



Mature Suburban Community Prototype: Municipality of Woodlawn

The Community:

With tree-lined streets, a solid tax base, and providing full services for its residents, Woodlawn has a 100% occupancy rate in both owner and renteroccupied dwellings. Incorporated as a “First Class Township” in the 1890s, this suburban community of Woodlawn has a total area of nine square miles, with a mining and residential history.

Woodlawn’s 30,000 residents are represented in 13,400 households and 8,600 families, with a population density of approximately 3,300 per square mile. The municipalities population has remained reasonably stable with a decrease of less than two percent during the last census period. Of the total households, 23% have children under 18 years of age, and 19% of the municipalities population are residents 65 years of age or older. Median household income in Woodlawn is \$55,000 and median family income is \$68,000.

Recreation and Park Facilities:

The municipality has over 200 acres of parkland in 14 parks. Park facilities include 13 tennis courts, eight basketball courts, eight playgrounds, five picnic pavilions, nine baseball fields, six soccer fields, and several walking trails. In addition, Woodlawn has several special-use facilities: a 30,000 square foot Community Recreation Center, a nine-hole golf course, and an aging, outdoor swimming pool. All park facilities are maintained by the Public Works Department.

The Recreation Department has a full-time, professional staff of four. The department provides more than just “core” recreational programs through its part-time staff and in concert with community providers. A cadre of volunteers makes it possible to offer sports leagues not covered by community organizations. The Woodlawn Athletic Association, an all volunteer organization, coordinates the following athletic programs in the community: spring and summer baseball, softball, and soccer; fall football; winter basketball; and winter wrestling. Special events are either offered solely through the Recreation Department or in partnership with various community groups.

Defining the Needs:

Woodlawn’s greatest challenge is updating its park system to current safety standards to address issues created by overuse and aging facilities. Several of the playgrounds are not in total compliance with current safety standards; the outdoor pool has reached the end of its useful life, is inadequate in size, and does not provide the newer water play activities residents desire;

the number of soccer fields fall short of the needs of this continually growing sport; the number of picnic pavilions cannot meet demand, and parking is no longer adequate at most of its park facilities. Additionally, citizens are requesting new facilities such as skate parks, dog parks, play areas for field hockey and cricket, and more trails for hiking and biking. All that considered, the Public Works Department has a difficult time maintaining the existing park facilities.

Meeting the Needs:

Even though the municipality has a solid tax base, capital improvement funds are limited and competition is high between departments for those funds. Woodlawn is currently faced with a failing sanitary sewer system, is desperate to build its police department a suitable facility, and has a large, unfunded pension liability.

Because of its community type and financial stability, Woodlawn cannot apply for many grants available from the county or federal government. The most likely source of outside government funding would be through the Community Conservation Partnership Program offered by the state through its Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

Partnerships with local businesses are another way to address improvements and additions to existing facilities. By offering naming rights or some other form of visible recognition in the parks, businesses can be enticed to assist with the funding of those facilities. Similarly, business sponsorships of programs and special events can help free up operating funds to use for capital improvements. Consideration could be given to apply for a DCNR “Peer-to-Peer” Technical Assistance Grant to review current operating efficiencies and fee-setting policies to look for ways to reduce costs, while increasing revenues.

Additional resources are available from NRPA, DCNR, and the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society (PRPS). NRPA offers an extensive list of publications specifically geared to the Parks and Recreation field, including books based on topics such as management, planning, leisure for all ages, and citizen members (<http://ipv.nrpa.org/Core/Orders/Default.aspx>). NRPA also offers a number of recreation program models that can be used in any community (<http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=28>).

DCNR provides a substantial list of publications that include two titles that might be of specific interest to mature suburban communities: “Financing Municipal Recreation and Parks” and “A Guide to Funding Recreation and Conservation Projects.” (<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/publications/index.aspx>).

The Recreation and Parks Technical Assistance Program (RecTAP) is offered by PRPS. This program matches Recreation and Park professionals with municipalities to provide advice and assistance on specific issues that can be addressed within a limited amount of time (<http://www.prps.org/pdf/RecTAPBrochure.pdf>).

<i>Summary of Recommendations: Mature Suburban Community Prototype</i>		
Priority	Goal/Policy	Implementation Strategy
1	Complete an overall Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan for the municipality and a Master Site Improvement Plan for each municipal park	Apply for a DCNR Matching Technical Assistance Grant to hire a consultant to assess and address all recreational program and facility needs, agency staffing, and to identify funding sources for the recommendations. This “combination” grant application should also include development of a Master Site Plan to address needed improvements for each of the 14 municipal parks.
2	Complete design development phase for each municipal park	Determine specific facility additions and improvements, equipment, and related infrastructure. Develop detailed drawings and specifications and accurate Estimates of Probable Costs for improvements at each park.
3	Develop funding strategy and development timeline	Based on the above two recommendations, develop a funding strategy and timeline to address: a. agency organizational and programming needs; b. a phased development plan for park improvements.
4	Initiate phased construction of identified park improvements	Complete construction documents, develop bid packets, and award construction contracts for each of the municipal parks, with construction phased as identified in the above recommendation.