

3.0 Policy Framework

One of Allegheny County's most valuable assets and one that is highly valued by residents, the county parks system faces an uncertain future. As described in Chapter 2.0, many complex issues need to be addressed if the parks and the rich resources they contain are to realize their full potential or even to meet basic maintenance and improvement needs identified by residents.

This chapter presents a policy framework consisting of an overall mission statement, supported by goals and objectives for the future management and development of the parks system. It articulates the primary function of the parks in four key areas:

1. Provide **regional recreation** opportunities for county residents.
2. Preserve the parks' rich **natural and cultural resources**.
3. Connect the parks to a **county-wide open space system**.
4. Establish a sustainable **management and financing structure** for the future.

The purpose of the policy framework is to provide an overall guide for decision-makers as they seek to address the many issues and secure a positive future for the Allegheny County parks. Specific recommendations for actions to be carried within the framework are presented in Chapters 4.0 and 5.0.

3.1 MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Allegheny County Parks is to enhance the quality of life and well being of Allegheny County residents through a regional parks system that:

- Provides quality landscapes, facilities, programs, and special events that meet county-wide needs for leisure and recreation on behalf of the diverse segments of the community;
- Conserves natural and cultural resources while offering educational programs and opportunities for hands on experience;
- Forms an integral part of a county-wide system of open spaces, greenways, and trails; and
- Contributes to the economic vitality of the County.

The County will accomplish this mission through a responsive and efficient operational structure that:

- Fosters a parks staff that is qualified, motivated, and customer oriented, whose skills are competitively compensated, and whose achievements are recognized;
- Maintains facilities and landscapes in a safe and attractive condition;
- Builds partnerships with public agencies and private businesses, non-profit organizations, and citizen volunteers; and
- Optimizes financial self-sufficiency within the context of the parks service mission.

3.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: RECREATION

A regional parks system providing Allegheny County residents with recreational opportunities that are related to the natural environment and/or are of a size or scale beyond the capabilities of municipalities to provide.

Objective 1.1

Provide diverse recreational facilities, programs, and special events appropriate to a regional parks system, including:

- passive/unstructured facilities and activities, such as trails, picnic groves, and informal open spaces, that allow residents to enjoy the outdoor environment and natural setting of the parks; and
- active/structured facilities and programs, such as sports complexes, activity centers, and special events, that serve county-wide needs. These should not include facilities or programs designed primarily to serve the local recreational needs of neighborhoods or municipalities.

Objective 1.2

Provide well-designed, well-maintained physical facilities and infrastructure to support the recreational functions of the parks system, including:

- Facilities located and designed in accordance with consistent guidelines that respect the character and resources of individual parks while establishing a unifying identity for the parks system;
- Circulation systems that provide safe and convenient access to/through the parks (including public transportation) while

separating different modes of travel (e.g., vehicles, bicyclists, pedestrians);

- Efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally sound utilities (water, sewer, restrooms, etc.) as required to support park activities; and
- Facilities that comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

GOAL 2: NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

A regional parks system that preserves natural, historic, and cultural resources.

Objective 2.1

Designate, preserve, and restore significant natural resource areas within the parks system.

Objective 2.2

Identify, preserve, and restore significant historic sites and buildings and other cultural resources within the parks system.

Objective 2.3

Ensure that construction, maintenance, and other activities protect natural and cultural resources within the parks by integrating resource preservation into project planning and programming and training parks personnel in these issues.

Objective 2.4

Increase public awareness of natural and cultural resources in the county parks through public educational and interpretive programs (see also Objective 4.7).

GOAL 3: COUNTY-WIDE OPEN SPACE

A county-wide system of open spaces interconnected by greenway corridors and trails.

Objective 3.1

Working with public and private sector partners, connect county parks to a county-wide system of greenways, trails, and conservation corridors.

Objective 3.2

As part of the county-wide open space system, preserve stream corridors, wetlands, unique habitat areas, and other areas identified as priorities for conservation.

GOAL 4: MANAGEMENT AND FINANCING

A regional parks system with a management and financing structure that supports its mission.

Objective 4.1

Establish an organizational structure for managing the county parks system that is designed to maximize effectiveness in achieving the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan.

Objective 4.2

Provide a qualified, motivated, and customer-oriented staff sufficient to manage, operate, and maintain the county parks system.

Objective 4.3

Adopt a strategic plan with adequate funding to address the results of years of deferred maintenance of county parks and recreation facilities.

Objective 4.4

Adopt a maintenance management plan defining procedures for the upkeep of parks and recreation facilities. This plan should be designed to lower maintenance costs while sustaining natural processes, conserving energy, and reducing waste.

Objective 4.5

Adopt a policy governing the acquisition, disposition, and development of county parkland, based upon the following principles:

- Acquisition of new parkland should be considered where appropriate to conserve important resources adjacent to existing county parks, connect county parks to the county-wide open space system, and/or preserve resources of county-wide significance;
- Existing county parkland should not be disposed of for non-park related uses unless new parkland of equal or greater value to the county parks mission is acquired; and
- New facility development should be considered where appropriate to fulfill the county parks mission, provided that it is financially viable and is sensitive to the character and natural setting of the park.

Objective 4.6

Maintain regular coordination and pursue cooperative partnerships with governmental agencies and private organizations with an interest in the county parks and county-wide open space and recreational issues.

Objective 4.7

Implement an active public outreach and marketing program consisting of the following components:

- Dissemination of information on county parks and activities through a variety of media, including maps and signage to direct persons to the parks and enhanced materials and signage at the parks;
- Educational and interpretive programs and opportunities for hands on experience of natural and cultural resources in the parks; and
- Involvement of citizen volunteers, schools, and other groups in park activities such as maintenance and improvement projects.

Objective 4.8

Integrate measures to promote safety and security into the design, management, and operation of county parks and park facilities.

Objective 4.9

Implement a sustainable, long-term financing plan for the operation, maintenance, and development of the parks system.

Objective 4.10

Manage and operate programs and facilities to improve the cost recovery performance of the county parks system. Cost recovery performance should be a factor in considering development of new facilities and programs.

