

Chapter 9

Recreation

A. OVERVIEW

The importance of open public spaces that can serve the recreational and leisure activities of a community has been indisputable throughout our nation's history. From the hanging of a peach basket on a pole in Springfield, Massachusetts to the Great Lawn of Central Park in New York City, the inclusion of places of various sizes and shapes that serve the community are significant to the citizen's well being. Our forefathers brought the importance of open space with them from the European landscape, which placed open space on equal footing with circulation and structure.

With our rush to the suburbs came a change in the view of open space. Open space was now seen merely as the area lying between existing development and the next subdivision or land that was leftover space and most likely could not be developed due to distance from utilities or was not profitable for any other use. The concept of *parks and recreation* was being separated, with only active recreation being given any attention by communities in the form of ball fields and court games, with most being constructed to serve adjoining schools.

Recent trends indicate a focus is once again being placed on open public spaces that can serve the recreational and leisure activities of a community. This focus is not only aimed at the traditional spaces such as greenspace filled with equipment and apparatus for play or fields that are lined for organized sports, but it is also closely looking at the importance of hardscaped areas known as urban parks that serve the community as places for gathering and socializing or serve to soften the building pattern of a core city center.

The National Recreation and Parks Association suggests that a park system be composed of a number of small parks, allowing between 6.25 and 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 people. The size and amount of land dedicated to parks and recreation facilities will vary from community to community, but should be taken into account when considering a total, well-rounded parks and recreation system and includes the following; **1) Mini-Parks**, which are specialized parks that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens. Their service area is less than a quarter mile radius. The desirable size for mini-parks is one acre or less and allows 0.25-0.5 acres per 1,000 people. These parks are routinely located within neighborhoods and in close proximity to apartment complexes, townhouse developments, or housing for the elderly; **2) Neighborhood Parks**, which are areas for intense recreational activities. Such activities include field games, court games, the use of a playground apparatus, skating, and picnicking. Their service area is a quarter to a half-mile radius to serve a population up to 5,000. Their desirable size is over fifteen acres, allowing approximately one to two acres per 1,000 people. Neighborhood parks are suitable in areas of intense development. They should be easily accessible to neighborhoods and geographically centered within safe walking and bike access. Neighborhood parks may also be developed as a school-park facility; **3) Community Parks**, which are developed in areas with an array of environmental qualities. Community parks include areas suited for intense recreational activities such as athletic complexes, ball fields and large swimming pools. They may also include an area to enjoy the natural environment. Activities in such areas include walking, viewing, sitting, and picnicking. These parks serve several neighborhoods (one to two mile radius). The desirable size for these parks is over twenty-five acres and five to eight acres per 1,000 people. **4) Regional Parks**,

which generally have expansive natural areas for outdoor recreation. Activities in such parks include picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, walking, and biking. They are also large enough to accommodate numerous informal play areas for children and adults. They serve several communities within a large area (one mile driving time) and usually offer over 200 acres and five to ten acres per 1,000 people. They may be contiguous to or encompassing natural resources; **5) Linear Parks** are large areas of open space that are developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel, such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and pleasure driving. They may also include active play areas. These parks have no specific service area requirements but should be of sufficient width to safeguard against encroachment and maximize its use. Desirable site characteristics include built or natural corridors, such as utility rights-of-way, bluff lines, vegetation patterns, and roads, that link other components of the recreation system or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas, and other park areas; and **6) Recreation Facilities**, which are large expansive areas that are primarily dedicated to one use or designed in such a way that different uses are not in each others way and they are commonly demarked by buildings or structures.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

The goals and actions pertaining to Recreation have been developed to promote the importance of incorporating open public space for recreational and leisure activities as development concepts in the City of Fairmont.

Goal:

The City of Fairmont should seek to provide a balanced recreation system that contributes to the well being of families and individuals, the attractiveness of neighborhoods and the economic, social and environmental health of the community as a whole.

Actions:

- Develop a parks and recreation system that is well rounded and includes the use of mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, regional parks, linear parks, urban parks and recreation facilities.
- Enhance the recreational experience of families and individuals in the City of Fairmont by making improvements and modifications to the equipment and apparatus at each of the municipal parks.
- Improve the attractiveness of the municipal park system through maintenance and beautification.
- Increase the economic, social and environmental viability of the City's recreation system through programs, informational brochures, signage and funding.
- Review the City of Fairmont's parks and recreational facilities existing inventory for lack of service, duplication of service as well as the range and types of services provided for residents and visitors.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Through an integrated network of parks, recreation facilities and outstanding programs, Fairmont offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities for its citizens and visitors. The recreation system available in the City of Fairmont includes;

Mini-Parks

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- 1) Bellview Park, which is approximately one acre in size and provides the residents of the area with playground equipment, basketball court and parking.
- 2) 5th Street Park, which is approximately two acres in size and contains two basketball courts, playground equipment and pavilion area.
- 3) Norwood Park, which is located at the intersection of Morgantown Avenue and Suncrest Boulevard, consists of tennis courts, basketball courts and playground equipment.
- 4) Morgantown Avenue, located on the east side of the city provides playground equipment, and a tennis court.
- 5) Oliver Avenue, located off of Locust Avenue the park provides tennis courts for the area.

Community Parks

- 1) Mary Lou Retton Youth Park, which is located off of Mary Lou Retton Drive and Old Monongah Road, is named after the 1984 Olympic Gold Medallist from Marion County. Included in its rolling 25-acres are four baseball fields, one football field, tennis courts with practice wall, picnicking, playgrounds, pavilion, and the West Virginia Miner's Memorial.
- 2) Windmill Park, which is located northwest of the CSX train yard between Buffalo Creek and the Monongahela River and comprises approximately 25 acres. The park offers tennis and basketball courts, fields for football, soccer, baseball and softball, playground equipment, concession stand, group pavilions, and restrooms. The park receives heavy use from the neighborhood and surrounding areas with several leagues and schools utilizing the grounds.

Regional Parks

- 1) East Marion Park also known as East Marion Recreation Complex, is located on State Street Extension, and provides a beautiful, complete family park with a variety of recreation opportunities. This 32-acre park offers tennis, horseshoes, a basketball court, a softball field, hiking and jogging trails, pavilions, a playground, picnicking, mini golf, and the famous "Wave Pool" and waterslide.
- 2) Morris Park, which is located south of Fairmont off Pleasant Valley Road. It consists of approximately one hundred and twelve acres. Morris Park consists of a one mile loop with two pavilions, restrooms, basketball court, tennis courts, and playground areas. This park is mostly used for passive recreation such as walking and picnicking. A recent addition to Morris Park is the establishment of a Disc Golf Course. The first of its kind in the area, disc golf combines the challenges of the game of golf, but instead of using clubs and balls players use a flying disc or Frisbee as they compete over 18 holes nestled along the serene atmosphere of the park.
- 3) The Mon River Park, also known as The Head of the Mon, is located at the point where the Tygart River and the West Fork River join to form the Monongalia River. While accessible by boat, it is a great point for fishing and picnicking.

Linear Parks

- 1) MCPARC Trail, beginning with a trail head located at the intersection of Morgantown Avenue and Winfield Street, the MCPARC Trail offers nearly three miles of converted



- railway property for joggers, bikers and walkers and extends to Prickett's Fort State Park where another trail head is located. A recent extension of this trail now takes users to Morgantown and the Pennsylvania State Line.
- 2) West Fork River Trail, which is the newest trail in the system, runs from Fairmont to Shinnston. The trail is approximately sixteen miles long and provides non-motorized uses such as walking, biking, jogging and horseback riding.
 - 3) Fairmont Bike Trail, which has been established as a temporary route serving as the link between the West Fork River Trail and the MCPARC Trail, utilizes city streets as a means of traversing from one trail to the other until such time as a permanent connection can be made utilizing railway property. Currently the route begins on Edgeway Drive where the West Fork Trail terminates, and proceeds along Country Club Road to the intersection with Woodside Drive, follows Woodside Drive to Coleman Avenue, then follows Coleman Avenue to Ninth Street, proceeds along Ninth Street to Benoni Avenue then to Locust Avenue where the route moves to Cleveland Avenue and Adams Street before crossing the Robert H. Mollohan/Jefferson Street Bridge. After crossing the bridge the route follows Merchant Street to Morgantown Avenue, following Morgantown Avenue in a northerly direction to the trailhead at Winfield Street.
 - 4) Palatine Park, which is beautifully situated along the East bank of the Monongahela River in the Downtown Central Business District, this park provides the perfect place for peaceful walks and access to the river. A single launch boat ramp and courtesy dock is located adjacent to the park. Recent improvements to the park include the construction of a sand volleyball court, the restoration of the decorative fountain, and clearing of brush from the riverbank. The restoration of the fountain and the clearing of the riverbank allow one to vision the possibilities of this tranquil setting and is why the area was part of the recent Downtown Revitalization Plan and Riverfront Master Plan studies undertaken by the City of Fairmont. Implementation activities for improvement and enhancement projects for Palatine Park will be part of the upcoming Urban Renewal Plan being developed by the Fairmont Urban Renewal Authority, as well as be the focus of some community and civic organizations that utilize the park for events such as the Three Rivers Festival, the annual Fourth of July Celebration and the Johnnie Johnson Blues and Jazz Festival.

Urban Parks

- 1) Veteran's Plaza, located on Adams Street near the intersection of Madison Street in the heart of Downtown, the Plaza features tributes to the military veterans of Marion County. The Plaza features large planters, a stage and benches.

Recreation Facilities

- 1) East-West Stadium, owned and operated by the Marion County Board of Education, this grand structure is currently undergoing several improvements and renovations. A new synthetic playing surface has been installed allowing for multiple uses to occur on the field without damage occurring to the turf. Additional planned upgrades will address the seating areas, the lighting, the press box and dressing rooms.
- 2) 12th Street Pool, owned by the City of Fairmont, this facility located adjacent to East-West Stadium has not operated since 2000 due to an un-repairable leak that made treatment of the water impossible, thus threatening the health and safety of users. The site is currently under

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- study as part of the Beltline Redevelopment Plan that is being sponsored by the Marion County Board of Education, the Marion County Commission and the City of Fairmont, with goal being to develop a means of restoring or rebuilding the municipal pool in some fashion. Preliminary ideas include enclosing the pool to provide for year round or inclement weather use as well as expanding the pool to accommodate competitive swimming.
- 3) 612 MAC, located at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue, serves as a community center for the local neighborhood providing several recreational and educational programs in the summer months as well as conducting after school programs for the area youth.
 - 4) Marion County Senior Citizens Center, located on Maplewood Drive, the Center provides recreational programs and activities for the senior population of the City as well as provides health and fitness equipment for members use at the facility.
 - 5) Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission Facilities, MCPARC owns and or maintains several outstanding facilities outside of the corporate limits of the City of Fairmont that provide outstanding outlets for the recreational and leisure activities of the City's residents and visitors including:
 - a. Worthington Park – a 5.2 acre waterfront park on the West Fork River with a baseball field, horseshoe courts, playground, basketball courts, a pavilion and beach.
 - b. Hutchinson Park – a 3.5 acre park with a baseball field, open space and a playground located just off the West Fork River Trail.
 - c. “For The Kids” Soccer Complex – a 12.5 acre park located on Route 250 just North of Fairmont on Ice’s Run that contains 6 soccer fields and new multipurpose concession/storage and restroom building.
 - d. BMX Park – a 25 acre park located off of Hoult Road contains a newly constructed BMX bicycle racing track.
 - e. Curtisville Lake – the 695 acre park includes a 30 acre lake, trails surrounding the lake, picnic areas and excellent fishing.

Several other recreation outlets are available in Fairmont through facilities owned by the Marion County Board of Education and located in the junior high schools and high schools as well as the gymnasium located at 5th Street. Fairmont State University also provides recreational facilities for the community, however their primary use is reserved for the students and faculty of the university. Fairmont also provides residents and visitors with a bowling alley and a walking trail of the Downtown Historic District. Located just out of the corporate limits are recreational features such as Coal Country Miniature Golf, Valley Worlds of Fun, Valley Falls State Park, Prickett’s Fort State Park and Apple Valley Golf Course. Golf courses are also located at the Fairmont Field Club and at Green Hills Country Club with privileges at each granted by membership. The recent turnaround of the water quality of the Tygart and Monongahela River has increased the boating and pleasure craft use on these waterways and with plans for riverfront development projects in Fairmont and downstream in Morgantown, the use will only increase.

Programs

Since its inception in 1977, the Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission has been committed to providing quality parks and recreation areas and providing outstanding activities and events. Each year MCPARC publishes a brochure detailing the activities and events they either coordinate or sponsor for the residents and visitors of Fairmont and Marion County, some of which include;



- MCPARC Family Fishing Day
- Annual Easter Egg Hunt
- MCPARC Youth Jam Bands
- MCPARC Tennis Lessons
- MCPARC Day Camp
- MCPARC Playground Program
- 612 MAC Dances
- Midnight Basketball League

MCPARC also coordinates several day and overnight trips around the state and region with a focus on recreation and leisure activities. MCPARC currently maintains offices in the Downtown Central Business District on Monroe Street and are an excellent resource for those seeking information on the recreational experiences of Fairmont and Marion County. MCPARC also maintains an outstanding web site with information their parks, recreation facilities and programs that can be accessed at www.MCPARC.com.

D. BASIC ISSUES

The City of Fairmont has all of the ingredients for a well rounded and well balanced parks and recreation system; beautiful settings, available space, high use and demand. Through their partnerships with Marion County Parks and Recreation and most recently the Board of Education, the City of Fairmont seems to be placing a higher priority on providing recreation outlets to the residents and visitors of Fairmont. When looking at the standards and criteria set by the National Recreation and Park Association Fairmont seems to be doing well in providing recreational outlets for members of the community. However, in putting this document together it was interesting to note several areas where the community was lacking facilities, program or open space.

While some of these elements are in the planning stages and have been discussed informally, the City of Fairmont could better serve residents and visitors by establishing a permanent link between the West Fork River Trail and the MCPARC Trail through the acquisition and development of the abandoned railway property from the Watson Bridge to the Low Level Bridge, constructing the Pedestrian Bridge over the Monongahela River and then completing the trail along the East side of Fairmont thus filling in the gap of a system that stretches from Shinnston to Morgantown and the Pennsylvania State line.

Through proper planning and participation from the community's recreation providers the construction of an indoor recreation center could meet the needs of the younger and older population sectors of the city, while at the same time provide a synergistic project for the community.

With renewed interest in Palatine Park, the construction of permanent restrooms and a new stage would enhance the events held annually in the park as well as better accommodate park users.

In order to continue to provide the existing level of recreational opportunities as well as develop new parks and facilities, the level of funding will need to be increased to those groups charged with providing the community recreation programs, parks and facilities. The City of Fairmont has placed a high priority on providing increased funding to recreation by proposing a municipal levy that will provide increase funding for park and rail trail development.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Short Range (2005-2008)

- a. Undertake a Comprehensive Needs Assessment of the parks and recreation system in Fairmont.
- b. Develop a Strategic Plan for Recreation that addresses the maintenance, expansion and adaptive reuse of the total parks and recreation system in the City, with consideration being given equally to parks, recreation facilities and programs.
- c. Develop an Action Plan for the maintenance and improvement to existing City parks, recreational facilities and programs.
- d. Make upgrades and improvements to the equipment at one of the City parks each fiscal year.
- e. Acquire abandoned railway property from the Watson Bridge to the Low Level Bridge and construct the rail trail along this corridor.
- f. Form a Recreation Task Force to study the feasibility and practicality of constructing an Indoor Rec Center.

2. Medium Range (2008-2011)

- a. Continue the maintenance and improvement program for the existing City parks.
- b. Implement findings of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment
- c. Implement the recommendations of the Strategic Plan for Recreation.
- d. Develop a new park, facility or open space in Fairmont.
- e. Construct the Pedestrian Bridge over the Monongahela River for the rail trail connection.
- f. Act on findings of the Recreation Task Force pertaining to the Indoor Rec Center.
- g. Acquire additional abandoned railway property for rail trail development on the East side of Fairmont.

3. Long Range (2011-2015)

- a. Continue the maintenance and improvement program for the existing City parks.
- b. Continue to implement findings from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.
- c. Continue to implement the recommendations of the Strategic Plan for Recreation.
- d. Develop a new park, facility or open space in Fairmont.
- e. Develop East side portion of the rail trail from the Pedestrian Bridge to the MCPARC Trail, include tie in to the bike paths along the Gateway Connector.