

CENTRE REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan



The Centre Region Council of Governments (COG) brings six local governments – State College Borough, and College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, Harris, and Patton Townships – together to collectively provide high quality, cost-effective public services to their residents. Centre Region Parks and Recreation is an agency of the Centre Region COG. Municipalities contribute shared funding in support of regional year-round recreation programming and municipal park and recreation facility and maintenance operations. Each municipality acquires and develops its own park sites.

As the Centre Region's population continues to grow, so does the demand for more parks, recreation programs, indoor and outdoor facilities, and interconnected bikeways and trails.

Streamlining governance structure, appropriate level of staffing, maximizing the use of alternative funding sources, placing an increased emphasis on partnerships, expanding indoor recreation programming, and natural resource conservation and sustainability became the focus of plan recommendations.



PROJECT RESULTS

Well over 4,000 interactions with the public generated input and support for this plan.

The Centre Region Parks and Recreation mission statement was updated: *Inspiring the Centre Region to learn, play, protect, and connect by creating diverse programs and experiences for all ages, backgrounds, and abilities in sustainable natural spaces and places.*

A top priority of the plan was to conduct a comprehensive staffing study for Centre Region Parks and Recreation, which was completed by Recreation and Parks Solutions.

An action/skate park plan that had been tabled for years was resurrected and has been constructed in State College Borough.

A study to address the appropriate governance structure for Centre Region Parks and Recreation is underway.

Multiple park master plans have been completed.

The plan serves as the basis of the strategic plan for Centre Region Parks and Recreation, with many of the key recommendations already implemented or in progress.

GALETON BOROUGH, POTTER COUNTY

Recreation Trails Feasibility Study and Community Park Master Plan



The feasibility study explored the development of a regional trail network following the historic Wellsville, Addison, and Galeton Railroad corridors, including opportunities to promote economic development with trail town amenities. Galeton Borough is the hub of the potential trail connecting it to the New York State Line to the north, Lyman Run State Park to the west, and the existing 62-mile Pine Creek Rail Trail to the east.

The John J. Collins Memorial Park is situated along the shore of Berger Lake at the center of Galeton Borough. With 1,149 residents, Galeton is a quiet place to live and visit, nestled in a valley surrounded by forested mountains. The Pine Creek and its west branch meet and flow through the park, where a dam creates the lake. Renovations at the community park were badly needed so preparation of the park master plan was a top priority.

The park is the community hub of Galeton and offers outdoor recreation opportunities for fun, fitness, and relaxation with close-to-home recreation facilities that residents use informally on their own. Fishing is popular at the lake early in the season when the lake water is cool. The play equipment area at the park is used heavily. Walking is a top activity at the park.

PROJECT RESULTS

The 13.5-mile east corridor connecting to the Pine Creek Rail Trail was studied in detail as the pilot trail segment, with conceptual designs for four trailheads and solutions for working around private properties and road and stream crossings prepared by YSM Landscape Architects.

Future trail management and maintenance options through partnerships with Potter and Tioga Counties were provided.

Plans for the renovated park include a six-sided pavilion with a natural amphitheater seating area, a paddle craft landing area, two age-segregated children's play equipment areas, a splash pad, an open lawn designed to be flooded for winter ice skating if temperatures allow, a walking trail circling the lake, restrooms, park benches, bike racks, and expanded parking lots.

Maintenance standards and guidelines to support the vision for the park were identified and the tasks, frequency, and cost of maintenance were outlined to provide the Galeton community with a consistently well-managed and maintained park.

CENTRAL BLAIR COUNTY RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION, BLAIR COUNTY

Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan



The Central Blair region has a long-standing commitment to improving the quality of life of its residents through cooperative municipal efforts.

The Central Blair County Recreation and Park Commission (CBRC) was created in 1993 to bring together the City of Altoona, Logan Township, and the Altoona Area School District to provide parks and recreation services to the community. The intergovernmental agency was the result of DCNR's first Peer Project, which was led by Recreation and Parks Solutions.

The City's population of 43,963, the Township's population of 12,413, and a service area of 62 square miles brings many challenges to CBRC. The City of Altoona and the Logan Township area immediately surrounding the City is the home to over 30 densely populated neighborhoods.

The plan is the community's strategy and course of action to meet the distinctive challenges existing in the Altoona area in order to sustain a quality, interconnected parks and recreation system.

The foundation of the plan puts children first, involves residents and community groups as partners, supports economic success, and improves neighborhood livability.

PROJECT RESULTS

Strategies to build funding and staffing capacity were prioritized after a benchmark review of demographically similar communities revealed that the region is lagging far behind in funding for parks and recreation.

A gap analysis evaluated what is missing from the park system, including identifying underserved neighborhoods.

The need for upgrades to park areas was assessed and a detailed capital improvement program was prepared by YSM Landscape Architects.

A connectivity plan was developed to address how to link community destinations to create a more walkable and bikeable community. Recommendations to connect the city and township to regional trails were identified as early action projects.



CITY OF READING AND READING SCHOOL DISTRICT, BERKS COUNTY

Reading Recreation Commission Formation



The City of Reading has a long history of providing quality recreation services for its residents. Years ago, the City staffed 28 summer playground programs for children. Due to dwindling financial resources, by 2010, only five supervised playground sites operated. In 2011, the playground program was not held due to lack of funding. The City Recreation Division had just two full-time staff positions left, and few recreation programs were offered. The parks and recreation facilities were suffering from decades of deferred maintenance. As one of the poorest cities in the nation, the City's financial situation called for alteration in its approach to parks and recreation to continue to provide public recreation for its residents, in particular its children.

Recreation and Parks Solutions worked with Reading City Council and Reading School District to establish the Reading Recreation Commission. The project included facilitating important decisions on responsibilities, funding, representation, in-kind services, staffing, programming, park and recreation facility operation, and maintenance. The goals for the proposed agency were to:

- Expand and enhance public neighborhood-based youth sports and recreation program opportunities through coordination between the City and School District.
- Support youth recreation programs through revenue earned, business support, grant funding, donations, and other sources rather than rely heavily on tax support.

PROJECT RESULTS

The Reading Recreation Commission was successfully formed in 2012 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency. It is flourishing today, garnering numerous awards including the Pennsylvania Parks and Recreation Agency of the Year in 2017.

Recreation and Parks Solutions assisted with recruiting and hiring the agency's first executive director, who continues to lead the recreation commission.

The operating budget has expanded by 10 times and the number of full-time employees has grown from two to 12.

Over \$1 million in private donations and sponsorships has helped to renovate seven buildings and 20 parks.

Grant funding in excess of \$3 million has supported over a 100 percent increase in recreation and social service programs for children.

EAST MARLBOROUGH TOWNSHIP, CHESTER COUNTY

Unionville Community Park Master Plan



East Marlborough Township is 15.5 square miles in area and includes the world-famous horticultural displays at Longwood Gardens, as well as the New Bolton Center, the veterinary school of the University of Pennsylvania, where pioneering animal research is done. Historic Unionville Village is listed on the National Register of Historic buildings and towns.

In 2011, the Township commissioned a park master plan for a centrally located, undeveloped 26-acre natural area to serve as its first community park.

The primary goals of the plan were to provide passive and active recreation for the community, blend and complement the historic fabric of the area, serve as a community gathering place, and preserve and enhance the site's natural resources.

Through key person interviews, on-line resident surveys, and focus group, public, and study committee meetings, the recreational needs of the community were analyzed to design a park that would meet these needs well into the future.



PROJECT RESULTS

The Township secured over \$1 million in grant funding that was matched with Township funds, and the Unionville Community Park was constructed in 2016. It features paved walking trails, benches, a picnic pavilion with restrooms, and an adjacent tot lot playground, and has become a centerpiece of the community.

To protect East Marlborough Township's financial investment into the development of facilities and amenities at the park, a park operation and management plan, with the annual costs of operating and maintaining the park and its facilities based on the proposed development, was prepared and approved.

In 2021, Recreation and Parks Solutions worked with Brandywine Conservancy to develop the East Marlborough Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan. The plan provides the Township with a powerful tool to advance open space preservation and recreational opportunities in a strategic and cost-effective manner.

POTTSTOWN AREA HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOUNDATION AND POTTSTOWN METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE, MONTGOMERY AND CHESTER COUNTY

Pottstown Area Regional Recreation Study and Committee Formation



Recreation and Parks Solutions worked with the Pottstown Metropolitan Regional Planning Committee and the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation to prepare a comprehensive inventory of the parks and recreation services of these seven municipalities: East Coventry Township, North Coventry Township, Douglass Township, Lower Pottsgrove Township, Pottstown Borough, Upper Pottsgrove Township, and West Pottsgrove Township.

The study included exploring the possibility of intergovernmental cooperation to fund and sustain a regional staff position focused on parks and recreation.

Regional priorities for parks and recreation were identified and became the functional areas of work for the future Regional Recreation Planner:

- Assessing resident's parks and recreation needs
- Writing and administering grants for park and trail development and acquisition
- Improving the maintenance of park areas in cost-effective ways
- Expanding public awareness of parks and recreation services
- Improving park amenities
- Developing trails and greenway connections
- Coordinating to prevent conflicts with community events
- Establishing partnerships

PROJECT RESULTS

An intergovernmental agreement forming the Pottstown Area Regional Recreation Committee (PARRC) was signed.

An equal cost sharing among the municipalities, a DCNR Circuit Rider grant, and a substantial financial commitment by the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, became the initial funding mechanism to hire a Regional Recreation Planner to undertake the committee's work. The Schuylkill River Greenway Association provided office space and health insurance benefits.

Recreation and Parks Solutions assisted in the recruitment and hiring of the first Regional Recreation Planner.

Regional coordination of parks and recreation services has proven to be very successful. Since 2015, over \$5.1 million in grant funding has been awarded for park, recreation, and trail planning and development projects from a combination of sources.

In 2022, the PARRC Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was founded to fund the Regional Recreation Planner position moving forward.

In 2023, a part-time Recreation Assistant was hired.

CENTRAL CARBON COUNTY REGION, CARBON COUNTY

Regional Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan



The five municipalities within the plan area – East Penn Township, Franklin Township, Lehigh Township, Mahoning Township, and Weissport Borough – and the Lehigh Area School District, worked closely to develop a multi-municipal plan.

The plan was prepared concurrently with a Regional Comprehensive Plan that creates a framework for enhancing and protecting the quality of life for these communities. Extensive public input was conducted through a mailed survey, key person interviews, public meetings, and study committee meetings.

Every park and trail site was visited, with detailed maintenance and development strategies and recommendations prepared. Regional collaboration and partnerships were the focus of the action plan recommendations for recreation programming, park development, financing, maintenance, and administration.



PROJECT RESULTS

A cooperative regional approach was initiated with the five municipalities closely collaborating on expansion, connection, and management of the region's parks, recreation, greenway, and open space resources to protect and strengthen their significant investments.

Rehabilitating existing park areas and recreation facilities and addressing safety concerns first was the top priority of the plan.

Municipalities agreed to acquire, within the next 20 years, an additional 150 total acres of municipally owned and managed parkland to serve current and future needs, including a new community park of at least 30 to 50 acres to serve the entire Central Carbon County region.

Over \$1.5 million in grant funding has supported park development projects in Lehigh Township, Weissport Borough, and East Penn Township.

COLUMBIA BOROUGH, LANCASTER COUNTY

Columbia River Park Revitalization Plan



With a population of 10,222 people, Columbia Borough is located in western Lancaster County on the east bank of the Susquehanna River. Columbia is experiencing a resurgence of economic development and community revitalization. A key part of the redevelopment of the Borough was the creation of a master plan for Columbia River Park.

Work included the preparation of a park operation and management plan, with the annual costs of operating and maintaining the redeveloped park and its facilities. A complete market analysis was prepared for the proposed visitor education center, with an inventory of similar regional facilities, potential programming, and revenue analysis.



PROJECT RESULTS

Since 2005, the plan has generated \$1.5 million in grant funding to renovate the park, the acquisition of 14 acres to expand the park, a \$100,000 grant which funded the preparation of a second master plan for the expanded area, and \$2 million in grant funding to build the visitor education center.

The Columbia Crossing River Trails Center is managed by Susquehanna Heritage for the Borough of Columbia as a gateway visitor education center and trailhead for land and water trails. Educational offerings focus on the river's historic, scenic, and recreational stories and experiences for residents and visitors, especially bringing river heritage to life for young people.

The start of the 14-mile Northwest Lancaster County River Trail is in Columbia River Park.

The renovated Columbia River Park now includes powerboat and paddle craft launches, picnic areas, and seating areas along the river. An outfitter is on-site in the park seasonally, offering canoe, kayak, and bike rentals, including shuttle service.

INDIAN STEPS MUSEUM, YORK COUNTY

Strategic Operation and Management Assessment



Indian Steps Museum is one of five properties owned and maintained by the Conservation Society of York County. It is located in Lower Chanceford Township along the Susquehanna River. Originally constructed in 1912 as a cabin retreat, Indian Steps Museum is a memorial to the Native Americans who lived along the Susquehanna River. Original stained-glass windows depicting Indian scenes, a massive bluestone table, and Indian artifacts embedded into the shape of pictographs within the walls are a few of the unique details.

The Indian Steps Museum has operated as a public museum since the 1940's. Educational field trips and programs for school-age children have provided generations of people with lasting childhood memories. The Museum was entered in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. The Conservation Society of York County does not receive public funding to operate the Museum. The Museum is supported by donations, admission fees for tours, memberships, revenue from event programs and educational opportunities, gift shop revenue, and private rentals.

In addition to the Museum, the grounds contain an icehouse, an archaeology lab, a hand-carved totem pole, summer kitchen, pond, frontage on the Susquehanna River, a large covered pavilion, and an abundance of native flora and fauna.

PROJECT RESULTS

With the goal to have Indian Steps Museum become self-sustaining, the plan provided realistic and specific program possibilities to generate revenue.

Potential new partners and grant funding sources were identified.

Ways to expand the use of the Museum and grounds for event use to generate revenue were detailed.

Sixteen viable revenue-generating alternatives not related to programming and event use were provided.

Maintenance strategies and standards were identified to best maintain the Museum grounds.



PENNSYLVANIA RECREATION AND PARK SOCIETY (PRPS) AND PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES (DCNR) BUREAU OF RECREATION AND CONSERVATION

Recreation and Parks Technical Assistance Program (RecTAP) Creation



Recreation and Parks Solutions created RecTAP, a statewide technical assistance service that provides grant funding for municipalities and nonprofits to contract with experts to provide assistance on specific parks and recreation issues.

The grant funding supports “start-up” or “stepping stone” projects that lead to the finalization or expansion of greater work. RecTAP is administered by PRPS and funded by a grant from the DCNR Community Conservation Partnerships Program, using the Environmental Stewardship Fund.

The project involved developing the concept for RecTAP, helping to secure ongoing funding, preparing all written materials including the grant application, and preparing marketing materials to launch the program.



PROJECT RESULTS

Since its founding in 2003, RecTAP grants have funded four to eight technical assistance projects every year, serving over 200 communities across Pennsylvania.

RecTAP grant amounts have increased since the program’s creation. RecTAP has become an essential service provided by PRPS, with continued funding from DCNR.

RecTAP grants have jump started significant improvements to parks and recreation systems through additional funding received from other grant sources.

In addition to creating RecTAP, Recreation and Parks Solutions has been the Peer Consultant on nine RecTAP projects:

- Establishment of a corporate membership program for the Danville Area Community Center
- Creation and hiring parks and recreation director position for Wyomissing Borough
- Staffing analysis, new position justification, and hiring of recreation program coordinator for Spring Garden Township
- Recruitment and hiring executive director for the Southern End Community Association in Quarryville
- Transition plan for the newly formed Latrobe-Unity Parks and Recreation Commission and partnership progress report five years later
- Recreation programming and marketing plan for the Municipality of Murrysville
- Park volunteer program for the Borough of Pottstown
- Recruitment and hiring executive director for the Reading Recreation Commission