that non-experienced riders would be on-board either, despite the environmental, health, and economic benefits.

What We Heard



Public Meeting: In an exercise asking residents to suggest, and show interest in, different aspects of their parks, maintenance was overwhelmingly popular. When asked as to why nearly all present reported feeling that not enough resources were dedicated to maintaining and supporting the Borough's parks to a high standard. Wildlife habitat, trees, "more trees", "diverse, bird-filled trees", and "native plants and flowers" all garnered significant support as well, with attendees saying they felt as if West Chester would benefit from a cooler park and street experience.

Borough Staff Key Person Interviews: Borough staff was primarily concerned with extending open space wherever possible beyond the parks and into the urban core. Stormwater curb bump-outs were mentioned as a possibility along streets as a way to compliment street tree initiatives, slow vehicular traffic, reduce total paved areas, manage stormwater, and provide pockets of habitat for Borough wildlife such as pollinators and song birds.

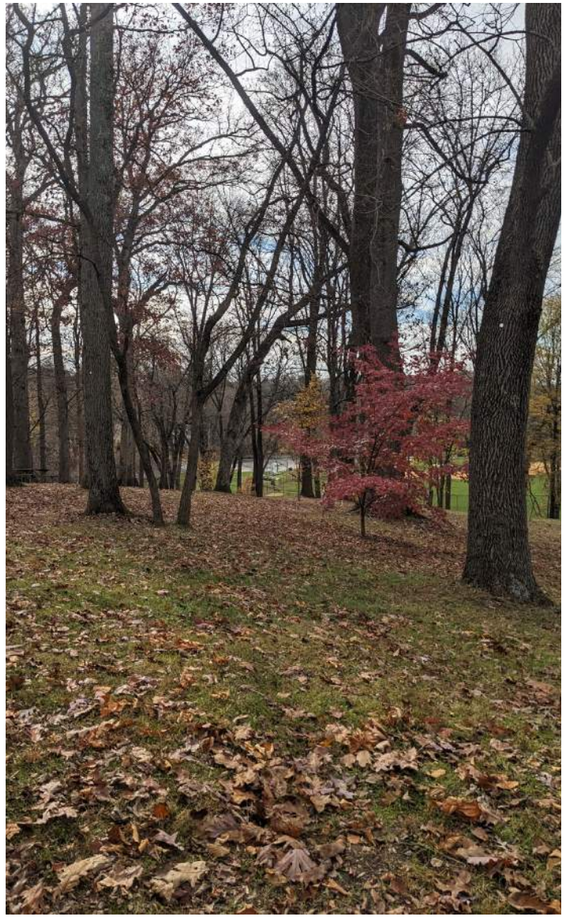
As mentioned in Chapter 4 - Parks for All, there were concerns around flooding along Goose Creek and the cost to the Borough when it occurred. Targeted stormwater interventions were suggested. Similarly, the Turk's Head Trail, mentioned in Chapter 5 - Go West Chester, was suggested as a way to cut vehicular emissions through a safe trail that would encourage the public to active transportation initiatives.

Borough Council Person Interviews: Council Members were concerned with the investment in park maintenance, expressing that they felt the cost had been mostly off-loaded to the Friends Groups. A common sentiment that was that the Borough had sat on its parks for an extended time and now was the time to exploring sustained, on-going improvements vs. "big-splashes". All mentioned support for trails and alternative transit routes throughout the Borough, with one noting that the "street needs to be re-delineated" to include bicyclists, plantings, and a wider range of utilities. The rails-with-trails via the Turk's Head Trail was mentioned as "more realistic" than waiting "another 10-years to maybe get rail connection". It was noted that effort to "maintain and care for these spaces so it's seen as something worth valuing," was more important than "just beautifying" any of them.

2018 Comprehensive & Urban Center Revitalization Plan: Environmental Sustainability was identified as the second Focus Area in the 2018 Comprehensive & Urban Center Revitalization Plan. Stated goals included protecting natural features and ecosystems, managing flood-prone areas, managing stormwater and water quality, and managing, and growing, the urban forest within the Borough. Special emphasis was given to the Borough residents whose initiative spurred West Chester to take action on sustainability. Recommendations focus on resident, business, and institution outreach, creating community-wide programs to encourage the adoption of renewable energy production, encouraging active transportation options, and continuing West Chester's tradition as a walkable, compact Borough.

2024 Chester County Interactive Tree Map: Published in 2024, the Chester County Interactive Tree Canopy Map allows users to view urban canopy coverage within Chester County municipalities. Information is provided on tree canopy acreage in a municipality, the total municipal acreage, and the percentage of tree canopy cover within the municipality. The stated tree canopy goal is dependent on the surrounding land uses in the area, as they can impact the realities of vegetative success, but a general, overall goal is to have at least 40% total canopy coverage within any municipality. West Chester currently has only 31.7% tree canopy coverage with a low goal of 30% and a high goal of 50%.

West Chester Borough Tree Commission and Tree Planting Program: The West Chester Tree Commission is an officially recognized committee of the Borough government. Their goal is to provide information to residents on proper tree care within the borough as well as fulfilling requests for new street trees and tree condemnations, where necessary. To that the end they have established a website, along with public works, where residents can find relevant information on what the commission does, the economic and health benefits of urban forestry, forms used to apply for new street trees, and additional information on the proper care and maintenance of urban trees. An interactive map allows visitors to view the borough's street tree coverage. The commission has a stated goal of planting two new trees for any one tree they must condemn.



Sustainability Advisory Committee: The Sustainability Advisory Committee was founded in 2015 as a medium for inter-borough departmental collaboration. It is an ad hoc committee and members are appointed by borough council members and serve two-year terms. Their initiatives include active programs such as the Adopt-a-Rain-Garden program and information campaigns surrounding topics such as single-use plastics and recycling. The Committee has advised on additional regulations such as ticketing vehicles parked at, but not utilizing, electric vehicle charging stations and the "Ready for 100" clean energy goals the borough adopted in 2017. They championed the 2024 ordinance requiring any new construction to include infrastructure to support electric vehicle charging as well.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- Reduce emissions in West Chester making the air healthier, safer, and cleaner to breathe.
- More greenspaces and less emissions means a cooler, and more comfortable, West Chester.
- Property values increase as green space does.
- Green infrastructure and stormwater infrastructure can reduce overall maintenance costs.
- Social sustainability improves inter-Borough relationships, lending itself to other, unrelated projects.

CHALLENGES

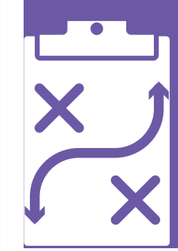
- Installation and improvement of green infrastructure and stormwater infrastructure comes with an up-front cost.
- Increased maintenance comes with an upfront cost.
- Stormwater infrastructure requires its own maintenance including keeping it from debris.
- It must be worked out between the Friends Groups and the Borough who is responsible for what maintenance.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Foster community relations through volunteer days and community involvement.
- Off-set installation costs through the comparatively low maintenance costs associated with green infrastructure after installation.
- Make West Chester a healthier, happier community as the benefits of being a sustainable community kick in.
- Deal with more frequent, heavier rainfall events and urban heat island effect through green infrastructure that simultaneously beautifies the borough.

THREATS

- There is existing hesitancy around maintenance in the parks. The Borough needs to prove it is dedicated to continued maintenance.
- People may be hesitant around the initial cost and additional maintenance costs.
- Too many residents only see the parks in their immediate vicinity, leading to uneven expectations and care – need to create a system of stewardship that extends to the borough as a whole.



Recommendations

Maintenance: For West Chester, sustainable practices start at maintenance. There is frustration among Friends Groups as they feel they bare the brunt of the burden when it comes to maintenance costs. Those living around parks without Friends Groups similarly feel that there is not enough money going into maintenance and general upkeep, leaving them feeling disenfranchised and disinterested in stewarding their parks.

Environmentally, economically, and socially this is not sustainable. Friends Groups play a critical role in the Borough, advocating for and supporting their parks, but are ultimately limited by the funds they raise. A park should never lack the proper care because it lacks private funds and, as such, the Borough should develop a concise maintenance plan and hire staff as-needed to execute it.

Community Days: Centrally organized community days help to ensure all parks in the Borough get the love they deserve while exposing residents to all West Chester has to offer! Clean-up days can address small-scale issues such as weeding bed or cleaning litter while encouraging residents to build camaraderie with their neighbors.

This is sustainability as a core-tenet of being a West Chester resident, ingraining it into the wider social fabric. Forming personal connections with parks alongside your neighbors feeds into a positive feedback loop, ensuring they are seen as important places to care for as well as enjoy!

Similarly these events, as with all park programming, carry an economic dimension. Those already on-the-town and socializing are likely to keep the good times rolling and patronize local restaurants, bars, and cafes alongside their neighbors and new friends. The Cycling Focus Group confirmed as much, providing a list of their favorite spots to hang-out after a group ride!

Trees for Parks: Nearby cities, such as Philadelphia, have programs dedicated to planting more trees in parks. West Chester should explore a similar option as it helps to beautify parks, provides habitat, cool the surrounding area, and mitigate stormwater. Additionally more trees support previous, stated Borough goals to further bolster the urban forest.

Stormwater and Habitat Bump-Outs: Proposed by a Borough employee as a means to support comprehensive plan goals such as Managing Flood-Prone Areas and Managing Stormwater and Water Quality, stormwater bump-outs additionally help slow traffic and beautify and cool the borough. In turn residents are more likely to ditch the car and choose the bike! Finally, more stormwater areas means less stress on the parks when it comes to handling waste-water, reducing the total, overall cost of maintenance within each.

How This Big Move Supports Our Vision

EXCELLENCE

Parks are only as good as they are maintained. Through continued, sustainable practices each park's lifetime will be extended ten-times over for people to enjoy for generations.

EQUITY

Sustainable practices are equitable practices. Sustainability lessens the load on active maintenance, ensuring that passive practices help to keep parks clean, functional, and beautiful.

CONNECTION

Events like Community Clean-up Days offer residents new opportunities to connect with parks, nature, and each other like never before.

VITALITY

Green infrastructure helps to improve our physical, mental, and emotional health through providing us beautiful spaces to recreate or just be present.

STEWARDSHIP

Sustainable maintenance practices encourage the community to become hands-on champions of their parks.

COLLABORATION

The Friends Groups are an invaluable resource in the borough's fight for sustainability. Through close, well-defined partnerships both can help to keep parks functional and beautiful.

Chapter 8
A Borough Ready for the Future

A Borough Ready for the Future Preparing for What's Next.

Overview: West Chester Borough stands at a pivotal moment in its commitment to parks and recreation. The community has voiced a clear desire for safe, welcoming, and high-quality public spaces, along with expanded recreational opportunities that meet the needs of residents of all ages and backgrounds. To achieve this vision, the Borough must invest not only in physical improvements, but in the capacity, systems, and leadership required to manage a growing and increasingly complex parks and recreation system.

This section of the PROS Plan outlines a strategic direction for strengthening the Borough's organizational capacity and management framework. It builds on decades of local progress, recent changes in recreation staffing and programming, community input, and the detailed analysis presented in Part 2: Plan Foundation. Together, these elements form a roadmap for ensuring that West Chester Borough is well-positioned to deliver excellent parks and recreation services now and into the future.

Why Organization and Management Are Important: A parks and recreation system is only as strong as the organization that supports it. No matter how beautiful the parks or how popular the programs, without sound management practices, well-defined roles, and sufficient staffing, the system cannot operate efficiently or equitably. Organization and management are what transform vision into action, ensure public accountability, and create the conditions for sustained community benefit.

In West Chester Borough, where staff capacity is limited and public demand is high, thoughtful coordination becomes especially vital. The integration of Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Sustainability, and Administration requires not just cooperation, but a shared commitment to clear communication, strategic planning, and effective resource management. Robust organizational systems allow departments to respond proactively to emerging needs, balance workloads, and make data-informed decisions.

Equally important is the Borough's ability to engage and guide community partners—such as Friends Groups, advisory committees, and nonprofit collaborators. When these relationships are supported by strong organizational frameworks and equitable oversight, they can greatly amplify the Borough's impact. Without it, however, the system risks becoming fragmented, reactive, and inequitable. Effective management is not an operational detail—it is the critical infrastructure that sustains a fair, transparent, and resilient parks and recreation system.

What We Heard

Throughout the PROS Plan process, residents, stakeholders, and staff shared thoughtful and consistent feedback about how well West Chester Borough's parks and recreation system is managed—and where improvements are needed. Many residents expressed gratitude for the commitment of Borough staff and volunteers, especially given the limited resources available. There was widespread respect for the high-impact work accomplished by such a small parks and recreation department.

Several recurring concerns also emerged. Community members noted that not all parks receive the same level of investment, attention, or programming—often due to disparities in advocacy or Friends Group involvement. Participants called for a more balanced and transparent system for evaluating and approving park projects. Others expressed frustration that decisions sometimes seem to bypass staff expertise or public input, creating confusion or perceived inequities.

Stakeholders also voiced a strong desire for better coordination among departments, clearer communication about roles and responsibilities, and more inclusive engagement practices. Suggestions included increasing staff capacity, formalizing partnerships with the Melton Community Center, and creating structured opportunities for collaborative planning.

In short, the community sees great value in West Chester's parks and recreation system—but also recognizes that organizational improvements are essential to ensure fairness, sustainability, and long-term success. Residents are ready to support a more strategic, inclusive, and coordinated approach to managing this vital public service.

Where We Are Now: West Chester Borough has a collaborative structure that supports shared responsibility for parks and recreation. The Recreation Department leads programming, community events, facility use coordination, and strategic planning. The Public Works Department maintains park assets and infrastructure. The Borough Administration manages budgeting, compliance, and interdepartmental alignment. The Sustainability Department integrates environmental responsibility and equity into Borough operations. In addition, several advisory commissions and active Friends Groups provide community leadership, advocacy, and volunteer support.

Organizational Readiness

Despite this strong foundation, the system is under-resourced. With only two full-time staff in the Recreation Department and no staff dedicated solely to park maintenance as functioning within Public Works, the Borough falls well below national benchmarks for municipalities of similar size. Project proposals from Friends Groups and stakeholders often go directly to Council without consistent staff evaluation, and smaller parks without advocacy groups receive less attention. Maintenance roles and responsibilities are shared, but not clearly delineated or tracked. There is no formal annual work plan or performance dashboard to guide priorities and track progress.

Organizational Vision

Where We Need to Be: To meet community expectations and realize the recommendations in this PROS Plan, West Chester Borough needs to:

- Expand staff capacity and clarify departmental roles.
- Implement a clear, collaborative project evaluation and decision-making process.
- Broaden and formalize community engagement across all neighborhoods.
- Leverage data and technology for transparency, maintenance, and accountability.
- Foster a system-wide culture of coordination, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Recommended Organizational Structure:

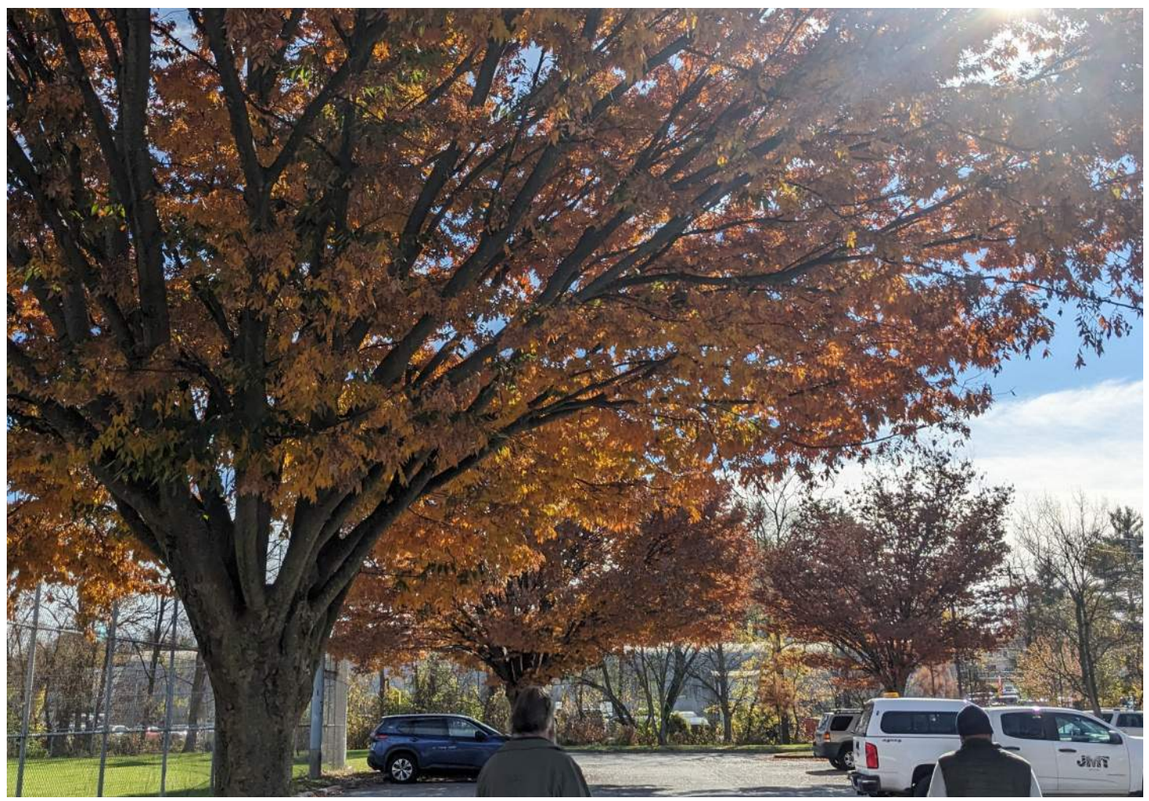
To support this vision, the following organizational refinements are recommended:

Recreation Department

- Director of Parks and Recreation (existing).
- Two full-time Program Coordinators (existing).
- Recreation Administrative Assistant (new).
- Community Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator (new).

Public Works Department

- Designate at least two FTEs for park-specific maintenance that includes natural resource management as well as traditional park maintenance tasks associated with active recreation facilities.
- Assign a Park Maintenance Crew Leader (new) to coordinate with Recreation and Sustainability.



Shared Support Roles

- GIS/Data and Asset Manager (shared with Sustainability or Planning)
- Grant and Capital Project Coordinator (shared with Borough Administration and the Sustainability Director now charged with grant responsibilities)

Recommendations

1.Establish and Adopt an Annual Parks and Recreation Work Program

- Develop annually with staff and stakeholder input .
- Align with PROS Plan, capital priorities, and community needs.
- Present to Council for endorsement prior to budget season.

2. Convene a Parks and Recreation Stakeholder Summit

- Host each late winter/early spring prior to budget development.
- Include Borough Council, advisory committees, Friends Groups, Public Works, Melton Center, and community partners.
- Identify shared priorities and generate input for the annual work program.

3. Expand Staffing and Clarify Roles

What We Heard

- Phase in new positions recommended above.
- Clearly define responsibilities for park programming, maintenance, and planning.
- Train Public Works staff in park-specific maintenance and natural resource care.

4. Establish and Implement a Project Review and Evaluation Framework

- Adopt standardized criteria for evaluating capital and Friends Group proposals. Refer to Table 1. Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Project Selection Criteria for an example.
- Require coordination across departments and advisory review before reaching Council.
- Build transparency and ensure equitable resource distribution.

5. Strengthen Community Engagement and Volunteerism

- Develop a Borough-wide Friends Network for collaboration and shared training.
- Support Friends Groups with tools, outreach, and legacy planning.
- Expand outreach to neighborhoods and underserved communities.
- Create an annual appreciation program for all community-based organizations. Include ongoing appreciation for the work delivered by community-based organizations such as Friends Groups.

6. Modernize Technology and Data Management

- Invest in software and ongoing training and technical support for program registration, maintenance tracking, and community feedback.
- Use GIS to monitor park conditions, accessibility, and service gaps.
- Create public-facing dashboards for transparency and accountability.

7. Implement a Capital Planning and Prioritization System

- Use PROS Plan criteria to rank projects annually.
- Link capital investments to the work plan and budget cycle.
- Include trail connectivity, underserved parks, and resiliency as prioritization factors.

Table 1. Proposed Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Project Selection Criteria

Criteria	Description	Score (0-5)	Weight (1-3)	Weighted Score
Alignment with PROS Plan Goals	Advances at least one core goal of the PROS Plan (access, equity, sustainability, inclusion, etc.)			
Community Need and Demand	Responds to documented need from surveys, engagement, or data (e.g., underserved group/area)			
Equity and Inclusion	Benefits underrepresented populations; includes ADA or inclusive features			
Geographic Distribution	Fills a gap in the park system; activates underutilized parks or underserved neighborhoods			
Partnership Potential	Leverages partners for funding, programming, or implementation			
Feasibility and Readiness	Is implementable within current budget, staffing, and timeline constraints			
Funding	Brings external funding or is in WCB CIP			
Project Sustainability	Includes a viable plan for long-term maintenance and stewardship			
Environmental Benefit and Resilience	Supports Borough sustainability goals or improves climate/environmental resilience			
Public Safety and Comfort	Improves lighting, circulation, accessibility, or user safety			
Potential for High Impact	Serves multiple user groups; enhances visibility or community identity			
Bonus				
Creativity & Innovation	Introduces creative solutions, pilot ideas, or scalable concepts			
Volunteer or in-Kind Commitment	Proposal includes confirmed volunteer hours or in-kind resources			
Time-Sensitive Opportunity	Leverages a rare funding or implementation window			
TOTAL				

Conclusion

Building the Future Today: West Chester Borough's future success depends on its ability to manage its park and recreation system with the same care and foresight that the community has shown in shaping this plan. With modest but strategic organizational investments, enhanced alignment across departments, and a renewed commitment to equity and accountability, the Borough can build a parks and recreation system that delivers on the promise of excellence—for every resident, in every neighborhood, every day.

Chapter 9
Investing in Our Community

Investing in Our Community

Overview: West Chester Borough's parks and recreation system is a source of pride, connection, and well-being—but it is also under pressure. With limited resources, the Recreation Department has delivered high-impact programs, enhanced community events, and initiated park improvements, often supported by grants and volunteer-driven fundraising. These accomplishments have deepened residents' appreciation and trust.

As community expectations evolve, infrastructure ages, and demand increases, the parks and recreation system is being asked to do more than ever before. At the same time, new development and redevelopment are bringing an influx of residents, revenue, and opportunities. Community members are calling for safe, well-maintained parks in every neighborhood, more year-round programming, and equitable access to facilities and services throughout the Borough.

To meet these expectations and prepare for the future, West Chester needs a proactive, transparent, and sustainable approach to parks and recreation financing. This chapter outlines a series of strategies designed to build fiscal resilience, strengthen partnerships, and ensure every dollar spent enhances community life.

Why Is This Important: Parks and recreation services are not luxuries—they are core components of a healthy, connected, and vibrant community. They enhance public health, provide safe places for play and gathering, contribute to environmental sustainability, and attract businesses and residents alike.

But these benefits depend on investment. Without stable, equitable funding, even the most creative plans cannot be implemented or sustained. In West Chester, the per capita operating investment in parks and recreation is below state and national benchmarks. Many capital needs remain unmet, and park maintenance is underfunded, particularly when labor costs borne by Public Works are not included.

Funding reflects community values. Transparent pricing, coordinated fundraising, and inclusive budget processes signal a shared commitment to fairness and accountability. A strong financial framework allows the Borough to:

- Expand access to quality recreation opportunities across all neighborhoods
- Maintain and upgrade parks equitably
- Support innovation and high standards in program delivery
- Leverage outside funding and community contributions effectively
- Build public confidence that parks and recreation are a wise investment

What We Heard

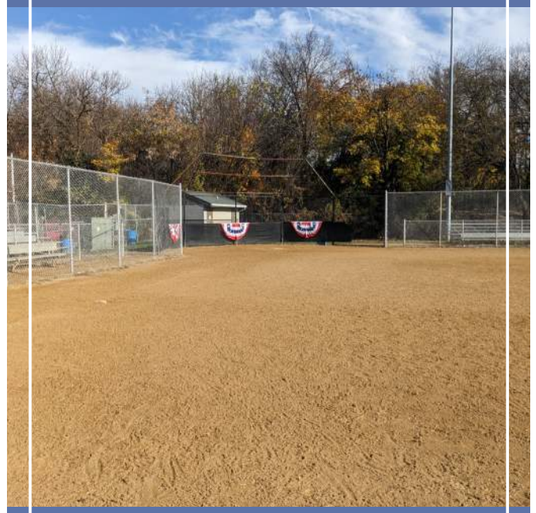
Throughout the PROS Plan process, community members expressed strong support for the Borough's Recreation Department. Residents frequently remarked on the high quality of events and programs, and many were surprised at how much the Department accomplishes with such limited funding.

At the same time, there was a clear and consistent call for greater investment. Residents want:

- **More year-round programming**, especially for children, teens, and families
- **Improved maintenance** in parks and public spaces
- **More equitable distribution of funding and attention** across all neighborhoods
- **Transparency** about how and why decisions are made

Supporting Parks and Recreation

In response to the question of willingness to financially support parks and recreation 95% of the survey respondents indicated that they would be willing to support additional funding ranging from $10-15 more per household to program fees, donations, and volunteering.



West Chester's parks and recreation system generates 36% of its budget from non-tax sources—well above national benchmarks.

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of better coordination with Friends Groups and called for Borough support to strengthen their efforts. Suggestions included the creation of a **centralized parks foundation** or donor fund and the adoption of a **formal pricing policy** to ensure fees are fair, consistent, and aligned with public benefit.

Residents widely supported strategies to diversify funding sources—including grants, sponsorships, and recreation fees from new development—but want reassurance that these funds will be used equitably and strategically.

Recommendations

To ensure the long-term financial strength and equity of West Chester's parks and recreation system, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Develop a Five-Year Financial Strategy

Create a long-term financial plan for parks and recreation that:

- Projects revenues and expenses for both operations and capital improvements
- Identifies new sources of funding, including sponsorships, grants, and philanthropy
- Includes cost estimates for long-term maintenance and staffing
- Establishes benchmarks and goals for equity and access across the system

2. Implement the Formal Pricing Policy

Implement a transparent, consistent, and equity-based pricing model that:

- Revise if necessary and adjust it annually.
- Sets cost recovery targets by program type
- Ensures public benefit programs (e.g., community events) remain subsidized
- Establishes discounts or scholarships for those with financial need
- Reviews and adjusts fees annually, with clear communication to users

3. Create and Prioritize a Capital Improvement Program

Develop a five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) based on:

- Clear project prioritization criteria: safety, accessibility, equity, and readiness
- Anticipated developer contributions and external funding opportunities

> At $25.47 per resident, Borough investment in parks falls short of the state ($50) and national medians ($49.67).

- Annual updates to reflect changing needs and funding availability

4. Strengthen Partnerships with Friends Groups

Coordinate and support volunteer Friends Groups through:

- A "Council of Friends Groups" for communication and collaboration
- Standardized review processes for project proposals
- Shared tools for fundraising, grant applications, and technical assistance
- Public recognition and volunteer appreciation events

5. Reconstitute the Borough-Wide Parks Friends Group as a Council

As recommended in the PROS Plan organizational section, reframe this group as a coordinating hub that:

- Serves as a fiscal home for major donations and legacy gifts as part of the Park Friends Alliance
- Supports mini-grants for small neighborhood park projects
- Runs campaigns for system-wide improvements
- Builds public trust and attracts philanthropic support

> Parks and recreation receives just 2.1% of the Borough's operating budget. DCNR recommends 5%.

6. Diversify and Expand Revenue Streams

Enhance non-tax revenue by exploring:

- Expanded sponsorship and naming opportunities
- Concessions, vendor partnerships, and facility rentals
- Tiered cost recovery for commercial or revenue-generating events
- Pricing adjustments tied to market demand and community benefit

7. Pursue Grants and Matching Funds Strategically

Maximize external funding through:

- Ongoing grant readiness (e.g., shovel-ready designs, data tracking)
- Grant bundling or phasing to meet funding thresholds
- Collaboration with Friends Groups and nonprofits on smaller-scale grants
- Proactive engagement with DCNR, county, and philanthropic funders

8. Fully Implement the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland Ordinance

Strengthen enforcement and strategic use of the ordinance by:

- Ensuring all eligible developments contribute land or pay fees-in-lieu
- Aligning collected fees with identified park needs in the same service area
- Creating clear accounting and public reporting mechanisms
- Reviewing and updating the fee schedule regularly to reflect real costs

This tool ensures that development pays its fair share to meet recreation demand and supports park improvements where growth occurs.

9. Consider a ¼ of 1% Earned Income Tax for Open Space and Recreation

Explore placing a referendum on the ballot to dedicate a ¼% EIT to support:

- Trail development and connectivity
- Recreation facility construction and upgrades
- Long-term maintenance and restoration of parks
- Open space acquisition or protection

This voter-approved funding tool is allowed under Pennsylvania's Open Space Preservation Act and has been successfully implemented in other municipalities. It provides a stable, long-term revenue stream to meet growing recreation and environmental needs.

10. Measure Progress and Communicate Impact

Use benchmarking, data, and storytelling to:

- Track and report progress toward funding and access goals
- Justify resource requests and CIP priorities
- Build public awareness of financial needs and successes
- Foster continued community and Council support

A Call to Action: The residents of West Chester have made their priorities clear: they want a parks and recreation system that is equitable, well-maintained, and responsive to a growing and diverse community. They value the programs, events, and green spaces that bring people together and improve daily life.

With thoughtful financial planning, inclusive policies, and strong partnerships—including modernized ordinances and innovative revenue tools—the Borough can deliver on that vision. Now is the time to invest—not only in parks and programs, but in the quality of life that defines West Chester as a great place to live, work, and play.

Chapter 10
Implementation

Implementation Turning Vision Into Action

Overview: This **PROS Plan** presents a bold vision for West Chester Borough's future—where parks are welcoming to all, where walking and biking connect neighborhoods and downtown, and where programs, facilities, and green spaces support a vibrant and healthy community. Now the challenge is clear: make it happen.

Implementation requires more than a list of projects. It demands leadership, partnerships, funding, and a commitment to sustained action. This chapter outlines the tools, strategies, and steps West Chester Borough can use to translate the Six Big Moves into real and measurable progress.

Our Foundation: Values, Vision, and Mission: At the heart of West Chester's PROS Plan is a belief in the power of public spaces to shape daily life, strengthen communities, and reflect shared values. This plan is not just about parks—it's about people, place, and purpose.

West Chester is a borough with deep roots and bold aspirations. Its compact scale, walkable neighborhoods, and vibrant civic life offer a strong foundation for a park and recreation system that is inclusive, connected, and forward-looking. As we plan for the future, we begin with a clear understanding of why our parks matter and what they can help us achieve.

The following values, vision, and mission statements serve as a compass for all planning, decision-making, and investment. They define what we stand for, where we're headed, and how we will work together to get there. They guide not only this plan, but the day-to-day operations, programs, partnerships, and policies that will shape the future of parks and recreation in West Chester.

These foundational statements ensure that every action taken—whether it's planting a tree, designing a park improvement, or launching a community event—reflects the character, priorities, and spirit of West Chester Borough.

West Chester Borough Values for Parks and Recreation Planning and Management

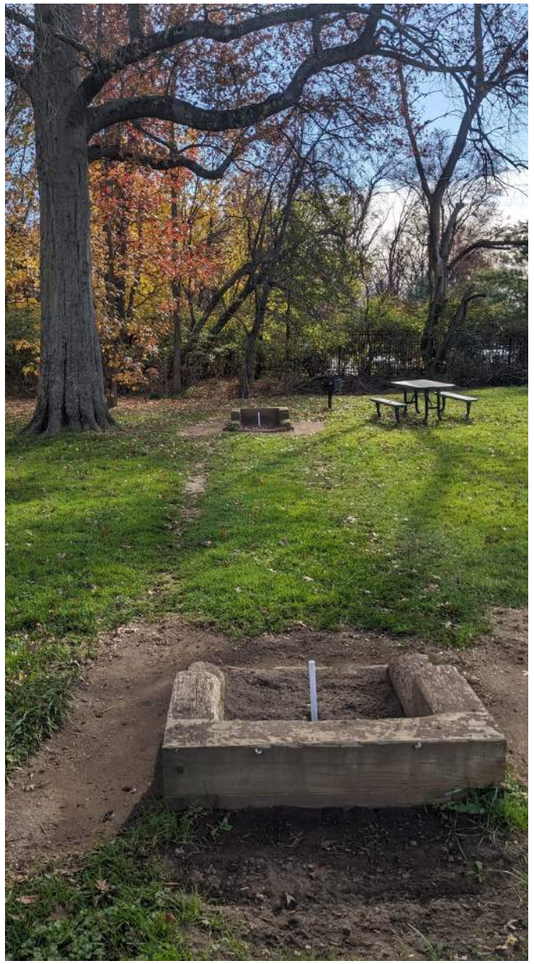
Equity: We commit to equitable access, investment, and inclusion. Every resident—regardless of age, income, race, gender, or ability—deserves safe, high-quality parks, trails, and recreation programs in their neighborhood. Equity guides how we prioritize improvements, allocate resources, and engage the community.

Stewardship: We are caretakers of the Borough's parks, natural resources, and historic landscapes. Our responsibility is to maintain and enhance these spaces with foresight and care—so they thrive for future generations. We support sustainable design, resilient infrastructure, and active community involvement.

Connection: We believe that public spaces should bring people together. Our parks, pathways, and programs help connect residents to each other, to nature, and to the vibrant life of the Borough. We strive to strengthen physical, social, and civic connections in every plan and project.

Excellence: We set a high bar for quality in design, operations, programming, and customer service. Our parks and recreation system should reflect the character, pride, and aspirations of West Chester. We invest in continuous improvement and professional leadership to deliver excellent results.

Transparency and Accountability: We value open, inclusive decision-making. Residents, staff, partners, and elected officials should all understand how and why park priorities are set. We will track progress, measure outcomes, and communicate clearly with the community to build trust and momentum.



Collaboration: We recognize that the best outcomes are built through partnership. From Friends Groups to regional agencies to everyday volunteers, collaboration helps us do more, serve more people, and reflect a broader range of voices and talents.

Vitality: Parks are essential to the health, happiness, and spirit of West Chester. They are places to move, celebrate, relax, and recharge. We embrace creativity, play, and wellness as core components of public life—and aim to provide year-round experiences that reflect the Borough's energy and diversity.

Vision Statement

A vibrant, inclusive parks and recreation system that enhances daily life, strengthens neighborhood connections, and fuels West Chester's economic vitality—attracting residents, supporting local businesses, and making the Borough a great place to live, work, and visit.

Mission Statement

To provide high-quality parks, public spaces, trails, and recreation programs that are safe, accessible, and inclusive for all. We serve the community by promoting health, strengthening social connection, honoring West Chester's history, and supporting economic vitality—through thoughtful planning, responsible stewardship, and meaningful partnerships.

Ready to Deliver

With the Borough's values, vision, and mission clearly defined, the next step is to focus on execution. Achieving this vision will require practical tools, clear priorities, dedicated staffing, and reliable funding. The Implementation Framework provides a roadmap for moving from ideas to outcomes—ensuring that decisions are guided by community goals and supported by the resources, partnerships, and systems needed to get the work done.

Implementation Framework:

1. Six Big Moves as the Roadmap

Each of the Six Big Moves defines a strategic direction. Together, they create a shared action agenda for the Borough, guiding decisions, budgets, partnerships, and work plans:

- PARKS FOR ALL: Invest in neighborhood parks with a focus on equity and quality.
- GO WEST CHESTER: Create safe, active connections by foot and bike.
- ACTIVE TOGETHER: Expand programs, events, and everyday activity opportunities.
- SUSTAINING WHAT WE LOVE: Improve maintenance, green infrastructure, and stewardship.
- A DEPARTMENT READY FOR THE FUTURE: Strengthen staffing, systems, and leadership.
- INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY: Establish stable and transparent funding strategies.

All recommendations from the plan align with one or more of these Big Moves, ensuring each action supports West Chester's broader goals.

2. Short-Term Wins and Long-Term Vision

Implementation should balance:

- Quick wins that build momentum and demonstrate early success.
- Medium-term priorities that require planning, coordination, and resource alignment.
- Long-term strategies that shape the system's future and require sustained leadership.

The Implementation Matrix identifies priority projects, timeframes, partners, and potential funding sources.

Leadership and Responsibility

Evolving Roles for the Borough:

The Borough must take a proactive leadership role. That includes:

- Establishing a Parks and Recreation Implementation Committee to coordinate across departments and partners.
- Designating Borough staff time or a new position to oversee implementation, including grant writing, project coordination, and progress tracking.
- Building management systems to evaluate park conditions, measure program performance, and track equity outcomes.

Partnerships That Drive Success:

Implementation depends on working with:

- Friends Groups for fundraising and volunteer mobilization, with clearer alignment to Borough priorities.
- West Chester BID (Business Improvement District) and the Chamber of Commerce for programming, special events, economic development, and tourism that benefits visitors and residents alike.
- Melton Center for expanded and new partnership roles for programming, the indoor recreation center and the park.
- Chester County for trail connections and open space coordination.
- Nonprofits and community organizations for stewardship, events, and youth engagement.
- West Chester University for collaboration on community programming, management and organization projects, and facilities and land use related to both university and borough needs.

Strategic Tips for West Chester Borough's Grantsmanship

Tactic	*Description*
1. Hire an external grant consultant or firm	1. On retainer or per-application basis to broaden capacity to support limitations in staff time and the range of grant opportunities
2. Use regional partners as leads	2. DVRPC, Chester County, West Chester University, West Chester Area School District, and potential nonprofits and foundations
3. Prepare a "grant-ready" project portfolio	3. Have cost estimates, basic concept plans, community support letters on file
4. Align with trending themes	4. Equity, climate resilience, public health, safety, green infrastructure

Funding and Phasing

Advancing a Diverse Funding Toolbox: West Chester should continue to draw on multiple funding sources, including:

- **Borough general funds** and dedicated capital budgets, phasing in adjustments to the percentage of borough operating funds for parks and recreation and increasing per capita investment in parks and recreation to approximate state, regional, and peer borough metrics. Consider adding or dedicating 0.05% to 0.25% (.0005 – .0025) slice of the EIT toward Open Space. For example, Uwchlan Township approved an extra 0.25% increase on the EIT to 1.25% total, with 75% earmarked for acquisition and 25% for maintenance.
- **Mandatory Dedication of Land Ordinance** updates to ensure fair developer contributions. Adopt a parkland standard of six acres per1,000 residents. These should reflect current market values of land with various zoning classification. Enforce the requirements of the land and or the fees. It is likely that most developments will be redevelopments that will result in the developer offering a fee in lieu of the dedication of parkland. Appendix B summarizes findings from the Mandatory Dedication Study prepared by Thomas Comitta Associates and recommends its adoption.
- **Grant programs from DCNR, DCED, DEP, Chester County, EPA, and others.** Consider retaining a team of grant experts in a wide variety of borough needs and potential funding sources.

Reframing Grantsmanship in West Chester Borough: Developing pragmatic, scalable strategies with limited in-house staff is key to access for competitive grant funding, especially for parks, recreation, trails, and green infrastructure. Focusing on practical steps to build internal readiness, reframe project opportunities, and pursue strategic partnerships and funding streams in a changing federal funding landscape is challenging and probably will require outside assistance. This would be an investment, not a coat.

1. Build a Cross-Functional Grants Team

Challenge: One grant writer (e.g., the Sustainability Director) cannot meet the demands or specialized needs of parks and recreation projects or the range of all the Borough's project funding needs.

Action Steps:

- Form an internal grant working group with representatives from: Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Borough Management, Finance, and Friends Group representatives.
- Continue to designate the Sustainability Director as the part-time Grants Coordinator for Parks & Recreation with support from the Parks & Recreation Department team.
- Provide staff with basic grant training (e.g., NRPA grant webinars, WeConservePA trainings, Grant Writing USA workshops).

2. Align Projects with Broader Grant Themes

Many relevant grants do not say "parks" but still support park and recreation goals. Reframe projects to align with cross-sectoral priorities.

3. Develop "Grant-Ready" Projects

Challenge: Many deadlines come quickly with little notice. Having "shovel ready" fully developed projects when funding becomes available can win grants.

Reframed Focus Area	Relevant Grant Sources
Climate Resilience & Greening	FEMA BRIC, EPA Environmental Justice, USDA Urban Forestry, IRA-funded state climate programs
Public Health & Equity	CDC REACH, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Active Transportation	DOT Safe Streets for All (SS4A), TAP, RAISE, CMAQ
Workforce Development	DOL YouthBuild, AmeriCorps NCCC,
Cultural Heritage & Placemaking	NEA Our Town, National Endowment for the Humanities, PA Council on the Arts

Action Steps:

- Create a Project Pipeline Database. Include the project name and location; rough scope, budget and timeline; community benefit statement; design/engineering status (conceptual, schematic, bid-ready)
- Prepare reusable templates with a standard project narrative; community profile with equity data; and letters of support from partners and officials
- Identify which projects require permits, site control, or environmental clearance.

4. Leverage Regional and Inter-Municipal Partnerships

Action Steps:

- Collaborate with Chester County, DVRPC, neighboring municipalities such as on the 250th Anniversary and recreation programs, West Chester University, West Chester Area School District, Chester County Hospital, and others
- Use partners as fiscal agents or co-applicants for complex grants.
- Prioritize regional trail, conservation, and green infrastructure initiatives that meet goals of West Chester Borough, Chester County, DVRPC and other regional initiatives.

5. Set Up Grants, Alerts, and Match Services

Use these tools to stay ahead of deadlines:

- Federal - Grants.gov and SAM.gov
- State & Local (PA) - PA DCED Single Application Portal; PA DCNR Grants page; PA GreenGov Council
- Match & Tracking Tools - Instrumentl
- Foundation Directory Online
- Professional Associations - NRPA, APA, WeConservePA, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (newsletters + technical assistance)

6. Tap Private and Nonprofit Funding Sources

Expand beyond government grants:

- Corporate Giving Programs - PECO, Aqua, Comcast, Disney, banks, and healthcare systems often offer community grants
- Community Foundations - Chester County Community Foundation
- Hospital Wellness/Health Equity Initiatives - Possible funders for fitness zones, ADA trails, nature therapy programs
- Partnership investments from institutions and nonprofits.
- Volunteer and in-kind resources to support stewardship and maintenance.

Phasing Actions Over Time: To make steady progress, actions can be phased by:

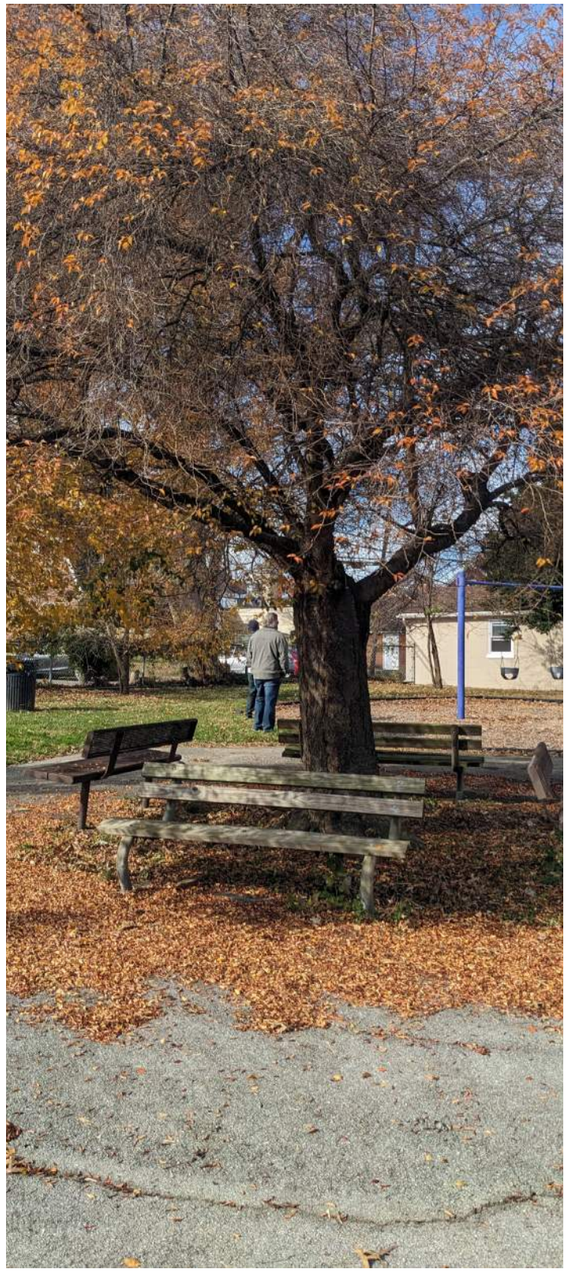
- Ongoing tasks (e.g., forming the Implementation Committee).
- Near-term (1–2 years): Plan park upgrades, pilot programs, and adopt funding updates.
- Mid-term (3–5 years): Implement trail links, expand programming, and grow department capacity.
- Long-term (5+ years): Secure large-scale funding, complete signature projects, and fully realize the Six Big Moves.

Tracking Progress and Adapting: A successful plan is a living document. West Chester should:

- Annually review and update the Implementation Matrix. The review should be conducted prior to budget discussions. It should evaluate PROS Implementation progress along with the changing needs and emerging opportunities in West Chester Borough.
- Publish a short Annual Parks and Recreation Report to share accomplishments, highlight new priorities, and build accountability. Include testimonials, benefits and outcomes not just budget and output.
- Use data and public input to guide adjustments and stay responsive to community needs.

Moving Forward

This Plan is ambitious because West Chester is ambitious. Its residents value their parks, their neighborhoods, and each other. By embracing this implementation strategy—with leadership, investment, and collaboration—West Chester can build a more connected, inclusive, and thriving future.



Parks for All– Invest in system-wide upgrades including modernized facilities, improved accessibility, enhanced landscaping, and expanded amenities to ensure all parks meet community needs now and in the future.			
Short Range – 2026-2027			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Develop a Master plan for, and redevelop, John O. Green Park	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of John O. Green Park, Friends of West Chester Parks	Park & Recreation Department, BID, Chamber of Commerce and other community volunteers
Develop a Master plan for, and develop, Horace Pippin Park	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of Horace Pippin Park, Friends of West Chester Parks	Park & Recreation Board, Parks and Recreation Department, Friends of Horace Pippin Park, and other community volunteers
Develop a Master plan for Hoopes Park, focusing on a new playground, tot lot, loop trail, and amenities such as plazas, bathrooms, and parking improvements.	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of Hoopes Park, Friends of West Chester Parks	Park & Recreation Board and Borough staff with support from community-based organizations and people
Benefits	John O. Green is West Chester's one, true downtown park; improvements will help make it a community anchor. Similar Hoopes Park is the Borough's only truly community park-scale park and needs improvements so that it may act as such. Horace Pippin Park currently lacks clear direction or use and needs a master plan to help define its role in the community.		
Medium Range - 2028 - 2033			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Develop a Master plan for Mosteller Park, including a connection to Greenfield along the creek.	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of Mosteller Park, Friends of West Chester Parks	Parks & Recreation Staff with support and guidance from Council, Park & Recreation Board and Borough Management, Friends Groups
Explore vacant and unused properties to expand total park acreage and fulfill unmet community needs, such as a skate-spot.	Grant Funding and Match	Borough Support, Community Input	Parks & Recreation Department, Parks & Recreation Board

Explore flood-prone parcels along Goose Creek to help alleviate stormwater concerns and provide a wetland park experience; something the Borough does not currently have.	Existing software	Staff time	Parks & Recreation Staff, Parks & Recreation Board
Benefits	Expand the Borough's total park acreage while providing new, unique park experiences that fulfill unmet community needs.		
Long Range – 2034-2036+			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Explore underutilized, Borough-owned, surface parking lots as outlined in the 2018 Comprehensive Parking Plan. Applicable if and when the Borough constructs a parking garage, rendering these lots useless and available as park land.	TBD	TBD	Parks & Recreation Staff, Parks & Recreation Board
Stay vigilant of large land holdings within the area, such as golf courses strip malls, or big box stores, that become available and transition them to park land.	Parks & Recreation Department Staff Time	Parks & Recreation Department Staff, Volunteer Time, Parks & Recreation Department Board	Parks & Recreation Department Staff, Parks & Recreation Board
Benefits	Expanding the Borough's total park land to meet current and projected demand requires out of the box thinking. These explore long-range solutions that have been successful for other communities to achieve this goal.		

Go West Chester – Create a walkable, bike-friendly borough where safe, active connections link neighborhoods, parks, downtown life, and the regional trail system.			
Short Range – 2026-2027			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Explore the Turk's Head Trail as a safe, off-road option for bicyclists, pedestrians, and West Chester University Students to commute and recreate safely via active transportation.	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of West Chester Parks, Turk's Head Trail Committee	Park & Recreation Department, BID, Chamber of Commerce and other community volunteers

Utilize findings from Bicycle Focus Group to create major north-south and east-west bicycle-friendly routes through the Borough.	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups	Borough support, Community Input, Friends of West Chester Parks	Park & Recreation Board, Parks and Recreation Department, and other community volunteers
Expand Bicycle Parking downtown and in all West Chester Borough parks.	Grant Funding and Match, Funds raised via Friends Groups, Funds raised via BID	Borough support, Friends Groups, Central Business District	Park & Recreation Board and Borough staff with support from Friends Groups and BID
Benefits	People will only commute and recreate via bicycle if they have a safe space to leave it! Providing parking in key, desirable areas and along safe routes will encourage active transportation.		
Medium Range - 2028 - 2033			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Utilize past-plans and Strava data to identify other bicycle routes through the Borough and develop them as safe streets	TBD	Borough support, Community Input, 2014 Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity Plan	Parks & Recreation Staff with support and guidance from Council, Park & Recreation Board and Borough Management
Benefits	Expand the Borough's total park acreage while providing new, unique park experiences that fulfill unmet community needs.		
Long Range – 2034-2036+			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Explore Regional Trail Connections as highlighted in past County Plans.	TBD	TBD	Parks & Recreation Staff, Parks & Recreation Board
Benefits	Regional connections allow residents to expand their recreation opportunities and bring visitors to the Borough - all without additional parking stress.		

Active Together – Strengthen and refine recreation programs through partnerships and targeted initiatives that reflect the diverse interests, abilities, ages, and cultures of the community.			
Short Range – 2026-2027			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Continue to advance special events	Cost Recovery of 36%, higher than national rate of 26%	Borough support, sponsorships, fees & charges	Park & Recreation Department, BID, Chamber of Commerce and other community volunteers
Create program plan for 2026 and 2027	Staff time	Partnerships	Park & Recreation Board, Partners and Staff
Plan for small events in parks where programs are not typically held.	Staff and volunteer time	Staff, neighborhood partners, Park Friends	Park & Recreation Board and Borough staff with support from community-based organizations and people
Coordinate with Melton Center on how to advance programming for all	Staff time from Parks & Recreation dept and the Melton Center	Staff, Melton Board, Parks & Recreation Board	Park & Recreation Department & Melton Center Staff
Update and implement Price Policy.	Staff time	Cost recovery increases	Policy needs to be adhered to and implemented. Support from Borough Management and Council needed.
Benefits	Builds community, guides programming, boosts awareness, leverages volunteers, provides potential expanded partnership for better public services.		
Medium Range - 2028 - 2033			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Explore how to expand youth recreation programs and implement where feasible. Make the case for why this is needed.	Fee supported with sliding scale	Borough Staff and community-based partners	Parks & Recreation Staff with support and guidance from Council, Park & Recreation Board and Borough Management
Involve WCU more as a partner	Partnership on staffing and facilities	WCU and Borough support in partnership	Parks & Recreation Director, Borough Manager
Implement tracking and evaluation system to document benefits of programs, testimonials	Existing software	Staff time and training to plan, develop and present programming outcomes & benefits	Parks & Recreation Staff
Work on creating brand and awareness of WCB's recreation services	TBD	Potential contractor, BID, Chamber, or WCU Support	Parks & Recreation Director and Program Coordinator

Create program plan for 2028 – 2033 annually	Staff time	Community based partners	Recreation Program Coordinator
Expand programming with Melton Center	Staff time in Parks & Recreation and the Melton Center	Indoor facilities and park at Melton	Park & Recreation Committee, volunteers, potential Recreation Director
Benefits	Potential new multi-municipal partnership for better public services at lower cost.		
Long Range – 2034-2036+			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Explore potential for indoor recreation facilities	TBD	TBD	Parks & Recreation Director, Parks & Recreation Board, Melton Center, support from Council and Borough Management
Assess participation and community feedback regularly, adjust programs accordingly, and continue pursuing sustainable staffing and funding models through partnerships and grants.	Staff and volunteer time	Annually	Parks & Recreation Department Staff
Benefits	Supports sustainable, cost-shared recreation services and strengthens municipal and community-based organizations in collaboration, builds public support, targets efficient use of resources.		

Borough Ready for the Future – Achieving excellence in public service through strengthened management, sustainable financing, and high-quality maintenance.			
Short Range – 2026-2027			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Establish an annual work program for parks and recreation including park projects	Staff time	Borough Manager & Council support	Park & Recreation Director and Program Coordinator
Plan and Convene a Parks & Recreation Stakeholder Summit	Funds for food, materials. Potential RecTAP grant, for facilitation, no match required.	Borough support	Park & Recreation Board, Partners and Staff
Consider retaining a facilitator for planning and implementing the Summit if deemed advantageous	Parks & Recreation Department planning with participation by key stakeholders such as Park Friends groups, Melton Center leagues, and other community-based groups.	Staff, neighborhood partners, Park Friends	Park & Recreation Board and Borough staff with support from community-based organizations and people
Establish and adopt Project Review process with criteria	Staff time.	Borough resources	Parks & Recreation Department Director with collaborative established for this purpose with key stakeholders. Council support needed for implementation, review, adoption and approval of projects.
Support and strengthen friends groups aligned with PROS Plan, park improvements and Friends' Groups support	Staff and volunteer time. Council support	Borough and Friends Groups	Establish council of friends groups to facilitate collaboration
Develop a "State of Parks, Recreation & Open Space Report"	Staff and Volunteer Time	Borough Administration	Recreation Program Coordinator with Parks & Recreation Committee as potential project lead
Benefits	An effectively organized and professionally managed parks and recreation system delivers high-quality services that enhance community well-being, support public health, and strengthen local economies. Strong leadership, clear roles, and efficient operations ensure that resources are used wisely, partnerships thrive, and every resident has access to safe, welcoming, and well-maintained parks and programs.		

Medium Range - 2028 - 2033			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Annually, Plan and Convene a Parks & Recreation Stakeholder Summit building upon the first one	Funds for food, materials	Borough support	Parks & Recreation Department planning with participation by key stakeholders such as Park Friends groups, Melton Center leagues, and other community-based groups.
Expand staffing and clarify roles	Staff time with additional salaries TBD	Borough	Borough Manager, Parks & Recreation Director, Public works Director
Implement Training Plan for Staff and Volunteers	1-2% of park and recreation budget	PRPS, NRPA for low-cost training	Parks & Recreation Department Director with staff support from related departments
Implement recommendations to increase recreation programs with management support	Grant Funding for staff	Director's salary on sliding scale over four years	Multi- municipal partners shared cost for benefits
Continue to strengthen the Melton Center partnerships	Staff time from Borough and Melton center	Borough & Melton Center staff, programs and facilities	Parks & Recreation Director, Melton Center Director and Board
Expand volunteerism and stewardship	TBD	Consider part-time staff for volunteerism coordination	Investment in staff time should bring a return on investment through increased volunteerism that now has a value of $33 per hour
Create program plan for 2028 – 2033 annually	Volunteer and staff time	Potential multi-municipal Recreation Director	Parks & Recreation Director, Program Coordinator
Broaden and formalize outreach and communication channels	Current advertising budget of $21,000 adjusted for COL	Borough and partners	Borough Manager or designated staff
Create Park Maintenance Standards Manual	Staff time, Peer grant of $18,000 with match of $1,800	PRPS, PA DCNR, Park Maintenance Institute have sample manuals.	Highway Department
Benefits	Over time, effective parks and recreation management builds greater public awareness, trust, and support by consistently delivering visible results and meaningful experiences. As community engagement grows and the value of parks becomes more widely recognized, it becomes easier to secure funding, forge partnerships, and expand services that reflect evolving community needs.		

Long Range – 2034-2036+			
Action Step	Costs	Resources	Responsibilities
Continue to implement an organized Capital Improvement Program based on project review and approval process	TBD	Borough funds, grant funds, private fundraising, Friends Groups	Parks & Recreation and Public Works Directors
Establish a dedicated Green Crew in park maintenance with specialized training in natural resource management	TBD based on staffing	Borough resources, training programs, professional associations (PRPS, NRPA)	Parks & Recreation Director and Public Works Director
Update the PROS Plan to guide the next decade	$20,000–$40,000 (consultant fees)	DCNR grant funding, Borough match	Borough Council, Borough Manager, Park & Recreation Director and Board
Implement asset management system for parks and facilities	$10,000–$25,000 (initial setup)	Software solutions, grants, Borough funding	Public Works in partnership with Parks & Recreation
Benefits	Implementing a long-range action plan ensures that parks and recreation investments are guided by a clear, community-driven vision, allowing resources to be allocated strategically over time. This forward-thinking approach promotes continuity, maximizes impact, and builds momentum—resulting in lasting improvements to quality of life, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability		

Chapter 11

Moving Forward Together

Moving Forward Together

Overview: West Chester's Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is more than a document: it is a shared vision for a more vibrant, connected, and healthy community. It reflects the voices of hundreds of residents, the dedication of local partners, and the Borough's commitment to investing in public spaces and services that matter.

The implementation chapter lays out the roadmap; from park improvements and trail connections to programming, organizational readiness and creative financing. But plans alone do not build parks, programs, or community trust. Success will depend on consistent follow-through, continued collaboration, and a willingness to adapt as conditions change and new opportunities arise.

Sustained Public Involvement: The energy and ideas that shaped this plan must continue long after its adoption. Whether through advisory committees, Friends Groups, surveys, or neighborhood and community-based organizational outreach, public input should remain central to decision-making. Ongoing engagement ensures accountability, responsiveness, and a deeper sense of shared ownership.

Equity must be a guiding principle in how public involvement is sustained. Currently, parks in more affluent neighborhoods—often supported by active Friends Groups and influential advocates—benefit from better facilities and regular programming, while parks in historically underserved areas receive fewer resources and host fewer events. This imbalance must

be addressed. Sustained outreach and intentional investment in marginalized neighborhoods will help ensure that every resident, regardless of where they live, has access to safe, vibrant parks, high-quality facilities, and meaningful recreation opportunities. Every park matters and every neighborhood deserves to be part of West Chester's shared success.

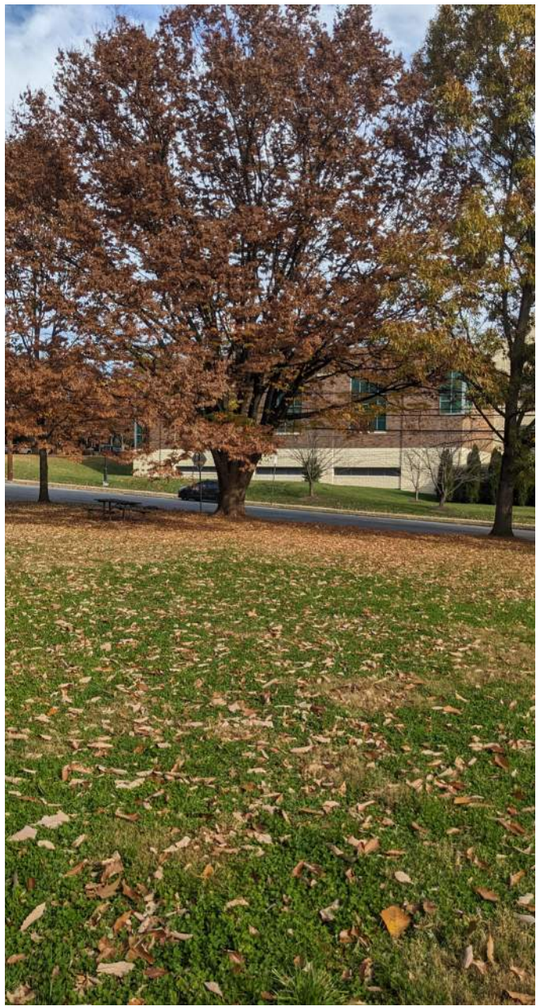
To help achieve this, the creation of a Park Friends Alliance is recommended. This council will act as a collaborative consortium, bringing together Friends Groups across the Borough to share resources, expertise, and advocacy strategies. It is not an umbrella organization making top-down decisions, but rather a facilitative body that supports peer learning, mutual support, and alignment around the shared vision of "Parks for All." By working cooperatively rather than competitively, the Park Friends Alliance can help ensure that the energy and passion of local volunteers benefit the entire system, especially the parks and neighborhoods that need it most.

Strengthening and Expanding Partnerships: Partnerships have always been part of West Chester's story and they are now more important than ever. From regional agencies and nonprofits to BID, Chamber of Commerce, and civic groups, collaboration allows the Borough to leverage expertise, extend capacity, and accomplish more together than any single entity could alone. A Park Friends Alliance and a broader culture of coordination will help unite individual efforts around common goals.

Growing Financial Capacity: No great parks and recreation system is built without investment. West Chester must continue to pursue creative, stable, and diversified funding strategies; whether through grants, local revenue tools, sponsorships, or regional initiatives. Building a dedicated team of staff and potential outside experts to seek and manage funding, especially through grants, will allow the Borough to seize opportunities and turn ideas into reality.

Looking Ahead with Optimism and Purpose: Change won't happen all at once, but the direction is clear. With this plan as a guide, West Chester is poised to create a parks and recreation system that is inclusive, resilient, and future-ready. A system where every resident can enjoy a safe walk or bike ride to a nearby park, participate in meaningful programs, and feel proud of the public spaces that define their community.

By staying focused, working together, and keeping community at the center, West Chester can move forward—not just with a plan, but with purpose.



Part 2

The Foundation

A reference with the data, analysis, and resources that support the plan.

Chapter 12
Park Assessment

Park Assessments Parks for the Future

Overview: Within West Chester Borough's 1.8 square miles there are 12 total parks totaling 43.80 acres. All of the parks are owned by the borough and many have active Friends Groups that are their enthusiastic stewards and benefactors. As there has not been a new Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan completed since 1992 with a supplement in the 2018 Borough Comprehensive Plan, it is important to provide new direction for each of the borough's parks and maximize their potential.

Inventory and Analysis: The consultant team visited each of the 12 parks to determine their strengths, weaknesses, and role within West Chester Borough. This was coupled with thorough desktop analysis, community engagement, and regular study committee meetings to form initial recommendations for each park and West Chester's parks, recreation, and open space system as a whole.

These factors are detailed on the following pages. The Borough of West Chester is a dynamic, impassioned community and any recommendations must be as well. This analysis is park-specific and meant to provide context for the recommendations that follow.

The Melton Center: Established in 1914, the Melton Center was intended as a community center to serve the "unmet needs of citizens who were traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised". Today it still proudly serves much of the West Chester community hosting family gatherings, summer camps, and a popular summer basketball league.

A robust neighborhood park is a part of the center and features basketball courts, a playground, and community garden. While it is not owned or managed by the Borough, it is open to and utilized by the public and, as such, was included in the park inventory completed by the consultant team. Further partnerships with the Melton Center surrounding this space should be pursued as they may be beneficial to both.

Friends Groups: Friends Groups are independent, community organizations within the Borough that represent, advocate for, and steward individual parks. The consultant team noted which parks had Friends Groups as part of the initial inventory due to a positive correlation between maintenance, use, and the presence of a Friends Group.

Park Classification: In the planning process parks are often classified by their relative size and the areas they serve. West Chester is largely a patchwork of what is commonly referred to as Neighborhood Parks, or those parks that are anywhere from 0.5 to 2 acres in total size and primarily serve their immediate surrounding neighborhoods.

On size alone, there are no true Community parks within West Chester, or parks 25 acres and above. Instead, three parks commonly referred to as "the big three" serve a similar role. These three parks, Marshall Square Park, Everhart Park, and Hoopes Park, meet the requirements for serving a minimum 2-mile radius service area while acting as central hubs for gathering, events, and general recreation.

Figure 1: An image of the Melton Center community gardens.

Schedule of West Chester Borough Park Standards

PARK TYPE	ACRES PER 1,000 POPULATION	SERVICE AREA
Community Park	8+ Acres	2-mile radius
Neighborhood Park	1 to 2 Acres	1/2 mile radius
Mini Park	1/2 to 1 Acre	1/4 mile radius

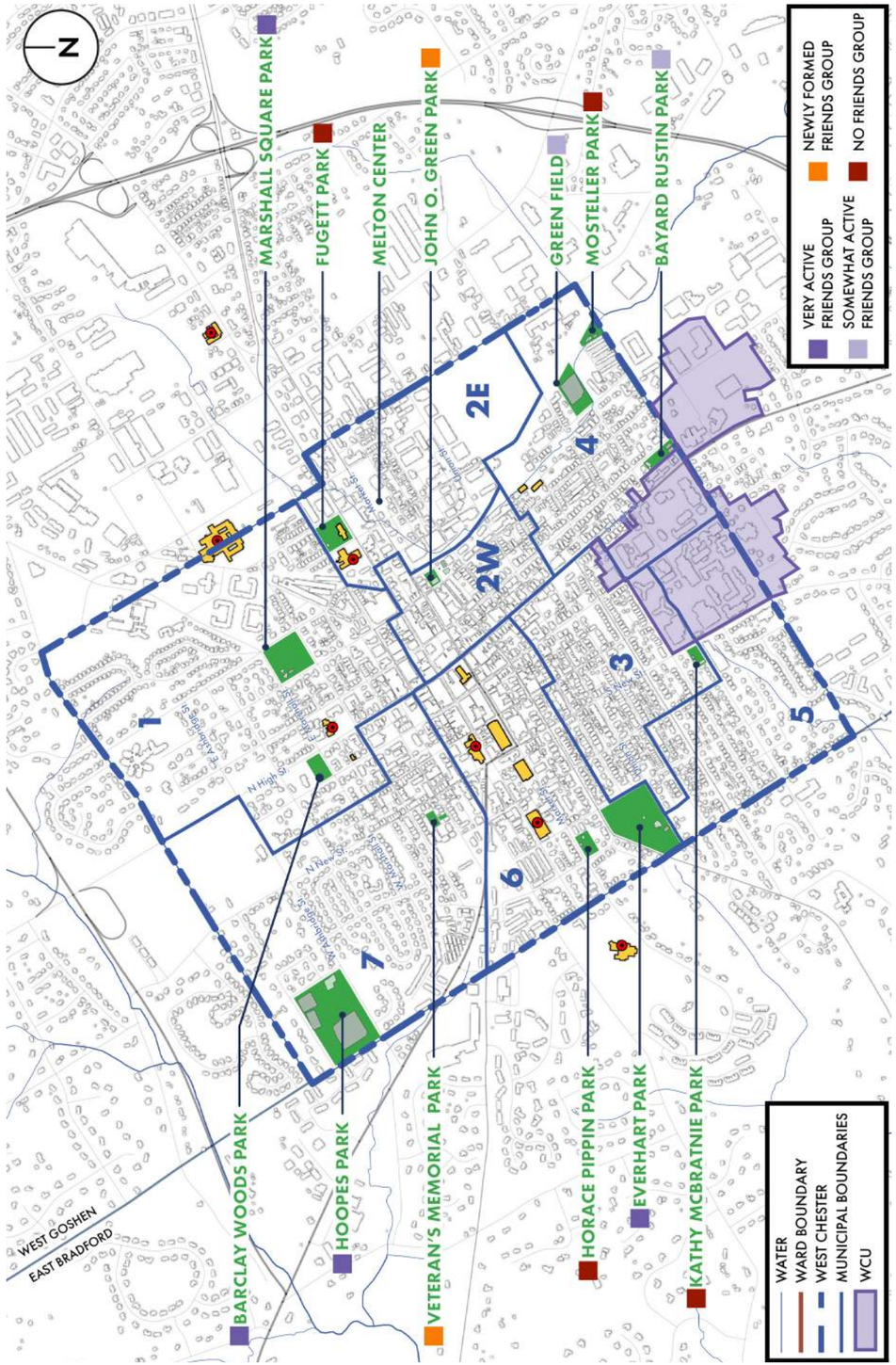
Figure 2: A table explaining the breakdown of parks by size and service area as defined by West Chester Borough.

Park Facilities and Classifications

PARK NAME	ACRES	BASEBALL DIAMONDS	BASKETBALL COURTS	TENNIS COURTS	PLAY SPACE	PAVILION	CONCESSION STAND	TABLE SEATING	BENCH SEATING	BATHROOMS	WATER FOUNTAIN	FRIENDS GROUP	NOTES	PARK DESIGNATION
WARD 1 - 6.38 TOTAL ACRES - 2 PARK(S)														
Marshall Square Park	5		X		X			X	X	X	X	Very Active	Gazebo, Specimen Trees	Community Park
Barclay Woods Park	1.38											Active	Specimen Trees	Neighborhood Park
WARD 2E - 2.50 TOTAL ACRES - 2 PARK(S)														
Fugett Park	2.50				X			X	X			None	Named for Notable Activist	Neighborhood Park
Melton Center*													Maintained by Melton Center, named for Notable Activist	Neighborhood Park
WARD 2W - 1.90 ACRES - 1 PARK(S)														
John O. Green Park	1.90		X		X	X		X	X		X	Newly Formed	Splash Pad, Climbing Wall, Named for former Police Chief	Neighborhood Park
WARD 3 - 0.80 TOTAL ACRES - 1 PARK(S)														
Kathy McBratnie Park	0.80		X		X							No Friends Group	Named for former Parks and Recreation Director	Mini Park
WARD 4 - 4.16 TOTAL ACRES - 3 PARK(S)														
Bayard Rustin Park	1.90		X		X			X	X		X	Somewhat Active	Historic structure, named for Notable Activist	Neighborhood Park
Green Field	0.93	X					X	X		X		Somewhat Active	Multi-Purpose Field, Stream Access	Mini Park
Mosteller Park	1.33		X		X			X				No Friends Group	Stream Access	Neighborhood Park
WARD 5 - 0 TOTAL ACRES - 0 PARK(S)														
WARD 6 - 11.41 TOTAL ACRES - 2 PARK(S)														
Everhart Park	10.20		X		X	X			X	X	X	Very Active	Gazebo, Specimen Trees, Stream, Accessible Playground	Community Park
Horace Pippin Park	1.21		X		X							No Friends Group	Named for Notable Painter and Artist	Neighborhood Park
WARD 7 - 16.71 ACRES - 2 PARK(S)														
Hoopes Park	16.20	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		Very Active	Home to adult baseball league active since 1950s, Pickleball	Community Park
Veteran's Memorial Park	0.51				X	X		X				Newly Formed		Mini Park

*Privately owned and operated but open to, and utilized by, the public.

Park Locations



The Park Score System: As part of the engagement process the consultant team asked the Study Committee to travel to each of West Chester's parks and assign it a score from one-to-five in four categories: Accessibility, Sociability, Comfort, and Uses.

These scores were then averaged to determine an overarching Park Score for each of the borough's parks. This score, along with input from West Chester Parks and Recreation, was then used to determine which parks needed the most immediate intervention. The end goal is to have each park's total Park Score as a 4-or-above. These criteria were adapted from the Project for Public Spaces Successful Public Space Criteria.

Identity and Recommendations: Parks, like people, each have their own unique identity. Through compiling what we heard from the community, the survey, and the Study Committee, the consultant team prepared a page of precedent imagery and a distinctive subtitle for each park. Both are intended to get to the core of park, identifying what makes it so singular and special within the Borough.

These recommendations build on the core Park Score areas and comments received alongside them. While individual master plans for each park will still be required, each recommendation is meant as a sort of starting pistol, creating actionable ideas that local communities and Friends Groups can rally around and move towards executing.

At the request of West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation and supported by findings concurrent with the Study Committee, two parks were identified as needing preliminary, ideated plans. As such, John O. Green, Hoopes, and Mosteller Parks have a third park page with rudimentary, rendered suggestions. As with the precedent imagery it is important to note that these are not official construction documents and will require a sealed, master plan and appropriate documentation to make happen.

Park Score Component Parts

Accessibility

- Is the park accessible to people of all abilities and ages?
- Is the park accessible by foot and by bike? For a family with a stroller?

Sociability

- Is the park welcoming? Is there a diverse group of people that uses it?
- Do you see yourself bringing family or friends?

Comfort

- Are you comfortable here?
- Are there enough places to sit, rest, etc?
- Is there enough shade? Amenities?

Use

- Is the parks function clear?
- Are there programs or amenities you would utilize?

Barclay Woods Park

A QUIET ARBORETUM

50 N Forney Avenue

1.38 Acres

Ward 1

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.46

ACCESSIBILITY
2.60

SOCIABILITY
2.13

COMFORT
4.05

USES
1.38

OBSERVATIONS

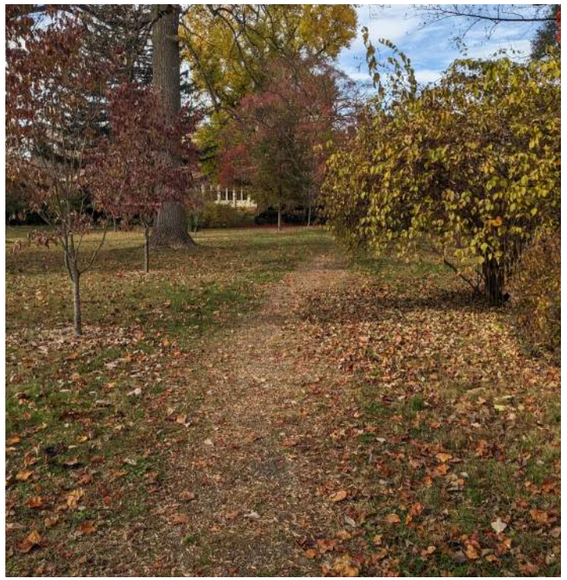
Barclay Woods is a small park with a number of well-kept specimen trees throughout. Its grounds are not extravagant and do not have a playspace, but are extremely well maintained and make a pleasant spot to picnic, relax, or meditate underneath the shaded canopy.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Specimen Trees

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Formalize Existing Pathway and Add Walking Path.
- Benches and/or Places to Sit.
- Highlight as quiet, meditative space.
- Emphasize Specimen Trees.
- Preserve Historic Gateway.
- Consider designation as a small arboretum.



Barclay Woods Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

50 N Forney Avenue | 1.38 Acres | Ward 1

Sculptural Installations

Perimeter Fence and Planting Bed

Interpretive Signage

Improved Main Entry

Improve Tree Plaques

Movable Seating

Fugett Park

THE MUNICIPAL PARK | 401 E. Gay St. | 2.5 Acres | Ward 1

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 3.22

ACCESSIBILITY
3.87

SOCIABILITY
2.63

COMFORT
4.78

USES
2.14

OBSERVATIONS

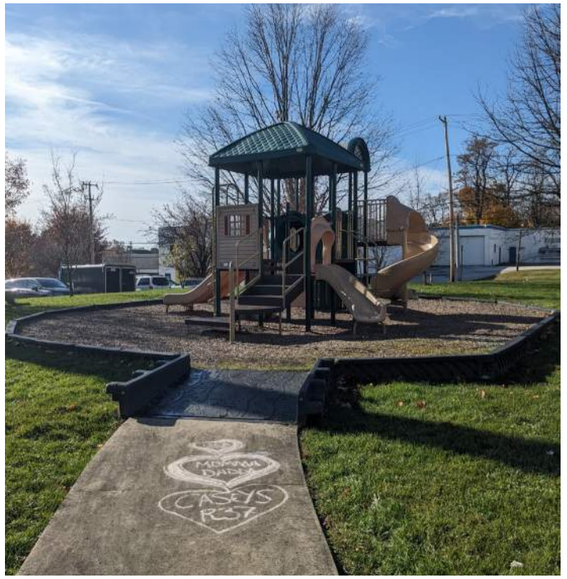
Fugett Park is a small, linear park located directly in front of West Chester Borough Hall. Its location is slightly awkward and not conducive to major improvements. Similarly, the playground that adorns one end of the park is recently updated and well-maintained, as are the picnic tables on the opposite end of the park. Events would be difficult to host here due to its location, size, and shape, and amenities such as walking trails would not fit either. The park is separated from Borough Hall by the parking area and functions as two, spaces.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Picnic Tables
- Playground

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Design linkages to create a cohesive municipal campus that serves multiple uses.
- Plaza space for employees to eat lunch or take a break.
- Low-rise landscaping open to the Municipal Building.
- Ample seating: picnic tables, benches, and seat walls.



Fugett Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

401 E. Gay St. | 2.5 Acres | Ward 1

Unique Paving and Ground Treatment

Game Tables

New Benches

Plaza with Raised Lawn and Seating

Improved Park Entrance

Accessible Table

Marshall Square Park

THE TOWN SQUARE | 200 E. Marshall St. | 5.0 Acres | Ward 1

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 3.90

ACCESSIBILITY
3.80

SOCIABILITY
3.40

COMFORT
4.70

USES
3.90

OBSERVATIONS

Marshall Square Park is another of West Chester Borough's "big three" parks. With ample room and ornate, well-preserved decorations, it is an attractive park with an active friends group. Several events, such as the summer concert series and Santa in the Square, are hosted within the park. Recently updated playgrounds and well-maintained walking paths additionally add to Marshall Square Park's overall attractive qualities.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Basketball Court
- Gazebo
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Water Fountain

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Complete an accessibility study and address immediate deficiencies.
- Work with Friends Group to identify future goals for improvements and park functions.

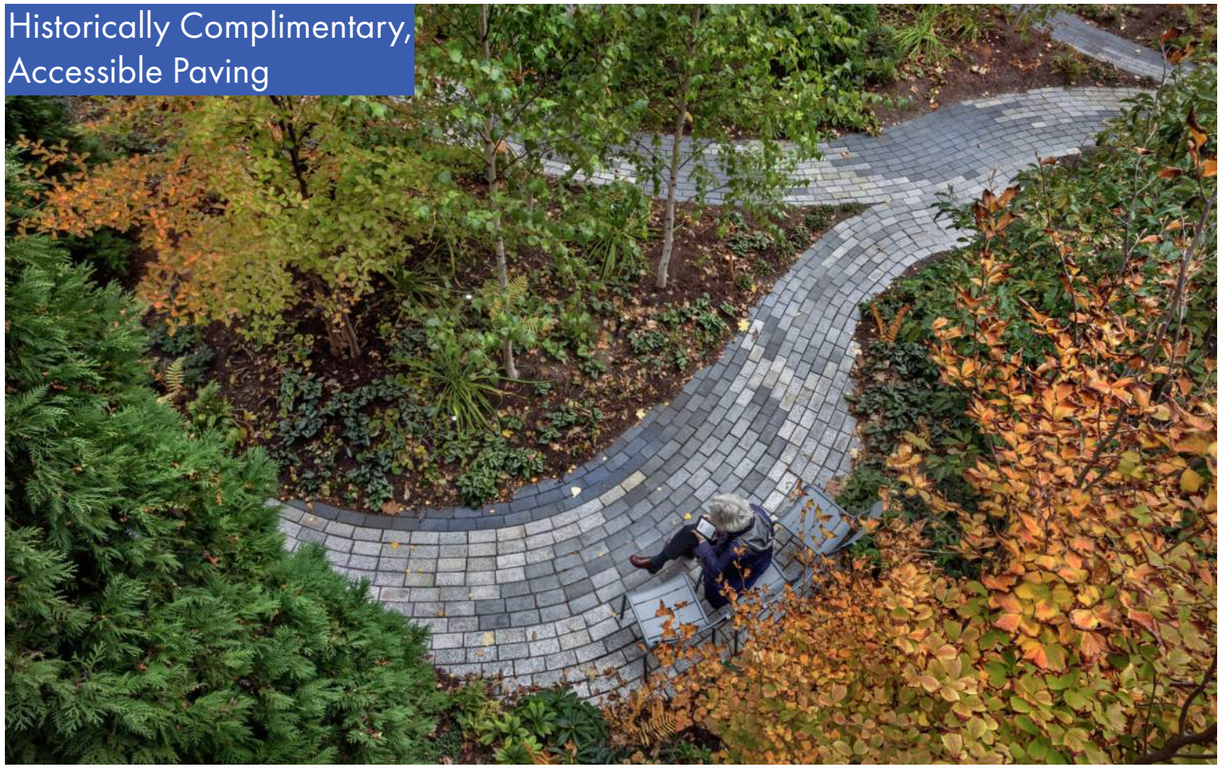
Marshall Square Park

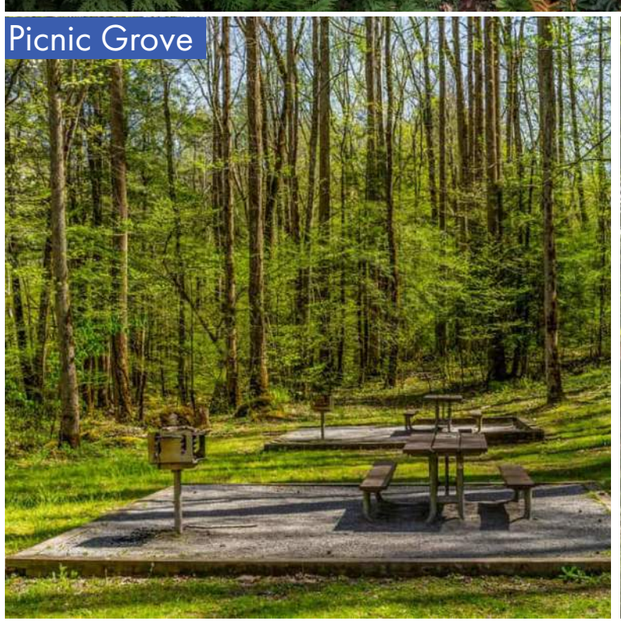
PRECEDENT IMAGES

200 E. Marshall St.

5.0 Acres

Ward 1


Historically Complimentary, Accessible Paving


Picnic Grove

Hammock Grove

Sculptural Playground

Accessible Bench Pads

Small Park Stage

John O. Green Park

PARK PROFILE

S. Matlack St and E. Miner St. | 0.54 Acres | Ward 2w

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.80

ACCESSIBILITY
3.44

SOCIABILITY
2.73

COMFORT
2.50

USES
2.56

OBSERVATIONS

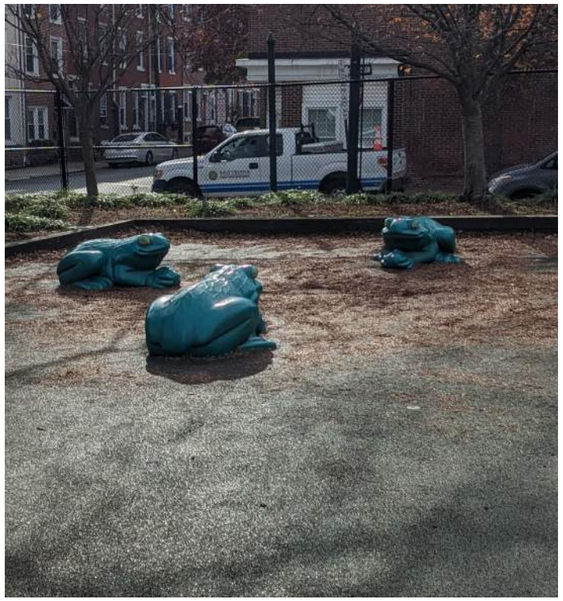
John O. Green Park is a small, urban park close to the heart of downtown West Chester. Formerly a brownfield site, it is not conducive to large quantities of vegetation but is host to a spray park, two playgrounds (one on either side of the park), basketball courts, a pavilion, picnic tables, and ample parking. Due to its urban nature and lack of vegetation, it needs more shade amenities. Additionally, there are drainage and ponding issues associated with runoff from the splash pad. The playground equipment could be upgraded as well, and there are minor ADA issues that will need to be addressed to ensure the longevity of the park. The rock wall, while a fun potential amenity, is also said to get little use within the park.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Pavilion
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Spray Park
- Basketball Court
- Playground

RECOMMENDATIONS

- See conceptual plan on following page.
- If the Borough opts to pursue the Turk's Head Trail, emphasize John O. Green as a trail head.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Lower, Re-design, or Remove Perimeter Fence with Low-Rise Landscape Bed Fencing
2. New Splashpad with Concrete Surface
3. Movable Planter Benches
4. Game Tables (Chess, Checkers)
5. Pavilion Upgrades
   a. New Roof
   b. Replace Rotted Wood
   c. Concrete Food Prep Station with Grill
6. Picnic Tables
7. New Tot Lot (Age 2-5 Playground)
8. New, Resilient Safety Surfacing
9. Exercise Station
10. Basketball Court Art
11. Teen Sitting Area
12. Re-Plant Existing Raised Landscape Beds

PARKS WITHOUT BORDERS

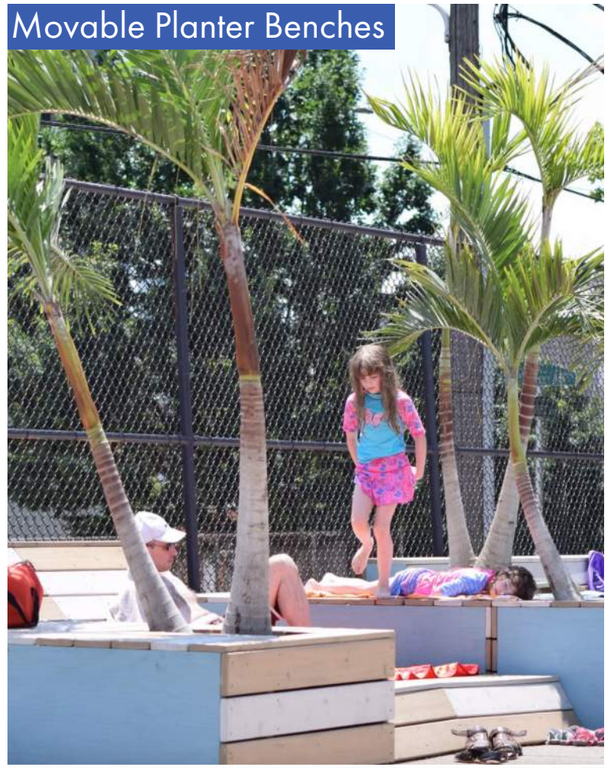
New York City has been re-imagining how parks meet the street in order to make them more open and welcoming under the Parks Without Borders Program. Further information can be found here.

John O. Green Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

S. Matlack St and E. Miner St. | 0.54 Acres | Ward 2w

Movable Planter Benches


Movable Planter Benches

Game Tables

Low-Rise Landscape Bed Fencing (12-18")

Before

After

Basketball Court Art

Food Prep Station with Grill

New Tot Lot

Kathy McBratnie Park

THE MEETING PLACE | 300 W. Nields St. | 0.80 Acres | Ward 3

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.58

ACCESSIBILITY
2.62

SOCIABILITY
2.14

COMFORT
3.56

USES
1.90

OBSERVATIONS

Kathy McBratnie Park is a small, local park adjacent to West Chester University. Currently it is geared towards young children, with only a small baseball backstop, half court basketball court, and playground. There are a few picnic tables scattered under large trees that provide excellent shade and a safe buffer from the street.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Backstop
- Basketball Court
- Open Play Area
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Water Fountain

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Updated and expand playground.
- Re-design and renovate basketball court paved area to be multi-functional.
- Update pavilion to include concessions and shade structure to support church groups and college clubs currently using the park.

Kathy McBratnie Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

300 W. Nields St. | 0.80 Acres | Ward 3

Multi-functional Court Area

Pavilion with Food Prep

Chalk Walls

New Tot Lot

Tot Lot Instruments

Sand Kitchen

Bayard Rustin Park

A HISTORIC GARDEN

740 S. Walnut St. | 1.40 Acres | Ward 4

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.92

ACCESSIBILITY
3.23

SOCIABILITY
2.46

COMFORT
4.09

USES
2.30

OBSERVATIONS

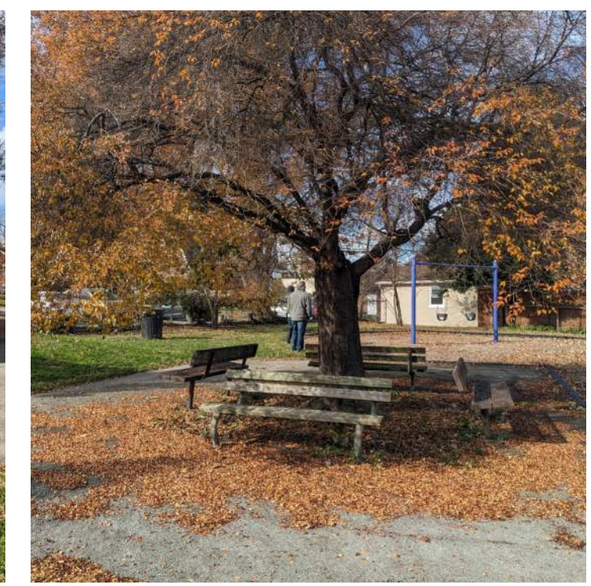
Bayard Rustin Park is a small, neighborhood park that formerly served as the central location for the borough's summer camp activities. A historic building on site was once used as a central location for campers, but is now in need of repairs and largely used for storage of excess equipment. A playground supports local play while two basketball courts are located on the southern end of the park.

CURRENT FEATURES

- 2 Basketball Courts
- Activity Building
- Backstop
- Open Play Area
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Water Fountain

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Renovate existing structure to be a flexible rental and maker space.
- Integrate existing structure into the park through a plaza and connection to existing pathways and planting areas.
- Expand visually interesting pathways and planting areas between.
- Update basketball courts to be multi-functional courts.



Bayard Rustin Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

740 S. Walnut St. | 1.40 Acres | Ward 4

Central Plaza in Front of Historic Structure

Extended Winding Pathways

Play-Pockets Within Garden

Multi-functional Court Area

Replace Perimeter Fence and Landscape Bed

New Tot Lot

Green Field

THE MULTI-PURPOSE FIELD

S. Franklin Street | 1.90 Acres | Ward 4

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.15

ACCESSIBILITY
2.61

SOCIABILITY
1.96

COMFORT
2.40

USES
1.69

OBSERVATIONS

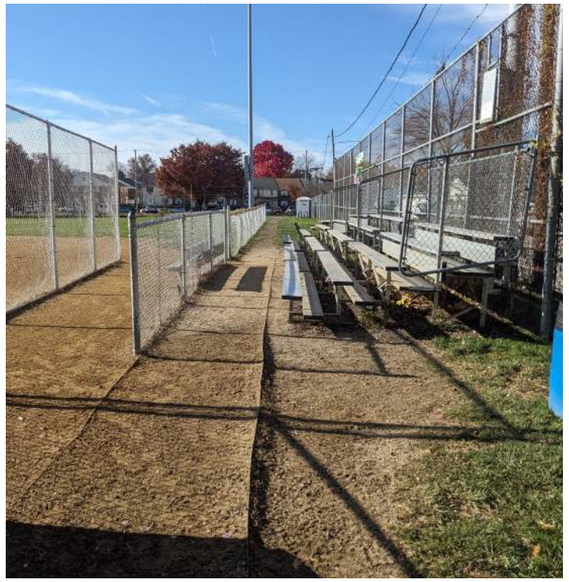
Green Field is a multi-purpose athletic field with ample parking and backing up to residences generally rented by college students. It is a popular location for sports leagues and intramural leagues, but is commonly used by college students for passive recreation when games are not ongoing. Similarly, there have been issues with people walking their dogs within the field and not properly cleaning up after them, creating undesirable playing conditions.

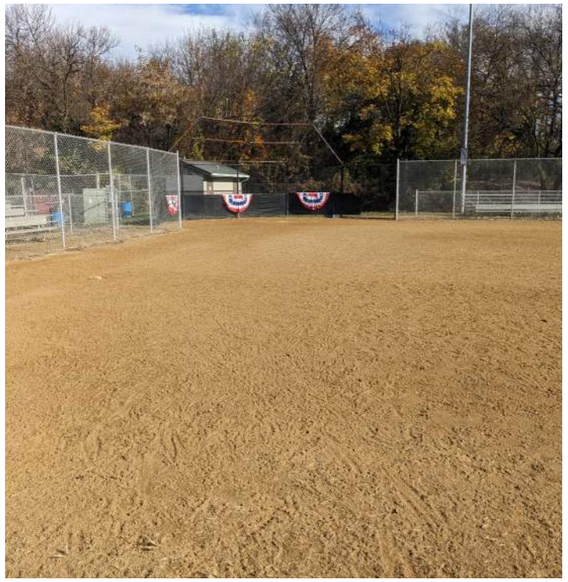
CURRENT FEATURES

- Bleachers
- Multi-Purpose Athletic Field
- Parking Lot
- Picnic Tables
- Restrooms
- Snack Bar

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore connection to Mosteller Park through creek-side trail connection.
- Address lack of ADA access to bleachers and facilities.
- Restrooms facilities should be upgraded with permanent improvements to improve functionality.
- Evaluate the condition of the restroom and the storage buildings and consider cost effectiveness of developing a new structure to serve both needs.





Green Field

THE MULTI-PURPOSE FIELD

S. Franklin Street | 1.90 Acres | Ward 4

Accessible Path to Bleachers

Accessible Bleachers

Batting and Pitching Cages

Improved Concessions, Storage, and Restroom

Team Pavilion

Creek Trail Connection

Mosteller Park

THE CREEK SIDE RETREAT | 601 E. Rosedale Avenue | 0.90 Acres | Ward 4

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.42

ACCESSIBILITY
2.38

SOCIABILITY
2.14

COMFORT
2.75

USES
2.74

OBSERVATIONS

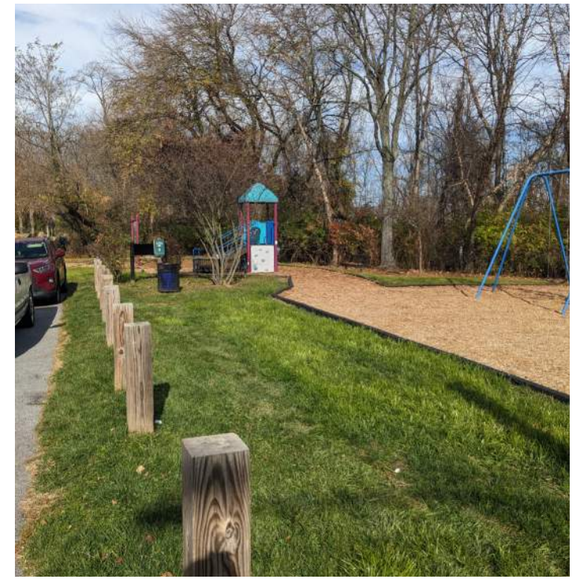
Mosteller Park is a neighborhood park within the borough that is adjacent to decommissioned commuter rail line and backed by a stream. Much like Veteran's Memorial Park, it is difficult to find without previously knowing where it is due to its only access point being two small alleys. There is no additional signage from the street to help indicate where the park is. Outside of this, it is a serviceable neighborhood park with up-to-date amenities and a pleasant setting. It will not accommodate larger gatherings or amenities due to its size but is functional within its current capacity and can be built upon as such.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Basketball Court
- Grill
- Open Play Area
- Picnic Tables
- Playground

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide access to the creek via a ramp and steps down.
- Explore connection to Green Field via creek-side trail. See concept plan on the following page.
- Replace out-dated play equipment; explore natural play elements.



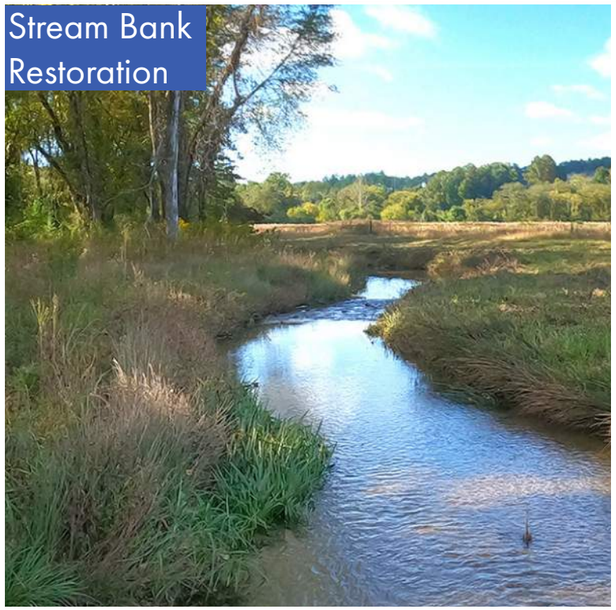
Mosteller Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

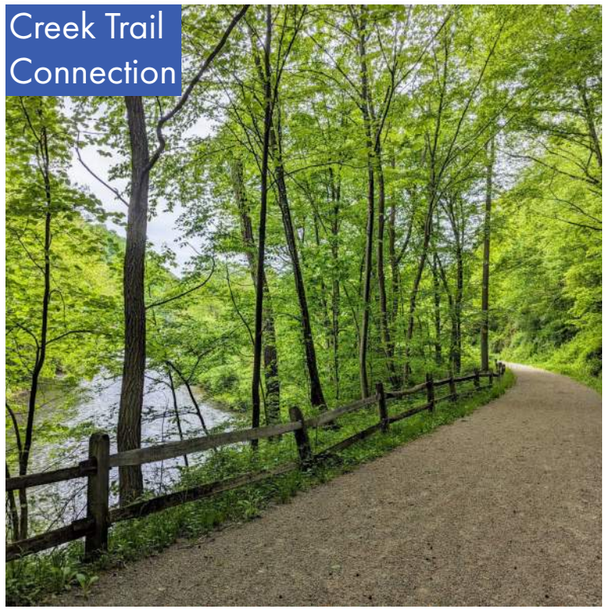
601 E. Rosedale Ave. 0.90 Acres Ward 4

Creek Access and Nature Play

Stream Bank Restoration



Creek Trail Connection



Natural Playground

Outdoor Education

Mud Kitchen

Mosteller Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES | 601 E. Rosedale Ave. | 0.90 Acres | Ward 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

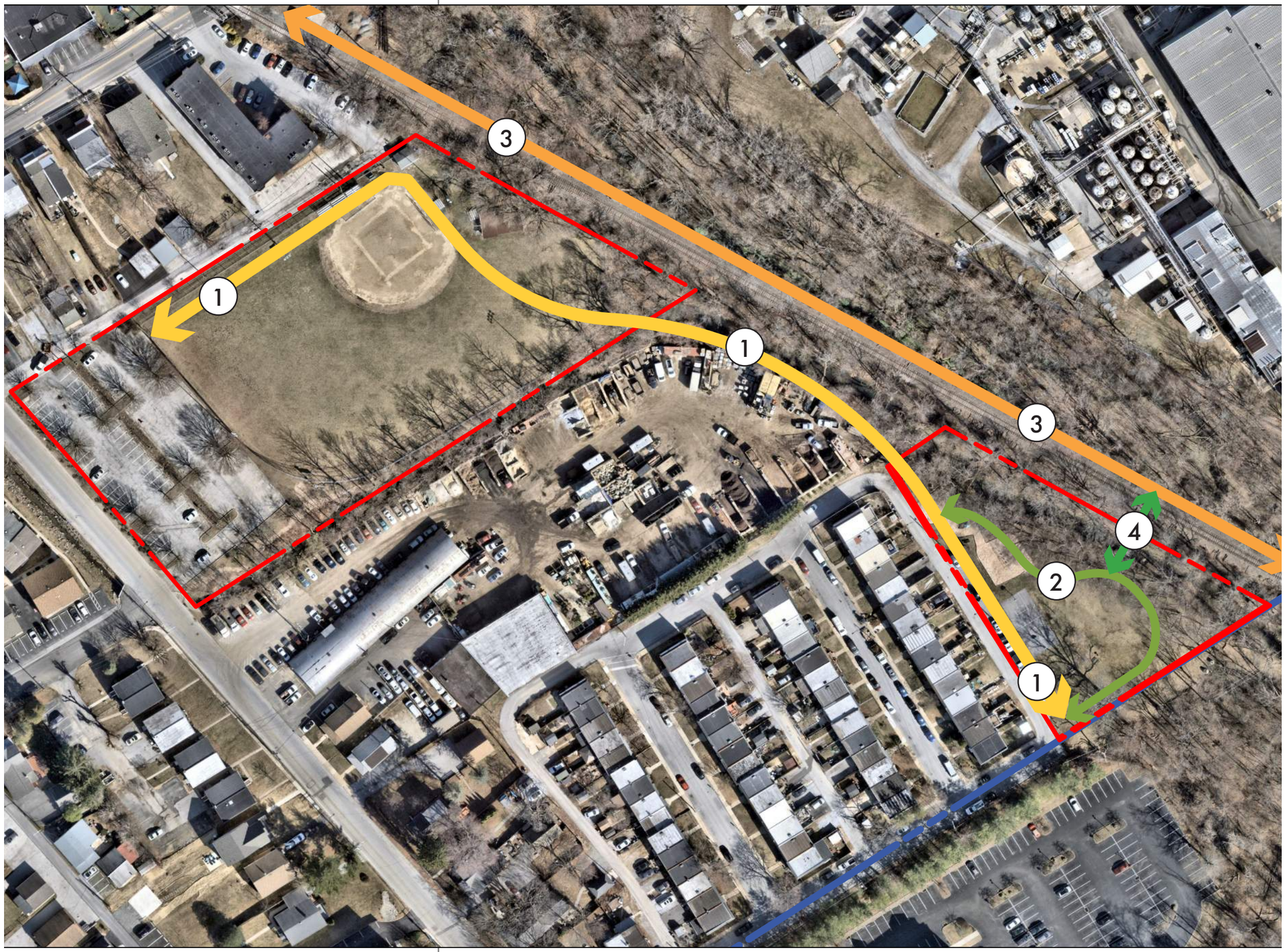
1. Improved Off-Street Parking
2. Bicycle Parking and Bike Racks
3. Restroom Facilities
4. Paved Bituminous Trail
5. Paved Bituminous Trail Connection to Green Field
6. New Playground and Safety Surfacing
7. Creek Access and Wading Area
8. Box Culvert Creek Crossing
9. Trail Connection and Track Crossing to the Proposed Turk's Head Trail
10. Tree and Fence Screen for Adjacent Properties
11. Proposed Turk's Head Trail
12. Borough of West Chester Southern Boundary

Mosteller Park to Green Field

POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mosteller Park to Green Field Connection (Easement Required)
2. Mosteller Park Interior Loop Trail
3. Proposed Turk's Head Trail
4. Potential Connection to the Proposed Turk's Head Trail



Horace Pippin Park

PARK PROFILE | 520 W. Market St. | 0.90 Acres | Ward 6

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 2.75

ACCESSIBILITY
2.36

SOCIABILITY
2.72

COMFORT
3.07

USES
2.96

OBSERVATIONS

Horace Pippin is a neighborhood park that is largely composed of one, open field. A backstop adorns the northwest corner and a playground in the northeast. Outside of this, the park is primarily made up of open space broken up by a few picnic tables. It does not have a clear direction or identity and the backstop is a remnant structure that is not utilized and serves no purpose.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Backstop
- Basketball Court
- Open Play Area
- Picnic Tables
- Playground

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in a Master Plan to determine best uses for this park.

Horace Pippin Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

520 W. Market St. | 0.90 Acres | Ward 6

New Playground (Ages 5-12)

Horseshoe Courts

New Climbing Equipment

New Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)

Outdoor Ping-Pong Table

Game Tables

Everhart Park

THE URBAN OASIS | 100 S. Brandywine St. | 10.2 Acres | Ward 6

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 4.33

ACCESSIBILITY
3.81

SOCIABILITY
4.71

COMFORT
4.58

USES
4.28

OBSERVATIONS

Everhart Park is a large, excellently maintained park that is one of three major parks within West Chester Borough. With a plethora of healthy, canopy trees and a well-maintained creek running through the center, it is a picturesque park that attracts weddings and other events. A recently renovated playground encourages more active use as well and helps to bring out families, while benches, walkways, and a gazebo bring in other recreators.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Activity Building
- Basketball Court
- Gazebo
- Grill
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Rustic Footbridge
- Water Fountain

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Address ADA access concerns specifically around entrances.
- Provide signage for and clearly mark ADA parking off of South Bradford Avenue.
- Edge treatments: Consider sidewalk connections around perimeter of the park to provide accessibility.
- Emphasize habitat through signage program aimed at celebrating biodiversity; act as pilot for West Chester's other parks.
- Consider dedicated nature-play along creek bed.

Everhart Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

100 S. Brandywine St. 10.2 Acres Ward 6

Stream Bed Crossings and Nature Play

Audubon Bird Certified Habitat

Interpretive Signage

Hanging Tents and Hammocks

Natural Playground

Creek Platforms

Hoopes Park

THE HILLSIDE HAVEN

700 Hoopes Park Lane. 16.2 Acres Ward 7

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 3.54

ACCESSIBILITY
3.02

SOCIABILITY
3.43

COMFORT
4

USES
3.8

OBSERVATIONS

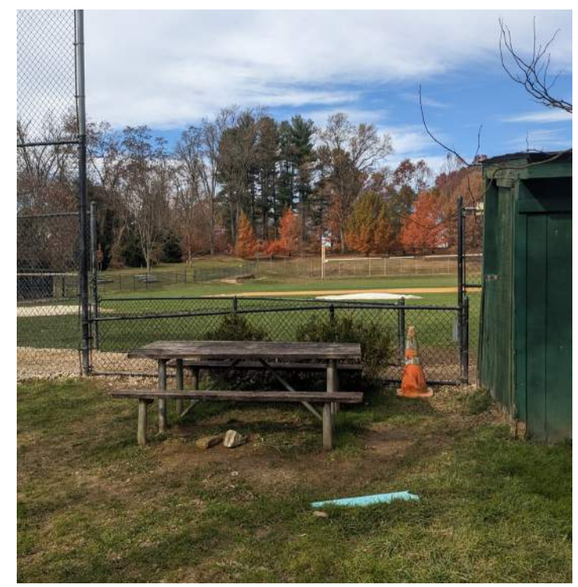
Hoopes Park is one of West Chester's "Big 3" Community Parks and the largest park within the borough. It is home to the Adult Baseball League, who have played in the park since 1956. The park features a story walk that, through a partnership with the local library, shares children's books along the walk that runs along the left edge of the park. There is a playground atop the large hill to the right of the side that needs to be replaced. Compared to Marshall Square and Everhart Park, Hoopes Park requires additional master planning and refurbishments.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Activity Building
- Adult Baseball Field
- Basketball Court
- Grill
- Open Play Area
- Parking
- Pavilion
- Picnic Tables
- Scattered Playground Equipment
- 2x Restroom and Storage Buildings
- Tennis Courts
- Water Fountain
- Tennis Courts
- Water Fountain

RECOMMENDATIONS

- See conceptual plan on the following page.

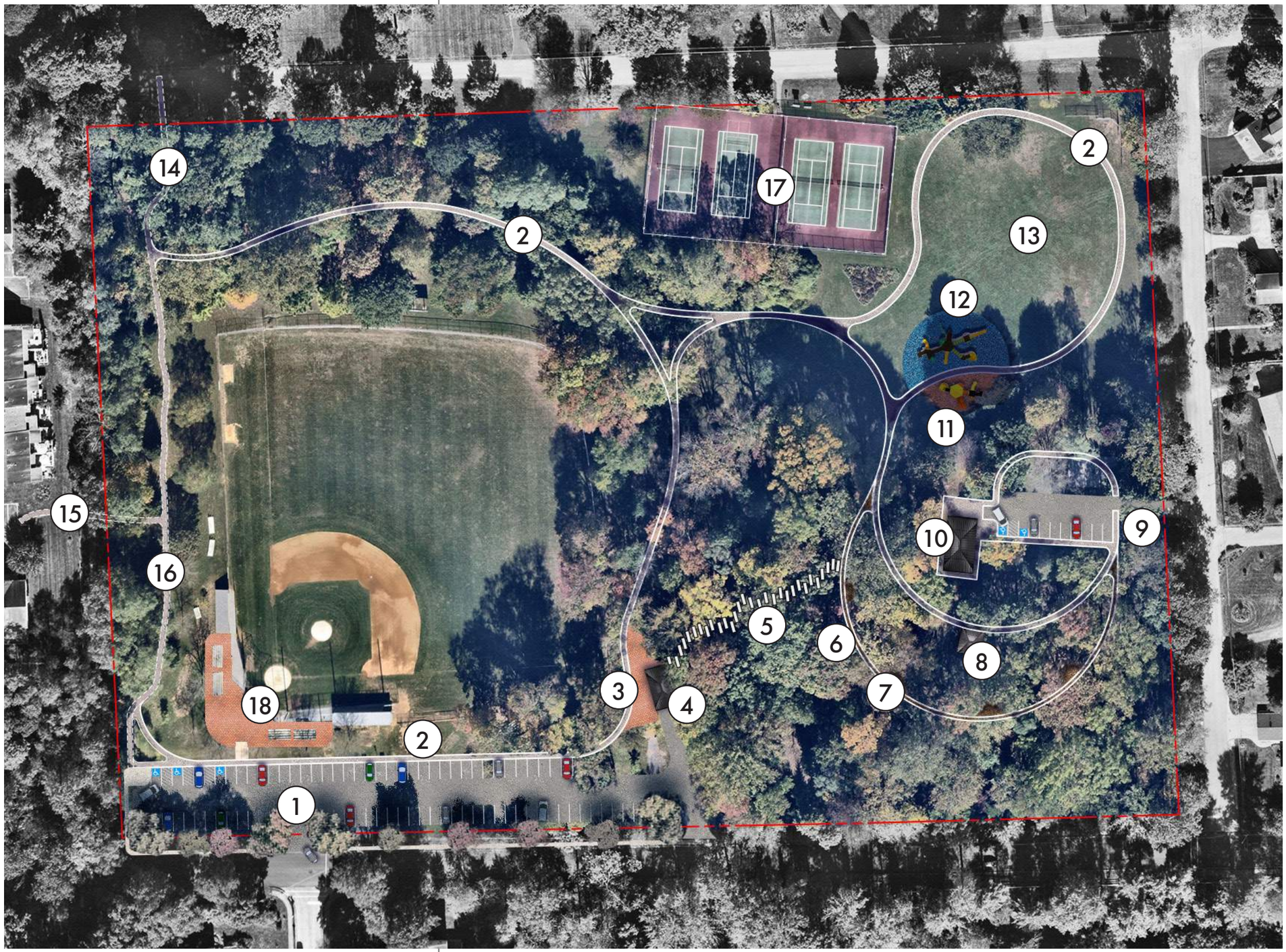


Hoopes Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES | 700 Hoopes Park Lane. | 16.2 Acres | Ward 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expanded Parking Lot (75 Spaces, 4 ADA Spaces)
2. 0.5 Mile Bituminous Loop Trail
3. Gathering Plaza and Viewing Area
4. Restroom and Storage Building Upgrade
5. Stone Stairs
6. Woodland Trail
7. Natural Play Areas Incorporated Into Woodlands
8. Overlook Seating Area
9. Re-Surfaced Parking Lot and New Turn-Around Along Hoopes Park Lane
10. Pavilion Improvements
11. New Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)
12. New Playground (Ages 5-12)
13. Open and Maintained Lawn for Free Play
14. Existing Connection to Gravel Trail
15. Existing Neighborhood Trail Connection
16. Existing Story Trail
17. Tennis Court Renovations Currently Underway to provide 3 Tennis Courts and 2 Pickleball Courts
18. Baseball Field Upgrades and Dugout Improvements



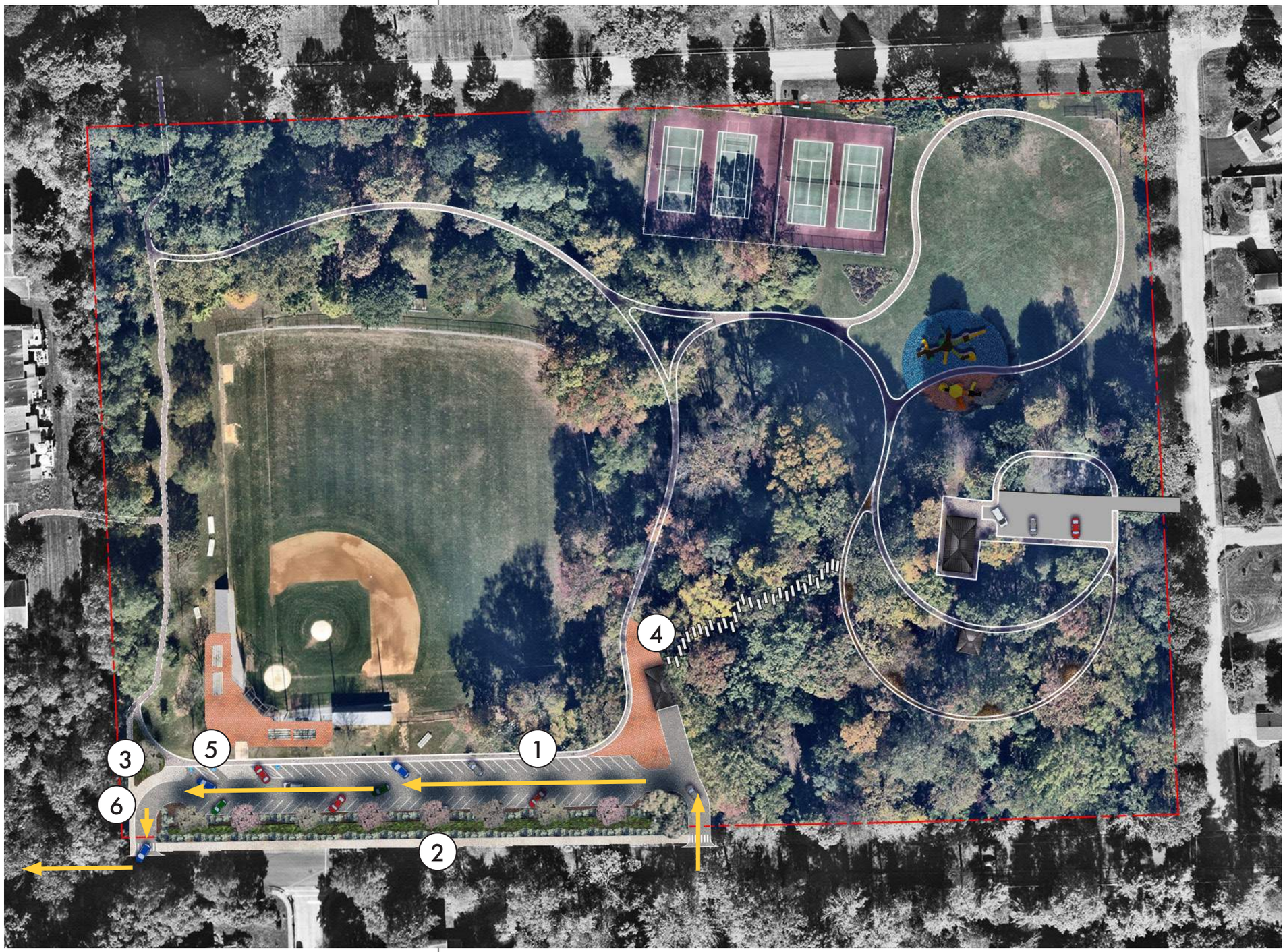
Hoopes Park

PARKING OVERLAY 700 Hoopes Park Lane. 16.2 Acres Ward 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expanded Parking Lot (80 Spaces, 4 ADA Spaces)
2. Stormwater Area and Visual Buffer
3. Plaza Stormwater Area
4. Expanded Plaza and Gathering Area
5. Drop-off Island and Accessible Parking Facilities
6. Drop-off Area and Meeting Place

The Parking Overlay sees a slightly expanded parking lot through employing a one-way, slanted parking approach. With the space saved additional plaza space is created as well as a designated drop-off and accessible drop-off area. A stormwater area along West Ashbridge Street both captures the Hoopes Park's stormwater overflow and acts as a visual buffer between the park and the adjacent neighborhood.



Hoopes Park

PRECEDENT IMAGES

700 Hoopes Park Lane. 16.2 Acres Ward 7

New Playground (Ages 5-12)

Stone Steps

Woodland Trail

New Tot-Lot (Ages 2-5)

Overlook Seating Area

Natural Play Areas

Veteran's Memorial Park

THE HIDDEN GEM | 315 Veit Alley | 0.50 Acres | Ward 7

OVERALL PARK SCORE: 3.64

ACCESSIBILITY
3.90

SOCIABILITY
3.14

COMFORT
4.05

USES
3.36

OBSERVATIONS

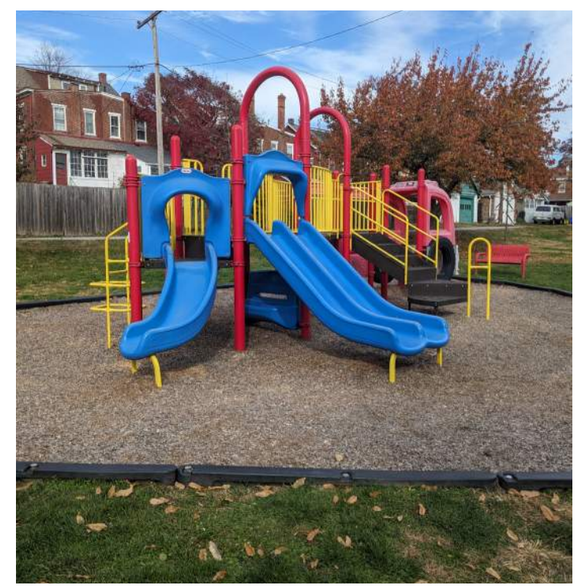
Veteran's Memorial Park is nestled behind numerous houses and is not easily visible from the street. A front gateway made between two houses is not entirely clear as an entrance to the park either. Despite this its pavilion, picnic tables, and playground are all appropriate features for a neighborhood park and helps it to serve the function well, though many people do not know the park is there.

CURRENT FEATURES

- Open Play Area
- Pavilion
- Picnic Tables
- Playground

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Better incorporate the alley as part of the park; continue the path across the stormwater garden via an accessible bridge.
- Define entrance at alley so it is more clear.



Veteran's Memorial Park

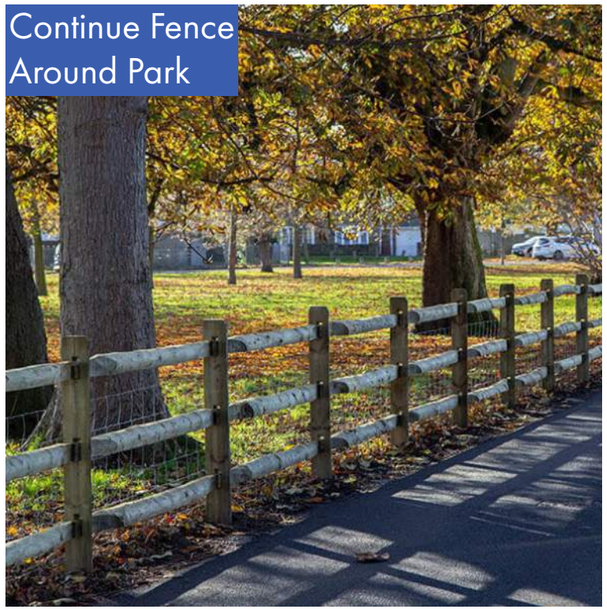
PRECEDENT IMAGES

315 Veit Alley | 0.50 Acres | Ward 7

Defined Entry Sequence

Emphasized Entrance

Continue Fence Around Park



Footbridge Over Swale

Concrete Food Prep Station with Grill

New Tot Lot

Chapter 13

Mandatory Dedication of Park Land

Amount of Parkland

Overview: How much parkland does West Chester Borough need to meet the recreation needs of residents? Currently West Chester Borough has 42.3 acres of parkland in 12 parks. In addition, the Melton Center has a park that is open to the public but not permanently protected.

Parkland is typically evaluated on a population ratio method that considers the acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. A population ratio method follows the logic that the amount of active parkland in a community should relate to the population to be served by the parkland. Simply put, the population of a community will drive the number of ballfields and basketball courts a community needs. As a community's population grows, so does the need for parkland. A population calculation can readily be updated as a community grows.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) does not endorse a one-size-fits-all standard for parkland acreage. While traditional guidelines once recommended a minimum of 10.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, NRPA now encourages communities to develop parkland goals that reflect their unique needs, demographics, geography, and local priorities. Through its Agency Performance Review and benchmarking tools, NRPA provides data to help municipalities compare themselves to similar communities and make informed decisions. This approach emphasizes equity, access, and quality over arbitrary acreage targets, recognizing that well-located, well-maintained parks can serve more people more effectively than simply expanding parkland.

The West Chester Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan establishes tailored parkland standards by drawing on a combination of historical precedent; national, state, regional, and county benchmarks; local context, peer borough comparisons; and consultations with land conservation organizations. The planning process reviewed traditional parkland standards and the evolution of NRPA's position, analyzed current NRPA Agency Performance Review metrics along with the metrics of Pennsylvania, DVRPC, and Chester County. Extensive research into peer boroughs helped to compare parkland acreage holdings in similar communities. To ensure that local standards reflect best practices and are grounded in the realities of land use, development patterns, and community needs, the plan also incorporated input from state and county agencies as well as private non-profit land conservation organizations, including WeConservePA. This multi-faceted approach provided a robust foundation for setting realistic and meaningful parkland goals for the Borough.

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The prevailing standard for active parkland acreage had been 10-acres per thousand-population. For more than 50 years. But much as changed in sports, recreation, and the way we spend our time. Consider the following factors that influence the amount of parkland needed to serve a community:

- *Pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the country*, having surged from near obscurity to a nationwide phenomenon. With more than 16 million players as of 2023, participation skyrocketed by 52% in just one year (2022–2023), creating unprecedented demand for courts and facilities.

Benefits of the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland or Fee-in-Lieu Ordinance

Recreational Opportunities

Recreational areas and opportunities can be created during the design stage of subdivisions and land developments, when design flexibility is potentially greatest.

Reduced Reliance on Public Expenditures

The applicant provides the land or funding for recreation facilities.

Additional Funding Potential

Fee-In-Lieu Ordinances can generate funds to match other grant sources.

Flexibility

Fee-In-Lieu can be used to meet recreational needs in areas where dedicated land may not be practical or available.

Energy Conservation

Recreational areas provided through Parkland Dedication and Fee-In-Lieu Ordinances inherently conserve energy by encouraging efficient land use, reducing the reliance on vehicles to access recreational areas, and creating opportunities for walkable activities based on Smart Growth principles.

Accessibility Requirements

Recreation land or fees or a combination thereof, are to be used only for the purpose of providing park and/or recreational facilities accessible to the development.

Regulations Must be Followed

The municipality must follow other specific standards and procedures set forth in the Municipalities Planning Code.

Source: Chester County Planning Commission

- *New youth sports have risen in popularity, particularly soccer and lacrosse:*
    - Soccer gained national momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, US Youth Soccer, the largest youth soccer organization in the country, has over 3 million members, ages 5 to 19.
    - Lacrosse began to take off in the early 2000s and now counts 1.89 million participants nationwide, with youth leagues expanding rapidly across many regions.
- *Girls' participation in sports has grown dramatically since Title IX was enacted in 1972*, ensuring equal access to programs and activities receiving federal funds; including athletics. At that time, fewer than 300,000 girls played high school sports, making up just 7% of all high school athletes. By the 2024–2025 school year, that number had risen to 4.24 million girls, representing 42% of all high school athletes. In 1972, only 1 in 27 girls played sports; by 2025, that figure had grown to 60%. This growth is also evident in youth sports leagues.
- *Youth sports now operate across multiple seasons, no longer confined to traditional schedules.* Baseball, for example, is widely played in both spring and fall. Soccer and lacrosse also offer year-round opportunities, reflecting increased demand and participation.

It is important to note that West Chester Borough has very limited recreation facilities including sports fields, game courts, dog parks, skate park and public spaces in the town center. Consequently, borough residents:

- Participate in soccer, lacrosse and field hockey leagues in other municipalities.
- Travel to parks in other communities.
- Use parks in other municipalities including playgrounds, natural areas, pavilions and walking and biking pathways. Respondents to the public opinion survey reported using a total 1,939 different facilities in other communities.

1. http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/media_kit/ataglance/, accessed May 2025..
2. SFIA. 2025 https://sfia.org. Accessed: May 15, 2025.
3. National Federation of State High School Associations, 2010-11 High School Athletics Participation Survey.
4. https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FINAL6_WSF-Title-IX-Infographic-2022.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com Accessed May 15, 2025.

Needs Assessment and Community Outreach: A Clear Call for More Parks and Recreation Facilities

The West Chester Borough PROS Plan was guided by a robust needs assessment process that combined data analysis, site inventories, public engagement, and peer community comparisons. This comprehensive approach confirmed a growing and widespread demand for expanded parks and recreation opportunities throughout the Borough.

What We Did: The planning process included:

- Park system inventories to evaluate existing conditions and capacities
- Demographic and land use analysis to understand community trends and constraints
- Public surveys, stakeholder interviews, and pop-up outreach to capture resident voices
- Focus groups and committee meetings with diverse representatives
- Comparative research with peer boroughs and state-level parkland benchmarks
- Mapping and GIS analysis to identify service gaps and park deserts

These methods ensured that the findings reflected both the quantitative needs of a dense, land-constrained borough and the qualitative feedback from residents and stakeholders across neighborhoods.

What We Found: The needs assessment and outreach process revealed:

- Significant service gaps in neighborhoods
- Heavy demand on existing parks, with many facilities showing signs of wear from overuse
- Strong public support for more recreation opportunities, especially walking trails, multi-generational gathering spaces, and places to enjoy nature
- A growing population—including college students, families, and older adults—placing pressure on limited parkland
- Disparities in park access and amenities across neighborhoods, indicating an equity concern
- Desire for more structured programming, including sports, fitness, arts, and nature education
- Need for facilities that can serve multiple uses year-round, including indoor space and sheltered outdoor pavilions

Residents and stakeholders consistently expressed that **West Chester's existing parks are valued but not sufficient for the current and future needs of the community**. Many participants noted traveling to surrounding townships to access trails, large fields, playgrounds, or passive open space not available in the Borough.

The Bottom Line: The results of the PROS Plan outreach and technical assessment align around a clear conclusion: West Chester Borough needs additional parks and recreation facilities to ensure all residents have equitable access to safe, high-quality spaces for play, health, and connection. Meeting this need will require strategic reinvestment in existing sites, creative approaches to land acquisition and partnerships, and the development of new facilities tailored to community priorities.

Unique Population Considerations in the Borough Parks and Recreation Facilities

While the Borough's current population is estimated to be 19,658, proposed multi-family residential developments will increase the population to about 22,000, an increase of about 13%. In addition, West Chester university has a population of 17,076 students including about 4,500 – 5,000 students that live in the Borough further swelling the population.

Tourism: Within the Philadelphia region and Chester County, West Chester Borough is a popular and growing visitor hub. It is a magnet for day-trippers from Philadelphia or Delaware; history and architecture buffs; event-goers and foodies; families visiting students; and

a heritage and cultural tourism audience. The Food Festival alone attracts about 25,000 people. The Brandywine Visitors Bureau estimates that more than 2,000,000 visit Chester County annually with West Chester Borough being a top destination.

Key Takeaway: West Chester Borough's parks and recreation system must support far more people than its residential population alone suggests—including thousands of students and a growing stream of visitors. This dynamic places disproportionate strain on limited parkland and facilities, intensifying wear, crowding, and competition for access. Without sustained investment and strategic planning, these pressures risk exacerbating inequities in who has access to safe, high-quality recreational spaces. Funding decisions and capital planning must reflect the true scope of demand, not just census figures, to ensure the system remains inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the community's needs.

National Metrics: More than a decade ago, NRPA (National Recreation & Park Association) replaced the single set of standards with the creation of the nationwide benchmarking tool for parks and recreation. Today, NRPA Park Metrics is the most comprehensive source of data benchmarks and insights for park and recreation agencies. An annual report summarizes the benchmarking data contributed by nearly 1,100 park and recreation agencies to the Park Metrics database. This report presents the "typical" (median) nationwide benchmarking numbers reminiscent of "standards." But, digging deeper in Park Metrics highlights the benefits of peer data and the limitations of the former one-size-fits-all set of standards.

In 2025, the NRPA's report shows that the national median of parkland is 10.2 acres per 1,000 residents. It also shows that municipalities have one park per 2,411 residents. For populations under 20,000, the median acreage per 1,000 is 12.9 with a range of 5.9 at the lower quartile of municipalities to a high of 22 acres per 1,000 in the higher quartile of municipalities. While the Borough falls short in parkland at only 2.2 acres per 1,000, it exceeds in having more parks at 1,630 residents per park.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Parkland Metrics: Pennsylvania does not have a single mandated parkland standard, but several widely accepted planning benchmarks are used throughout the state—typically grounded in NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association) guidance, DVRPC (for southeastern PA), and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The most cited range is 10 to 12 acres per 1,000 residents. This includes:

- Mini parks: 0.25–0.5 acres/1,000
- Neighborhood parks: 1.0–2.0 acres/1,000
- Community parks: 5.0–8.0 acres/1,000
- Regional parks/open space: additional acreage based on setting and access

This standard is referenced in DCNR planning guidance, county comprehensive plans (e.g., Chester, Montgomery, Lancaster), and many municipal ordinances.

Regional Parkland Metrics: DVRPC (Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission) developed standards, established in DVRPC's 2003 Balanced Land Use Guidelines, to help municipalities determine appropriate parkland dedication levels during subdivision/planning. For High-density Municipalities, DVRPC's identified target around 7 acres/1,000. Applied to West Chester Borough's population is 7.08 acres per 1,000.

Chester County Parkland Metrics: Chester County itself does not have a single unified "acres per 1,000 residents" parkland standard, but its municipalities typically follow state and national guidelines which translate into 10 – 12.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.

Peer Borough Comparisons: Peer comparisons are very important. Since the national benchmarks address about 1,000 municipalities, the planning team conducted research of peer boroughs in Pennsylvania to generate information on parkland availability in similar communities in Pennsylvania. The comparisons are fully reported in Table___ of the Financing chapter of this Plan. Table 1 presents the peer borough comparisons for parkland in Pennsylvania.

2025 West Chester Borough's Status Quo Calculation: 19,658 (2024 U.S. Bureau of the Census population estimate) ÷ 1,000 = 19.65 acres per 1,000 population.

42.3 (parkland acreage) ÷ 19,658 = 2.1-acres of parkland/1,000 residents

At 2.1-acres per 1,000 population, West Chester Borough falls short of historical standards, current national, state, regional, and county metrics as well as peer borough comparisons developed for West Chester Borough's PROS Plan. This suggests the need for additional parkland for current residents. The need for parkland to serve future residents moving into the borough at a significant rate (already exceeding DVPRC population projections for 2050) is especially important as to relieve pressure from overuse of existing facilities by about 13% more people. The planning and outreach to recreation user groups further verified the need for additional parkland in the Borough.

Parkland Standard Recommended for West Chester Borough

A needs-based assessment of parkland should consider population growth projections, the parkland/facility needs of user groups and their participation trends, the unique characteristics of the municipality, municipal recreation goals, and other elements. The public outreach, parkland use, and population projections illustrate that additional parkland is needed to serve current residents as well as the significantly increasing residential population.

Based on the acreage analysis, population, research into parkland standards, the report of Thomas Committa Associates in Appendix B on the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland, and the findings of public outreach, the municipal parkland goal of six acres per 1,000 population is suggested as the default standard for future parkland planning analysis in West Chester Borough. The following conclusions can be drawn from the assessment of parkland acreage using the six-acre parkland standard:

- West Chester Borough has a current parkland deficit of 98 acres. This will increase by another 18 acres with new multi-family development.
- Although short of the Pennsylvania metric of 10 acres per 1,000 population, the six-acre parkland recommendation falls at the mid-point of peer borough parkland, an acre short of the DVRPC standard, and in the lower quartile of national findings on municipal parkland.
- The Borough is already densely developed. Opportunities for additional parkland to be considered include the future of the West Chester Country Club, redevelopment in the Borough, additional public spaces in the downtown no matter the size, and parking solutions that could free up existing parking areas for public recreation use.

Land Dedication Formula: The six-acre parkland standard can be translated into a land dedication formula for adoption as the Park Dedication and Land and Fees in Lieu for Parks and Recreation amendment to the SALDO (West Chester Borough Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance). The land dedication formula determines how much land is required for dedication as parkland as development occurs.

A dwelling unit calculation using the municipal parkland standard of providing six-acres of parkland per 1,000 residents is the basis for the land dedication formula. To derive a per unit calculation using this methodology, the 1,000 population figure is divided by the municipality's 2024 U.S. Census average household size. The following calculation results.

- West Chester Borough 2024 Average Household Size: 2.1 1,000/2.1 persons per dwelling unit = 476 dwellings
- Dividing the desired six-acre per 1,000 residents by the number of dwelling units/1,0000 persons (476) yields the amount of land to be dedicated per dwelling unit:
- 6-acres/408 dwellings = 0.013 acres/dwelling
- Example: For a subdivision of 100 residences, the 0.013-acre requirement yields 1.3-acres of parkland:
- 0.013-acres/dwelling x 100 dwellings = 1.3 acres

Parkland and Design Features: This PROS Plan's responsibility regarding the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland and Fees-in-Lieu is to set the standard for parkland. The TCA Report on Recommended Ordinance Changes that is contained in Appendix B provide for the recommendations that support Borough goals in parkland and are related to the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland

Fee-in-Lieu: When fee-in-lieu is preferred over land dedication, West Chester Borough should require that the fee relate to the fair market value of the land to be dedicated.

Using the 1.3 acres of land dedication for a 100-unit subdivision, the developer should provide the Borough with an appraisal of the required 1.3-acre parcel. Therefore, if the land were appraised at $213,000 per acre as an example based on current residential property sales, the Borough would accept a $276,900 fee-in-lieu of the land dedication.

With a per-dwelling fee, the fee should be updated annually to align with current real estate market conditions and the current fair market value of an acre of land, the basis of the dwelling unit fee calculation.

Land Type and Characteristic for Dedication Requirements: The characteristics of land suitable for dedication for recreation purposes should be defined by the West Chester Borough Subdivision and Land Development ordinance. The current ordinance has generalized criteria for lands to be dedicated. Mandatory dedication ordinances should provide concise criteria for land to be dedication for parkland to protect the municipality from receiving lands that do not provide recreation benefit.

West Chester Borough Fees-in-Lieu

All fees paid in lieu will be determined as follows:

- *Recreational Land Fee-in-Lieu:* The applicant wouldn't pay the Borough in an agreed upon payment plan a fee-in-lieu of dedication calculated in an amount equal to the market value per acre in the Zoning District in which the project is situated.
- *Recreational Infrastructure Fee-in-Lieu:* The applicant would pay the Borough a fee-in-lieu of recreational infrastructure in an amount to be determined for each 1,000 square fee of building structure or improvement proposed for any non-residential land development plan.
- All fees paid in lieu of land dedication or recreational infrastructure shall be used for:
  - The acquisition of land for parks, recreation areas, facilities, open space and trails or bikeways as component addition, to the West Chester Borough system.
  - The construction of improvements and recreational infrastructure.
  - Costs incidental to such purposes including, but not limited to, planning, engineering, design, administrative and legal fees, utility relocation or installation, construction of sewage or water facilities, vehicular and pedestrian access signage and the purchase of park equipment and maintenance.
  - Combination of Land Dedication and Fees in Lieu of Land Dedication. The Borough may accept a combination of land dedication in fee simple title, grants of rights-of-way and easements and fees in lieu of land in order to meet the requirements and standards of the West Chester Borough PROS Plan or such additional plans and designs as may be approved for the Borough's trail and bikeway system.

Conclusion: Planning for a Resilient, Equitable, and Well-Served Park System

The West Chester Borough PROS Plan makes clear that the Borough's current parkland supply, just 2.1 acres per 1,000 residents, falls significantly below local, state, and national benchmarks. When accounting for its unique pressures, growing residential density, a large student population, and regional tourism, West Chester's true service population far exceeds its census count, further widening the gap between supply and demand.

Compounding this challenge is the fact that **West Chester is already a densely developed borough, with little open space remaining for traditional parkland acquisition**. This makes the need for creative, strategic, and opportunistic planning even more urgent, whether through redevelopment, joint use of public land, or adaptive reuse of underutilized spaces.

Establishing a **six-acre-per-1,000-residents standard** provides a realistic, attainable benchmark grounded in best practices, peer comparisons, and public input. Applying this standard reveals an **existing deficit of nearly 100 acres**, with more parkland needed to serve planned development. Without proactive action, this shortfall will increase, resulting in facility overuse, inequitable access, and diminished quality of life.

To address this need, the Borough must implement strategic land dedication and fee-in-lieu policies, prioritize investment in underused or redevelopable sites, and explore innovative partnerships to acquire or reclaim public space. The goal is not merely to add acreage, but to create a resilient, inclusive, and high-functioning park system that meets the evolving needs of West Chester's full community—today and in the future.

Chapter 14
Program and Services Analysis

Recreation Opportunities: Programs and Services

Overview: The West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Department delivers an impressive array of high-quality programs, events, and activities year-round—despite operating with a small but highly dedicated professional staff of just two. Through strategic partnerships with public agencies, private businesses, and nonprofit organizations, the department has built a robust and diverse recreation calendar that serves residents of all ages. Their ability to leverage limited resources into a thriving community asset exemplifies both innovation and commitment to public service.

Recreation Programs and Services Assessment: The PROS Plan Assessment offers an in-depth perspective of program and service offerings and helps identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities regarding recreation opportunities programs, and services. The assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, key system-wide issues, areas of improvement, and future programs and services for residents.

The consulting team based these program findings and comments from a review of information provided by West Chester's management team including Parks and Recreation, Borough Management, and community key stakeholders including program descriptions, financial data, partnerships, promotion methods, etc. This information addresses the program offerings from a systems perspective for the entire portfolio of programs, as well as individual program information.

West Chester Borough offers a diverse array of public recreation programs through its Parks and Recreation Department and its partners as shown in the 2024 Program Inventory.

2024 Program Inventory

The West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Department not only offers an impressive range of year-round programs but also organizes some of the region's most beloved community events—many of which draw hundreds to tens of thousands of participants. These programs are made possible by the dedication of the small professional staff, the generous support of sponsors, and the enthusiastic involvement of volunteers, partner organizations, and municipal departments. The following inventory highlights participation levels, staffing needs, sponsorship support, and the wide-reaching impact of key annual events that contribute to West Chester's vibrant civic life and strong sense of community.

Table 1 is a comprehensive listing of public recreation programs and community events offered by the West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Department in 2024. This year-round schedule reflects the department's commitment to providing high-quality, inclusive opportunities for fitness, enrichment, and connection—serving residents of all ages through seasonal classes, sports clinics, youth camps, wellness activities, community festivals, and destination trips. The table that follows showcases the breadth and diversity of offerings hosted across local parks, downtown spaces, and regional destinations.

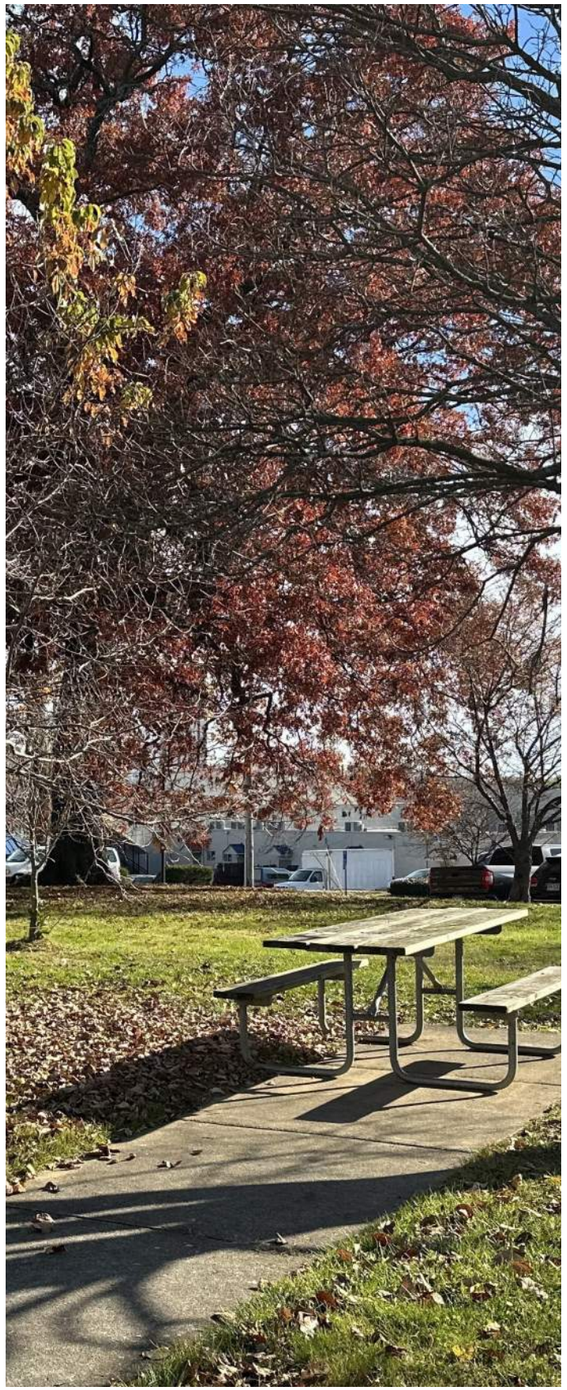


Table 1. West Chester Borough Program Inventory 2024		
Activity	**Start/End Dates**	**Location**
Zumba in the Park - 03/16 Class	03/16/2024 - 03/16/2024	Marshall Square Park
Zumba in the Park - 03/16 Class	03/17/2024 - 04/21/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 1 Intermediate Weekend	03/17/2024 - 04/21/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 1 Junior Weekend	03/17/2024 - 04/21/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Zumba in the Park - 3/23	03/23/2024 - 03/23/2024	Marshall Square Park
Washington D.C. Cherry Blossom Trip - Washington DC Cherry Blossom Trip	03/29/2024 - 03/29/2024	Washington D.C.
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Weekday Intermediate Session 1	04/10/2024 - 05/08/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Weekday Session 1 Beginner	04/10/2024 - 05/08/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
225 West Chester Parade - 225 West Chester Parade	04/21/2024 - 04/21/2024	Downtown West Chester
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Mondays - Spring - Adult clinic	04/22/2024 - 06/03/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Tuesday - Spring - Adult clinic	04/23/2024 - 05/28/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Yoga With Hannah - Yoga in the Park 5/2	05/02/2024 - 05/02/2024	Marshall Square Park
Triple Threat Fitness Yoga In the Park - All 3 Classes	05/04/2024 - 05/18/2024	Everhart Park
Triple Threat Fitness Yoga In the Park - May 4th Class	05/04/2024 - 05/04/2024	Everhart Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Junior Session 2 Weekend	05/05/2024 - 06/02/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 2 Weekend Beginner	05/05/2024 - 06/02/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 2 Weekend Intermediate	05/05/2024 - 06/02/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Yoga With Hannah - Yoga in the Park 5/9	05/09/2024 - 05/09/2024	Marshall Square Park
New York On Your Own - New York On Your Own	05/11/2024 - 05/11/2024	New York City
Triple Threat Fitness Yoga In the Park - May 11th Class	05/11/2024 - 05/11/2024	Everhart Park
Yoga With Hannah - Yoga in the Park 5/16	05/16/2024 - 05/16/2024	Marshall Square Park

Table 1. West Chester Borough Program Inventory 2024 (cont.)		
Activity	**Start/End Dates**	**Location**
Triple Threat Fitness Yoga In the Park - May 18th Class	05/18/2024 - 05/18/2024	Everhart Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 2 Weekday Beginner	05/22/2024 - 06/19/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Spring 2024 Session 2 Weekday Intermediate	05/22/2024 - 06/19/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Yoga With Hannah - Yoga in the Park 5/23	05/23/2024 - 05/23/2024	Marshall Square Park
Yoga With Hannah - Yoga in the Park 5/30	05/30/2024 - 05/30/2024	Marshall Square Park
Butterfly Yoga - Butterfly Yoga 06/01	06/01/2024 - 06/01/2024	Marshall Square Park
42nd Annual THMF Non-Food Vendor Application - THMF Crafter Application	06/02/2024 - 06/02/2024	Everhart Park
42nd Annual THMF Non-Food Vendor Application - THMF Non-Crafter Application	06/02/2024 - 06/02/2024	Everhart Park
42nd Annual THMF Non-Food Vendor Application - THMF Non-Profit Application	06/02/2024 - 06/02/2024	Everhart Park
42nd Annual Turks Head Music Festival - Food Vendor Application- June 8th, 2025 - 2024 Food Vendor Registration	06/02/2024 - 06/02/2024	Everhart Park
Family Yoga in the Park - 6/4 Lesson	06/04/2024 - 06/04/2024	Marshall Square Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Summer Sunday Session Beginner	06/16/2024 - 07/14/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Summer Sunday Session Intermediate	06/16/2024 - 07/14/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Summer Sunday Session Junior	06/16/2024 - 07/14/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Abrakadoodle Art Camps - Kick, Catch, and Splash	06/17/2024 - 06/21/2024	Everhart Park

Table 1. West Chester Borough Program Inventory 2024 (cont.)		
Activity	**Start/End Dates**	**Location**
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Mondays - Summer - Adult clinic	06/17/2024 - 07/22/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Family Yoga in the Park - 6/19 Lesson	06/19/2024 - 06/19/2024	Marshall Square Park
Brandywine School of Wizardry - 6/24 - 6/28	06/24/2024 - 06/28/2024	Hoopes Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Junior Pickleball Camp	06/24/2024 - 06/27/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Family Yoga in the Park - 7/09 Lesson	07/09/2024 - 07/09/2024	Marshall Square Park
FIT4MOM - Stroller Strides	07/09/2024 - 08/08/2024	Everhart Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Summer Wednesday Sessions Beginner	07/10/2024 - 08/07/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Summer Wednesday Sessions Intermediate	07/10/2024 - 08/07/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Bricks 4 Kids - Amusement Park Theme Week	07/15/2024 - 07/19/2024	Hoopes Park – Pavilion
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Summer Junior Tennis Camp July 11-17 yr olds	07/15/2024 - 07/19/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Summer Junior Tennis Camp July 5-10 yr olds	07/15/2024 - 07/19/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Junior Pickleball Camp July #1	07/15/2024 - 07/18/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Abrakadoodle Art Camps - Let's Go Camping	07/22/2024 - 07/26/2024	Everhart Park
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Junior Pickleball Camp July #2	07/22/2024 - 07/25/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Family Yoga in the Park - 7/23 Lesson	07/23/2024 - 07/23/2024	Marshall Square Park
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Summer Junior Tennis Camp August 11-17 yr olds	08/05/2024 - 08/09/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Summer Junior Tennis Camp August 5-10 yr olds	08/05/2024 - 08/09/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Junior Pickleball Camp August	08/05/2024 - 08/08/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Touch A Truck / Night Out Against Crime - Vehicle Sign Up - TAT/NOAC Vehicle Sign Up	08/06/2024 - 08/06/2024	Henderson High School
Bricks 4 Kids - Web-Slingers and Avengers Unite	08/12/2024 - 08/16/2024	Hoopes Park – Pavilion

Table 1. West Chester Borough Program Inventory 2024 (cont.)		
Activity	**Start/End Dates**	**Location**
Family Yoga in the Park - 8/13 Lesson	08/13/2024 - 08/13/2024	Marshall Square Park
Welcome to the Borough - Family Fun Night - Welcome to Borough/ Family Fun Night (Non-students)	08/23/2024 - 08/23/2024	Downtown West Chester on Gay St.
Welcome to the Borough - Family Fun Night - Welcome to Borough/ Family Fun Night (WCU STUDENTS)	08/23/2024 - 08/23/2024	Downtown West Chester on Gay St.
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Mondays - FALL - Adult clinic	08/26/2024 - 10/07/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Just Tennis with Justin DePietropaolo - Tuesdays- FALL - Adult clinic	09/09/2024 - 10/07/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Fall Session 1 Wednesday Sessions Adult Beginner	09/11/2024 - 10/09/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Fall Session 1 Wednesday Sessions Adult Intermediate	09/11/2024 - 10/09/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
44th Annual Chester County Restaurant & Food Truck Festival Application - 2024 Restaurant Festival Crafter application	09/15/2024 - 09/15/2024	Downtown West Chester
44th Annual Chester County Restaurant & Food Truck Festival Application - 2024 Restaurant Festival FOOD TRUCK/FOOD VENDOR sign up	09/15/2024 - 09/15/2024	Downtown West Chester
44th Annual Chester County Restaurant & Food Truck Festival Application - 2024 Restaurant Festival NON-Crafter application	09/15/2024 - 09/15/2024	Downtown West Chester
44th Annual Chester County Restaurant & Food Truck Festival Application - 2024 Restaurant Festival NON-Profit application	09/15/2024 - 09/15/2024	Downtown West Chester
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Sunday Fall 1 Sessions Beginner Adult	09/15/2024 - 10/13/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Sunday Fall 1 Sessions Intermediate Adult	09/15/2024 - 10/13/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Sunday Fall 1 Sessions Junior (6-14)	09/15/2024 - 10/13/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts
Halloween Parade 2024 - Halloween Parade 2024 Sign Up	10/23/2024 - 10/23/2024	Downtown West Chester
Pickleball - Universal Rackets & Tyler Stroyek - Fall Session 2 Wednesday Sessions Adult Beginner	10/23/2024 - 11/20/2024	Hoopes Park - Tennis Courts

Signature Events and Community Participation

In 2024 There Were 46,850 Recreation Special Event Participants In West Chester

West Chester Borough's Parks and Recreation Department delivers a robust calendar of signature events that complement its regular programming and contribute to the community's cultural vibrancy and social connectedness. These events attract thousands of participants annually, foster local pride, and serve residents of all ages and backgrounds. Despite a small professional staff, the department successfully coordinates these large-scale activities through a strong network of sponsors, volunteers, and partnerships with municipal agencies, nonprofits, and private companies. These public events activate parks and public spaces, foster community pride, and provide inclusive, intergenerational experiences. These events represent a vital part of the Borough's identity and are made possible through careful coordination, strong community partnerships, and generous support from sponsors and volunteers.

The following highlights summarize key events from the 2024 programming year, illustrating the impressive reach of the department's work—with just two full-time staff. Each event reflects thoughtful planning and a commitment to quality, accessibility, and collaboration.

Annual Easter Egg Hunt

600+ Participants | 10 - 12 Volunteers | 6,000+ Eggs Sponsored | Included sensory-sensitive features for children with special needs

Turks Head Music Festival

6,500 Participants | 60 - 75 Vendors | Family Entertainment | 7 Bands | Kids' Games and Rides

30+ Volunteers | Sponsored

Coordinated with WCPD, Parking, and Public Works

Park Concerts

3 Concerts Annually | 200+ Attendance per Event

Family Friendly Entertainment | Food Trucks

Sponsored | 2 Staff

Movie Nights in the Park

3 Showings per Year | 30+ Attendance per Event

Held in Rotating Parks

Mini Golf on Gay Street

250+ Golfers | Professional Event Contractor

18-Hole Course Installed on Gay Street

2 Staff | 5 - 7 Volunteers

Virtual Golf on Gay Street

60+ Golfers (in Inaugural Year)

Hosted by 2 Professional Golf Simulation Companies

2 Staff

Night Out Against Crime/Touch-a-Truck

1,200+ Attendees | 30+ Vendors and Food Trucks

Multiple Public Safety Departments Participate

2 Staff | 5 - 7 Volunteers | Organized with WCPD

Chester County Restaurant & Food Truck Festival

25,000+ Attendees | 125+ Vendors and Food Trucks

3 Music Stages with 6 Bands | Beer and Wine Garden

2 Staff | 20+ Volunteers

Coordinated with WCPD, Parking, and Public Works

Annual Halloween Parade

1,000+ Parade Participants | 10,000+ Spectators

30+ Entries | 2 Staff | 20 - 25 Volunteers

Sponsored | Over $1,500 in Candy Distributed

Breakfast with Santa

100+ Attendees | 2 Staff | 5 - 7 Volunteers

Santa at the Square

1,000+ Attendees | 4 - 7 Sponsors and Vendors

Food Trucks | Holiday Decorations Throughout Marshall Square | 2 Staff | 10 - 12 Volunteers

These events showcase the Borough's ability to activate public spaces, engage residents, and build a stronger, more inclusive community—despite limited staffing. As the Borough plans for future programming, these successful models provide a strong foundation for continued growth, strategic partnerships, and targeted expansion of community offerings.

Historic Context and Recreation Programming

West Chester Borough has a long and complex history of segregated recreation. In the early 20th century, Black residents were excluded from facilities like the YMCA, leading to the creation of the Melton Center in 1918 to provide a safe and welcoming space for the Black community. Located in Ward 4, the Melton Center remains the Borough's only indoor recreation facility—and continues to serve as a vital community anchor. However, its use has largely remained localized rather than integrated into broader Borough-wide recreation efforts.

Until 2019, the Borough's Parks and Recreation Department offered three well-attended summer camps, Summer Day Camp and Camp B.I.G., which consistently operated at full capacity, serving several hundred children each year. These programs played a key role in engaging youth from across the Borough. When the department was downsized, these camps were discontinued due to staffing reductions.

As West Chester works to rebuild and re-imagine its recreation system, the Melton Center presents an important opportunity. Its history, location, and facilities make it well-suited to be more fully integrated into the Borough's programming framework. Expanding and promoting its use Borough-wide would help address longstanding disparities and ensure more inclusive, equitable access to year-round indoor recreation.

Interpretation of 2024 Recreation

West Chester Borough's 2024 recreation calendar showcases a vibrant, diverse, and well-orchestrated slate of public programs and events that span all seasons and serve a wide demographic. This ambitious offering—planned, implemented and managed by a small professional staff—demonstrates strategic use of partnerships and public spaces to foster year-round community engagement, health, and wellness.

1. High Volume and Frequency of Programs

- Over 100 scheduled activities between March and December.
- Programs offered nearly every week of the year, with multiple concurrent sessions at peak times (spring and summer).

2. Diverse Program Types

- Fitness and Wellness: Zumba, yoga, stroller strides, Triple Threat Fitness, and Hiking Hound Adventures.
- Sports and Skills Clinics: Extensive tennis and pickleball programming (beginner to intermediate, youth to adult).
- Arts and Culture: Abrakadoodle art camps, Bricks 4 Kids, and Brandywine School of Wizardry.
- Community Events and Trips: Annual festivals (Turks head, Restaurant Festival), family nights, seasonal parades, and bus trips to NYC and DC.

3. Effective Use of Public Spaces

- Hoopes Park serves as the primary hub for sports programming and youth camps.
- Marshall Square and Everhart Parks host fitness classes, family yoga, and nature-based programs.
- Downtown West Chester and regional destinations support large-scale community events and cultural excursions.
- West Chester Library is the venue for year-round public recreation related programs.
- Signature Parks serve as the primary venues for programs and events. This is partially because these parks have sufficient support facilities to accommodate the visitation for special events, staffing limitations with limited capacity to explore new programs or different locations, and reliance on historical patterns of where programs and events are held.
- Downtown as a Park The idea of treating Downtown as a Park could be explored as a creative placemaking strategy. By re-imagining the vibrant town center as a recreational destination, the Borough can transform downtown into an inviting public space for leisure, social connection, and community events.
- However, the Borough does not currently offer recreation programs at the Melton Center, a historically Black, non-profit community facility that is open to the public. Expanding programming partnerships with inclusive community anchors like the Melton Center could help increase access, build equity, and strengthen trust across West Chester's diverse neighborhoods.

4. Age and Audience Inclusion

- Programs serve a range of ages: early childhood, youth, adults, seniors, and families.
- Opportunities include drop-in events, multi-week sessions, and one-time experiences.

5. Strategic Partnerships

- Collaborations with organizations like the Business Improvement District (BID) Chamber of Commerce, West Chester Library, Universal Rackets, FIT4MOM, Abrakadoodle, and Bricks 4 Kids expand offerings without increasing Borough Staffing needs.
- Partnerships with West Chester University could be expanded in the future.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- ***Diverse Year-Round Offerings:*** Over 100 programs in 2024, including sports, wellness, arts, and community events serving all age groups.
- ***High Participation and Community Engagement:*** Signature events attract thousands of attendees, fostering civic pride and strong volunteerism.
- ***Strategic Partnerships:*** Collaborations with public agencies, nonprofits, instructors, and private contractors expand capacity without increasing staff.
- ***Efficient Use of Public Spaces:*** Parks and downtown spaces are used creatively for recreation and special events.
- ***High Output with Limited Staff:*** A professional staff of two delivers a volume of programs typically managed by larger departments.

CHALLENGES

- ***Severely Limited Staffing:*** The small size of the Department limits expansion, responsiveness, and oversight of program quality and equity.
- ***Lack of Indoor Public Facility Access:*** The Borough does not operate or regularly program at the Melton Community Center—the only indoor recreation facility in town.
- ***Programming Focused on Signature Parks:*** Park programs and events are primarily held in Marshall Square and Everhart Parks and the town center. This is due to tradition, facilities available in these parks, staffing, and historical patterns of program planning. More programs should be held in smaller parks. Rotation of programs and expanding partnerships could help with phasing in additional venues for public recreation events, programs and activities.
- ***Inadequate Program Tracking:*** No centralized system to monitor participation trends, equity metrics, or evaluate program performance. The tracking is limited to the program inventory.
- ***Limited School Holiday and Summer Youth Programming:*** A significant gap identified by residents, especially for children, youth, and teens.
- ***Marketing and Communications Gaps:*** Limited reach to underserved communities and low visibility for some programs.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Reintroduce and Expand Youth Programs:*** Especially summer camps and school holiday options, which residents strongly desire.
- ***Integrate Melton Community Center into Borough-Wide Programming:*** Promotes equity, addresses historical exclusion, and leverages an existing public asset.
- ***Increase Staff or Develop Operational Partnerships:*** To expand capacity, maintain program quality, and relieve reliance on volunteers.
- ***Formalize Data Collection, Program Evaluation, and Reporting:*** To support planning, equity goals, and future grant applications. An annual report on parks and recreation should be developed, including benefits to the community – social, economic and environmental.
- ***Leverage Event Success for Funding:*** Use participation numbers and volunteer support as evidence for increased Borough or grant investment, especially for staffing.

THREATS

- ***Sustainability of Current Model:*** Risk of burnout and operational breakdown with continued high output and no staffing increase.
- ***Equity Perception and Access Gaps:*** The lack of Borough programming at the smaller parks and the Melton Center along with gaps in youth services may reinforce historical disparities.
- ***Dependence on Partnerships and Volunteers:*** Valuable but not guaranteed year to year; loss of key partners could leave major program gaps.
- ***Limited Indoor Space:*** Weather-dependent programming limits flexibility and year-round service, particularly for seniors, teens, and winter activities.

Recommendations

West Chester Borough offers an impressive range of recreation programs and community events, especially given its limited staffing and operational capacity. However, public input and program analysis reveal opportunities to improve service delivery, address unmet needs—particularly for youth—and expand equitable access to recreation across all neighborhoods. The following recommendations are grounded in community feedback, current program inventory, and an understanding of local capacity. They are intended to guide realistic, phased improvements while recognizing the importance of aligning goals with available resources or advocating for additional staff and support where necessary.

1. Develop a Centralized Program Evaluation and Needs Assessment System

- Track registration, participation rates, and user satisfaction to better assess success, improve offerings, and support future funding requests.
- Prioritize tracking demographic reach (age, residency, neighborhood, etc.) to inform equitable access.
- About 40% of the survey respondents indicated that children, youth and teens were the groups most in need of more recreation services. This is an unusually high finding in a Borough with a parks and recreation department, Typically, the community views this group as well served. The lack of summer recreation and school holiday programming appears to be the reason for this rating.

2. Strengthen Marketing & Communication

- While the range of programs is robust, increasing awareness—especially among underserved populations—could boost participation.
- Consider a quarterly digital/print recreation guide and more consistent social media promotion.

3. Introduce Tiered Program Access

- Develop sliding scale fees or scholarship options to ensure programs remain accessible, especially for youth and families with limited income.

4. Hold Events in Parks and Recreation Facilities Throughout the Borough

- Phase in the programming and events equitably in parks throughout West Chester Borough. Start with the Melton Community Center.

5. Plan for Capacity

- Programs like pickleball and youth camps are likely near or at capacity.
- Evaluate the need for additional courts, park space, youth programs especially in summer and school holidays, or scheduling efficiencies.

6. Leverage Success for Funding

- Use this high-output, low-staff model as a case study to advocate for increased investment in staff, facilities, and maintenance, park space, youth programs especially in summer and school holidays, or scheduling efficiencies.

Conclusion

West Chester Borough's Parks and Recreation Department demonstrates an extraordinary ability to deliver high-impact, year-round programming with minimal staffing and limited resources. The department's creative use of public spaces, strong partnerships, and diverse offerings have made it a valued and visible presence in the community. However, challenges related to capacity, equity, and sustainability remain. With strategic investment—especially in staffing, program evaluation, and inclusion—West Chester can build on its existing strengths to ensure that all residents, regardless of age, income, or neighborhood, have access to meaningful recreation opportunities. Embracing partnerships with facilities like the Melton Center, expanding youth and indoor programs, and establishing systems for program monitoring and outreach will be critical to fulfilling the Borough's vision of a more connected, active, and equitable community.

Chapter 15
Trails and Connectivity

Trails and Connectivity

Overview: West Chester is growing! Ever a popular destination for visitors and residents alike, the borough is predicted to see an almost 6% population growth rate per year through 2025. However, the borough is only 1.8 square miles wide and geographically boxed in by West Goshen and East Bradford Townships, leaving it with little room to expand. With limited opportunities to create new recreation space within its boundary West Chester must consider regional recreation opportunities and partnerships where possible. Trails offer an exciting way to do just that, allowing West Chester residents to get around town or explore outside the Borough (and all while leaving the car at home!

Why Trails: Trails are more than just a recreational opportunity! Be it by walking, running, biking, or even rollerblading, trails move people and connect them to nature and local and regional destinations. As such it's not all just fun and games. Instead trails are valuable infrastructure that can change how we commute, get around town, or even make our way over to other municipalities for a quick trip. When thinking trails West Chester Borough should think of the big picture with these four benefit areas:

- Transportation and Access
- Recreation
- Environment and Sustainability
- Community Benefits and Equity

Benefits of Trails and Connectivity

Transportation and Access: If you are a new bicyclist, commuting on the road can be intimidating. Trails provide a safe, off-road alternative that make Active Transportation an option for everyone, regardless of age or ability while connecting to other, regional destinations. This can bring economic benefits through increased tourism as well as lessen the associated car traffic that plagues the Borough. West Chester University Students can stop worrying about where they are going to park their car after class knowing there is an easy, safe way to get around town without it.

Recreation: At only 1.8 square miles, the Borough has limited room to ride! Local cycling groups report meeting in parking lots with their bikes strapped to their cars just to ride out of town. Local families, meanwhile, have to navigate a bike rack, car seats, and more to take a family ride in a nearby municipality. Trail access represents a major gap in the Borough's current parks, recreation, and open space land and should be a priority going forward. In turn it will open-up bicycling, running, walking, and more to a whole new group of other people who may otherwise be hesitant to take their chances on the road!

Environment and Sustainability: West Chester wants to cut back on its emissions. A sustainability leader in Chester County, the Borough has taken numerous steps to encourage residents to ditch the car and pick up a bike. A comprehensive trail network bolsters these plans as it provides a safe, off-road option for anyone hesitant to start their Active Transportation journey on-road. Similarly, trail heads and connections beginning in the Borough cut out the need to drive to one. Finally trails offer a unique opportunity to get out of West Chester's dense, urban core and into nature!

Community Benefits and Equity: Everyone should be able to get around, regardless of age. Trails offer connections and access for those too young, or too old, to drive while promoting physical activity and conservation. Much like parks, trails are economic engines, increasing adjacent property values and attracting tourism, cycling groups, run clubs, and more! The car, once the dominant mode of transportation between two municipalities, is entirely optional once again; freeing those without to get out of town and enjoy for awhile.

Where to Start

With parks, maintenance, and more already on the docket adding trails can seem daunting. However, it is important to remember that starting is the most important step and West Chester (luckily) already has a lot to start with! From here it is as easy as identifying a pilot project that can be used to launch the Borough's foray into local, and regional, trail connections.

You Don't Have to Go It Alone: Trails, unlike parks, often span multiple municipalities. This opens the door for unique partnerships that can be rewarding for everyone, creating a recreational amenity that, comparative to parks, is a relatively low upfront investment while simultaneously generating a high return on investment. West Chester Borough should consider trails as not just as what they can accomplish alone but as what regional opportunities it can open up as well. The Consultant Team has compiled findings below highlighting projects that West Chester could complete independently as well as previously developed, county-level studies that present opportunities for multi-municipality collaboration.

Pilot Project: The Turk's Head Trail

Previously highlighted in Chapter 5 - Go West Chester, the Turk's Head Trail proposal offers a unique opportunity as it could be a multi-municipal collaboration or entirely self-contained. Proposed as a rails-with-trails option alongside the existing, seldom-used SEPTA rail right-of-way, it would preserve rail functionality for the historic tourist train that runs throughout the year (or for the return of service) while simultaneously providing a trail that connects multiple municipalities.

This would, of course, require collaboration between these municipalities, including a deal with SEPTA to build a trail within the rail right-of-way, funding contributions, and joint-grant applications. The flip-side, however, is that this also opens the door to a regional Active Transportation and recreation amenity, providing economic and recreational opportunity as well as a gateway to local, multi-municipal collaboration with West Goshen, Thornbury, and Westtown.

Both **Rails-to-Trails** and **Rails-with-Trails** involve reviving former or existing railway corridors for recreational use but are different in approach.

Rails-to-Trails: Abandoned, unused, or otherwise inactive railways are converted into trail corridors for public, recreational use. In this case the tracks are removed or otherwise made inoperable.

Rails-with-Trails: As proposed in the **Turk's Head Trail Plan**, this approach involves building a trail along but not within a railway corridor. **Railways can remain active or be reactivated**, leaving the option open for SEPTA to reinstate railway access to West Chester Borough.

Local Opportunities: West Chester may also decide to pursue the Turk's Head Trail only within the Borough. While more limiting, this is still entirely possible and is not without its benefits. The former SEPTA rail right-of-way provides potential connections to Mosteller Park, Green Field, and John O. Green Park, where the rail line ultimately terminates. John O. Green Park could be positioned as a trail head, spurring further investment and interest in the park. Similarly the trail could act as a connection to Mosteller Park and Green Field which, as of now, are isolated from the rest of West Chester's park system while also providing a safe, off-road connection for West Chester University students to commute between campus, home, and the Central Business District.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 12 - Park Assessments, a small, creek-side trail connection is recommended between Mosteller Park and Green Field. This could act as a tie-in to, or off-shoot of, the Turk's Head Trail depending on how the Borough wants to invest in or frame it. Regardless the Turk's Head Trail offers an excellent starting point for West Chester's trail and connectivity initiatives.

Somewhere to Start: Jumping right into regional trails and multi-municipal partnerships can be daunting. Pilot Projects, such as the local arm of the Turk's Head Trail, offer a way for West Chester to get the ball rolling in a manageable way while still building local support and excitement.

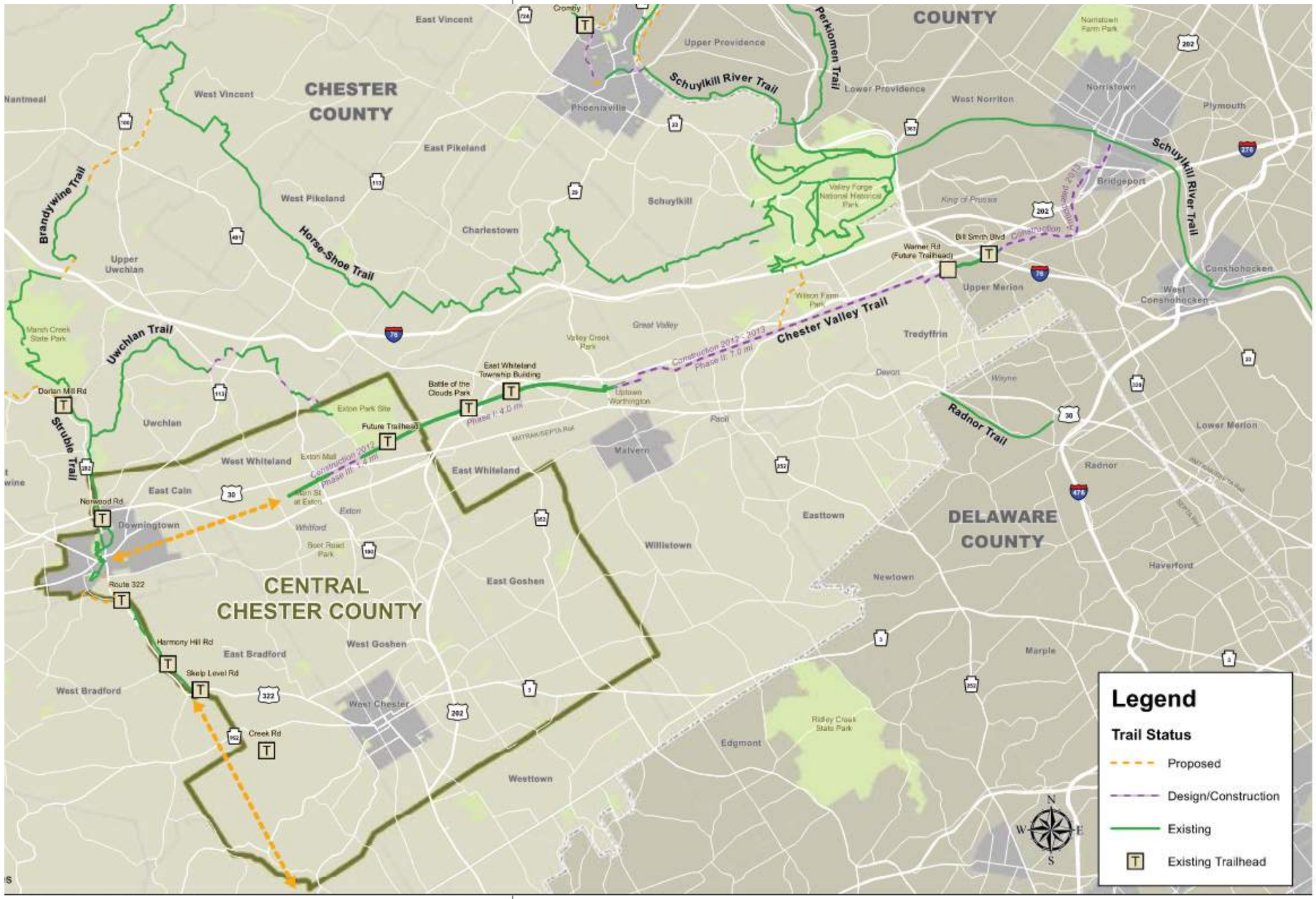
This is a critical step as the Borough can then gauge the feasibility of expansion and regional-scale endeavors. A strong, positive public reaction can mean further resource allocation and a dedicated push while negativity or backlash can help stay the course, re-direct, or abandon further work entirely. The most important thing regardless, however, is taking action.

Regional Opportunities

Over the course of the engagement process the consultant team found and presented various opportunities for regional trail connections completed by Chester County are compiled below.

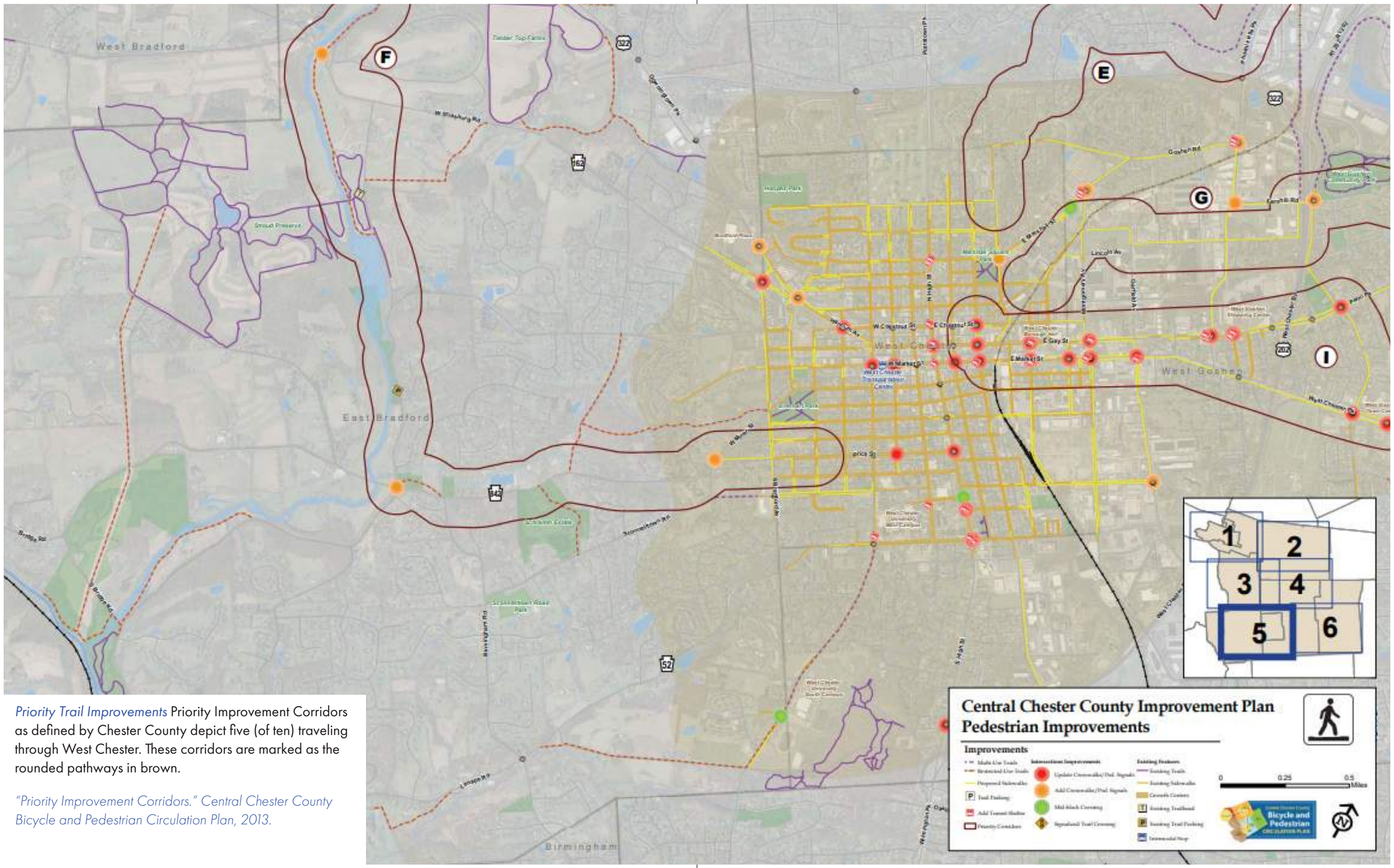
2013 Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan: Developed by the Chester County Planning and Health Commissions in 2013, this plan focused on creating "healthy, vibrant, and economically viable communities that facilitate and encourage more walking and biking." Diagrammatic trail maps showed possible off-road, conceptual trails with on-road connectors between East Bradford Township, East Caln Township, Downingtown Borough, West Goshen Township, West Whiteland Township, and West Chester Borough.

In all of the maps within the report, West Chester is shown as a regional centerpoint with trails often meeting in, and traveling through, the Borough. There is an immense recreational and economic opportunity in exploring these connections as it strengthens the Borough's position as a regional hub.



Existing Trails and Connections Within Central Chester County. Central Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, 2013.

Regional Opportunities



Priority Trail Improvements Priority Improvement Corridors as defined by Chester County depict five (of ten) traveling through West Chester. These corridors are marked as the rounded pathways in brown.

"Priority Improvement Corridors." Central Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, 2013.

Regional Opportunities

Priority Trail Improvements: These ten corridors are identified as the ten "priority" corridors in Chester County. These corridors were intended as Chester County's primary on-and-off road trail system to connect the six-aforementioned municipalities to one another. Of these ten corridors, five flow directly through the Borough with the next closest being three in Downingtown.

This indicates that the county already sees West Chester as a major confluence within Central Chester County. In searching for regional partnerships to expand recreation opportunities and trail networks, the Borough should reach out to the County and see what initiatives they are pursuing and what partnerships may be available. In doing so West Chester can strengthen its own trail access while simultaneously positioning itself to be more accessible, driving tourism and economic improvements. As of now only a portion of corridor F have been completed as part of the East Branch Brandywine Trail that runs through the Hammory Hill Nature Area and Brandywine Meadows Preserve.

"Priority Implementation Projects." Central Chester County Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, 2013.

Chapter 16
Operations & Management

Operations and Management

The Cornerstone of a Great Parks & Recreation System

Overview: Behind every well-loved park, successful event, or impactful recreation program is a foundation of effective operations and management. In public parks and recreation, this work often goes unnoticed—but it is the essential backbone that ensures facilities are clean and safe, programs are well-run, and services are equitably delivered to the community.

Operations and management represent more than logistics; they reflect a department's capacity to turn vision into reality. Whether it's maintaining playgrounds, managing volunteers, balancing budgets, coordinating friends groups and sports leagues, or responding to resident needs, the quality of these everyday functions directly shapes public trust and satisfaction.

In a small municipality like West Chester Borough, where resources are limited and community expectations are high, effective management becomes even more critical. It requires not only technical expertise and efficiency but also leadership, collaboration, and a deep commitment to public service.

This chapter outlines the full range of functions required to manage a high-performing parks and recreation system and provides recommendations for strengthening organizational capacity to meet current and future demands.

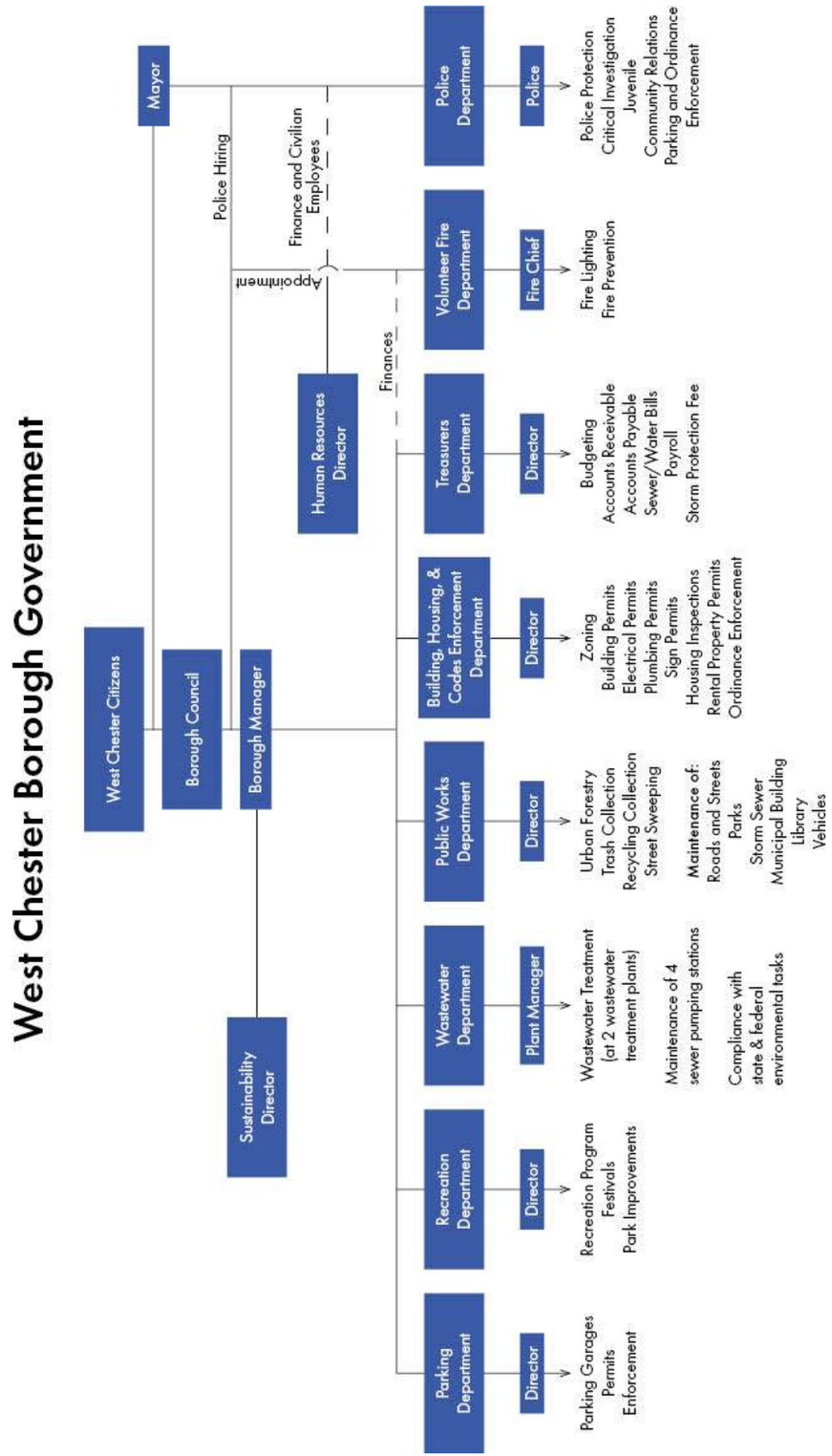
Governance Overview

Borough Organization and Parks and Recreation: West Chester Borough operates under a home rule charter with an elected seven-member Borough Council and a Mayor. The Council sets policy and allocates resources, while a professional Borough Manager oversees day-to-day operations, supervises department heads, and implements the policies of Council. Within this municipal structure, parks and recreation is delivered through a collaborative framework involving multiple departments and advisory leadership.

Borough Administration: The Borough Manager plays a central role in aligning parks and recreation operations with overall municipal goals. Borough Administration oversees budget development, grant administration, interdepartmental coordination, legal compliance, and human resources support for all departments. The Manager's office also plays a key role in facilitating partnerships, managing cross-cutting initiatives (such as sustainability or accessibility efforts), and presenting parks and recreation-related priorities to Borough Council.

Recreation Department: The Recreation Department is responsible for developing and delivering recreation programs, planning and managing community events, coordinating park use and rentals, and advancing strategic initiatives related to park access, open space, and public engagement. A small but highly dedicated staff leads this work, supported by seasonal workers, community partners, and volunteers.

Public Works Department: While the Recreation Department focuses on programming, planning, and community services, responsibility for routine park maintenance, including mowing, trash collection, equipment repair, and snow removal, largely resides with the Public Works Department. The two departments work closely together to coordinate daily upkeep, respond to service requests, and manage larger capital projects. As park and trail systems grow more complex, clarifying roles and strengthening communication between Recreation and Public Works is essential for effective and sustainable stewardship. Natural resource management will continue to increase in importance with climate change and public support. This requires a unique skill set to traditional park maintenance.



Sustainability Department: West Chester Borough's Sustainability Department works to advance environmental responsibility, economic resilience, and social equity across the community. Having a dedicated municipal Sustainability Director is still relatively uncommon in Pennsylvania, though it is becoming more common in progressive or urban municipalities. Partnering with the volunteer-based Sustainability Advisory Committee, the department leads initiatives in clean energy, stormwater management, waste reduction, and green building.

Key programs include:

- A commitment to 100% renewable electricity by 2035
- The West Chester Sustainable! building certification
- Curbside recycling, composting, and plastics reduction
- Public outreach through workshops and the Friends of Sustainable West Chester network

Together, these efforts make sustainability a core part of Borough policy and everyday life.

Advisory Committees: Several advisory committees, boards, and commissions focus on parks and recreation, environmental sustainability, urban planning, and parking management. These committees and commissions are integral to maintaining and improving the quality of life in West Chester Borough.

Recreation Commission: The West Chester Recreation Commission serves as the official advisory body to Borough Council on matters related to parks and recreation. Its members, appointed by Council, provide strategic guidance, serve as a bridge between residents and municipal leadership, and ensure that community perspectives shape the Borough's direction.

Planning Commission: The Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing land development projects and ensuring they align with the Borough's zoning and subdivision codes. Comprising seven resident members appointed by the Borough Council, the Commission evaluates proposals for new developments, subdivisions, and zoning amendments, providing recommendations to Borough Council. This includes recommendations on the Mandatory Dedication of Parkland.

Parking Committee: The Parking Committee's mission is to recommend actions to the Borough Council that facilitate residents' and visitors' access to homes and businesses by ensuring meaningful parking opportunities. The committee oversees the Parking Department, focusing on efficiency and efficacy, and develops sustainable parking policies to support the borough's smart growth.

Sustainability Advisory Committee: The Sustainability Advisory Committee focuses on promoting environmental initiatives within the borough. Their efforts include programs like Adopt-a-Rain Garden, Clean Energy initiatives, recycling events, and stormwater management. The committee also works on policies related to single-use plastics and provides resources for utility assistance programs.

Tree Commission: The Tree Commission is dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the borough's urban forest. They oversee the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees on public property, ensuring the health and safety of the community's green spaces.

Ad Hoc Committees

When the Borough undertakes a project, Council can appoint a temporary citizens' advisory committee for it. One example is the PROS Plan Advisory Committee.

Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Advisory Committee (PAC): The PAC was a volunteer group established to guide the development of the Borough's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan—a comprehensive 10-year strategy aimed at enhancing the community's recreational and green spaces. This initiative marks the first major update to the Borough's parks and recreation planning since 1986.

PAC Purpose and Responsibilities: The PAC served as the PROS Plan's steering committee, collaborating with the Borough's Recreation Department and the planning team consultants to:

- Evaluate existing parks, playgrounds, and open spaces for accessibility, safety, activities and recreation/environmental opportunities, comfort and image, and sociability.
- Identify opportunities for new park development, facility upgrades, and land acquisition.

- Assess community needs and recreation programming through public engagement.
- Develop recommendations for sustainable improvements and funding strategies.
- Ensure compliance with ADA standards while promoting inclusive and welcoming access to recreational facilities

The PAC's work included providing valuable insights about community needs, sharing local knowledge, identifying key contacts and partners, and helping to shape meaningful public engagement. Members participate in public meetings, offer feedback on emerging ideas, and serve as ambassadors for the planning process—ensuring that the plan reflects the voices and priorities of West Chester's diverse neighborhoods.

The PAC comprised nine members, including representatives from the Borough Council, Planning Commission, Recreation Commission, the local business community, and five residents. No prior experience was required for resident members—just a passion for parks and community engagement.

Support Groups

Support groups play an essential role in the vitality and long-term success of parks, recreation, and open space systems. These organizations—including "Friends of" groups, conservancies, nonprofit partners, neighborhood associations, and volunteer coalitions—bring energy, expertise, and grassroots leadership to public spaces. They often serve as trusted community liaisons, helping to engage residents, raise funds, coordinate volunteers, and advocate for park improvements.

In many communities, these groups extend the capacity of municipal government by stewarding specific parks, organizing programs and events, and enhancing public awareness of natural and cultural resources. Their contributions foster community pride, ownership, and a shared commitment to protecting and improving the public realm.

This section highlights the support groups active in West Chester Borough, outlines their missions and accomplishments, and explores opportunities for strengthening collaboration and expanding their impact.

Chester County Planning Commission While not technically a support group, the Chester County Planning Commission (CCPC) provides critical support to municipalities in planning, developing, and enhancing parks, recreation, and trail systems. This support helps local governments align with countywide goals for livability, sustainability, and community health as outlined in the County's comprehensive plan, Landscapes3. Key areas of CCPC support include:

Planning Guidance and Technical Assistance

- Assists municipalities in developing and updating park, recreation, open space, and trail plans.
- Offers guidance on best practices for greenway planning, trail connectivity, and park design.
- Helps local governments incorporate recreation planning into comprehensive and multi-municipal planning efforts.

Funding and Grant Support

- Provides grant guidance by identifying state and regional funding sources (such as DCNR, DVRPC, and county open space funds).
- Helps municipalities develop competitive grant applications, including letters of support and assistance with project scoping.

Regional Coordination

- Facilitates inter-municipal collaboration for large-scale trail systems like the Chester Valley Trail and Schuylkill River Trail extensions. These are important trails to the residents of West Chester Borough.
- Works with local and regional partners to connect local trail projects to broader networks across the County and region.

Mapping and Data Resources

- Offers GIS data, mapping tools, and analysis to support open space planning, trail alignment, and facility inventories.

- Maintains and updates online resources such as the Interactive Parks and Trails Map and the Protected Open Space Tracking system.

Education and Outreach

- Hosts training sessions, workshops, and planning forums to share knowledge and build local capacity.
- Develops and distributes toolkits, planning guides, and model ordinances to help municipalities implement best practices.

By serving as a resource hub, convener, and planning partner, the Chester County Planning Commission plays a key role in helping local communities, including West Chester Borough, expand recreation opportunities, improve park infrastructure, and create connected greenway systems that benefit residents and visitors alike.

Park Friends Groups

Park Friends Groups are grassroots organizations formed by community members who share a deep commitment to their local parks. Their primary purpose is to support the care, improvement, and enjoyment of these public spaces through volunteerism, advocacy, fundraising, and community engagement. Whether formally organized or informally led by dedicated neighbors, these groups play a vital role in enhancing the quality and sustainability of parks.

Friends Groups often serve as the "eyes, ears, and hands" of a park—identifying needs, organizing clean-ups and events, raising funds for amenities, and working in partnership with municipal staff to support long-term stewardship. They help foster a sense of ownership and pride among residents while encouraging broader community involvement.

This section profiles the Friends Groups active in West Chester Borough, highlighting their missions, key accomplishments, and opportunities to strengthen their role in supporting a vibrant, well-maintained, welcoming and inclusive park system.

West Chester's Park Friends

West Chester Borough has three active park friends groups and five smaller groups that are not active. One central organization for park friends, the West Chester Borough Park Friends Association, has been in the state of flux since the onset of COVID.

FRIENDS OF EVERHART PARK: The Friends of Everhart Park (FOEP) is a dedicated nonprofit organization based in West Chester, Pennsylvania, committed to preserving and enhancing the natural beauty and community value of Everhart Park. Established in 1989 in response to a proposed utility pipeline that threatened the park's ancient hardwood trees, FOEP has since played a pivotal role in maintaining and improving this cherished 10-acre green space.

Mission and Goals: FOEP's mission centers on restoring Everhart Park to its historical roots while integrating new features that serve the evolving needs of the community. Their goals include:

- Constructing a tool shed within the park
- Building a wetland boardwalk with educational signage
- Creating a stroller-friendly entrance at Miner and Union Streets
- Installing new benches and labeling various tree species
- Mapping the park and establishing a lending library
- Re-turfing areas and addressing erosion issues
- Collaborating with the borough to enhance restroom accessibility

Key Projects and Initiatives: Over the years, FOEP has spearheaded numerous projects to enrich the park's environment and user experience:

- Planting over 13 trees and mulching them for protection
- Trimming existing trees in collaboration with the borough

- Stewarding a Little Free Library for community use
- Developing a Monarch Way Station to support pollinator habitats
- Designating a "Forest Bathing" area to encourage mindfulness and connection with nature

Community Engagement and Events: FOEP actively engages the community through various events and volunteer opportunities, such as:

- Annual spring and fall clean-up days
- Perennial plant sales to raise funds for park improvements
- Participation in local festivals and educational programs.

Membership and Support: Community members can support FOEP through two membership options:

- Active Household Membership ($20/year): Includes volunteering at events like plant sales and park clean-ups.
- Guilt-Free Household Membership ($50/year): Provides financial support without volunteer commitments.

Membership contributions directly fund ongoing and future projects aimed at enhancing Everhart Park for all visitors.

FRIENDS OF HOOPES PARK: The Friends of Hoopes Park is a volunteer-driven community group dedicated to preserving, enhancing, and activating Hoopes Park—the largest public park in West Chester Borough, spanning 16.2 acres. Named after botanist Josiah Hoopes, the park was originally established in 1872 as an arboretum and continues to serve as a vital green space for recreation, education, and community gatherings.

Mission and Goals: The Friends of Hoopes Park aim to:

- Restore and maintain existing park facilities
- Introduce new amenities aligned with current and future community needs
- Foster local support and pride for this cherished public space
- Specific initiatives include improving tennis courts, upgrading the pavilion, adding fitness trail equipment, and enhancing tree and grounds maintenance.

Projects and Initiatives: The group has been instrumental in several key projects:

- Racquet Center Rehabilitation: Collaborating with the Borough and engineers to renovate tennis courts and add pickleball courts, supported by grants from DCNR and DCED.
- StoryWalk® Installation: Partnering with the West Chester Public Library to create a StoryWalk®—a series of story panels along a park trail to promote literacy and outdoor activity.
- Wildlife Habitat Enhancement: Installing owl and bat houses to support local biodiversity.

Community Engagement: The Friends group actively engages the community through events and volunteer opportunities, such as park clean-up days and seasonal activities.

Community members can support the Friends of Hoopes Park by volunteering, attending events, or making tax-deductible donations.

FRIENDS OF MARSHALL SQUARE: The Friends of Marshall Square Park (FMSP) is a volunteer-based nonprofit organization committed to the preservation, enhancement, and community engagement of Marshall Square Park—the oldest public square in West Chester Borough. Established in 2005, FMSP continues a legacy of civic stewardship that began when the park was first dedicated in 1848.

Mission and Purpose: FMSP's mission is to support the care, preservation, and improvement of Marshall Square Park for the benefit of West Chester residents. The organization focuses on:

- Preserving the park's historic features, including its arboretum, hardscape, and historic structures.
- Raising awareness among local government entities about the park's significance.
- Prioritizing and defining park projects for approval and funding.
- Fundraising through memberships, donations, grants, and events.
- Encouraging responsible use of the park by promoting community activities.

Key Projects and Accomplishments: FMSP has spearheaded numerous initiatives to enhance the park's infrastructure and historical integrity including:

- Fountain Restoration: Recovered and restored the historic Jack Loew Memorial Fountain, originally installed in 1889 and re-dedicated in 2016.
- Playground Improvements: Installed new playground equipment and fencing to create a safe and engaging area for children.
- Swiss Cottage Rehabilitation: Restored the 1878 Swiss Cottage, a unique architectural feature within the park.
- Tree Identification Project: Labeled various tree species and developed a tree map/guide to educate visitors about the park's botanical diversity.
- Historic Pathway Restoration: Uncovered and maintained the park's original brick swales and pathways.

Community Engagement and Events: FMSP fosters community involvement through a variety of events and programs:

- Music at Marshall: A summer concert series featuring local musicians and community potlucks.
- Progressive Dinner: An annual neighborhood event where participants enjoy courses at different homes.
- Park Cleanup Days: Organized efforts to maintain the park's cleanliness and appearance.
- Christmas Luminaria: A festive display of luminaria throughout the park during the holiday season.

Membership and Support: Community members can support FMSP through various means:

- Membership: Annual memberships help fund ongoing projects and initiatives.
- Donations: Tax-deductible contributions support the park's maintenance and improvement.
- Volunteering: Opportunities are available on committees such as Events, Concerts, and Membership Outreach.

MELTON COMMUNITY CENTER: Currently, there is no formally designated "Friends of the Melton Community Center" group akin to the Friends organizations supporting parks like Everhart, Hoopes, or Marshall Square in the Borough. However, the Charles A. Melton Arts & Education Center benefits from substantial community support through various partnerships, volunteer initiatives, and dedicated funding efforts.

Community Support and Partnerships: The Melton Center collaborates with numerous local organizations to enhance its programs and services. For instance, the West Chester Green Team has partnered with the center to provide children's programming focused on environmental education and sustainability.

Additionally, the 2Fish Community Café, operating within the Melton Center, exemplifies a successful partnership that combines culinary training, academic assistance, and charitable meals to support the community.

WEST CHESTER GREEN TEAM: The West Chester Green Team (WCGT) is a non-governmental civic organization dedicated to promoting environmental sustainability and education in the community. Formed in January 2019, WCGT emerged from the collaboration of four local environmental groups: Don't Spray Me!, Plastic-Free Please, Ready for 100, and Chester County Citizens for Climate Protection.

Mission and Objectives: WCGT's mission is to educate the public and foster green initiatives that harmonize with nature and community well-being.
The organization focuses on several key areas:

- Climate & Energy: Advocating for renewable energy adoption and climate change mitigation strategies.
- Air & Water Quality: Monitoring and improving local air and water resources.
- Pesticides & Herbicides: Reducing the use of harmful chemicals in public and private spaces.
- Plastics Reduction: Encouraging the decrease of single-use plastics through community education and policy support.
- Dark Skies Initiative: Promoting responsible lighting to protect nocturnal environments.
- Living Landscapes: Supporting the creation and maintenance of sustainable gardens and green spaces.

Community Engagement and Events: WCGT actively engages the community through various events and programs:

- West Chester Porchfest: An annual music festival that brings together local musicians and residents to celebrate community and sustainability.
- Educational Workshops: Hosting seminars on topics like organic gardening, plastic reduction, and climate action.
- Collaborations with West Chester University: Partnering on events such as film screenings and discussions to promote environmental awareness.
- Residents interested in supporting WCGT's mission can participate by volunteering, attending events, or donating.

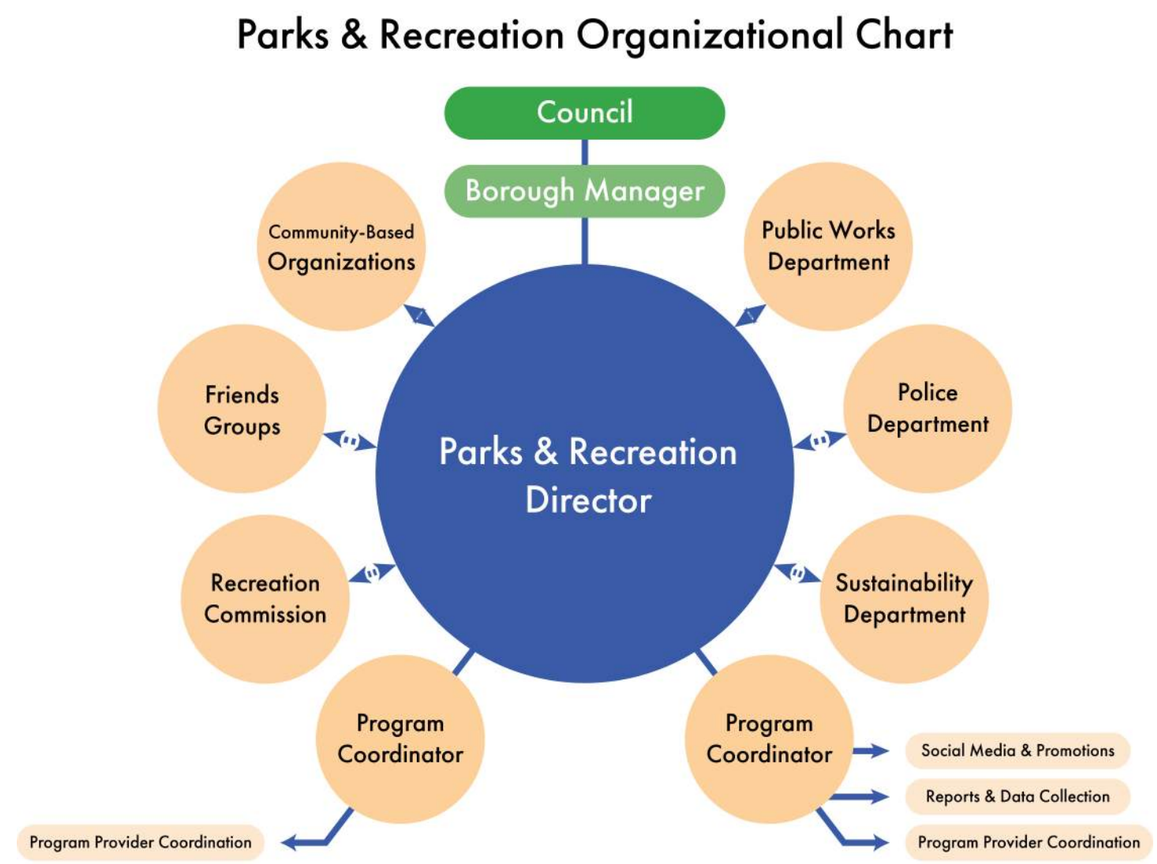
A Coordinated Framework for Success: Together, these entities form an integrated governance framework that enables West Chester to deliver meaningful parks and recreation services despite limited staffing and resources. Success depends on strong collaboration, clearly defined responsibilities, and a shared commitment to providing high-quality, equitable, and responsive services to all residents.

Organizational Structure and Staffing

As shown in the departmental organizational chart, the West Chester Recreation Department is led by the Parks & Recreation Director in partnership with other Borough departments and supported by a Program Coordinator, private and non-profit sector partners, and volunteers. This core team plans and delivers a wide array of events, programs, and services that benefit residents of all ages. Despite its modest size, the Department operates year-round and manages park rentals, capital improvement planning, maintenance oversight, and public communications related to recreation.

As the community's needs grow and the Department takes on expanded responsibilities, the current staffing model is being stretched. Future organizational assessments are recommended to identify additional staffing or shared service options in conjunction with budget planning.

Recreation Department Operations



Although a common perception is that a Recreation Department's function is to directly provide programs, the Department is responsible for so much more as shown in the sidebar on core functions and tasks. Recreation departments are vital to community well-being, public health, and quality of life. Their responsibilities go far beyond organizing events or maintaining green spaces. These departments manage complex systems that integrate recreation programming, environmental stewardship, infrastructure maintenance, public engagement, and policy implementation. Whether coordinating a camp, restoring a streambank, or coordination on maintaining safe, welcoming parks, the work of a Recreation Department reflects a commitment to accessible, responsive, and sustainable public service. Before 2019, the Recreation Department had many more full, part-time and seasonal staff than the two full-time now available. It is important to consider this in light of all the functions the Department carries out. The sidebar on Core Functions and Tasks outlines the broad scope of functions and tasks typically carried out by such departments.

Core Function and Tasks of a Recreation Department

PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

- Develop and implement Parks and Recreation Master Plans
- Strategic planning and goal setting
- Develop and administer budgets
- Track performance metrics and outcomes
- Prepare reports and presentations for elected officials
- Grant writing and administration
- Interdepartmental coordination
- Develop and enforce department policies and procedures

PARK OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

- Daily coordination of maintenance of parks, playgrounds, trails, and sports fields
- Litter collection, mowing, tree trimming, and landscaping
- Restroom cleaning and facility upkeep
- Facility inspections and risk management
- Repairs and replacements of park infrastructure
- Snow and ice removal in parks
- Graffiti removal and vandalism response
- Utility and vendor management

RECREATION PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

- Plan, direct and implement major special events that attract about 50,000 participants
- Develop and implement year-round recreation programs
- Coordinate camps, sports leagues, and fitness programs
- Offer cultural, arts, and special interest programs
- Conduct program evaluations and registration tracking
- Recruit and supervise partners instructors, coaches, and volunteers
- Provide inclusion services for people with disabilities

EVENTS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Plan and manage special events (festivals, concerts, etc.)
- Coordinate parades and community celebrations
- Facilitate permits for private events in parks
- Manage volunteer programs and events
- Conduct public engagement (surveys, meetings, etc.)
- Produce program guides and promotional materials
- Respond to complaints and service requests
- Outreach to underserved populations
- Provide staff support to committees and task forces
- Advise elected officials on trends and needs

Core Function and Tasks of a Recreation Department (cont.)

FACILITY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

- Operate and schedule athletic fields, courts, and rec centers
- Manage facility reservations and rentals
- Coordinate capital improvements and construction projects
- Maintain asset inventories
- Ensure ADA compliance and safety standards

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Oversee trails and natural area infrastructure
- Preserve and manage natural areas, woodlands, and wetlands
- Implement invasive species control and habitat restoration
- Conduct tree planting and care initiatives
- Monitor and improve biodiversity in park ecosystems
- Partner with environmental groups and agencies

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Manage program registration and customer inquiries
- Maintain website and social media

REVENUE GENERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Collect program fees and rental charges
- Develop sponsorship and naming rights programs
- Facilitate public-private and nonprofit partnerships
- Implement developer contribution policies
- Lease park facilities for vendors

SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- Conduct safety inspections and audits
- Train staff in CPR and emergency procedures
- Manage incidents and accident reporting
- Ensure regulatory compliance
- Coordinate with emergency responders

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE SUPPORT

- Support and coordinate advisory boards or commissions
- Implement municipal ordinances related to parks
- Provide staff support to committees and task forces
- Advise elected officials on trends and needs

Organizational Structure and Staffing

The Borough of West Chester Public Works Department is structured specifically to be responsive to "todays" needs of its residents and also to provide adequate management and maintenance to the Borough's infrastructure and other assets. Listed below are some of the primary responsibilities of the Public Works Department:

- Traffic Signals
- Borough roads and some state highways
- Ordinance Compliance
- Parks and Playgrounds
- Sanitary Sewer Systems
- Storm Water Systems
- Street Lights
- Fleet and equipment
- Solid Waste Collection
- Yard Waste Collection
- Big Belly/Litter Collection
- Recycle Collection
- Snow Removal
- Street Sweeping
- Street Signs
- Tree planting and pruning
- Pavement Markings
- Curb Painting
- Buildings and Grounds
- Parking lots and garages
- Capital Improvements Administration and Management
- Permit Issuance

While this list illustrates the breadth and complexity of responsibilities handled by the Public Works Department, it is important to recognize that park maintenance is only one function among many performed. Park upkeep requires specialized skills—such as turf management, playground safety

inspections, and horticultural care—that differ significantly from the traditional responsibilities of public works crews. The Borough of West Chester has structured its Public Works Department to be responsive to the evolving needs of today's residents while also providing professional management and maintenance of the Borough's infrastructure and assets. In addition to parks and playgrounds, the department oversees a wide range of systems and services, including traffic signals, roads, stormwater and sanitary sewer systems, solid waste and recycling collection, street lighting, vehicle fleet maintenance, public buildings, and capital project oversight. This multifaceted portfolio reflects the department's critical role in maintaining the health, safety, and daily functioning of the Borough—and underscores the importance of clear coordination and dedicated expertise when it comes to maintaining and enhancing the Borough's park system.

Benchmarks

According to the National Recreation and Park Association's 2025 Financial Management and Budgeting Agency Performance Review, municipalities with populations under 20,000 have six parks and recreation full-time equivalent employees. The six FTE's is reported by the lower quartile of municipalities. The median number was 13.8 with 32 FTEs reported by the upper quartile of municipalities. West Chester Borough as two FTEs in Recreation and 30 FTEs in Public Works for park maintenance.

Partnerships, Community Engagement, and Collaboration are a cornerstone of West Chester's recreation system. The Recreation Department has built strong partnerships with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and other governments to expand its reach. Examples include co-sponsored events, shared use of facilities, and multi-agency collaborations on programming.

Historically, public engagement in West Chester Borough's parks and recreation system has centered largely around the three major Friends Groups—those affiliated with Everhart, Hoopes, and Marshall Square Parks. These groups have played an important role in advocating for improvements and investing volunteer energy into signature parks. However, this engagement has been uneven across the system. Smaller neighborhood parks and the Melton Community Center have seen limited community involvement and few formal channels for resident input. As a result, investment and attention have tended to concentrate in parks with active Friends Groups, leaving others without a comparable voice or champion.

Another challenge has been the informal process by which park projects have moved forward. Friends Groups often bring proposals directly to Borough Council, which has historically approved requests in the absence of a long-range plan or formal evaluation framework. While this approach is understandable—given the lack of strategic guidance and the community's eagerness to improve beloved spaces—it has sometimes bypassed staff review, data analysis, and broader community input.

With the adoption of the PROS Plan, West Chester Borough now has an opportunity to establish a more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative approach to public engagement. The plan's data collection, needs assessments, and system-wide perspective provide a strong foundation for prioritizing investments based on equity, access, and demonstrated need. Moving forward, a more structured review process—guided by the PROS Plan and coordinated between the Recreation Department, Borough Council, and community stakeholders—will ensure that decisions reflect the best available information and the shared goals of the entire community.

This shift does not diminish the value of Friends Groups; rather, it invites them to be part of a larger, coordinated system that balances local passion with community-wide priorities. Through this lens, public engagement can grow beyond individual park advocacy to become a driving force behind an equitable, vibrant, and connected parks and recreation system for all residents.

Technology and Information Management: West Chester uses recreation software to manage program registration. As demand for services and transparency grows, additional technology investments will help track usage, assess performance, and provide real-time feedback loops. A future goal could be to develop dashboards and GIS-based tools for mapping park access, tracking maintenance, and visualizing capital needs.

Maintenance and Asset Management: Parks and recreation maintenance is a shared responsibility between Parks and Recreation and the Public Works Department. As the system expands, this shared model needs clearer delineation especially with respect to park planning, with the possible addition of dedicated park maintenance staff. A system-wide maintenance plan and asset inventory are recommended to ensure timely upkeep, safety, and life-cycle management.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- ***Dedicated Leadership Across Departments:*** Strong coordination through Borough Manager, Recreation Director, Public Works, and interdepartmental collaboration.
- ***Highly Committed Staff and Volunteers:*** Core staff and advisory volunteers provide exceptional dedication and service.
- ***Active Friends Groups in Signature Parks:*** Provide fundraising, stewardship, and advocacy in key parks.
- ***Sustainability Department and Advisory Committee:*** Embeds environmental and equity goals into operations.
- ***Support from Chester County Planning Commission:*** Enhances planning through grants, GIS, and technical assistance.
- ***Strong Partnerships:*** Collaboration with nonprofits, BID, Chamber of Commerce, and regional agencies broadens impact.

CHALLENGES

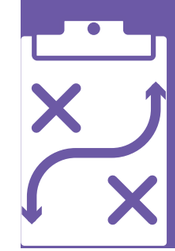
- ***Insufficient Recreation Staffing:*** Staffing is well below national benchmarks, limiting capacity and reach.
- ***Unbalanced Engagement and Investment:*** Parks without Friends Groups receive less attention and funding.
- ***Lack of Structured Project Review Process:*** Proposals sometimes bypass strategic review or alignment with community needs.
- ***Undefined Maintenance Roles:*** Park upkeep responsibilities between Public Works and Recreation are based on historical precedent and need to evolve with workload cost tracking, technology and natural resource management/ sustainability initiatives..
- ***Limited Technology and Data Systems:*** Lacks digital tools to monitor assets, track data, or analyze equity.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***Implementing the PROS Plan Framework:*** Guides data-driven decisions and prioritization of resources.
- ***Formalizing Engagement Channels:*** Broadens participation beyond Friends Groups and encourages inclusion.
- ***Building engaging relationship with Melton Community Center:*** Opens possibilities for indoor recreation and inclusion of the park in Borough-wide system to foster expanded welcoming community-wide park and recreation system and community cohesion.
- ***Expanding Staffing and Capacity:*** Justifies future staffing needs through benchmarks and operational gaps.
- ***Investing in Technology and Asset Management:*** Improves transparency, resource allocation, and maintenance tracking.
- ***Leveraging Regional and State Support:*** Aligns with county and state plans to pursue funding and expand trails.
- ***Strengthening Collaboration with Public Works:*** Clarifies roles and integrates natural resource stewardship.

THREATS

- ***Continued Staffing Constraints:*** May limit execution of PROS Plan recommendations.
- ***Volunteer Burnout or Group Imbalance and Implications for Legacy Planning as Friends Groups stakeholders cease involvement:*** Heavy reliance on a few Friends Groups could reduce equity and capacity.
- ***Competing Capital Priorities:*** Recreation improvements may be deprioritized amidst broader infrastructure needs.
- ***Maintenance Backlog and Infrastructure Aging:*** Without attention, aging assets could create safety and quality concerns.
- ***Fragmented Communication and Oversight:*** Lack of coordinated review may result in reactive rather than strategic action.



Organizational Structure and Staffing

The following strategic recommendations are grounded in the SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis of West Chester Borough's Parks and Recreation system. They are designed to build upon the Borough's existing strengths, address its current challenges, take advantage of timely opportunities, and mitigate potential threats. These recommendations provide a clear and actionable path toward a more equitable, sustainable, and well-managed parks and recreation system.

Establish and Implement a Formal Project Review and Approval Framework: Create a standardized review process for capital and program proposals. Use the PROS Plan and needs assessments to evaluate proposals and ensure equitable investment. Require departmental and Recreation Commission review before Borough Council deliberation and decision-making. Provide Council with timely well-crafted information to support their discussions and effective decision-making.

Convene an Annual Stakeholder Summit Prior to Budget Development: The Recreation Department should host an annual Parks and Recreation Stakeholder Summit each spring or early summer. Invite stakeholders including Borough Council members, Recreation Commission, Friends Groups, the Melton Community Center, Public Works, Sustainability, youth sports leagues, community organizations, and interested residents. Facilitate a structured discussion of emerging needs, opportunities, and constraints. Use the summit to collaboratively set priorities and shape the content of the annual Parks and Recreation Work Program and budget request. Document and share the outcomes to build transparency, alignment, and accountability.

Develop an Annual Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Work Program: Based on the Summit and other data, create a clear, actionable annual work program that outlines major projects, initiatives, partnership efforts, and ongoing responsibilities. Align the work program with PROS Plan recommendations, capital priorities, community input, and available staffing. Use the work program to set clear expectations, track progress, and report accomplishments to Borough Council and the community. Incorporate feedback from Friends Groups, staff, advisory committees, and other partners to ensure collaborative input and consistency between meeting Borough community needs and projects proposed by community-based organizations..

Expand Recreation Department Staffing and Capacity: Develop a phased staffing plan aligned with national benchmarks. Consider shared services or contracted support for programming and maintenance. Prioritize hires with expertise in outreach, inclusion, and sustainability.

Broaden and Formalize Community Engagement Channels: Create a Parks and Recreation Community Engagement Policy. Elevate underrepresented voices through neighborhood liaisons and hold regular forums focused on underserved parks and the Melton Community Center.

Integrate Technology and Asset Management Tools: Invest in recreation and asset management software. Work toward using GIS for park condition tracking and create public dashboards to report on equity, usage, and capital improvements.

Clarify and Evolve Maintenance Roles with Public Works: Conduct a maintenance task audit and cost analysis. Define clear responsibilities between departments. Develop formalized workload cost tracking, shared work plans and protocols for natural resource care.

Support Friends Groups with Training and Legacy Planning: Provide governance and fundraising training to establish Friends Groups in all parks. Recruit assistance from successful friends groups to spur the formation and success of additional friends groups. Promote succession planning and create a Borough-wide Friends network to enhance coordination and peer learning.

Strengthen the Partnership with the Melton Community Center: Establish shared programming and facility use agreements. Include Melton Park in system-wide planning and branding. Highlight the Center in Borough communications.

Leverage External Funding and Regional Alignment: Seek grants aligned with Landscapes3, the Chester County Bicycle Plan, and the PA Outdoor Recreation Plan. Prioritize safe places to bicycle to connect with the regional trail projects and prepare strong, data-informed applications.

Implement a Capital Investment Prioritization Framework: Use PROS Plan criteria to prioritize projects. Facilitate joint workshops with Council and stakeholders and integrate priorities into multi-year budgets.

Create a Parks and Recreation Performance Dashboard: Track indicators like access, participation, maintenance, and project delivery. Share public-facing dashboards and use metrics to guide decision-making and accountability.

Conclusion

West Chester Borough's ability to deliver a high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable parks and recreation system depends on the strength of its organizational foundation. This chapter has detailed the structures, partnerships, and operational frameworks that currently support parks and recreation, while also identifying critical gaps in staffing, coordination, and capacity. With the PROS Plan in place, the Borough is now positioned to modernize its systems, align efforts across departments, and ensure that investments reflect community-wide needs and priorities. By advancing the strategic recommendations outlined in this plan, West Chester can create a more responsive, equitable, and resilient recreation system—one that honors its legacy of civic stewardship while meeting the evolving demands of a diverse and growing population. In doing so, the Borough will not only strengthen public trust and satisfaction but also ensure that parks and recreation remain a cornerstone of community life for generations to come.

Chapter 17
Financing Parks and Recreation

Investing in Our Community Financing Parks and Recreation.

Overview: According to the Borough's 2025 municipal budget message, West Chester's financial health is closely tied to its popularity as a place to live, work, and visit. Attracting and retaining businesses, visitors, and residents is a shared priority between the public and private sectors. Research consistently shows that quality of life—including access to parks, trails, and recreation opportunities—is a key factor in business decisions about where to locate or expand.

Parks and recreation are not just amenities—they are essential public services that enhance quality of life, promote health, support environmental sustainability, and strengthen social connections. In West Chester Borough, the Recreation Department has made notable progress in expanding programming, producing successful community events, and investing in much-needed capital improvements. As use grows and infrastructure ages, maintaining and advancing these services will require stable, diversified, and forward-looking financial strategies.

Shaping the Future: Redevelopment, Revenue, and Community Investment: As a fully developed community, West Chester Borough's population growth will occur primarily through redevelopment, typically at higher densities than existing development. Most neighborhoods will continue to maintain stable land use patterns. In the downtown area, zoning regulations allow multifamily and mixed-use developments of up to seven stories in certain locations. Over the past five years, four of the Borough's six largest land development proposals have been apartment projects, totaling 869 proposed new housing units. Once fully occupied, these projects could increase the Borough's population by approximately 1,800 residents—about 9% above the July 2023 census estimate of 19,658—within five years.

The remaining two major proposals include a new hotel in the downtown core, expected to be completed in 2025, and a warehouse distribution center on a 28-acre site formerly occupied by the Wyeth pharmaceutical company. To accommodate this growth and redevelopment, the Borough is planning strategic infrastructure investments in sewer systems, roads, stormwater management, and parks, while maintaining current levels of public safety services.

These six large developments are projected to generate $4.2 million in sewer tap-in fees, $484,000 in additional annual property tax revenue, $716,925 in earned income tax, and $713,800 in recreation fee-in-lieu payments—funds that can be directed toward park capital improvements. However, because development

Smart Spending: How Parks Deliver Big Returns for Communities

General Return-on-Investment

- **$4 in economic value per $1 invested in public parks and recreation** Source: National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), The Economic Impact of Local Parks, 2020. https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/the-economic-impact-of-local-parks/

Public Health Benefits

- **$3 in medical cost savings for every $1 invested in community-based physical activity programs** Source: Trust for Public Land (TPL), The Health Benefits of Parks, 2009 Link to TPL brief
- **Parks and recreation contribute to reducing obesity-related healthcare costs, which the CDC estimates at $147 billion annually in the U.S.** Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Cost of Obesity, 2022 https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html

Economic Development & Jobs

- **$1 in park operations supports $1.23 in economic activity, and $1 in capital spending supports $1.44 in economic activity** Source: NRPA, The Economic Impact of Local Parks, 2020 https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/the-economic-impact-of-local-parks/

Property Values

- **Proximity to parks can raise residential property values by 5% to 20%, depending on the quality and type of park** Source: Trust for Public Land, Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System, 2009. https://www.tpl.org/resource/measuring-economic-value-city-park-system

Environmental Benefits

- **Every $1 invested in urban trees and green infrastructure yields $2–$6 in environmental services, such as stormwater reduction and air pollution mitigation. Every dollar invested in parks and green space can generate between $4 and $11, due to increased tourism, improved property values, and enhanced community health.** Source: American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) / Center for Urban Forest Research. https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/benefits-green-infrastructure

timelines are often uncertain, only projects currently under construction—such as the new hotel—are included in formal revenue forecasts.

Parks and Recreation Budget Structure: West Chester Borough's parks and recreation budget is divided into two key components: the Operating Budget and the Capital Improvement Budget. The Operating Budget covers day-to-day expenses related to administration, programs, and park maintenance. In contrast, the Capital Improvement Budget funds major investments—such as land acquisition, facility upgrades, and equipment purchases—that typically exceed $10,000 in cost and have a lifespan of more than seven years.

Operating Budget Trends: As shown in Table 1, from 2021 to 2025, the Borough's parks and recreation revenues grew from $121,000 to $178,200—an encouraging trend driven by expanded programming, sponsorships, and event revenue.

Table 1. West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Revenues 2025 - 2021

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Special Event Fee	20,000	3,000	3,500	12,500	-
ARPA Cash		65,000	-	-	-
Rest. Festival Revenue	45,000	24,000	35,000	23,000	38,000
Small Event Revenue	2,000	500	8,000	-	3,500
Event Permit Applications	-	-	-	-	3,500
Summer Camps	-	-	-	-	15,000
Volleyball			10,000	16,000	15,000
Turks Head Fest. Revenue	16,000	8,400	7,000	12,750	7,500
Sponsorship Revenue	30,200	30,200	-	25,000	15,000
Park Rental Fees	10,000	16,000	-	15,000	1,500
Rec Classes	-	-	30,000	30,000	6,000
Trip and Class revenue	55,000	68,000	-	-	16,000
TOTAL	**178,200**	**215,100**	**93,500**	**134,500**	**121,000**

As shown in Table 2, expenditures have risen from $134,800 to $239,000 over the same period. Personnel costs of $260,000+ annually, represent the largest share of the budget. Investment in staff reflects the Borough's commitment to professional service delivery but highlights the need for sustained funding sources.

Table 2. West Chester Borough Parks and Recreation Expenditures 2025-2021

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Salaries	175,078	149,666	117,147	87,805	86,235
Longevity	-	-		--	1,480
Summer					5,000
Insurance W/C	2,151	2,528	4,180	2,500	4,000
Insurance - Medical	68,348	47,277	31,903	33,215	32,466
DC Pension	2,750	-			-
FICA	13,393	11,449	8,962	6,717	7,093
SALARY TOTAL	**261,721**	**210,920**	**162,192**	**130,237**	**136,274**
Office Supplies	-	-	1,000	2,000	3,000
Postage/Printing	-	-	-	1,000	2,000
Other	-	-	4,000	5,000	5,000
Utilities	-	-	14,500	14,000	3,000
Summer Camp					5,000
Volleyball	-	-	-	16,000	15,000
Consultant	-	-	8,000	2,500	1,000
Advertising	21,000	12,500	15,000	10,000	10,000
Software Licenses	4,000	3,500	6,000	5,000	6,500
Park Maintenance	51,000	51,000	36,000	26,000	-
Trips & Classes	76,000	72,000	40,000	50,000	22,000
Restaurant Festival	39,000	30,000	35,000	23,000	38,000
Turks Head Festival	19,500	15,000	18,000	12,750	7,500
Touch truck Event	4,000	2,500	2,500	2,000	1,500
Halloween Parade	4,000	3,000	5,000	3,000	2,000
Small events	16,500	6,500	4,000	3,500	3,500
Training	4,000	4,500	4,500	3,500	-
Insurance Gen & Liability	-	-	-	-	1,800
Refunds					3,000
TOTAL OPERATING	**239,000**	**200,500**	**193,500**	**234,250**	**134,800**
Transfer to Capital	130,635	100,000	142,500	55,000	136,274
TOTAL	**631,356**	**511,420**	**498,192**	**379,487**	**271,074**

With a population of 19,658, the Borough invests $25.47 per capita in parks and recreation annually. With the Borough's operating budget of $22,971,022, parks and recreation represents 2.1% of the total operating budget. The Recreation Department generates 36% of its budget from non-tax sources. The per capita non-tax revenue generated per capita at $9.06 is close to the national per capita of $10.86. The Park Maintenance budget of $51,000 which is about $1,205 per acre. Labor costs are not tracked and included in the Public Works budget. This would increase the Borough's annual per acre investment in park maintenance.

Table 3. West Chester Borough Parks & Recreation Capital Improvement Projects 2025

	Project Cost $	Grant $
Rehabilitation of tennis and pickleball courts-Hoopes	290,000	275,300
Replace aging playground equipment, fall zones, etc.-Horrace Pippin	85,000	-
Replace poured-in-place rubber with brushed concrete-JOG	65,000	-
Relocate and replace aging playground equipment Hoopes	8,500	-
Total	**448,500**	**275,300**

Capital Improvements and Outside Funding: As shown in Table 2, the Borough transfers funds to capital improvements annually, ranging from $55,000 to $142,500 in 2021 through 2025, for cyclic replacement and long-term park improvements. While this demonstrates fiscal responsibility, total system needs still outstrip available resources—especially as residents express strong support for improved parks, expanded trails, and more year-round programs.

As shown in Table 3, the 2025 Capital Improvement Program totals $448,500 and focuses on critical upgrades to playgrounds, safety surfaces, and athletic courts. A state grant of $275,300 will fund the rehabilitation of tennis and pickleball courts at Hoopes Park—underscoring the Borough's ability to secure competitive external funding.

Still, many projects lack dedicated funding. Continued pursuit of state, county, and foundation grants is essential. Equally important are partnerships that reduce reliance on municipal funds while advancing shared goals—particularly with Friends Groups.

Benchmarks and Peer Comparisons

Benchmarks are reference points used to measure performance, progress, or quality against established standards or comparable peers. In parks and recreation planning, benchmarks help municipalities assess how well their services, facilities, staffing, and funding levels align with best practices or with other similar communities.

- Benchmarks can come from:
- National standards (e.g., NRPA's Agency Performance Review)
- State or regional data
- Comparable municipalities based on size, demographics, and service area
- Internal goals set by the municipality itself

Importantly, there is no right or wrong answer when using benchmarks—they are tools for comparison, not judgments of good or bad. A benchmark simply shows where a community stands in relation to others or to an aspirational goal. The value lies in understanding differences and using that insight to inform decisions that align with local needs, priorities, and resources.

Using benchmarks allows West Chester Borough to:

- Identify strengths and areas for improvement
- Set realistic and measurable goals
- Support funding and staffing requests with evidence
- Track progress over time

For example, if a borough, like West Chester, maintains fewer acres of parkland per 1,000 residents than similar municipalities, that benchmark can help justify land acquisition or capital investment. Similarly, benchmarking program participation, budget allocations, or staff ratios can guide operational decisions and resource allocation.

By comparing current conditions to benchmarks, West Chester Borough can make informed, strategic decisions to better serve residents and plan for future needs.

Based on the 2025 National Recreation and Park Association's Agency Performance Review, the lower quartile benchmarks for park and recreation agencies are as follows:

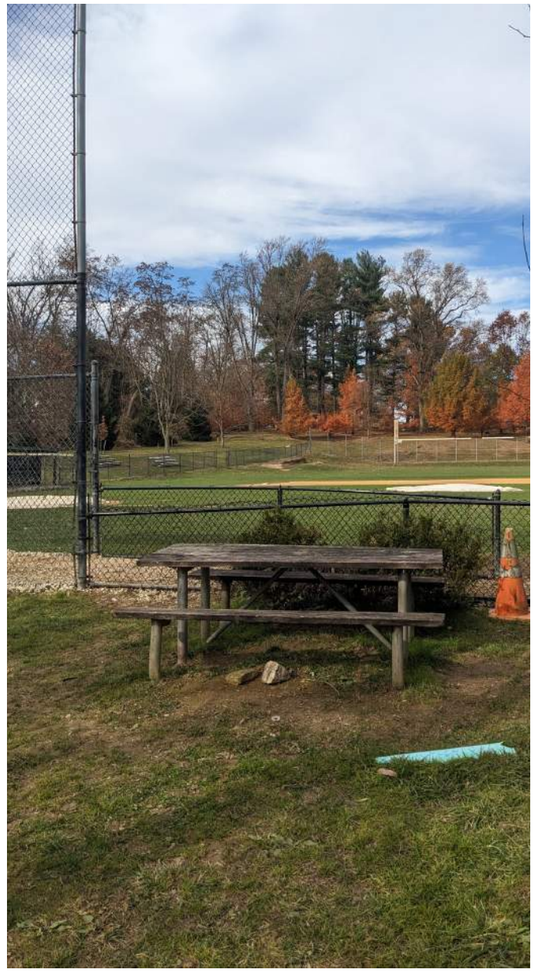


Table 4. Parks and Recreation Budget Benchmarks: West Chester vs. NRPA Municipal Comparisons

Factor	West Chester Borough	Municipalities Lower Quartile and > 20,000 Population	Median for Municipalities >20,000 Population	Municipalities Upper Quartile and > 20,000 Population
Per Capita Operating Budget	$25.47	$15.45	$49.67	$104.13
Per Acre Costs	$1,205	$3,446	$9,512	$27,711
5-year Capital Budget	2025: $448,500	$509,192	$2,212,000	$7,612,000
Cost Recovery	38%	16%	31%	59%

Pricing Policy: Equitable, Transparent, and Sustainable Fees

To guide equitable, transparent, and sustainable program fees, the Borough should adopt a formal Pricing Policy based on community benefit, individual benefit, and cost-recovery goals.

Table 5. Benchmarks of Pennsylvania Boroughs

Borough	Population	Square Miles	# Parks	Park Acreage/Acres per 1,000	FTE Staff	Operating Budget	Per Capita	% Borough Operating Budget
West Chester	**19,658**	**1.85**	**13**	**42.3/2.1**	**2 plus maintenance**	**$500,721**	**$25.47**	**3.1%**
Phoenixville	19,871	3.6	14	72/3.6	6	$1,659,783	$83.53	8.0%
Carlisle	22,341	5.54	18	164/7	8 & seasonals	$1,318,485	$59.01	2.9%
Quakertown	9,247	2.04	4	91/10	2 & seasonals	$668,350	$72,27	5.9%
New Cumberland (West Shore Regional Recreation Consortium)	7,547	1.69	19	98/12	Shared	$188,300	$24.90	2.7%
Lansdale	18,978	3	21	159/8.3	8 & seasonals	$1,836,786	$96.78	9.9%
Hanover	16,458	4.8	14	2,549/3-150 (51 acres in town parks)	1 plus 2 FTEs in Public Works Staff	$412,614	25.07	2.2%

Key Principles:

- Equity: Programs with the greatest public benefit (e.g., festivals) receive greater subsidy; those with private benefit (e.g., adult classes) recover more costs.
- Cost Recovery: Each program should meet a target recovery percentage, set by type and strategic goals.
- Access: Need-based discounts or scholarships should be available to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation.
- Transparency: Pricing rationale should be clearly communicated, with fees reviewed annually.

Table 6. Potential Program Pricing Policy

Program Type	Cost Recovery Target	Example
Community-wide Events	0–20%	Free or nominal fee
Youth, Camps, & Classes	50–75%	Tiered pricing; sibling discounts. Potential scholarship program with community partners.
Adult Recreation Programs	75–100%	Market-based with full cost recovery
Facility Rentals	100%+	Includes cost of staffing and supplies
Commercial or High Fee Events	Tiered	See below

Adopting a pricing policy will support financial sustainability while reinforcing the Borough's commitment to inclusive, accessible recreation opportunities.

Events that charge participant entry fees or otherwise generate revenue are required to reimburse the Borough for all direct and indirect costs associated with public services rendered to support the event. This includes, but is not limited to, police presence, street closures, public works support, and administrative oversight. For events generating substantial revenue, an additional fee of 10% of gross receipts may be applied to support infrastructure wear-and-tear and equitable use of public resources.

Recommended Changes to the Pricing Policy for High-Fee Events

1. Implement a Cost-Recovery Fee Structure

Introduce a tiered cost recovery model based on event type, size, and potential for revenue generation. For events with high entry fees, set a minimum percentage of gross revenue (e.g., 10–15%) to be paid to the Borough or a flat rate cost-recovery fee based on estimated municipal service costs (police, public works, etc.).

Example: For parades with entry fees over $50 per participant or events generating over $10,000 in total revenue, require payment equal to 100% of the Borough's estimated service costs plus a percentage-based surcharge to account for wear-and-tear or opportunity cost.

2. Require Detailed Budgets from Sponsors

Ask event organizers to submit a budget or revenue plan during the permit application. This ensures transparency and allows the Borough to fairly assess the ability to pay.

3. Define a "Commercial Event" Category

Create a pricing category for commercial or revenue-generating events, distinct from community or nonprofit events. These should be subject to higher permit fees and required to cover all Borough costs incurred.

4. Use a Standardized Cost Estimate Formula

Develop a formula based on:

- Staff hours (e.g., police, cleanup, admin)
- Equipment or facility use
- Lost opportunity or overtime

This provides consistency, reduces dispute, and justifies charges to the public.

5. Establish an Enforcement and Collections Policy

Clarify that failure to pay full Borough-assessed costs may result in denial of future permits, legal collection, or public disclosure of non-payment.

Community-Based Fundraising: The Role of Friends Groups: West Chester Borough benefits from the strong support and fundraising of three active park-based volunteer organizations:

- Friends of Marshall Square Park
- Friends of Everhart Park
- Friends of Hoopes Park

These Friends Groups play a vital role in fundraising, organizing community events, advocating for park improvements, and contributing to beautification and stewardship. Their volunteer time, grassroots support, and financial contributions multiply the impact of municipal investments.

Over the years, Friends Groups have raised tens of thousands of dollars for park revitalization, historic restoration, benches, gardens, trees, playground enhancements, concerts, and signage—improvements that directly benefit park users while enhancing the character and quality of the Borough's public spaces.

Strengthening the Friends of West Chester Parks: The Friends of West Chester Parks is technically the central organization coordinating community support for parks. Ideally, this nonprofit group should collaborate closely with the Borough's Parks and Recreation Department to enhance the quality of life by maintaining and improving public parks and trails. It is an umbrella organization for several park-specific volunteer groups but they operate independently. Strength in numbers helps with advocacy and building the case for support for parks and recreation. Since this organization could provide more value to the Borough and active friends groups, the following actions could help to strengthen this organization.

1.Clarify Mission and Role

Redefine the role of the Friends of West Chester Parks as a network hub, not an umbrella organization. As a hub, there is no control over independent groups! Each of the active park friends groups is successful in carrying out projects, fundraising, and getting Borough Council approvals. With a transition from an "umbrella" organization to a hub, that supports existing friends groups as well as opens the door for the formation of new friends groups, sharing information, providing technical support and helping neighborhoods without function friends groups for their close-to-home parks.

2. Create a Collaborative Governance Structure

Establish a "Council of Friends Groups" with membership by each independent friends group. Define bylaws,, organizational structure and council operations to facilitate cooperation, with guidance on how individual groups align with broader goals.

3. Formalize Relationships and Expectations

Although a process exists for reviewing and approving park improvement projects, it is not consistently followed or enforced. As a result, some Friends groups bypass the Parks and Recreation Department and take proposals—often accompanied by funding—to Borough Council directly. This places Council in a difficult position, where approving a project may feel politically necessary, even if the proposal has not been evaluated for consistency with park plans, operational impacts, or long-term priorities. A reinforced and consistently applied review process is needed to uphold sound governance and ensure alignment across all stakeholders.

Develop or update MOUs (Memoranda of Understanding) between the Borough, the Friends of West Chester Parks, and each individual Park Friends group. Include expectations for communication protocols, fiscal responsibility and reporting, capital project coordination, and park standards

4. Offer Support and Added Value

Host volunteer appreciation events, leadership training, and joint fundraisers (e.g., "Party for the Parks" event benefiting all parks). Share information and potential grant-writing assistance, fundraising tools, and 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsorship. Consider a mini-grant program in which the Friends of West Chester Parks raises money and re-grants it for small park improvements proposed by local groups.

5. Build Visibility and Trust

Rebrand the Friends of West Chester Parks with a clear, compelling mission and visual identity. Create an annual "State of the Parks" report highlighting accomplishments of all groups. Feature joint initiatives in local media to build public recognition.

Friends Groups reflect the community's pride in its parks and its willingness to invest time, money, and creativity in their care. With stronger coordination, shared planning, and recognition, they can become even more powerful allies in funding and stewarding park improvements.

The Case for Action: Why a Financial Strategy Matters

West Chester Borough is experiencing both growing use of its parks and increased demands on its recreation system—pressures driven by new development, rising program participation, and aging infrastructure. While the Borough has made notable progress through smart budgeting, outside funding, and community partnerships, current and future needs still outpace available resources.

At the same time, new residential and commercial developments are expected to bring additional revenue, residents, and recreation demand. These changes create a window of opportunity—and a responsibility—to ensure the Borough's parks and recreation system can grow sustainably, remain inclusive, and deliver long-term value to the community.

A clear and proactive financial strategy is essential to:

- Maintain and upgrade facilities equitably across neighborhoods
- Sustain high-quality programs and special events
- Leverage grants and donor support effectively
- Prepare for growth and changing community expectations
- Support staff, partnerships, and stewardship at a high standard

The following strategies provide a practical roadmap to strengthen the Borough's financial resilience and expand the capacity of its parks and recreation system to serve all residents.

Recommendations

To strengthen financial capacity and resilience, the Borough can build on current progress by pursuing the following strategies:

- Develop a five-year parks and recreation financial plan that includes revenue forecasts, cost projections, and targeted grant strategies to support sustainable growth.
- Adopt a formal Pricing Policy to promote consistency, equity, and transparency in fee-setting for programs, services, and facility use.
- Prioritize capital projects and develop a five-year Capital Improvement Program based on clear criteria such as safety & health, accessibility, equity, and readiness for funding or implementation.
- Expand collaboration with Friends Groups through coordinated fundraising plans, shared priorities, transparent project alignment processes, and recognition.
- Explore the creation of a Borough-wide Parks Foundation or Donor Fund to centralize philanthropic giving and support transformative, system-wide improvements.
- Diversify revenue streams by pursuing opportunities such as corporate sponsorships, donor campaigns, concessions, and facility rentals.
- Continue actively pursuing state, county, and foundation grants to supplement local funds and accelerate priority capital improvements.

With strategic financial planning, community partnerships, and sustained public engagement, West Chester Borough is well-positioned to maintain and grow a parks and recreation system that enriches the lives of residents across all ages, abilities, and neighborhoods.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- **Diversified Revenue Base:** The Recreation Department generates 36% of its operating budget from non-tax sources, including sponsorships, program fees, special events, and rentals which is higher than national recovery rate.
- **Successful Grant Acquisition:** The Borough has demonstrated strong grant-writing capacity, securing competitive state funds for capital improvements (e.g., $275,300 for Hoopes Park).
- **Active Friends Groups:** Dedicated park-based volunteer organizations provide grassroots fundraising, project support, and community advocacy.
- **Growing Program Revenue:** Event and program revenues have steadily increased, reflecting strong public interest and effective marketing.
- **Commitment to Quality:** Investments in staff and professional service delivery reflect a municipal commitment to high-quality public recreation.
- **Fees-in-Lieu:** Funds can be used for capital improvements.

CHALLENGES

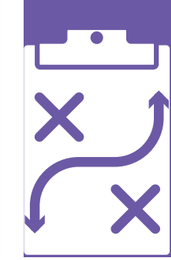
- **Below-Average Per Capita Investment:** At $25.47, West Chester's per capita operating investment in parks and recreation falls below both the Pennsylvania average (~$50) and national median ($49.67).
- **Underfunded Capital Needs:** Many capital projects lack dedicated funding, and annual transfers to the Capital Improvement Budget vary significantly.
- **Inadequate Park Maintenance Funding:** The reported $1,205 per acre in maintenance excludes labor costs borne by Public Works, underrepresenting true expenditures.
- **Outdated Formal Pricing Policy:** The Borough lacks a consistent, equitable framework for setting program and facility fees.
- **Inconsistent Oversight of Friends Group Proposals:** Some Friends Group-led initiatives bypass coordinated planning, creating potential misalignment with Borough goals.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Revenue from Redevelopment:** New residential and commercial development is expected to generate over $700,000 in recreation fees-in-lieu and increased annual tax revenue.
- **Pricing Policy Implementation:** A formal policy can balance cost recovery, public benefit, and access, while improving transparency and long-term sustainability.
- **Partnership Development:** Opportunities exist to expand collaborations with Friends Groups, local businesses, and philanthropic organizations.
- **Foundation or Donor Fund Creation:** A Borough-wide Parks Foundation could centralize giving, pursue large-scale investments, and build public trust.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Use of NRPA and Pennsylvania benchmarks can inform strategic planning, goal-setting, and funding requests.

THREATS

- Reliance on Uncertain Development Timelines: Recreation funding linked to future development is vulnerable to delays, changes in scope, or project cancellations.
- **Rising Costs of Service Delivery:** Increases in personnel, materials, and insurance may outpace revenue growth if not addressed through sustainable funding models.
- **Limited Municipal Budget Share:** Parks and recreation currently receive only 2.1% of the total operating budget—well below PA DCNR's recommended 5%.
- **Overdependence on Volunteer Labor:** Continued reliance on Friends Groups without formal coordination, support, or recognition may lead to burnout or inefficiencies.
- **Competition for Grants:** As more municipalities pursue state and foundation funding, securing external grants may become increasingly competitive.



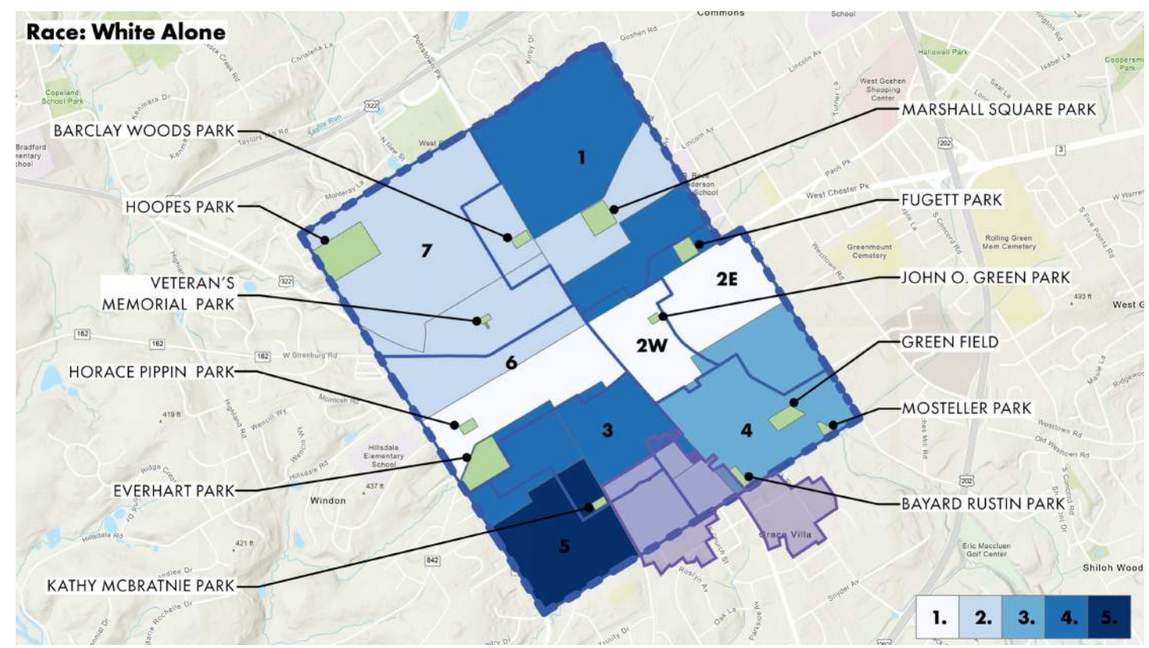
Appendix A
Demographic Mapping

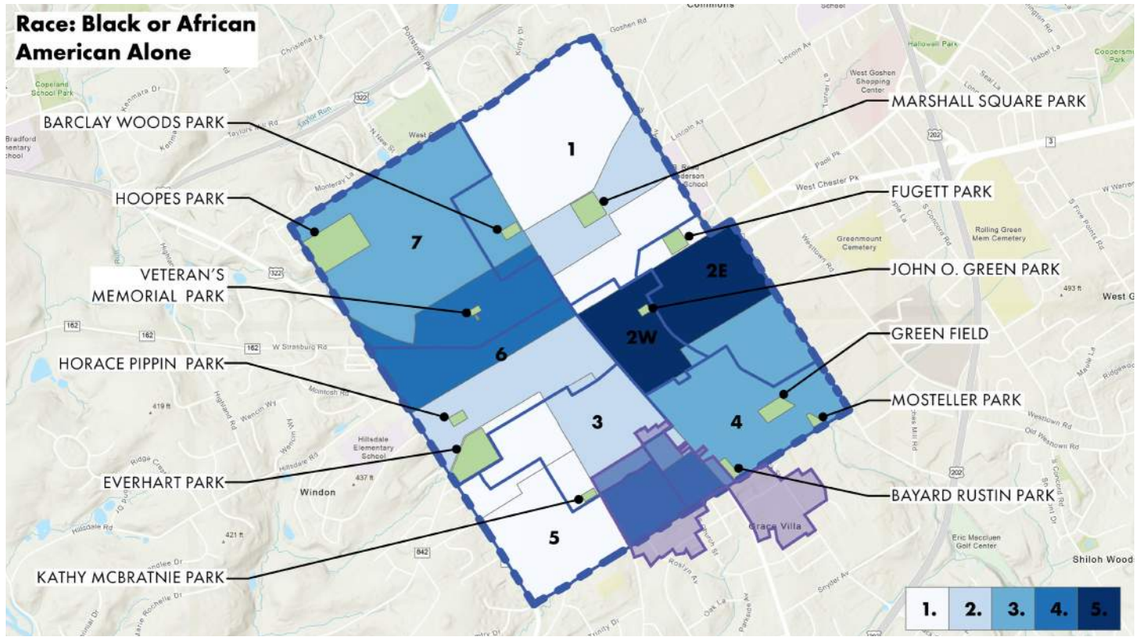
Demographic Mapping

Why Demographic Mapping: Demographic mapping is an invaluable tool within park planning that helps us to understand who lives around, and likely uses, parks within our community. This helps us to create targeted improvements within specific parks as well as the park system at large. John O. Green Park, for example, may need more resources in the immediate future to support the large increase in young families moving in. Demographic mapping helps the consultant team and borough gain these insights while also creating sleek, easy-to-read visualizations to share their findings.

Interpreting the Legend: Index Scores: Many of the attached maps are measured via an index, or a calculated, composite score based on multiple factors. Educational Attainment, for example, is not presented as just the static number of bachelor's degrees within a ward but as the number of bachelor's degrees vs the population of the ward. This presents a more dynamic understanding of statistics. For example, if 50% of the population in a ward has a bachelor's degree or higher it tells us more than if we see that 50 people within that ward have reached the same level of educational attainment. The former indicates a high level of educational attainment within the area while the latter does account for any factor beyond how many bachelor's degrees there are.

Indexes are calculated to return representative numbers on a scale of one to five, with one being the lowest score and five being the highest. For our purposes one correlates to the lightest areas on the map while a five correlates with the darkest. In the Educational Attainment maps, for example, this would mean that those areas with low levels of educational attainment vs their total population would be a lighter color, or a one, while those with high levels of educational attainment vs their total population, or a five, would be darker.

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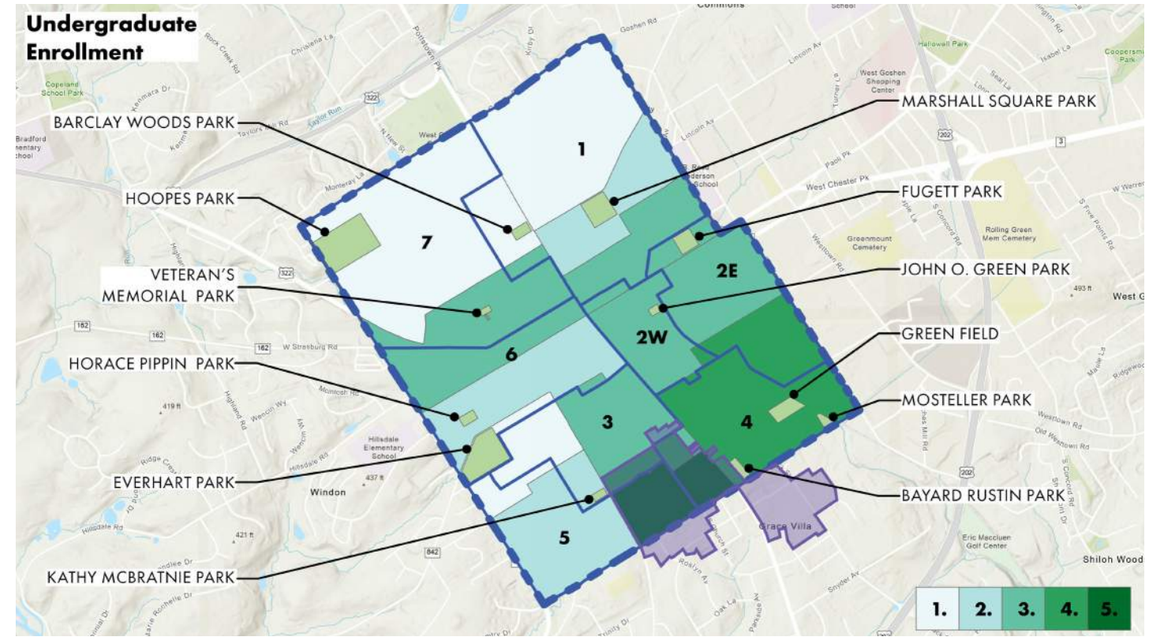
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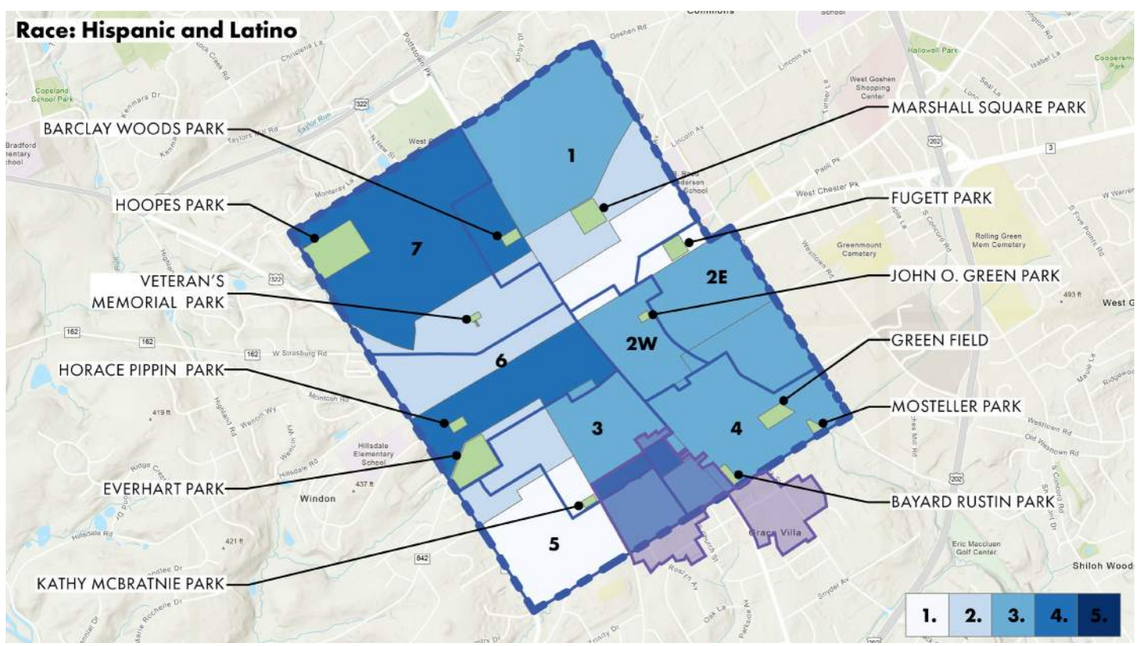
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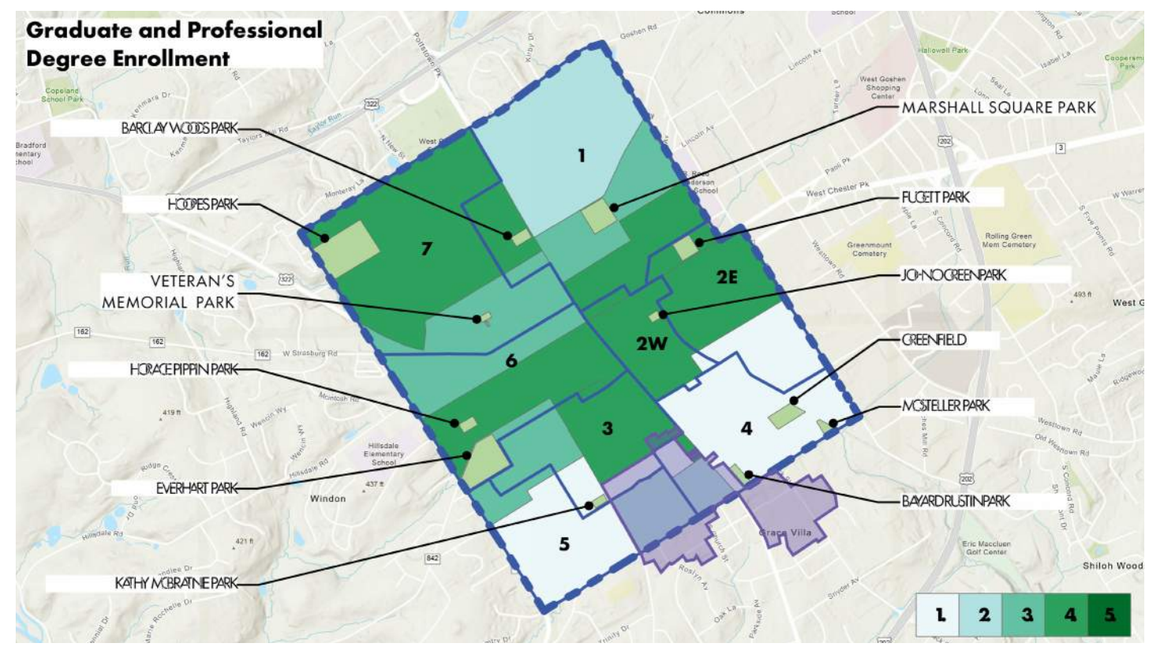
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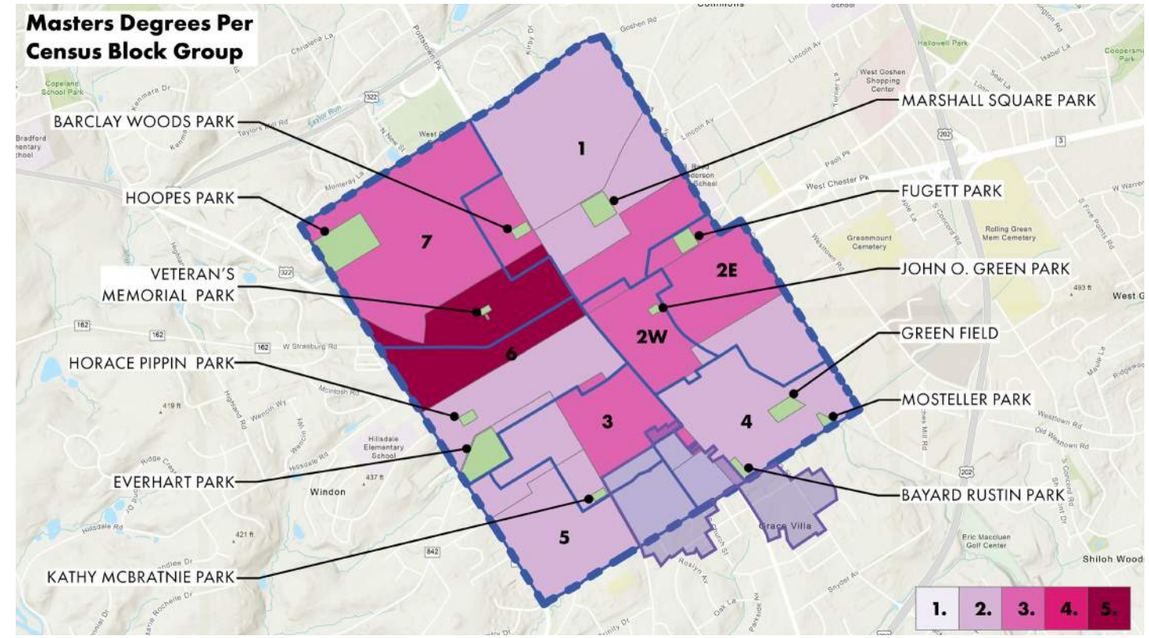
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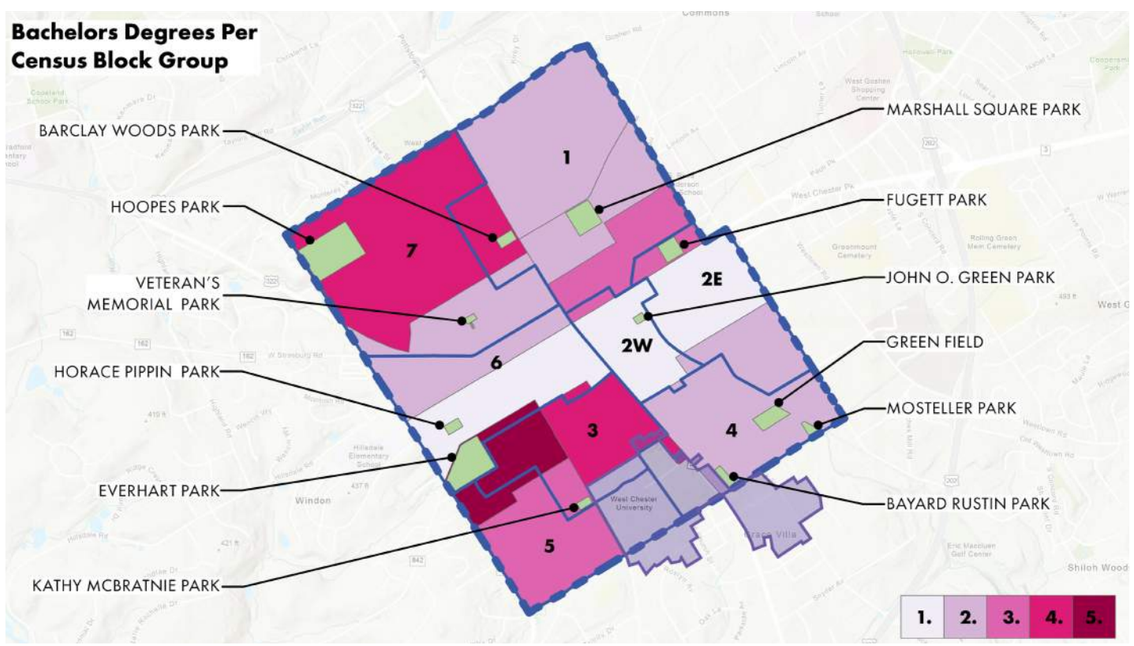
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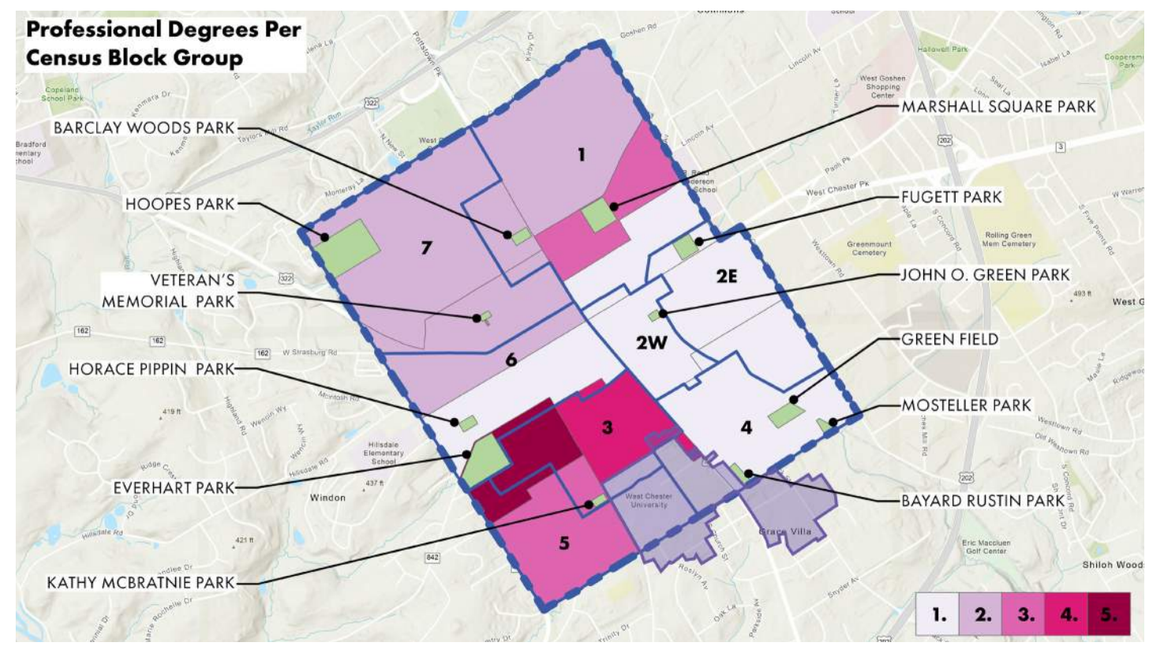
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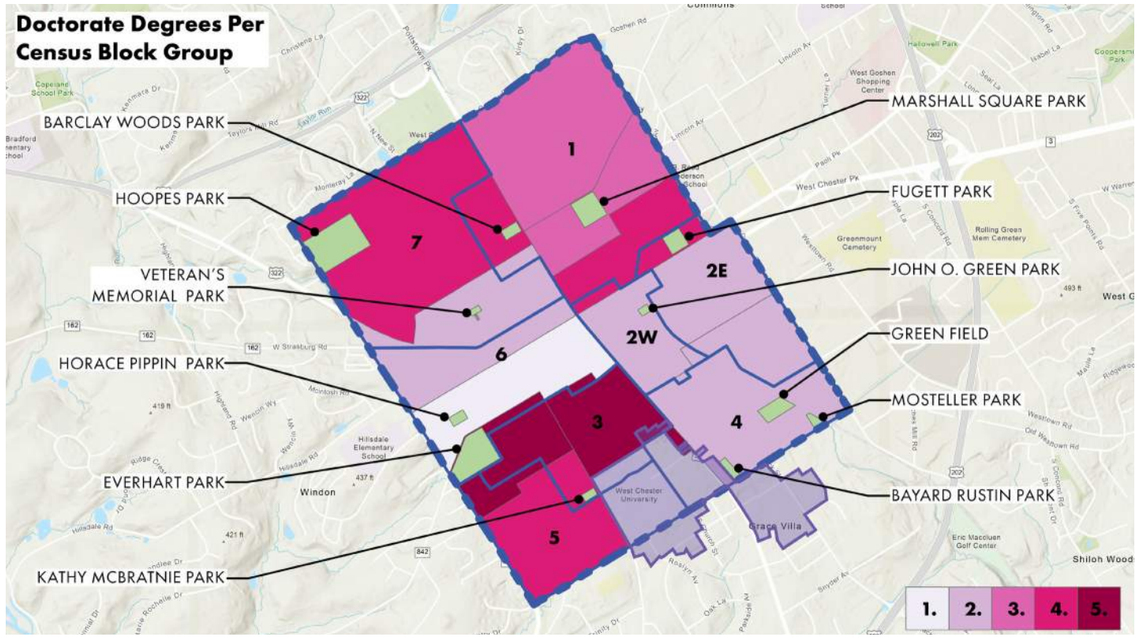
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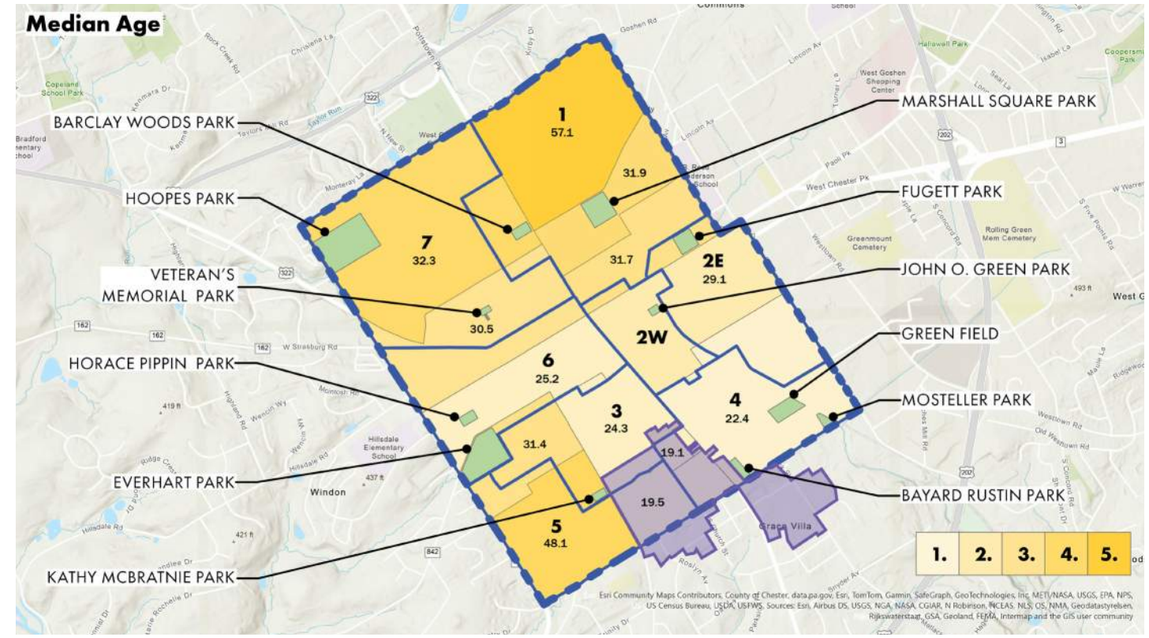
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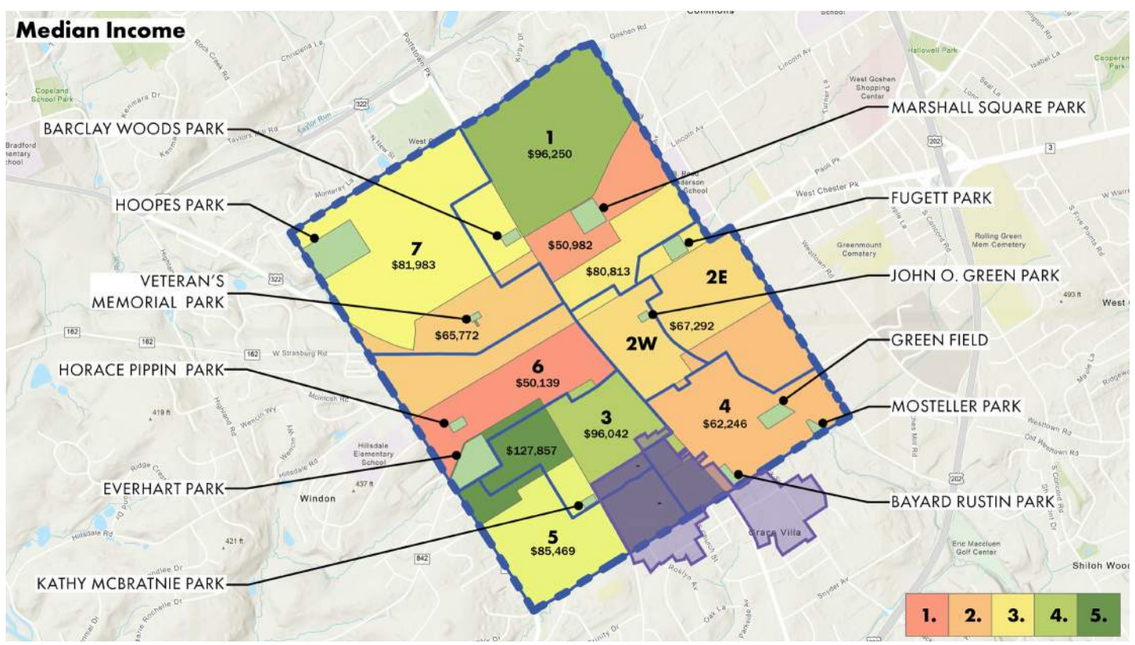
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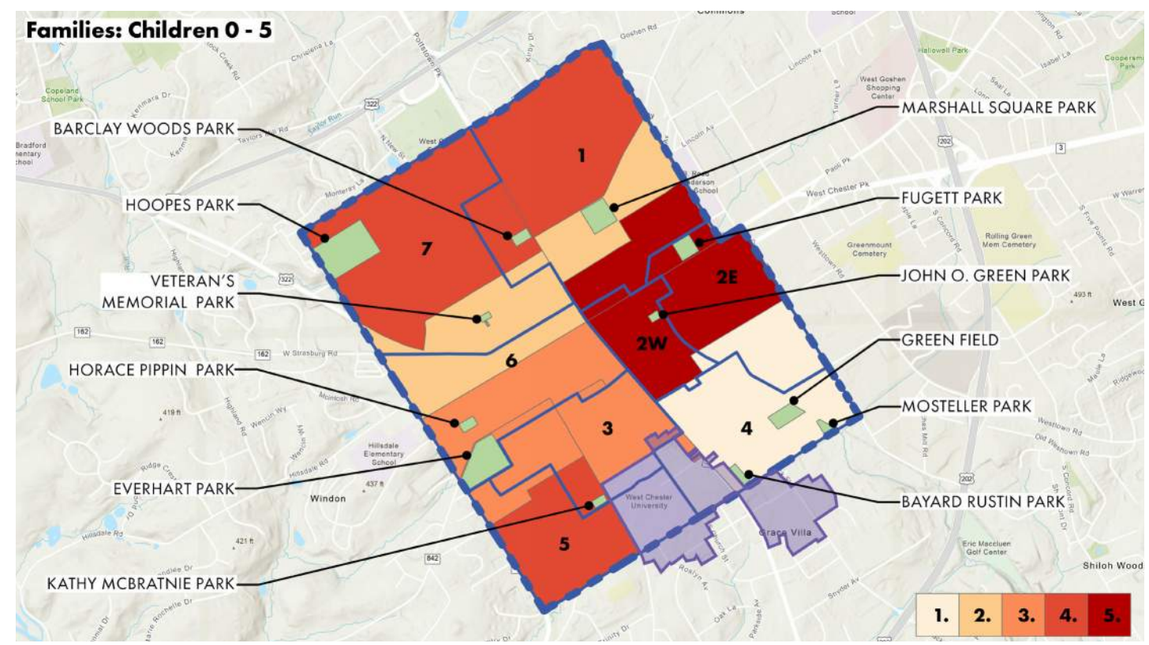
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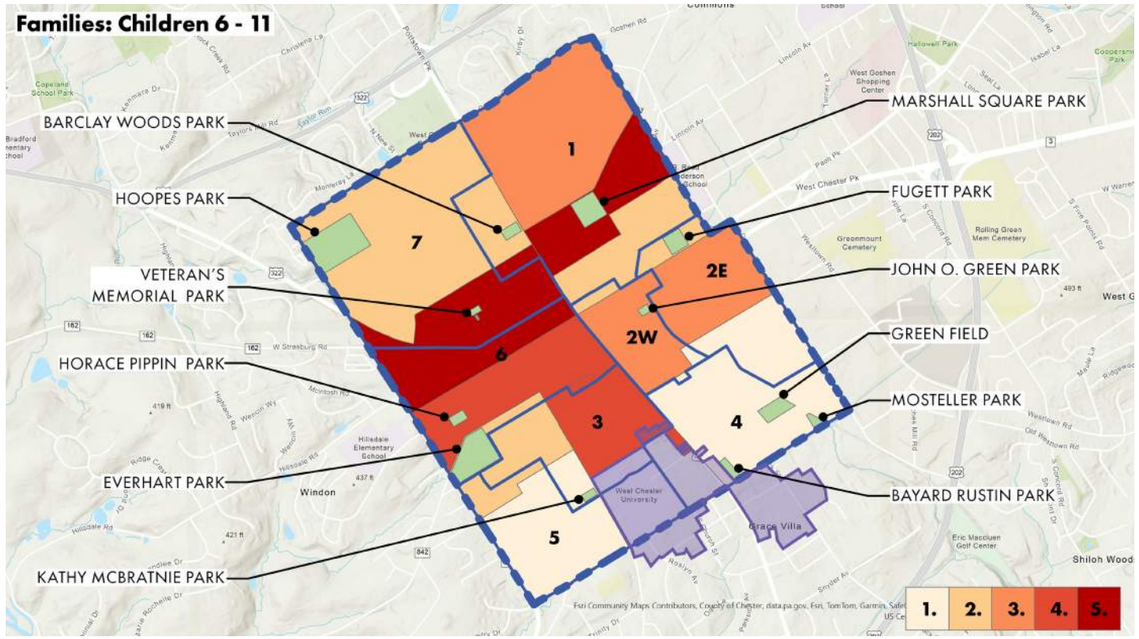
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EVERHART PARK
KATHY MCBRATNIE PARK
MARSHALL SQUARE PARK
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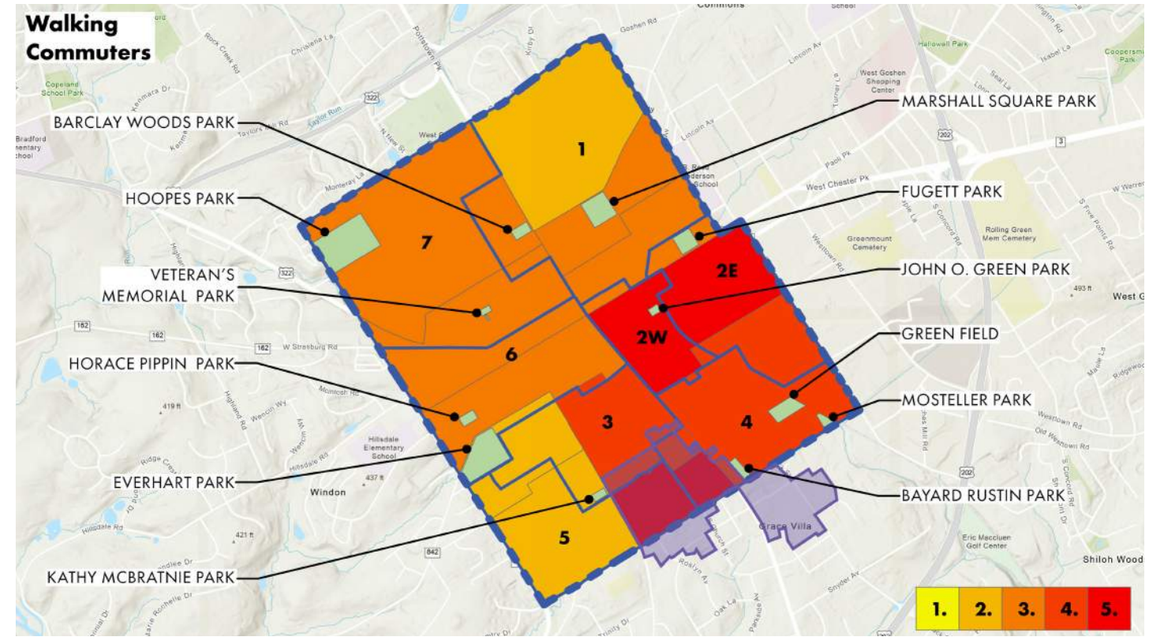
Walking Commuters
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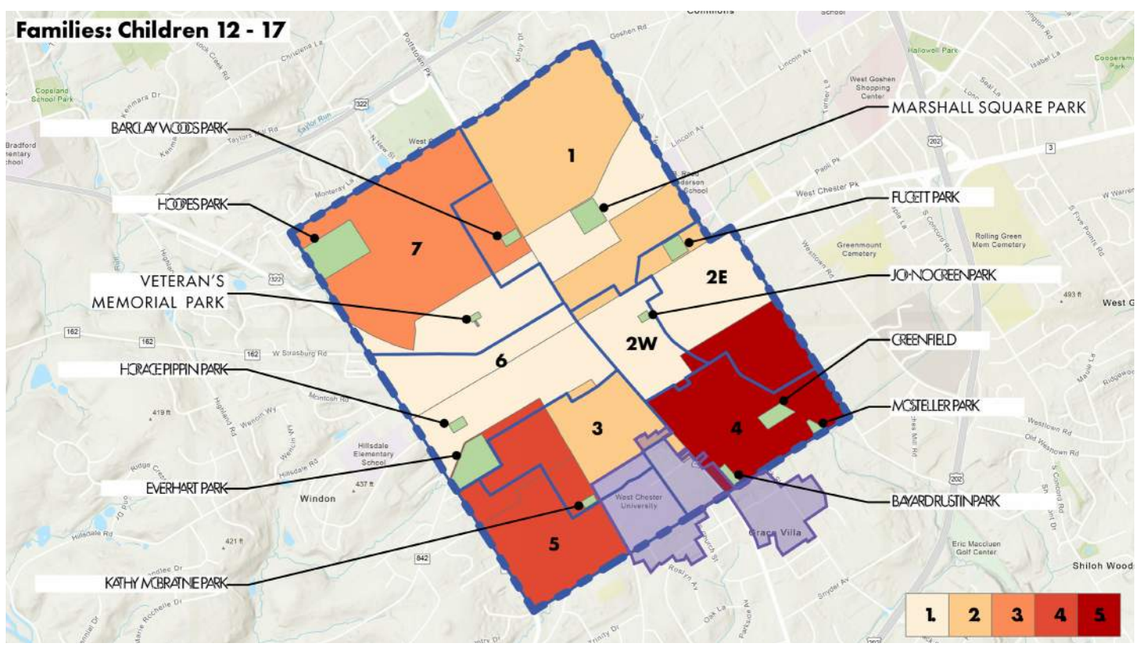
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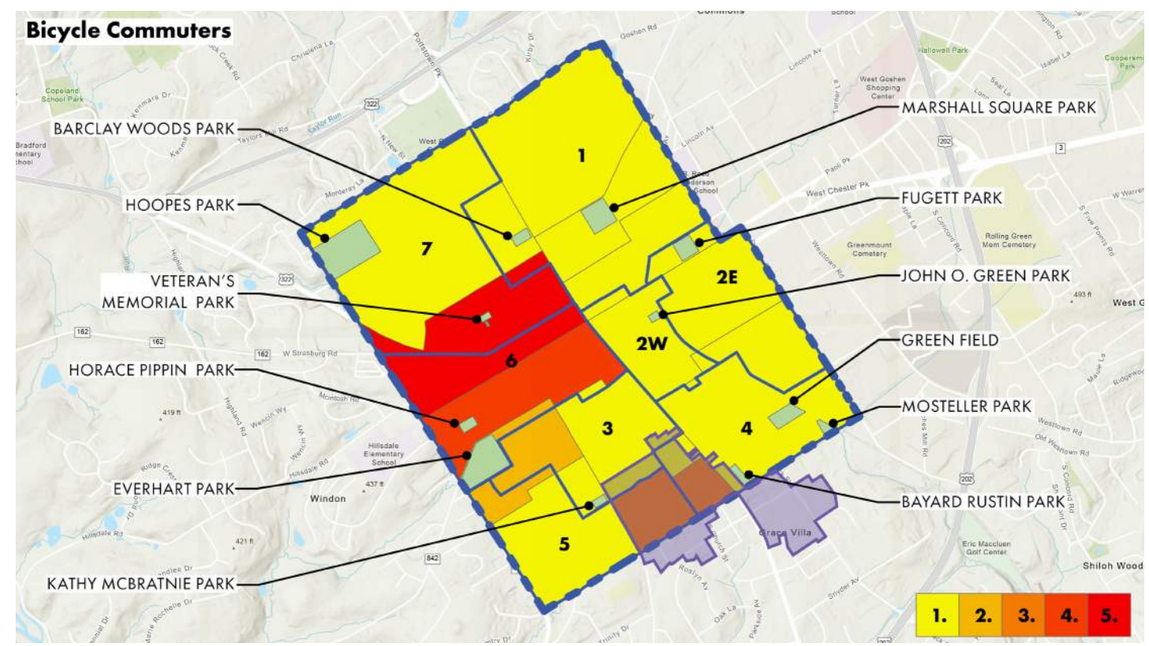
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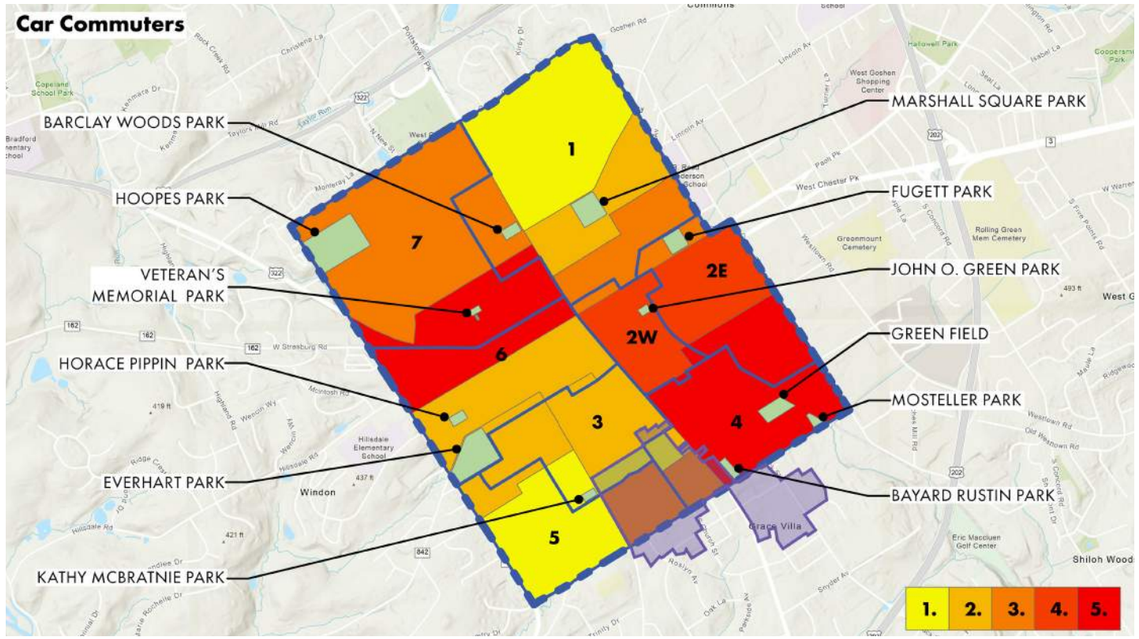
Car Commuters
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HOOPES PARK
VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK
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EVERHART PARK
KATHY MCBRATNIE PARK
MARSHALL SQUARE PARK
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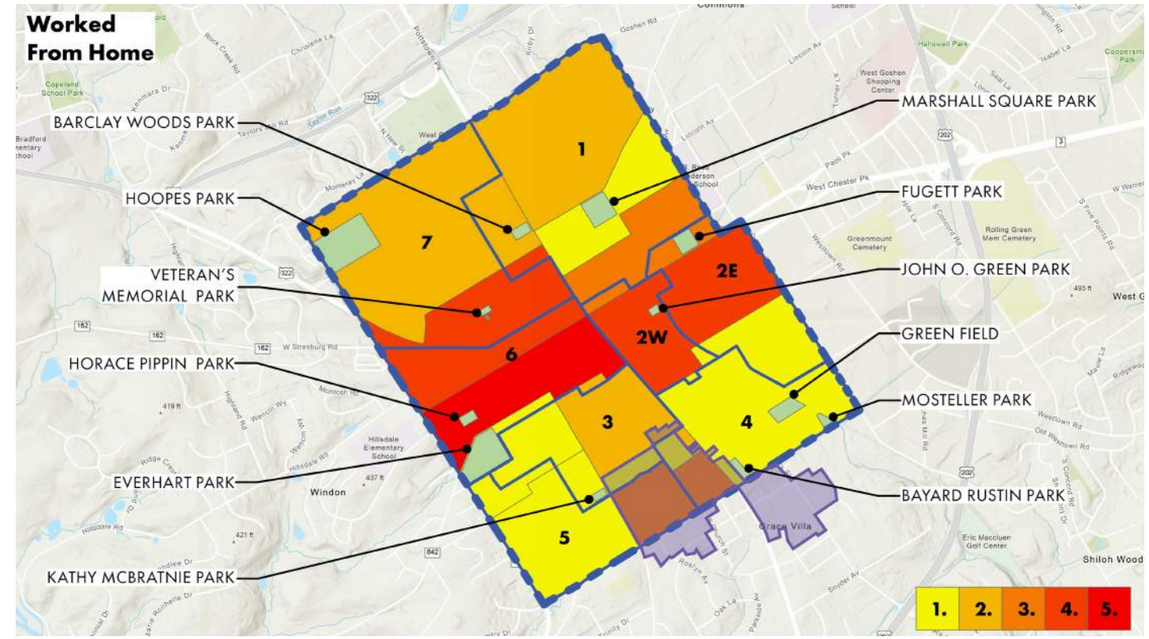
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HOOPES PARK
VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK
HORACE PIPPIN PARK
EVERHART PARK
KATHY MCBRATNIE PARK
MARSHALL SQUARE PARK
FUGETT PARK
JOHN O. GREEN PARK
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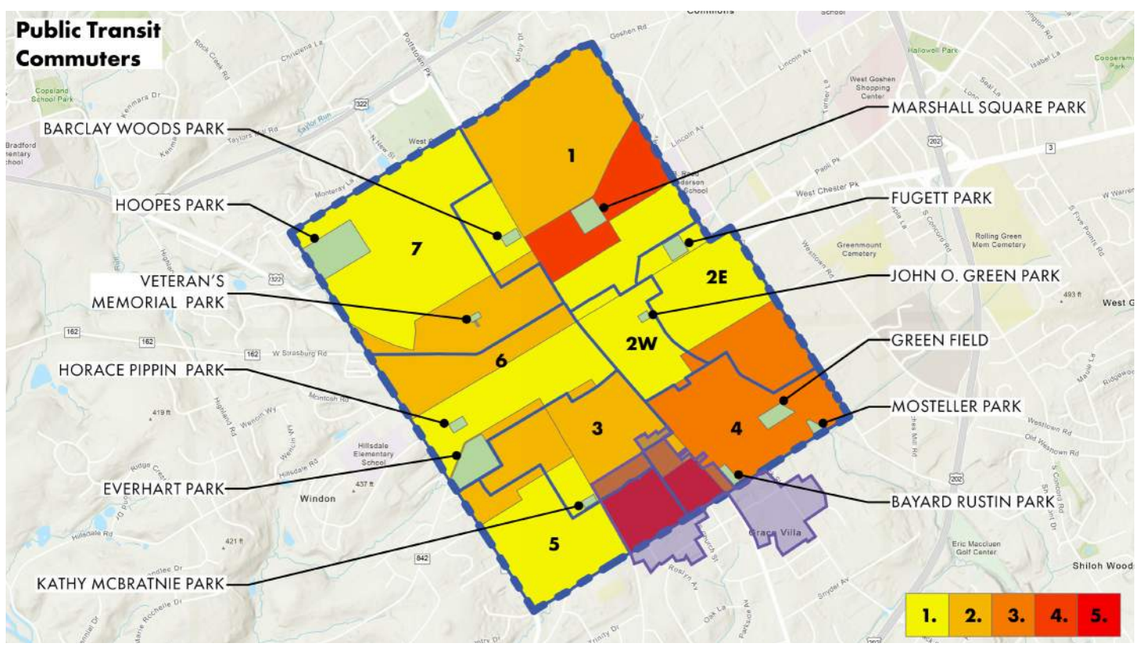
Public Transit Commuters
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VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK
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EVERHART PARK
KATHY MCBRATNIE PARK
MARSHALL SQUARE PARK
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Appendix B

Mandatory Dedication of Parkland

Mandatory Dedication of Parkland

Recommended Ordinance Amendments

West Chester Borough – Chester County, PA

Draft: May 1, 2024

Contents

The Recommended Ordinance Amendments included herein pertain to the following provisions:

Chapter 97 – Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance

- Section 97-8 Terms defined.
- Section 97-38 Recreational land and facilities.
- Section 97-38.1. Recreational land and facilities or payment of fee in lieu thereof.

Appendix A: Article IV Design Standards

- Section 97.A.6. Common Open Space
- Section 97.A.18.a. Private Passive Recreational Space
- Section 97.A.18.b. Public Space.
- Section 97.A.19. Recreational Facilities

Chapter 112 – Zoning Ordinance

- Section 112-202 Definitions.
- Section 112-308. NC-3 Neighborhood Conservation District
- Section 112-308.B. Dimensional Requirements
- Section 112-309. TC Town Center District
- Section 112-309.B. Dimensional requirements
- Section 112-309.C. Design Standards
- Section 112-310. CS Commercial Service District.
- Section 112-310.B. Dimensional requirements
- Section 112-310.C. Design Standards

Note: These Recommend Ordinance Amendments to be discussed at the West Chester Borough Planning Commission Meeting on April 30, 2024.

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Recommended Ordinance Amendments

West Chester Borough – Chester County, PA

Draft: May 1, 2024

Chapter 97 - Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance

Section 97-8. Terms defined.

Green Space/Green Area That portion of a tract or lot which is maintained or landscaped with shrubs, trees, groundcover, soil, mulch, grass, vegetable gardens and/or flower beds and is not occupied by any buildings, pavement or other impervious surfaces, except in the Town Center District, as provided for in Chapter 112 of the Borough Code, titled "Zoning."

Open Space Natural or landscape areas restricted in perpetuity to natural resource protection, conservation or recreation or used for noise and/or visual buffers or for other purposes as described in the open space provisions of Chapter 112 of the Borough Code, titled "Zoning."

Private Passive Recreational Space Passive recreational amenities provided as part of a Multifamily development with more than 12 units, intended for the use by residents of the development. This space may also be provided in the form of Public Space.

Public Space An outdoor pedestrian gathering space or a streetscape for the use of the public, in the form of such spaces as a plaza, square, courtyard, or green.

Recreation Fee-in-Lieu The funds that are paid to the Borough a subdivision or land development, in accordance with the requirements of Article IV, and in accordance with the Fee Schedule adopted by Borough Council.

Recreational Areas and Facilities Publicly owned and maintained passive recreation and active recreation amenities intended to serve the public.

Section 97-38 Recreational areas and facilities and payment of fee in lieu. Where a proposed subdivision or land development is submitted under the terms of Chapter 112 of the Borough Code, titled "Zoning,", a recreation fee in lieu shall be provided.

A. Purpose. The purpose of this section is to require all subdivisions and land developments and newly created or converted condominiums to provide a recreation fee in lieu in order to:

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1. Ensure and provide adequate recreational areas and facilities to serve the future residents and inhabitants of the Borough.
2. Comply with the Borough Recreation Plan.
3. Be consistent with recreational guidelines of such agencies as the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the Chester County Planning Commission's Linking Landscapes, ADA, the PA DCNR, and the CPSC (Consumer Products Safety Commission).
4. Reduce increasing pressure on the usage of existing recreational areas and facilities.
5. Ensure that all present and future residents and inhabitants of the Borough have the opportunity to engage in varied recreational pursuits.
6. Reduce the possibility of the Borough becoming overburdened with the development and maintenance of many very small, randomly planned and widely separated recreation areas.
7. Ensure maintenance of recreational areas and facilities for residents and inhabitants of the Borough.

B. *Applicability.* The requirements of this section shall apply to all subdivisions and land developments.

C. *General requirements.* All applicants for any subdivision or land development shall pay a fee in lieu to the Borough, consistent with the following requirements:

1. Such fee shall, from time to time, be established by resolution by the Borough Council, and in accordance with the Fee Schedule.
2. Such fee shall be in conformance with the Borough Recreation Plan as amended from time to time, and the Design Standards in Appendix A of this Chapter 97.
3. A note shall be placed on the subdivision and/or land development plan prepared for recording, stipulating the amount of the fee to be paid and the means and timing of payment, consistent with the terms of this section, and consistent with the resolution of Borough Council.
4. All monies paid to the Borough pursuant to this section shall be used for providing, acquiring, operating or maintaining park or recreational facilities reasonably accessible to the development, based on Recreational Service Area Standards for Community Parks of the NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association).
5. The full amount of the fee shall be placed in escrow or otherwise secured in a manner deemed acceptable under the terms of § 97-16 of this chapter as a condition of final plan approval by the Council. Actual payment of the fee for any lot shall be made at one of the following points, whichever shall occur first:
   a. At the time of conveyance of any lot;
   b. At the time of application for a building permit; or

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   c. At the time that any public improvements are offered for dedication.

6. The funds received shall be placed in the Borough's Park, Open Space and Recreation Reserve Fund which shall be under the exclusive control of the Borough Council. All fees received pursuant to this section shall be deposited in this fund and shall be specifically identified as reserved for providing, acquiring, operating or maintaining park or recreational facilities. Interest earned on such accounts shall become funds of that account. All sums received for and deposited in the Park, Open Space and Recreation Reserve Fund shall be held, invested and reinvested in the same manner as other funds of the Borough, but shall not be considered part of the general revenues of the Borough. The Borough shall, upon request of the party paying the fee required under this section, refund such fee, plus interest accumulated thereon from the date of payment if the Borough used the fee paid for a purpose other than the purposes set forth in this section. The developer and/or the applicant may waive, in writing, the requirement that such fees be expended for the purposes set forth herein and the requirement that such fees be repaid as set forth above.

Appendix A: Article IV Design Standards

Please refer to the following 8 pages for the recommended changes to **Appendix A: Article IV Design Standards**. However, please note the changes pertain to the Sections listed below.

- *Section 97.A.6. Common Open Space* (remove this section)
- *Add new Section 97.A.6.18.a. Private Passive Recreational Space*
- *Section 97.A.18.b. Public Space (previously 97.A.18.)* (revised this section)
- *Section 97-A.19. Recreational Facilities.* (revised this section and removed page 19.1.)

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- *Chapter 112 – Zoning Ordinance*
- *Section 112-202 Definitions.*
- *Private Passive Recreational Space* Passive recreational amenities provided as part of a Multifamily development with more than 12 units, intended for the use by residents of the development. This space may also be provided in the form of Public Space
- *Public Space* An outdoor pedestrian gathering space or a streetscape for the use of the public, in the form of such spaces as a plaza, square, courtyard, or green.
- *Section 112-308. NC-3 Neighborhood Conservation District*

Section 112-308.B. Dimensional requirements	
Lot area, minimum per dwelling unit	2,500 sq. ft.
Lot width, minimum	
Detached	40 ft.
Semidetached	30 ft.
Attached	20 ft.
Multifamily building	80 ft.
Build-to line/front yard	Match existing adjacent setback
Side yard, minimum	Existing adjacent, 10 feet minimum
Multifamily building	20 feet
Accessory structures	5 feet
Rear yard, minimum	20 feet
Accessory structures	5 feet
Height, maximum	35 feet; Multifamily 55 feet
Impervious coverage, maximum	70%
Building coverage, maximum	50%
Green space, minimum	30%
Private Passive Recreation Space	
Multifamily Development with more than 12 units	5%