

ENGLEWOOD MASTER PLAN 2009

Recreation and Open Space Element



November 24, 2009

RECREATION AND ENGLEWOOD OPEN SPACE

Recreation and Open Space

Introduction

Among a community's most important public facilities are its parks, playgrounds and open spaces. This is particularly true in a suburban city such as Englewood, which derives much of its attractiveness from its uncrowded character, and whose residents want the best possible living environment for themselves and their families. The value of outdoor recreation for people of all ages is well established, and its importance is bound to increase in the future as advances in technology give the average person



Figure VII - 1: Little League Field in Mackay Park

greater amounts of leisure time. Likewise, in preserving the character of a city, which in time can develop a greater degree of intensity, the establishment and preservation of landscaped, permanently open spaces will assume an ever increasing importance.

Englewood has numerous parks, ranging in size from intimate pocket parks to a large park serving the entire city, Mackay Park, which covers over 20 acres, to 140 acre nature preserve (Allison Park and Flat Rock Brook Nature Center). Englewood has well over 300 acres of open space, including 200 acres of parks.

The parks vary considerably in character: some feature playgrounds, ball fields, and other recreational activities that attract athletes and youngsters; other parks are tranquil places for relaxation, while Flat Brook Nature Association is a 140-acre conservation area with a variety of trails, a rock quarry, meadows, and ponds.

This open space constitutes a precious resource for the residents of Englewood, and it must be preserved for future generations. In 1996, the City adopted a zoning district that recognized all existing



Figure VII - 2: The Director of the Flat Rock Brook Nature Center, Stephen Wiessner with his assistant

available open space as a distinct and valuable asset. The Planning Board recommends that the City maintain this important ordinance so it reflects current conditions in the City.

In 2009, the City took position of an important property in the northwest section of Englewood. Eleanor Harvey, a long time resident and activist in Englewood, deeded her property to the City of Englewood. This is a 2.10 acre property in a location that does not have a park. This property will be maintained by the City of Englewood as passive open space in accordance with Ms. Harvey's wishes.

Englewood currently has 214 acres of parkland and recreation areas which amounts to approximately 6.8% of the

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total land area of Englewood. There are several methodologies to calculate what constitutes a healthy amount of open space in a built up suburban community. The Balanced Land Use methodology is shown on the following page.

The Balanced Land Use methodology has been utilized by the State of New Jersey to assess open space needs of a community. The current park inventory is over double that which is calculated through the Balanced Land Use Criteria. However, the Balanced Land Use methodology also recommends that substantial open space be set aside by the County, the State and the Federal Government and Englewood is devoid of any such set asides.

An alternate estimation of need is provided by the National Park and Recreation Association (NPRA) and this is known as the Core System Standard and it is based on population. The NPRA standards recommend that public park and recreation areas be provided at a ratio of 8.375 acres per 1,000 people. Using the population estimate in the Demographic section of this Master Plan of 28,000 people, the recommended public park and recreation area in Englewood should be approximately 234 acres.

**Figure VII - 3:
Inventory of
Englewood
Parks**

Parks	Block	Lot	Area (Acres)
Artus Park	2802	35.02	0.29
Allison Park	3601	6	74.81
Cambridge Ave. Lawn Area	411	1	1.14
Crystal Lake	3012	4	6.00
Denning Park	2220	1.02	5.19
Dunning Park	1204	10.02	1.04
Durie Park*	805	6	3.50
Flat Rock Brook Nature Center	3705	1	41.80
	3601	5	11.10
	3501	44	12.00
Grarrity Field	Included in Trumbull Park		
Glenbrook Park	305	3	1.16
Harvey Property	201	1	2.10
Herring Field	305	1	4.48
Hudson Avenue Park	706	1	0.11
Mackay Park	2309	20	20.00
Madison Park	2911	13	1.23
Morris Park	312	9.01	1.86
	313	8	0.70
Triangle Park	706	1	0.11
Trumbull Park	3404	1	3.20
	3403	1	2.00
Tryon Avenue Pool	204	40	0.36
Veterans Memorial Park	1201	1.01	2.94
Winton White Stadium Complex *	801	26	14.90
West Depot Square Park	1201	1.01	2.75
Total Park Acreage			214.77

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Description	Acres
Total City Area	3168
Less undeveloped wetlands & floodplains	12
Less State & County Parklands	0
Total	3156
3% of Total	94.68

Figure VII - 4: Balanced Use Tabulation

Englewood's 214 acres is close to this figure but somewhat deficient. Englewood has done an excellent job of preserving additional space along the railroad right-of-way north of Demarest Avenue and through zoning, tree preservation ordinance and steep slope ordinance that result in open space buffers throughout the residential zoning districts.

Given the built-up nature of Englewood, there remain few opportunities to increase the supply of open space and recreation acreage. Nevertheless, it is possible to take fuller advantage of the

parks and other spaces in Englewood. The parks should function together as a linked system. This means that greater thought should be given to the character of each park so that it is tailored to serve the neighborhood where it is located and becomes a focus of daily community life. To achieve this goal, the Master Plan makes three recommendations.

Increase Utilization

Many parks and open spaces in Englewood are underutilized. Often vacant, they do not function as a neighborhood

hub nor do they reinforce a sense of community. Through intelligent design and an effort to satisfy the specific needs of residents in the immediate vicinity, pocket parks can begin to function as centers of neighborhood life. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to think of the parks in relation to the immediate area they serve, determine what improvements and plantings residents favor, allow the parks to take on a distinct identity, highlight their presence in the community, and attract recreational activities.

In many communities, residents are invited to plant and maintain gardens in neighborhood parks. The active participation of residents becomes an important factor in maintaining the park and its furnishings, creating a safe and protected environment, and encouraging use. There is no reason to insist on uniformity of design among the city's pocket parks. To the



Figure VII - 5: West Palisade Island gateway from the West.

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contrary, allowing each park to assume a distinctive identity, with different kinds of landscape effects, will build local attachments to the park. Parks can also be used as laboratories for environmental education, whether in structured groups or in the free play of young children exploring nature.

Figure VII - 6: Mackay Park, reconstructed in 1995 is the City's most heavily utilized park.



Figure VII - 7: Mackay Park, on a typical weekend

In addition to involving neighborhood associations, the city should reach out to other community groups, including the Garden Club, youth groups, and nature organizations, to participate in a program of park-based activities.

Connect Open Spaces

The impact of Englewood's impressive inventory of open space would be magnified if landscaped paths physically connected our parks. A network of landscaped paths would provide several important benefits.

First, it would enhance the town's recreational resources by providing a long, varied, and scenic path that could be used

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Figure VII - 8: Allison Park—Managed by the Flat Rock Brook Nature Association

for walking, jogging, skating, and biking.

Second, the paths would highlight the location of the city's parks. For example, the addition of planting strips along the streets leading from West Palisade Avenue to MacKay Park would heighten awareness of the park as a great civic resource and center of communal life in Englewood. MacKay Park has been redesigned and upgraded to a first class recreation area. Facilities include playing fields, generous open lawns, a running track, toilet facilities, swimming pool, and a raised lanai, which serves as a platform for musical performances. The quality of the facilities and the open space conservation are models of urban parkland design.

Mackay Park is connected to the downtown pedestrian traffic, so that an intermingling

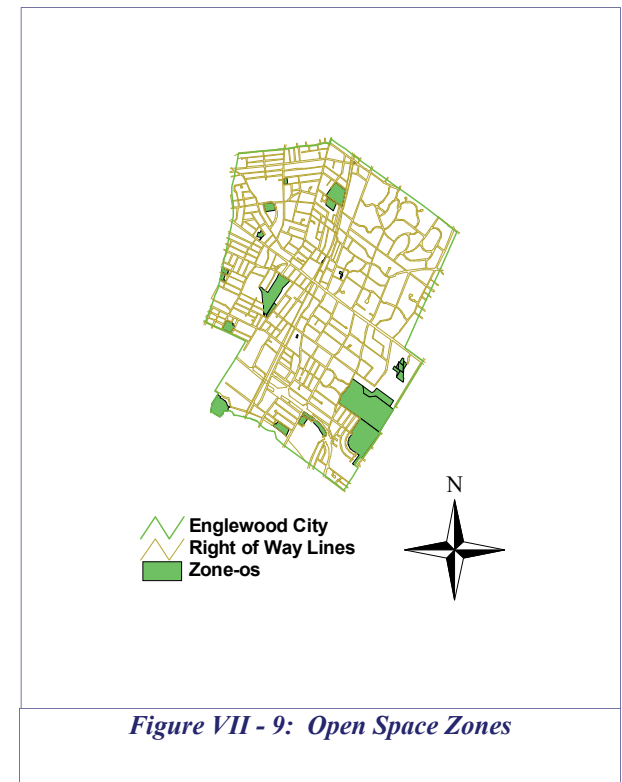


Figure VII - 9: Open Space Zones

of shopping and recreational functions encourages people to walk from one to the other, and thus reinforce both areas in the public's awareness. Programming events in Mackay Park would serve to increase the utilization of the Park as well as bring Englewood residents together.

The Wayfinding System, currently being designed, can provide the visual connections that would lead a pedestrian in that direction. Use of trees and lighting along the walkways would also achieve these goals.



Figure VII - 10: Dwight Morrow High School and Janis Dismis Middle School Complex including the open space and recreational areas

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Third, a network of landscaped paths would make Englewood a more pedestrian-friendly city and encourage people of all generations to walk, rollerblade, or ride bicycles from their homes to downtown, to the public library, to school or to a neighborhood park. Moreover, making the city amenable to pedestrians would reinforce other objectives of the Master Plan: the trolley shuttle system should be expanded and the City should continue to foster residential living in the Central Business District.

Fourth, a system of pathways would establish valuable connections between residential districts and the commercial center. Although the downtown is a regional destination, it is first and foremost the heart of our city, and as such, it should be easily accessible to all the residential areas.

Englewood has a great advantage over typical auto-dependent suburbs because we have a town center with a variety of uses. But our residential neighborhoods are not connected to the downtown by pedestrian paths; for the most part, it is necessary to drive downtown. A chain of paths can knit our neighborhoods and commercial center together, alleviate the reliance on the automobile, and even foster a sense of unity between different parts of town.

Our streets need not function only as traffic conveyors; they have the potential to serve as social connectors bringing people together. To fulfill that potential and enable people to circulate on foot at least as easily as in cars, there is a need for sidewalks and landscaped paths so that residents can use the streets in safety.

The gateways to the City have been greatly enhanced over the past ten years. The addition of the Wayfinding System to the gateways will improve visual identification and encourage access to the downtown.

Bicycle Storage Areas

The creation of bicycle storage areas in strategic locations throughout the downtown and in recreation areas should be implemented. These storage areas will encourage the use of alternative transportation and provide the opportunity for residents to bike into the downtown and increase access to the recreation areas. Site plan review should include an examination of bike racks for major developments involving residential property.

The Park at Depot Square

The intersection of Demarest and North Dean Streets is a major point of entry to

the Central Business District. Three of the four corners were occupied by gas stations and there has been a transformation of the area in the past several years. There is a new bus stop at the southwest corner however, beyond the bus stop extends a spartan zone of grass. This open space lies at the edge of downtown, near a large concentration of people and beside a parking lot. It has a few benches and some handsome trees, but despite these locational and other assets, the space is rarely used. Several factors explain its underutilization, including poor landscape design, the layout of the parking lot, and the spur of Park Place which divides the park in half. This space now attracts no activity; it is vacant, unappealing, and sterile, but the potential is enormous to make a wonderful public space and gateway to Englewood.

In 2003, the Master Plan offered a new vision of this area with a design for a park, a range of new amenities, improved circulation and parking facilities. Although this scheme proved too ambitious for the City Council, a more modest effort should be made. This effort should include event programming as well as physical improvements. The physical improvements should include landscaping as well as the construction of a small amphitheater that will encourage the park's utilization for concerts. The improved setting may invite other uses, such as craft



Figure VII - 11: Conceptual plan for Depot Park

fairs, Garden Club sales, and school-related programs.

The amphitheater might also provide a venue for outdoor movies and other public entertainments and programs. A

summer film festival, jazz concerts offered by performers associated with the nearby recording studio, Memorial Day honors—these are the type of activities that the theater at Depot Square Park is designed to accommodate. The amphi-

theater will thus form part of a cultural axis including the BergenPac Theater and Bennett Studios.

The section of the park west of the railroad tracks is scheduled for improvements including the creation of an open channel where a subsurface culvert exists. The channel will have natural embankments, fully landscaped, with a bridge crossing to access West Street. A preliminary rendering is shown on the next page but this rendering is being revised to maintain the North Van Brunt Street connection to Demarest Avenue.

Recreation Programs

The Englewood Recreation Department has developed goals and objectives to

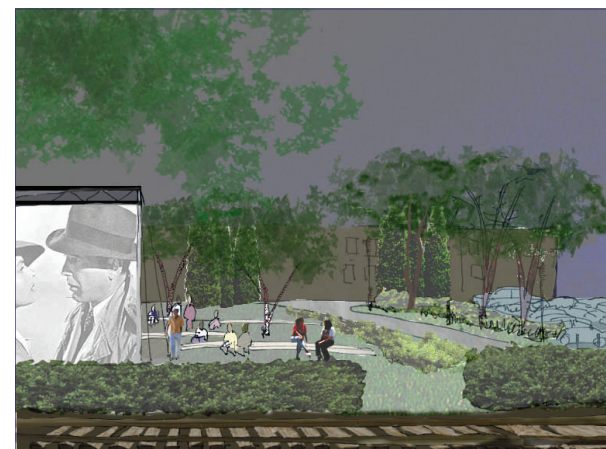


Figure VII - 12: Amphitheatre with removable movie screen.

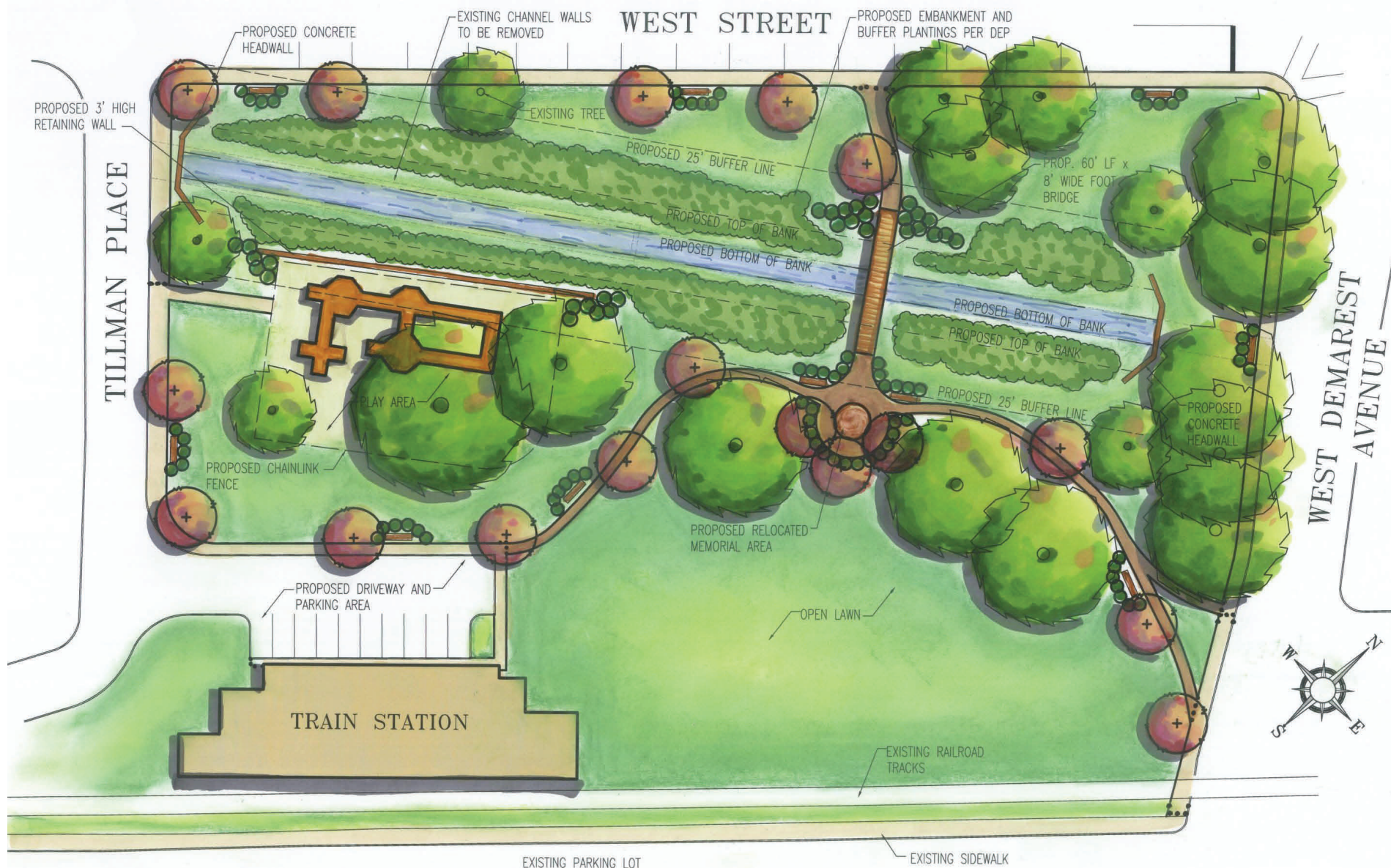


Figure VII - 13: Conceptual plan for Depot Park West

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provide an operational structure for future decisions related to provision of parks and recreation for the Englewood Community. These goals and objectives are reviewed annually and modified as necessary.

Goal #1: Create a sense of community and belonging

Objectives:

- Offer programming targeted to families and residents without support services.
- Support and encourage new developments to include areas for active and passive recreation
- Increase programs and services to the aging population
- Increase programs and services to the teen population

Goal #2: Assure parks and recreation facilities are well maintained and accessible to all residents of the community.

Residents of Englewood take good care of their private homes and grounds as evidenced by the abundance of landscaping contractors. Quality is important to residents and it is expected that community assets are protected and valued as well.

Objectives:

- Analyze and improve universal accessibility
- Update and maintain park equipment and facilities as needed, including playground equipment, hard pavement surfaces, and landscaping.
- Implement standardized park signage, and review and provide lighting, benches, and waste receptacles where appropriate.

Goal #3: To create a community of healthy residents by providing opportunities that promote and encourage active lifestyles.

Englewood wants to encourage and develop an active resident base that includes runners, walkers, cyclists, and team athletes.

Objectives:

- Increase non-motorized transportation connections between parks, historical sites, community facilities and shopping districts that allow residents to cycle, walk, and run.
- Develop and promote programming that promotes active lifestyles for all ages

Goal #4: Provide recreation programming and facility opportunities that meet

the needs and interests of the entire community.

Objectives:

- Study the need for a multi-use outdoor community gathering area that serves as a venue for concerts, art and other cultural programming. Several areas are currently available and should be considered. Increased programming is critical to bringing the community together.
- Create recreation opportunities beyond traditional team sports (i.e. educational components, individual sporting pursuits, training/self improvement courses, etc.)
- Provide additional environmental-oriented programs and use parks as outdoor classrooms
- Expand cultural programs and events (i.e. music, art)
- Increase programs offered for senior adults and teenagers

Goal #5: To use existing community resources efficiently to demonstrate fiscal responsibility.

Objectives:

- Explore opportunities with Bergen County to minimize duplication and competition between agencies.
- Maintain open dialogue with adjacent communities regarding opportunity to improve and expand the quality of

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public recreation facilities, including investigation of feasibility of development on a larger scale recreation facilities (i.e. ice arena, aquatic or community center).

- Develop partnerships and monitor potential grant opportunities with NJRPA
- Continue to share facilities with the Englewood Public Schools at school properties
- Recruit civic and business organizations for assistance with park improvement projects.

Goal #6: Provide efficient administration of the parks and recreation department.

Customer service is a necessity and an expectation in order to remain competitive in providing leisure services.

Objectives:

- Maintain upgraded computer hardware along with registration and facility reservation software
- Expand web-based marketing efforts to inform residents of programs and events
- Monitor the need for additional support staff

- Review parks and recreation master plan annually to establish priorities and responsibilities.

System Wide Recommendations

In addition to capital investments into the parks and recreation system, the Parks and Recreation Department must also provide effort to maintain the high quality of the system. The following items describe system wide suggestions that should be coordinated each year.

Barrier Free Accessibility

As parks and facilities are improved or developed, a high priority must be placed on upgrades that improve barrier free accessibility with improvements to proper surfaces for wheelchairs, accessible picnic tables, and play equipment that provides universal access.

Recreation Programming

Partner with state and county programs, private businesses, and other groups, leagues, services, and programs.

Staffing

Annually monitor staffing levels and office facility needs for efficient administration,

operation, programming and maintenance of the parks and recreation.

Park Promotion

Use creative promotional approaches to increase awareness. Promotional ideas could include: park maps and park events. Increased awareness will increase appreciation and support as well as a spirit of volunteerism with maintenance and development projects.

Fund Raising

Develop new and creative ways to raise funds for park improvements.

Public Involvement

Solicit residents' suggestions on planning, use, and improvement of parks and programming. This can be accomplished with focus groups, public meetings, surveys, or through resident feedback solicited at parks and recreation events.