

Recreation, Open Space, Greenway Plan & Smart Agriculture Initiative

This portion of the Plan represents a follow-up to Section 2, which addressed the natural environment of the two townships. This portion of the plan represents analysis of recreation issues as they related to a wider relationship with the natural environment. This section also contains the conservation of natural resources to the extent not pre-empted by state or federal law. Finally, this chapter also includes information about certain agriculture issues that relate to open space.

After the last major revisions to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PaMPC), there were major changes in the way comprehensive plans must address conservation issues. To be consistent with the PaMPC, this plan must contain statements that:

- 1. Lawful activities, such as the extraction of minerals, may impact water supply sources, and such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specifies replacement and restoration of water supplies affected by such activities.*
- 2. Commercial agricultural production may impact water supply sources.*

Recreation Background: Expanding recreation infrastructure to meet growth was a major recommendation of the 1968 Comprehensive Plan for the Region. However, significant development of recreation facilities has only become a reality recently.

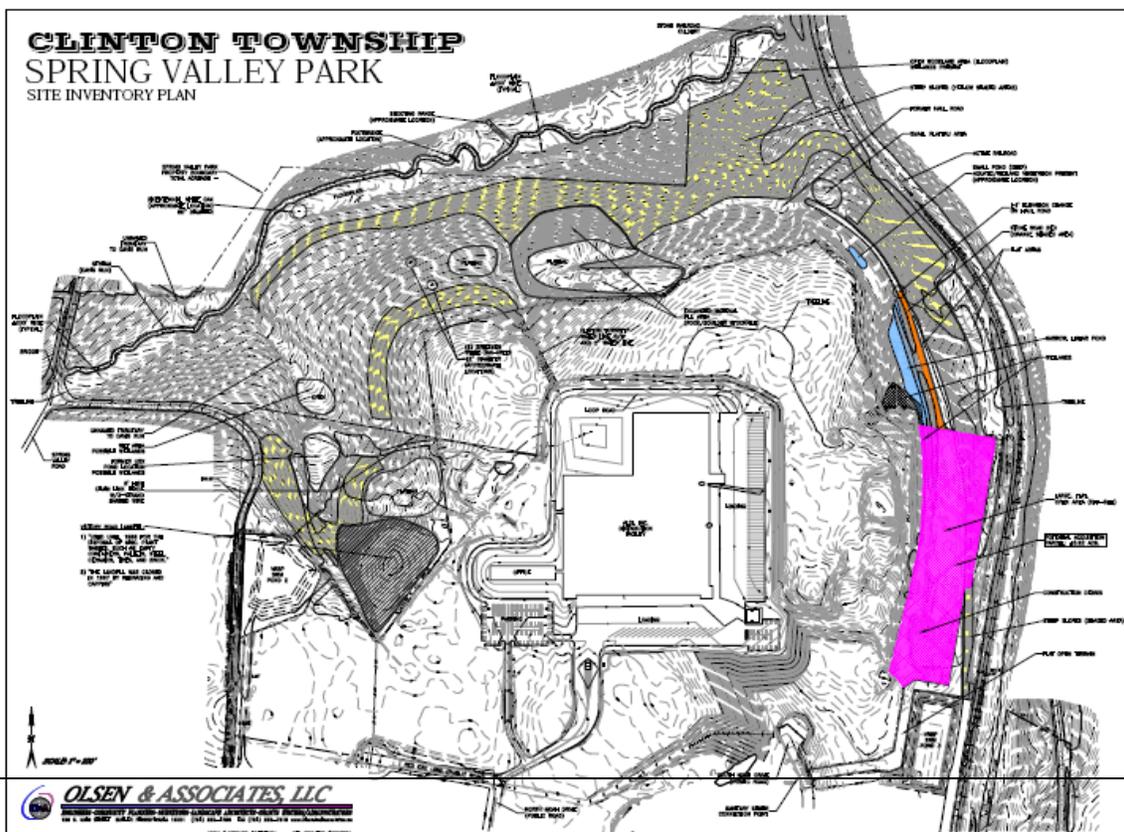
Clinton Township Recreation Plan: Prior to 1999, Clinton Township had no public parkland. In 2004, Clinton Township conducted a needs analysis of the recreation requirements of the community. The result was a formal plan to initially develop a public park at the Spring Valley property owned by the Township. The master plan document contains overall community recreation needs and a list of needed

improvements at the site. With an addendum, it has been formally adopted as a recreation plan pursuant to section 503 (11) of the Pa. Municipalities Planning Code.

The Plan contains four phases for the development of the Spring Valley Park

Phase	Activities	Costs
Phase I	Parking lots, trails, picnic areas, signage, clearing and grading	\$343,558
Phase II	Overlook platform, picnic shelters, mountain bike trail, benches	\$191,102
Phase III	Expanded parking, large picnic shelter, restrooms, multi-purpose athletic field	\$337,267
Phase IV	Playground, sand volleyball, and bocce facilities, water service extension, additional restrooms and playground	\$298,273
Phases I-IV	All facilities	\$1,170,200*

*2004 cost estimates



With \$1.17 Million in improvements necessary, the Township has sought a rational method in providing for both the needs of existing and projected future residents. The Township presently has 75 acres of parkland for its 2779 citizens. This represents about 27 acres per 1,000 persons.

To continue meeting the present standards, the Township would need to add perhaps 40 acres of parkland by 2020, or raise additional funds to allow the Spring Valley Park to reach optimum phase IV development. National experts believe a rural community needs an optimum ratio of 45 acres of parkland per 1000 persons (Recreation. Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines Washington: National Recreation and Park Association, page 91). In a rural community, recreation preferences are weighted towards outdoor open space uses (walking, hiking, hunting, nature observation). These uses require larger tracts than urban neighborhood play lots, or organized sports fields. Tracts of less than 5 acres will have limited utility to Township residents, unless physically linked to the current public park lands or a larger open space network.

The proposed park is centrally located in Clinton Townships' region most likely to see future growth and development. It also is easily accessible to both current and likely future township residents.

Buffalo Township Recreation Planning: The previous 1968 Township Plan proposed a *Sarver Run County Park* in the northern area adjacent to the Clinton Township line. Since that time, Buffalo Township began development of a Trail system. The geography of the township is generally enhanced by this beautiful trail. However, the Township has reached a crossroads, in which population growth indicates some expansion of recreation facilities. By the aforementioned nationwide standard (45 acres per 1,000 persons) the Township would need 300 acres of park land (These are meant to serve as a broad guideline, as the National Recreation and Parks Association recognizes that the demographics, density and preferences of each community are different. However, even at a much lower than national standard, Buffalo Township

lacks enough parkland to meet the needs of its citizens. Certainly, citizens have benefited from the generosity of private recreation in the community. For example, the Lernerville Speedway facility has allowed the use of its land and buildings for community purposes at no cost. School district facilities have also been used by citizens. However, these cannot be guaranteed to meet community needs into the future. Unless township parkland is owned by the township or subject to a long-term lease, its use for future recreation simply cannot be guaranteed.

It is perhaps more disturbing that as a growth community, Buffalo Township will fall further behind in its ratio of citizens to parkland. If possible, the Township should prepare a community level analysis of parks recreation and open space. Two different approaches have been discussed by Township residents. The first involved the establishment of a large central community park, as Clinton Township has chosen to do. The second was to establish a series of smaller neighborhood or special use parks, ideally linked to the trail and creating a large, multi-use linear park. Two detailed prospectus papers were created by citizens to evaluate such possibilities. To further examine objective recreation needs in the context of Citizen desires, a member of the Buffalo Township Comprehensive Planning Committee conducted a recreation needs survey. The following is a direct quote from the submission of the original results:

The survey was made available to residents during May from the 5th to the 15th, a sample is attached. Distribution was accomplished through businesses and direct solicitation. Surveys were available at Sarver True Value, Kings Restaurant, The Hive Coffee Shop, Hill's Tree Care and Nursery and Davidson's Family Restaurant. In addition, inputs were actively solicited during Community Day at Lernerville Speedway. A summary of results is attached.

The results clearly had four desires ranked as most important; Swimming, Community Center, Picnic Shelters and Hiking/Wildlife Viewing Areas. The rating scores were derived from a weighted system where a person's number one priority was given ten points with a sliding scale that assigned one point for their tenth priority. The next area of interest are the results when asked "What is a reasonable level of tax payment that you would pay to support these activities?". The overall average was \$77. Comments were also collected and are listed in a third attachment. Additionally, I tracked contact information for volunteers interested in

participating on a recreation committee. This list will be held until needed. Lastly, our committee discussions about a recreation corridor with smaller parks versus a large park complex will not be swayed by survey results, this topic came out fairly even.

In summary I believe the most telling data point is the level of funding people are willing to commit. While the amount of \$77 per year isn't a realistic tax level the fact that 55% of respondents felt recreation was important enough to spend their dollars is very telling

Consistent with this survey, Buffalo Township should pursue an approach to the development of parkland that is both planned and opportunistic. Initially, more picnic and outdoor greenspace can be created. Then more developed facilities could be added later.

Of particular importance will be the ability to finance recreation improvements. It is strongly recommended that Buffalo Township pursue the creation of a public dedication of land or fee in lieu of land amendment to the Township subdivision regulations. Fees in lieu of land are typically around \$500 per dwelling unit in western Pennsylvania. This would raise over \$500,000 for Buffalo Township if the number of projected future housing units were actually built during the planning period.

Smart Agriculture Initiative: Prior to initiation of the Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan, the Two Communities joined together with the Glynwood Center to undertake a smart agriculture assessment. Glynwood Center's *Smart Agriculture Initiative* is intended to help residents examine and articulate the multiple benefits that small-scale farming provides to small communities: economic, aesthetic, environmental and local foods. According to the Center, "Through the use of specially designed citizen assessment tools, "non-expert" residents begin to understand the role of farming in their community while developing the broad constituency needed to create and implement an action strategy"

The project represented an appropriate precursor to a multi-municipal comprehensive plan. It was not primarily a plan document, but a process that connected non-farming and farming citizens, and looked at social economic and land use issues related to declining local agriculture. The process included a seminar on municipal tools to preserve farmland with two prominent eastern Pennsylvania planning professionals. This was presented to Buffalo and Clinton Township officials. It also involved building better bridges between farmers and non-farming citizens. Perhaps this is the most important legacy of that initiative. The Pa. Municipalities Planning Code requires that Comprehensive Plans contain a statement that “commercial agriculture production impact water supply sources”. This indicates one of many sources of conflict between the growing non-farming and dwindling farming communities.

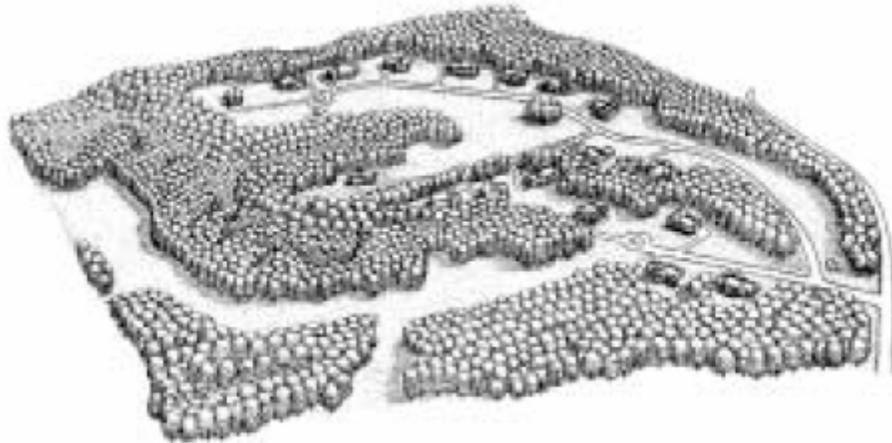
Greenway Concept Plan: When Citizens of Buffalo and Clinton Township identify rural features that are important to them, among the highest features mentioned are the lands without buildings. The Open lands of the Townships include private farmland, private woodland (and non-wooded vacant land), public space owned by the municipalities (such as the Spring Valley Park and the Butler-Freeport Trail), open space owned by homeowner’s groups as a part of a subdivision, and open space owed by conservation groups, such as the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. Because of the differing ownership patterns, the value, purpose, and management goals for each form of green space is different.

Generally speaking, private farm and forest land has aesthetic values when it is seen from public rights of way. It also contributes to the local economy through agricultural and woodland production. It also has an innate value as what planners call “green” infrastructure. Infrastructure is typically and traditionally defined as the roads, cables, wires, pipes, bridges, canals, reservoirs, and sewers that support economy and society. “Grey” infrastructure is the normal term for these structures. Green infrastructure includes woodlands, soil, wetlands, natural swales and streams. They actually function like gray infrastructure, particularly in terms of stormwater

management. Wetlands retain stormwater. Forest Land initially soaks up nearly three quarters of the runoff from a rain event. If wetlands are drained, streams are channelized and woodlots are cut down, the community must install more gray infrastructure or face flooding. Thus, planners and smart developers are working to save the free green infrastructure so it does not need to be replaced by concrete. Like a sewer or public water system, natural drainage and water purification systems only work well if they area interconnected.

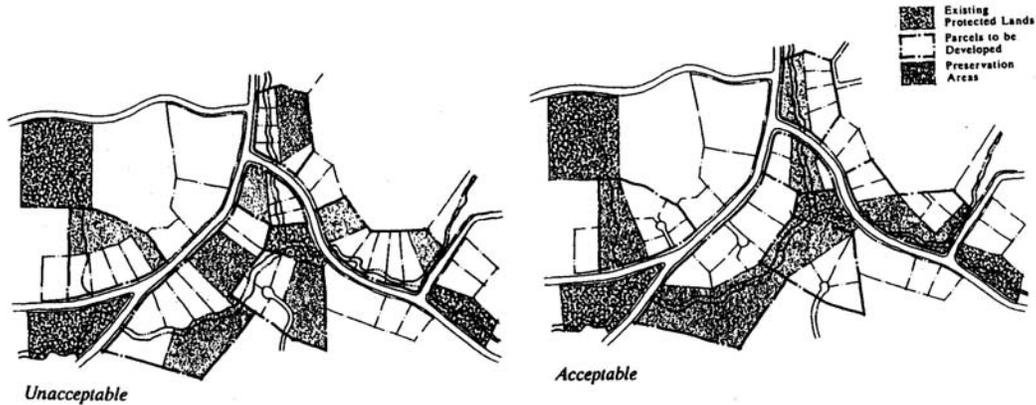
When private greenway land develops it then becomes essential that new roads (“gray” infrastructure) and similar aspects of the development are planned *around the identified green infrastructure*. The next illustration, prepared by the Pa.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, illustrates the results if these concepts are followed. In this case, the Greenways have two additional roles to



play. They add significant value to private property, and they serve as a buffer between adjacent developments.

The next illustration (Also provided by the Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) shows how this concept looks when applied to several adjacent properties that are developed for housing.



In addition to enhancing natural stormwater management, the resultant connections can provide wildlife habitat.

What these connected greenway networks do not necessarily provide is access for humans. Private farm and forest land, or even homeowner's land, need not be open to public recreation in order for the greenway to work. Access is part of the bundle of property rights, and if access is desired, land or rights of way should be purchased (or donated). However, in many cases, there are nearby public rights of way, such as township roads or navigable waterways that might serve to allow connections between areas where public trespass is not allowed.

A right of way for recreational use could be part of a fees or land ordinance as permitted by Article Five of the Planning Code, but only upon the development of land. Because both Townships have Planned Residential Development Regulations within local zoning, there is already precedent for integrating conservation lands into development. Buffalo Township's RA district and its use of effective Agricultural zoning are particularly important. The addition of language to require this open space fit into a greenway could bring this approach to the next level; creating a sensible, linked system of open space of various uses and types. When the Planned Residential Development (PRD) regulations are combined with the mandatory dedication of land or fees in lieu of land (such as Clinton Township has enacted), the open space in a PRD could be part of a public or private network. In some cases, it may be worthwhile

to combine PRD Homeowners' Association, private land with a small public access easement, which could be integrated into the development plan.