

Appendix E: Parks & Recreation Boards
Future Directions



Community Park and Recreation Boards

Strong citizen support is essential in successful park, recreation and open space systems. Professionals in parks and recreation must combine efforts with citizens to truly make the difference in the community. This is particularly true in the Doylestown Community where citizen involvement is a hallmark of the public parks and recreation system.

Plan Findings Regarding the Parks & Recreation Boards

The citizens who serve on the municipal parks and recreation boards play an important role in public parks and recreation. The findings from the research for the **Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan** regarding the parks and recreation boards included the following:

1. Both Boards are advisory, not policy making.
2. Both Boards operate on an historical basis rooted in tradition. A look at how the boards could operate in the future could be considered based on the new parks, recreation and open space plan.
3. Both the Doylestown Township Parks and Recreation Board and the Doylestown Borough Parks and Recreation Board expressed interest in meeting together annually. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss issues and opportunities of common concern and to devise strategies to move ahead together.
4. The Parks & Recreation Boards expressed interest in forming some sort of alliances with similar boards such as the Open Space Boards and the Environmental Advisory Councils. This would facilitate a holistic approach to community planning and citizen involvement. The alliance could range from informal discussions to formal liaisons.
5. The Parks & Recreation Boards would benefit by having school district representation on the boards.
6. Roles & responsibilities need to be clearly defined and implemented with respect to having a new plan in place. Since both boards are advisory, how the boards could work, what the functions of different members would be, and the relationships of the boards with municipal professionals should be clarified and documented.
7. Since there are already joint municipal parks and recreation related committees such as the Bike & Hike Committee and the Joint Council on the Performing Arts, perhaps exploring further merger of the parks and recreation boards could be considered.

8. There appears to be a sense among board members to plunge right into plan implementation. While this might seem to be a logical next step, it is more important to have the Boards work on defining their purpose, roles, responsibilities, operating methods and approaches at this time. Having a clear formal written statement of these items will strengthen board operations far into the future. It is worth the time and effort to discuss and formalize policies regarding the parks and recreation boards. This is similar to writing a business plan!

Next Steps for the Parks & Recreation Boards

Now that the Doylestown Community has a joint parks, recreation and open space plan in place, it is time to gear up for implementation. The newly adopted plan can be the catalyst for assessing current board operations to devise strategies and attitudes to spring ahead with a new commitment rooted in spirit, morale and camaraderie.

Fostering the Spirit of Collaboration

In order to grow the spirit of collaboration and dedication to parks and recreation rooted in strong commitment to the Doylestown community, the Parks and Recreation Boards could develop the following tasks and put the results in writing. **Written** policies and procedures help to clarify and simplify operations.

1. **Define the mission and purpose of the Parks and Recreation Boards.** This should include a statement of ethics that embodies positive attitudes, respect for individuals and organizations and an expectation for realistic optimism in moving ahead in plan implementation.
2. **Create an atmosphere of willingness** among the members to contribute to and support parks, recreation and open space initiatives, key stakeholders and the general public. Negativity and indifference cannot be tolerated as these will bring down the organization and interfere with plan implementation.
3. **Establish roles and responsibilities for board members.** Define relationships of the board to parks and recreation professionals, municipal administration and elected officials. Board member roles could be related to functional areas of parks and recreation such as land, facilities, programs, park maintenance, safety & security, budget and so on. Liaison roles with related municipal boards could be established as well. Other possible roles could be rooted in service to various client groups such as special needs, families, teens, the arts, sports, senior adults and so on. Another potential way to organize roles is around the four goals of the plan. It is imperative that members understand that their role is within the context of parks and recreation as a whole so that their particular functional role does not supersede the big picture. The big picture is the Vision Statement in the plan.
4. **Develop a sense of camaraderie.** The professionals and the citizen volunteers are in parks and recreation together for the good of the community. Optimism, appreciation, and mutual respect are key factors. This needs to carry through when

times are challenging as well as when things are going well. Be confident and express confidence in all undertakings.

5. **Support the objectives of the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan.** Create opportunities and ways to get the plan implemented. In order to create the opportunities, it is essential to listen, be actively engaged in parks and recreation efforts, observe first hand what is happening in the Doylestown Community, and show drive (leadership) in capitalizing on emerging circumstances to make things happen.
6. **Recognize that there will be some sacrifices in serving on the board.** Presence in programs, attendance at meetings, demonstrating support for things you might not totally agree with and missing time at home are all the cost of doing business.
7. **Be on the look out for how to improve parks and recreation.** Parks and recreation is either moving ahead or going backwards – it is never standing still!
8. **Make the intention to commit to these steps.** Making a commitment to these actions is paramount.

Characteristics of An Effective Board

- The Board has a written purpose.
- Roles and responsibilities are defined in writing.
- All members understand their roles and responsibilities, including the fact that the board is advisory, not policy-making.
- There is a spirit of collaboration and teamwork.
- Mutual respect among the board members and the professional staff is apparent.
- The board has confidence in the professional director, municipal management, and elected officials.
- Board members collectively arrive at decisions through informed discussion. No one person dominates. Diverse opinions are respected and encouraged. Differences of opinion are viewed as healthy and treated constructively. Members support the ultimate decision of the board.
- Board members have a sense of belonging and experience satisfaction from contributing to the community in a positive fashion.
- The board helps to set goals and objectives, an annual work plan, and evaluation of accomplishments and opportunities in parks, recreation and open space.
- The board complies with its rules, regulations and responsibilities as the chief advisory body for parks, recreation and open space.
- The board issues an annual report to the board of elected officials of accomplishments, needs and opportunities through the parks and recreation professional.

Doylestown Parks & Recreation Boards in the Future

As board members change over due to resignations or term expirations, new members will be needed. Board members should be qualified, creative and effective leaders who will champion the Doylestown community parks, recreation and open space. They understand the potential of the parks and recreation system to enhance the quality of life in this community and the region. Potential board members should have an interest in advancing parks and recreation and knowledge of the Doylestown community. Expertise in one or more of the following areas would be advantageous:

- Natural lands management and environmental protection
- Land use and community planning
- Recreation
- Tourism
- Marketing and public relations
- Business and finance
- Economic development
- Landscaping and horticulture
- Planning and fundraising
- Public/private partnerships

All new board members should receive an orientation to the parks and recreation system. Newly elected officials should be invited to participate in the training as well. Retain membership in the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS) and the National Recreation and Park Association for the board. Inform and support member attendance at PRPS training programs and seminars for board members. Consider working with the Bucks County Recreation Council on having a joint annual meeting of parks and recreation board members in place of one monthly meeting. This would help to foster a citizen network for parks and recreation in Bucks County and to leverage support for issues of regional importance in parks, recreation and open space.

Action Steps

With the plan adoption, the boards could take the next year to develop their purpose, roles, responsibilities, training materials, and methods of operating. Managing the change will be a challenge as it is easy to stay in the comfort zone of “the way we’ve always done things”.

In order to achieve the highest level of success, the board members and professional staff need to be involved jointly in the process of determining their purpose, roles, responsibilities and so on. The following steps outline a potential approach.

1. Consider inviting PADCNR to a meeting to discuss community parks and recreation boards as an educational session. This could be a joint meeting of the Township and Borough boards.

2. Plan and hold a “retreat” to identify the purpose, mission and roles. This could be held on a Saturday to allow for more time than a standard evening meeting. Consider applying for a RecTAP grant from PRPS to retain an outside professional to guide the planning and implementation of the retreat and help with the production of follow-up materials. This is a \$1,500 grant with no match required.
3. Assign responsibility to board members for the development of identified written materials for board operation. All materials should be collectively discussed, revised where needed and adopted for use. These would include purpose, roles, responsibilities, code of ethics, board expectations and other materials as determined.
4. Develop training materials for board members.
5. Consider the possibility of applying for a Peer Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to explore the potential merger of parks and recreation functions between the Township and the Borough. This is a grant of \$9,000 with a \$1,000 local match for a one year study. An outside parks and recreation professional would work with the municipalities in exploring various aspects of parks and recreation consolidation. This would provide the framework and information for ultimate decision-making by the municipalities regarding future joint efforts.
6. Set up a thematic meeting schedule to run over the course of each year. Assigning themes and topics to meetings will set up a rhythm and stability for board functioning. It will help board members and professional staff to establish a routine along with common expectations. Of course the meetings would be dynamic and could accommodate inclusion of relevant topics for discussion and action as needed. These themes could be quarterly:
 - First Quarter – Programs. Board training (such as participation in annual PRPS board seminar). Consider holding the annual joint Township and Borough Parks and Recreation Boards meeting in this quarter. Associated board members could also be invited such as the EAC, Open Space Board, Planning Commission and so on.
 - Second Quarter –Land and Facilities. Annual parks and recreation tour. Consider working with the Bucks County Recreation Council to hold a meeting inviting all municipal parks and recreation boards for the purpose of networking ideas and strengthening boards through discussions with peers from throughout the region.
 - Third Quarter – Planning. Evaluating plan implementation, opportunities, and community needs. Consider holding an annual sports forum in this quarter as part of a meeting.

- Fourth Quarter –Operations and Financing. Planning for the next fiscal year, examining funding requirements and revenue sources, policies, and programs to be held. Developing a work program for the next fiscal year.
7. Organize each meeting according to a series of routine components: educational segment, reports, items requiring decisions and action, items for discussion, and meeting evaluation. This will provide an atmosphere of interaction rather than straight reporting. The educational segment could be a topic or item to enhance the knowledge base or expertise of the group. This meeting segment could rotate among board members and staff as well as through invited speakers. Invited speakers could be from the school district, county or municipal planning commission, arts organizations, people with special needs, business people, partners/sponsors or others. Board members could provide a segment rooted in their own expertise as it pertains to parks, recreation, open space, trails, greenways, conservation, marketing, fundraising, trends, planning and soon. The goal would be to facilitate change and improvements by raising the quality of discussion in the meetings and networking the ideas. Since the boards will be moving into new ways of operating, performing a brief meeting evaluation will help to improve each meeting. It should only take a couple of minutes! The findings should be applied to the next meeting in a continuous cycle of refinement and improvement.

