

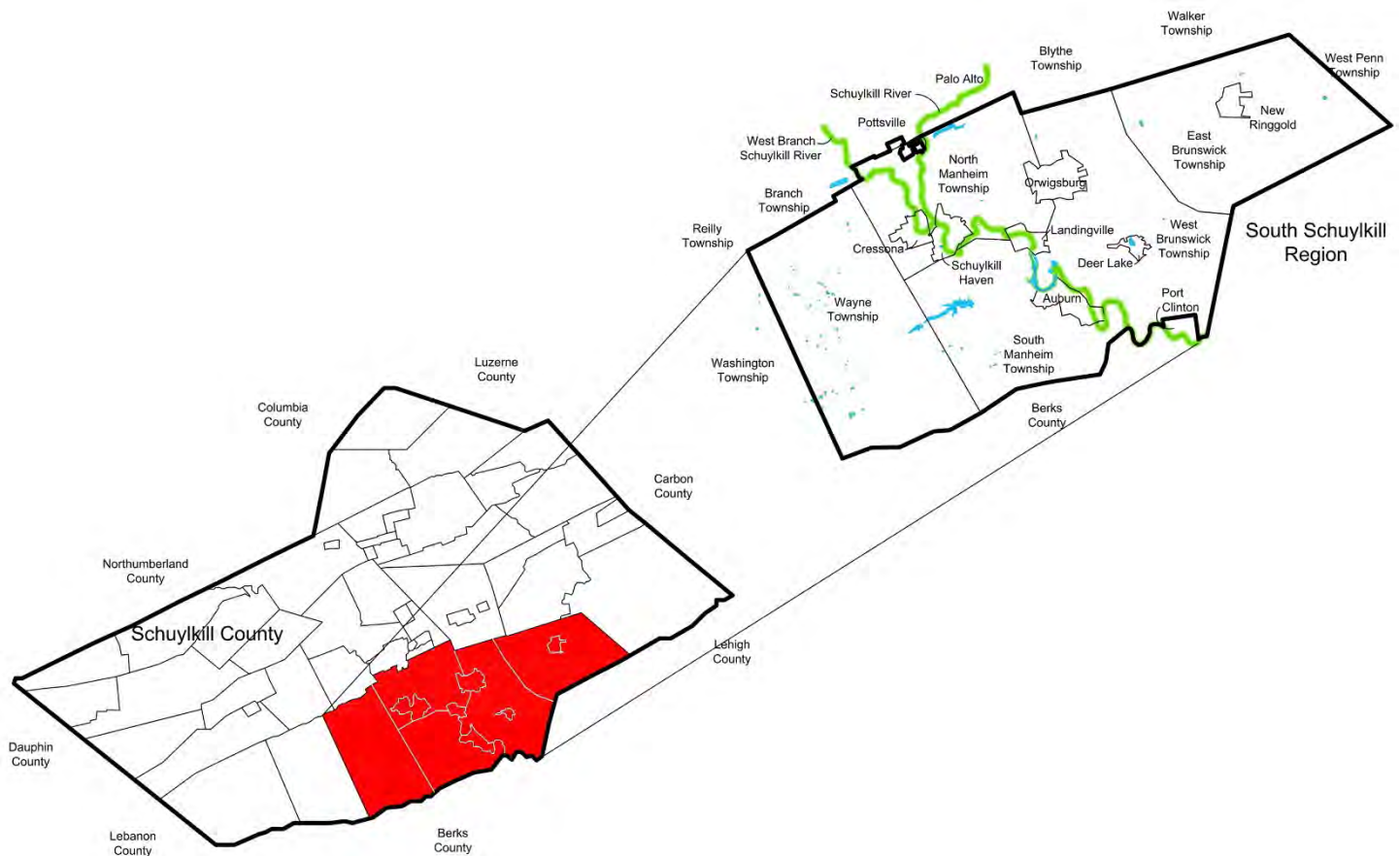
# Chapter 2

## Regional Profile

# Chapter 2 – Regional Profile

Understanding the context and character of the South Schuylkill Region communities is vital to creating a plan for parks and recreation that will successfully serve citizens. The regional profile explores the region's locations, history, demographics, and findings of the public involvement process for this **Plan**.

## Location and Configuration



The South Schuylkill Region is comprised of 12 municipalities in south-central Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. The municipalities include seven boroughs (Auburn, Cressona, Deer Lake, Landingville, New Ringgold, Orwigsburg, and Port Clinton Boroughs) and five townships (East Brunswick, North Manheim, South Manheim, Wayne and West Brunswick Townships). Nine of the 12 municipalities make up the Blue Mountain School District, to include: Auburn, Cressona, Deer Lake, New Ringgold, and Orwigsburg Boroughs and East Brunswick, North Manheim, Wayne, and West Brunswick Townships. Landingville and Port Clinton Boroughs and South Manheim Township are part of the Schuylkill Haven School District.

The South Schuylkill Region is south of Pottsville Borough, the County seat and extends to the Berks County border to the south. Adjoining municipalities to the east include West Penn Township, to the

north include Walker, Blythe, East Norwegian, Branch and Reilly Townships and Pottsville Borough, and to the west Washington Township. The region is traversed by the West Branch Schuylkill River and Schuylkill River, generally flowing north to south through the center of the region.

## History

Schuylkill County was formed on March 1, 1811 out of Northampton and Berks counties. Parts of Columbia and Luzerne counties were added in 1818. The name honors the Schuylkill River. The County seat is Pottsville. Early settlers were German.

The history of the County is closely tied to the story of anthracite coal mining. Anthracite coal was discovered in Schuylkill County in 1770 but its benefits were not recognized until the 1800's.



The Schuylkill Canal, 108-mile waterway connecting Philadelphia and the County, was completed in 1828. The Schuylkill Canal aided the growth of coal mining and other industries, transporting resources between Schuylkill County and major markets such as Philadelphia, New York City, and Baltimore. In 1833 the first rail locomotive transported coal in the County and by 1844 railroads had overtaken the canal as the primary means of transporting coal from Schuylkill County. The anthracite industry fueled the County's industrial revolution. After World War I the demand for anthracite decline. In addition to anthracite coal, Schuylkill County's heritage is based in agriculture of the fertile valleys between the mountains.

## Municipal Government

The South Schuylkill Region includes 12 municipalities, seven boroughs and five townships. The seven boroughs are governed by borough councils made up of five to seven members. Boroughs follow a Borough Code; they tend to have a weak mayor system, where the elected council holds most of the power. The mayor is primarily responsible for oversight of law enforcement, but can break a tie in council, as well. The council can appoint a manager to institute policies. The five townships are second-class townships which are represented by a Board of Supervisors, usually with three or five members that function under the Second Class Township Code.

## Demographics

### Population History & Projections

The South Schuylkill Region had a 2010 population of 23,449. Between 2000 and 2010 Pennsylvania grew by 3.4-percent and Schuylkill County lost population at a rate of -1.36-percent. The South Schuylkill Region population grew at 6.15-percent over the same time. Schuylkill County does not



calculate population projections. Population projections from the US Census 2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate are noted in Table 2-1. The 5-Year Estimate show that overall the South Schuylkill Region was projected to decrease population by 0.39-percent. Eight of the 12 municipalities in the Region have a projected decrease in population, with Port Clinton and Landingville Boroughs projected to have significant decreases. The remaining four municipalities show growth over the same time, with Deer Lake and Cressona Boroughs having projected growth over 8-percent.

Table 2-1 Pennsylvania, Schuylkill County and Southern Schuylkill Region Municipal Population History and Projections						
Area	1990 Population	2000 Population	2010 Population	% Change 2000-2010	2016 Population Estimate *	Estimated % Change 2010-2016
Pennsylvania	11,881,643	12,281,054	12,702,379	3.43%	12,783,977	0.64%
Schuylkill County	152,585	150,336	148,289	-1.36%	145,503	-1.88%
Southern Schuylkill Region	20,396	22,090	23,449	6.15%	23,357	-0.39%
Auburn Borough	913	839	741	-1.17%	763	2.97%
Cressona Borough	1,694	1,635	1,651	0.98%	1,798	8.90%
Deer Lake Borough	550	528	687	30.11%	746	8.59%
East Brunswick Township	1,506	1,601	1,793	11.99%	1,748	-2.51%
Landingville Borough	192	175	159	-9.14%	100	-37.11%
New Ringgold Borough	315	291	276	-5.15%	263	-4.71%
North Manheim Township	3,404	3,287	3,770	14.69%	3,728	-1.11%
Orwigsburg Borough	2,780	3,106	3,099	-0.23%	3,027	-2.32%
Port Clinton Borough	328	288	326	13.19%	260	-20.25%
South Manheim Township	1,558	2,191	2,507	14.42%	2,534	1.08%
Wayne Township	3,929	4,721	5,113	8.30%	5,093	-0.39%
West Brunswick Township	3,227	3,428	3,327	-2.95%	3,297	-0.90%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, \* US Census 2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate

### What Change is Significant?

The U.S. Bureau of the Census considers a change of 2.5-percent to be significant.

## Age

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the median age for Schuylkill County was 43.2 in 2010, higher than the State at 40.1. Three municipalities match or have a lower median age than the State to

include: Cressona, Port Clinton, and Deer Lake Boroughs. Seven municipalities had higher median age in 2010 than the County with West Brunswick Township having the highest with a median age of 48.1.

Over one-quarter of the South Schuylkill Region population is less than 25 years old, the traditional ages that are targeted with park facilities. The active adults, ages 25 to 74 comprise 63.8-percent of the South Schuylkill Region. This large age cohort is interested in traditional park facilities as well as facilities for fitness and wellness. Trails are very popular with this age group. Planning and programming for active seniors and seniors over 75 years old is important based on the older demographic of the region.

Area	Under 5 years	5-24 years	25-54 years	55-74 years	75+ years	Median Age
Pennsylvania	5.7	26.2	39.9	20.5	7.7	40.1
Schuylkill County	5.2	22.2	40.8	22.4	9.4	43.2
Southern Schuylkill Region	5.0	22.8	40.4	23.4	8.4	-
Auburn Borough	4.3%	24.0%	42.2%	22.0%	7.4%	43.9
Cressona Borough	5.9	26.2	42.6	17.7	7.6	38.9
Deer Lake Borough	6.4	24.0	43.4	21.7	4.5	40.1
East Brunswick Township	3.9	23.3	42.8	23.2	6.7	44.5
Landingville Borough	5.7	27.7	39.0	22.0	5.7	41.9
New Ringgold Borough	7.6	22.8	44.2	17.0	8.3	42.0
North Manheim Township	5.3	24.4	38.8	21.5	10.0	43.5
Orwigsburg Borough	4.6	21.7	36.8	21.9	15.0	45.5
Port Clinton Borough	7.7	26.7	40.8	19.3	5.5	37.5
South Manheim Township	5.1	22.8	42.3	24.5	5.3	43.3
Wayne Township	5.0	22.1	41.7	24.8	6.3	44.7
West Brunswick Township	4.6	19.9	38.4	28.2	8.9	48.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

## Race

The 2010 U.S. Census American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate lists Schuylkill County as 94.4-percent white. The South Schuylkill Region is generally homogenous from the perspective of race with only one municipality listing a lower percentage of white residents in 2010; North Manheim Township at 93.6-percent.

## Education

The 2016 U. S. Census American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate indicated that 87.9-percent of Schuylkill County residents are high school graduates. An additional 15.3-percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Residents of the South Schuylkill Region have more high school graduates with only Auburn, New Ringgold, and Port Clinton Borough and West Brunswick with fewer percentage of high school graduates.

Table 2-3 Pennsylvania, Schuylkill County and Southern Schuylkill Region Municipal Race, Housing Value, Household Income, Education Attainment, 2016					
Area	Race - % White Population	Median Value Owner Occupied Housing	Median Household Income	Education % High School Graduate or Higher	Education % Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Pennsylvania	81.9%	\$167,700	\$54,895	89.5%	29.3%
Schuylkill County	94.4	95,200	46,573	87.9	15.3
Auburn Borough	97.7	85,000	45,139	78.8	10.4
Cressona Borough	96.8	107,800	55,667	89.1	12.2
Deer Lake Borough	97.2	187,100	72,917	95.9	27.7
East Brunswick Township	97.0	202,700	64,271	93.6	28.7
Landingville Borough	98.1	102,500	62,750	92.2	14.3
New Ringgold Borough	96.4	94,200	47,500	86.1	15.5
North Manheim Township	93.6	176,600	74,720	92.3	25.6
Orwigsburg Borough	95.7	145,600	55,986	90.2	27.9
Port Clinton Borough	98.2	90,000	49,464	80.2	5.2
South Manheim Township	98.0	171,800	70,781	90.5	23.5
Wayne Township	97.8	168,700	70,601	95.0	26.4
West Brunswick Township	97.2	166,200	54,312	87.6	28.4

Source: US Census 2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate

## Income

The median income for Schuylkill County is \$46,573, which is less than the state. The median income for the South Schuylkill Region exceeds the County in 11 of the 12 municipalities. Generally, the South Schuylkill Region is more affluent than other communities in the County.

## Housing

The median value of an owner-occupied house in Schuylkill County is \$95,200, based on the U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates. The median value of owner-occupied housing for the state is \$167,700. The median value of owner-occupied housing in the South Schuylkill Region exceed the Schuylkill County value in 10 of the 12 municipalities.

## Public Participation

This planning project included a four-part public participation process which included working with a Study Committee, conducting interviews and forums, holding public meetings, and coordinating an on-line public comment survey.

### Study Committee

The Study Committee was established to guide the planning process and provide feedback regarding project findings. The Study Committee was comprised of representatives of the 12 municipalities, Blue Mountain School District, Schuylkill County, and Blue Mountain Recreation Commission. The Study Committee met several times throughout the plan development to discuss project findings and planning considerations and to review the draft report. The Study Committee provided guidance and direction on the plan, identified key stakeholders for interviews, and shared feedback and ideas for consideration.

### Key Person Interviews and Forums

The planning process included interviews and forums with key stakeholders in the region. The purpose of the interviews and forums was to obtain information, ideas, concerns, and suggestions from individuals and organizations regarding parks, trails, recreation facilities, and recreation programs. Forums were held with public works supervisors and sports organizations. In addition to attending a forum, each sports organization was asked to fill out a detailed questionnaire detailing the participation, playing season, facilities, and maintenance and operations of the sports program.



### Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held to obtain input from citizens regarding their leisure interests, park and recreation opportunities, and existing park use. The first public meeting was held early in the planning process. The public meeting was preceded by an open house where citizens could view maps of parks and trails and ask questions of the consultant team. The open house and first public meeting drew over 30 attendees.

A second public meeting was held to share the mission, vision, goals, and recommendations of this **Plan**.



## Online Public Comment

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The Blue Mountain Recreation Commission hosted an on-line questionnaire on their website. The questionnaire explored resident's opinions regarding parks, recreation facilities, and how they would like to spend their leisure time in the region. The questionnaire was posted from May 16, 2017 to November 8, 2017 and 544 people logged onto the on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire included 14 multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. The questionnaire results are summarized on the next page.

- **The most popular reason respondents visit parks is to Experience Nature (68.70%), followed closely by Fitness and Wellness (65.56%) and Trail Activities (64.07%).** The next highest response is Self-Directed Activities (60.56%). Self-directed recreation to pursue personal interest in the outdoor setting is why residents visit parks.
- **Respondents indicate that the South Schuylkill region communities should prioritize Maintaining Parks and Recreation Facilities (76.12%) over the next ten years.** The second priority is Improve Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities (68.25%) and the third priority is Achieve a Balance of All of Above (63.75%).

When high priority and medium priority are combined, the priorities switch with Improve Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities (98.77%) the highest and Maintaining Parks and Recreation Facilities (97.96%) the second priority. The third highest priority is Achieve a Balance of All of Above (96.54%).

The highest respondent percentage for the Low Priority category is Acquire New Parkland (26.21%).

Investing and maintaining existing parks should be the priority for the region.

- **Most of respondent's state that they never visit most of the parks in the South Schuylkill region.** Most of the parks are small community parks and the finding that most respondents never visit most parks aligns with a regional perspective where respondents are only familiar with the parks in their community.

Of the facilities listed, only three parks received most respondents indicating that they visit the facility Seasonally: BMSD Middle School Indoor Swimming Pool (44.87%), Orwigsburg Memorial Park (33.12%), and Albright's Woods Park (32.55%).

Two parks had the highest response for Not Aware of This Park Facility: Aaron Kreager Playground (52.17%) and East Brunswick Park (44.05%).

When the total visitation (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, and Seasonally) is combined, Albright's Woods Park is the most visited (73.67%). This aligns with the preference stated in Question #1 for self-directed activities in an outdoor setting. The second most visited is Orwigsburg Memorial Park (71.80%). The next most frequent site for visitation is BMSD Middle School Indoor Swimming Pool (67.95%).

- **Respondents indicated that it is Very Important (VI) to expand or add the following facilities in the South Schuylkill region. The top 10 VI facilities are listed in priority order. Also noted are the combined total for Very Important and Somewhat Important (SI).**



1. **Restrooms – VI – 72.69%, VI+SI – 96.84%**
2. **Trails for running/jogging/bicycling/cross-country skiing – VI – 61.50%, VI+SI – 93.16%**
3. **Children’s play equipment/area – VI – 54.65%, VI+SI – 91.61%**
4. **Dog park area – VI – 41.08%, VI+SI – 71.33%**
5. **Swimming pool – VI – 40.14%, VI+SI – 72.48%**
6. **Picnic Pavilion – VI – 38.51%, VI+SI – 85.81%**
7. **More Access Area for Canoe/Kayak Launch – VI – 37.64%, VI+SI – 76.42%**
8. **Informal Picnic Area – VI – 32.88%, VI+SI – 84.13%**
9. **Spray Ground – Water Spray Play Feature – VI – 32.42%, VI+SI – 66.67%**
10. **Recreation Center with Gymnasium, Class Rooms – VI – 27.33%, VI+SI – 69.02%**

The ranking stays the same for the top 3 responses if the scores for Very Important and Somewhat Important are combined.

The convenience of having restrooms in parks is important to visitors. Trails for exercise and children’s play areas are considered core facilities for parks.

Dog parks are preferred by a core contingent of respondents, but, interest in the facility when broadened to include both VI and SI (71.33%) falls below standard park facilities such as Picnic Pavilions (85.81%), Informal Picnic Areas (84.13%), Special Events Area (79.73%), More Access Area for Canoe/Kayak Launch (76.42%), Swimming Pool (72.48%), Basketball Court (72.31%), and Athletic Field Lights (71.62%).

The highest response percentage for the Not Needed option was 20.00% for Lacrosse Field. Lacrosse is growing significantly in many areas of Pennsylvania and is taking participants from traditional sports such as baseball, football, and soccer. Lacrosse is not played in either the Blue Mountain School District or the Schuylkill Haven School District and no club teams or recreation lacrosse leagues have been established. As the sport is introduced into the area the need for additional multi-purpose flat fields will grow.

- **Responses to Availability of Recreation Programs in the South Schuylkill region was split by age.** The three youngest cohorts (Preschool, Elementary School Students, and Middle School Students) ranked highest with the Right Amount of recreation programs based on the responses, although Not Enough was the second ranked response in each age group. The four older age groups (High School Students, Young Adults, Adults, and Mature Adults) and Families ranked Not Enough as the highest response. Don’t Know was the highest response for People with Disabilities.

With Not Enough as the second highest response for preschool through middle school children, there is room for growth in programming opportunities. Not Enough as the highest response for high school students, adults of all ages, and families shows the need for expanded programming.

- **Respondents indicate that the number one reason they do not participate in BMRC programs is Don't Know About Them (34.01%).** The second highest reason is Too Busy (27.03%) followed by Programs Offered Do Not Interest Me (20.64%). The same question for the Schuylkill Haven Recreation Department resulted in a clear majority of respondents indicating that they Don't Know About Them (61.62%).

Over one-third of respondents are not participating in Blue Mountain Recreation Commission programs because they do not know about them. More than half of respondents are unaware of Schuylkill Haven Recreation Department programs. Marketing of programs is needed.

- **Respondents, by age, indicated highest interests in the following recreation programs:**
  - Preschool – Arts and Crafts (30.86%), Summer Day Camps (26.79%), and Aquatics (23.68%).
  - Elementary School – Summer Day Camps (74.11%), League Sports (baseball, basketball, soccer, etc.) (61.11%), and Arts and Crafts (56.57%).
  - Teens – League Sports (baseball, basketball, soccer, etc.) (51.11%), Non-League Sports (golf, tennis, etc.) (48.77%), and Clubs (45.09%).
  - Adults – Self-Improvement and Education Classes (87.88%), Exercise and Fitness (86.57%), and Outdoor Recreation, water-based (kayaking, canoeing, tubing, paddle boarding) (84.39%)
  - Seniors – Trips (23.45%), Special Events (19.82%), and Concerts (18.77%).

Program interests vary by age. There is strong interest in more recreation programs for adults, particularly learning, fitness, and outdoor activities. Senior program interests lean toward less active, social recreation activities. Teen interest in non-league sports and clubs opens some areas for potential program expansion.

- **Respondents indicated the following preferences regarding annual additional investment in parks and recreation:**
  - I would be willing to pay up to an additional \$10 per year more (32.85%).
  - I would be willing to pay between \$11 to \$20 per year more (27.58%)

Combined the two responses above garner 60.43% of respondents.

- I am not willing to pay more (21.10%)

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents are willing to pay more per year for park and recreation investment.

- **Respondents indicated that they receive information about parks and recreation opportunities in the region from Blue Mountain Recreation Commission website (32.69%), Social Media (19.85%), and Word of Mouth (12.83%).** Non-traditional communications (websites) are more popular than traditional notices about programs (newspaper, newsletters).

- **The open-ended question: *Please use this space for any additional comments you may have regarding parks and recreation in the South Schuylkill region.***, garnered 100 responses. Of the 100 responses, 20 referenced the need for a dog park and 9 noted the desire for more trail opportunities.

## Public Participation Process, Research, and Review of Current Conditions Findings

Each method of obtaining public input found a consistent message from the citizens of the South Schuylkill Region. The following summarizes the input from the public meetings, on-line survey, key stakeholders, and observations from field work and assessment of current condition.

**Parks** – The municipal parks typically target the recreation needs of youth with an emphasis on play equipment and sports fields. Memorial Park/Albright’s Woods/Blue Mountain Middle School together function as the hub for active recreation in the area. The playgrounds generally need to be updated, with a few exceptions, and the equipment should be arranged to be age-segregated. There are typically no accommodations to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act in the parks. Resident interest in developing a dog park was expressed at the first public meeting and in the on-line questionnaire. Access to streams and the river is desired to participate in fishing and paddle sports.



**Schools** – The partnership and facilities at the schools of the Blue Mountain School District are important to the overall delivery of recreation services. The middle school provides athletic fields for youth sports and the indoor swimming pool which is available to community use for programs and open swim. The high school and elementary school fields and gymnasiums are also used for recreation programs.

**Community Sports** – Various organizations, including the Blue Mountain Recreation Commission, provide youth sports programming for residents of the South Schuylkill Region. The programs use municipal parks, schools, and private athletic fields located through the region. The basketball, wrestling, swimming, softball, and T-ball programs are stable while the soccer program is growing, and football and baseball are slightly decreasing in participation. Baseball, softball, and soccer leagues indicate that they would like additional fields. The need for fields was noted to become more necessary for practice once the competitive season begins. Community organization use of private fields is critical to meeting the field needs of the programs. Without the use of private fields there would be a greater need for additional fields at parks and schools.

The region has not seen the introduction and growth of lacrosse and field hockey that other areas of the State are experiencing. If or when these sports are introduced into the South Schuylkill area, additional pressure will be placed on the available fields.

**Trails** – The on-line questionnaire results show a strong desire by respondents for trails and access to natural areas. The most popular reasons respondents visit parks are to Experience Nature (68.70%), Fitness and Wellness (65.56%), and Trail Activities (64.07%). 93.16% of respondents ranked trails for running/jogging/bicycling/cross-country skiing as very important or somewhat important. The region is fortunate to have the Bartram Trail and citizens would like to see the missing trail links developed. Trails should be provided in existing parks to provide close-to-home locations for fitness and wellness activities.

**Programs and Services** – The Blue Mountain Recreation Commission provides important public recreation services which include sports league coordination, the summer park programs, swimming pool operation and programs, recreation programs for youth and adults, and special events. Additional program opportunities are desired for high school students, young adults, adults, mature adults and families.

**Maintenance** – Finding time and small budgets make park maintenance a challenge in the smaller communities of the region. Opportunities should be explored to cooperate on park maintenance within the region. Maintenance activities should be formalized in a written maintenance management plan to improve work scheduling, tracking, and budgeting. Playgrounds should be routinely inspected by a Certified Playground Safety Inspector.