

7th Inning: Recreation, Parks and Open Space



The 7th Inning process varied somewhat from that of the other Working Groups, as this process was structured by guidelines of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), which funded a major portion of the overall BAMM Plan. This Inning presents the summary of the BAMM Plan Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan, which is provided as a “double header” under separate cover.

Overview

As the historic social and economic hub of Butler County, the City of Butler in many ways anchors the study area for this exciting and unique multi-municipal approach to comprehensive recreation, parks and open space planning. The five municipalities cover over 70 square miles of varying landscapes.

The five communities share a common history and collective sense of place, while displaying unique qualities. Ranging from dense urban communities in downtown Butler and East Butler to sprawling farmland in Summit and Penn Townships, the landscape is unique, varied and common to western Pennsylvania, typical of the Allegheny Plateau region. Central Butler County’s landscape is bisected by heavily wooded and steeply sloping stream corridors that give way to plateaus of rich fertile agricultural lands. Dotted along this landscape are the historic communities of the region including Herman, Meridian, Nixon, Renfrew, Lyndora, Highfield, East Butler Borough, and the City of Butler.

From a recreational stand point, all five communities share much in common. Each community currently owns at least one parcel of land which is earmarked as a recreational space. However, organized municipal recreational services are not currently present in any of the five communities, with the exception of the City of Butler’s Summer Parks Program. This deficiency is due largely to the lack of personnel, volunteer or paid, who would organize and operate recreational services through the municipalities. Beyond dedicated park maintenance staff in two of the communities, none of the municipalities have recreation personnel on staff. Additionally, none of the communities have acting parks and recreation boards.

Despite the lack of organized municipal recreation programming, many existing recreation facilities are offered to residents as spaces for general recreation. The City of Butler has the largest concentration of municipal recreation facilities and parks that contain the most diversity of use areas. Butler Township on the other hand, has the largest holdings of park land. The following table provides a brief review of the public recreation facilities in each municipality.



Table 7-1 – Existing Public Recreation Facilities

Butler Township	
	Butler Township Park
	Deshon Woods
	Alameda Park (Butler County facility)
	Dan Lohner Park
	Preston Property (to be transferred to the Township in 2010)
East Butler Borough	
	Baseball Park
	Parklet at 5th and Broad Street
	Parklet adjacent to the VFD
Penn Township	
	Renfrew Park
	Harcrest Park (not yet developed)
Summit Township	
	Park property on Bonniebrook Road (not yet developed)
	Butler-Freeport Trail (rail trail to be completed through Township in 2010)
City of Butler	
	Memorial Park
	Ritts Park
	South Side Playground*
	Institute Hill Playground
	Rotary Park
	Old High School Football Field*
	Diamond Park*
	Father Marinaro Park
	Whippo Avenue Park

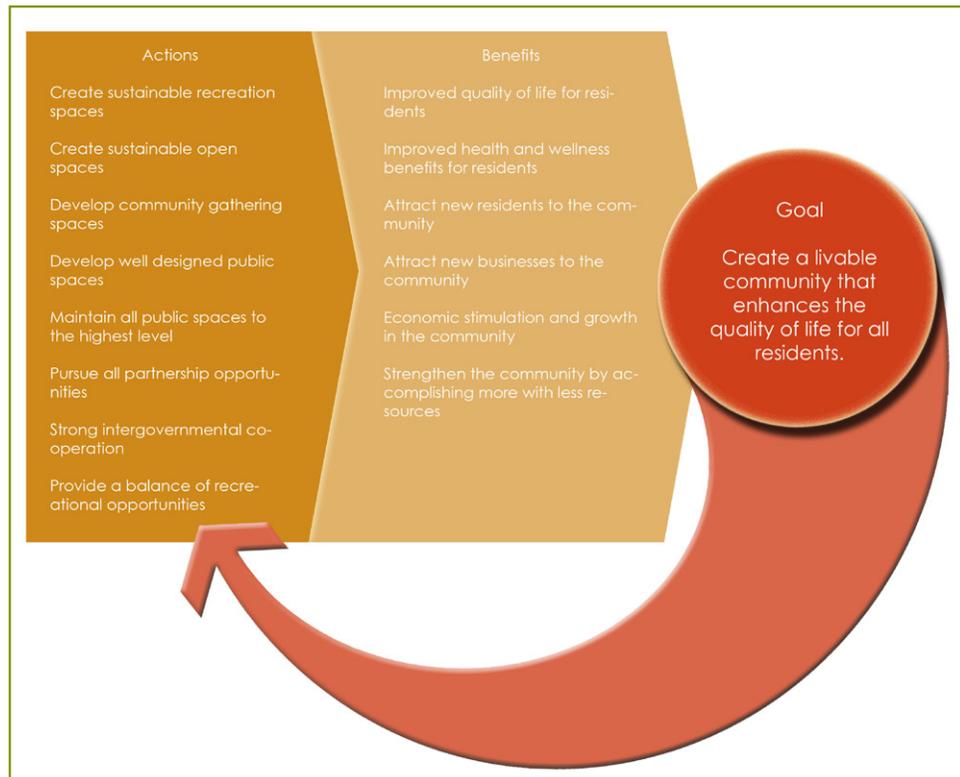
* Not City-Owned Parks

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Recreation & Parks Mission Statement and Goals

After considerable discussion and review, the Parks and Recreation Working Group settled on a slightly different approach to a standard mission statement. Rather than a narrative statement, the working Group developed a visual graphic as a way to rationally communicate a complex set of ideas. In this statement, the broad categories are refined by concise statements which demonstrate the desired actions needed to create the desired benefits which, in turn, achieve the ultimate goal of this plan. This format provides a clear cause and effect relationship between the key components of the mission statement.



This statement is a reflection of the region's direction, purpose and goals for the parks, recreational opportunities and open spaces over the next ten years. Because of the importance of the mission statement, it is imperative that it be re-evaluated annually to determine if continues to reflect the current initiatives being undertaken in the region.

The mission statement sets the foundation for the goals. A goal is a target that states exactly what must be done, who must do it, and when it must be accomplished. The following goals have been identified by the Working Group and represent the foundation upon which the recommendations of this plan are built:

Develop a comprehensive network of safe bicycle and pedestrian access routes in the greater Butler area.

Develop a unified and cohesive method to publicize existing recreation facilities, recreation programs and general recreational opportunities in the greater Butler area.

Develop partnerships among municipalities, local organizations and recreation providers to foster a culture of open communication and collaboration.

Maintain all municipal recreation facilities to the highest level of acceptable standards to ensure clean, safe and aesthetically please facilities.

Develop a plan to ensure the long-term financial sustainability for the operation, maintenance and development of parks, recreational facilities and programs.



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Preserve open space areas that contain features of natural and/or cultural significance.

Develop and maintain clean, safe and well appointed facilities that meet the needs of all users in the community.

Maintain the staff necessary to support the development, implementation and maintenance of all facilities and programs.

Build a culture of sustainability within the parks and recreation organization to promote green building practices and the use of alternative methods for park development and maintenance.

Develop a well rounded offering of programs for all age and user groups within the community.

Public Comments

To ensure that the voices of all residents were heard, three strategic methods of community input collection were implemented, as discussed in detail in the 2nd Inning. Monthly meetings were held with the Working Group, which was involved in every step of the planning process. The Working Group acted as an additional conduit of community input, as members provided a direct link between residents and the planning process.

The community survey offered a very unique view of the interests of the community regarding parks and recreation. Given the random sampling of the survey, the findings of the survey are statistically representative of the community at large. General highlights from the parks and recreation portion of the survey include:



Parks and Recreation Survey

- Almost 90% of those responding felt that the Butler area municipalities should partner in the development of parks and recreational programs and facilities.
- Existing parks and recreational facilities should be improved.
- The types of facilities that would get the most use are:
 - Walking trails
 - Restrooms
 - Nature trails
 - Picnic areas and tables
 - Bike trails
- Over 63% responded that public recreation is either important or very important to their family.
- 65.8% responded that their municipality should provide recreation programming for all ages, abilities and interest groups.
- Nearly 40% of responses indicate that they travel five or fewer miles for recreation facilities. This indicates that 40% or residents find their recreation facilities within the BAMM study area.
- Nearly half responded that the existing parks are in need of some improvements.
- The establishment of a regional trail system is a top interest.
- The types of programs residents are most interested in include:
 - Special events
 - Outdoor/nature programs
 - Educational programs
 - Cultural activities
 - Youth programs
 - Adult programs
 - Teen activities
 - Seniors programs
- Over 65% of residents support increasing funding towards recreation, parks and trails within the community.
- Nearly 65% of residents support additional monetary funding directed toward parks and recreation.

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Facilities and Open Space

Each of the five municipalities has some park property, either developed or undeveloped, within their community. Additionally, a number of regional recreation resources, both public and private, provide outlets for BMM residents. However, how do we know if the municipalities are adequately serving the needs of the community residents?

One method is to compare what is available in the community against a set of generally accepted national standards. In this case, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has two reference manuals which provide data on generally accepted recreation space standards. The following table provides a comparison of existing municipally-owned facilities compared to NRPA standards:

Table 7-2 - Butler Area Multi-Municipal Recreation Facility Comparison to NRPA Standards (Based on 1983 Guidelines)

Activity/Facility	One Facility, per the following population	Existing Facilities	Needed Facilities	Surplus/ (Deficiency)
Ball Fields	2,500	6	17	(11)
Basketball Cts.	5,000	7	8	(1)
Football Fields	20,000	1	2	(1)
Picnic Shelters	2,000	11	21	(11)
Soccer Fields	10,000	2	4	(2)
Tennis Courts	2,000	3	21	(18)
Volleyball Cts.	5,000	2	8	(6)

There are a number of other facilities in the region that are owned by other public entities, private parties, or non-profits. The following table compares all recreation facilities in the region to the recommended NRPA Standards.

Table 7-3 – Comparison all Facilities in Region

Activity/Facility	One Facility, per the following population	Existing Facilities	Needed Facilities	Surplus/ (Deficiency)
Ball Fields	2,500	43	17	26
Basketball Cts.	5,000	18	8	10
Football Fields	20,000	5	2	3
Picnic Shelters	2,000	33	21	12
Soccer Fields	10,000	12	4	8
Tennis Courts	2,000	12	21	(9)
Volleyball Cts.	5,000	10	8	2

This comparison indicates a substantial surplus of all facilities except tennis courts. However, a number of the facilities are in poor condition and are not usable; but they could still be available if properly maintained. Some of the facilities, such as basketball/volleyball courts and baseball/football fields, are overlapping and do not allow for both sports at the same time. Therefore, even though this appears to be a major surplus, it is not as substantial as it appears.

The NRPA standards are offered only as a general guideline to provide a basis for which to determine how existing parks compare to the “average” community. The only true method of determining if existing recreation facilities are adequate is to ask residents through the use of recreational surveys, program feedback forms and general observations of the use of recreational facilities.

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Facility and Equipment Maintenance

Maintenance of parks and other municipally-owned properties is essential to providing safe, usable and aesthetically -pleasing facilities and areas for residents and visitors. An efficient and effective recreation and parks maintenance program will enhance recreation amenities, save money, reduce liability, improve the life expectancy of the facilities, create an attractive park atmosphere, and foster environmental stewardship.

Currently, all park maintenance responsibilities are addressed by either the Road Department or the Parks Department, depending on the municipality. Due to limited staffing specific to park maintenance, all five municipalities currently follow a responsive plan rather than a preventative plan for maintenance. While staff members perform adequate routine maintenance in the parks, a formal maintenance plan would provide staff with the information needed to prioritize tasks and complete them efficiently and effectively. The formal plan would help to reduce liability risks and assist in the coordination of project planning.

The design and development of a **proactive maintenance plan** along with a responsive plan will keep the park areas and facilities in top condition. A responsive plan must be available to accommodate the unforeseen issues that will arise, and provide direction for the immediate repair or closing of a facility until repairs can be made. This reactionary plan requires specific attention to the pending issue and varies with each situation. A proactive plan is designed to eliminate major issues before they arise. The proactive approach takes into consideration both short- and long-range maintenance details. This will not eliminate all responsive issues, but will allow the issues to be handled more efficiently when they arise. Developing the proactive maintenance plan can seem like a monumental task, but by conquering it one step at a time, a strong feasible plan can be developed.

Risk management is a critical component of facility maintenance. DCNR defines risk management as “the process of making park areas and recreation facilities safer by conducting and documenting routine safety inspections, having procedures in place to correct problems and performing the necessary work promptly.”

A risk management plan covers all recreation areas, facilities, programs and services offered. Each component of the park or recreation area needs to be thoroughly inspected and compared to the standards of acceptable conditions, and then classified as a “safety risk” or “in good condition.” It is recommended that all communities implement a weekly visual inspection of park equipment, especially playground equipment, before and/or after heavy use periods. Any hazardous conditions should be noted and repaired immediately or closed, if repairs cannot be made at that time. More detailed monthly inspections should be conducted to ensure safe conditions of all facilities and equipment. A yearly playground audit is also highly recommended.

Each of the inspection methods discussed above must be documented and properly filed so that work tasks can be scheduled to address any issues noted and for quick reference in case of potential law suits involving the equipment.

Programming

Recreation programming is a valuable asset that communities can provide to their residents. Programs can touch the lives of residents who otherwise may have limited access to recreational opportunities. Communities that do extend recreation programming to their residents also foster an increased quality of life which has a long-term economic impact of increased property values supported by individuals wanting to move into a “livable” community.

Today, only minimal programming is offered by the five communities. Much of this is due to the limited staffing, lack of active park and recreation boards in all five communities, and the availability of funding. The following table provides a list of programs offered in the last five years by each municipality:



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Table 7-4 – Recreation programs offered within the last 5 years.	
Municipality	Program
Butler Township	
	American Red Cross Babysitter Training Program
	Hunter Safety Course
	Boater Education Course
	Breakfast w/Easter Bunny
	Breakfast w/Santa
City of Butler	
	Summer Playground Program
East Butler Borough	
	No programs offered at this time
Penn Township	
	Penn Township currently partners to support the following programs:
	Easter Egg Hunt
	Halloween Parade
	Breakfast w/Santa
	Community Day
Summit Township	
	No programs offered at this time

Despite the limited availability of recreational programs within the BAMB Plan area at this time, residents **overwhelmingly support community-based recreation**. According to the community survey, 65.75% of residents believe that the municipalities need recreation programs for all ages, abilities and interests, while an additional 29.18% indicated that municipalities should provide at least some basic programs. Thus, a total of 94.93% indicated that recreation should be provided by the municipalities. This is by far a clear message for the BAMB Plan area.

Information gathered through the key person interviews, community survey, public meetings and Working Group meetings indicated a strong desire for more recreation programming and improved recreation facilities. Improving and increasing recreation programming will require constant monitoring of each activity to assure its continued value to the residents or that other types of programs should be considered.

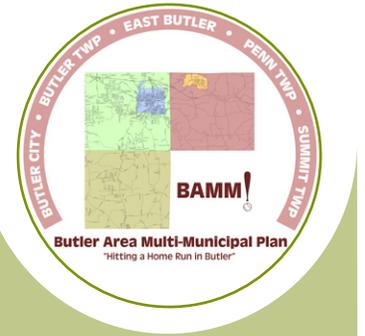
Considering all of the information provided through the various public input methods, it is clear that the most effective method to develop recreational programs will be to do so in a **collaborative manner**. Thus, it is imperative that the BAMB Plan communities explore the option of hiring a **Regional Recreation Director** to begin offering a variety of programs for all age groups.

Recommendations

The Working Group developed a broad list of goals and objectives for each of the major topic areas of this plan: Partnerships, Programs, Finance, Publicity, Facilities and Open Space, and Staffing. Periodically through the planning process, the list of objectives was reviewed, discussed and revised to reflect the most current findings of the Steering Committee and Working Group. Near the end of the planning process, the Working Group was asked to rank the list of objectives in order of priority or need of implementation. The Working Group was asked to rank these items on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being a high priority (with need to implement within 1 to 4 years time), 2 as a medium priority (implementation within 5 to 10 years) and 3 a low priority (implementation as needed or beyond 10 years).



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The prioritized list of objectives, provided below, should be used as a guide for the completion of projects in a logical and timely order.

The following pages outline the specific goals and objectives. Please note that the right hand column provides the priority of each objective as listed per goal. Following the list of goals and objectives is a table that provides an easy to follow list of objectives categorized by the implementation sequence of High, Medium and Low priority.

Develop a comprehensive network of safe bicycle and pedestrian access routes in the greater Butler area.		
	Objective	Priority
A	Prepare an Open Space and Greenways Plan for the BAMB Plan area. This plan will identify the location(s) for trail development and designated bicycle and pedestrian routes.	High
B	Develop a variety of non-motorized multi-use trails in existing parks.	High
C	Develop non-motorized multi-use trails connecting parks, neighborhoods and schools.	Medium
D	Develop non-motorized multi-use trails along key commercial corridors.	Medium
E	Work with PennDOT on future road improvement projects to develop walking and biking lanes along existing roadways.	High
F	Update municipal planning regulations to require the accommodation of walking and bicycle routes in all new developments.	High
G	Update municipal planning regulations to require sidewalks in all new developments.	High
H	Negotiate/require the dedication of rights-of-way, for trail development, in all new developments and all redevelopment projects.	High
I	Work with the Butler Freeport Community Trail Association to develop adequate parking areas at existing and proposed trail heads.	Medium

Develop a unified and cohesive method to publicize existing recreation facilities, recreation programs and general recreational opportunities in the greater Butler area.		
	Objective	Priority
A	Develop a publicity package aimed at promoting what is already here.	Medium
B	Work closely with County agencies to take advantage of the existing resource base in an effort to market what is here.	High
C	Develop a marketing scheme aimed at attracting new residents into the community by promoting the quality of life factors associated with the recreational resources of the community.	Medium
D	Link existing recreation provider websites (County departments, municipalities and private recreation providers) in order to create a network of common interests.	High
E	Develop and maintain a joint municipal website to advertise existing parks and recreational facilities as well as programs being offered in the community.	Medium
F	Promote the BAMB Plan area as a regional recreation destination.	Low
G	Develop a multi-municipal parks and recreation newsletter to advertise programs, park facilities and community events.	Low
H	Develop a public relations/marketing plan.	Low
I	Develop a logo for the proposed multi-municipal recreation organization.	Low

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Develop partnerships among municipalities, local organizations and recreation providers to foster a culture of open communication and collaboration.

	Objective	Priority
A	Butler City, Butler Township, East Butler Borough, Penn Township and Summit Township will work together in a joint partnership to advance recreational opportunities in the BAMB Plan area.	High
B	Establish a multi-municipal recreation board for the greater Butler area.	High
C	Work closely with the Butler County Parks and Recreation Department staff to build programs and share facilities.	High
D	Work closely with the County Tourism Bureau to market what is here.	Low
E	Create a resource for shared knowledge and coordination of recreational programming between municipalities and community based groups.	Medium
F	Work closely with the schools to share facilities.	Medium
G	Develop partnerships with athletic associations, scouting groups, churches, businesses, private recreation providers and other public recreation providers.	Medium
H	Develop relationships with local media outlets to aid in marketing efforts.	Low

Maintain all municipal recreation facilities to the highest level of acceptable standards to ensure clean, safe and aesthetically pleasing facilities.

	Objective	Priority
A	Each municipality participating in a multi-municipal recreation programming association will retain the responsibility for maintenance of their respective municipal facilities. Staffing will be critical to ensure facilities are maintained to the appropriate levels.	High
B	Each municipality must establish an appropriately-sized budget specifically for the maintenance of recreation facilities.	High
C	Each municipality must develop a facilities maintenance program that includes protocol for routine inspections, damage reporting and all standard maintenance items.	High
D	Develop a park maintenance manual.	Low

Develop a plan to ensure the long-term financial sustainability for the operation, maintenance and development of parks, recreational facilities and programs.

	Objective	Priority
A	Increase funding directed toward parks, recreational programs and trails/greenways.	High
B	Implement a mandatory dedication/fee in-lieu of ordinance in each community.	High
C	Create a funding mechanism and "rainy day funds" for the acquisition, development and maintenance of facilities.	Medium
D	Design, develop and operate facilities to be financially sustainable.	High
E	Design and develop recreational programs to be financially sustainable through user fees, sponsorship and donations.	High
F	Pursue all grant opportunities available for the development and acquisition of park facilities and programs.	High
G	Develop relationships with potential sponsors and foundations in order to support recreational opportunities within the community.	Medium
H	Establish a protocol/mechanism for the acquisition and/or appropriation of land for parks and open space.	Low
I	Develop a budget item for recreation programming.	High
J	Create separate line items for expenditures and revenues for each recreational program.	Medium
K	Evaluate mandatory dedication policies every five years to ensure the adequacy of the policy language and fee.	Medium

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Preserve open space areas that contain features of natural and/or cultural significance.		
	Objective	Priority
A	Promote the preservation of valuable open space through the encouragement of tax-based and development rights-based landowner incentives.	High
B	Municipalities must be vigilant for potential land acquisition opportunities as a means of preserving valuable open space areas.	Medium
C	Promote the preservation of steep hillsides, streams and waterways and other environmentally-sensitive areas.	High
D	Develop greenway corridors.	Low
E	Protect the quality of streams and riparian corridors.	Medium
F	Develop an invasive species management plan and implement plan within parks and open spaces.	Low



Develop and maintain clean, safe and well-appointed facilities that meet the needs of all users in the community.		
	Objective	Priority
A	All communities must focus on improving existing park facilities.	High
B	Penn Township – implement the master plan for Harcrest Park.	High
C	Butler Township – prepare master plans for Butler Township Park, Deshon Woods and the Preston estate property.	High
D	Butler Township - Explore the opportunity to link Butler Township Park to Highfield in order to create a large recreation area/open space network.	Medium
E	Summit Township – Develop the existing 10-acre parcel on Bonniebrook Road and connect park with the Butler-Freeport trail via a walking/bicycle path. Potential improvements to include: pavilions, restrooms, playground, parking area, horseshoes, bocce, and/or volleyball.	High
F	Butler City – implement the master plans for Memorial Park and Father Marinaro Park.	High
G	East Butler Borough – develop a master plan for the parklet at the corner of Broad Street and 5th Avenue.	High
H	Park improvements to include: Walking trails, Nature trails, Bike trails, Hiking trails, Restrooms, Sledding areas, Environmental education areas, Picnic areas/shelters, Playgrounds, Outdoor amphitheater, Natural areas, Swimming	High/Medium
I	Future park improvements must plan for a diversity of facilities in order to appeal to a wider variety of users.	Medium/Low
J	Municipalities shall be vigilant for potential acquisition or donation of land for the expansion of recreational spaces.	Medium/Low
K	Municipalities must work together to allow for the shared use of facilities.	High
L	Create a balance of active and passive recreational areas in the BAMM Plan area.	Medium
M	Do not overdevelop existing parks with active use facilities, maintain a balance of active and passive areas within the parks.	Medium
N	Maintain facilities to the highest level of acceptable standards.	High
O	Build community ownership in the parks through outreach opportunities and partnering with residents for facility development and maintenance.	High
P	Conduct routine inspections of all park facilities and areas to ensure safety and limit liability issues.	High
Q	Establish a multi-municipal public activities center to provide year-round activities.	Low
R	Provide facilities for all ages and user abilities.	Medium
S	Develop multi-functional facilities which can accommodate multiple uses and user groups.	Medium
T	Ensure that all facilities meet ADA requirements.	High
U	Develop risk management guidelines.	Low



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Maintain the staff necessary to support the development, implementation and maintenance of all facilities and programs.

	Objective	Priority
A	Hire a fulltime multi-municipal recreation director for the BAMM Plan area.	High
B	Develop a multi-municipal recreation organization for the purpose of developing and administering recreation programs.	High
C	Each municipality is responsible for maintaining their respective facilities and ensuring that staffing is appropriate for the maintenance tasks required.	High
D	Work with colleges and universities for internship opportunities.	Medium/Low
E	Establish a list of volunteers willing to donate time, service and materials toward park improvements and program development.	High
F	Establish a "Friends of the Park" organization in each municipality and/or for each respective park (recreation) facility.	Medium/Low
G	Encourage staff to attend seminars, conferences and workshops.	High
H	Develop job descriptions for existing and future staff.	Medium
I	Develop a detailed operations manual.	Low
J	Develop a personnel policy manual.	Low
K	Implement alternative hiring practices (work study programs, PPC, WorkForce, etc.	Low

Build a culture of sustainability within the parks and recreation organization to promote green building practices and the use of alternative methods for park development and maintenance.

	Objective	Priority
A	Strive to implement sustainable practices in everything we do.	High
B	Explore sustainable building options in all future structures.	Medium
C	Manage storm water via the use of vegetated swales, bio-swales, rain gardens and other methods to promote on-site infiltration.	Medium
D	Develop master plans for parks that protect sensitive natural areas and work with the sites natural systems.	Medium
E	Use recycled and sustainable products within park operations, concessions, restrooms, cleaning products, etc.	Medium
F	Promote a culture of recycling within the parks by providing ample recycle containers for park patrons.	High
G	Evaluate equipment at time of purchase for fuel efficiency and strive to purchase the most efficient equipment for the appropriate application.	Medium

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Develop a well rounded offering of programs for all age and user groups within the community.

	Objective	Priority
A	Develop a multi-municipal recreation programming director position by completing the following tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a Peer-to-Peer study to assess the interest and practicalities associated with developing a multi-municipal recreation organization. • Apply for a Circuit Rider to assist with funding a recreation director. • Establish a multi-municipal recreation organization with a Board of Directors made up of representatives from each participating municipality. The recreation director will be responsible to and report to the Board. 	High
B	Provide programs that meet the needs of all community residents regardless of age and ability.	Medium
C	Provide seasonal programs for year-round activities.	Medium
D	Establish user fees that ensure long-term financial sustainability of municipal recreation programs.	Medium
E	The municipalities need to offer recreation programs for all ages, abilities and interests. Educational programs, Cultural programs, Special events, Nature/outdoor programs, Arts and Crafts, Youth programs, Adult programs, Teen programs, Family-oriented programs, Seniors programs, Sports programs	High/Medium
F	Expand youth athletic opportunities not associated with organized sports clubs, associations and the schools.	Medium
G	Provide recreational opportunities for low-income families.	Medium
H	Provide non-competitive youth activities.	Medium
I	Establish neighborhood-based activities for all age groups in order to build a stronger sense of community.	Medium
J	Develop a coordinated plan to provide recreation program opportunities.	High
K	Maintain a balance of “bottom up” and “top down” recreation – foster recreation groups and volunteer groups while also building municipal recreation (cooperation among groups).	High
L	Work with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to provide opportunities for hunting areas/ programs.	Low
M	Work with the Butler Freeport Community Trail and other organizations to develop regional geocaching opportunities.	Low
N	Provide opportunities for indoor and outdoor activities.	Medium
O	Utilize all available existing facilities for program venues.	Medium
P	Insure that the program agenda is inclusive and stresses diversity.	Medium
Q	Develop a program policy manual.	Low
R	Develop and maintain a uniform standard of program record keeping to track attendance, program evaluation, successes, failures, etc.	Low

