

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A municipality's parks, recreation and open space needs are best evaluated by using a combination of techniques. One technique is to refer to population-based guidelines that were developed by the National Recreation and Parks Association. Surveying the opinions of the people who use the system is another valid approach. A third method is to interview municipal administrators, local athletic organizations and others who plan and implement local recreation programs. Amity Township used all three of these techniques as part of this study.

### **National Recreation and Park Association Guidelines**

How much parkland is enough? The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has traditionally recommended that municipalities provide a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of active recreation land per 1,000 residents (1.25 to 2.5 acres of neighborhood parks plus 5.0 to 8.0 acres of community parks). "Active recreation land" as it applies to these guidelines means parks with athletic facilities and/or playground equipment, as opposed to land preserved primarily for its environmental amenities. NRPA no longer relies strictly on these guidelines because of the growing use of parks by residents of two or more municipalities and the importance today of greenways and other non-sports oriented facilities. While statistical guidelines are one indicator, they should never be considered definitive. NRPA parkland guidelines should only be used as part of a larger needs analysis that also incorporates local perceptions and preferences.

NRPA guidelines distinguish between neighborhood parks and community parks. These two types of parks are defined in this Plan as follows:

- *Neighborhood Parks* are smaller recreation areas designed to primarily serve the immediate residential area. They typically include playground equipment, picnic tables and perhaps basketball courts or small athletic fields suited mainly for informal use. Most people who use a neighborhood park arrive there on foot or by bike rather than by car.
- *Community Parks* are larger areas of intense activity that serve the entire municipality and perhaps residents of other municipalities as well. Among other recreation facilities, they typically include athletic fields and courts suitable for organized, competitive sports. More people tend to arrive at community parks by car than by foot or bike.

The following table lists community parks and neighborhood parks in Amity Township. Monocacy Hill Recreation Area (a special use area), undeveloped publicly-accessible open spaces and the Amity Elementary School property are also included to show the full range of parks, recreation facilities and public open spaces available to Amity Township residents.

**TABLE 7  
EXISTING RECREATION AREAS  
Amity Township - 2000**

RECREATION AREA	ACRES	OWNER	REFERENCE NUMBER ON EXISTING RECREATION AREAS MAP (Page 29)
<b>Community Parks</b>			
Lake Drive Park & Recreation Area	25.0	Amity Township	1
Hill Road Recreation Area	10.0	Amity Township	2
Myron S. Wheeler Recreation Area (Township Building Fields)	6.0	Amity Township	3
Amity Park Road Recreation Area	7.0	Amity Township	8
Amity Athletic Club Pool and Recreation Area	<u>27.0</u>	Amity Athletic Club	15
	75.0		
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>			
Locust Grove Recreation Area	0.4	Amity Township	5
<b>Special Use Areas</b>			
Monocacy Hill Recreation Area	420.0	Amity Township	7
<b>Undeveloped Publicly-Accessible Open Spaces</b>			
Old Airport Road Open Space	12.0	Amity Township	4
Locust Grove Open Space	2.0	Amity Township	6
Cider Mill Open Space	9.0	Amity Township	9
Greenbriar Open Space	49.0	Amity Township	10
Open Space Adjacent to Sewage Treatment Plant	4.5	Amity Township	11
Open Space Along Schuylkill River	28.0	Amity Township	12
Weavertown Road Open Space (Haas Farm)	68.0	Amity Township	13
Woods Edge Open Space	<u>17.0</u>	Homeowners Assoc.	14
	189.5		
<b>Schools</b>			
Amity Elementary Center	27.0	Daniel Boone S.D.	16

Source: Amity Township, URDC

### Neighborhood Parks

The 0.4-acre Locust Grove Recreation Area is the only neighborhood park in Amity Township. The traditional NRPA guidelines recommend that municipalities provide 1.25 to 2.5 acres of neighborhood parks per 1,000 residents. NRPA guidelines suggest that, at an estimated 2000 population of 8,848 (See the Community Profile section of this Plan), Amity should have between 11 and 22 acres of neighborhood parkland. As shown on Table 8, additional neighborhood park acreage would be needed in the future to accommodate population growth.

TABLE 8  
 COMPARISON TO TRADITIONAL NRPA  
 NEIGHBORHOOD PARKLAND GUIDELINES  
 Amity Township - 2000-2010 (in acres)

	@ ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION (8,848)	@ PROJECTED 2005 POPULATION (11,757)	@ PROJECTED 2010 POPULATION (13,788)
Current Neighborhood Parkland (2000)	0.4	0.4	0.4
Neighborhood Parkland Required to Meet NRPA Guideline (1.25 to 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents)	11.1 to 22.1	14.7 to 29.4	17.2 to 34.5
Deficit	10.7 to 21.7	14.3 to 29.0	16.8 to 34.1

Source: URDC

The 1993 Amity Township Parks and Recreation Plan calls for establishing neighborhood parks in several areas to address Amity's neighborhood parkland deficit. However, neighborhood parks have not been a high priority in Amity in recent years. Under its mandatory dedication regulations, the Township has preferred to accept fees rather than land because: a) small isolated parcels of open space can be difficult to maintain, b) the Township's emphasis has been on improving and expanding its community-wide recreation facilities, and c) Lake Drive Park and Recreation Area, which is really a community park, also serves as a neighborhood park for the large surrounding residential area.

Since the 1993 Parks and Recreation Plan was prepared, two new residential subdivisions have resulted in 58 acres of publicly-accessible open space preserved and dedicated to the Township: 9 acres at Cider Mill and 49 acres at Greenbriar. An additional open space of 17 acres at Woods Edge was preserved and dedicated to a homeowners association. Some of this land has active recreation potential and some does not. However, should the Township's priorities change, much of this is land could be developed into neighborhood parks if any such demand arises. Furthermore, if necessary, Amity Township could begin to accept more land instead of fees under its mandatory dedication regulations. With these two options available, Amity does not have a need in the foreseeable future to acquire additional acreage for neighborhood parks.

### Community Parks

Traditional NRPA guidelines recommend that municipalities have between 5.0 and 8.0 acres of community parkland per 1,000 residents. NRPA guidelines suggest that, at an estimated 2000 population of 8,848, Amity should have between 44 and 71 acres of community parkland. As described in the Community Profile section, the projections prepared for this Plan call for Amity's population to increase to 11,757 by 2005. This translates into a need for between 59 and 94 acres at the traditional NRPA guideline of 5.0 to 8.0 acres of community parkland per 1,000 residents. Using the same NRPA guideline, Amity would need between 68 and 109 acres of community parkland at its projected 2010 population of 13,788.

**TABLE 9  
COMPARISON TO TRADITIONAL NRPA COMMUNITY  
PARKLAND GUIDELINES**

**Amity Township - 2000-2010 (in acres)**

	@ ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION (8,848)	@ PROJECTED 2005 POPULATION (11,757)	@ PROJECTED 2010 POPULATION (13,788)
Current Community Parkland (2000)	75	75	75
Community Parkland Required to Meet NRPA Guideline (5.0 to 8.0 acres per 1,000 residents)	44 to 71	59 to 94	69 to 110
Surplus / Deficit	+ 31 to + 4	+ 16 to - 19	+ 6 to - 35

Source: URDC

Amity Township currently has 75 acres of community parkland as follows:

- Lake Drive Park and Recreation Area (25 acres)
- Hill Road Recreation Area (10 acres)
- Myron S. Wheeler Recreation Area (6 acres)
- Amity Park Road Recreation Area (7 acres)
- Amity Athletic Club (27 acres) - This site serves all the functions of a community park even though Amity Township does not own it.

Table 9 shows that, compared to traditional NRPA guidelines, Amity currently has sufficient community parkland. Table 9 also shows Amity is short by a maximum of 19 acres of community parkland considering the Township's projected 2005 population of 11,757. This deficit grows to a maximum of 35 acres compared to Amity's projected 2010 population of 13,788.

In some municipalities, this shortfall would be cause for acquiring additional land. However, Amity is fortunate to own two conveniently located, undeveloped parcels that are well suited for active recreation and can be developed into community parkland in the future as needed: Weavertown Road Open Space (68 acres) and Old Airport Road Open Space (12 acres).

While the future of the Airport Road site has not been discussed in detail, it is the Township's stated intention to pursue development of publicly-accessible recreation facilities at the Weavertown Road site. Devoting slightly more than one-half of this 68-acre site to active recreation would be enough to meet the 35-acre maximum projected 2010 deficit for community parkland shown on Table 9. To address any future shortfalls in community parkland acreage, Amity only needs to ensure that publicly-accessible recreation facilities are developed on land the Township already owns for this purpose. Amity Township does not need to acquire any additional land for community parks.

## **Key Person Interviews**

As part of this needs analysis, interviews and discussions were held with a variety of people who plan, oversee and implement recreation services in Amity Township, including representatives from the following entities, among others:

- Amity Township Board of Supervisors
- Amity Township Park and Recreation Board
- Amity Township Planning Commission
- Amity Township Manager
- Daniel Boone School District
- Douglassville 2010 Committee
- Monocacy Hill Conservation Association
- Amity Athletic Club
- Douglassville Youth Baseball Association
- Daniel Boone Coaches Association
- Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County
- Amity Heritage Society

Discussions involved every aspect of recreation in the Township, including parks, recreation facilities, open space conservation, historic preservation, recreation programming, maintenance and funding. The following is a summary of the primary needs reported during these interviews:

### Parks and Recreation Facilities

- Amity needs indoor recreation facilities to supplement the inadequate gym at Amity Elementary School and to provide multi-purpose rooms for exercise, community meetings and related activities.
- Any plans for indoor recreation facilities need to be coordinated with plans that the St. Paul's UCC Church on Weavertown Road has for constructing its own community center.
- Amity has an immediate need for an additional full-size baseball field for 13 to 15 year old players.
- There is an immediate need to replace the T-Ball baseball field that will be lost as construction begins on the new school building at the Amity Elementary Center.
- In the next five years, at least one additional Little League baseball field will be necessary in Amity for players 12 years old and under.

- Parking is inadequate for peak use at Lake Drive Park and Recreation Area, Hill Road Recreation Area.
- More parking is needed now at Monocacy Hill Recreation Area. The future of the small, deteriorated structure on-site should be determined promptly. In the longer run, composting toilets should replace the current pit toilets at this park.
- The Township and the athletic associations need to continue working together to provide additional improvements and amenities at Lake Drive Park and Recreation Area, Hill Road Recreation Area and Myron S. Wheeler Recreation Area (the Township Building Fields).
- The future location of a new middle school for the Daniel Boone School District needs to be determined.
- The new Birdsboro Library site offers the potential for a walking path, tennis courts, skate boarding and other activities in conjunction with a library building.

#### Greenways

- Amity needs greenway links to the Thun Trail from Monocacy Hill Recreation Area and from elsewhere in the Township.
- Any greenway planning should include the tunnels beneath the abandoned railroad that provides pedestrian access between Douglassville and Old Morlatton Village.

#### Open Space Conservation

- The growth and development threatening Amity Township's rural environment needs to be moderated and more strictly controlled.

#### Historic Preservation

- Amity Township needs to take a strong stance on protecting historic structures from demolition.
- The key to the Douglassville 2010 vision is convincing PennDOT to make U.S. 422 West two-way traffic so that U.S. 422 East can return to being a pedestrian friendly local road.

#### Recreation Programming

- There is major unrealized potential for enhancing environmental education programming at Monocacy Hill Recreation Area.

- Indoor soccer, lacrosse and field hockey are examples of sports whose potential in Amity are being constrained because playing facilities are not available.
- There is a demand in Amity for providing swimming lessons to Township residents.

#### Recreation Administration

- Reliance on volunteer labor alone makes expansion of programming and/or facilities at Monocacy Hill Recreation Area very difficult.
- A method is needed to track how many people use Monocacy Hill Recreation Area.
- Amity needs to replace its current summer playground leaders with professionals from the Reading YMCA.

#### Recreation Maintenance

- More infield mix and grading is needed because heavy usage and erosion have deteriorated the infields/base paths on some Township-owned baseball fields.
- Safety inspections of the playground equipment at Township parks need to be more formalized and more frequent.

#### Recreation Funding

- Amity needs a well-planned, prioritized capital budget to guide the future use of mandatory dedication revenues that the Township receives in lieu of recreation land.

### **Public Survey**

In addition to population-based guidelines and key person interviews, public surveys are another important technique for assessing needs. Township officials and other community recreation providers have valuable perspectives. But it is also very instructive to find out what is on the minds of the people who use the parks and attend the recreation activities available in the Township. In June 1999, Amity Township Amity conducted a mail survey of all households in the municipality. The highlights from the results of this “customer survey” are summarized below.

1. Men and women between 30 and 49 years old were the largest age group represented among households that responded to the survey, at 18% each.
2. Survey respondents indicated that they and their families participate in hiking and walking most frequently. Bicycling was the second most frequently mentioned recreation activity

and outdoor sports like baseball, softball and golf were next. Drama, water skiing, cross-country skiing and handball/racquetball were the least frequently cited activities—each was noted by less than 1% of survey respondents.

3. Lake Drive is the most frequently used park in Amity; 37 % of respondents said they use it either weekly or monthly during the peak season. Monocacy Hill Recreation Area was a close second (33%). The Township Baseball Fields ranked third (26%). 80% of the respondents indicated that they never use the Locust Grove Recreation Area. This is not surprising for a strictly neighborhood-oriented park. (Hill Road Recreation Area was not fully operational at the time of the survey.)
4. Respondents indicated that the top five most needed recreation facilities in Amity are hiking and walking trails; bicycling trails; indoor recreation space; playground apparatus and natural areas. According to respondents, the five most needed recreation programs are holiday events/festivals/concerts; swimming; aerobics and exercise; playground programs; and trips and tours tied with arts & crafts and hobbies.
5.
  - a) 36% believe the township has an inadequate supply of parks and recreational facilities; 54% disagree and 10% have no opinion.
  - b) 52% believe their neighborhood is adequately served by recreation facilities.
  - c) 48% feel the supply of organized recreation activities/programs is inadequate; 21% have no opinion.
  - d) 63% believe the overall maintenance of the parks is good.
  - e) 61% agree that there should be more sports and recreational programs for youth.
  - f) “No opinion” was the most frequently cited reply in regard to the need for recreation opportunities for senior citizens.
  - g) 86% believe private land developers should be required to assist in development of recreation facilities as part of new subdivisions.
  - h) 67% think there is an insufficient number of indoor recreational facilities open to the public.
  - i) 76% agree with charging user fees to help defray the costs of specialized recreation programs.
  - j) 68% think funding for recreation should be expanded to provide for recreation personnel, expanded programs and facilities.
  - k) 40% agree there is a need for more sports fields in their area; 28% have no opinion.
  - l) 54% think the number of playgrounds in their area is inadequate.
  - m) 66% believe efforts should be made to connect schools, parks and playgrounds with multipurpose trails.
  - n) 64% believe that the existing trail along the Schuylkill River should be expanded and connected to the Monocacy Hill trails.
  - o) 73% believe abandoned railroad right-of-ways should be acquired for use as trails.
  - p) 88% think that critical or unique natural areas should be acquired or otherwise protected for parkland and open space purposes.
  - q) 61.3% believe an outdoor amphitheater should be established to accommodate activities.



- r) 79% think recreation facilities should be lighted for night time use, with time restrictions.
  - s) Only 10% agree that there is no need for additional public recreation facilities because they use private recreation facilities.
6. Respondents believe the three most important actions the township should implement to satisfy the recreation needs of households are: more natural areas for preservation; a community-wide trail systems; and an indoor recreation center.