

## ***1.0 Introduction***

### **1.1 THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM**

The Allegheny County parks system consists of approximately 12,000 acres in nine parks that encircle the City of Pittsburgh at about a 15-mile radius (Figure 1). Listed in order of size, these parks are:

- North Park (3,010 acres)
- South Park (1,999 acres)
- Settler’s Cabin Park (1,589 acres)
- Deer Lakes Park (1,180 acres)
- Round Hill Park (1,101 acres)
- Boyce Park (1,096 acres)
- White Oak Park (810 acres)
- Hartwood (629 acres)
- Harrison Hills Park (500 acres)

The county parks are rich in recreational, natural, and historic resources. The two largest parks in the system, North and South Parks, were established in the 1920s and 1930s. The remaining seven parks – referred to as the “regional parks” – were acquired and developed in the 1950s and 1960s. The parks allow Allegheny County residents to enjoy a variety of recreational activities in diverse outdoor settings, contributing greatly to the quality of life in the County.

All of the county parks offer basic recreation opportunities that include passively delivered activities such as picnicking, walking, and bird watching. The most intensively developed parks are North and South, with the remainder offering varying degrees of developed recreation opportunities. Each park has evolved around a theme or distinctive characteristic. North Park is known for the 72-acre lake, the largest man made body of water in Allegheny County, and its golf course. South Park is home to a game preserve, the County Fairgrounds, and 27 holes of golf. Round Hill Park supports an exhibit farm; White Oak is touted for its unique natural habitats; Boyce Park is home to a ski slope and wave pool; Deer Lakes contains three fishing lakes; Harrison Hills offers nature programs and spectacular views of the Allegheny River; Settler's Cabin's attractions include a wave pool and a diving pool;

and Hartwood Acres provides cultural opportunities through its live performances and tours of the late Mary Flinn Lawrence estate.

## 1.2 GOALS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN

The first Comprehensive Master Plan for the Allegheny County parks system was adopted in 1977.<sup>1</sup> Prepared at the end of the period of development of the regional parks, this plan assumed that the parks system would continue to expand in the future. However, conditions in Allegheny County and the county parks have changed greatly in the more than two decades that have passed since preparation of the first parks system master plan. Factors such as a restructured county government, fiscal constraints, and aging park facilities have contributed to a change in priorities regarding development and management of the parks system. In response to these changes, and in recognition of the importance of the parks to the well being of Allegheny County residents, the County has prepared this Comprehensive Master Plan to determine the actions it should take to shape the future of the nine county parks.

The goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan are to:

1. Establish an overall vision statement and policy framework for the long-range development and management of the Allegheny County parks system.
2. Identify recreational and other park-related needs of the parks system's users.
3. Develop a comprehensive inventory of natural and cultural resources, facilities, and programs in the county parks.
4. Assess current operations and management procedures for the county parks.
5. Based upon the above, formulate policies and an action plan to guide decision-making with regard to maintaining and enhancing the overall parks system and the nine parks that comprise it.

## 1.3 PLANNING PROCESS

The Comprehensive Master Plan has been prepared using an open planning process that has included extensive input from Allegheny County residents. Policy direction in developing the Plan has been provided by a dual citizens' committee. Chaired by Senator Tim

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<sup>1</sup> *Allegheny County Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Conservation Plan*, Allegheny County Department of Planning and Development, December 1977

Murphy, the Parks 2000 Committee is comprised of representatives of a variety of civic, non-profit, business, and recreational interests in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The Parks Advisory Board is comprised of representatives of communities adjacent to the Allegheny County parks.

The planning process has included four major phases:

- Inventory and analysis/needs assessment
- Mission statement/policy framework
- Recommendations/plan options
- Master Plan development

***Inventory and analysis/needs assessment:*** In this phase of work, background information on park facilities, programs, and operations; natural and cultural resources; and other topics relevant to the Allegheny County parks was collected and evaluated. Issues important to the future of the parks system were identified through analysis of the background information, interviews of persons with a specific knowledge of or stake in the parks, and input received from a series of five public meetings conducted in April 2000. Finally, the recreational needs of park users were evaluated using a variety of measures, including a mail survey of a cross-section of Allegheny County residents.

The results of the inventory and analysis and needs assessment are summarized in Chapter 2.0 of this Master Plan. This phase of work is fully documented in the separate *Background Report*.

***Mission statement/policy framework:*** In this phase, a mission statement and policy framework were formulated to guide long-range planning for the parks system. A preliminary version of the mission statement/policy framework was prepared in June 2000 and reviewed with the citizens' committee. The initial draft has been revised based upon the results of subsequent steps in the planning process and is presented in Chapter 3.0 of this Master Plan.

***Recommendations/plan options:*** In this phase, potential approaches to addressing the issues identified in the inventory and analysis and needs assessment were formulated as a basis for evaluating options for the future of Allegheny County parks system. This phase began with a second series of five public meetings conducted in November 2000 to present the results of the inventory and analysis and to solicit input from residents regarding what they perceive as priorities for the parks. Following these public meetings, recommendations and options for the parks system as a whole and for each of the nine parks were prepared by

the consultant team and discussed in citizens' committee workshops to set the direction for development of the Master Plan.

***Master Plan development:*** In this phase, the recommendations and options from the previous phase were developed into the full Comprehensive Master Plan. Chapter 4.0 presents the Plan's recommendations for the parks system as a whole. Recommendations specific to the nine parks within the system are presented in Chapter 5.0. Chapter 6.0 provides additional detail regarding implementation of the plan, including priorities for capital improvements and other actions the County will take to secure the future of the parks system.

A third round of public meetings will be conducted on the Draft Comprehensive Master Plan, after which a Final Comprehensive Master Plan will be prepared for adoption by County Council.