



DRAFT

ASTON TOWNSHIP PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN

OCTOBER 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ASTON TOWNSHIP PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN *2015*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The *Aston Township Parks and Recreation Plan* sets forth a blueprint for how the Township can protect and improve its parks and recreation resources to enhance the quality of life for current and future Aston residents. Aston is a vibrant suburban community with a high quality of life, a stable housing market, good schools and civic institutions, and a strong sense of community pride. Located in the center of Delaware County about 20 miles west of Philadelphia, Aston is blessed with ample park and open space resources in proportion to its population. Even more recreation opportunities are available outside Aston within a short drive.

Changing demographics and growing demands on existing parks facilities have prompted the development of a new focused strategy for improving facilities and programs – to enhance quality of life for current and future residents. In order to promote the quality of life for future generations, it is necessary not only to assess current needs, but also to allocate resources wisely to provide for future demands.

Plan Goals and Objectives

The underlying purpose of the Plan is to identify opportunities and set priorities for parks and recreation enhancements in Aston Township, to guide future decision making and fund raising. It sets forth policy recommendations intended to inform the Board of Commissioners of issues and objectives of importance to Aston residents, and of strategies for achieving those objectives.

In pursuit of this goal, the Plan addresses the desire to maintain open space for both passive and active recreation, while planning for future growth. The expectation is that an enhanced park system in the township will improve the overall quality of life in the community, increase property values, and enhance the attractiveness of Aston Township to new businesses and residents.

The Plan is not a law. It should remain flexible at all times, to react to changing needs and take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. The Plan's recommendations should continually be re-assessed, and updated periodically to reflect current conditions and aspirations.

The Plan should be referred to by the Board of Commissioners for guidance on setting priorities, allocating financial resources, and directing staff, volunteers, and outside professionals who may collaborate to implement park improvements.

PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Overall Goals:

1. *Provide for current and future recreation needs of the community.*
2. *Conserve natural resources.*
3. *Develop an effective implementation strategy.*
4. *Provide for excellent management and maintenance of parks resources.*

Specific Objectives:

1. *Provide a variety of recreation opportunities for people of all ages and interests.*
2. *Identify opportunities to expand walking and biking trails.*
3. *Identify natural and scenic areas to be protected and enhanced.*
4. *Prioritize needs and wants.*
5. *Identify specific actions and projects.*
6. *Identify funding sources to make improvements.*

The Importance of Parks and Open Space

There is no question that parks and open space contribute strongly to the quality of life of our communities. Numerous studies have shown that there are significant benefits to conserving open space, as it has the power to attract residents and business, promote tourism, elevate property values, and create a sense of place. More than just a pleasant amenity, open space resources have been proven to have direct and indirect economic benefits. Among these benefits are:

- Increases nearby property values.
- Helps to attract business and commercial development.
- Energizes economic development and neighborhood revitalization
- Promotes health and fitness.
- Builds community spirit by providing venues to meet and interact with others.
- Conserves natural resources and cultural heritage.
- Attracts tourism.



Plan Preparation and Organization

This plan was developed through extensive outreach and dialogue with a wide range of interested stakeholders, including public officials, local institutions, adjacent property owners, and the general public. The study was developed over a period of eight months during 2015. The Plan was shaped and guided by a Steering Committee of interested citizens representing a cross-section of Aston civic life. The Committee included representatives of civic organizations, recreation associations, park neighbors, township officials and concerned residents. Five meetings were held with the steering committee, which took place in March, April, June, July, and September 2015.

Two public meetings were held to present the recommendations of the steering committee and solicit feedback. These took place in October and November of 2015. The Plan was formally adopted by the Township Board of Commissioners in November, 2015.

This Plan is organized to reflect the process that was followed in developing the recommendations.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – *What is the Plan?*
Overall project goals, objectives, and parameters.
- **Chapter 2: Township Profile** – *What is Aston all about?*
Description of the Township and its social and physical characteristics.
- **Chapter 3: Existing Conditions** – *What do we already have?*
Inventory of Aston's existing park and open space resources, recreation programming, and park management infrastructure.
- **Chapter 4: Issues and Opportunities** – *What more do we want?*
Identification of needs, wants, issues of concern, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Chapter 5: Recommendations** – *What can we get?*
Opportunities to improve and protect parks and open space, and expand recreational programming.
- **Chapter 6: Implementation** – *How do we get it?*
Action plan to outline a realistic approach to implement the recommendations, including costs, timeline, and responsible parties.

Relationship to Other Plans

This *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* is consistent with and an extension of other recent and ongoing planning initiatives in Aston and Delaware County. For Aston to achieve its goals in sustaining and enhancing quality of life, it is important that a coherent vision for the future is expressed in public policy. The development of municipal planning documents which are consistent in their objectives is one way that this can happen. Related plans and policy documents include the following:

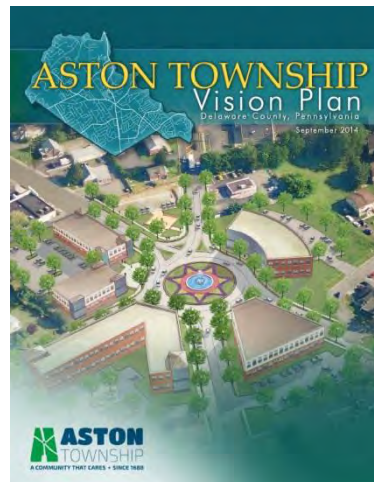
Aston Township Vision Plan (2014)

The Aston Township Vision Plan was prepared in 2014 as an effort to assist the community with identifying priority actions to enhance the economic sustainability and quality of life in the Township. The Aston Vision Plan Committee, a group of 22 local volunteers, evaluated previous plans, developed a market assessment of opportunities, and created a community vision for both tangible and intangible assets aimed at enhancing economic development and quality of life in the community. Several recommendations with regard to Zoning and Transportation relate directly to parks and open space, specifically the following objectives:

- Promote the development of Open Space and community civic spaces
- Advance the Chester Creek Branch Trail to construction.

Aston Township Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan (2006)

The 2006 Plan is the basis for this current Plan, and one intent of this report is to review, analyze and amend the information based upon the Township's current goals and objectives. The 2006 report offered an inventory of existing parks and park conditions, identified issues of concern, and made recommendations for specific improvements to many of the parks. The 2006

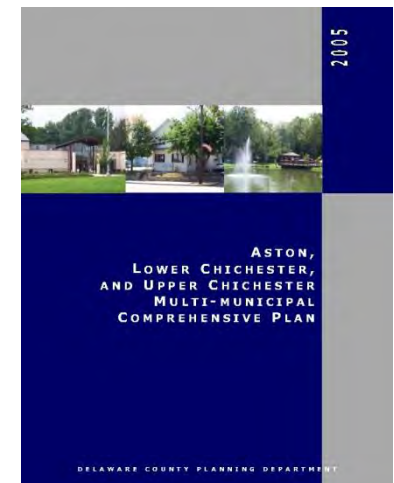
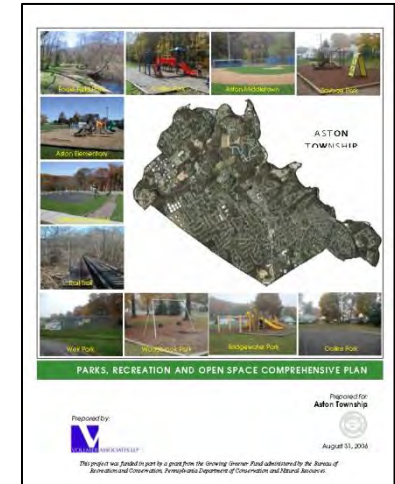


Plan identified finances and administration as the most significant issues to be addressed. It recommended pursuing grant opportunities and public/private partnerships as methods to increase financial resources for parks.

The 2006 Plan also encouraged the Township to organize a Recreation and Open Space Committee to oversee parks and spearhead improvements, and recommended strengthening the relationship between the Township and the Penn-Delco School District. Strides in that direction have been made during the intervening years, and are the subject of further recommendations made in this report.

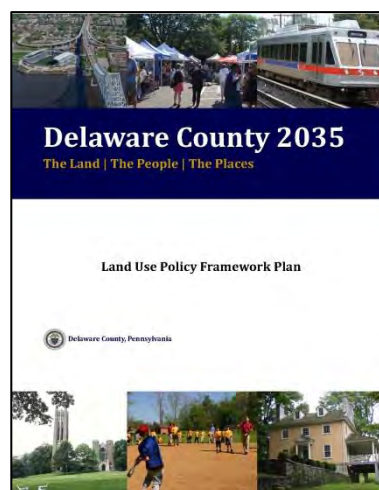
Aston Township Comprehensive Plan (2005, update planned for 2016)

The Aston Comprehensive Plan is the formal municipal policy document that establishes overall goals and objectives for the Township, to guide municipal priorities and policy. This Plan contains specific topics covering a wide range of community issues, including Parks and Recreation. The existing Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2005, and is presently in the process of being updated. It is anticipated that the recommendations of this 2015 Parks and Recreation Plan will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan to be adopted in 2016.



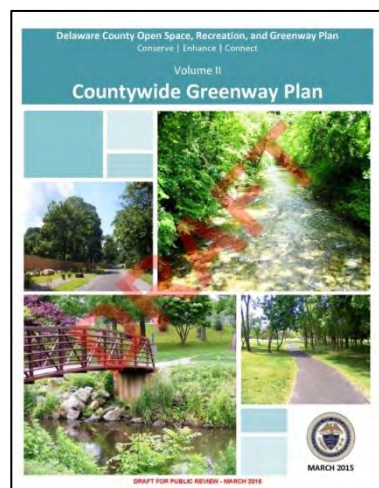
Delaware County 2035 (2013)

Adopted in 2013, this Comprehensive Plan for Delaware County was prepared by the Delaware County Planning Department, and establishes an overall vision for the future of the County through the year 2035. It also sets policies for development, redevelopment, conservation, and economic initiatives. The Plan provides the County's 49 municipalities with a framework for the strategic use of public resources to improve the quality of life for all its residents. In accordance with the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), the plan "establishes objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including, but not limited to, the location, character, and timing of future developments." *Delaware County 2035* consists of a central Land Use Policy Framework Plan and a number of related, interconnected, but more detailed component plans. These plans are all informed by individual municipal comprehensive planning efforts.



Delaware County Open Space and Recreation Plan (2015)

In 2015, the Delaware County Planning Department prepared a county-wide Open Space and Recreation Plan to address all facets of parks and recreation planning in the County including municipal, public and private land, and trails. Volume I of this plan provides a complete review of municipal, county, state, and federal open space within Delaware County. It includes an inventory of existing open spaces and natural resources, analysis of open space



and recreational needs and opportunities, and an overview of implementation methods for municipalities and the County to utilize.

Zoning Ordinance of Aston Township

The Township Zoning Ordinance contains regulations which define how property in defined zoning districts can be developed and used. The Ordinance covers all aspects of land use, from type of use to lot size, placement, density, and building height. Several sections of the ordinance pertain directly or indirectly to parks and open space.

- Floodplain Conservation District (Section 1286). The purpose of this district is "to prevent the loss of property and life, the creation of health and safety standards, the disruption of commerce and governmental services, the extraordinary and unnecessary expenditure of public funds for flood protection and relief, and the impairment of the tax bases" by regulating and/or restricting uses in the floodplain. The Floodway District (FW), Flood-Fringe District (FF) and General Floodplain District (FA) have been delineated for areas within the 100-year floodplain. Indirectly, by prohibiting certain development in the floodplain, this ordinance may help to preserve the purpose of a floodplain and retain open space along the streams.
- Steep Slope Conservation District (Section 1288). The Purpose of this district is "to expand upon the Community development objectives associated with environmental protection and preservation of natural resources" by conserving and protecting those areas having steep slopes, preventing development that would cause erosion and pollution of stream water, and protecting the natural vegetative cover on steep slope areas. The steep slope areas are overlays to the Zoning Districts, not districts of their own. Steep Slopes are defined as those areas having a vertical slope between 15% and 25%. Very Steep Slopes have a vertical slope over 25%. Like the Floodplain Conservation ordinance, this ordinance may help to preserve open space by discouraging development, grading, and clearing steep slope areas.

CHAPTER 2

TOWNSHIP PROFILE

Aston Township is a diverse and stable community with a healthy balance of developed areas and remaining open space. The Township has a recognizable cultural heritage, community-minded residents, strong institutions, key natural resources, good transportation access, and a growing commercial base. All these resources are significant assets, and are relevant to the needs and opportunities for enhanced parks and recreation.

Regional Setting and Development Patterns

Aston Township is located in Delaware County in southeastern Pennsylvania. It is situated 22 miles southwest of Philadelphia and 14 miles northeast of Wilmington, Delaware. Covering an area of 5.7 square miles, Aston is bounded by several neighboring townships. The longest border is with Middletown Township to the east. Other neighbors include Chester Township to the southeast, Upper Chichester Township to the south, and small borders with Concord Township and Bethel Township to the west.



Aston Township was first settled in 1682 as a municipality and was incorporated as a township in 1688. Aston became a First Class Township in 1906. Originally, many of the early residents of the Township came from Bampton Parish in Oxfordshire, England. Aston is characterized by its topography and natural features that influenced its original development patterns. With the swiftly running streams of Chester Creek and its West Branch, it became the ideal site for many milling establishments early in its history.

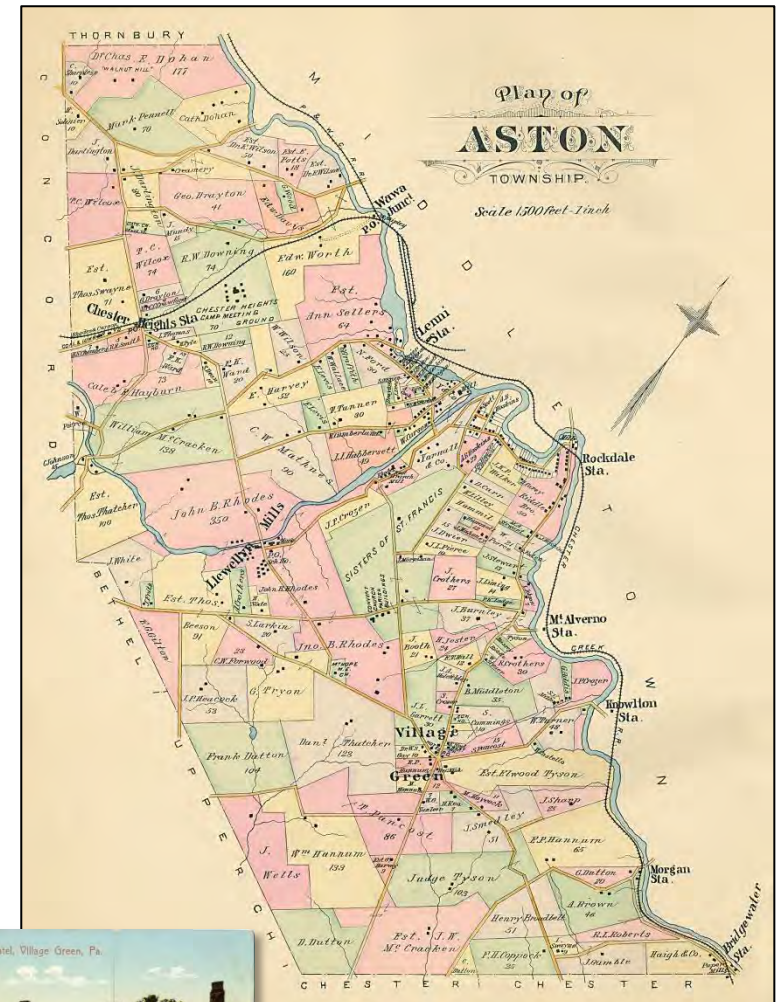
Significant to the Township's evolution was the Chester Creek Branch Railroad, originally part of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was constructed shortly after the Civil War and parallels the scenic Chester Creek. The railroad served the interests of local businesses and created opportunities for new ventures along its route through the gently rolling hills and mature wooded areas of the Chester Creek valley. During the Industrial Revolution, mills, factories, and warehouses located adjacent to the rail while new communities sprouted near rail depots.

The late 19th and early 20th century industrial expansion was to have the greatest influence on the physical layout of Aston Township. Large parcels were purchased for industrial use, replacing agricultural areas and creating demand for more worker housing. Housing in early Aston subdivisions was platted and built on a grid, and tended to be less dense than neighborhoods in Chester City or Philadelphia. The layout maintained urban characteristics, such as easy walks to general stores, religious institutions, and schools. Population growth, as well as industrial and commercial growth began increasing after World War I.

As modes of transportation diversified, patterns of development changed. With the advancement of the automobile and the interstate highway system, rail service fell out of demand, and many Chester Creek businesses relocated. After the Chester Creek Branch sustained severe flood damage during Hurricane Agnes in 1972, service on the line was discontinued.

After World War II, suburbanization continued in Aston Township, which experienced rapid population growth as well as the establishment of new industrial and commercial enterprises. Residential subdivisions developed in the 1960s and 1970s created many of the neighborhood parks that exist today. More recent subdivisions resulted in dedicated open space that may present a future opportunity for public recreation.

Currently, the Township is considered nearly built out, with most of the remaining open space devoted to school campuses, utilities, cemeteries, parks and recreational facilities.



Source: Aston Township Historical Society

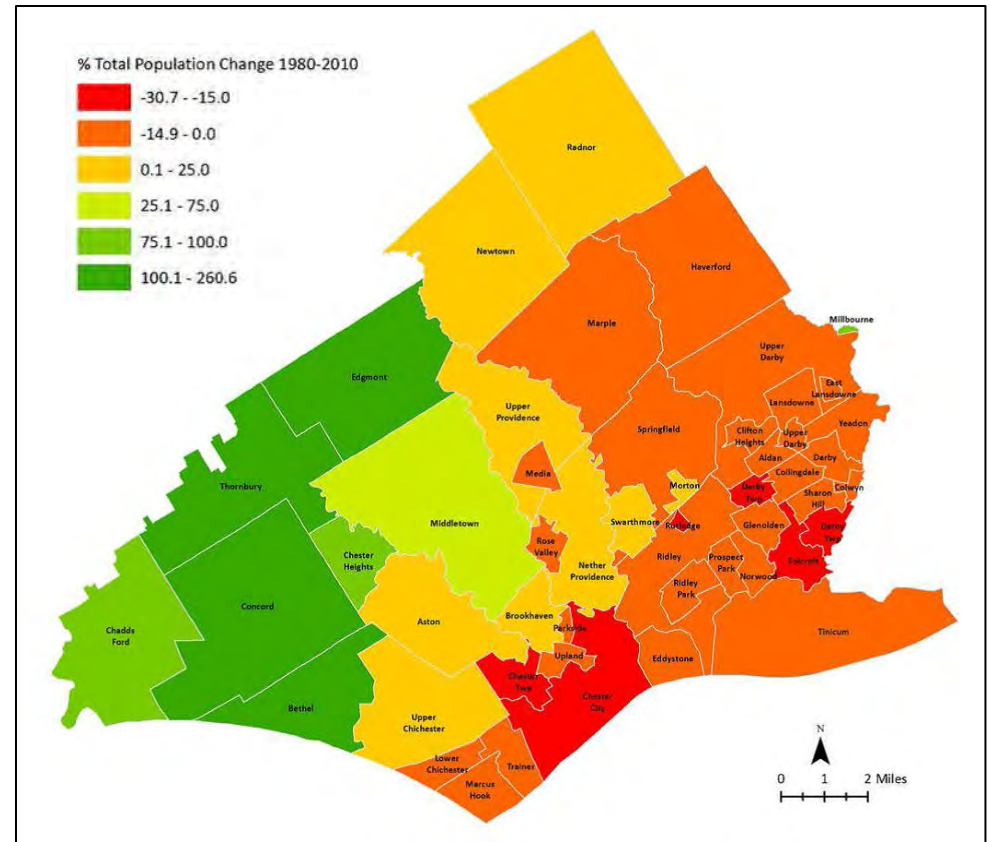
Above: 1892 map of Aston Township. Development is clustered around rail stations, as well as Village Green which is the location of the present 5-points intersection.

Left: Seven Stars Hotel at Village Green, the center of today's Aston.

Demographics

The population of Aston is 16,592, according to the 2010 United States Census. An estimate of future population growth in the Township is made by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), which projects a steady increase in population in the coming decades, slightly outpacing the population increase county-wide. Although the population of Aston has not grown as fast as some neighboring communities, Aston's residential population is established and stable. Aston has far less vacant housing, and far more owner-occupied, than the overall percentage across Delaware County. In the county, the general trend over the past 30 years has been for inner-ring municipalities to lose population, while outer communities in the western part of the county have seen high population growth. Aston, in contrast, has seen a more modest and steady growth.

One reason the western municipalities have been able to grow more in recent decades was the availability of land for development. Low-density suburban living grew in popularity over the last 30 years, and where residences were built, commercial development to serve them followed. During this time period, land became very valuable and a great deal of former agricultural land was sold for development. As large tracts of land become more limited in the western and northern portions of the county, the type of development is expected to change from the sprawling single family homes popular in the 1990s and 2000s, to more dense housing patterns such as townhomes. Over the last decade, there has been a renewed interest in smaller lot sizes, more public open space, and trail and transit connections. In many areas, zoning ordinances have been amended to not only allow, but also encourage, denser housing and more land conservation. Infill development and redevelopment is expected to be the trend in the eastern, southern, and central parts of the County.



Source: Delaware County Planning Department

Aston Population			
Area	2000	2010	% change
Aston Township	16,203	16,592	2.4%
Delaware County	550,864	558,979	1.5%

Vacant Housing Units			
Area	2000	2010	Rate
Aston Township	140	146	2.4%
Delaware County	10,658	14,202	6.4%

Aston Population Forecast			
Area	2010	2040	% change
Aston Township	16,592	16,980	2.3%
Delaware County	558,979	569,982	2.0%

Owner-Occupied Housing Units			
Area	2000	2010	Rate
Aston Township	5,186	5,357	90.1%
Delaware County	148,384	147,212	70.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Socio-Economic Profile

The latest US Census (2010) offers a look at how the current population is broken down in terms of age groups, income and racial makeup.

- Approximately 5% of Aston's population is under 5 years old, while 21% is 18 years old or younger. 15% of the population is over 65 years old.
- The population density for the Township as a whole is 2,890 persons/square mile.
- The population is 52% female and 48% male.
- There are 6,091 housing units in the Township, with an average of 2.69 persons per household. 90% of the housing units are owner-occupied.
- The average household income in Aston Township is \$77,966.
- 94.3 percent of the population describe themselves as White alone, followed by 2.8% Black or African American, 1.6% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian, and less than 1% mixed race.
- 92% of the population has graduated high school, while 27% has a bachelor's degree or higher.

Local Government

Aston is governed by a seven-member Board of Commissioners that represents the seven voting wards within the township. The Commissioners are elected to serve a four-year term. The Commissioners form committees for the purposes of concentrating efforts in a variety of areas, one being recreation, that are made up of three Commissioners. They conduct meetings on a monthly basis, or as deemed appropriate.

The Township Manager is in charge of the office staff, the Public Works Department, and the Code Enforcement Department. The Public Works crews, under the direction of the Township Manager, have the primary responsibility for maintenance and inspections of the parks within the township. The Township Manager is also responsible for the scheduling of all activities that utilize any Township facilities.

Local Institutions

Key institutions in Aston are major property owners and stewards of open space. The Penn-Delco School District encompasses Aston Township as well as neighboring Brookhaven Borough and Parkside Borough. Approximately 3,400 students are enrolled in grades Kindergarten through 12. The district comprises six schools, four of which are located in Aston, which are:

- Sun Valley High School
- Northley Middle School
- Aston Elementary School
- Pennell Elementary School

The Sisters of St. Francis Convent and Neumann University are both large institutions located in the northern part of the township. Each controls significant property holdings containing large portions of open space. While they are both privately owned, and their properties are not generally open to the public, both institutions are expected to keep large amounts of their open space undisturbed in the foreseeable future.



Neumann University is an important land steward in Aston Township.

Natural and Cultural Resources

A key component of planning for parks and open space is a review of natural features. Sensitive environmental features such as streams, woodlands, steep slopes, and floodplains may warrant some degree of protection, and may be incorporated into the township's open space plan. Also, these areas may naturally lend themselves to use as public recreation areas such as parks and walking trails.

Soils

According to the Soil Survey of Chester and Delaware Counties (1963), a large portion of the soils within Aston Township consist of a soil group known as Made Land (Ma). This term refers to a type of soil mixture present after grading and earthmoving during construction. The amount of Made Land actually present within the Township is greater than the Survey shows due to development during recent decades.

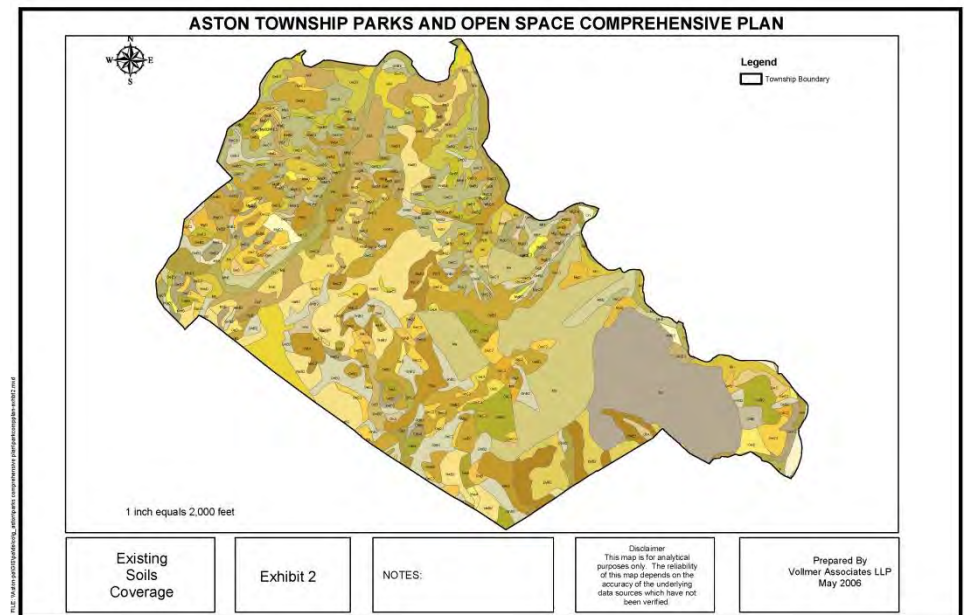
Aston Township is generally a developed community with pockets of green space helping to maintain neighborhoods and areas with a more rural character. Agricultural and Woodland soils, which are also present (in addition to Made Land) within the study area particularly in Aston's southern area, comprise the majority of the remaining land. Large portions of these soils are listed as Class 1 and 11, indicating that they are of the highest quality for the purpose of agriculture or woodlands. These well-drained soils are important indicators of the potential for agricultural and forestry uses. While these uses may not be common practices in the Township, they lend themselves to being considered when evaluating future preservation needs and priorities.

Soils within the stream valleys are predominately hydric soils or soils with hydric inclusions indicating the potential for classification as wetlands.

Steep Slopes

Generally, the terrain in the Township can be considered moderately sloped, with areas of gently rolling hills and plateaus. The northern portion of the township contains the steepest slopes, mostly along the Chester Creek stream corridors.

The Aston Township Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 1288, defines the Steep Slope Conservation District, mainly to conserve and protect those areas having steep slopes from excessive and inappropriate development. Areas of Steep Slopes are those with a vertical slope between 15% and 25%. Very Steep Slopes are any vertical slopes greater than 25%. Special use regulations are in place for development of areas that contain steep slopes.



Source: Aston Township Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2006)

Woodlands

TreeVitalize is a public-private partnership organized by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to help restore tree cover, educate citizens about planting trees, and help local governments protect and restore their urban trees. They provide maps that show the percentage of tree cover, based upon USGS National Land Cover Database. The latest map, prepared in 2005, indicates that Aston Township has a range of tree coverage:

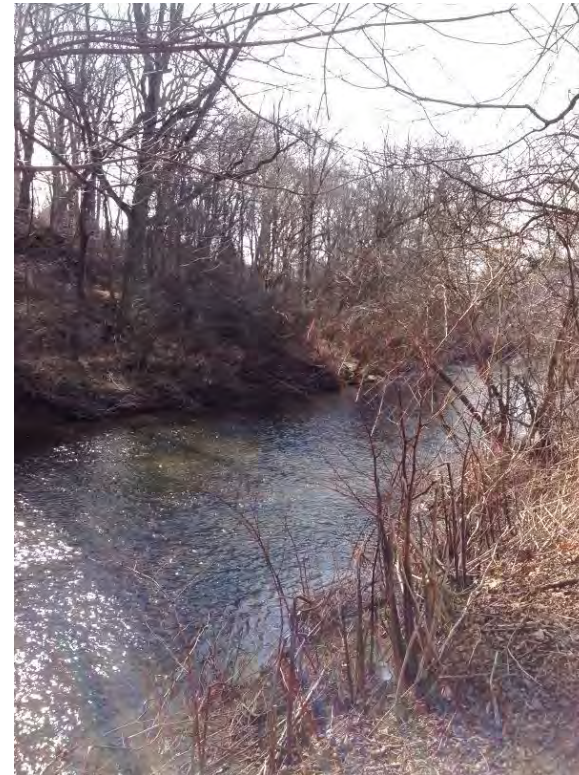
- The northern portion of the township, generally above Concord Road, has the most tree canopy cover, ranging from 30% to 40% cover.
- The southeastern portion of the township, generally the area east of Pennell Road, has 20% to 30% cover.
- The remaining area in the western portion of the township, south of Concord Road and East of Pennell Road, has the least amount of tree cover, ranging from 10% to 20%.

Natural Habitats

According to the Natural Areas Inventory of Delaware County, prepared by the Pennsylvania Science office of the Nature Conservancy (1992, updated 1998), Aston Township is home to a population of S2S3 aquatic plants, which grow in the West Branch of Chester Creek. The Nature Conservancy has declared this species to be rare, and its presence is indicative of good water quality. It further indicates that it is ranked as the lowest priority for protection primarily due to the limited threats, management needs, and existing protection that it has. The indication of good water quality is particularly significant because of the annual fish stocking performed by the Pennsylvania Fish and Wildlife Service.

Cultural Resources

An informal survey of Aston's historic resources was created in 2005. Historic and cultural resources are often incorporated into public open space networks, as a means to preserve these sites that increase public awareness and appreciation. Aston has a number of historic buildings and places. Of these, one resource has been officially declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places: the Village Green School House. In addition, Our Lady of Angels Convent complex and its scattered historic buildings is a strong candidate for historic designation. The mill villages are especially unique and could be candidates for National Register of Historic Districts.



Stream corridors in Aston serve as important habitats for flora and fauna.



The Village Green School House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

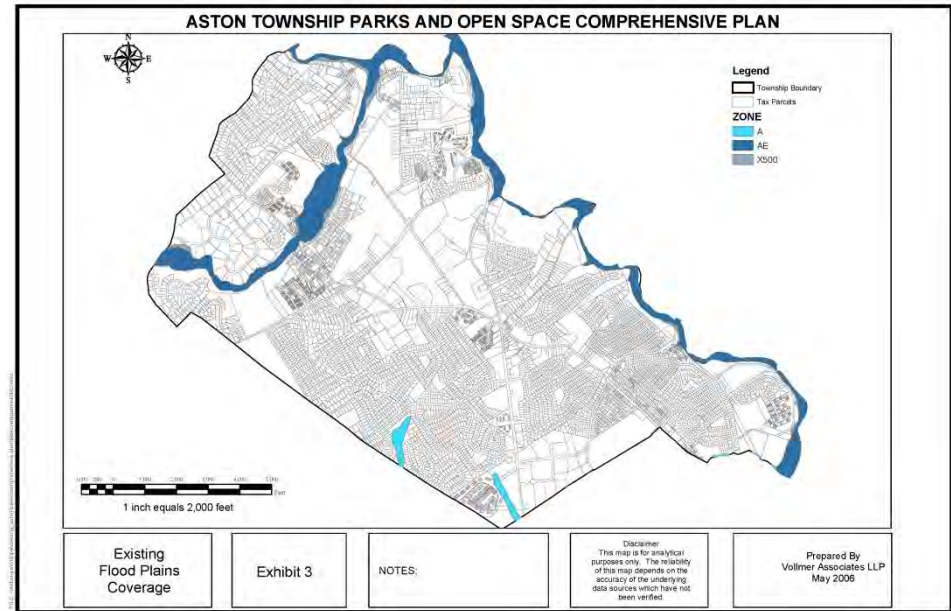
Hydrology

Chester Creek is perhaps the most identifiable natural resource in the Township. Chester Creek has two branches, the main branch, is referred to as Chester Creek, and the West Branch. The main branch rises in East Whiteland and flows 24 miles to its confluence with the Delaware River in Chester City, Pennsylvania. The West Branch begins near Route 202 in Concord Township, and joins with the East Branch in Aston.

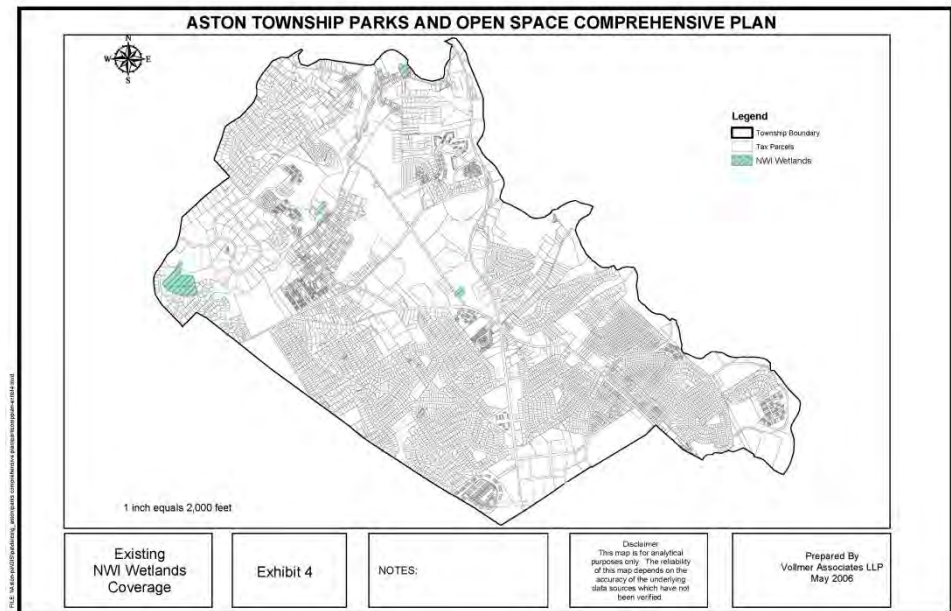
Floodplains within the township fall generally along the stream corridors. Surveys completed for the purpose of Chester Creek Act 167 Storm Water Management Plan indicate a number of flooding problem areas in the township, many of which are directly attributable to the frequent flooding and stream erosion along the township's streams. A number of identified problem areas affect township recreational facilities: Fisher Park and Poore Park experience channel and stream flooding. Weir Park historically has experienced storm water problems from a tributary of Marcus Hook Creek, however a recent flood control project has significantly improved that condition. Other locations of flooding problems include low-lying areas along the West Branch of the Chester Creek, as well as along Lenni Road near the border with Chester Heights Borough and Middletown Township. In 1999, Hurricane Floyd devastated the Aston Middletown Little League field, located along the main branch of Chester Creek. At the field location, the Chester Creek has the greatest drainage area of any of the recreational areas in Aston Township.

According to the National Wetlands Inventory Map, there are few wetlands in Aston Township. Most are located along the West Branch of Chester Creek, while isolated small wetlands areas are located in the southern portion of the township.

There are no special protection waters, either High Quality Waters or Exceptional Value Waters, in Aston Township. The Pennsylvania Code, a publication which lists all rules, regulations, and other administrative documents from the Government of Pennsylvania, designates Chester Creek and its tributaries as Warm Water Fisheries.



Source: Aston Township Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2006)



Source: Aston Township Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2006)

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CHAPTER 3

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Aston is blessed with a variety of parks and open spaces of varying size and type. Parks in Aston currently accommodate a wide range of activities, including a wide variety of sports and active recreation, playgrounds and informal recreation, and simple passive recreation such as walking and picnicking.

This chapter documents the existing parks and open space resources in the township. An inventory and assessment of existing parks was conducted in spring of 2015 to identify current facilities, and to determine safety concerns, usage, overall condition and character. This information is used as a basis from which to identify overall park needs and to develop recommendations for park improvements, which is summarized in the following Chapter.

Park Classifications

Parks and open space can be described in a variety of different ways. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) classifications are widely accepted, and are intended to be used at the local level. The park types listed on the next page are adopted from the NRPA standards, which take into consideration community needs. It is possible that a single park can be classified as more than one type. The first four types are more illustrative of the size and service area of a park, while the others relate to its ownership, facilities, and intended use.

Ownership of Parks and Open Space

When considering parks, it is common to think first of township-owned parks and other public places. While these may be the dominant opportunities for recreation, it is important to also take into account the full range of open space that may be available for use by residents of the community, in one form or another. This broader range of open space may include private and institutional properties which are open to public use, and even public-inaccessible areas which nevertheless are preserved as green space.



Township parks accommodate both passive and active recreation.

NRPA Park Classifications

- **Mini-Park** – Also known as a “pocket park,” is the smallest size park, usually serving one recreational need in a residential setting. It can be a small playground, ornamental garden, or sitting area, up to one acre in size and serving an area within a ¼ mile radius.
- **Neighborhood Park** - The basic unit of a municipal park system, serving one neighborhood and not more than one municipality. Many different activities can take place at one neighborhood park. Five to ten acres is often an optimal size.
- **Community Park** - Serves a broader area than a neighborhood park. The size is as needed to accommodate desired uses, but is often between 30 and 50 acres. Emphasis may be placed on the preservation of unique landscapes and open spaces within these parks. Programs and facilities at these parks attract people from surrounding municipalities or from around a county.
- **Regional Park and Park Reserve** - Large scale, regionally based parks and open spaces, focusing on natural lands preservation and nature recreation. Size can be in the thousands of acres. State and national parks and preserves fall under this category.
- **Sports Complex** - Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities on larger and fewer sites strategically located throughout the community. These are optimally 40 to 80 acres and may also include community or neighborhood park facilities.
- **School Park** - Can be used in conjunction with, or in place of neighborhood or community parks. School sites often provide a majority of a community’s indoor recreation and community center facilities.
- **Special Use** - Single-purpose parks that serve a wide area because it contains unique features that cannot be provided by municipalities in many areas of a county.
- **Greenway** - Linear connection that ties park systems together to form a linear park, preserves natural resources, or provides space for a trail.
- **Private Park / Recreation Facility** - Park and recreation facility that is privately owned and operated as a club or commercial operation, contributing to the overall park and recreation system.
- **Undeveloped Open Space** - Publicly-owned open space that has not been developed with recreation facilities and is not part of a greenway. These spaces could become a park or remain as an undeveloped area for wildlife or as scenic visual relief.

Township Parks

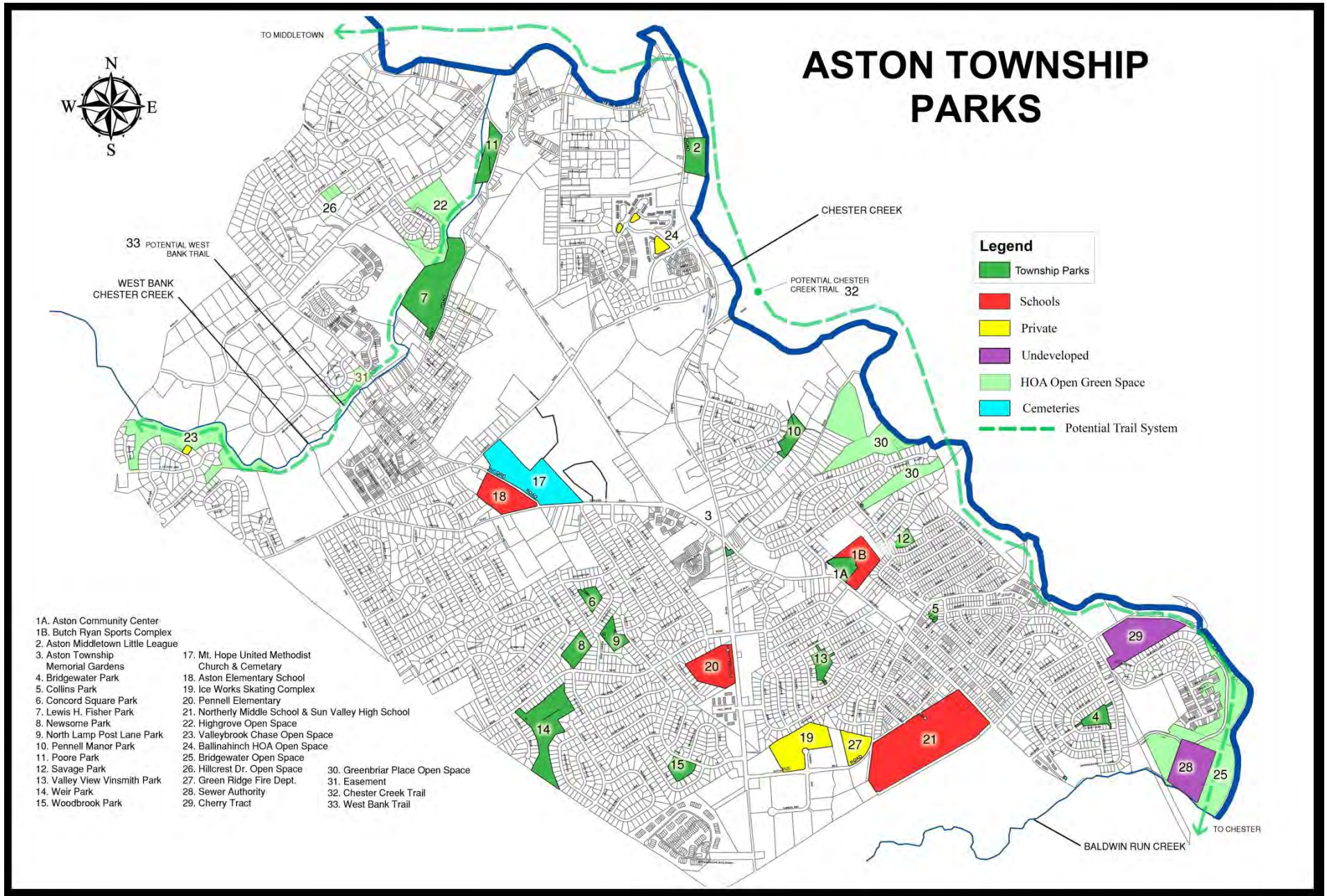
Aston Township has a multitude of recreational facilities available to the residents of the township. The types of facilities range from small neighborhood parks, large natural open spaces, trails, and indoor facilities and programs. These are owned and maintained by the township utilizing township resources, though sometimes with the help of community organizations. *Aston Township parks are described individually in Appendix A.*

Schools and School Grounds

The Penn-Delco School District has four schools in Aston with indoor and outdoor athletic facilities and playgrounds of a type and size appropriate for the grade level. Generally in our region, public schools usually allow residents to use their facilities when not in use by school teams or classes. In Aston, the schools allow limited use by residents and youth sports organizations, subject to schedule coordination and other limitations. *Individual schools and facilities are described in Appendix A.*



School grounds serve as important recreation facilities for the community.



ASTON TOWNSHIP EXISTING PARKS AND OPEN SPACE 2015		SIZE (ACRES)	PLAYGROUND	FOOTBALL	BASKETBALL	BASEBALL/SOFTBALL	SOCCER/LACROSSE	TENNIS	WADING	PASSIVE RECREATION	ICE SKATING	NATURE	COMMUNITY EVENTS	RESTROOMS	SWIMMING	OFF-STREET PARKING
MAP	MINI PARKS															
3	ASTON MEMORIAL GARDENS	0.4											X			X
	NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS															
4	BRIDGEWATER PARK	2.5	X		X	X							X			
5	COLLINS PARK	0.7				X							X			
6	CONCORD SQUARE PARK	2.4	X		X					X			X			
9	NORTH LAMP POST LANE PARK	3.2	X		X					X			X			
10	PENNEL MANOR	3.7											X			
12	SAVAGE PARK	1.5	X		X								X			
13	VALLEYVIEW/VINSMITH PARK	3.0	X		X	X							X			
15	WOODBROOK PARK	3.0	X		X					X			X			
	ACTIVE RECREATION PARKS															
1A	ASTON COMMUNITY CENTER	2.5			X								X	X		X
1B	BUTCH RYAN FIELDS	17.0		X		X										X
2	ASTON MIDDLETOWN LITTLE LEAGUE	5.5				X								X		X
14	WEIR PARK	15.9	X			X								X		X
	SCHOOL GROUNDS															
21	SUN VALLEY HS/NORTHLEY MS	45.7				X	X	X	X				X		X	X
20	PENNEL ELEMENTARY	10.6	X				X									X
18	ASTON ELEMENTARY	9.5	X				X									X
	NATURE PARKS															
7	LEWIS K. FISHER PARK	19.3	X		X							X				X
8	NEWSOME PARK	4.0										X				
11	POORE PARK	5.2	X		X							X				X
	PRIVATE SPACE															
19	ICE WORKS	NA								X				X		X
17	MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY	19.9							X							
22	HIGHGROVE OPEN SPACE	14.5														
23	VALLEYBROOK CHASE OPEN SPACE	22.4														
24	BALLINAHINCH OPEN SPACE	6.3														
25	BRIDGEWATER OPEN SPACE	42.6														
26	HILLCREST DRIVE OPEN SPACE	1.4														
27	GREEN RIDGE FIRE DEPT	4.9											X			
28	SEWER AUTHORITY	16.0														
29	CHERRY TRACT	13.9														
30	GREENBRIAR PLACE OPEN SPACE	31.2														
31	EASEMENT	3.1														

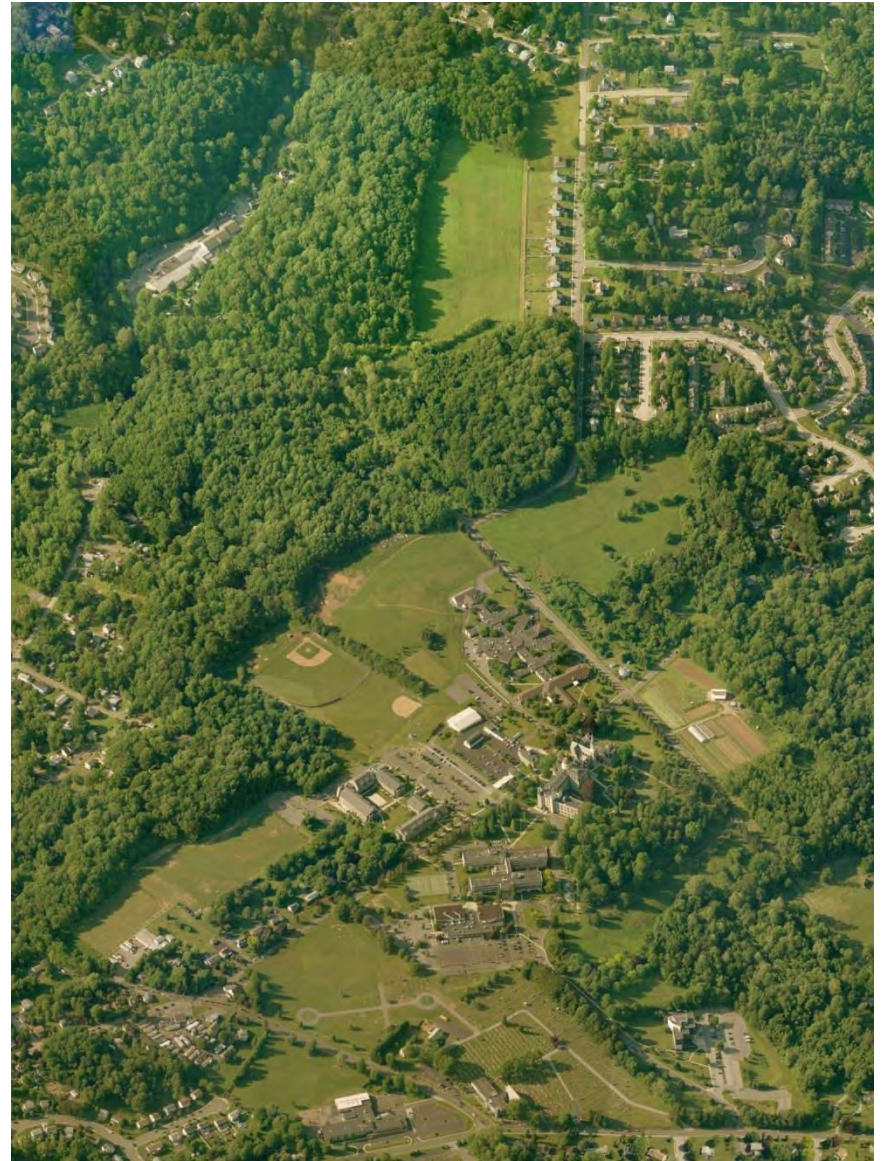


A detailed inventory and description of Aston Township parks can be found in the appendix.

Privately Owned Recreation /Open Space

Many privately-owned properties in Aston are accessible to the public for recreational use, subject to limitations. Other properties may not be available to the public, but are nevertheless protected from development to some degree. They may contribute to the scenic value of the landscape and serve an important role in conservation of natural resources. For these reasons, the public usually has an interest in seeing these resources preserved, even though they are in private hands. Examples of privately-owned recreation and open space include:

- Homeowners Association Open Space: In Aston as elsewhere, developers often set aside portions of a property for open space as part of the process of residential subdivision. The open space is usually preserved to satisfy an ordinance requirement to dedicated open space or preserve environmentally sensitive land. The land that is preserved is often owned and maintained by a homeowners association or HOA. There are several examples in Aston. While the dedicated open space on these properties does not necessarily provide for public access, it does provide a potential future opportunity for public use for recreational use such as walking trails, provided appropriate access easements can be negotiated.
- Institutional Open Space: It is important to note that Aston is home to institutions that are stewards of significant amounts of open space. While these properties may or may not be accessible to the public for recreation purposes, the open space areas contribute highly to the character of the landscape in this part of the township.
 - The Sisters of St. Francis Convent and Neumann College are adjacent properties in the northern half of Aston Township. Each has holdings containing large portions of undisturbed open space in the form of lawns, hilly meadows, wetlands, and woodlands. While they are both privately owned, the institutions expect to keep large amounts of their open spaces undisturbed for the foreseeable future.
 - Adjacent to Neumann College, Mount Hope Cemetery provides visual relief as well as some passive recreational opportunities. By their nature, cemeteries are large “green” parcels that are unlikely to be developed, and are generally open to the public. The cemetery is well maintained and has been a “good neighbor” to the township.



Some private properties may not be available to the public, but still contribute to the scenic value of the landscape and serve an important role in conservation of natural resources.

- Several churches in Aston have outdoor play areas and/or playgrounds that are available to members of their individual congregations and affiliated organizations.
- Private commercial recreation facilities: Some recreation facilities are privately-owned and profit-driven commercial enterprises. These may be open to the public for a fee, and thereby are included among the overall range of recreation opportunities available to the public. In Aston, the two most prominent examples are:
 - Ice Works, a major regional ice skating facility hosting public skating along with a wide range of organized hockey leagues and skating programs.
 - Planet Fitness, a membership-based fitness center that is part of a national chain.
- Vacant and Undeveloped Properties: Significant portions of undeveloped area in Aston are protected as HOA open space, as described above. Additionally, there are a small number of undeveloped open space parcels that are not protected, and could potentially be developed at any time. These parcels represent potential future opportunities for expansion of public recreation and open space. The potential of these properties for public use should be carefully evaluated, and protections put in place if warranted to keep open future options.
 - Sewer Authority – This 16-acre parcel in the southeastern corner of the township is being decommissioned as a sewer treatment plant, and will be available for redevelopment. This property appears to have strong potential for future parks and recreation use.
 - Cherry Tract – This undeveloped parcel has potential as future public open space in a natural setting.



Top: Private commercial facilities are included in the range of recreation opportunities available to the public.

Above: The Sewer Authority parcel has potential for development as a future recreation complex.

Summary of Aston Park Facilities

Existing parks in Aston provide a variety of facilities for organized sports, informal recreation, and community events. These facilities are summarized on the next page and described below.

Athletic Facilities

- *Football:* One (1) natural turf field located at the Aston Community Center. The condition of the turf is poor due to frequent use and inadequate recovery time for the grass.
- *Basketball:*
 - Indoor: Aston Community Center, school gymnasiums
 - Outdoor: 9 outdoor courts are available in individual neighborhood parks. The condition of the outdoor courts varies. Most are older asphalt courts that have evidence of heaving/settling/cracking of the court surface, and some have missing baskets and/or backboards.
- *Soccer/Lacrosse:* Multi-purpose fields for soccer, lacrosse, and other field sports are present at the four local schools, with use by permission of the school district. Conditions of the fields are generally good.
- *Baseball/Softball:*
 - Little League regulation-size fields (60' diamond) are available at Weir Park (4 fields) and Aston-Middletown Little League (3 fields). Overall condition of these fields is excellent.
 - Major-league size fields (90' diamond) are available at Sun Valley High School (3 fields). One of these fields (Buggy Field) is used by the Aston Valley Baseball League for Babe Ruth games. Overall condition of these fields is very good.
 - Softball fields are present at Sun Valley High School (1 field), and Aston Community Center (3 fields). Overall condition of these fields is very good.
 - Informal youth baseball fields are present in two neighborhood parks, Bridgewater and Valley View/Vinsmith, and are suitable for T-ball or other recreational use. Condition of these fields varies by park.

- *Tennis:* Outdoor tennis courts (5) are present at Sun Valley High School, and are available for public use on a limited basis at the discretion of the school district. Condition is very good.

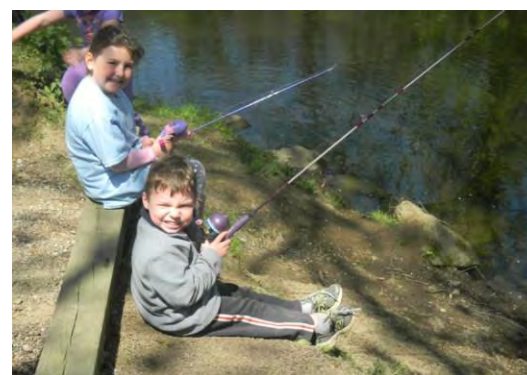
Informal Recreation

- *Playgrounds:* Children's playgrounds are abundant in Aston, and are a principle feature in almost every township park, as well as the two elementary schools. Playgrounds feature various combinations of swings, slides, and climbing equipment. Condition is good, but varies by park.
- *Trails:* An unpaved walking trail is present in Fisher Park, winding from the parking lot to the stream. Paved perimeter walking trails are planned for Valleyview/Vinsmith Park and Newsome Park. The running track at Sun Valley High School sees occasional use by the public for walking, and is open on a limited basis at the discretion of the school district.

Community Events

- The Aston Community Center is the principle location for community events. A number of annual events are held here, including Camp Rainbow summer camp (June-July), Summer Concert Series (July-August), Community Day (October), Winter Fun Festival (December), Easter Egg Hunt (March/April), and many others. The community center building includes a library, a board meeting room, a community meeting room, a historical room, a storage room, lavatories, an office, a lounge area, and a large gymnasium. The meeting rooms are in high demand year-round for use by a wide variety of community organizations.
- Annual 4th of July Fireworks are held at Sun Valley High School, with refreshments served across the street at the Green Ridge Fire Department.
- The Green Ridge Fire Department hosts an annual Fall Carnival on its grounds on W. Dutton Mill Road.
- The Aston Public Library hosts a wide range of community events at its location at the Community Center, including concerts, continuing education, arts and crafts, and exercise classes.

PROXIMITY TO ASTON RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES	Available in Aston	Available within 5 Miles of Aston	Available within 20 Miles of Aston	Not Available within 20 Miles of Aston
PLAYGROUND	X	X	X	
FOOTBALL	X	X	X	
BASKETBALL	X	X	X	
BASEBALL/SOFTBALL	X	X	X	
SOCCER/LACROSSE	X	X	X	
TENNIS	X	X	X	
BEACH VOLLEYBALL		X	X	
WALKING TRAIL - 1 MILE OR LESS	X	X	X	
WALKING TRAIL - MORE THAN 1 MILE		X	X	
OFF-STREET BIKE TRAIL			X	
PASSIVE RECREATION	X	X	X	
FISHING	X	X	X	
ICE SKATING	X	X	X	
SWIMMING	X	X	X	
KAYAKING/BOATING		X	X	
GOLF			X	
BOWLING		X	X	
SKIING				X
SKATEBOARD PARK		X	X	
MINIATURE GOLF			X	
ARBORETUM OR NATURE CENTER		X	X	
REGIONAL PARK (MORE THAN 50 ACRES)		X	X	
NATIONAL PARK OR WILDLIFE REFUGE			X	



A wide range of activities are available in Aston, with many other types available a short drive away.

Parks and Recreation Opportunities Beyond Aston

While Aston Township boasts a healthy variety of Parks and open space, it is not possible or practical for every possible type of recreation facility to be available within the township itself. Outside Aston, many popular types of parks and recreation facility are available to Aston residents. Even though these may not be within the township park system, nevertheless they should be accounted for as part of the overall available recreation resources. To the extent these facilities exist elsewhere, it may not be necessary for them to be provided by Aston Township. This is a partial list of park and recreation resources available outside Aston, and is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory.

Community Parks in Nearby Municipalities

- Concord Township – Located immediately to the west of Aston, Concord Township contains several parks and open spaces that offer unique features not found in Aston.
 - Concord Township Park on Smithbridge Avenue features beach volleyball, an expansive children’s playground, and paved walking trail.
 - Newlin Grist Mill, located on Baltimore Pike (Route 1) features extensive walking trails in a wooded setting.
 - Garnet Valley High School on Smithbridge Road has a cluster of 8 tennis courts that are heavily used by the public.
- Thornbury Park in Thornton Township features basketball, tennis, softball, and extensive paved and unpaved walking trails.
- Upper Chichester Township Municipal Park on Furey Road features a skateboard park, along with playing fields and children’s playground.

Other Types of Public Parks

Public parks are often owned and managed at the County, State, or Federal level. Such parks are not present in Aston, though several are present in nearby municipalities and are available for use by Aston Township residents.

- Delaware County manages 6 parks that encompass more than 600 acres of open space. These tend to be large-scale regional parks with trails and other amenities. The nearest one is Clayton Park on Route 322 in Concord Township. This park, the largest of the county’s park and recreational facilities, sits on 170 acres of scenic woodlands, and offers a nine-hole golf course, four playing fields, shaded picnic groves, nature trails and parking.



Concord Township Park



Upper Chichester Municipal Park



Clayton Park

- The nearest Pennsylvania State Park is Ridley Creek State Park in Edgmont and Middletown Townships. This park occupies more than 2,600 acres that are primarily wooded, and bisected by Ridley Creek. Activities include hiking, biking horseback riding, picnicking, fishing, cross country skiing, and camping.
- National Parks are considered to have the highest level of scenic beauty or cultural importance to U.S. history. There are three national parks within 25 miles of Aston, which are Valley Forge National Historic Park in Valley Forge, Pa; Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia; and a new park first established in 2013, First State National Historical Park that encompasses several sites in the state of Delaware.
- John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in Tinicum Township is managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is an important migratory bird stopover along the Atlantic Flyway, and a protected breeding habitat for threatened and endangered species. The facility contains a canoe launch, environmental education center, and over ten miles of trails.

Special Use Facilities

- **Swimming:** Aston does not have full-fledged public swimming pool facilities. Swimming is available nearby from several member-based swim clubs, the closest of which are Brookhaven Swim Club and Knowlton/Hidden Hollow Swim Club, both located within a mile of Aston. Northley Middle School has an indoor swimming pool for use by students, with opportunity for limited use by the public.
- **Golf:** Many public and private golf courses are present in the area. The nearest courses open to the public are The Golf Course at Glen Mills (Concord Township), Clayton Park Golf Club (Concord Township), and Paxson Hollow Golf Club (Marple Township).
- **Fitness:** Numerous private commercial fitness centers are located in the nearby Aston vicinity. In addition, the YMCA offers a wide range of fitness and recreation programs for all ages. The closest facility is Rocky Run YMCA located on Baltimore Pike in Lima, about 2 miles north of Aston.
- **Bowling:** Several private commercial bowling alleys are located nearby, the closest of which is AMF Conchester Lanes on Route 322 in Upper Chichester.
- **Arboretums:** There are numerous Arboretums and Nature Centers in the nearby region which are open to the public and serve as outstanding resources for experiencing the natural environment. Those closest to Aston include Taylor Memorial Arboretum (Wallingford), Tyler Arboretum (Media), and Palmer Arboretum (Thornbury).



Aston residents benefit from the ability to enjoy many nearby parks and recreation facilities outside the township boundaries.

Top: Ridley Creek State Park.

Above: Heinz National Wildlife Refuge

Trends in Recreation Programming

The park and open space facilities available to Aston residents are a critically important public resource. Just as important as the parks themselves are the programs and organized activities that provide enhanced opportunities for the public to enjoy the parks and participate in recreation of all kinds.

The range of potential recreation programming is practically endless. The ideal range of programs will differ for every community, depending on the age, interests, and ability of its residents, as well as the type and quality of its park resources. In general, recreation activities are classified into two categories: **Active recreation** typically consists of sports and athletics that require higher levels of movement for participation. **Passive recreation** generally involves less vigorous levels of activity, such as walking, picnicking, or wildlife observation.

As noted in the 2015 *Delaware County Open Space and Recreation Plan*, there are a number of national trends in recreation and programming that are relevant to Aston, including the following:

- **Increasing participation in sports**, such as soccer and lacrosse, result in the need for additional sport facilities. Nationally, about 60 percent of boys and 47 percent of girls will participate in organized youth sports by age six. Most children will play sports at some time: only about 15 percent of boys and girls will never play a team sport.
- **Certain types of facilities are growing in overall popularity, in our region and elsewhere:**
 - **Dog parks** - Dog parks are the segment of public parks experiencing the fastest rate of growth in the United States.
 - **Spray parks** - A spray park is a zero-depth play area where water sprays from structures or ground sprays and then is drained away before it can accumulate. When properly designed, spray parks offer cost-effective, safe, and fun additions to public play spaces that are suitable for children of all ages. There is no need for lifeguards, and water jets can be easily controlled to turn off and on at specific times. Spray parks provide the opportunity to engage in water without the cost and safety risk of traditional swimming pools.

- **Naturalized playscapes** - These “nature” playgrounds are places with as few man made components as possible. Using plants, topography, trees, rocks, and other natural elements, these playscapes are an alternative to pre-fabricated play equipment. They are designed with the intent of bringing children and people back to nature, and to promote creative and open-ended play.



Naturalized playscapes are becoming popular as an alternative to traditional play equipment.



Spraygrounds are safe and fun additions to playgrounds.

- **Self-directed recreation activities are important.** While organized recreation programs create opportunities for recreation, it is also important to provide people with the opportunity to create their own activities informally. This includes the unprogrammed use of athletic facilities such as tennis and basketball courts, as well as informal activities like hiking, biking, fishing, picnicking, and socializing.
- **Partnerships are important.** Municipalities can maximize their park and program resources by partnering with outside organizations for financial resources, recreation programs, and park maintenance.
- **Strengthening connections to the natural environment** is becoming a high priority of citizens, conservation organizations, and government. Across the country and our region, people recognize the importance of conserving nature and developing facilities that help people directly experience the natural areas in their local area. The increased popularity of nature trails is an evidence of this trend.
- **Health and wellness is a growing national concern.** Long-term, the nation's biggest health concern remains obesity. Despite all the youth leagues, the waistlines of America's children are growing. According to national statistics, 17 percent of children were obese in 2009-10; almost triple the rate of 1980. Many people, including both adults and children, fail to get minimum amounts of daily/weekly exercise.
- **Trends in Recreation Programming** include:
 - **Health and fitness.** Parks and recreation departments have begun to take an active role in public health and fitness through creative recreation programs.
 - **Generational programming** encompasses the development of recreation programs for all ages young to old, as well as opportunities for people of different ages to participate together.
 - **Life sports** include activities that people can play throughout their lifetime, such as bicycling, kayaking, swimming, jogging, and tennis.
 - **Collaborative programming** is becoming more prevalent, as the public and private sectors frequently collaborate to provide programs and services.

Park Accessibility

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal law which prohibits discrimination based on disability. The federal government publishes regulations which outline accessibility standards setting minimum requirements for newly designed and constructed or altered facilities, public accommodations, and commercial facilities to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. The most current regulations were updated in 2010, entitled "2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design."

Park facilities, designed for and used by the public, are required to comply with these regulations. The regulations cover both new construction and alterations to existing facilities that were commenced after January 1992. Certain exemptions do apply, such as if it were structurally impracticable to provide the accommodations.

Design professionals are familiar with the regulations, and inherently incorporate the standards into new designs. For exterior park facilities, this includes steps, handrails, ramps and curb ramps, etc. The regulations also include standards which apply specifically to public playgrounds and sports facilities. One of the township-wide recommendations, and many of the park specific recommendations for improvements, include elements of ADA compliance. The most frequently noted are:

- **Accessible Routes:** Regulations state that at least one accessible route, most commonly a paved sidewalk, be provided to the site and shall connect accessible buildings, elements and facilities within the site. An accessible route is required to connect to the boundary of each area of sports activity (both courts and field sports). For play areas, accessible routes must be provided to each play area, and also within the play area to connect accessible play components. Various types of rubber surfacing or engineered wood mulch can provide the accessible surface within the play area.
- **Play Areas:** For a new playground, or if an existing playground receives new equipment, regulations require that a certain number of the individual components, based upon the total number and type of components, be accessible by children with disabilities, on an accessible route, and integrated into the play area.

Programming Organizations in Aston

A strong sense of community, promoted and supported by active community and recreation programs, helps to create desirable places to live and work. Low-cost activities for all ages provide opportunities for the entire community to become active and involved. Community programming can also become local traditions that bring residents of all ages together. The traditions created help to promote community pride.

Aston is fortunate to have a strong and active range of community organizations devoted to providing recreation and community programs. This contributes greatly to the quality of life of the township and in strengthening community ties among residents. Current programming includes the following notable organizations and activities:

Organized Sports Associations

- **Aston Athletic Association (AAA):** AAA offers a wide range of organized youth sports and athletic activities. Teams in all sports compete under the name Aston AA Bandits. Sports and activities include the following:
 - *Football:* age 4-14
(Community Center field)
 - *Basketball:* boys age 4-18, and girls age 4-13.
(Community Center, Northly Middle School, Aston Elem., Pennell Elem.)
 - *Lacrosse:* girls and boys, through grade 8
(Pennell Elem)
 - *Softball:* girls, kindergarten through age 16
(Community Center fields)
 - *Volleyball:* girls 3rd to 8th grade
 - *Wrestling:* ages 6-14
(Sun Valley High School)
 - *Cheerleading:* age 4-15
- **Aston Middletown Little League (AMLL):** AMLL offers youth baseball for ages 4-12, and is affiliated with the national Little League organization. Games held at their complex on Pennell Road. The fields are owned by Aston Township, but maintained and used exclusively by AMLL, by mutual agreement.



Aston Athletic Association offers a wide range of athletic programs.



- **Aston Valley Baseball League (AVBL):** AVBL offers youth baseball for ages 4-15, and is affiliated with Cal Ripken Baseball and Babe Ruth League Baseball. Games for the 4-12 ages are held at Weir Park. Weir Park is owned by Aston Township, but the fields are maintained and used exclusively by AVBL, by mutual agreement. Games for 13-15 ages are held at Buggy Field located behind Sun Valley High School.
- **Aston Youth Soccer Association (AYSA):** AYSA offers a wide range of soccer programs for boys and girls ages 4-19, including intramural and travel teams. AYSA primarily uses school fields, mostly Sun Valley HS, Northly MS, and Pennell Elementary School.



Penn-Delco School District

The school district offers a wide range of age-appropriate sports and activities for students. A significant portion of school students are Aston residents, who benefit from school programs and activities. However, those programs and activities are offered at the discretion of the school district, and are not addressed within the scope of this study.

Community Organizations

A variety of established community organizations sponsor events, activities, and programs throughout the year, collectively appealing to a diverse range of interests and ages. Some of these organizations include:

- American Legion Green Ridge Memorial Post #926
- Aston Lions Club
- Mount Hope U.M. Church Cub Scout Pack #77
- St James Episcopal Church Troop #292
- St. Joseph R.C. Church Boy Scout Troop #225
- VFW Bonaventure-Clark Post #6613



CHAPTER 4

ISSUES, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The previous chapter outlined the current parks facilities and programs available in Aston. This chapter examines these resources and envisions how the parks system in Aston could be better, by identifying issues of concern to residents, needs and wants for improved facilities and programs, and opportunities to make future improvements. Strategies to address these issues, needs, and opportunities are outlined in the following section, *Chapter 5: Recommendations*.

Assessment of Needs

At one time, park planning relied on numerical standards based on population and density to determine open space needs. For example, one accepted standard was that communities should have at least 10 acres of park land per 1,000 residents. These numerical standards, however, provide only a rough idea of how well a community's park system serves the needs of its residents. Traditional numerical standards do not account for private open space, or lands owned and managed by institutions and school districts which share use of their facilities with the community, providing many of the same benefits as municipal parks. Nor do they account for age of the population, availability of natural resources, or specific local interests, or for the presence of nearby recreational facilities that happen to be outside the formal community boundaries.

In recent years, park planners have taken the view that the traditional fixed park and recreation standards were too crude and rigid to be applied uniformly to something as complicated and variable as recreation planning. In 1995, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) dropped its numerical 'one-size-fits-all' standard. Instead, it now emphasizes a systemic approach that accounts for unique needs and opportunities of a community. The NRPA suggest park planners promote a comprehensive planning process that is based on local concerns and assessment of conditions to define a plan that meets community needs.

Even considering the outdated and somewhat arbitrary former standard of 10 acres per 1,000 residents, Aston measures up well. Based on the 2010 census population of 16,592, Aston would require 166 acres of usable space. Today, Aston Township parks take up 72 acres, and school district playing fields provide an additional 83 acres, for a total of 155 acres. These totals do not include undeveloped open space areas associated with HOAs, which account for

another 118 acres, and institutional properties in Aston, which add to the overall character of the township and remain in reserve for potential future public use.

Despite this trend away from numerical standards, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) has developed basic "parkland" standards based on population density (3.08 acres per 1,000 population). For Aston, the DVRPC formula indicates a target of 132 acres of municipal active and passive recreational lands. Aston measures up to this standard as well.

Numerical standards aside, it is important that Aston plan its park according to its own unique values and circumstances, and according to the priorities of its own residents. On the question of whether there is "enough" park and open space in Aston, the answer is subjective: with a limited amount of township area, park needs must be balanced against other needs for land use in the community, such as for housing, commercial and retail services, and other types of public facilities and infrastructure.

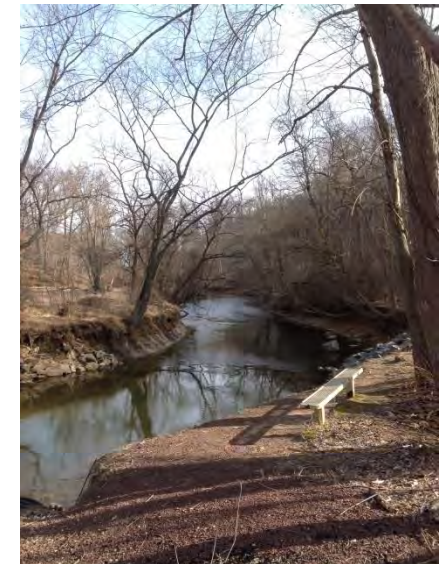
With this in mind, extensive discussion took place with the steering committee and other stakeholders in the township, to assess perceived needs and wants for parks facilities and resources. The outcome of these discussions was a general – but not universal – consensus of concerns and priorities. These are presented in four primary categories:

- **Current Strengths:** Positive attributes to be protected and enhanced.
- **Issues and Concerns:** Problems that should be addressed.
- **Needs and Desires:** Improvements and new features that would be beneficial.
- **Opportunities to Improve:** Unique circumstances that will help make improvements possible.

Current Strengths

While the focus of the study was predominantly on ways to improve parks in Aston, it was important to identify the perceived strengths of the current parks and recreation system, in order to protect and enhance those aspects of the system that are already of high value. During analysis of the current system, several components were recognized as strengths:

- Community Center:** The Aston Community Center indeed does function as the center of civic life in Aston. It is a tremendous resource for the township. This is the one location in the township that features a concentration of various facilities and activities. The library is a major community destination. The Center hosts a wide range of community activities and events, and is open for use by civic organizations. The indoor courts and outdoor fields allow for a range of organized youth sports. Given the diverse array of activities present on this site, the Community Center is a valued resource as a place to meet friends and neighbors and participate in civic life.
- Youth Sports Programs:** For a community its size, Aston has a very wide and high-quality range of youth sports programs, which are well-managed and have a high level of participation. Given the importance of these activities to local families, it is important to accommodate the needs of these programs to ensure continued success.
- Neighborhood Parks:** A unique aspect of the Aston park system is the collection of small neighborhood parks that are central features of residential neighborhoods across the township. While these parks vary in their condition and level of use, they all have potential as hubs of social activity at the neighborhood level, and this potential should be enhanced through park-specific improvements and the involvement of local residents.
- Natural Areas:** Aston may lack dramatic natural scenery or widely-known environmental attractions. But the stream corridors of the Chester Creek and West Bank Creek are beloved locally. These stream corridors are the best place in the township to experience the natural landscape up close. They are also important elements of Aston's cultural heritage with its origin as a mill town.



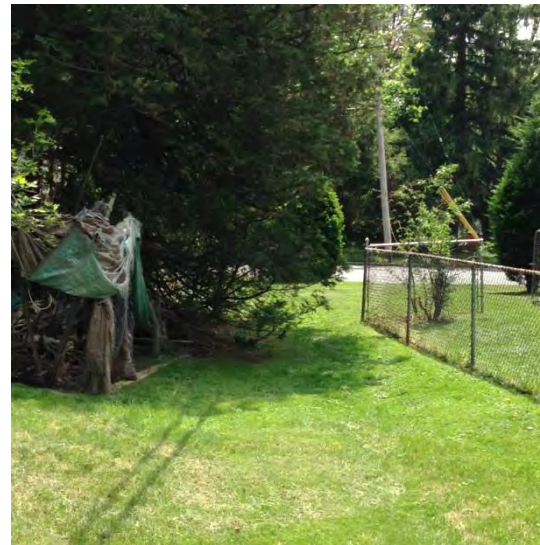
Current strengths of the parks system should be protected and enhanced.

Issues and Concerns

While parks and open spaces in Aston are generally well-appreciated, this study encouraged the Committee to identify problems that should be addressed, and ways that current parks could be improved. A range of issues and concerns emerged, including the following:

- Most of the youth sports associations are dependent on the Penn-Delco **School District** for field use. The relationship between the township and school district was noted as very important. The athletic associations rely on using school playing fields for the majority of sports. Some school fields and facilities are available for public use only on an inconsistent basis, such as tennis courts and track at Sun Valley HS. The relationship between the schools and township should be nurtured in order to maximize the cooperation between the two entities, to the overall benefit of the public.
- Many of the neighborhood parks are located at the center of residential blocks, so have **limited visibility** from the street. As they are screened from view, these parks tend to be havens for undesirable activity, including vandalism.
- Entrances to the neighborhood parks are often **poorly marked** and unwelcoming. Improvements to the entrances might encourage more use.
- Overall **access** to some parks could be improved. Some of the parks are on streets with no sidewalks, such as Fisher Park and Poore Park, making it difficult to walk or bike there. Safety is a concern and a detriment to use of these parks. Within the parks, **accessibility** in most cases does not comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Playing fields behind the **Community Center** get heavy year-round use, and it is difficult to maintain the turf in good condition.
- General **maintenance** in the parks is adequate but uneven. Some parks appear to be more well-maintained than others. Maintenance is generally best in the parks where the regular township services are supplemented by maintenance contributions from neighbors or affiliated civic organizations.

- Playing fields at Aston-Middletown Little League are subject to seasonal flooding and **poor drainage**, due to close proximity to the Creek.
- At the Community Center, unprogrammed outdoor space should be reserved for **community activities** and events such as the Easter Egg Hunt.
- The **use of school gyms** for youth sports programs is not always maximized. Better coordination with the school district may result in more effective use of school facilities, and could alleviate some of the pressure on space in the Community Center.
- There is a perception that existing park programs in the township emphasize sports. There is an interest in the development of a wider range of organized programs that might include a wider range of interests and have **appeal for all ages**.
- The **stream bank corridors** of the Chester Creek and West Branch Creek are valuable natural resources that should be protected for future public access as well as for environmental conservation. Ownership is currently mostly in private hands.

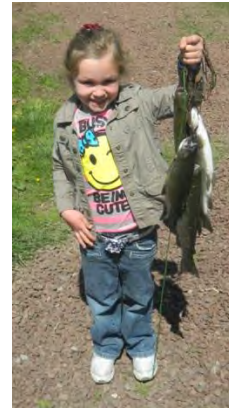


Many neighborhood parks have poor visibility from the street, and poorly marked entrances.

Needs and Desires

While the range of parks facilities in Aston is commendable, there is a perceived need for different, enhanced, or enlarged facilities, to meet the level of demand and address the interests of current and future residents. Prominent needs and desires are as follows:

- There is an overwhelming demand for use of **indoor space** at the Community Center, both for sports and for community events. More indoor space is needed.
- There is the desire for an **“inclusive” park/playground** for children of all ages and abilities. The preferred location is at the Community Center. Preliminary planning has already taken place to envision what this type of playground might consist of and where it could be located.
- Regarding organized youth sports, the **Aston Youth Soccer Association** particularly has the desire to manage and schedule the use of its own fields. Currently the organization relies entirely on using school fields which are under the control of the school district.
- Recycling, composting, community gardening, and other **environmentally sustainable** practices should be accommodated within the parks system, along with environmental education.
- A **dog park** is desirable, as there is no such facility in Aston. Off-leash dogs are perceived to be a problem at the Community Center fields.
- There is an interest in developing more **off-street trails** for walking and biking. There are very limited opportunities currently in Aston parks. Trails will appeal to users of all ages and abilities, and provide an opportunity to experience the natural environment.
- There is an interest in maintaining and improving opportunities for **nature-oriented** activities such as fishing and hiking.
- At Aston Middletown Little League, there is a need for **more parking** and more efficient vehicular circulation. A second driveway access is currently being planned. At Weir Park also, the home of Aston Valley Baseball, more off-street parking is needed.
- Several desirable park amenities are not present in Aston parks, including beach volleyball, tennis, and a paved off-street trail for walking and bike riding. Nearby examples of parks with these amenities include Thornbury Park and Concord Township Park.



New types of park features desired in Aston include a dog park, community gardens, trails, accessible playground, and nature-oriented activities.

Opportunities to Improve

In considering ways to achieve stated goals, there are a number of advantageous circumstances that present opportunities to address current issues and needs. These opportunities include:

- The former **Sewer Authority** property on Gamble Lane may be available for redevelopment as public open space. This 14-acre property provides adequate size to accommodate multiple playing fields for soccer or other sports, as well as for environmentally-responsible activities such as composting and recycling.
- The township has hired an architect to evaluate needs and solutions for a range of **township facilities**, including the Community Center. This presents a unique opportunity for the needs for indoor activity space to be evaluated in a professional manner as part of a township-wide study.
- **Delaware County** has earlier this year released a comprehensive *Parks and Open Space Plan*, which presents a broad range of goals and objectives. The Plan acknowledges the critical importance of local municipalities as stewards of parks and implementing entities for capital improvements. The Plan confirms the strong interest of the County in working collaboratively with local municipalities to achieve common goals. Since the County is currently attentive to these issues, it is an ideal time for Aston to work directly with the County to identify common interests and specific ways to work together to address them.
- The **Chester Creek rail corridor** has been prioritized by Delaware County and regionally as a potential future multi-purpose walking/biking trail that could link to the broader planned regional trail system. The regional trail advocacy coalition known as the Circuit has also recognized this rail alignment as an important potential trail connection. The first segment of the proposed trail – through neighboring Middletown Township – is under construction in 2015. The adjoining segment is envisioned to run through Aston, on the former rail alignment alongside Chester Creek. The focus and investment of regional planning effort that has already been expended on developing the concept for this trail represents an opportunity for Aston to partner with a range of supportive agencies and advocacy organizations to further plan and implement this trail.



Above: Delaware County has prioritized the Chester Creek rail corridor as a potential trail that could be a key part of a regional trail system.

Left: The first segment of the Chester Creek Trail is under construction now in Middletown Township.



- Several parcels along the **West Bank Creek** are protected in some way, including Fisher Park and Poore Park, and dedicated open space associated with the Highgrove and Valleybrook Chase developments. This stream corridor represents a significant township asset and a vital opportunity to develop a continuous off-road walking trail. Stream corridors are logical places to locate public trails because they can be scenic and provide closeness to nature. They are usually relatively level and unobstructed. A trail located near a stream bank can provide easier access to the stream, making it a favorable destination for environmental education programs.
- Preliminary plans have already been developed for **Newsome Park**, which will include a pond with walking path. This will provide additional nature-oriented recreation, and also help to alleviate a stormwater drainage problem downstream.
- Preliminary plans have already been developed for **Valley View/Vinsmith Park**, which include a perimeter walking path, and renovated playground, baseball field, and basketball court. The involvement of the neighboring community in planning the proposed improvements presents an opportunity for continued partnership between the township and local residents, which could be a model for other similar neighborhood parks.
- The neighbors surrounding **Savage Park** have begun a process to develop recommendations for improvements to that park.
- Conceptual design has been done for an **“inclusive” playground** for users of all abilities, to be located at the Community Center.
- Issues concerning linear trail and stream corridors by their nature extend beyond Aston and into **neighboring municipalities**. These townships, including Middletown, Brookhaven, and others, very likely share a range of mutual interests and objectives. These mutual interests provide an opportunity for Aston to work with neighboring townships to develop joint solutions. Multi-municipal partnerships have become increasingly common in recent years, and can be seen as a cost-effective way to enhance the level of services. Agreements have become commonplace between municipal parks departments, school districts, and athletic organizations.

Plans to improve Newsome Park have already been developed and may be constructed soon.



CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

The underlying purpose of the *Aston Township Parks and Recreation Plan* is to identify opportunities and set priorities for parks and recreation enhancements in the township. The following recommendations represent a suggested course of action for Aston to follow during the next 10 years, and represent the priorities set by the Steering Committee during the course of this study. They include a wide variety of actions. Some recommended projects are straightforward and relatively low-cost. Others are ambitious long-term initiatives that will require significant funds. Some involve policy decisions that cost nothing, only the will to act.

There is no expectation that these recommendations can be implemented all at once. With understandably limited resources, the township will need to proceed incrementally, starting with the “low-hanging fruit”, and working steadily toward more ambitious goals.

Highest Priority Recommendations

1. *Strengthen the relationship between the Township and the Penn-Delco School District*, to maximize the public use of indoor and outdoor school recreation facilities. The relationship between the township and school district is critically important, since the athletic associations rely on using school playing fields for the majority of sports. Some school fields and facilities are available for public use only on an inconsistent basis, such as tennis courts and track at Sun Valley HS. It was agreed that the relationship between the schools and township should be formalized and nurtured in order to maximize the cooperation between the two entities, to the overall benefit of the public. The Parks and Recreation Committee of the Board of Commissioners should take the lead on reaching out to the school district, and should act as the steward of that relationship.

Almost all of the local youth athletic associations are dependent on the school district to some degree for the use of facilities. Aston Athletic Association (AAA) relies on school facilities for most of its sports programs, including football, lacrosse, and basketball. Aston Youth Soccer Association (AYSA) almost exclusively uses school fields. Aston Valley Baseball League (AVBL) uses Buggy Field at Sun Valley High School for its teenage and adult baseball programs. While the relationship with the school district has historically been stable and mutually beneficial, further dialogue should be pursued to formalize terms of usage and explore ways to maximize cooperation.



Local youth sports associations rely on using school district fields.

2. **Prepare a Site Master Plan for the Community Center Complex.** A wide range of improvements are desired for the Community Center and adjacent Butch Ryan playing fields. While any of these single elements might be improved individually, the strong recommendation is to prepare an overall Site Master Plan to incorporate various program elements into a single cohesive plan. Elements to be included in the Plan include:

- Community Center expansion to provide more indoor space;
- new playground with accessible features to accommodate users with disabilities;
- flexible outdoor open space for community events;
- improved parking layout and circulation for vehicles and pedestrians;
- improvements to the athletic fields;
- potential walking trail to include wooded slope behind the fields;

A Site Master Plan would determine the optimal arrangement of features on the site, and provide a framework for implementation of each individual element. Since the majority of the property is owned by the school district, the schools should be an active partner in developing the Plan. The Plan should be prepared by a professional design consultant such as a licensed landscape architect, with input from an architect with respect to the Community Center building.

3. **Engage Township residents in a participatory process to evaluate the needs to upgrade neighborhood parks.** The needs of each neighborhood are unique, and improvements to individual neighborhood parks should reflect the preferences of nearby residents. In order to determine the kind of upgrades that would be most appreciated, each neighborhood park should be planned with input from those in that neighborhood. The local Commissioner should convene meetings of residents in each ward to discuss their own parks and develop suggestions for improvements. This community engagement process can be used to stimulate the creation of individual park “Friends” groups to support each park. Support and participation of the public is critical to establishing a sustainable program of parks maintenance and improvements. Depending on the outcome of the individual community planning efforts for each park, the township can determine approximate costs for requested upgrades, and set priorities for budget expenditures.



Top: A Master Plan for the Community Center Complex will find the best ways to integrate many proposed improvements.

Left: The public should be included in planning for neighborhood parks.

4. **Prepare a Master Plan for a new Township Recreation Complex**, to be located at the Sewer Authority property on Gamble Lane. The Sewer Authority has relocated its operations elsewhere and is in the process of de-commissioning the facility. This 14-acre site may represent the best opportunity within the township for a large vacant property that can be developed for public use. A new complex on this site could potentially include a variety of active and passive recreation elements, such as playing fields (soccer, etc.), courts (tennis/basketball, etc.), walking trail, swimming pool, volleyball, playground, dog park, recycling and composting center, community gardens, and other features. It also could house Public Works facilities and functions. The Master Plan would determine which features are the most viable and desirable, the optimal layout of the property, and approximate costs for development. It would include an extensive public outreach component to identify and assess the highest and best use for the property, and also be coordinated with a separate township-wide facility assessment.
5. **Prepare a Township-Wide Trails Feasibility Study**. The desire for off-street pedestrian and bicycle trails is perceived to be a high-priority for township residents. A Trails Feasibility Study will identify specific opportunities and evaluate the feasibility of constructing trails throughout the township. Trail opportunities may include the Chester Creek Trail, the West Bank Trail (connecting Fisher Park to Poore Park and beyond), self-contained loop trails, and on-street bike lanes. The advantages of planning for a township-wide trails network are to improve access to parks and other destinations, improve opportunities for exercise and recreation, and increase public access to natural areas.



Top: The Sewer Authority property has potential for development as a recreation complex.

Above: Off-street trails are a high priority for Aston residents.

Township-Wide Parks Planning Recommendations

1. **Assess feasibility of creating additional indoor recreation space.** The expansion of the Community Center is one suggested way to create more indoor space for community events and athletics. The township should explore other potential ways to achieve this goal, such as utilizing existing facilities elsewhere in the township.
2. **Strengthen community involvement in parks planning and maintenance.** The township should encourage the creation of “Friends” groups to act as stewards of individual parks, and promote other ways to maximize community input.
3. **Implement a tree canopy restoration project in township parks,** to provide for a new generation of park trees. In most parks, the existing shade trees are old and approaching the end of their normal life span. Many have already died and have been removed in recent years. An annual program should plant some new trees each year, to ensure a canopy of shade in parks for future years.
4. **Determine the best location to create a township-wide dog-park.** An off-leash fenced dog park is desired, but may be something many residents do not want in their “back yard.”
5. **Assess the best purpose and level of need for outdoor basketball courts.** The township has outdoor basketball courts in abundance. But most are in need of repair and are lightly used. The township should invest in comprehensive repairs only if active uses for the courts can be identified, such as summer recreation league use. If active uses are not found, the township may consider reducing the number of courts, and repairing a smaller number to serve as the primary outdoor courts.
6. **Investigate options for future park expansion.** Confirm the ownership status and potential public value of current undeveloped parcels within the township, for conservation of natural features for the possibility to expand open space resources to meet future needs.
7. **Clarify administrative responsibilities with respect to implementing parks improvements.** Within the township administrative structure, roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined so that specific steps to implement recommended improvements can be carried out effectively.



Programs to restore the tree canopy and find uses for outdoor basketball courts are two recommendations that apply to many parks throughout the township.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Active Recreation:

- *Community Center/Butch Ryan Fields:*
 - Construct an inclusive park/playground for all abilities.
 - Artificial turf should be considered for the football field.
 - Consider expanding Community Center.
- *Aston- Middletown Little League:*
 - A second driveway access is being planned.
- *Weir Park:*
 - Consider converting tennis courts to parking.
 - Relocate playground and convert existing to parking.
- *Penn-Delco School District Properties*
 - Collaborate with school district to maximize use of facilities.



Entrances to neighborhood parks should be improved and better identified.

Neighborhood Parks:

- Overall: Improve park entrances and Identification signs.
- *Bridgewater Park:* Basic maintenance only, no major changes.
- *Collins Park:* Complete rehabilitation
- *Concord Square Park:* Basic maintenance only, no major changes.
- *North Lamp Post Lane Park:* Basic maintenance only, no major changes.
- *Savage Park:* Basic maintenance only, no major changes.
- *Valley View/Vinsmith Park:* Significant improvements planned for 2016.
- *Woodbrook Park:* Basic maintenance only, no major changes.



Natural Resources:

- *Lewis K. Fisher Park:*
 - Investigate trail connection with Poore Park along the creek
 - Expand parking. Add picnic pavilion, gazebo, or other similar features.
- *Poore Park:* Improve trails along the creek.
- *Newsome Park:* Planned improvements include walking trail and fishing pond.

Land Use Policy Recommendations

There are a number of actions that the township can take regarding Land Use Policy that help to facilitate implementation of the proposed park improvements.

Municipal Comprehensive Plan

The recommendations of this Plan should be incorporated into the Aston Township Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan represents the overriding planning document that formally defines the community vision and articulates in detail the long term community goals and objectives. The Comprehensive Plan serves as the basis for implementation of a wide range of municipal land use policies such as Zoning and Land Development Ordinances. It also is a basis to justify major capital improvements such as for parks and recreation. The Parks and Recreation Plan may serve as the *Recreation* element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Official Map

To protect its interest in acquiring the properties and rights-of-way necessary to establish future trails and parks, the township can depict the proposed improvements on an Official Township Map. An “official map” is a combined map and ordinance designed to implement the goals set forth in the comprehensive plan. The official map shows the locations of planned future public lands and facilities such as transportation, recreational parks and trails, and open space. The official map expresses a municipality’s interest in acquiring these lands for public purposes sometime in the future. The authority to create an official map is granted in Article IV of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC).

Listing a parcel or portion of a property on an official map notifies developers and property owners that the area mapped is of interest to a municipality for public purposes sometime in the future. According to the MPC, designation of a property on the official map does not constitute a taking in and of itself. It simply gives a municipality an opportunity to negotiate acquisition of property, or rights thereto, where a public use would be beneficial before development or redevelopment occurs. Once a property owner or developer notifies a municipality of their intention to build, subdivide or perform other work

on land that is located on an official map, the municipality has one year to either purchase the land, come to a mutual agreement with the developer, condemn the land through eminent domain, or decide not to pursue the acquisition of the land.

Adoption of the Official Map and corresponding Ordinance are subject to public review and must follow an established process as required by the MPC.

Zoning and SALDO

Provisions of the Township Zoning Code, and particularly the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO), should be reviewed and strengthened where possible to facilitate greenway construction. Where the proposed trail rights-of-way are established, developers may be required to provide easements for public access, or construct portions of the trail that cross their properties. Trail design guidelines may be incorporated by reference into the SALDO, so there can be a clear understanding by all parties on the expectations of the township.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLEMENTATION

The previous chapters outline the *What?* - a broad range of recommendations for individual park and open space enhancements intended to better provide for the current and future recreational needs of the community.

This chapter concerns the *How?* - the steps necessary to implement the proposed improvements and bring these ideas to reality. Implementation of the recommendations will be described in terms of the probable costs, sources of funding, and optimal sequence. It also outlines specific actions that are necessary, how they may best occur, and how different entities can collaborate to achieve the most effective results. It may be helpful to think of recommended actions as belonging to one of three categories:

- **Policy** recommendations are actions that are largely administrative, and can be performed largely with existing staff using existing resources. Examples of policy recommendations are updating zoning ordinances or drafting an official map. The process of implementing policy actions is not as much financial as it is political. Policy changes must have political support, which almost always means having public support. This often requires considerable public outreach and education to effectively communicate the expected impact of proposed changes and the ultimate public benefits that are expected to result. Since implantation of policy actions does not require much in the way of funding, these can be undertaken almost immediately. The impact of policy changes may seem subtle, since they rarely result in tangible improvements in the ground that can be seen right away. However, policy changes are critical since they establish clear objectives for planning and development, and set the legal framework for funding and management of improvement plans.
- **Planning** recommendations are those that clarify goals, investigate possibilities, and identify specific projects. Examples of planning efforts include drawing up master plans for future park expansion, and working out the possibilities for new recreation programs. This report is another example of a planning activity. Planning efforts can also include feasibility studies, to determine whether certain “good ideas” are really possible; public outreach, to build broad support and understanding; coordination between the township and

its partners; and many other activities. Planning activities are most useful when they are focused and specific. For this reason plans usually require staff or professional consultants to devote the appropriate amount of time and attention. There is a cost to this time, often referred to as “soft costs.” Fortunately there are many grant and funding programs available to municipalities, which are described later in this chapter. Since the level of funding necessary is moderate, planning efforts can be undertaken in the near-term.

- **Capital Projects** are those involving acquisition of property or construction of physical improvements – these are the initiatives that cost money. The chief obstacle is financial. By the time a project reaches the capital project stage, it has usually gained public support. Larger capital projects usually require funding beyond the typical municipal budget. Aston will look to outside sources of funding, such as grants, bonds, or other techniques described later in this chapter. In today’s economic environment, successful strategies almost always involve partnerships, which can be with the private sector, other public sector agencies, non-profit organizations, or (frequently) regional multi-municipal collaboration. Since the process of raising capital funds is often laborious and time-consuming, these projects are usually seen as long-term.



Anticipated Costs

As described in the previous Chapter, the Plan includes a wide range of recommendations. Some can be implemented at minimal cost, while others are very ambitious and will require significant financial investment. It is expected that funds for major expenditures will be sought from grants and other outside sources, and will not be funded from the operating budget of the township. Minor expenditures for small projects, planning efforts, and specific maintenance tasks will be funded from the annual budget, and should be planned for accordingly.

Ultimately, the total cost of planned improvements will be dependent on the exact nature of the work, which will need to be determined by a thoughtful planning process for each individual park site. Until such time as specific improvement plans are drawn up, potential costs are speculative. Potential costs for the recommendations made in this Plan are detailed in Appendix B.

Five-Year Action Plan

With an aggressive approach, it is conceivable that a significant number of the Plan recommendations can be completed or underway within the next five years.

Near-term actions should focus on tasks and projects that can achieve results quickly and effectively. Tangible results will build momentum and public support, and demonstrate credibility with stakeholders and potential funding partners. Other short-term actions should involve continued planning for the more ambitious elements of the plan. Bigger, more complicated projects take time, since they involve many steps and many stakeholders. It is important to start the process as soon as can be managed, otherwise good will and cooperative spirit may dissipate. Near-term actions that should be initiated within the next 18 months include:

- Community outreach to residents and stakeholders.
- Policy updates to facilitate park improvements.
- Basic maintenance and simple upgrades in neighborhood parks.
- Significant rehabilitation already planned for one or more parks.
- Seek grant funding for Planning-oriented Feasibility Studies and Master Planning.

In subsequent years, further steps can be taken to advance complex projects, and physical improvements can be made to high-priority sites identified during the community outreach phase. During years 3-5, Aston Township should expect to undertake activities such as:

- Reliance on parks "Friends" groups for new programming and maintenance support.
- Park rehabilitation for 2-3 additional neighborhood parks.
- Complete Conceptual Design for one or more major improvement projects.
- Seek grant funding for preliminary/final design for one or more selected projects.



Sources of Funding

A wide variety of financing tools and outside funding sources are available to municipalities in Pennsylvania, which can be directly targeted to the recommendations made in this report. The most successful strategies will involve pursuing multiple sources in combination. In this way, locally-generated funds can be used to “match” funds (i.e., grants) from outside agencies.

Grant Funding Programs: Dozens of grant programs are potentially available through various agencies at the federal, state, and local levels to fund the type of planning and development initiatives that are recommended in this Plan. Each grant program has specific requirements, and is subject to certain limitations. These grant programs are almost universally competitive, and are awarded based on the merits of individual proposed projects and on the quality of grant application submissions. The most common funding source to local municipalities is the DCNR Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2), which brings together a number of streams of public money into one application program. C2P2 grants generally cover 50% of the cost for a variety of project types for parks and recreation, including planning, land acquisition, park development, and trails. Below is a list of grants and other funding sources which are applicable in Delaware County and its municipalities. These sources are for projects relating to open space, parks, recreation, greenway, environmental education, and environmental stewardship projects for which municipalities are eligible applicants, unless otherwise noted. Most grant funding programs are not guaranteed in perpetuity; some programs end and new ones are established every year.

Local Taxes: The most direct way to generate funds is through local taxation, through means such as property taxes, earned income taxes, and real estate transfer taxes. Tax allocations for recreation and open space must compete with the full range of other municipal needs, and new taxes are subject to political and voter consent. Aston implemented an earned income tax several years ago, allowing for a potential increase in budget allocation for parks.

Municipal Bonds: Significant expenditures such as the construction of recreation facilities or purchase of land often cannot be funded out of general municipal operating revenue. For this reason, municipalities sometimes issue long-term debt to finance major capital projects. Bonds have been used to great

effect in Pennsylvania, and are a proven and effective way to finance open space projects. A variety of different types of bond options are available to municipalities. Most commonly, local governments issue *General Obligation Bonds*. These are bonds that are secured by the full trust and credit of the municipality, and backed by the taxable value of its property. In this case, the local government pledges the use of any sources of its revenue (like raising taxes, for instance) to generate sufficient revenues to make the debt service payments. *Revenue Bonds* are a type of bond that can be used to fund projects that requires a large up-front cost, but can be paid for over time with municipal revenue generated in subsequent years. The issuing government entity pledges to generate sufficient revenue annually to cover the new project’s operating costs, plus meet the annual debt service requirements.

Nationally, The Trust for Public Land maintains LandVote, a database of local bond referenda and special tax increases dedicated to public open space, including trail and greenway development. According to this database, since 1995 Pennsylvania voters have approved more than \$1.2 billion in local bonds and taxes for open space protection, acquisition, and development.

Corporate Sponsorship: There is a growing recognition by corporations and others in the private sector that there is a positive value in being associated with parks and recreation initiatives. Additionally, there has been a growing boldness on the part of local governments to ask for private sector financial support. This has led to a wide array of sponsored programs, including events such as fitness runs and concerts, advertising promotions that use park facilities as a backdrop, and widespread presence of corporate logos and brand names in public venues.

User Fees: It has become commonplace for maintenance and operational costs for recreation facilities to be subsidized with user fees. In many places these fees have become an essential source of revenue. These fees can be captured in a variety of ways, often through paid participation in recreation programs.

Donations: Not to be discounted is the potential for “voluntary fees.” Voluntary donations from users are a big part of the revenue budget for many familiar cultural institutions. The same philosophy can be applied to recreational amenities. Many individuals are happy to make contributions to park agencies and programs solely to improve the community in which they live.

Potential Grant Funding Opportunities

Circuit Rider Program

Eligibility: Pennsylvania local governments (multi-municipal)
Purpose: Four-year grant program to hire a full-time recreation director to share services through an intergovernmental cooperative effort
Terms: 100% of circuit rider's salary for first year, then 25 percent less each year
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Website: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us>

Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2)

Eligibility: Pennsylvania local governments and non-profits
Purpose: To plan for, conserve, rehabilitate, and develop parks, recreational facilities, trails, and waterways; to build professional capacity; and educate the public on the benefits of recreation and public space
Terms: Varies; most require a match of 50 percent
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Website: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us>

County Natural Area Inventory Grants

Eligibility: Pennsylvania county and local governments
Purpose: To inventory natural areas, special habitats, open space, and recreation
Terms: Grant funding for 50% of project costs
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Website: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us>

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Eligibility: State and local governments
Purpose: Matching grants for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities
Terms: Match required
Sponsor: National Park Service
Website: <http://www.nps.gov>

Municipal Challenge Grant and Tree Improvement Grant

Eligibility: Pennsylvania municipalities and non-profits
Purpose: To assist municipalities in developing comprehensive shade tree management programs
Terms: Vary
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Community Forests
Website: <http://www.pacommunityforests.com>

Municipal Tree Restoration Program (MTRP) Electric Utility Grants

Eligibility: Pennsylvania municipalities
Purpose: To assist communities to choose appropriate trees for planting under utility wires and to encourage the improvement of municipal tree programs
Terms: Vary
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Community Forests
Website: <http://www.pacommunityforests.com>

PECO Green Regions

Eligibility: Municipalities in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties
Purpose: To protect, acquire, and enhance open space
Terms: Grants of up to \$10,000
Sponsor: Natural Lands Trust
Website: <http://www.natlands.org>

Rail to Trail Grants

Eligibility: Pennsylvania local governments
Purpose: Provides grants to determine the feasibility of converting a railroad right-of-way to a multi-use trail
Terms: Grants fund 50% of total project costs
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Website: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us>

Recreational Trails Program

Eligibility: Pennsylvania local governments, state and federal agencies
Purpose: Grants for developing and maintaining recreational trails and trail-related facilities
Terms: 80% of project costs up to maximum \$100,000 with 20% required match
Sponsor: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Website: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us>

Regional Trails Program

Eligibility: County, municipal, and city government agencies or departments, and non-profit organizations within the DVRPC nine-county region
Purpose: Grants to plan, design, and/or construct multi-use trails for recreation and alternative transportation
Terms: Maximum grant award of \$60,000 for any single project; match of 20 % of the total project budget as either cash or documented in-kind services
Sponsor: Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
Website: <http://www.dvrpc.org/RegionalTrailsProgram>

Property and Right-of-Way Acquisition

There are several common mechanisms for the acquisition of open space land and right-of-way for future parks and trails, such as fee simple purchase, easements, and donations. They can be used separately or in combination with other techniques listed below to facilitate acquisition.

Fee Simple Acquisition: The most effective means of preserving land is through fee simple purchase. Fee simple ownership gives the owner complete control of the land, including all public access and conservation practice decisions. However, fee simple acquisition, particularly purchases at market value, can also be the most expensive. Therefore, many entities interested in land preservation, particularly public agencies or land conservancies with limited budgets, will usually explore more creative options to acquire open space.

Easements/Deed Restrictions: An easement is a mechanism by which a municipality or conservation organization can obtain a legal interest in private land for public use or conservation purposes.

Conservation easements place restrictions on development at a lower cost than fee simple acquisition. Under a conservation easement, land remains in current ownership, but the property owner voluntarily agrees to donate or sell one or more rights attached to the land. In the case of a conservation or access easement, it would be the right to develop the land. A conservation easement may also provide the property owner with federal income tax and estate tax benefits. Conservation easements are frequently used for environmental preservation without providing for public use of the land. The easement can be held by a municipality, county, or a private conservancy such as Natural Lands Trust, which are headquartered in Delaware County.

A conservation easement can also be combined with a **pedestrian easement** or **right of public access easement** to allow public access for walking, hiking, bicycling, and other activities. The easement language typically establishes rules and restrictions, such as limiting when, where, and how the easement may be utilized. PA Act 68, Recreational Use of Land and Water Act (RULWA), assures that the landowner is not held liable for any injuries, crimes, or death associated with public use of the land.

A **joint-use easement** allows multiple uses under one easement. Electric transmission lines, sanitary sewer lines, and petroleum or gas pipelines have utility easements for their uses. There are opportunities to use these corridors for trail connection, as they contain a cleared pathway. A joint-use easement allows multiple uses under one easement.

Purchase and Leaseback or Resale: An entity interested in preservation, such as a local government or a conservancy, can purchase land in fee simple, place restrictions on the deed prohibiting certain uses (e.g., residential development), and resell or lease the land to an interested party. The original buyer gains the potential for future use at the current price and may recover some or all, of the purchase price through leasing. The land is maintained in open space and may be developed as a park if and when future demand warrants. Resale of some or all of the land with deed restrictions may maintain open space levels, relieve the municipality of maintenance obligations, and return the land to the tax rolls.

Donation: Land or an easement on the land is frequently donated by a private owner, organization, or corporation. Local governments should encourage the donation of land or easements by pointing out benefits of such actions, including possible federal income and estate tax benefits and public relations value. In addition to land, corporations and other private parties also frequently provide cash donations for worthy causes, including land preservation.

Land Development Fees and Mandatory Dedication: In Aston Township, the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance requires that developers dedicate a portion of their property for recreation purposes, or pay a fee-in-lieu of that dedication of land. This ordinance requirement has resulted in the various protected open space areas associated with residential subdivisions. The current ordinance requires that residential developments set aside 2,000 square feet of land for each dwelling unit. Non-residential developments are required to set aside 5% of the total land area. The Board of Commissioners determines whether the open space or recreational areas shall be conveyed to the township or remain privately owned (Section 1238.06).

Maintenance and Operations

Current maintenance to most the township-owned parks is performed by the Public Works Department. Most of the park upgrades recommended in this Plan are expected to result in only incremental maintenance costs, which can be absorbed within the existing township budget and staff capability.

Where more ambitious upgrades are considered – such as a new sports complex, or linear trail corridor - the township will need to rely on private-sector partners to provide supplemental maintenance and operations. For instance, new recreation fields should be cared for by the primary users of the facilities, which are expected to be the youth sports associations.

One successful model in Aston has been the ongoing arrangement for use and maintenance of little league fields. Both Aston-Middletown Little League and Aston Valley Little League operate their programs on township-owned properties. By agreement, these sports association are responsible for routine maintenance of the properties, including performing the actual work and bearing the costs. Ideally, this model can extend to other properties and include other recreation leagues.

This type of public-private partnership has become increasingly common in recent decades, and can extend the neighborhood parks as well as athletic facilities. Private non-profit organizations often provide supplemental



Effective community partnerships will be key to providing a higher level of maintenance and programming in township parks.

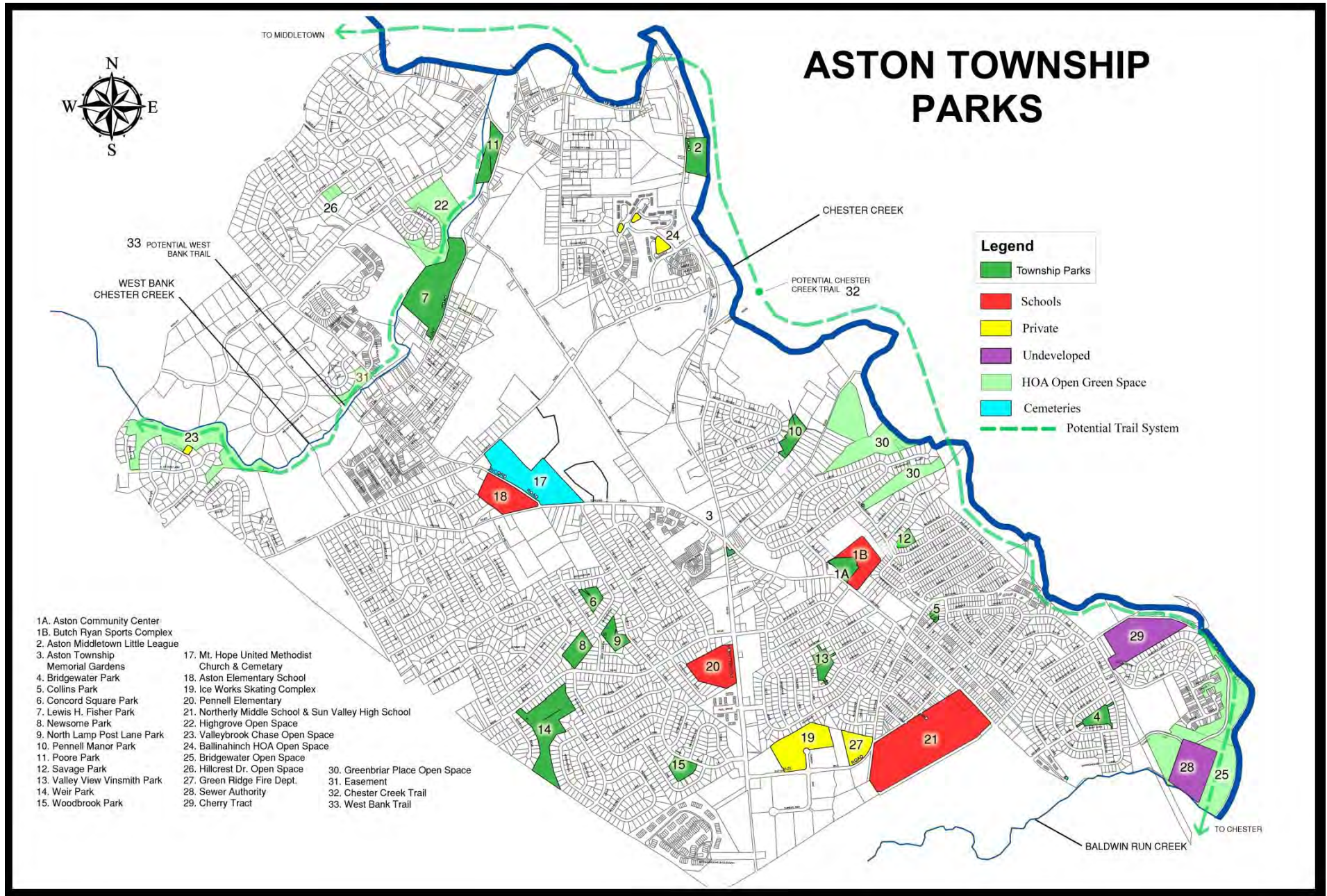
maintenance and programs over and above that which can be provided by the host municipality. These “Friends” groups, as they are often known, make possible a higher standard of care that would otherwise occur. The neighborhood parks in Aston would all benefit from an active “Friends” group comprised of nearby residents who may feel a personal investment in their neighborhood park.

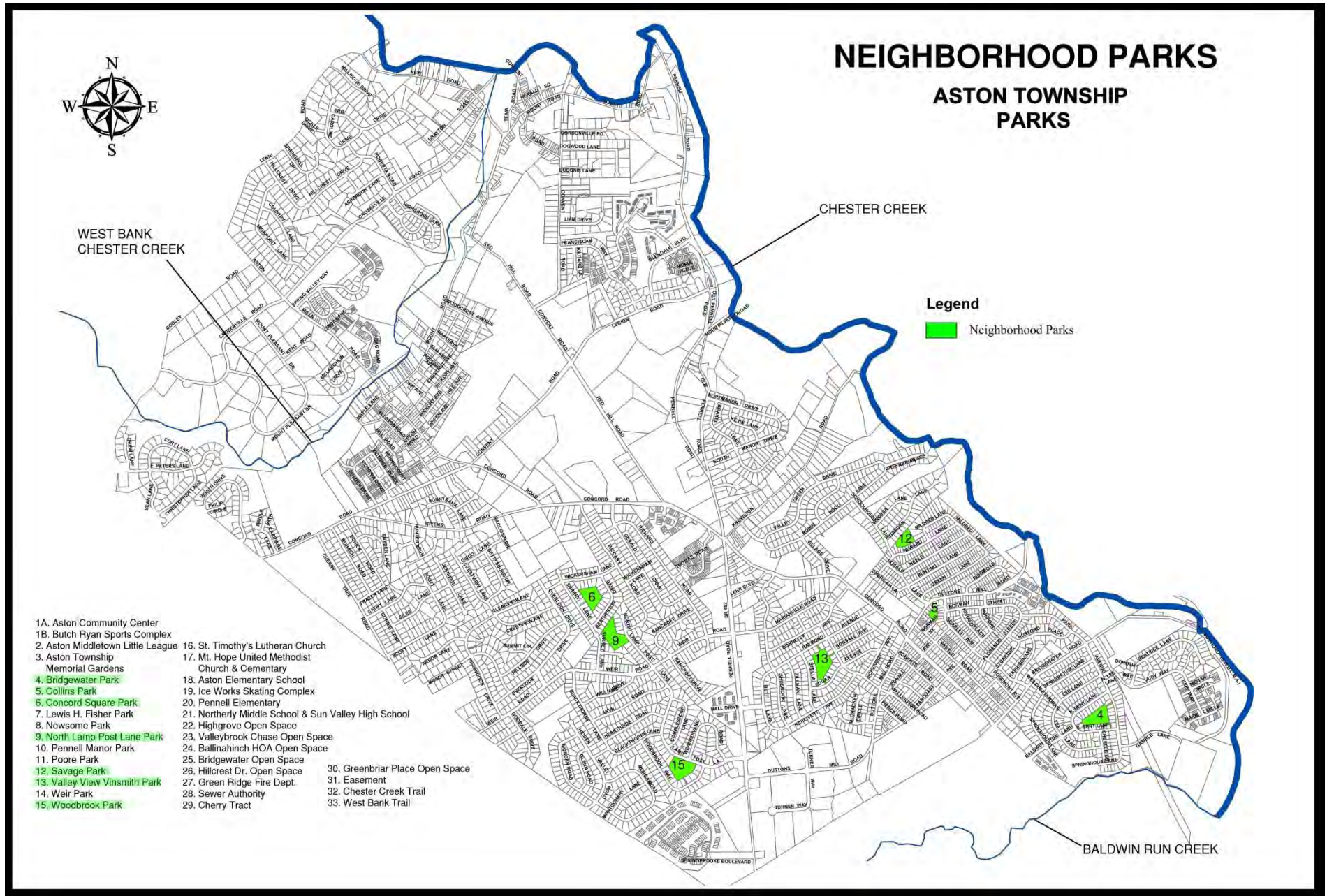
Responsible Parties

Aston Township government will need to be the responsible lead entity for the implementation of the Plan recommendations. Within the township administrative structure, roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and assigned so that specific actions can be carried out effectively. It is expected that the Board of Commissioners, Recreation Committee, and township Manager will all have important roles in advancing the objectives of the Plan. Given the limited staff and financial resources available at the current time, the township may need to enlist the support of professional consultants and non-profit community partners to assist in carrying out the recommendations of the Plan.

- **Board of Commissioners:** Key roles are to set policy, approve expenditures, and endorse recommendations of the Recreation Committee
- **Recreation Committee:** Key roles are to spearhead community outreach, determine priorities for parks and recreation initiatives, oversee a limited number of parks programming, and make recommendations to the Board for budgetary expenditures.
- **Township Manager:** Oversee the hiring of professional consultants, oversee public works department in managing construction projects, oversee preparation of grant applications and other fundraising efforts.
- **Professional Consultants:** Prepare feasibility studies, design park improvements, oversee construction permitting required by regulatory agencies, prepare construction documents.
- **Community Partners:** Operate recreation programs, raise funds, assist with maintenance.

APPENDIX A
ASTON PARK INVENTORY





BRIDGEWATER PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 2.5 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, playground, baseball field
- Overall good condition
- 3 pedestrian entrances from street
- Baseball field is relatively new

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrances.
- Repair playground borders, supplement wood safety surface.
- Replace missing basketball goal.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and all play components.
- Install site furniture: benches, picnic tables, and trash cans.
- Remove tree stumps.
- Add plantings to stabilize slopes.



COLLINS PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 0.7 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court
- Limited visibility and access from street
- Underused
- Overall poor condition

Recommended Improvements

- Improve park access from Norman Street, with paved sidewalk and entrance signs.
- Reseed lawn area, remove tree stumps.
- Repave basketball court surface and provide new goals.
- Install new playground with ADA compliant equipment.
- Install site furniture: benches, trash cans, and picnic tables.



CONCORD SQUARE PARK

Key Facts

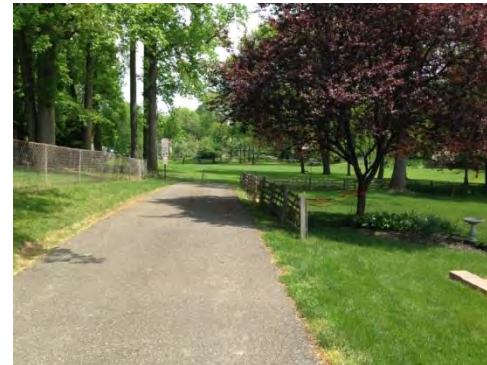
Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 2.4 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, playground, lawn area with mature trees
- 2 pedestrian entrances
- Open lawn area has potential for new uses
- Overall good condition

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrances.
- Repair basketball court surface.
- Install site furniture: benches, trash cans, and picnic tables.
- Better establish park boundaries.
- Remove tree stumps.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and all play components.
- Explore the feasibility of a youth soccer field in the lower lawn area.



NORTH LAMP POST LANE PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 3.2 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, swingset lawn area with mature trees
- Two pedestrian access points
- Open lawn area has potential for new uses
- Overall good condition

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrances, included paved walkway from Surrey Lane.
- Re-set playground border edging.
- Remove tree stumps.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and playground.
- Replace missing basketball hoop.
- Stabilize eroded stream bank.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.
- Better establish the park boundaries.



PENNELL MANOR PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 3.7 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Densely wooded, small open lawn area
- Unimproved
- Access point into the park is not clear

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrance.
- Install playground or other activity feature.
- Provide ADA compliant access.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.
- Better establish the park boundaries.



SAVAGE PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 1.5 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, swing set, playground, lawn area
- Open grass area
- Only one access point into the park
- Steep slope limits usable area

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrances.
- Repair playground border edging.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and playground.
- Conceal large storm water inlet.
- Remove tree stumps.
- Add new shade trees.
- Re-grade steep slope.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.
- Better establish the park boundaries.



VALLEY VIEW/VINSMITH PARK

Key Facts

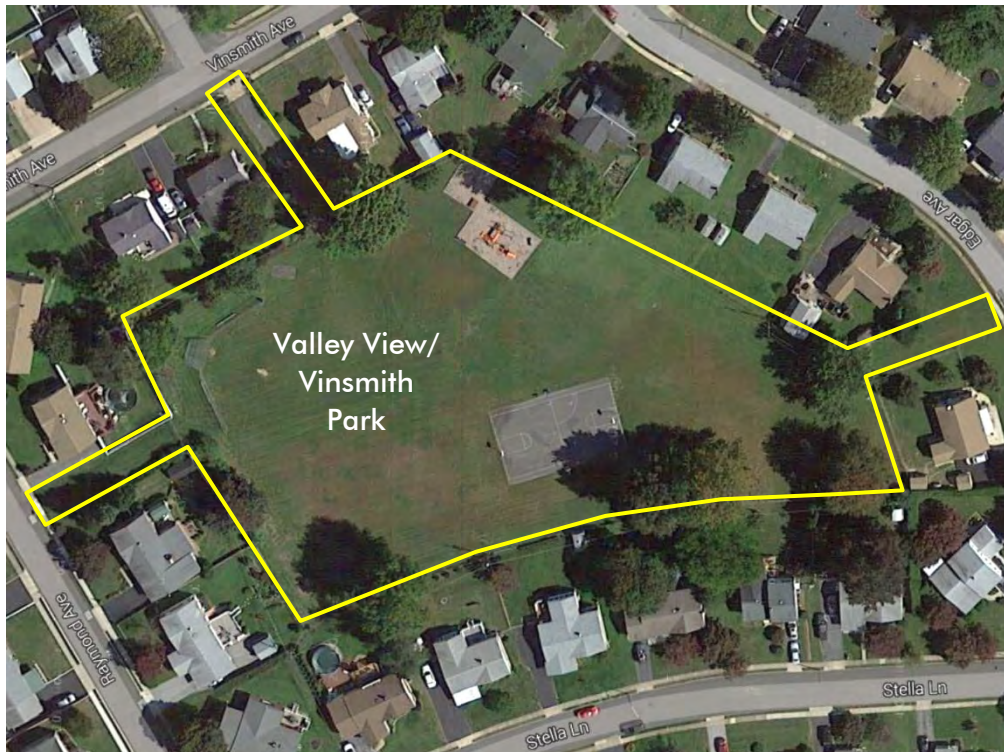
Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 3.0 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, playground, baseball field with backstop, lawn area
- 3 access points into the park
- Planned for renovation - 2016

Recommended Improvements

- Identify and improve park entrances, including paved walkways from Edgar and Raymond Avenue.
- Repair playground border edging.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and playground.
- Re-seed baseball field, and replace backstop and sideline fencing.
- Develop a landscaped walking path around the inside perimeter of the park, with a destination gazebo.
- Add furnishings, remove tree stumps.



WOODBROOK PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Neighborhood
Size: 3.0 acres
Ownership: Township

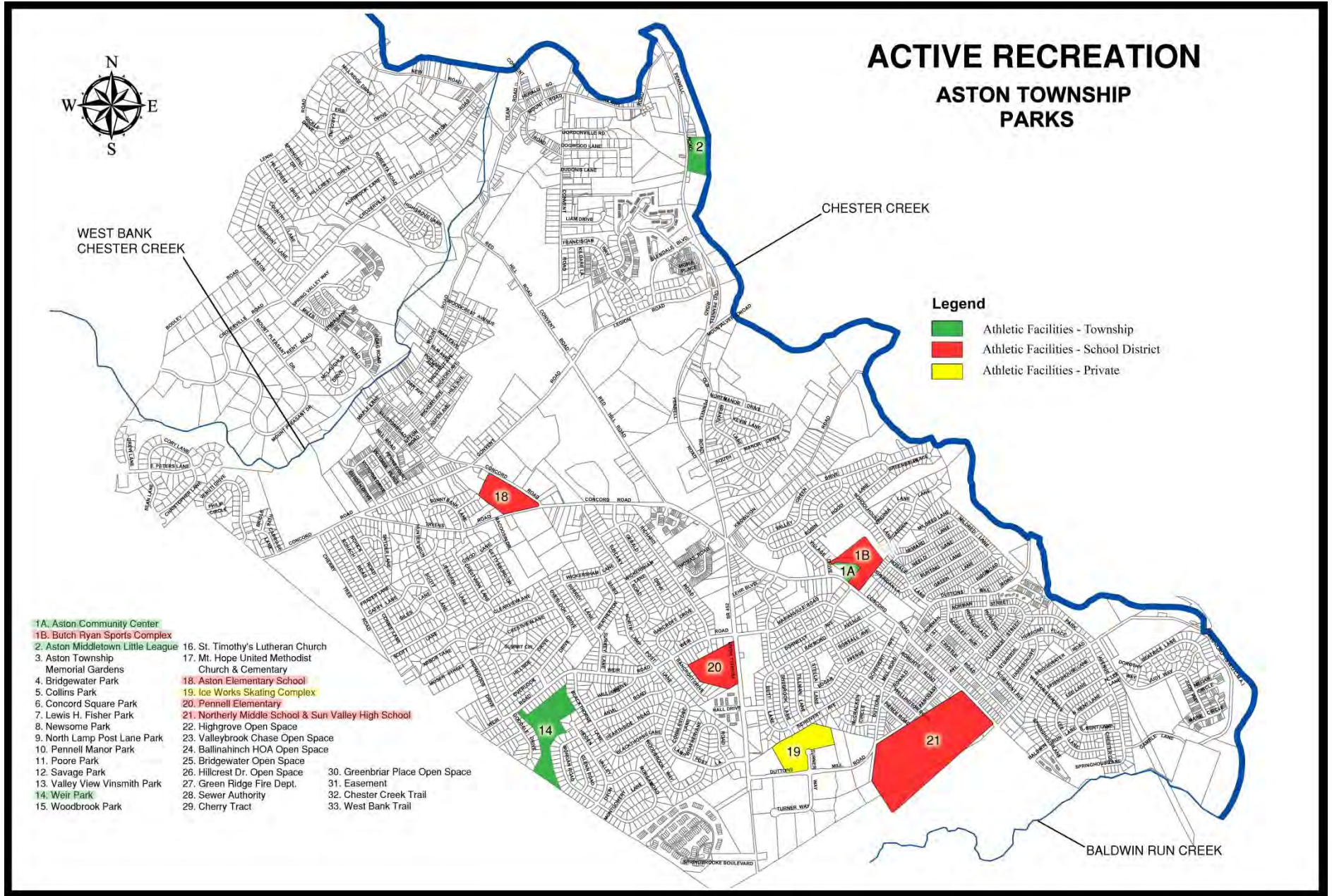
Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court, swing set, playground, lawn area with trees
- Good visibility and open from the street
- Overall good condition

Recommended Improvements

- Install park identification sign.
- Repair playground border edging.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and playground.
- Rehabilitate lawn areas, remove tree stumps, fill low spots around manholes.
- Repair basketball court surface.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.
- Improve and widen walking path from Lamp Post Lane.





ASTON COMMUNITY CENTER/BUTCH RYAN FIELDS

Key Facts

Park Type: Active Recreation

Size: 19.5 acres

Ownership:

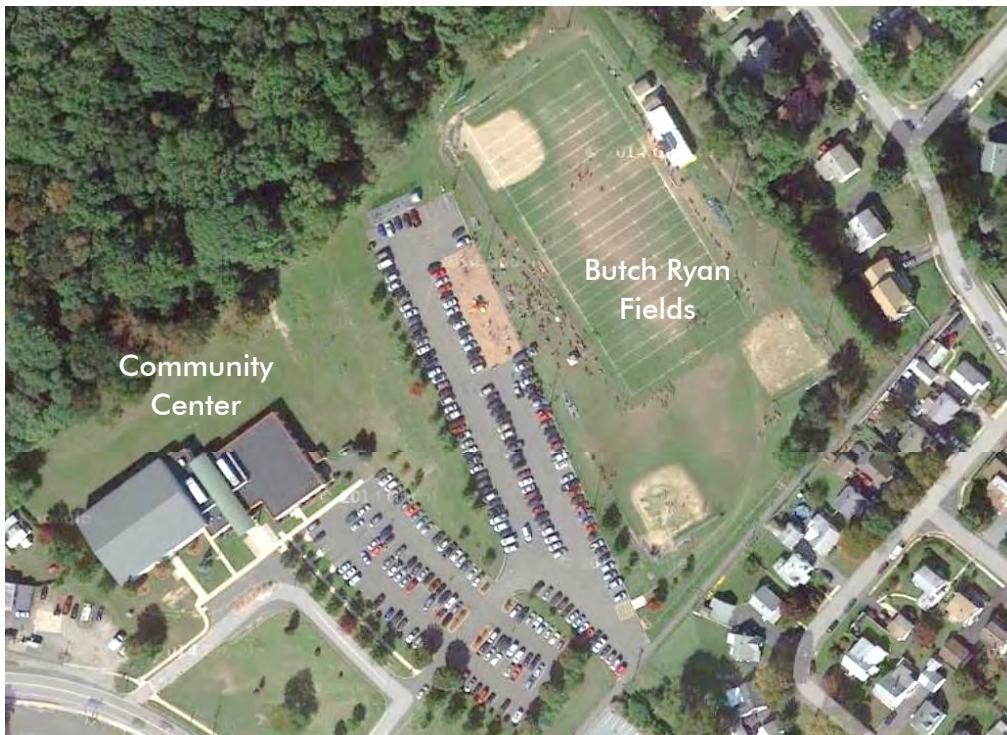
Township owns Community Center,
Pennadelco School Dist. owns fields

Park Features and Issues

- Community Center with gymnasium and library
- Multi-purpose field
3 softball fields
playground

Recommended Improvements

- Prepare site master plan to best allocate space and arrange features.
- Install new “inclusive” playground.
- Provide ADA compliant access to fields and playground.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.
- Remove existing playground and expand parking.
- Expand Community Center to provide more indoor space for athletics and community use.



ASTON-MIDDLETOWN LITTLE LEAGUE

Key Facts

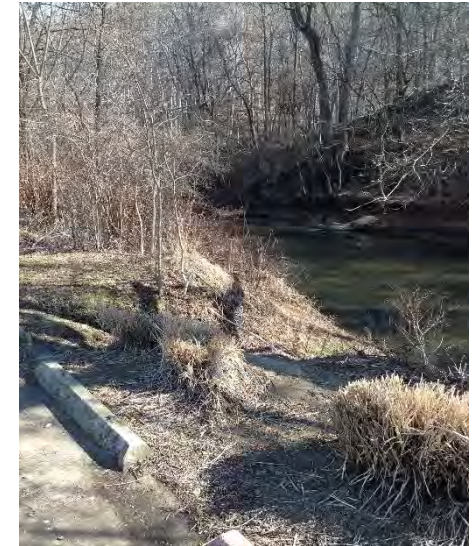
Park Type: Active Recreation
Size: 5.5 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- 3 Little League baseball fields
- concession stand and restrooms
- limited on-site parking

Recommended Improvements

- Construct new driveway entrance from Pennell Road.
- Provide ADA compliant parking stalls and access to facilities.
- Investigate effectiveness of installing field underdrainage to help storm water drainage.
- Install a 6' high fence around the utility tower for safety reasons.
- Replace the wooden bulletin board with a newer, more weather resistant one.



WEIR PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Active Recreation
Size: 15.9 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- 4 Little League baseball fields;
- concession stand and restrooms
- limited on-site parking
- playground

Recommended Improvements

- Additional parking is needed.
- Install shade trees along back of parking lot and walkway entrance.
- Relocate the playground in order to expand the parking lot.
- Re-purpose the tennis court to make more room for parking, or for a more useful purpose such as roller hockey.



SUN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL AND NORTHLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Key Facts

Park Type: School Grounds
Size: 45.7 acres
Ownership: Penn-Delco S.D.

Recommended Improvements

- Maintain effective coordination with the school district for use of the fields and facilities.
- Install ADA-compliant walkway to Buggy Field

Park Features and Issues

- 5 baseball/softball fields (Buggy Field used by Aston Valley LL)
- 6 multi-purpose fields
- 6 tennis courts
- stadium with perimeter running track
- limited parking
- School has 2 gymnasiums and indoor swimming pool
- Fields used for youth soccer, lacrosse, softball



ASTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Key Facts

Park Type: School Grounds
Size: 9.5 acres
Ownership: Penn-Delco School District

Park Features and Issues

- Multi-purpose field (used by Aston Youth Soccer)
- playground
- limited on-site parking



PENNELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

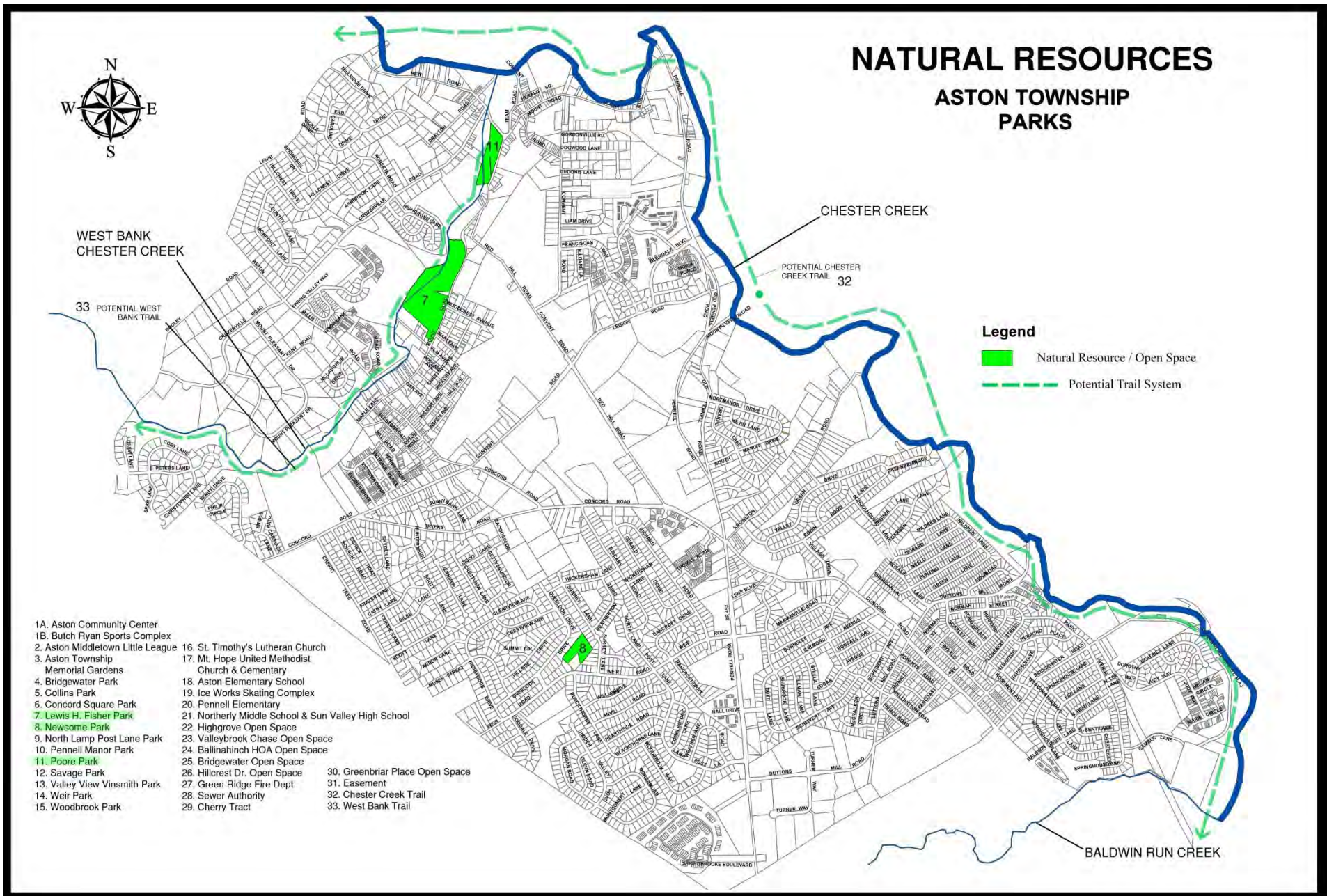
Key Facts

Park Type: School Grounds
Size: 10.6 acres
Ownership: Penn-Delco School District

Park Features and Issues

- Multi-purpose field (used by Aston Youth Soccer)
- playground
- limited on-site parking





LEWIS K. FISHER PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Nature
Size: 19.3 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court
- playground
- open lawn area with trees
- trail along stream
- off-street parking
- woodlands

Recommended Improvements

- Improve and enlarge parking area; expand into existing basketball court area.
- Relocate basketball court; new court paving and goals.
- Provide ADA compliant access to court and playground.
- Provide environmental education and interpretation.
- Utilize the open space behind the parking for a picnic/activity area.
- Add benches, tables and trash cans.



NEWSOME PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Nature
Size: 4.0 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Currently undeveloped
- Access from Weir Road
- Future plans for a park have been developed, to include fishing pond and walking path

Recommended Improvements

- Parking entrance sign
- Off-street parking
- Fishing Pond
- Perimeter walking path
- Site furnishings: picnic tables, benches, trash cans



POORE PARK

Key Facts

Park Type: Nature
Size: 5.2 acres
Ownership: Township

Park Features and Issues

- Basketball court
- Playground and swing set
- off-street parking
- trail along stream
- No sidewalks – limited pedestrian access

Recommended Improvements

- Expand the existing parking. Provide ADA-compliant access from parking lot to playground.
- Repair the basketball court where the tree roots have caused damage.
- Establish walking path along the creek.
- Improve stream access for better connection to the water.
- Introduce nature and stream oriented programs .

