

Liberty Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan



February 16, 2009



Brandstetter Carroll Inc.
ARCHITECTS ENGINEERS PLANNERS





RESOLUTION NO. 2009-050

Board of Trustees, Liberty Township
Butler County, Ohio

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN AS A GUIDE FOR THE FUTURE GROWTH OF LIBERTY TOWNSHIP PARKS AS PRESENTED BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND BRANDSTETTER CARROLL, INC.

RESOLVED by the Board of Trustees of Liberty Township, Butler County, Ohio, that

WHEREAS, Dina Minneci, Liberty Township Administrator, requests the Liberty Township Board of Trustees approve the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as a guide for the future growth of Liberty Township Parks as presented by the Steering Committee and Brandstetter Carroll, Inc.;

WHEREAS, the Parks Master Plan Steering Committee has worked diligently with Brandstetter Carroll, Inc. to prepare the plan, incorporating input from stakeholder groups and Township residents; and

WHEREAS, public open houses were held on February 18, 2009 and February 26, 2009, and public hearings were held by the Trustees on March 17, 2009 and April 7, 2009, where public comment on the plan was solicited;


THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Liberty Township Board of Trustees hereby approve the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as a guide for the future growth of Liberty Township Parks as presented by the Steering Committee and Brandstetter Carroll, Inc.

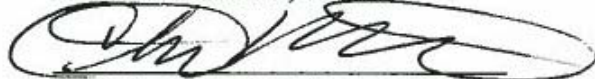
Trustee Maticic moved to approve the resolution. Trustee Kern seconded the motion. Upon call of the roll, the vote resulted as follows:

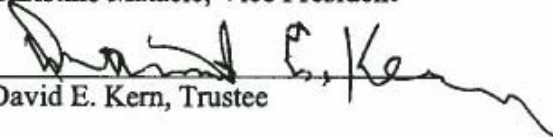
Trustee Maticic,	yes
Trustee Kern,	yes
Trustee Hiltman,	yes

COPY

Adopted: Tuesday, April 7, 2009

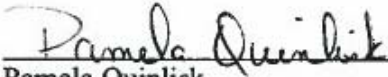

Patrick M. Hiltman, President


Christine Matacic, Vice President

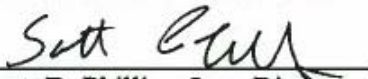

David E. Kern, Trustee

AUTHENTICATION

This is to certify that this resolution was duly passed, and filed with the Liberty Township Fiscal Officer this 7th day of April, 2009.


Pamela Quinlisk
Fiscal Officer

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


Scott D. Phillips, Law Director

Acknowledgements

Parks and Recreation Master Plan Liberty Township, Ohio

Liberty Township Board of Township Trustees

Pat Hiltman, President
Christine Maticic, Vice President
Dave Kern, Trustee

Liberty Township Staff Representatives

Dina Minneci, Township Administrator
Melanie Brokaw, Assistant Administrator/HR Director
Jonathan D. West, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning
Andrew Meyer, Senior Planner, Project Manager
Rick Plummer, Services Department Foreman

Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee

Michele Allen	Amy Murray
Cory Backstrom	John Newcomb
Laurie Ballenger	Kevin O'Sullivan
Bob Bollenbacher	Chris Passarge
Melanie Brokaw	Mike Reed
Sarah Clippinger	Bruce Rhodes
Brian Collins	Rick Schaeffer
Kurt Feldmann	John Schaller
Jonathan Granville	Louis Sorn
Jim Kovac	Dean Swartz
Mollie Marconi	Barry Thiel
Christine Maticic	Dan Walter

Liberty Township Park Committee Members

Kurt Feldmann, President	John Leugers
Michele Allen, Vice-President	Rick Schaeffer
Amy Murray, Secretary	Louis Sorn
Laurie Ballenger	Barry Thiel
Bob Bollenbacher	

Liberty Township Events Committee Members

Brian Collins, President
Mike Reed, Secretary / Treasurer
Sarah Clippinger
Jim Kovac

John Newcomb
Dan Walter
Mollie Marconi, Associate Member

Consultant Team

Brandstetter Carroll Inc.
2360 Chauvin Drive
Lexington, Kentucky 40517
(859) 268-1933 VOICE
(800) 368-1933
(859) 268-3341 FAX
Architect's Project No. 07125
April 7, 2009

Patrick D. Hoagland, ASLA – Project Manager
Wayne Bain, CPRP
Mark E. Horman, ASLA
Lisa Wright
Lynda Gates
Ronald Vine - Leisure Vision, Inc.
Jason Morado

Parks and Recreation Master Plan Liberty Township, Ohio April, 2009



Executive Summary

The Existing Parks and Recreation Landscape in Liberty Township

Parks and recreation facilities and services are provided by Liberty Township through the Liberty Township Services Department, as well as by MetroParks of Butler County, private and partnering organizations throughout the Liberty Township community. The Township owned lands include 305 acres, of which approximately 73 are developed park land.

MetroParks of Butler County operate the Miami-Erie Canal Park and Dudley Woods MetroPark. Dudley Woods is actually owned by Liberty Township, but operated by the MetroParks. MetroParks also controls the 435 acre Voice of America Park which is very close to the township boundary and provides several fields and facilities for area residents.

Several athletic organizations provide and schedule programs for various sports such as football, soccer, baseball, softball, basketball and lacrosse. The only athletic fields or courts on Township owned land are soccer fields at Liberty Park. The Lakota Sports Organization (LSO) owns and operates two properties totaling approximately 26 acres.

Most indoor recreation that is provided in the township is provided by the Lakota YMCA.

The Master Plan compared the population and need for park land in 2008, 2013, and at build-out. In general, there is currently a deficit of 244 acres by the standards established by the steering committee, which will grow to 322 acres by 2013 and then 759 acres at build-out. Currently, the largest deficit is the community wide parks of 195 acres which grows to 470 acres at build-out. The need for larger county space will continue to grow from a current

deficit of 35 to 207 acres by build-out. The current demand for neighborhood parks is short by 14 acres according to the standards, but will become a deficit of 83 acres by build-out.

The analysis identified the need for both parks and open space. Including the township, county, schools, homeowner associations, and private parks and open space, there is 1,078 acres set aside. This is a surplus currently, but will grow to a deficit of 947 acres by build-out of this community.

Liberty Township offers limited recreation programming, primarily special events such as the Fourth of July Activities, Fall Festival and Easter Egg Hunt. All of these events are held in Liberty Park.

The Need for a Plan The leadership of the Board of Trustees, Liberty Township Parks Committee and Events Committee realize that there is a need for more parks and recreation facilities, programs and services to serve the community. The Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan-2006 included an extensive public input process with the need for more parks, open space, recreation opportunities and trails identified as priorities.

Therefore, the Township leaders commissioned the preparation of this long range Parks and Recreation Master Plan for Liberty Township.

Liberty Township is rapidly growing with a current population of approximately 33,000 residents. This is up from 9,249 in 1990 and 22,819 in 2000. The Township Planning Staff estimates a range of the population at the build-out condition of 59,958 to 75,643 residents, depending on the actual density. This is nearly double the current population.

The first phase of the Master Plan process was to identify the community needs through an extensive public input process, comparison to other communities, and identification of regional and national trends in parks and recreation services. The process continued with an approach of identifying specific strategies to provide for the needs of as many residents as possible in the most efficient manner.



A Citizen Driven Plan

The Plan is truly based on the community needs. The public was involved in the process in the following methods:

- A public workshop at the beginning of the process.
- A Community Attitude and Interest Survey that was completed by approximately 443 random households.
- An active Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee.
- Meetings with stakeholder groups including:
 - Lakota Sports Organization
 - Lakota Thunderbirds
 - MetroParks of Butler County
 - Lakota YMCA
 - Lakota School District
 - Partners in Prime
 - Boy Scouts
 - Girl Scouts
 - OSU Extension
 - 4H
 - Township staff
 - Elected officials
- Preliminary presentations of the public input findings.

- A neighborhood meeting to discuss the Wilhelmina Park Concept Plan.
- Public Open House presentations on February 18 and 26, 2009.
- A presentation to the Liberty Township Trustees on March 17, 2009.

What Liberty Township Residents Told Us

Through the many opportunities for community input, the citizens' needs were determined. The following is a brief summary of the findings and needs as communicated in the various methods:

1. Voice of America Park, Fort Liberty Playland, and Liberty Park, are the parks that are visited by the most households.
2. 79% of persons responding to the survey visited a park at least once in the past year which is much higher than the national benchmark of 72%.
3. Approximately 85% of the households that use parks rated the existing facilities as "Excellent" or "Good". This is close to the national benchmark of 84%.
4. 31% of respondent households have participated in programs offered by the Liberty Township in the past year. (Equal to the national benchmark)
5. According to the survey results, the facilities with the highest unmet demand include:
 - Paved walking and biking trails
 - Natural areas and nature parks
 - Outdoor swimming pools/aquatic centers
 - Indoor swimming pools/water parks
 - Indoor fitness and exercise facilities
 - Golf driving range/training facilities
 - Large community or county parks
 - Picnic areas and shelters
 - Small neighborhood parks

- Outdoor stage or amphitheater
6. Programs with the highest unmet needs include:
 - Adult wellness and fitness
 - Nature programs
 - Adult sports
 - Youth learn to swim
 - Water fitness
 - Special events
 - Youth summer camp
 - Youth fitness and wellness
 7. There is a general shortage of active recreation facilities throughout the Township.
 8. There is a strong desire to maintain and upgrade the park system.
 9. There is a very strong demand indicated in all methods of public input for integrated trails throughout the Township.
 10. There is a strong need to publicize the park locations and activities because “I do not know what is being offered” and “I do not know locations of facilities” were the two top reasons indicated in the survey that prevent households from using parks, facilities and programs more often.



Future Vision of Parks and Recreation for Liberty Township

The vision for the future for Parks and Recreation in Liberty Township, which was developed in conjunction with the Master Plan Steering Committee and based on findings from the surveys, workshops, community input, and

the Consultant’s recommendations, include the following components: Parks and recreation opportunities in Liberty Township.

1. Provides convenient access within walking distance to a park environment for all residents;
2. Is connected with a series of pathways and bikeways to provide access to neighborhoods, parks, schools and other destinations for transportation purposes and for recreation;
3. Preserves the past while planning for the future;
4. Offers unique and scenic park and recreation opportunities;
5. Fosters an appreciation of nature and illustrates respect for the natural environment and promotes sustainable natural resource management practices;
6. Engages families and all citizens to participate in healthy outdoor activities;
7. Provides facilities that are accessible to all;
8. Includes a partnership of the Township, developers, County MetroParks, School District, volunteers, and various organizations to acquire, develop, operate and manage the parks and facilities;
9. Significantly adds to the unique identity of Liberty Township as an outstanding place to live, work and play;
10. Increases value and pride in the Township;
11. Provides a balance of active recreation, passive recreation, and natural environments that are equitably distributed throughout the Township;

12. Is funded in an efficient and responsible manner while providing the level of service and maintenance necessary for a high quality system;
13. Utilizes every opportunity to leverage funding from outside sources such as grants, philanthropy, and volunteerism;
14. Provides some events and programs that generate revenues to support the operations costs;
15. Includes parks and programs that are well publicized and recognized by the residents;
16. Complements the activities, facilities and programs offered by other organizations and businesses serving the community;
17. Is supported by an active group of community leaders and volunteers that promotes implementation of the Master Plan over the long term.

Major Recommended Facilities

The Master Plan Steering Committee participated in a priority setting exercise to rank the proposed capital improvement projects. The recommended park improvements, in priority order, include the following:

1. Develop Wilhelmina Park.



2. Acquire land and develop a new West Central Community Park along Ohio

Route 747 (Princeton Glendale Rd.) with active sports field complexes with approximately 4 baseball/softball fields and 4 soccer/rectangular fields, picnic areas, trails, large playground, disc golf, natural areas, etc.

3. Fort Liberty Playland - Pave the parking lot and provide a paved walkway to the restroom building.
4. Acquire land and develop a passive nature and conservation park along Gregory Creek in central Liberty Township.
5. Develop trail linkages to link parks, neighborhoods, schools, etc. Develop a Liberty Township Trails and Greenways Plan.
6. Wetlands Park - Develop a restroom and trail mileage markers.
7. Dudley Memorial Park - Develop a restroom, upgrade the playground, and pave the parking lot.
8. Liberty Park - Pave the parking lot and upgrade the playground equipment.
9. Develop a consistent park entrance signage program.
10. Acquire land and develop a large Northeast Community Park.
11. Acquire land and develop a North Central Community Park.
12. Acquire land and develop a Central Community Park southeast of Millikin Road at Maud Hughes.
13. Allen Park - Develop a small playground and picnic shelter.
14. Reserves of Liberty Park - Upgrade the playground and add a restroom. Install an entrance sign along Grandin Ridge Dr.

15. Acquire additional land to be preserved as open space.
16. Develop Sunrise Stables Neighborhood Park.
17. Expand and promote the Butler County Canal Park at the Miami River.
18. Cherokee Park - Develop a playground and picnic shelter.
19. Maud Hughes Incline - Install a small picnic shelter.
20. Develop Summerlin Neighborhood Park.

Other Recommendations

1. Acquire land to assure space for future park expansion and to remain as reserved open space.
2. The Master Plan identifies potential park locations totaling 670 acres of new park development and a total of 947 acres of combined new park land and open space.
3. Reactivate the Friends of Liberty Parks and Recreation organization to raise funds for land, development, operations, and programs for both active and passive opportunities.
4. Partner with MetroParks of Butler County and other organizations to provide nature education opportunities.
5. Establish a position of Recreation and Events Coordinator to take over the

duties of planning the current and additional events. This position would be partially funded by fund raising, fees generated, and sponsorships.

6. Establish a marketing program and web based calendar to promote and coordinate the parks, programs, and events offered in the Township by various organizations.

Where to Get More Information

This new Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes a great deal of additional detail including the following topics:

- Population and land use trends
- Existing budget and staff
- Inventory of existing programs
- Inventory of existing parks and facilities
- Summary of public workshops and focus groups
- Discussion of survey results
- Park and facility needs
- Individual park recommendations and budgets
- Priorities for the proposed improvements
- Implementation strategies

This information is intended to provide the direction needed by the Liberty Township Board of Trustees, the Parks and Events Committees, Planning and Zoning Department, Services Department, and other community groups to implement the Master Plan. The final Master Plan is available for viewing at the Liberty Township offices at 6400 Princeton Road.

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I. Introduction

A. Mission Statement

The mission of Liberty Township is to maintain its position as a family-oriented community that promotes a high quality of life for all ages and income levels. The Township is committed to providing reliable services, promoting educational excellence, being environmentally conscious and encouraging a viable local economy with sustainable development and growth. In pursuing this mission, the township places a high value on protecting the residential character of surrounding neighborhoods by ensuring that the commercial development is well planned and consistent with the character of the surrounding residential community.

B. The Need for a Plan

Liberty Township is a rapidly growing community located between Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio along Interstate 75. The rapid growth is a result of significant residential development within the township. The population growth records indicate that the township had 9,249 residents in 1990 which grew to 22,819 by the year 2000, a 146.72% increase for the decade. Current estimates place the population at about 33,180 with projections to 38,394 by the year 2013. Estimates that have been performed by the Township Planning Department indicate a range of the population at the buildout condition of the community of between 59,958 and 75,643 total residents. The range is based upon dwelling units per acre of 1.6 – 2.5, and the final result will depend upon the actual development that occurs. With this in mind, the current population will nearly double and the township must be in a position to provide the facilities and services that are required to meet the goals of the above mission statement.

The parks and recreation needs for the residents of Liberty Township are met with a variety of facilities and organizations. The township and the MetroParks of Butler County combine to provide 14 locations on 322 acres of parks within the township. The 17 acre Butler County Canal Park is owned by the County MetroParks and Dudley Woods MetroPark consists of 63 acres that are owned by the township but operated and maintained by the County Park District. In addition, the Lakota Schools operate 112 acres of recreational and park facilities on their properties within Liberty Township. The township is fortunate that the Voice of America Park is located immediately adjacent to the township and provides benefits even though it is not within the township boundaries. The Lakota Sports Organization (LSO) also operates two parks with recreational facilities within the township totaling approximately 26 acres at the Walter J. Long Park and the LSO Park on Yankee Road.

The Lakota YMCA also operates an indoor facility with an outdoor aquatic center and roller hockey rink within the township area as well. The YMCA currently has approximately 13,000 members with most of those within a five mile radius which includes most of West Chester Township and Liberty Township. Indoor

recreation in the township is primarily provided by the Lakota YMCA. In addition to the sites operated by the government agencies, several homeowner associations provide open space and recreation facilities totaling 534 acres. Some of these provide neighborhood swimming pools, playgrounds, trails, picnic shelters and other amenities to serve the residents of their neighborhoods. There are also plans for at least another 104 acres of open space that will be part of future proposed developments.

The facilities provided by the township are primarily passive outdoor recreation. There are no athletic fields on any of the township properties with the exception of six soccer fields at Liberty Park. All of the youth sports leagues utilize the LSO properties, school properties or other locations throughout the community. These organizations provide a very valuable service to provide the youth athletic programs required and are realizing a very high level of participation in their activities.

The township is served by two committees related to parks and recreation activities. The Events Committee plans and organizes the July 4th Festival, Easter Egg Hunt, and Fall Festival for the community. The July 4th Festival includes a parade, 5K race and fireworks in Liberty Park. The July 4th event has over 500 participants and their fall festival has 2,000-3,000 participants. The Parks Committee plans for the development and operation of the parks and recreational facilities throughout the township and is one of the primary members of the Steering Committee for this Master Plan. It is intended that this Master Plan will become a resource for this Committee as they plan for the future of the parks and recreation facilities and programs for the township.

The Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2006, included several references to the need to improve parks, recreation and open space throughout the community. The goals of this plan were based upon several extensive public input processes including open houses with a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis (SWOT) as well as a public input survey and several open public meetings. Some of the priorities of this plan which pertained to parks, recreation and open space include the following:

1. Community identity/vision

Rural flavor could be encouraged with more rural style businesses, like history-recreation farms, more community festivals, other summer ideas, public gardens.

2. Transportation/infrastructure

Priority two - Integrate sidewalks/pedestrian ways and bike paths to create community linkages; Prepare an overall pedestrian plan.

3. Parks
 - a. Priority one - Financing of parks-find alternatives means to get money; redefine park department-park conservation.
 - b. Priority two - Make sure Liberty Township has adequate park space for the number of residents and locate them adjacent to residents.
 - c. Priority three – Require developers to provide land for parks and park facilities (encourage active and passive park facilities both public and private).
 - d. Priority four – Focus on quality of parks, not quantity.
 - e. Priority five – There is a need for a central park facility; Parks Committee needs an identified plan for trails and parks; allow a balance in the social aspects (parks, etc); join/link parks that are active and passive; consider the preservation of farm land related to the development of parks; all park land needs forward-view (hundred year not 10 year flood plain) and tree plantings (Oaks not Bradford Pear); plan for community parks where our youth have the opportunity to play team sports; need soccer fields; provide plant life areas, not just “green deserts” in all recreation areas.
4. Environmental/Historic Resources
 - a. Priority two – Developers should give “usable green space” not “leftovers”; preserve natural areas; include sidewalks, pedestrian ways and arterials

More detailed information for the Comprehensive Plan is included in the appendices.

All of these factors and the continued growth of Liberty Township caused the Township Trustees and staff to realize the need for a comprehensive process to identify the true needs of the community so that Liberty Township can be in a position to meet those needs as the population continues to grow and the land becomes more scarce.

C. Planning Process

1. The planning process for the Liberty Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan included the following components.
 - a. A review of the previous studies that pertain to the delivery of parks and recreation facilities and services in Liberty Township.

- b. A review of the population and land use trends for Liberty Township.
- c. Preparation of a parks and recreation facilities and programs inventory, including a discussion of facilities by park type and a discussion of parks and recreation facilities provided by the township, County, homeowner associations, and other providers.
- d. The preparation of a Comprehensive Needs Analysis based on recreation facility level of service guidelines, public workshops, surveys of the general public, and meetings with special interest groups.
- e. Benchmarking to other parks and recreation agencies throughout Ohio to develop comparisons to their budgets, programs, land, and staffing.
- f. Review and oversight by a Master Plan Steering Committee with representatives of the community and officials from the township.
- g. Recommendations for improvements to existing parks.
- h. Recommendations for land and new parks.
- i. Preparation of conceptual plans for selected sites based on recommendations.
- j. An Action Plan identifying the recommendations and proposed improvements, responsible party and potential funding sources for the recommendations.

D. Why are Parks Important?

Here are some reasons why this Master Planning effort, additional planning, and the future of parks and recreation in Liberty Township are very important:

The local governments, homeowners association, and non-profit organizations in the Liberty Township area manage over 1,400 acres of land designated for parks, recreation, and open space purposes. The Lakota Schools operate several additional acres of playgrounds and recreational field areas. These agencies have the responsibility to manage this land in an efficient manner that is consistent with the health, safety and welfare of the community.

For many residents, parks provide residents' only access to the natural environment. For all residents they provide natural and active outdoor recreational opportunities.

The quality of a community's parks and recreation system is viewed as one of the indicators of the overall quality of life. Property values around parks tend to be considerably higher than other areas, thereby making an annual contribution to the community in the form of higher property tax revenues, as well as additional

profits to the owners at point of sale. More valuable properties also tend to be maintained at a higher level, improving the appearance of the communities.

A recent study titled “The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation” by John L. Crompton for the Trust for Public Land included a section on the impact of parks and open space on property taxes. This study indicates that property values are higher for properties near quality parks and open spaces than for similar properties located elsewhere. Approximately 20 studies have investigated this issue in the last few decades which overwhelmingly verified the legitimacy of the “Proximate Principle” of increased land values near parks. In addition, recent surveys of home buyers by the National Association of Home Builders indicate that trails, parks, and playgrounds are three of the top five amenities that a home buyer desires when considering a new home purchase.

