WOLF’S HOLLOW
MASTER PLAN
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Appendices are included in a separate enclosure.
INTRODUCTION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wolf's Hollow County Park is a passive recreation park found on the western edge of Chester County. Its quiet setting is interrupted only by the sound of the creek, birdcalls, hay harvesting machinery, and the occasional gunshot from the nearby sportsman’s club. Its character is of a country estate, with areas of manicured lawn, a lengthy allee of trees, and traces of horse trails meandering through the woods. This picturesque landscape welcomes visitors, with many options for hiking and walking, and tranquility among the woods, streams, and fields. As Chester County begins to assess its full potential, these inherent qualities are important to remember, as they are found less and less in the developing urban/rural fringe of this part of Pennsylvania.

Indeed, some of the biggest impacts for Wolf's Hollow Park will come not from extensive program and amenities, but from telling the stories of the layers of history that has taken place here. This park represents an opportunity for passive recreationists to enjoy an outdoor space that showcases a natural condition that has reclaimed prior human interventions. The Octoraro Creek was, over different phases of its history, the site of much industrial activity, and its stories trace the similar arc of many other sites found throughout Chester County. Indeed, it is part of a much larger interpretive script that weaves across this part of the country.

The woods, fields, and water of Wolf’s Hollow do not need extensive structures, built up features, or intensive activity in order to be appreciated by the public as a county park. Instead, they should be nurtured the way they are, with improvements focusing on access, visitor safety, and outdoor education and interpretation. As the residents have noted, there are many other locations around Chester County, where sports fields, and activities such as mountain biking, already exist or are poised to be developed.

As well, there are existing parcels within the park boundary that could be considered for sale in order to help finance park improvements. The River House parcel, in the southwestern corner of the Park, could potentially be sold to a private owner, as this piece of the Park is difficult to access and maintain. The 12-acre outparcel along Schoff Road could also be sold, with a conservation easement in place that would help mitigate stormwater runoff issues upstream of the Park. It has been noted that the Stoltzfus property, near the northwest corner of the Park, is a desirable piece of land that would help the Park in numerous ways, including habitat protection and the potential for a new creekside trail. These property transactions are at this point only preliminary, but they have been given consideration in the production of this final document.

The called-for improvements to the Park are designed to enhance and protect the existing assets. Major components include the Core Loop Trail, the reconstruction of the Dam and floodplain, and a new entrance to the Park that accesses an improved Barn Complex that is open to the public.

The Core Loop Trail gives visitors a relatively level, easily navigated 2-mile path, which weaves its way through various habitats and landscapes and provides connections to all major trails within the existing trail network. The Core Loop Trail establishes a new edge between the forest and the fields near the central barn complex, setting up the conditions for the creation of a spectrum of ecotones that will cater to an increased diversity of birds, reptiles, insects, and mammals. The variated edge will also create conditions for different plant species to thrive, adding to visitor interest and to the health of the Park’s ecosystem.

Another major component of the Master Plan is the reconstruction of the wet meadow floodplain behind the Dam structure. Originally designed to hold a pleasure lake for the estate on the hill, the Dam has since been breached, and the stream that fed the lake now cuts a deep trench across the landscape before cascading into the woods. The twin goals of the reconstruction are stormwater management and educational interpretation. The wet meadow will help infiltrate and slow stormwater that enters the Park from neighboring properties and upstream golf course, and will also help reduce downstream erosion. In addition, as an accessible environmental feature, school groups and visitors will be able to explore a unique ecological system up close. The creation of a boardwalk will enable walking out into the floodplain, to understand how the stream makes its meandering course through the vegetation and how wildlife live among the grasses. This will be an ideal spot for bird watching and spotting amphibians, in addition to being an interesting historical component to the Park’s backstory.

Third, a new entrance is proposed to open up the northern half of the Park and make the entire park more accessible to visitors. Glen Run Road currently serves only emergency and maintenance vehicles, as agreed upon in the Special Exception guidelines that defined the operational framework for the Park. Now is a good time to reassess this road to determine its highest and best use for the public, which could be a new gateway to Wolf’s Hollow. This would alleviate pressure on the southern half of the Park, and would provide easy access to the nearby Core Loop Trail. The opening of this new entrance would significantly increase the level of enjoyment for visitors to the Park.

Between these three major park features, the Core Loop Trail, the Wet Meadow Boardwalk, and the new entrance on Glen Run Road, the access, stormwater management, and educational and interpretive experience at Wolf’s Hollow will be substantially increased, at a cost that does not take away from the existing beauty and quiet nature found throughout this edge of Chester County. The rest of the park improvements focus on maintaining the structures and landscapes already in place, with enhancements to the trail network that serve to improve the visitor experience and protect investments that have already been made.

The plan focuses attention on two important zones of the Park, referred to as the Fields and the Dam. These zones represent areas of the Park that contain woven layers of the plan’s five themes: natural resources, cultural resources, stormwater management, infrastructure amenities, and recreational amenities. They showcase the ability of this park to be many things to many people, depending on the day, season, duration of visit, activity, or group size. These zones will be the primary attractions of the Park, attracting visitorship while easing the impact on more sensitive areas from large groups or continuous use.

On the whole, this plan seeks to establish a guiding document for the future managed development of Wolf’s Hollow Park. It has gone through an extensive public engagement process, and been influenced by many of the interested parties that value the Park. The plan is flexible, with options for testing ideas, choosing alternatives, and continuing to engage the public as the needs of the County and the desires of nearby residents evolve. What remains intact is the impact the Park has on its visitors, through its picturesque landscape of rolling fields, deep woods, and swift streams. The plan ultimately seeks to preserve the desired qualities that exist, enhance the features with powerful potential, and grow when necessary the infrastructure that keeps the Park safe, accessible, and enjoyable.
PARK NOMENCLATURE

The two maps on the facing page label and designate various park features and places, so that they may be referenced throughout this document. Some of the naming conventions may not directly align with existing conditions, as the maps intend to show a planned future state that does not yet exist.

In naming natural features, the design team merely hopes to create easily referenced locations, and not set specific names for Chester County to use going forward. Naming can be an interactive way for county residents to take ownership and make the Park feel like their own, and may develop organically over time.
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Broadly speaking, the primary goal of this Master Plan is to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural and cultural resources of Chester County. In addition, the plan seeks to provide educational and interpretive opportunities related to significant on-site environmental features and cultural artifacts, create a high quality recreational attraction in western Chester County, and provide a safe, clean park that is inviting and welcoming to users of all ages and backgrounds. Overall, the plan promotes sustainability in environmental preservation and management, seeks to be financially responsible, and encourages social equity through the creation of accessible, engaging, and community-oriented open space held in common by the public.

Within these larger goals, the Master Plan intends to create a shared vision and framework for the long term development of appropriate park uses, facilities, and improvements. Through a community engagement process the Master Plan sought public input and gave residents the chance to have their say and inform the discussion about how the Park should function and be used. By establishing clear priorities the plan should be able to inform future decision making, and understand the wider connections between local, regional, and national park trends.

The Site Plan design is intended to put down on paper the locations and extents of proposed park improvements or adjustments, and although precise construction and implementation may differ in size and scope, the Site Plan helps to communicate intended results and envision future frameworks. This includes identifying appropriate improvements to park infrastructure and utilities. Complementary to the Site Plan is the General Maintenance Management Plan, which guides the effective operation of the Park going forward, and the Cost Estimate, which begins to put dollar amounts on implementaiton.
The Master Plan for the Park is impacted by the Special Exception Guidelines outlined in the purchase agreement by Chester County. Key components of that agreement are listed here, as they influenced design decisions and will play a factor in implementation.

22. Sound master planning for the proper development of the County park dictates the need for a gradual and careful planning process extending over a period of years prior to the development of the park. It is not possible for the County to seek and obtain the development approvals necessary to develop the park, or to gain protection from ordinance changes, without first completing that process.

- This Master Plan represents the careful planning process that is required.

24. The details of each of the proposed uses for the park or property as a County park will evolve specifically through a combined process of public participation and professionally guided master planning under the auspices of the Department of Parks and Recreation of the County and the County Commissioners.

- This Master Plan utilized public participation and a professionally guided master planning process, working in conjunction with a stakeholder committee and county officials.

This decision is subject to the following conditions:

a. The County would not conduct a major event at the Park without prior approval of the Board of Supervisors, which shall not be unreasonably withheld or delayed. A major event is one which is reasonably expected to draw attendance of 500 or more visitors to the Park on a single day over the average attendance for that day.

b. The County will locate the public access to the Park on Schoff Road. The Park’s access to Glen Run Road would be used solely for maintenance and emergency service.

c. The County shall use sound planning practices for the development of any mixed use, e.g., pedestrian and equestrian, trails so as to minimize risk of injury.

d. The County shall maintain in agricultural use the areas of the Park designated for agricultural use on the Future Land Use Map identified as Exhibit A-6 in the proceedings of the Zoning Hearing Board.

- These considerations have been examined through the master planning process, and this document provides guidance for the County to move forward in a responsible and sensitive manner to enhance the park experience for county residents.
CONTEXT AND SURROUNDINGS

Chester County

An affluent county just west of Philadelphia, Chester County was one of the original counties created by William Penn in 1682. Located between Philadelphia and the inland farms of the Susquehanna region, Chester County has a long history of settlement and influence through different eras of our country’s history. With West Chester as the County seat, a number of smaller towns and boroughs dot the landscape of farm fields and natural areas. Atglen Borough is nearest to Wolf’s Hollow Park, and the main east west thoroughfare of the Lincoln Highway (Route 30), passes nearby. In addition, Amtrak’s Keystone line crosses east to west through this portion of the County.

The Chester County Park and Recreation Department was established in 1958. Today the system includes over 4,600 acres of dedicated public parkland, made up of six regional parks that serve different areas of the county and provide different experiences and resources for visitors. The mission of Chester County Parks is to provide conservation, management, maintenance, education, and recreation services to residents, businesses, and visitors so that they may experience open space and understand the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the County.

West Fallowfield Township

Wolf’s Hollow sits in the northwest corner of West Fallowfield, a township of Chester County with a population of about 2,500 people, many of whom are Amish farmers. Located on the western border of Chester County, separated by the Octoraro Creek from Lancaster County, West Fallowfield encompasses 18 square miles of fields, creeks, and pockets of forest. Approximately 70% of West Fallowfield is devoted to agriculture, as most its rolling hills are designated prime agricultural soils. Many of the landowners in the township have placed their farms under agricultural conservation easements, and about 6,000 acres of farmland are in Agricultural Security Areas.

Octoraro Creek

A tributary of the Susquehanna River, and part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Octoraro forms the boundary of Chester and Lancaster Counties. The creek drains a total of 208 square miles of Pennsylvania and Maryland on its way to the Chesapeake Bay. The creek is managed by the Octoraro Creek Watershed Association, which is dedicated to protecting and conserving the natural and historical resources of the Octoraro Watershed. As an active partner with landowners and municipalities, the Association works to improve water quality and promote sound land use practices. Designated a Pennsylvania Scenic River, the creek is accessible to the public at various points, but its shoreline remains predominantly wild. As its eastern branch flows through Wolf’s Hollow, it is quite shallow, but large and wide enough to support a variety of riparian species of fish, turtles, and the occasional river otter.

Wolf’s Hollow

Wolf’s Hollow Park is located in western Chester County, and was opened in 2010. The Park is 569 acres of deep woods, fields, glades, and water. It contains the largest continuous swath of forest in West Fallowfield township, and fronts almost three miles of the Octoraro Creek. The Park is rustic in nature, with limited public facilities, and a single vehicular entrance with a small parking area. Hiking only trails wind their way through the woods and around the edge of the fields, which are in active agricultural use. The terrain of the Park has retained its natural state, as much of the area is defined by steep hillsides unfavorable to development or agriculture. The Park is designated as a Carry In/Carry Out Area. A large County maintenance facility currently occupies a central portion of the Park.
Regional context map.