

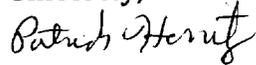
April 1, 2009

Mr. Robert J. Donchez
President
Bethlehem City Council
10E Church Street
Bethlehem PA 18018

Dear President Donchez:

Attached is an addendum to the most recent Parks and Recreation Plan requested by council and compiled by the Recreation Commission. This report reflects input from citizens of the city and results in a series of recommendations for councils' consideration. Also included is the list of "shovel-ready projects" referred to in the report.

Sincerely,



Patrick Herrity
Chairman, Recreation Commission

Enclosures

City of Bethlehem Recreation Commission
Addendum to the Parks and Recreation Plan of 2007

This is a report compiled at the request of city council to supplement the Parks and Recreation Plan of 2007. The plan while adequate for legal purposes lacked a citizen's input component and a vision of the role Parks and Recreation could play in the lives of the citizens of Bethlehem.

The last plan adopted by council occurred in 1975. After a number of short-term goals were achieved Parks and Recreation existed without an overarching view of how to proceed. This is not to say improvements were not made. The list is long and includes improvements to the Ice House to create a new recreation facility, the creation of many new fields for organized sports and new playground equipment in a number of neighborhood parks. What is notable is that they were accomplished during a time of shrinking Parks and Public Property budgets, a result of a shrinking tax base and stagnant developer fees.

The Parks and Recreation Plan of 2007 consists of a very comprehensive inventory of our parks and programs. It also presents a list of goals and recommendations along with an action plan delineating how to achieve these goals. Many of these plans are already underway, planned but not funded or considered short term in nature. All these projects are laudable and have our support but do not fully reflect the desires of many of our citizens.

We used information gathered from The Comprehensive Plan's Public Forum held recently at Sand Island as our primary source material. In trying to get a handle on all this information it became apparent that while Parks and Recreation was but one discussion group our park system was mentioned in almost every other group. Be it Housing and Neighborhoods, Downtown Revitalization and Economic Development, Environmental Protection or Historic, Arts and Tourism, our parks, in the minds of our neighbors had a role to play in making each of these topics a success.

In the Housing and Neighborhoods discussion group, they spoke of the need for more community space within the neighborhoods, a "neighborhood commons" for events, gatherings, relaxation and contemplation. Any neighborhood blessed with a park knows that properly designed it could serve just this purpose.

The Historic Preservation, Arts and Tourism group stated that there should be more room for public display of art and more performance space for artists and felt using our parks would be one solution. Protecting the Historic Structures along the Monocacy Creek was a concern. Restoring the original stream bank/riparian buffer and flood plain was mentioned as a possible solution, no doubt the work of the Parks Department. Another festival was envisioned.

In the area of environmental protection the towpath and canal along the Lehigh were mentioned along with the need for better maintenance and trash cleanup. There was a feeling that our parks needed more green infrastructure. They saw a

need to protect the Monocacy and Saucon Creeks, both of which flow extensively through our park system.

The greenway and the Lehigh River were mentioned for their role in downtown revitalization by making center city a more pleasing place to visit.

The Parks and Recreation discussion began with the recognition that many of our parks have been neglected both in capital expenditures and in the level of maintenance they currently receive. While the recent purchase of the greenway was timely many felt that no new purchases should be made until all our parks could be raised up to modern levels of safety, aesthetics and usefulness. They felt surveillance cameras would be prudent to protect our investment.

Among those participants new to the city there was a perceived need to better publicize events and future plans and a need for better signage in and throughout our parks and along our trails. To in part prove this point many of the suggestions put forth on this evening were projects already planned by the city.

There was a concern for the safety of young people getting to our parks, specifically the skate park. There was interest in extending the trail along Monocacy Creek. Poop bag standards at parks were seen as important.

A second skate park was envisioned for the north side. Some saw a need for more programming for our at risk youth. Community centers for both the north side and south side were mentioned. An indoor swimming pool to accommodate the needs of our growing senior population was suggested. There were many more suggestions for improvement, many ideas on how to creatively enhance our parks and greenways.

Suffice to say Parks and Public Property has a role to play in almost every aspect of our city's ongoing evolution, everything from economic development to environmental protection to the development and maintenance of facilities that will enhance the mental and physical well being of its citizens. Recognition of this fact will hopefully bring greater resources to bear in the future.

With all this in mind the Recreation Commission would like to make the following recommendations.

In the short term every effort should be made to raise the bar on the maintenance of our parks, increased trash pickup, more attention to routine items such as lawns, shrubs, trees etc. and better response time to problems.

We should continue to assess and expand our recreational programming for our youth in order to keep them actively engaged and lessen the need to resort to a gang lifestyle.

We should reassess and refurbish all our neighborhood facilities. Each park/playground should be viewed holistically to create a multigenerational,

multiseasonal facility that draws people from the neighborhood out to exercise, socialize and enjoy.

We should accelerate the timetable for the creation of the skate park. It is a project long in development and besides serving our city's young athletes it will attract regional interest and further enhance Bethlehem's image as a tourist destination. We should study the feasibility of extending the nature trail from Monocacy Park to the Archibald Johnson Conservation Area. We should continue to expand our web presence by identifying park locations and their amenities for new residents.

We need to be sensitive to the changing needs and interests of our neighbors. In particular we should maintain some level of flexibility in the design and layout of athletic fields and other facilities to meet potential changes in use and lessen the impact of conversion, for example soccer to lacrosse.

Recently the Mayor created an extensive list of shovel ready projects worthy of consideration under the stimulus package passed by Congress. The list contains many projects associated with parks and recreation, projects listed in the 2007 plan and new needs that have since become apparent. While we realize not every need will be funded by this package we hope the mere mention of them on this list, raises their profile and encourages the administration and council to redouble their efforts to seek funding for these long overdue improvements.

Finally, and most importantly the administration should revisit the Park and Recreation Plan within the next 3 to 5 years. Most of the objectives of the current plan by then will have been met and we feel a more detailed and more visionary plan should be created. We feel that it should include a Community Center with an indoor swimming component to reflect changing lifestyles and the demands of the public. We caution the city from feeling the need to duplicate service on both sides of the Lehigh River. Rather we should expand the now proposed shuttle bus/trolley for visitors to include all areas of the city for all our citizens to use.

“Shovel Ready” Projects related to Parks and Recreation

Construction of restrooms at City Line Little League field

Upgrade of Monocacy Complex power system/infrastructure

Resurface Yosko Park and Sand Island Basketball courts

Renovations to Daughters of the American Revolution House

Resurface Westside Park tennis courts

Saucon Park-Saints field elevation and lighting

Public pool repairs/improvements

Redesign of Friendship, Fairview and Higbee Parks

Develop Sand Island West

Construct Skate Park

Develop Greenway from New Street to Lynn Avenue