

# Parks Advisory Committee Final Report

## Committee

Joseph Setting II – Chair  
Jessica Gibson – Sub-Committee Chair  
Michael Hoffman – Sub-Committee Chair  
Jonathan Husband – Sub-Committee Chair  
Romain Alexander – Member  
Anne Farley – Member  
Judy Filipkowski – Member  
Lorraine Fleming – Member  
Chris Hutchinson – Member  
Deborah Kraak – Member  
Susan Moerschel – Member  
Jim Reynolds – Member  
Larry Smith – Member  
Craig Trostle - Member

## Executive Summary

245 Parks on 5,922.55 acres as follows:

-	15	Regional / Reservation	3,224.90 acres
-	25	District	837.34 acres
-	205	Neighborhood	1,860.31 acres

There should be centralization of parks and recreation responsibilities to establish true and effective accountability, and facilitate, enhance and promote the following functions:

- (1) Interdivisional cooperation and coordination;
- (2) Development and implementation of a unified parks and recreation vision and mission;
- (3) Development, implementation and responsive revision of parks system planning;
- (4) Development, implementation and prioritizing parks and recreation budgets, including budgets pertaining to capital improvements and recreation needs and demands;
- (5) Compilation and use of in-depth knowledge of entire parks and recreation system;
- (6) Development and implementation of effective marketing strategy;
- (7) Identify and effectively advocate for parks and recreation system needs;
- (8) Identify, develop and implement clear policy for parks and recreation system;
- (9) Identify, coordinate and prioritize leases of various County assets; and
- (10) Effectively lead, with clear authority, the parks and recreation system for New Castle County.

There should be a specific effort on improving community outreach, including through the use of various technological means.

There should be an immediate effort to develop parks and recreation opportunities south of the C&D Canal.

In coordination with the effort to better centralize the parks and recreation system, there should be a particular focus on quickly and effectively responding to changing demographics, dynamics, and

stakeholder needs in adjacent geographic areas, particularly in the face of increased competition from neighboring parks and recreation systems.

There should be a particular focus on establishing a clear avenue of communication to quickly and effectively respond to public inquiries, both to allow the public to better understand where to direct their inquiries as well as to enable the County personnel to better identify and distribute responsive communication and fulfill inquiries.

There should be a renewed focus on increasing diversity within County-sponsored events by offering a broader range and reach of multicultural programs including, though not limited to, arts and music. Greater partnership with the City of Wilmington or the State, as appropriate, should be pursued to reach underserved communities.

There should be a particular emphasis and priority placed on identifying historic properties within the parks and recreation system to determine the demands and challenges of long-term asset maintenance and management.

### **SWOT Analysis**

#### **Community Communication and Outreach Sub-Committee (Chair - Jessica Gibson)**

##### Strengths

- Annual events well attended (tradition)
- Tons of park space to considered for outreach methods
- Some social media presence

##### Weaknesses

- Activities and outreach weak below the canal
- Lack of connection to new residential developments and grass roots communities
- Lack of consistent marketing and branding
  - a. No central place to view events or offerings
  - b. Duplicate efforts on social media

##### Opportunities

- Create electronic mailers to attract millennials and transplants
- Review capacity at current community events- high attendance/ high traffic
- Identify other parks/space and use to expose residents to under used spaces
- Use open space for specific community needs engagement
- Utilize technology to modernize website and all marketing outlets
- Re-engage corporate and non-profit sector
- Create a long term plan in partnership with County Pride, Inc.
- Engage Small Business Community in programs and create an "Economic-Tourism" model
  - a. Engage hotels, chamber of commerce, restaurants, outdoor Arts events
  - b. Use small parks strategically to engage community and support local non-profit missions

##### Threats

- Lack of communication/events below the canal
- Lack of collaboration with underserved/disengaged communities
- Lack of corporate and non-profit sector collaboration/funding- programing

## **Parks and Recreation System Future Planning Sub-Committee (Chair – Michael Hoffman)**

### Strengths

- Professional personnel--lean but highly competent
- Many acres of parkland obtained at little or no cost
- 2006 Long Range Park Acquisition and Development Plan (thru 2025) followed faithfully to the extent funding is available
- Plan modified as census data becomes available
- State's SCORP process aids both "parks" and "recreation" in identifying current and future needs, a collaborative effort.
- Coordination between Parks and the Land Use Department planners and the transportation planner in identifying open space suitable for parkland
- Currently a capital budget line item for parkland acquisition
- Database of existing infrastructure with lifecycle plan

### Weaknesses

- Insufficient number of specialized professionals; e.g., foresters/arborists
- Operating funding inconsistent/unpredictable over the past two decades
- Despite SCORP relationship little coordination with the State or City of Wilmington on planning for future County growth
- Limited implementation of changing planning objectives
- Maintenance staff primarily reactive rather than proactive
- Missed opportunities to improve quality and appearance of parks
- Communication between the "parks" unit and "recreation" unit a HUGE problem
- Cooperation between units likewise large problem
- Both functions understaffed and often rely on part-time or outside contractual assistance.
- "Parks" function is buried in the Special Services Department along with many disparate functions. Likewise, "recreation" functions are buried in the Community Services Department with disparate functions.
- "Parks" and "Recreation" offices/staffs in different buildings
- Lack of defined leadership for "parks" and "recreation"
- Lack of an advocate for parks and recreation needs

### Opportunities

- The area south of the C & D Canal is underserved; the "Parkland Projections for Middletown-Odesa-Townsend Planning District 2005-2025" can be reviewed, implemented as indicated.
- Other underserved areas: Ogletown and Red Lion
- Professional forestry crews and horticulturists could greatly improve the appearance of some parks; add new positions as resources available.
- Since most neighborhood parks' maintenance consists largely of mowing there is an opportunity for organizing neighborhoods to improve the appearance (and ecological values) of their parks; professional supervision (and organizing skills) could greatly aid this.
- "Parks" and "Recreation" functions can be reorganized to more effectively coordinate and address parks and recreation needs and add needed accountability.
- Utilizing community volunteers to provide leadership for improving neighborhood parks' appearance. This may include forming an Advisory Committee for New Castle County Parks.

### Threats

- Budgetary constraints a persistent problem

- Very rapid demographic changes south of the Canal have led to an increased need for additional focus on parks and recreation demands
- Competing private for-profit and NGO recreational facilities, also Maryland and Pennsylvania facilities detracting from use of New Castle County facilities
- It's unclear what money is persistently available for additional parkland acquisition

### **Maintenance of Facilities Sub-Committee (Chair – Jonathan Husband)**

#### Strengths

- Trained and skilled workers and volunteers
- Modern and functional equipment in good repairs
- Robust Capital Replacement Budget
- Up to date and accurate inventory of equipment
- Park grounds and facilities in good shape (with notable exceptions; for ex., Rockwood)
- Excellent response times (internal and external) and public interaction by employees
- Public appreciation
- Internal Communication (Planning and Operations)
- Computerized scheduling
- Unique offerings (for ex., Rockwood historic house in original landscape, Carousel Park Horse Farm, Delcastle Golf Course, Middle Run Valley Natural Area, etc.)

#### Weaknesses

- Strained budget due to varying priorities, including absence of specialists on staff
- Historic property budget/appreciation; Confusion of protocols for dealing with historic properties
- Lack of protocols for dealing with specialized contractors/employees
- Low bid enforcement
- Loss of friends groups (for ex., Rockwood)
- Vacancies and under-staffing; over-reliance on volunteers and part-time staff
- Cost/benefit analysis overlooked (dealing with quantity items) due to high initial up-front costs
- Lack of database about the status of parks' maintenance, needs and repair/replacement prioritized listing to minimize costs and maximize efficiency
- Lack of active anonymous suggestion box
- Lack of detailed O&M Plan
- External Communication with recreational programming/League play
- Cross training for specialists
- "Passing on of the Torch" successional planning
- Internal employee structure (who reports to whom) is murky
- Poor web pages and site signage
- Lack of social media presence

#### Opportunities

- Ever increasing demand for public services
- Economic development driver to force "Great" park system (need to document this) Attract corporate business to neighborhoods/environment that promotes and enhances health, safety and welfare, livable and walkable communities, enhanced recreational opportunities.
- Volunteers groups for specific projects and unique disciplines.

- Taking advantage of expert local advice on maintaining historic properties
- Taking advantage of other municipality services, and those of the county and state
- Active and regular friends groups could be started or restarted
- Leverage publicity and social media to increase awareness of parks' needs
- Education and utilization of private community groups to assist in the removal of invasive plants and woody vines that are degrading and killing the native vegetation in the public parklands and their own private open space parklands.

#### Threats

- Budget parameters set by others
- Strain on outside activities/programs/events requiring service
- Expanded services
- Diversified interests demanding services
- Parks and facilities/infrastructure additions
- Wasteful cycle of increased costs to rebuild and repair irreplaceable historic structures (after significant capital improvements) due to deferred spending of operating maintenance funds.
- Invasive plants and woody vines that are overrunning and decimating our native natural areas due to lack of resources for adequate control.

#### References

- a. NCC Parks Website Home Page
- b. NCC Parks Website List of Facilities
- c. NCC Long Range Acquisition and Development Plan (2006)
- d. NCC Parkland Projections for MOT (2005 – 2025)
- e. NCC Parkland Inventory Map
- f. DE Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2013 – 2018)
- g. Department of Community Services / Division of Community Resources Organization Chart

#### Appendix

- a. Public Meeting Agenda
- b. Public Meeting Sign-In Sheet
- c. Public Meeting Minutes
- d. Submitted Written Public Comments from the Public Meeting and the Transition Committee Website



**PARKS PUBLIC MEETING**  
Wednesday, January 11, 2017  
7pm

Gilliam Building, 67 Reads Way, New Castle, DE 19720

**Public Meeting**

**Purpose:** To receive thought and ideas from the public that will be considered in the development of recommendations to County Executive Meyer and his Administration. The recommendations will be provided to help guide improvements to New Castle County.

**7pm Joe Setting, Transition Team Chair - Welcome**

**7:15pm-8pm** Public Comment with Transition Team Members on Selected Topics:

- Each Speaker will have 5 minutes (timed)

Strengths and Weaknesses of Park Use  
Opportunities for Parks and Community Development  
Historical Parks Use

**8pm-** Update on process and final recommendations submission

**8:15pm- Adjournment**

\*Committee will accept paper notes

**PARKS MEETING SIGN-IN SHEET**

January 11, 2017

Name	Address	E-Mail
Barbara DuVal		baduval@ncdde.org
Dena Kind		ckink@ncdde.org
Carol Dougherty		ckdougherty@ncdde.org
HEATHER MERGENTHALER		hmergenthaler@ncdde.org
REGINA MARINI		rmarini@ncdde.org
Jane Rattenni		jrattenni@ncdde.org
Linda Lumis		llumis@ncdde.org
BILLY FOSTER	57 MERCER DR 19713	B.R. FOSTER 4RAVAFFOO.COM
DOUGLAS SHARPE	5 WHITE CLAY DR 19111 NEWARK DE	
Angela Connolly	124 Garrett Rd Newark DE 19713	med.stitcher1959@yahoo.com
Frank Warnock	105 medley Dr. Newark 19713	mntn2lion@yahoo.com
Brenna Gossin	3205 Fairview Rd Wilmington, DE 19808	brenna@dehature.org
Alex Johnson	1223 Ced Baltimore Rd Newark DE 19702	
Ellen Kohler	107 Dakota Ave	Kohler.e.j@gmail.com





# Minutes

Matt Meyer's NCC Parks Advisory Transition Committee Public Meeting

1/11/17 at 7 pm – Gilliam Building, 67 Read's Way, New Castle, Delaware

## Committee Members Present:

Joe Setting, Chairman  
Jessica Gibson, Sub-Committee Chair  
Mike Hoffman, Sub-Committee Chair  
Jonathan Husband, Sub-Committee Chair  
Deborah Kraak  
Judy Filipkowski  
Romain Alexander  
Lorraine Fleming  
Chris Hutchinson  
Craig Trostle  
Larry Smith

## Committee Members Not Present:

Anne Farley  
Jim Reynolds  
Susan Moerschel

## Also Present:

Brian Boyle, Acting Chief of Staff to County Executive Matt Meyer

## Joe Setting:

- Welcome. Thank you to all for attending. Requested all attendees sign in.
- 3 Subcommittees:
  1. Community Communication & Outreach: Jessica Gibson, Chair
  2. Parks & Recreation System Future Planning: Mike Hoffman, Chair
  3. Maintenance of Facilities: Jonathan Husband, Chair
- Introduction of all Committee Members
- Purpose of meeting is to receive thought and ideas from the public that will be considered in the development of recommendations to County Executive Meyer and his Administration. The recommendations will be provide to help guide improvements to New Castle County.
- [www.NCC2017.com](http://www.NCC2017.com) – for submission of comments

## Public Comments:

Arabella Bianco: President, Coalition Natural Stream Valley & actively facilitating White Clay Creek watershed. Would like an increase in spending for parks, open space and recreation facilities – especially outdoor ones. There had been a previous council to advise on open space and parks. Would like to see it brought back. At one time, \$13 Million in NCC capital improvements/parks acquisition. \$ has been removed/cutback. \$3.5 Million now in it. Requesting \$13 Million. Would like Parks to be its own division/unit in Department of Special Services. Was better and more efficiently administrated when done this way in the past (operating as its own department). A coherent division would be better for everyone.

Angela Connolly & Frank Warnock: Works at 1<sup>st</sup> State Bikes & admins of FB Group Save Ogetown Pond. Mr. Warnock noted dedicated open space in DE looks impressive. Would like every community and development to have local access to a regional park (within walking & biking distance). Not to minor smaller parks in developments, but ones like Talley Day Park or Glasgow Park. Parks are vital to wellbeing of people in area. Vast areas of state where even though much acreage is set aside, there are still areas

that don't have access to regional parks. Wants to ensure people have safe walkable/bikeable access to parks. Requests \$10 Million/yr allocated. Ms. Connolly thanked the committee and noted Ogletown is under served. Noted Vince's 17 acres is for sale and will likely become a European Supermarket with 50-70% open space.

Donald Sharp: Commended Lorraine Fleming on her great job helping environment. White Clay Creek State Park and other parks are gorgeous. Need willing buyers, lobbyists, legislators to support parks. Asking for funding for open space. Issue with NCC: Middle Run which developer made only part parkland. Would have liked to have been notified as was not happy that this happened without community being made aware.

Linda Lumb: Works for Department of Land Use & Customer Service. All of NCC events – get generally good feedback. People love these free NCC events and would like them to continue.

Bill Dunn: VP, Civic League of NCC. Recently 1 of medium sized parks, Powell Ford Park on Stanton Kiamensi Road, had path placed around it. Jon Husband got this improvement done. Community really appreciated this in Stanton Area. Original plans there were to place ball fields and other amenities however only ballfields were built. Would like it to be considered to have \$ collected from ballfield rents at this park to be used to improve the park. Since path installation, seems like 50% more people are using the park. Also, infestation of vines is an issue. Asianic bittersweet kills trees by overtaking them. Community members also have done things there (no specifics given).

Ellen Kohler: N. Wilmington resident. Her neighborhood park seems to have similar issues to NCC parks. Would like to set up network or friends group so NCC knows about their issues with park management. This type of partnership would be helpful. Parks also address SWM & Wildlife. Would love to see more open space.

Brenna Goggin: Director of Advocacy, Delaware Nature Society. Would like to continue managing parks and helping NCC with protection and environmental matters. Echoes previously noted desire for open space and funding for farmland preservation. Re: Farmland preservation, NCC could allow limited agriculture to thrive but hasn't thus far. NCC could/should protect mature forests. As a resident, she lives across from Brandywine Springs and is a dog owner and loves walking the dog. Upset and confused when walking in park and changes happen about which community is not made aware. NCC takes action in parks & doesn't notify the groups that use parks. Also, she has seen people spraying chemicals in tributary. Please have public notice in parks about planned changes so that people know what is being done in parks (for example: when clear or cutting – why?).

Ray Johnson: Commended Jon Husband on his work. He is here to speak for deer, cougar & animals that parks serve. He's followed the cougar for 5-8 years. Does cougar tracking from White Clay past Veteran's Hospital to Christiana to Red Lion to Diet Mills to Iron Hill to Elk Mills and back to White Clay. Cougars do public a big favor as deer predators. Need to provide pathways to connect parks via railways and streams and passages - working with highway department. If wildlife had passages, wildlife and humans could co-exist better.

#### Conclusion:

Joe Setting: Final Report Due 2/1/17. Compiling all Sub-committee work and public comments into report. Thank you to the public and the Committee Members.

Of note: After meeting, the following email address was identified for use by community in finding out what is happening in parks or to notify NCC about issues with parks: [ParksRequest@NCCde.org](mailto:ParksRequest@NCCde.org).

Minutes taken by: Judy Landis Setting