

## Planning Process

---

Community involvement was a critical part of the project's planning process and was encouraged wherever practical. Such involvement includes the project's Steering Committee, a Citizen Survey, Press Conferences, Community Meetings and Commissioner Briefings.

### A. Steering Committee

The Comprehensive Plan's Steering Committee members represent a cross section of municipalities and interests throughout the County. Meeting six times, (January 13, 1999, February 16, 1999, April 6, 1999, June 29, 1999, October 28, 1999 and March 14, 2000), the thirty-one (31) volunteers assisted the Bureau of Parks and Recreation and the Consultant. In addition to contributing information specific to their communities, members reviewed work activities, posed challenges and offered feedback regarding the Plan's progress. Throughout this process, members drawn from the Steering Committee also served on Focus Groups (sub-committees). These individuals provided a more detailed review of work products and tasks, verified specific municipal park facility information and established the role of additional open space, trails and greenways within the County's overall park, recreation and open space system.

### B. Citizen Survey

As a driving force in the Plan's development, the Citizen Survey enabled residents to voice their opinions and perceptions of current County and recreation services. The four (4) page mail-in Survey, distributed to 10% of the County's households, received an impressive 17.1% response rate (2,391 returns). The Citizen Survey queried the public regarding popularity of recreation programs and facilities, priorities for future County roles and responsibilities as well as potential funding support for future increased programming activities and land acquisition.

Overall, the Survey revealed that most residents are pleased with the quality of the recreation facilities and services that the County provides. In general, survey residents expressed that:

- Parks and recreation enhance the County's quality of life and can attract new residents and businesses,
- The County should address acreage needs and park facility improvements (maintenance, new facilities and trails) as soon as is practical,
- The number and frequency of environmental education and family-oriented programs should be increased,

- The Bureau should continue to support municipal recreation providers with professional assistance in the form of technical expertise, project facilitation and planning coordination.
- The County's annual budget appropriation for existing facility maintenance and organized recreation programs and should be increased and
- These is support to commit additional funds to develop new parks or trails or expand existing parks, trails or open space areas.

Key survey questions and responses are summarized in Chapter 5. A copy of the Citizen Survey, general survey observations as well as detailed results are provided in Appendix I.

### **C. Press Conferences**

The County formally unveiled the Comprehensive Plan initiative to the public at an August 24, 1999 Press Conference. News media and interested residents were briefed about the project's Citizen Survey results and the preliminary background analyses conclusions. The Press Conference Exhibits, reporting the study's preliminary findings, are provided in Appendix A.

### **D. Community Meetings**

The Bureau hosted seven regional community meetings to gather additional public input. Several Steering Committee members presented residents of each region with an overview of the planning process's initial findings, needs assessment, Citizen Survey feedback and preliminary recommendations. Resident expressed concerns regarding the County's role and responsibility in expanding parks and recreation opportunities, tourism, increased taxes and technical support for municipal recreation. The public's comments were integrated into the Final Plan. The meetings were held as follows:

<u>Region</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Northmoreland Park	March 7, 2000
2	Latrobe Municipal Building	February 23, 2000
3	Ligonier Valley Library	March 8, 2000
4	West Overton Museum	March 1, 2000
5	Hempfield Municipal Building	February 22, 2000
6	Murrysville Community Building	March 8, 2000
7	Rostraver Municipal Building	February 18, 2000

See Appendix A for a summary of the public's specific questions and remarks as well as a tabulation of comments for the community meetings.

### E. Commissioners' Briefings

Westmoreland County Commissioners were involved in three stages of the comprehensive planning process. On August 9, 1999, the Bureau outlined the County's park and open space inventory; physical and socio-economic findings, data; citizen perceptions and park acreage needs.

On April 11, 2000, the Bureau presented the Plan's Executive Summary and an overview of the final Plan to the Commissioners. The Bureau also explained the Plan's value in guiding future park and recreation planning as well as the contributions that parks and recreation offer to enhancing the County's quality of life.

At the final briefing, April 25, 2000, the Bureau provided additional information regarding the final Plan and answered Commissioners' questions. The Bureau requested that the Commissioners adopt **Parks Horizons** as the County's Comprehensive Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan.