



Multi-Municipal Small Community Prototype: Creekside Borough

The Community:

With a small-town feel, affordable housing, and part of the Delta Area School District, Creekside Borough is appealing to both young families and empty nesters. Incorporated in the late 1800s, this small community southwest of Pittsburgh, PA has an approximate total area of 1 square miles, with an industrial and residential history.

Creekside's almost 5,000 residents are represented in 2,400 households and 1,300 families, with a population density of 5,000 per square mile. The borough's population has been decreasing over the past few decades. Households with children under 18 years of age make up 23% of the total households in the municipality, and 26% of the borough's population are residents 65 years of age or older. The median household income in Creekside is \$29,000 and the median family income is \$38,000.

Recreation and Park Facilities:

Close to the center of town, is Memorial Park, the home of the Creekside Veterans of Foreign Wars monument. This 3-acre park also contains a playground, a small gazebo, open grass areas, and mature landscaping. Residents gather here in nice weather to let their children and grandchildren play at the playground or on the lawn areas, engage in a game of cards or checkers with friends, or simply enjoy the fresh air and sunshine.

Towards the western end of town is Blue Slate Creek Park, built around the creek for which the town is named. This 16-acre park features a larger playground, two picnic pavilions, a basketball and tennis court, baseball field, and open lawn areas where soccer teams practice during the season.

The Creekside Community Association, along with the borough, offers special events such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Community Day, and Halloween Parade. "A Week in the Park", now in its seventh year, offers children 7 to 12 years of age 5 days of fun in an outdoor setting, while giving teenagers a chance to volunteer and continue what is becoming a solid community tradition. These activities are all held in Blue Slate Creek Park.

Youth sports are offered by community organizations. The Creekside Athletic Association has summer programs for T-ball, boy's baseball, and girl's slow-pitch softball. The Hills Area Soccer Club offers in-house and travel team opportunities for both boys and girls during the spring and fall seasons; this program continues to grow in

popularity. These activities also take place at Blue Slate Creek Park and at Delta Area School District facilities.

Defining the Needs:

Almost 50% of Creekside Borough's population consists of senior citizens (26%) or youth under the age of 18 years (23%). While there is currently adequate opportunity for youth in certain athletic activities, there is little available in general recreation programming for that population and even less for older adults.

With the borough's population, the National Recreation and Parks Association ("NRPA") suggests that a "core" system of parklands for Creekside would be comprised of 31 to 53 acres of developed open space. The borough currently has only 19 acres of parkland. Creekside also does not have the specialized recreation facilities to serve its specific population mix; access to a public swimming pool and community recreation center could serve both the senior and youth populations, as well as the general population.

Meeting the Needs:

Being a small, older community with limited financial and physical resources, it would be difficult for Creekside Borough to meet the recreational needs of its residents without outside assistance and collaboration. While many approaches could be taken to address the shortfalls in programs and facilities, a combination of approaches including local tax-based funding; grants from foundations and county and state government; sponsorships and partnerships with local businesses, and multi-municipal cooperation could help Creekside meet its resident's recreational needs.

As an initial approach, the borough might apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources ("DCNR") for a "Peer-to-Peer" Technical Assistance grant. Under this grant program, a recreation professional could be retained as a consultant to analyze and offer solutions to Creekside's specific recreation and park needs or, and perhaps more importantly, form an multi-municipal recreation and park agency in concert with surrounding communities. This multi-municipal agency, comprised of appointed representatives from each community, would provide the direction and oversight of this joint recreation and park program.

If such a multi-municipal recreation and park agency could be established, a grant could then be sought from DCNR for a "Circuit Rider" project. These projects provide grant

funds for regional organizations to hire a professional, full-time staff person. The Circuit Rider's purpose is to initiate new programs and services for municipalities and organizations that individually do not have the financial resources to hire a professional staff person. This program provides a decreasing funding level over a four-year period, with the intention that the communities would continue this program on their own at the end of the grant period.

By joining with other communities, Creekside Borough would be able to provide access for its residents to the specialized recreation facilities mentioned above. According to the national standards, a swimming pool serves a population of 20,000; it is feasible to provide such a facility jointly with a few neighboring communities. While no individual community this size could afford to build and operate a recreation center, once again a multi-municipal effort could construct a center. This community recreation center could offer senior programming during the day, youth programs after school and on weekends, and teen and adult programming in the evenings.

DCNR's "Small Community Development" program might be of particular interest to Creekside Borough. As Creekside is a community of less than 5,000 residents, they qualify for this special grant program. Projects under this type of grant provide a municipality an alternate method of funding for the rehabilitation and development of minor indoor and basic outdoor park and recreation facilities. The maximum small community grant is \$48,000 with a total project cost of \$60,000 (80/20 match). Small communities may receive up to 100% funding for projects up to \$20,000.

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://intershop.active.com/cgi-bin/NRPA.storefront/45036d300656924d2717ac10005d05c3/Catalog/1002>). 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 several titles that might be of interest to small communities: Multi-Municipal Cooperation for Recreation and Parks, Community Recreation and Parks Handbook, Financing Municipal Recreation and Parks, Recreation and Parks Board Handbook, A Guide to Funding Recreation and Conservation Projects, and Keys to Success (<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: Multi-Municipal Community Prototype</i>		
Priority	Goal/Policy	Implementation Strategy
1	Establish Recreation & Park Advisory Board	Create an advisory board to advise borough elected officials and administrative staff on issues related to parks and recreation.
2	Identify & address repair needs of existing community's facilities	Inventory existing recreation and park facilities owned by borough. Identify repair/replacement needs, prioritize list, complete needed repair work.
3	Establish Multi-Municipal Recreation & Park Agency	Apply for "Peer-to-Peer" Technical Assistance Grant from DCNR to develop a cooperative agreement with neighboring communities.
4	Complete a "Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan	Apply for a DCNR matching technical assistance grant to hire a consultant to assess and address all recreation program and facility needs, recommend an agency organizational structure, and identify funding sources for the recommendations in a formal document prepared for the multi-municipal recreation and parks agency.
5	Initiate programs & services to address community needs	Apply for "Circuit Rider" Technical Assistance Grant from DCNR to hire a recreation professional.
6	Develop Funding Strategy and Development Timeline	Based on the above Comprehensive Plan, implement agency organizational structure, develop a funding strategy employing the identified sources, and prepare a phase plan of work to develop needed recreation and park facilities.