

Introduction

I. Introduction

A. The Need for a Plan

The Township of Middletown is fortunate to offer an abundance of parks and recreation opportunities for its residents. Parks are provided by the Township, Monmouth County, State and Federal governments. The Township primarily provides the neighborhood and community parks to serve the closer to home needs of residents. The Township and Schools provide most of the active recreation facilities in the community. Monmouth County, the State of New Jersey and the Federal Government provide larger and more specialized facilities and parks that attract visitors from the region. Overall, the Township provides 862 acres of park land at 43 sites, and an additional 413 acres of open space at 23 sites. Over 200 acres of land located at Middletown Board of Education sites are used for active recreation. Unique facilities provided by the Township include the Middletown Swim and Tennis Club, Middletown Arts Center, Poricy Park Nature Preserve, and the Senior Center, gym, classrooms and park facilities at Croydon Hall.

The Monmouth County Park Commission provides an additional 2,496 acres at nine parks within the Township. Over 2000 acres of park land are provided by the State and National Governments at the Leonardo State Marina, Swimming River Reservoir, and Gateway National Recreation Area.

Even with all of this park land, the Township Committee and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs have been hearing of specific unmet needs from residents, especially for athletic field improvements, an indoor swimming pool, an ice rink, and the need to improve the existing parks. The Department and Township responded by commissioning this Master Plan process to verify these needs and to determine any other gaps in the delivery of parks and recreation services. The process has been citizen driven through a wide variety of methods to gain information on the specific needs of individuals and organized user groups. Once the gaps and needs were identified, a "Vision for the Future" was developed and then a series of action strategies were developed to accomplish the vision.

B. A Bold Vision

1. Chicago Architect and Urban Planner Daniel H. Burnham best summed up the philosophy of a bold vision by the following quote "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty. Think big."

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2. With this preface, the leadership of Middletown Township, The Advisory Board of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, the Master Plan Steering Committee, and the Consultant, Brandstetter Carroll Inc., present this bold vision for the long-term future of parks, recreation and open space in the Township of Middletown.

C. Planning Process

The planning process for the Middletown Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan included the following components.

1. A review of the previous studies that pertain to the delivery of parks and recreation facilities and services in Middletown.
2. A review of the population and land use trends for the Township.
3. Preparation of a parks and recreation facilities and programs inventory, including a discussion of facilities by park type and a discussion of parks and recreation facilities provided by the County, Township, and other providers.
4. The preparation of a Comprehensive Needs Analysis based on recreation facility goals, public workshops, surveys of the general public and of focus groups with specific interest groups.
5. Benchmarking to other parks and recreation agencies throughout New Jersey to develop comparisons to their budgets, programs, athletic field, and staffing.
6. Detailed analysis of three specific issues including: artificial turf athletic fields; indoor ice rink; and an indoor swimming pool.
7. Review and oversight by a Master Plan Steering Committee with representatives of the community and Township.
8. Recommendations for improvements to existing parks.
9. Recommendations for land and new parks.
10. Preparation of conceptual plans for some of the recommendations.
11. An Action Plan which identifies the recommended tasks and improvements, responsible party, and potential funding sources for the proposed recommendations.

D. Why are Parks Important?

Here are some reasons why this Master Planning effort, additional planning and the future of parks, recreation and open space in Middletown are very important:

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1. The State, County, Township, and other organizations in Middletown manage approximately 5,806 acres of land designated for parks, recreation, and open space purposes. The schools operate several additional acres of campus and recreational area. These agencies have the responsibility to manage this land in an efficient manner that is consistent with the health, safety and welfare of the community.
2. For many residents, parks provide their only access to the natural environment. For all residents they provide natural and active outdoor recreational opportunities.
3. The quality of a community's parks and recreation system is viewed as one of the indicators of the overall quality of life.
4. Property values around parks tend to be considerably higher than other areas, thereby making an annual contribution to the community in the form of higher property tax revenues, as well as additional profits to the owners at point of sale. More valuable properties also tend to be maintained at a higher level, improving the appearance of the communities.

