



Chapter 6

Park Maintenance

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Park Maintenance Practices

The Public Works Departments of the 12 Southern Schuylkill municipalities are responsible for maintaining the public parks, trails, and indoor and outdoor recreation facilities owned by the municipalities.

Good maintenance practices are important for South Schuylkill region public park areas, trails and recreation facilities for five reasons:

- 1) Increased Safety for Visitors – Public safety is an essential concern; proper maintenance of park areas and recreation facilities helps municipalities manage risk by avoiding unnecessary injuries. The municipalities are less likely to be sued for negligence if staff routinely checks for unsafe conditions and then promptly corrects hazardous situations.
- 2) More Facility Use By the Public – Well-maintained facilities are frequented more often. Residents are only able to enjoy their park visits if facilities and equipment are maintained in useful condition.
- 3) Less Vandalism – Well-maintained facilities are usually less vandalized. Vandalism corrected as soon as possible, and proper maintenance procedures, allows that to happen.
- 4) Citizen Support for Additional Recreation and Park Facilities – As citizens see the municipalities properly maintain park areas and recreation facilities, they are more inclined to support expansion of these areas and facilities.
- 5) More Attractive Municipalities – Well-maintained public park areas and recreation facilities help to develop a positive image for the municipalities, making them places people want to live and work.

The Public Works Departments provide the maintenance needed to provide safe, clean, useable and attractive park and recreation facilities to the public in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Maintenance is typically the single largest recurring expenditure in parks and recreation operations. Over the lifetime of a park, about 75% of its cost can be attributed to maintenance while the remaining 25% is the cost of acquisition, development, design and construction.

The amount and frequency of maintenance needed at each park location is largely dependent on the age of facilities, type of construction, intensity of use, the kind of activities, vandalism and community expectations. Park maintenance tasks are focused on the duties needed to proactively and reactively care for the parks including a variety of recreation facilities and amenities.

Dusk-to-dawn lighting is typically provided under pavilions and on the outside wall of ball field sheds. None of the parks are gated and there are few security cameras in place at parks. Rules and regulations for park areas have been adopted by ordinance and are posted at most park sites.

A Public Works Forum was held in August 2017 to bring together the staff responsible for maintaining the park areas, recreation facilities and trails in the region. Seven municipalities and the Blue Mountain School District were present.

The current park maintenance practices of each municipality include the following:

West Brunswick Township

- Recent park improvements are doubling the size of the parking lot, adding new bleachers and a new netted batting cage.
- Has 2 full-time road crew staff who help with park maintenance.
- Has a written inter-municipal agreement with South Manheim Township and Wayne Township which provides structure to coordinate public works activities.
- Mowing is contracted out; advertisements on the ballfield fences pay for the mowing contract.
- Inspections are done on an informal basis.
- Orwigsburg Softball drags and lines fields with its own equipment, has dumpster, puts trash cans out and empties them into dumpster, pays for portable restrooms.

South Manheim Township

- Currently has no park areas or recreation facilities except for portions of a trail, which the township mows.
- Has 3 full-time and 2 part-time (summer) staff.

Wayne Township

- Recent park improvements include a new playground. Recreation fields are being developed as well at a new park area.
- Mowing is contracted out.
- Has 4 full-time and 2 part-time staff who help with park maintenance.
- Portable restrooms and trash removal are paid for by the township.
- Inspections are done twice each year.

- A recreation board has just been established, which will be a big help in determining what improvements to make and budget needs.
- Capital funds are set aside for park improvements with the help of the Blue Mountain Recreation fund and a \$1,000 per lot mandatory dedication ordinance.

Cressona Borough

- Basketball and tennis courts need to be resurfaced.
- Has 2 full-time and 1 part-time (summer) staff who help with park maintenance, including maintenance needs at the swimming pool.
- Does one large inspection of park areas and recreation facilities in the winter, plus a visual inspection in the spring.
- Cressona Baseball does a lot of work at the ballfield areas, including mowing.

Orwigsburg Borough

- Recent park improvements include a new playground at Memorial Park. The Little League and T-ball fields need major overhauls. The playground at Walborn Street is not in good shape. A new playground is planned at Ridgeview.
- Has 3 full-time and 2 part-time staff who help with park maintenance. The borough maintains all facilities, mows grass and collects trash. Has 1 part-time cleaning person for the Memorial building and 1 part-time person for Albright's Woods rentals.
- Little League provides some maintenance help.
- Budget is done by borough council.
- Does inspections twice each year – spring and fall – in between times the users of the playgrounds will report issues to the borough staff.

Deer Lake Borough

- Significant park improvements have been planned over the last few years. The entire park will be renovated. Plans are to create a performing arts/festival/special event facility. Revenue enhancement is built into the park plans.
- Sports fields are in good shape. The tennis courts are not in good shape and may be adapted for other uses. Parking lots are getting new lighting and ballfields are getting new backstops.
- Has no employees, either full- or part-time. Park maintenance is subcontracted, including mowing, trash removal, restroom, concession stand and cook shed cleaning.
- Volunteers help with grass mowing at the ballfield.

- Inspections are done on an ongoing, informal basis by volunteers.
- Maintaining the dam at the lake (desilting) is the biggest maintenance challenge and a huge expense.
- Holds a yearly budget workshop with budgeting done on a 1, 5 and 10-year basis.
- Scheduling of the grove/pavilion area is at times a challenge. Groups want to use it for free and don't understand the need to reserve it.

East Brunswick Township

- Planned park improvements include removing the basketball/tennis court area and outdated playground and replacing them. Property has been purchased for a potential indoor community center facility.
- Has 3 full-time and 2 part-time staff who help with park maintenance.
- Approximately \$250,000 has been spent on recreation facilities in the past few years. The township is continuing to make significant financial investments in parks and recreation. Have received DCNR and DCED grant funds.
- Inspections of facilities are held twice each year and problems are reported to the township supervisors.
- The budget process is ongoing.
- Scheduling of the field is beginning to be an issue. One field is not enough and it is getting too much use.

Blue Mountain School District

- Maintains 5 buildings plus the Eagle Field complex.
- Planned improvements include installing new stadium restroom facilities, which will be funded with the help of the Blue Mountain Rec fund and school district funds.
- The walking trail receives a lot of use and is cooperatively maintained with the help of Orwigsburg Borough. The track is also open for community use.
- Has shared school district owned equipment to help multiple municipalities (infield groomer). Works closely with Orwigsburg Borough to maintain facilities. Helped to resurface the floor at the Memorial gym.
- Head custodians do inspections of all facilities.
- Deadlines for usage requests for school district facilities are a minimum of two months prior to use. This helps prevent last minute requests.

Park Maintenance Overview

Overall, the park areas and recreation facilities are in good shape. Exceptions to this are some of the older playground areas, tennis courts and basketball courts.

The parks are maintained by a combination of full-time and part-time public works/roads crew staff in each municipality (with the exception of Deer Lake Borough, which has no staff) and contracted services (mainly grass mowing). Most of the municipalities are subcontracting mowing.

Some of the municipalities work together for park maintenance by sharing equipment and expertise. Each municipality has between 2-4 full-time and 1-2 part-time public works staff who perform park maintenance tasks. The Blue Mountain School District also shares its maintenance equipment with some municipalities.

Youth sports organizations play a role in recreation facility maintenance, ranging from dragging and lining ballfields, to paying for portable restrooms, to paying for trash removal.

Improvements are continually being made to facilities by the municipalities. Examples are new bleachers, expanded parking areas, and new playground areas. Vandalism is not a significant problem. Park area and recreation facility inspections are generally done twice each year, in the spring and fall. Repairs are made as soon as possible once identified.

Budget workshops are held each year with parks and recreation items included.

Park Maintenance Needs

Issue #1: Scheduling of field usage is difficult, with many different groups wanting to use fields and municipalities having different procedures to request use.

Standardizing field and facility request forms and rental agreements is needed. Some of the municipalities do not currently use a field/facility request form. Coordinated scheduling among the municipalities would be helpful. Also, helpful would be the development of a priority list of field users. For example, those sports programs that are open to and serve all youth should receive priority for use of fields over those programs that are open by try-out only. Those programs that serve mainly region residents should have higher priority for field use over non-resident groups.

Issue #2: Finding time to do park maintenance work can be difficult.

Other responsibilities of the public works staff take priority much of the time, especially work on municipal roads.

Issue #3: The budgets for park maintenance are not nearly enough to do the job as well as could be done.

The municipalities are making do with the funds and the personnel they have to the best of their ability. Any increase of park maintenance budgets, however small, would make a significant difference in the quality of maintenance.

Issue #4: Keeping park maintenance equipment in working condition is an issue, as new equipment is not purchased on a regular basis.

An inventory of park and field maintenance equipment across all municipalities and the school district is needed as a start to coordinate shared use.

Issue #5: More sports groups are being formed and sports seasons are continuing to get longer.

Fields and facilities are constantly being requested and used. There are not enough fields and facilities available to meet the demand. The school district facilities are maxed out and can't handle even the current usage. Municipal facilities are in the same situation (West and East Brunswick Townships for outdoor facilities; Orwigsburg Borough for indoor facilities). Scheduling the usage of Memorial gym is difficult. It is in very high demand and booked solid, as it is one of the only available indoor facilities outside of school district facilities.

Issue #6: The playground equipment is not fully inspected on a regular basis to ensure it meets Consumer Product Safety Commission standards.

A Blue Mountain Rec staff person is a Certified Playground Safety Inspector. Time needs to be allocated for him to do an inspection for each of the municipalities and the school district of their playground equipment to identify playground safety issues including hazards, equipment specifications, surfacing requirements and risk management methods.

Issue #7: At times, individuals and groups do not follow rules for facility use and may even damage park property.

Municipalities all have different rules and regulations for the use of their park facilities. Standardizing rules and regulations would make it easier to enforce them. Park rules and regulations should be uniform, including park opening and closing hours. Installing inexpensive security cameras that link to cell phones would help to identify vandals and reduce damage.

Issue #8: There is no written maintenance plan that describes the municipalities' expectations and timing for park maintenance.

The grass is cut and trash is picked up, but overall, the condition of the parks is average. Items such as lack of basketball court striping and inadequate playground surfacing give the appearance of average maintenance and more care needed for some of the park areas and recreation facilities.

Providing regular joint in-service training for park maintenance staff would help to set basic standards for maintenance across the municipalities. The municipal workers responsible for park maintenance need to be trained together.