

Strategic Plan and Recommendations

V. Strategic Plan and Recommendations

A. Current Parks Committee Mission and Vision Statements

Mission Statement

Liberty Township Parks will provide superior facilities, services and recreational opportunities for all Liberty Township residents. The Liberty Township Parks Committee will use the principles of integrity, innovation, and professionalism to guide our activities in Parks development.

Vision Statement

The Liberty Township Parks Committee will continuously work to improve the quality of parks and recreation for all the residents and business citizens of Liberty Township. Our committee will work to maintain a proactive approach and insure a strong bond with the township government and township residents.

B. Proposed Mission Statement

Liberty Township is committed to providing a high quality of life for all residents and business citizens by providing access to an interconnected and outstanding system of scenic parks, active and passive recreation areas, facilities, programs, and services in the most effective, efficient, and economical manner possible.

C. Proposed Vision and Goals

The township envisions a parks and recreation system that accomplishes the following goals:

1. Provides convenient access within walking distance to a park environment for all residents;
2. Is connected with a series of pathways and bikeways to provide access to neighborhoods, parks, schools and other destinations for transportation purposes and for recreation;
3. Preserves the past while planning for the future;
4. Offers unique and scenic park and recreation opportunities;
5. Fosters an appreciation of nature and illustrates respect for the natural environment and promotes sustainable natural resource management practices;
6. Engages families and all citizens to participate in healthy outdoor activities;
7. Provides facilities that are accessible to all;

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8. Includes a partnership of the township, developers, County MetroParks, School District, volunteers, and various organizations to acquire, develop, operate and manage the parks and facilities;
9. Significantly adds to the unique identity of Liberty Township as an outstanding place to live, work and play;
10. Increases value and pride in the township;
11. Provides a balance of active recreation, passive recreation, and natural environments that are equitably distributed throughout the township;
12. Is funded in an efficient and responsible manner while providing the level of service and maintenance necessary for a high quality system;
13. The township utilizes every opportunity to leverage funding from outside sources such as grants, philanthropy, and volunteerism;
14. Provides some events and programs that generate revenues to support the operations costs;
15. Includes parks and programs that are well publicized and recognized by the residents;
16. Complements the activities, facilities and programs offered by other organizations and businesses serving the community;
17. Is supported by an active group of community leaders and volunteers that promotes implementation of the Master Plan over the long term.

D. Observations, Analysis, and Recommendations

The following are a series of observations, findings, and information gained from the focus groups, workshops and surveys, along with the Consultant's analysis. These are followed by recommendations to meet the goals described previously.

1. Existing Park Improvements
 - a. Observations and Analysis
 - (1) About 79% of Liberty Township residents visited parks in the township according to the surveys. This is higher than the national benchmark of 72%. Of those that visited parks, over 41% visited over 11 times in the last year.
 - (2) Of the 79% that visited parks in the last year, 22% rated the physical condition as "Excellent" and 63% as "Good." The 22% as "excellent" is lower than the national benchmark of 30%, but the combined "excellent" and

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“good” (85%) was nearly equal to the national benchmark of 84%.

(3) The parks that residents in the survey indicated they visited in the last year included:

- VOA Park 67%
- Fort Liberty Playland 54%
- Liberty Park 37%
- Lakota YMCA 32%
- Wetlands Park 26%
- LSO Walter J. Long Park 20%

(4) The surveys indicated that the parks visited most by residents were generally the same list as above.

(5) The parks that are visited most provide a variety of facilities such as playgrounds, trails, picnic shelters, and athletic fields.

(6) The improvements to existing parks that were most requested by the households that responded to the survey included:

- Restrooms 57%
- Sidewalks/trails 50%
- Bike trails and bike lanes 41%
- Drinking fountains 39%
- Natural areas 35%
- Playground equipment 32%
- Picnic shelters 31%

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Update the playground equipment at existing parks.
- (2) Add picnic shelters to existing parks where appropriate.
- (3) Provide quality restrooms at all community parks of 20 acres or more and drinking fountains at all parks where appropriate.

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- (4) Develop restrooms at Wetlands Park, Dudley Memorial Park, Reserves of Liberty Park, and the proposed Wilhelmina Park.
- (5) Develop a plan for Wilhelmina Park to include trails, playground, restrooms, picnic shelters, natural areas, open space, and possibly an amphitheater.

2. New Park Development

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) Large Community Parks ranked second (75%) and Neighborhood Parks ranked fourth (69%) among facilities for which residents have a need. These are both much higher than the national benchmarks of 69% and 60% respectively.
- (2) Large Community Parks ranked 6th and Neighborhood Parks ranked 8th among facilities indicated by households for which their needs are being met 50% or less.
- (3) Among facilities that are most important to households, Neighborhood Parks ranked second and Large Community Park ranks fourth.
- (4) Homeowners' Associations meet some of the demand for close-to-home park space in selected neighborhoods.
- (5) When compared to communities in the area, Liberty Township has 490 citizens per active park acre compared to the average of 453 and median of 271. Therefore Liberty Township is less well served. A review of total park acres per 1000 residents, Liberty Township (7.35) is lower than both the average of 9.1 and the median of 7.9.
- (6) A comparison to typical level of service standards used throughout the region for developed park land, Liberty Township is well below the standard for all types of park land including neighborhood parks, community parks and county parks by about 244 acres. This situation will become considerably greater as the population grows from approximately 33,000 today to about 67,000 at build-out with a shortage of 759 acres.

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- (7) An analysis of the adopted level of service standards for Liberty Township for both developed and undeveloped open space in the township indicates the township will be short by 947 acres at build out. (This analysis considered land owned by Liberty Township, Butler MetroParks, Lakota Schools, LSO, private parks, Lakota YMCA, an HOA dedicated open space).
- (8) When asked to identify reasons preventing households from using parks, recreation facilities and programs in Liberty Township more, the residents indicated: (National benchmark in parenthesis)
- | | | |
|---|-----|-------|
| ▪ I do not know what is being offered | 54% | (23%) |
| ▪ I do not know locations of facilities | 36% | (13%) |
| ▪ Program or facility not offered | 26% | (13%) |
| ▪ Use facilities in other park systems | 25% | (15%) |
| ▪ Too far from our residence | 22% | (15%) |
| ▪ Do not have the right equipment | 13% | (7%) |
| ▪ Lack of quality programs | 12% | (7%) |

In every case, the response is higher than the national median, indicating a lower level of facilities, programs and awareness in Liberty Township.

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Table 16, Potential Park Locations, lists potential park locations, park type, acreage, and potential park features. These include existing township owned land, future HOA or subdivision open space and proposed park locations. These parks will total 670 acres of new park development.
- (2) Figure 32, Proposed Park Service Areas, illustrates the general locations of the parks identified in Table 16. The purple areas with the hatch pattern identify general locations for proposed Community Parks or open space. The magenta circles identify locations for Neighborhood Parks, primarily at proposed HOA sites to serve their neighborhoods. The light blue hatched areas indicate the general locations for Community or Neighborhood Parks at existing township owned land or proposed subdivision land. One is located at Wilhelmina Park, another at Sunrise Stables and at a park in the proposed Terry Farm development.

Table 16: Potential Park Locations

Park Location	Type	Potential Park Acres		Park Features
		Community or County Park Acres	Neighborhood Park Acres	
Existing Township Land				
Wilhelmina Park	Community	50		Active and passive park space with ballfields, picnic areas, trails, amphitheater, etc.
Sunrise Stables	Neighborhood		20	Playground, picnic shelter, game courts, parking, etc.
Summerlin	Neighborhood		7.5	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Future HOA or Subdivision Open Space				
Terry Farm	Community	20		To be developed in conjunction with the subdivision. Should include amenities for the neighborhood plus playgrounds, picnic areas, trails, etc.
Glenview Ridge	Neighborhood		4	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Lakeview Cove	Neighborhood		4.95	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Harbour Towne	Neighborhood		5	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Liberty Grand Villas	Neighborhood		8	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Proposed Park Locations				
West Central along State Route 747	Community	150		Active sports fields for the western portion of the Township, picnic areas, trails. Athletic organizations would operate and maintain the ballfields and game/practice fields. Should include multiple field complex for baseball/softball and for soccer/rectangular field sports. Also include picnic areas, playgrounds, trails, etc. Possibly a disc golf course.
Northeast Community Park	Community	50		Balance of active and passive facilities and activities for the north central portion of the Township

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Park Location	Type	Potential Park Acres		Park Features
		Community or County Park Acres	Neighborhood Park Acres	
North Central Neighborhood Park	Neighborhood		10	Neighborhood park to serve the subdivision
Gregory Creek Park	County	300		Passive nature and conservation themed greenbelt park with nature trails, scenic vistas of Gregory Creek, group picnic areas, disc golf, playgrounds, etc. Ideal location for a partnership with Butler MetroParks. Should link to Dudley Woods MetroPark and Cherokee Park.
Central Park - General area is southeast of Millikin at Maud Hughes	Community	20		Small Community Park to serve the surrounding subdivisions. Picnic areas, trails, playground, open fields, parking, restroom, etc.
North Central Community Park	Community	20		Small Community Park to serve the surrounding subdivisions. Picnic areas, trails, playground, open fields, parking, restroom, etc.
Total		610	59.45	

Figure 32: Proposed Park Service Areas



0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles February 11, 2009



Proposed Park Service Areas
Liberty Township Parks Master Plan
Butler County, Ohio

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- (3) The largest of the proposed parks is the Gregory Creek Park that would serve as a north-south greenway connector through the township and connect Dudley Woods MetroPark, Cherokee Park, and extend to the southern portion of the township. This could be acquired over time and would be primarily a passive park and open space. A greenway trail is the main feature of the space. The MetroParks of Butler County could be a partner or the primary owner of the park as an extension of Dudley Woods Park. The more developed portions could include group picnic areas, disc golf, playgrounds, and similar low impact features.
- (4) Figure 32 also illustrates the recommended locations for trail connections as described in the next section.
- (5) The proposed enhancement of the VOA Park by Butler MetroParks will meet some of the demand for additional County Park development.
- (6) Continue to work with developers to set aside useable or adequate land for parks and open space.
- (7) Develop Wilhelmina Park and other township owned land into neighborhood and community parks.
- (8) Acquire additional land for parks with emphasis on parks that will provide a balance of active and passive recreation and natural areas. Acquire land in strategic locations to provide good access to every planned residential area in the township.
- (9) Be proactive in land acquisition. Concentrate on land acquisition and then on development to secure land for the future of Liberty Township.
- (10) Develop an education and marketing campaign to inform residents of the parks, trails and services available. This should be an ongoing effort.

3. Trails

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) Walking and hiking trails were rated very high in the surveys including:

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- Highest among facilities that township residents have a need,
 - Highest among facilities that are most important to households,
 - Highest among facilities whose needs are being met less than 50% with 4,617 households having an unmet need,
 - “Providing Trail Systems” ranked third in the importance of functions that could be performed by Liberty Township
 - “Integrated Trail System” rated highest of potential improvements households would most like to have made in Liberty Township.
- (2) Development of walking and biking trails ranked highest among potential improvements to spend township funds.
- (3) Trails and linkages of parks, schools, business areas, and neighborhoods were discussed by several of the focus groups and identified as a high priority in the community workshops.
- b. Recommendations:
- (1) Continue to place emphasis on implementation of interconnecting trails in all new subdivisions.
- (2) Develop a Liberty Township Greenways Plan to identify the more specific potential routes, design guidelines, and implementation steps.
- (3) Develop an integrated trail system of bikeways and walkways throughout the township. Encourage sidewalks where trails are not available.
- (4) Develop additional walking trails in the parks and open spaces.
- (5) Figure 32 illustrates the recommended locations for trail connections between the parks and neighborhoods in the black dashed lines and arrows. The orange, red, blue and green lines indicate existing or planned sidewalks, shared use trails and hiking trails.
- (6) Promote and market the existing trail systems in the parks.

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- (7) Place a high priority on the acquisition of land to link parks, neighborhoods, schools and commercial areas in all new open space acquisition.
- (8) Develop a balance of natural, unpaved trails and paved bike/walk trails.
- (9) Establish a volunteer base to assist in the development and maintenance of trails.

4. Nature Areas and Nature Education

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) In the Community Attitude and Interest Survey, natural areas and nature parks rated the following:
 - “Preserving the environment and providing open and green space” ranked second in the functions that could be performed by Liberty Township with 74% indicating this function as “Very important” and rated highest for the functions that are “most important”.
 - “Natural areas and nature parks” ranked second highest in the facilities which households have a need with 75% of households indicating this need. This ranks much higher than national benchmarking of 51%. It also ranked fifth highest of the facilities that are “Most important” to households.
 - “More natural areas” ranked fifth in the improvements respondents would most like to have made to Liberty Township Parks.
 - “Nature Programs” ranked second for programs with the highest unmet need indicating that there are 3,414 households whose needs are being met 50% or less.
 - “Nature Programs” ranked fourth among recreation programs that are most important to households.
 - “Acquisition of land for open space/green space” received the second highest amount at \$23 when respondents were asked to allocate \$100 in new funding to various types of parks and recreation facilities. Development of trails was first at 25%.
- (2) The need for more nature education has been identified in the focus groups and workshops.

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b. Recommendations:

- (1) Preserve the environment and acquire more open space.
- (2) Continue to purchase open space with a priority on linkages between parks, schools, neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- (3) Partner with other organizations, such as Butler MetroParks, to provide nature education programs.
- (4) Acquire open space along Gregory Creek to serve as a central greenway through the township and to provide a north-south greenbelt. This will also allow for the preservation of the riparian habitats. MetroParks could be a logical partner with the township in acquisition, development and maintenance of this park land.
- (5) Develop a balance of active, passive and natural areas in park development.

5. Outdoor Athletic Fields

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) Most athletic fields in the community are provided by the Lakota Sports Organization (LSO) on land they own. Several soccer and baseball/softball fields are also provided at the nearby VOA Park which is within the service area of LSO and other organizations. Athletic leagues are provided by LSO or other organizations. School land is also used for games and practices.
- (2) The only athletic facilities on township owned parks are the soccer fields at Liberty Park on Yankee Road, which are used by the YMCA and LSO.
- (3) There is a very strong demand for athletic fields, especially for practice fields.
- (4) Several organizations utilize school land for their games and practices.
- (5) There are no athletic fields in the western half of Liberty Township.
- (6) The local sports organizations service areas include both Liberty and West Chester Townships.

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- (7) Liberty Township has a significantly higher percentage of children age 14 and under (30.2%) than Butler County (22.5%) and the State of Ohio (19.7).
- (8) Comparisons to other communities indicate that Liberty Township has more fields available in the sport's prime season than the average or median for other communities in the region. This analysis includes school land and LSO land.
- (9) The growth of sports such as lacrosse and field hockey, along with the trend for sports to extend their seasons, has strongly increased the demand for field space.

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Recognize that MetroParks of Butler County plans to further develop the VOA Park. MetroParks unveiled a new Enhancement Plan for the park on July 18, 2008 which indicates rearrangement of the park to include 8 baseball/softball fields and 23 soccer/multi-purpose rectangular fields with improved parking and access.
- (2) Develop additional athletic fields at existing park land or land to be acquired. Ideally the fields would be developed in complexes with multiple fields for maximum efficiency of management and maintenance, reduced travel time for families, and oversight by league organizations.
- (3) Light existing fields where possible to maximize use.
- (4) Potentially develop a synthetic turf field to be used by all sports at a new or existing park.

6. Programs

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) Minimal programming is currently being offered by the township with primary emphasis on community events such as: the 4th of July Festival, Parade and 5K Run; Easter Egg Hunt in Liberty Park; and the Fall Festival.
- (2) The community desires additional programming. "Providing programs for all residents" was identified 4th highest among functions that could be performed by the township with 58% of households indicating it as "very important." It ranked 5th in functions households

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considered as “most important” for Liberty Township to provide.

(3) Among functions that are most important for Liberty Township to provide, “Providing program” ranked behind (1) Preserving the environment and providing open/green spaces”, (2) Operating and maintaining parks and facilities”, (3) “Providing trail systems”, and (4) “Providing spaces for outdoor sports programs”.

(4) The current staff that is planning events also serves as the Township Human Resources Director and other duties, which limits the available time to dedicate toward programs and events.

(5) Sports and Arts Programs are provided by the following organizations:

- Sports Programs

Lakota Tomahawks and Stallions (Football & Cheerleading)

Lakota Sports Organization (Select Soccer, Recreation Soccer, Baseball, Flag Football, Softball)

Lakota Thunderbird Basketball

Lakota Family YMCA

Upward basketball and flag football

- Arts Programs

The Arts Council of West Chester and Liberty

Children’s Performing Arts of Lakota, Inc.

Fitton Center for the Creative Arts

Arts in Middletown

b. Recommendations:

(1) Hire a Recreation and Events Program Coordinator to take over the duties of planning the current events and to begin to provide programming and additional events for the residents of Liberty Township. Potential program areas to consider that may also be revenue producing include:

- Nature programs in conjunction with other agencies,
- Adult sports programs,

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- Special events and festivals,
 - Cultural arts programs such as art, dance, performing arts,
 - Summer concert series.
- (2) Coordinate with the Lakota School District for possible use of their indoor and outdoor facilities for programming.
 - (3) Supplement the Program Coordinator with internships from university students majoring in Recreation Administration as the demand for additional programs grows.
 - (4) Coordinate programs with MetroParks of Butler County and/or partner with MetroParks to provide all programming in the township parks for the township.
 - (5) Program User Satisfaction
 - Develop monitoring system for customer/user feedback on programs and facilities.
 - Continue to develop an increased level of program and facility statistics in monitoring use and program needs.
7. Outdoor Aquatics
- a. Observations and Analysis:
 - (1) The only community pool in the township requires membership to the Lakota YMCA.
 - (2) Use of outdoor swimming pools and water parks was the third highest unmet demand with 4,138 households.
 - (3) Outdoor swimming pools and water parks ranked 7th among facilities for which residents had the highest need.
 - (4) Swimming is the second highest participatory recreation activity in the country following exercise walking.
 - (5) Several subdivisions provide community swimming pools for their residents.
 - b. Recommendations - The Steering Committee has stated that the township should concentrate on other outdoor activities and not compete with organizations, neighborhoods, and private clubs that offer swimming.

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8. Indoor Programming and Recreation

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) Currently, the Lakota YMCA offers the primary indoor recreation programs and facility in the township.
- (2) Focus groups with seniors support the need for an indoor community facility. The seniors would like to have a facility in Liberty Township.
- (3) The community surveys identified that indoor swimming pools ranked fourth among the households whose needs are being met 50% or less. Indoor game courts ranked 15th.
- (4) Adult fitness and wellness programs ranked first in the programs needed by residents (59%) and ranked as having the highest unmet need.
- (5) The schools gyms and other spaces are used by community organizations for basketball leagues and other activities. The Schools Central Office controls the use of the spaces to verify that the organizations have proper liability insurance and to monitor fees and charges. The rates are very reasonable.

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Continue to partner with and support the YMCA to offer needed indoor recreation and fitness.
- (2) Maximize use of schools for indoor programming.
- (3) The Steering Committee has expressed that the township should concentrate on outdoor facilities and activities.

9. Maintenance

a. Observations and Analysis:

- (1) There is no Township staff dedicated to parks. The Township Services Department currently maintains the parks with four full time staff. The Services Department also oversees the roads, parks and cemeteries.
- (2) With the high demand for trails indicated in the survey and the focus groups, a much higher level of maintenance will

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be warranted to maintain and monitor the additional trail system.

- (3) The development of additional parks and programming to bring people into the parks will require that the township budget additional funds for maintenance. In addition, additional expertise will be required in the areas of horticulture, turf care, tree care, and playground safety inspections.

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Expand the maintenance department under the direction of the Service Foreman with the additional expertise as outlined above.
- (2) Provide additional maintenance staff and a viable operations budget as the facilities expand.
- (3) Develop a volunteer base to assist in the maintenance, development, and monitoring of the trail system.
- (4) Coordinate with MetroParks to take advantage of their broader expertise in parks maintenance.
- (5) Develop an adopt-a-park or trail program to promote volunteerism and community support.

10. Partnerships

a. Observations and Analysis - Several organizations in the community provide leisure and recreation programs for residents of all ages. This is especially true for youth sports activities, which have placed substantial financial and manpower resources into the youth sports facilities and programs.

b. Recommendations:

- (1) Reactivate the “Friends of Liberty Parks and Recreation” organization to be an advocate for this Master Plan and to raise funds through donations, endowments, trusts, and grants.
- (2) Establish a potential public/private partnership for the development of specialized facilities.
- (3) Continue partnerships with the Butler MetroParks, YMCA, Lakota Schools, youth sports organizations and other non-

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profit organizations for trail development and management, land acquisition, and park development.

- (4) Continue and open dialogue and partnerships with public and private schools for facility use and programs.
- (5) Continue an open dialogue among the various groups to cross market, coordinate, and avoid duplication of programs and activities.
- (6) Develop a brochure and use the township web site to list available programs, not just for township activities, but also for the YMCA, sports organizations, MetroParks, and private opportunities in the township. This could include a calendar of events. The process of developing and maintaining the calendar will also be a good tool to coordinate among the various organizations in planning for events and avoiding conflicts.