

BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE

INTERIM REPORT OF THE MAYOR'S AD HOC FIELD STUDY COMMITTEE

April 8, 2019

Introduction

This Committee was formed to study all recreational properties owned by the Borough, both active and passive; to determine what improvements can be made; what the estimated costs would be for these improvements; to establish priorities for the improvements; and to explore funding options to finance the improvements. To date, the Committee has met on February 18, March 7 and April 3, 2019.

It is the last point, exploring funding options and making a funding recommendation, that is the Committee's first priority. Because this item was the first order of Committee business, the recreational property inventory list on page 2 is not a complete report of the Committee's recreational property findings as more time is necessary to speak with stakeholders as well as the Recreation and Open Space Committees to complete the list, recommend improvements, and address the costs involved.

The Committee is dedicated to creating safe, attractive, useable recreational areas that will appeal to all current members of our community as well as future members. In order to develop and enhance the Borough's current properties, the Committee recognized the need to identify a means of funding these improvements without increasing taxes.

Funding Recommendation

The Committee discussed various fundraising avenues. Considering the number of potential projects, listed below, benefiting Bernardsville's diverse community of outdoor space enthusiasts, the Committee's recommendation is to amend the current Open Space Tax Ordinance.

The current ordinance, amended by public question on November 4, 2008, provides that up to 20% of the Open Space tax be used for development and the remaining 80% is strictly for property acquisition. The Committee is recommending that the Council amend the ordinance so that effective January 1, 2020, 20% would be allocated strictly for acquisition and 80% would be for either acquisition or development. The current balance in the Open Space Tax would remain for acquisition only. By increasing the portion of the tax available for development, the improvements would be financed with no additional cost to taxpayers.

This would require public approval by placing a question on the November 2019 ballot so the ultimate decision would lie with the residents. Attached is a proposed draft of the ballot language and Questions and Answers. The Committee is aware that a ballot question needs to be submitted prior to August 1, 2019 for the November ballot and therefore requests that the Council give this recommendation serious and immediate consideration.

The Process Following Resolution of the Funding Question:

1. Inventory Properties

The following properties were identified as Borough owned recreational properties:

- Basketball Courts
- Chestnut Avenue
- Claremont Field
- Kiwanis/Rotary Field
- Laurelwood Trail
- Lindabury/Nervine Park
- Meeker Road

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- Moraine Crest
 - Old Army Trail
 - Peters Tract - 251 Claremont
 - Polo Grounds/Veterans Field
 - Rose Bowl
 - Swimming Pool

2. Make Property Assessments

The following is a brief listing of suggested improvements to the properties, not necessarily in order of priority:

- Basketball courts – lighting, lower hoops for younger players
- Chestnut Avenue
- Claremont Field – fieldhouse, bathrooms accessible from outside
- Kiwanis/Rotary Field - garden, parking lot
- Laurelwood Trail - complete clearing to Roundtop Road, trailhead kiosk
- Lindabury/Nervine Park - walking path, benches
- Meeker Road
- Moraine Crest - trail, bridge, walkway on Mt. Airy Road
- Old Army Trail - benches
- Peters Tract/251 Claremont - trail clearing, entrance gate, security
- Polo Grounds/Veterans Field - lighting, additional electric and plumbing for snack bar, bathrooms, softball field bleachers, storage shed
- Rose Bowl – dugouts for player safety
- Swimming Pool - parking lot, renovated bathrooms/locker rooms
- TBD – location for a dog park

Funding just a few of these improvements would require more than three years of the 20% currently allocated for improvements in the Open Space ordinance, without any funds being put aside for turf replacement.

3. Establish Priorities

Once estimated costs and scope of work have been determined, the Committee will make recommendations to the Recreation Committee and Borough Council as to project priorities.

Why Invest in Developing Recreational Properties

Investing in the Borough's outdoor spaces will benefit all its citizens. Outdoor recreation is

- Good for the mind. It prevents or reduces stress; improves self-esteem, confidence and creativity; spiritual growth; and provides an increased sense of exhilaration, adventure and challenge from life.
- Good for the body. Getting outside provides physical benefits, such as aerobic, cardiovascular and muscular fitness, as well as improved functioning of the immune system.
- Good for social connections. The great outdoors affords social benefits like bonding with like-minded people who enjoy similar outdoor activities and feeling an increased pride in their community and nation.
- Good for the economy. People who regularly participate in outdoor recreation tend to be more productive at work. And the preservation of the natural areas needed for outdoor recreation increases property values.
- Great for the great outdoors. Outdoor recreation provides environmental benefits, including increased environmental awareness. Concern that results from outdoor recreation can lead to increased involvement in environmental issues.

Members of the Committee are: Jim Davis, Greg Degrandpre, Mike Dwyer, Heather Eich, Sarah Falzarano, Ned Ginty, Mike Hoppe, Graham Macmillan, Steve Reynolds, Al Schaufler, Frank Sole, Marc Walden and Luis Zorrilla.