UNDERSTANDING WOLF’S HOLLOW
At the beginning of the project, the design team undertook an extensive analysis of existing plans and information about Wolf’s Hollow, and used Chester County resources and in person site visits to record and begin to understand the landscape of the Park.

The following maps portray the results of the initial inventory, broken into four categories: Natural Resources, Cultural Resources, Infrastructural Amenities, and Recreational Amenities. These maps formed the basis for the following stages of the plan, and informed the consultant team’s interpretation of Wolf’s Hollow County Park.
Natural Resources

Water
2.7 miles of the Octoraro Creek
1.5 miles of tributary stream
1 quarter-acre pond

Woods
374 acres of forest (over 100 acres interior forest)
8 acres of open woodland
67% of the Park

Fields
30-40 acres of mowed clearing
33 acres of meadow
106 acres of crop hayfield
14 acres of prime agricultural soils
28% of the Park

Cultural Resources

Ruins
Dam
Stone Walls
Boathouse
Stone House

Buildings
Residential Structures
Orchard House
Maintenance Complex (Barn + Garage + Shed)

Recreational Amenities

Over 8 miles of trails
Picnic Areas

Infrastructure

Public entrance
County entrance
Residential entrance
2 mile Wolf’s Hollow Drive
20 parking spaces
20 overflow parking spaces
Natural Resources – Forest, Fields, Water

Wolf’s Hollow is dominated by a mature forest encompassing 374 acres. The forest topography is steep, with many slopes greater than 15%. The riparian corridor of the Octoraro Creek is restricted by these slopes, and so is the swift-flowing tributary stream that falls into the Octoraro from the farm fields to the east. This stream valley anchors the southern half of the Park, and is the dominant natural feature that visitors engage with after leaving the parking area.

Farming is present in the Park on the level areas, where the prime agricultural soils are utilized for growing hay. The fields in the center of the Park surrounding the Barn Complex, and at the southern entrance to the Park, create transition zones from neighboring farms. A significant woodland edge exists in multiple places between field and forest, and the park experience is largely absorbed through the double-lens of open expanse and enclosed woodland.

Around and between these major zones can be found natural meadows, mowed lawns, and areas of low brush and small trees. There are pockets of generously spaced coniferous trees, encroaching forest reclaiming open clearings, and riparian habitat near the pond and in the stream behind the Dam. There is ornamental planting along the road, with a one mile alley of maple trees extending from the creek ford to the northern forest edge.

Cultural Resources

There are many layers of heritage in Wolf’s Hollow County Park. Over time, the Park has passed through four epochs of use, including pre-colonial settlement, industrial growth, country estate, and now finally, as a park. Presently, the Park shows runs from Octoraro Creek mills, the country estate of Leonard Schoff, and the Gagliardi family, the last owners to occupy the park site before it was sold to the County. The features found among these layers include the truly historic stone walls and foundation ruins along the creek, a small house at the northern end of the Park (Visionary Center), and the very recently constructed Manor House. The Orchard House, a historic structure rebuilt in the last century, contributes to the cultural story of Wolf’s Hollow along with the breached dam and boathouse foundation. A full report on the Orchard House can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to structures, the landscape can be read as a cultural resource, because it indicates settlement, intervention, and alteration that showcase the types of land uses and modifications that have occurred over time. The forest, for example, contains many old growth trees that cannot be found in most of Chester County. The agricultural fields, and their fences, are very characteristic of the landscape of agrarian settlement in this part of Pennsylvania.

Recreational Amenities

The principal recreational element found in the Park is the trail system. There are many miles of trails, of varying degrees of difficulty, that access most of the Park’s land. The longest trail is the Octoraro Ridge Trail, which begins at the visitor parking lot and winds through the stream valley before climbing up to the top of the steep slope above the Octoraro Creek. Other trails form loops or provide connection to the Octoraro Ridge Trail, while the Fenceline Trail follows the extent of the farm fields around the Barn Complex. In addition to these trails, many visitors treat Wolf’s Hollow Drive as a pedestrian path, as it is the only paved surface found in the Park. While it is steep in some areas, and exceeds accessibility requirements, it is ideal for strollers and runners looking for a smooth surface.

The six viewpoints found in the Park are characterized by level areas of dirt, grass, and gravel, and have picnic tables and offer views to the creek and beyond, especially in winter. Other picnic areas can be found scattered around the Dam and floodplain area, at the pond, and where the Fenceline Trail meets Wolf’s Hollow Drive.

Infrastructure

The existing infrastructure at Wolf’s Hollow was created to serve the previous owners’ needs, as a way of accessing buildings and providing utility services. As determined by the Special Exception, the only entrance to the Park is on Schoff Road, which forms the southern boundary. Wolf’s Hollow Drive enters the Park on the south side and meanders past the Dam, over a small ford in the creek, up to the manor house, on to the barn complex and down to the visionary center on the north end. This is the only road in the Park, with the exception of driveways that access the Manor House and Barn Complex. The road is narrower than other township or county roads, and takes on the character of a country lane. Flanked for much of its length by maple trees, it represents the principal means of circulation in the Park.

There are small parking areas found near the south entrance, at the Orchard House, at the River House and at the Barn Complex. Of these only the 20-space parking area near the south entrance is accessible to the public. Utilities are limited to areas serving existing structures. Water is fed from six wells scattered around the Park and located near these buildings. Sewage is handled by septic systems, gas lines are fed from refueling tanks, and electricity enters the Park from Glen Run Road and branches off to reach the Visionary Center, Barn Complex, Orchard House, and Manor House. The River House is served by an electric line from Schoff Road.

The character of Wolf’s Hollow is enhanced by the presence of wood fences and stone walls. These exist throughout the Park, bordering fields and woods, and setting the park boundary, and lining the Wolf’s Hollow Drive. Gates can be found in the fences and walls, and along the road, which control access for vehicles and pedestrians, designate private areas, or mark entrances and intersections for trails.
Challenges
- Stormwater quantity and quality after rain events
- Steep slopes are prone to erosion
- Protection of sensitive areas from impacts of increased park programming
- Limited number of ecological cover types

Opportunities
- Safeguard and improve water quality while reducing stormwater flow
- Showcase/celebrate the unique natural features
- Provide natural resource education and interpretation
- Enhance wildlife habitat and successional landscapes

Challenges
- Lacking in visitor accommodation
- Steep slopes and accessibility
- How to complement other regional outdoor amenities without competing within the region

Opportunities
- Improved trail hierarchy and trail surfaces for multiple users
- Increased programming and special events

Challenges
- Limited vehicular circulation within the site
- Only one public entrance to the Park
- Limited amount of parking spaces
- Need for public restrooms

Opportunities
- Improved access to park/new gateways
- Enhanced circulation plan serving all users
- Increased facilities to accommodate visitors

Challenges
- Limitations of old and contemporary structures’ use and program
- Maintenance facility occupies a central location in the open space of the Park

Opportunities
- Cultural resource education and interpretation
- Adaptive re-use of old and contemporary structures
RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

1. Create more recreational opportunities
2. Provide for multiple user groups
3. Balance the needs to natural resources

CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

1. CREATE MORE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
2. PROVIDE FOR MULTIPLE USER GROUPS
3. BALANCE THE NEEDS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

1. Access + Parking
2. Restrooms + Facilities
3. Stormwater Management

CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

1. Access + Parking
2. Restrooms + Facilities
3. Stormwater Management

INFRASTRUCTURE

CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Community Engagement
The Master Plan process involved an extensive outreach program that sought input from the general public, the dedicated group of professionals on the stakeholder committee, and Chester County employees. Two public meetings were held, to collect initial input and to receive feedback on the draft Master Plan. Along the way, an additional three stakeholder meetings were conducted, to provide guidance to the design team and ensure the project was moving in a productive direction. The public was invited to respond to an online survey over the course of one month, which gave the design team the chance to collect important data from a large audience. See Appendix A for online survey results and feedback from the community meetings. Additionally, there was a Draft Plan comment period open thru the end of January 2017.

Users
The engagement process revealed that most of the park’s visitors come from within the local area - the nearby communities of West Fallowfield, Atglen, Parkesburg, and Sadsbury. Interestingly, despite its location on the border with Lancaster County, over 80% of the park’s visitors come from Chester County. No respondents claimed to live in Delaware County or Philadelphia, and only 7% of respondents said they traveled more than 25 miles to get to the Park, although license plates from neighboring states are often found in the parking lot.

Most of these visitors are coming to walk the trails and enjoy the woods. Deep woods offer a unique experience and change of scenery compared to much of Chester County, and so the Park is seen as a place of escape and quiet solitude. Respondents to the user survey cited the park’s quiet, natural setting, and its beautiful hiking trails as the things they most enjoy. There is a manicured country estate appearance to much of the Park outside the woods, and visitors appreciate the well-maintained fences and roadside landscape of Wolf’s Hollow Drive. According to the survey, this is where people come for beauty, relaxation, and recreation, and recreation is driven principally by the desire to walk, exercise, and enjoy nature.

Sample User Survey Responses:

“Keep it as is, maybe add a restroom.”
“I love the natural beauty.”
“Leave it alone.”
“It is a hidden gem.”
What suggestions do you have to improve the Park?

What level of programming / development would you like to see?

How far do you have to travel to get to Wolf's Hollow?

What is the best use of the Barn Complex?
In response to the public feedback and initial stakeholder meetings, two alternative development scenarios were examined. The difference between these options focuses on the intensity of park development. Feedback indicated to the design team that the client and the public were not seeking a heavily programmed, intensely built-up, active park experience, but rather to maintain the Park’s natural beauty and inherent qualities as a passive place of escape.

The adjacent maps were developed during the Alternatives phase of the Master Plan. They represent potential future visions for the Park around the key themes, and attempt to capture all the results and feedback from working with the community and the stakeholder group, as well as park staff and project team site visits. As alternatives, they were used to gain consensus about the future direction of the Park, and ultimately influenced the final plan and its phasing and implementation strategies.
Alternative 1 represents a very low impact level of programming, with regards to the Park components steering the Master Plan. In this scenario, new infrastructural expansion would be limited, and the focus would be on natural resources and stormwater management. Recreational improvements would focus on shoring up the existing trail system. Cultural resources would be preserved or selectively demolished if they were deemed unsafe. Overall, the natural resources would be managed as-is or slightly enhanced with simple measures.

Alternative 2 takes a more aggressive approach, though it still only focuses development and intervention on two key areas, and leaves much of the Park untouched or only slightly modified. Medium impact infrastructural moves would allow a slightly higher level of programming, but overall the Park would continue to function principally as a natural preserve. Recreational and public comfort improvements in the form of picnic pavilions or group gathering spaces, restrooms, trailhead information kiosks, and parking areas would increase visitation numbers but keep activity focused on specific sites.

**Phases**

After weighing the options and considering the alternatives in terms of how they met public expectation, and upon hearing input from the steering committee, the design team shifted its approach to the Master Plan away from two different scenarios and towards a phased approach. Alternative 1 came to represent the first steps of the Master Plan, and includes simple measures that preserve the existing character and experience of Wolf’s Hollow Park. Alternative 2 then came to be expressed as a second phase, designed to enhance the Park with low impact improvements and interventions that would serve to increase visitor choice, comfort level, and educational or interpretive experience.