

## Recommendations

### A. Ensure the Availability of a Variety of Recreational Opportunities that Adequately Serve Fayette County's Population

1. Consider developing a Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan. This plan, building upon the 2000 Comprehensive Plan, would assess programming, facilities and administrative/maintenance aspects of the County's current situation and develop a program for providing facilities, services, etc., based upon community identified needs which consider population densities, age levels, and interests.
2. Explore the possibility of hiring a Parks and Recreation Director to aid in the development and administration of recreation facilities/programs and establish a formal department within the County.
3. Consider developing Master Site Development Plans for current and future County parks and recreation areas. These master plans can include items such as proposed facilities, construction schedules, maintenance schedules and funding sources.
4. Proactively plan a County-wide system of trails. Consider taking a leadership role in facilitating communities and volunteer groups in identifying and implementing "rails to trails" projects.
  - ✓ Support the expansion and maintenance of the Youghiogheny River Trail.
  - ✓ Consider the development of spur trails that connect the Youghiogheny River Trail with neighborhoods within the County.
  - ✓ Ensure the implementation and continuation of a successful trail maintenance plan. This maintenance plan could utilize local volunteer groups throughout the County to work on individual trail segments.

Trailheads along existing, proposed and future trails throughout the County could serve as access points to a County-wide trail system and provide site amenities that would offer opportunities for the trail user as well as serve the local community where the trail head is located. This would include the development of a trail head with benches, lighting, landscaping, and play equipment, benefiting the local communities where there is a deficiency in neighborhood park opportunities.

Property considered for rail-trail usage holds a great deal of potential for recreation and transportation use. The development of trails will provide benefits for current and future generations of Fayette County residents. Trails will provide linkages and access to adjoining counties in the region through existing and planned trail projects. Trail maintenance burdens on the County can be greatly reduced through the development of organized volunteers. Inventory of Recreation Facilities Map shows the abandoned rail lines within Fayette County, which provide the opportunity for the development of future trails.

5. Design and install improved park identification signs. These signs could be designed by a local graphic artist, and constructed by the vocational school, or funded through a fundraiser. County park signs should reflect a common theme or design to immediately signify to the park user that the site is a Fayette County Park.

6. Require regularly scheduled playground and park audits, inspections and maintenance to be completed under the direction of a Certified Playground Safety Inspector. The County can choose to train a staff member in becoming a Certified Playground Safety Inspector. Typically, classes are conducted annually during the weekend of the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society annual conference. Certification is for three years. A playground safety inspection checklist could include:
- Improper protective surfacing
  - Inadequate fall zones
  - Protrusion and entanglement hazards
  - Entrapment in openings
  - Insufficient equipment spacing
  - Trip hazards
  - Lack of supervision
  - Age appropriate activities
  - Lack of maintenance
  - Pinch, crush, shearing and sharp edge hazards
  - Platforms with no guardrails
  - Equipment not recommended for public playgrounds. Such equipment includes heavy swings such as animal figure swings and multiple occupant/glider type swings; free swinging ropes; and swinging exercise rings and trapeze bars (both are considered athletic equipment and are not recommended for public playgrounds).

7. In Fayette County's previous Comprehensive Plan, completed in 1968, key recreation issues were addressed and long-range objectives identified. This plan was consulted in light of the park development that has taken place over the past years and its recommendations revisited, where relevant. One of the main goals stated in the Comprehensive Plan was as follows:

*“To insure that open space areas and facilities will be of sufficient size and adequately distributed throughout the County to serve the needs of all its citizens.”*

The current distribution of County-owned facilities does not equally serve all populated areas of the County. In particular, the northwestern section of the County contains a relatively dense population and no County-owned facility exists in the immediate area. The southeastern and east-central portions of the County are adequately served by numerous recreation facilities, including state parks, state gamelands and state forests. The southwest section is served by German-Masontown County Park, the west-central areas by Dunlap Creek County Park, and the northeastern section of the County is served by Jacobs Creek County Park.

In the County's previous Comprehensive Plan, several potential new County park sites were identified, but, to date, none have been implemented. One potential new County park opportunity suggested in the previous plan still holds merit today and should be explored further. A Youghiogheny riverfront park would offer a unique recreation opportunity and fulfill the potential need for a new County park in the northwestern section of Fayette County. See Recreation Inventory and Analysis Map for potential new County park areas.

8. Continue the conservation and rehabilitation of all historic sites within the County.
9. Continue to maintain a high level of natural, historical and recreational resources in a sustainable manner. These vital community resources perpetuate tourism in the County and should be protected for future use and enjoyment.
10. Evaluate vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian access to key tourist attractions and improve access where necessary. This access, however, should not infringe upon designated natural areas that are vital to the success of recreational tourism, the preservation of the County's natural character, and the development of a successful County greenway and open space system.
11. The existing trails in Fayette County (Youghiogheny River Trail, Sheepskin Trail, Brown's Run) bring in much-needed revenue to the small business economy of the area and as trails are developed in the future. Build upon the potential for generating revenue becomes even greater.
12. Recreation along the two rivers within the County holds the potential for the generation of revenue through the river recreation-related businesses.

Consider the development of a river recreation overlay land use classification along the Monongahela and Youghiogheny Rivers. This land use classification will allow appropriate economic development where the base zoning may not permit commercial uses. Additionally, the overlay will provide a mechanism for the protection of the river corridors as important natural and recreational resources for the County.

*Considerations could include:*

- Permit the limited development of special river/trail recreation related businesses within the overlay area (e.g., bed and breakfast establishments, bait shops, canoe and bicycle shops/rentals, snack shops, etc.).
- Consider requiring a 50 foot buffer (for new development) along property that abuts the rivers to create a continuous corridor running along the rivers through the township. This corridor could be used in the future to develop a trail or be protected as a riparian zone habitat.
- Promote the development of boat launches and marinas at appropriate locations within the overlay corridor. Formal boat launch areas will provide access to the rivers for a variety of river recreation opportunities. Coordinate with DEP, Army Corps of Engineers, and Fish and Boat Commission to determine the preferred location and type of future boat launches.

B. Develop a County Greenway System

With many important natural areas, Fayette County has unique opportunities for development of a system of greenways, which should be addressed before further population growth and development begin to reduce available options. Greenways are of the first importance in preservation of the natural resources which give the County its character and make it a desirable place to live.

The Greenways and Open Space Inventory and Analysis shows potential areas that through proper preservation would lead to the creation of a County-wide Greenways and Open Space system. These potential greenway opportunities consist of steep slopes, heavily vegetated areas, County and State Parks, State Gamelands, wetlands and environmentally significant waterways. Identification of key corridors that include all or some combination of these elements results in the creation of a County Greenways and Open Space system that promotes the preservation of important natural resources and Fayette County's rural character, provides recreational opportunities for County residents and preserves their quality of life.

In addition to these greenway opportunities, proposed and existing trails are shown, as well as abandoned rail lines that may develop into additional recreational trails (potential rail to trail opportunities). Trails are not a necessary component of a greenways, but, in some cases, are a compatible use that provide recreation opportunities for County residents. Trails for walking and bicycling are among the primary recreation needs of many Americans and are of importance as regional recreation resources. However, encroaching land use and environmental damage make protection of natural resources of central importance throughout the County. While greenways benefit human populations in many ways, recreational use may in some cases endanger habitats and wild populations. This study recommends that feasibility studies be conducted for each segment of the depicted greenway corridors, to ensure that natural features are protected. Detailed consideration of each segment will determine suitable recreational uses. In general, greenway corridors are not suitable for active recreation facilities such as sports fields and playgrounds. Trails and possibly shelters are more in keeping with the purpose of these conservation areas. Feasibility studies can also determine whether trails should be limited to pedestrian use (woodchip surfacing) or whether more intensive uses requiring hard surfacing (crushed limestone), such as cycling and horseback riding, may be safely allowed. The impact of trailhead areas, which may contain vehicular parking and circulation, must also be considered.

When planning the extent of greenway corridors, it is important not to limit protected areas to narrow strips of vegetation paralleling a stream. Because they are intended for conservation, greenway corridors that include streams should not only include the stream valley but also sensitive natural features associated with the stream. The size of the riparian buffer needed to protect stream quality should be carefully considered. Buffer areas help to control sedimentation, reduce pollution associated with runoff, affect air and water temperatures, provide habitat for wildlife supported by the stream, and, from a recreational standpoint, enhance the quality of the recreation experience. The importance of adequate riparian buffers as essential to water and habitat quality cannot be over-stressed.

Development of greenway corridors requires a well-planned strategy, which may employ any of several approaches:

- An advocacy group consisting of private citizens and public officials which promotes the greenway and pursues funding; may be a non-profit organization
- A non-profit land trust formed to preserve natural features and resources, which can acquire and hold land
- A Greenway Conservation Commission established by the County, supported by a citizens' advisory committee appointed to assist in planning and development
- Greenway corridors may be planned and developed as a project of the Fayette County Planning Commission
- Designation of greenway corridors may be left up to the discretion of municipal

governments

Following the creation of a proactive system for the designation and preservation of greenways and open space throughout the County, these additional actions would ensure the system's success.

1. Assume a leadership role in coordinating and assisting communities in planning and facilitating the designation of greenway corridors.
2. Promote/run educational programs focusing on the benefits of greenways and recreation.
3. Continue to coordinate efforts with the County Conservation District Office and Fish and Game Commissions to preserve greenways and open space.

**Table 1 - Greenway Funding and Support Sources**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Type of Assistance</b>	<b>Project Type</b>
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	Rivers Conservation Funding	Funding	River corridor & riparian improvements, including recreational development; acquisition of land for river conservation purposes
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	Community Grant Program	Funding	Planning, acquisition, & development of recreational facilities
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	Land Trust Grants	Funding	Planning & acquisition of open space and natural areas (non-profit land trusts & conservancies)
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Flood Plain Management Services	Planning	Planning for floodplain use, regulations, preservation of open space
U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service	Watershed Surveys and Planning	Planning & Funding	Watershed planning & floodplain management activities
U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention	Planning & Funding	Watershed protection, sedimentation control, recreation
U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service	Watershed Protection & Flood Prevention Loans	Funding	Matching funds for watershed conservation, including recreation
U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service	Resource Conservation and Development	Planning	Resource conservation in rural areas
U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration	Public Works and Development Facilities	Funding	Public facilities, including tourist facilities
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Community Planning & Development	Community Development Block Grant	Funding	Community facilities & services, including recreation facilities
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Community Planning & Development	Community Development Block Grant - Small Cities Program	Funding	Urban renewal, including recreation facilities
U.S. Department of the Interior U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Fish and Wildlife Resources	Funding	Conservation of fish & wildlife resources
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service	Land and Water Conservation Fund	Funding	Acquisition, development, rehabilitation of outdoor recreation facilities
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service	Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program	Planning	River, trail, & conservation projects
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service	Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program	Funding	Rehabilitation of recreation areas and facilities, planning development
U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration	Highway Planning & Construction	Funding	Bicycle & pedestrian ways, rest areas, fringe & parking facilities
U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration	National Recreational Trails Funding Program	Funding	Maintain existing trails & develop new trails, including acquisition of easements
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Environmental Finance Program	Planning	Assistance in developing financing for environmental programs