



Chapter 7

The Recreation Commission



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50 Years of Cooperation

Almost 50 years ago, the Blue Mountain School District and its nine municipalities concluded that by working together, they would maximize the use of current park areas and recreation facilities by the public and successfully avoid duplication of park areas and recreation facilities needed in the future, saving money for each entity. They also determined that the municipalities and school district would work together to plan for facility development, improvement and maintenance so that facilities would keep pace with recreation participation.

In this geographically large, rural area, a partnership would also make it possible for the school district and the municipalities to offer an extensive schedule of recreation programs that none could offer on their own. In addition, intergovernmental cooperation would increase the partners' competitiveness for grant funding for park and recreation facility development and improvements.

In October 1968, an intergovernmental agreement forming the Blue Mountain Intergovernmental Recreation Commission was adopted by ordinance by the Boroughs of Auburn, Cressona, Deer Lake, New Ringgold and Orwigsburg and the Townships of East Brunswick, North Manheim, Wayne and West Brunswick, and by resolution by the Blue Mountain School District.

The Commission's Structure and Authority

The Commission governing body is designated as the 'Recreation and Park Board' and consists of 20 voting members who serve four-year terms. Each municipality is represented by two members, one resident and one elected official. The Blue Mountain School District is represented by two members, both of which must be an elected school board member. Thus, each municipality and the school district are equally represented as partners.

The Commission's authority is spelled out in its intergovernmental agreement, a copy of which is in the appendix. It is a governing, policy-making board and has regularly scheduled monthly meetings and approved by-laws for its operation.

The school district's role in the funding and operation of the Commission, along with the nine municipalities, provides residents with a full-service recreation department in a rural area that would not otherwise have this important community service.

Purpose and Mission

The purpose of the Commission is to effectively and economically meet the present and future needs of citizens by operating, planning, and supervising community recreation services and facilities, close to home, through joint efforts of the 10 governing bodies. The Commission may not own or acquire real estate but may enter into lease agreements for the use of facilities. The current mission statement of the Commission follows.

Mission Statement

It is the major objective of the Blue Mountain Recreation Commission to extend to the greatest number of people throughout the Blue Mountain area, regardless of age, sex, race, handicap, skill level or financial status, the most varied recreational activities that are practical to originate and conduct.

Finances

The formula for financing the annual budget of the Blue Mountain Recreation Commission is 10 percent (10%) of the one percent (1%) Earned Income Tax that is collected by each municipality and the school district. The Earned Income Tax proceeds are split evenly between each local municipality and the school district. Payments are made by each municipality and the school district to the Commission monthly as funds are received from the tax collector. Table 7-1 details the contribution amounts for 2015 and 2016.

Table 7-1 Municipal/School District Contributions to Blue Mountain Recreation Commission from Earned Income Tax Receipts – 2015 and 2016		
Entity	2015	2016
Auburn Borough	\$7,109	\$7,508
Cressona Borough	\$17,022	\$17,127
Deer Lake Borough	\$8,988	\$9,151
East Brunswick Township	\$25,396	\$25,754
New Ringgold Borough	\$2,394	\$2,386
North Manheim Township	\$43,118	\$45,852
Orwigsburg Borough	\$37,442	\$38,472
Wayne Township	\$60,593	\$63,127
West Brunswick Township	\$44,089	\$43,550
Blue Mountain School District	\$241,806	\$248,451
Total	\$487,956	\$497,712

Annual Budgeting

The Commission operates its budget on a calendar-year basis. The annual budget and cost sharing contributions are reviewed by the Recreation and Park Board no later than its September board meeting. The budget must be approved by its October meeting and distributed to all governing bodies participating in the Commission no later than October 31.

Table 7-2 details the actual operating revenue and expenses for the Commission from 2014 to 2016 and the 2017 budget. The net revenue shown for each year is carried over to the following year via the Commission fund balance.

Table 7-2 BMRC Operating Revenue and Expenses				
	2014 Actual	2015 Actual	2016 Actual	2017 Budget
Total Revenue	\$763,360	\$801,860	\$800,185	\$804,900
Total Expense	\$719,320	\$763,605	\$826,915	\$804,900
Net	+\$44,040	+\$38,255	-\$21,730	\$0

Source: BMRC

Approximately 61% of the Commission budget is funded by earned income tax contributions, 33% is program revenue, and 6% is pool admission and concession revenue.

Capital Improvement Fund

The Capital Improvement Fund was started by the Commission in 1974 to allow municipalities and the school district to provide or improve recreation facilities in their jurisdictions. Currently the Commission allocates \$100,000 each year to the Capital Improvement fund. The funds are divided among the entities in proportion to the percentage of total earned income tax funds paid to the Commission in the previous year. Each entity must submit a letter to the Recreation and Park Board detailing their project. Once the project is approved work can move forward. Entities are reimbursed after the Recreation Director inspects the work and paid bills are submitted. If an entity does not submit a request, the funds allocated to it lapse into the general fund of the Commission. An entity may request that funds for a recreation facility be accumulated and held over a period of years.

Table 7-3 BMRC Capital Improvement Fund			
Municipality	Balance 12/31/15	Allocated 2016	CIF Fund Total
Auburn Borough	\$4,380	\$1,500	\$5,880
Cressona Borough	\$13,118	\$3,500	\$16,618
Deer Lake Borough	\$8,901	\$1,800	\$10,701
East Brunswick Township	\$30,250	\$5,200	\$35,450
New Ringgold Borough	\$2,918	\$500	\$3,418
North Manheim Township	\$15,984	\$8,800	\$24,784
Orwigsburg Borough	\$24,272	\$7,700	\$31,972
Wayne Township	\$62,618	\$12,400	\$75,018
West Brunswick Township	\$51,636	\$9,000	\$60,636
Blue Mountain School District	\$137,499	\$49,600	\$187,099
Total	\$351,575	\$100,000	\$451,575

Source: BMRC

Table 7-3 outlines the Capital Improvement Fund balance from 2015, the distribution amounts allocated to each municipality and the school district in 2016, and the total amount currently in the fund.

In-Kind Support

The in-kind support of the Blue Mountain School District is an invaluable asset for the Commission. Its office is on school district property; it is not charged rent but pays the utility bills for the office. Full-time employees are school district employees with school district benefits. Payroll is performed by the school district. Salary and benefit costs are reimbursed to the school district by the Commission. The Recreation Director is hired by the school district and considered as a school administrator.

The school district provides custodial assistance when needed. The Commission hires its own gym attendants and has keys to all school buildings. The school district plows the parking lot at the Commission offices when necessary, cleans the exterior bathrooms located behind the offices, and does maintenance at the offices such as replacing lights, fixing plumbing problems, etc.

The school district provides space for all recreation programs free of charge, storage areas at the schools to house program supplies, human resources support regarding insurance and benefits questions, and field maintenance if needed, including trash removal. In particular, the open access to schools for community recreation maximizes the use of these tax-supported facilities for all ages, not only school-age children.

The municipalities also provide in-kind support to the Commission. Cressona Pool is managed by the Commission for the Borough, which provides maintenance support including start up, shut down and winterizing duties for the pool. Municipalities that host the Commission summer playground programs provide trash removal from the sites. Use of all municipal parks and recreation facilities is free of charge for programming. Municipalities also offer space to promote programs in newsletters and at municipal buildings.



Staffing and Volunteers

The Commission school-year office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Summer office hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday. Its offices are located on Blue Mountain School District property in a separate building.

The Commission employs five full-time staff in the following positions: Recreation Director, Program Coordinator, Recreation Supervisor – Sports and Playgrounds, Recreation Supervisor – Aquatics, Recreation Programming and Special Events, and Administrative Assistant.

In 2016, the Commission employed 34 part-time staff in child care, lifeguard, water safety instructor and gym attendant positions during the school year. In the summer months, 68 part-time staff worked in lifeguard, water safety instructor, child care, playground leader, pool attendant and office assistant positions. In addition, the Commission has independent contractors it pays to run Biddy Tumbling, Cheernastics, Dog Obedience, Aqua Aerobics, Scuba Diving and Yoga programs. Four swim team coaches are hired for each season as well. A personnel procedure and policy manual has been formally approved and adopted by the Commission.

Agency Brand

The Commission has a logo which is not used on all printed material. Its printed material also does not have a consistent, recognizable look. The Commission has no positioning statement or agency tag line to use in conjunction with its logo.

Program Administration

The Commission is known for its quality recreation programs for youth. Programs are focused primarily on school age children. Its most popular programs are the youth basketball league, track and field school day program, swimming lessons and swim team. The Commission offers very few programs for adults and no senior adult programming. Programs for preschool age children and family special events are limited as well.

Table 7-4 lists the individual number of people who participated in Commission activities in 2016, by program category and season.

Table 7-4 BMRC Program Enrollment Statistics - 2016					
Category	Fall	Spring	Summer	Winter	Total
Adult Programs	35	37		12	84
Aquatic Programs	150	190	364	101	805
Cressona Pool Pass			397		397
Red Cross Program		14	8		22
Summer Camps			381		381
Summer Youth			815		815
Youth Programs	290	118	50	141	599
Youth Sports	541	131	92	155	919
Totals	1,016	490	2,107	409	4,022

Source: BMRC

Program Partners

The Commission has few partners for its recreation programs outside of the municipalities and the school district. It works with the American Red Cross for its certification programs and partners with a company called Science Explorers to run programs.

Program Locations and Facility Use

The school district allows the no-cost use of the elementary schools, middle school and high school buildings and grounds for community recreation programs throughout the year. Access to school facilities is excellent as are relationships with school personnel. Requests for school use for programs have always been approved.

The Commission utilizes the following places to host programs:

- Blue Mountain Elementary East
- Blue Mountain Elementary West
- Blue Mountain Elementary Cressona
- Blue Mountain Middle School
- Blue Mountain High School
- Albright's Woods – Orwigsburg Borough
- Memorial Building – Orwigsburg Borough
- Deer Lake Park Area – Deer Lake Borough
- Auburn Park Area – Auburn Borough
- Park on Tyson Street – New Ringgold Borough
- Park and property on Route 443 in Wayne Township (formerly owned by Higher Ground Worship)
- Park in Cressona Borough

The Commission operates two public swimming pools for the region's residents. The Blue Mountain Middle School indoor pool is open during the school year and over the summer months; the outdoor Cressona pool is open over the summer months. The Commission has lease agreements with the school district and Borough of Cressona to manage and operate the two swimming pools.

How Many?

BMRC statistics show it had 4,022 participants in its programs in 2016.

Program Revenue

Program prices appear to be very reasonable and not a deterrent to participation. Fees were reduced significantly in 2011; many programs were reduced in price by half the cost. Most of the program fees have not been increased since 2011.

Program revenue as a percent of total Commission revenue was 33% in 2016.

The Commission does not have a non-resident fee policy in place. At times, non-residents are charged higher fees, but there are no established guidelines for how those fees are determined. The Commission has a scholarship program in place to provide financial assistance to children whose families have demonstrated financial needs.

If a program is cancelled, a full refund or credit is issued. Due to injury/illness before or after the start of the program, if the Commission is notified immediately, a pro-rated/full refund or credit is granted

after a letter is received by the program participant and/or the doctor for approval at the Commission's monthly board meeting.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation forms exist for youth recreation programs. However, program participants are not asked to evaluate programs on a regular basis.

Program Promotion

The Commission publishes newsletters and program flyers that are distributed through the schools. It also utilizes its website, Facebook and email notifications to promote programs, as well as placing printed material at municipal offices and area businesses. A seasonal program guide is not produced.

Facing the Future

The Commission offers many quality recreation programs for the region. It is a respected and professionally-managed agency that has served the region's residents for nearly 50 years through a unique, special partnership arrangement among the Blue Mountain School District and its nine municipalities. In particular, the Commission's direct tie to the school district allows public recreational use of the facilities supported by taxpayers.

As it enters its next 50 years of service to the community, some issues face the Commission, which are outlined below.

Issue #1: Community leaders may not fully understand how the services and programs provided by the Commission benefit residents and the community and may take its services for granted.

Not enough time and effort has been spent on promoting the success the Commission has had and the benefits residents are gaining through its services. At every opportunity, the Commission needs to promote the benefits of its services to residents and inform elected officials about its successes. This task appears to have taken a back seat to program delivery. The upcoming 50th anniversary is a great opportunity for the Commission to begin to share its story.

Issue #2: The Commission Recreation and Park Board is not engaged or leveraged to support the agency as well as it could be.

Specifically, some board members have not attended meetings on a regular basis. In addition, some board members may not be reporting progress to the entity they represent. Moreover, some board members do not regularly show their support by attending programs.

Issue #3: The Commission's website could be enhanced to better inform the public of its programs and services.

People of all ages use the internet daily to access information. While the current website is functional, a professionally-designed website would enhance the Commission's image and better engage residents.

Issue #4: The Commission has not established and implemented its brand.

The Commission's mission statement is outdated; the look of printed materials is not consistent; the logo is not used consistently, does not reflect the programming and does not reproduce well. Better branding will help elevate awareness of the mission and help the community understand the value the Commission brings.

Issue #5: Municipalities need support and help to better maintain their park areas and recreation facilities.

The Commission has a role to play in improving the maintenance of municipal park areas and recreation facilities which will need to be determined. It has a significant opportunity to be more involved with its municipalities to provide technical assistance for parks, trails and recreation facility operation and maintenance.

Issue #6: Some age groups are not served well with recreation programs.

The Commission offers many programs; however, three age groups have few programs offered for them: preschoolers, adults and seniors.

Issue #7: The Commission works with few partners to provide programs.

The list of potential partners for the Commission is a long one – area sportsmen's clubs, Orwigsburg Library, Hawk Mountain Scout Reservation, Diakon Living and Learning after 50, etc. Partners would help the Commission to provide expanded program opportunities.

Issue #8: Program participants are not regularly asked to evaluate programs.

Measuring the qualitative success of recreation programs and special events through evaluations helps to improve existing programs and expand program offerings. The more the Commission knows about people's experiences in programs, the better it will be able to improve programs to provide quality experiences.

Issue #9: The region has an abundance of parks, recreation facilities and natural areas for people to enjoy on their own.

The Commission could play a role in promoting the self-directed opportunities available in each municipality, including the facilities available for rental.

Comparison of Municipal Parks and Recreation Revenue and Expenses

Table 7-5 presents a comparison of the parks and recreation spending and income of each municipality in 2014. The percentage of the total municipal budget spent on parks and recreation is presented as well. Parks and recreation expenses for the nine municipalities participating in the Blue Mountain Recreation Commission include the contributions to the Recreation Commission from earned income tax receipts, as well as any other municipal parks and recreation expenses.

Table 7-5

Parks and Recreation Revenue and Expenses by Municipality – 2014*

Municipality	Total Revenue	Parks & Rec Revenue	Total Expenses	Parks & Rec Expenses	% Spent on Parks & Rec
Auburn Borough	\$225,683	\$0	\$232,305	\$8,231	3.5%
Cressona Borough	\$581,634	\$3,762	\$563,739	\$13,355	2.4%
Deer Lake Borough***	\$263,131	\$0	\$378,971	\$18,686	6.7%
East Brunswick Township***	\$674,852	\$0	\$555,907	\$25,070	4.5%
Landingville Borough**	-	-	-	-	-
New Ringgold Borough	\$97,369	\$0	\$142,329	\$2,261	1.6%
North Manheim Township	\$1,421,679	\$0	\$1,321,977	\$46,414	3.5%
Orwigsburg Borough***	\$1,349,119	\$0	1,433,398	\$76,823	5.4%
Port Clinton Borough	\$70,863	\$210	\$94,515	\$4,111	4.4%
South Manheim Township	\$629,886	\$0	\$633,018	\$0	0%
Wayne Township	\$953,857	\$3,000	\$1,129,949	\$75,211	6.6%
West Brunswick Township***	\$1,063,839	\$0	\$802,226	\$58,130	7.2%

*PA DCED Governor's Center for Local Government Services Municipal Annual Audits and Financial Reports

**No information was listed

***Public library financial supporter