Comprehensive Recreation, Open Space and **Greenways** Plan **City of Meadville EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - February 2016**



he purpose of the Meadville Comprehensive Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Plan (Plan) was to inventory and analyze all components of parks, recreation, and open space within the City. In 2013, the City adopted a comprehensive land use plan that included recreation in a general sense. One of the high priority recommendations of the plan was for the City to develop a comprehensive park, recreation and open space plan. The Meadville Plan included three main phases: Existing Conditions, Needs Analysis, and Action Plan.

Existing Conditions

This phase included developing the City's profile and analysis of demographics, parks and recreation facilities, events, management and operations. This inventory and analysis was completed by a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP) and supplemented with key stakeholder interviews and meetings with the project Steering Committee. In addition to those located in the City limits, park and recreation facilities and programs from neighboring communities were inventoried as well. Existing Recreation Facilities are shown on Map 1 at the end of this summary.

Needs Analysis

This phase included identifying and assessing the needs of the City in terms of recreation. This information was collected through a variety of methods including: Steering Committee meetings, public meetings, surveys, and interviews with stakeholders.

Action Plan

This phase included developing recommendations to meet the identified needs. The reality of current economic and administrative constraints were also taken into account while developing the recommendations. Once developed, the recommendations were ranked in terms of priority through input from the Steering Committee and public.



To guide the Meadville Comprehensive Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Plan, the following Mission Statement and goals were developed:

"The mission of the Meadville Comprehensive Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Plan is to enhance recreation, connections and quality of life for the Meadville community."

- **Goal 1:** Develop and Maintain first class **Facilities** that will meet the needs of all users, while ensuring a high standard of maintenance, cleanliness, safety and aesthetically pleasing areas within the Meadville area parks.
- Goal 2: Develop Programs that meet the needs, interests and desires of all the residents of the Meadville area.
- Goal 3: Promote facilities and recreational programs utilizing the most effective forms of **Publicity** for the audience.
- Goal 4: Employ Staff and/or utilize Volunteers to develop and maintain recreational facilities and programs.
- Goal 5: Ensure the long-term Financial health of parks and recreation in the Meadville Area.
- Goal 6: Develop strong Partnerships in an effort to enhance parks and recreation opportunities.
- Goal 7: Promote Conservation and Preservation of valuable Open Space in the Meadville Area.
- **Goal 8:** Develop a **Comprehensive Interconnected Multi-Modal System** that provides safe bicycle and pedestrian routes throughout the Meadville Area.

Goal 1: Develop and maintain first class *Facilities* that will meet the needs of all users, while ensuring a high standard of maintenance, cleanliness, safety and aesthetically pleasing areas within the Meadville area parks.

High Priority Action Item: Improve Bicentennial Park

Bicentennial Park is an important asset for the City. The park, located along French Creek has an existing launch site. The City is currently partnering with the French Creek Valley Conservancy to be identified as a Creek Town. The Ernst Trail group is actively pursuing options to extend the trail into the City with a trail head at Bicentennial. The following issues were identified in order to make the park a local and regional destination and tie in with the other efforts regarding the park.

- * Log Cabin—Address slippery walkways and treat logs for beetle infestation
- Boat Launch—Work with the Conservancy to improve the boat launch (including signage) and potentially relocate it to a better location
- * Pavilion—Update the roof and fascia and replace rotting boards on picnic tables
- * Playground—Install a new structure, potentially with an environmental theme
- * Restrooms—Treat roof to avoid deterioration and remove moss
- * General—Remove invasive plants along the creek and install interpretive signage throughout the park to explain the history of the city and French Creek

High Priority Action Item: Construct playground at HP Way Park

HP Way Park is an existing City park located on land that is leased from the Meadville Water Authority. This park previously had facilities, but they were all removed when existing underground tanks were replaced with two 2.5 million gallon storage tanks. The Water Authority has agreed to set aside land on the site to build a new playground and park. The City is leading a public input process as this plan is being written to determine what the site should look like and what it should contain. It is highly recommended that the City continue to work with the Water Authority and local residents on this process, and ensure that proper funds are identified to build the park and its facilities once the planning process is complete.

High Priority Action Item: Improve safety and security in the parks

While there are not a high rate of incidents in the parks, it is always good to ensure the parks and facilities are safe. As was noted during the planning process areas of concern were identified in some of the City's parks in regard to safety. The City should address these items as quickly as possible. Several other items should also be addressed in terms of safety and security:

- * Post signs in the City Parks that include contact information for problems and safety issues that park users may encounter.
- * Provide adequate lighting throughout the parks to improve safety and visibility.
- * Repair or restrict usage of hazardous areas and/or facilities immediately.
- * Post park rules and regulations in visible locations in each of the Meadville area parks so all park users are aware of what is required of them when using the park system.



Goal 2: Develop *Programs* that meet the needs, interests and desires of all the residents of the Meadville area.

High Priority Action Item: Establish a lead organization to develop recreational programming for the Meadville area

The organization most suited for this role is the Meadville Area Recreation Complex (MARC). Staff and Board members of the MARC actively participated in this planning process and have indicated a desire to expand their programming. The City should initiate targeted discussions with the MARC to determine what programs should be offered and what resources the MARC will need to assist in this effort in terms of additional funding, staff, volunteers, etc. Chapter 3 of this plan discusses in detail the types of programs that may be



successful and criteria to use in setting a recreation program schedule.

High Priority Action Item: Re-establish the Summer Program

In previous years, the City did offer a summer program for youth in Meadville. This program was held at City parks throughout the summer months. During the planning process, many participants noted that they thought this program was very beneficial and efforts should be taken to reestablish it. As previously mentioned, the City does not have the staff resources to offer programs, but this could be something that is discussed with representatives from the MARC as something they could lead (see Action Item above). Allegheny College and the Crawford Central School District could also be approached as sources for student volunteers to help staff summer programs.

If this program is re-established, it should rotate through various parks within the City of Meadville if possible. This would allow for children throughout the City to participate.

Goal 3: Promote facilities and recreational programs utilizing the most effective forms of *Publicity* for the audience.

High Priority Action Item: Develop an e-mail database of residents who would like to receive recreational information

The City should begin to develop a e-mail database of people who are interested in receiving updates about the parks and programs. The information can be collected at events or facilities throughout the City and an item should be added to the City's website that allows people to sign up for the contact list. The database can be updated as new people become interested. Once the list is established, there should be one or two people at the City who are responsible for sending regular (perhaps monthly) e-mails blasts regarding park and recreation in the area. This could be used to advertise City events or events that are held by other organizations (such as the MARC, sports organizations, neighboring municipalities, etc.) in the Meadville Area. These organizations should also be contacted to determine if they have contact lists that would like to be added to the Meadville database.

High Priority Action Item: Post a calendar of monthly events on the City of Meadville website

In addition to the e-mail database, the existing Meadville website should be updated to include a monthly calendar of events and meetings. This calendar could be used to advertise non-recreation events as well so it includes a full list of what is happening in the City. Similar to the e-mail blast, the calendar can be used by other community organizations as well to share their meeting information. The calendar should be created so that it displays information about the event (in terms of times and locations). If available, the events should be linked to other sites that provide additional information for the uses.



Goal 4: Employ Staff and / or utilize Volunteers to develop and maintain recreational facilities and programs.

High Priority Action Item: Coordinate with Allegheny College for internship opportunities

Allegheny College students are a great asset for the City in terms of providing volunteers. Students often have to complete community service as part of their degree or may be looking for internship opportunities. A formal partnership should be developed with the College so that each semester, interested students are matched to opportunities that exist for volunteers or internships. In addition to the College, the High School could be a source of student volunteers. The MARC could also be a partner in this effort, in that they could help to manage the student volunteers / interns for the recreation programs that they will potentially offer in the future (i.e. the Summer Playground Program discussed under Goal 2).



High Priority Action Item: Establish a list of volunteers.

Students are not the only avenue for identifying volunteers. Residents and members of community organizations should also be explored. The City should establish an easy way for interested people to offer their services, forms should be made available at all events moving forward, and a volunteer item should be posted on the City website that allows people to easily sign up via the web. The e-mail blast discussed under Goal 3 is another option that can be used to identify volunteers. A link to the volunteer web page can be included with each e-mail blast. Meadville is fortunate to be home to many businesses and corporations, these entities should also be approached for volunteer opportunities.

Once the method and list have been established, it can be taken a step further to begin coding individuals interested in specific type of volunteerism and could note if they are willing to volunteer time, funds, supplies, etc.

Goal 5: Ensure the long-term *Financial* health of parks and recreation in the Meadville area.

High Priority Action Item: Pursue a variety of grants and alternative funding sources for park and recreation development.

Grants are perhaps one of the best sources of obtaining alternative funding for parks and recreation to supplement the monies needed to improve these facilities in the community. There are many grants available from various government agencies and from numerous foundations. It does take time to research the various grants, and a thorough knowledge of your project is necessary to write a grant that will be funded. It is recommended that the person at the City responsible for writing grants attend grant seminars and workshops that are offered in western Pennsylvania. The format of some of the grants change yearly requiring a continual update through the workshops offered. Partnering with neighbors, such as West Mead Township, on grant applications for shared equipment or completing a combined application for playground equipment for multiple parks would strengthen the application.

In addition to grants there are other types of funding sources available, foundations being one example. There are generally four types of foundations: (1) private family; (2) community; (3) national; and (4) operating. Similar to grant funding, the various foundations need to be researched to determine what is appropriate for Meadville.

Business sponsors are another source of funding. These can be easy to obtain, if you are well prepared to sell the opportunity. Many businesses look for an opportunity to get their name in front of people, get involved in the community, and create a positive image. In order to obtain these sponsorships, an enticing project or program must be put together in a professional manner and properly presented.

High Priority Action Item: Utilize outside funding as a match to lessen the financial output of the City.

Grants often include a match requirement in the award. The City should explore options to use donations, foundation money, other grant awards, in-kind services etc. as matching money towards additional grant opportunities. This will lessen the burden on the City to identify cash match within the City budget.

Goal 6: Develop strong Partnerships in an effort to enhance parks and recreation opportunities.

High Priority Action Item: Develop a coordinated and collaborative effort between recreational providers in the Meadville Area.

There are many organizations and entities operating in Meadville and surrounding communities that offer recreation services. In order to reduce duplication and potentially save on resources, an effort should be made to bring representatives from these various organizations together on a regular basis (perhaps only once or twice per year) to discuss what programs and facilities are being offered, what needs exist and how everyone can share in resources (including time, equipment, etc.). The MARC should be approached by the City to act as the lead entity for coordinating the meetings. This would make sense since they are a major recreation provider in the area that serves a larger population than just the City of Meadville.

High Priority Action Item: Coordinate efforts with various trail organizations to ensure a welldefined and safe trail system throughout the Meadville Area.

Providing safe and easily accessed connections within the City of Meadville as well as to areas around the City, was something that was regularly mentioned throughout the planning process. The Ernst Trail is a major asset located just outside the City limits and organizations like the French Creek Valley Conservancy and the MARC are developing small trails on property located throughout Meadville. Coordinating these efforts to provide an interconnected network of bicycle and pedestrian trails and pathways throughout the City would be beneficial for residents, students and others at Allegheny College, local employees and visitors.



High Priority Action Item: Maintain the French Creek corridor as a quality water trail.

French Creek is an important asset to the City of Meadville and the surrounding areas. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council along with the French Creek Valley Conservancy, launched a Creek Town program in three Crawford County communities in 2012. There are currently efforts underway to include Meadville as a Creek Town in this program due to its proximity to French Creek and the other potential assets (such as connections to the Ernst Trail) and the business community located within the City. Supporting these efforts will only enhance the recreation system within Meadville and provide additional ways for people to recreate including access to water.

High Priority Action Item: Retain natural areas and greenway corridors throughout the parks.

Many of the City's parks have open space and wooded areas located within their borders. Keeping these areas as natural and pristine as possible will add to the value of the park and recreation system. As noted above, offering passive recreation as well as active recreation opportunities provides a well rounded park and recreation system and one that can be enjoyed by multiple users. In addition to the open space and wooded areas, trail systems (primarily in Cora Clark Park) should be maintained as natural areas that can be accessed through the trail system. Connecting these trails throughout the City and park system, whenever possible, should also be a priority for the City.



High Priority Action Item: Assist with the proposed connections to the Ernst Trail.

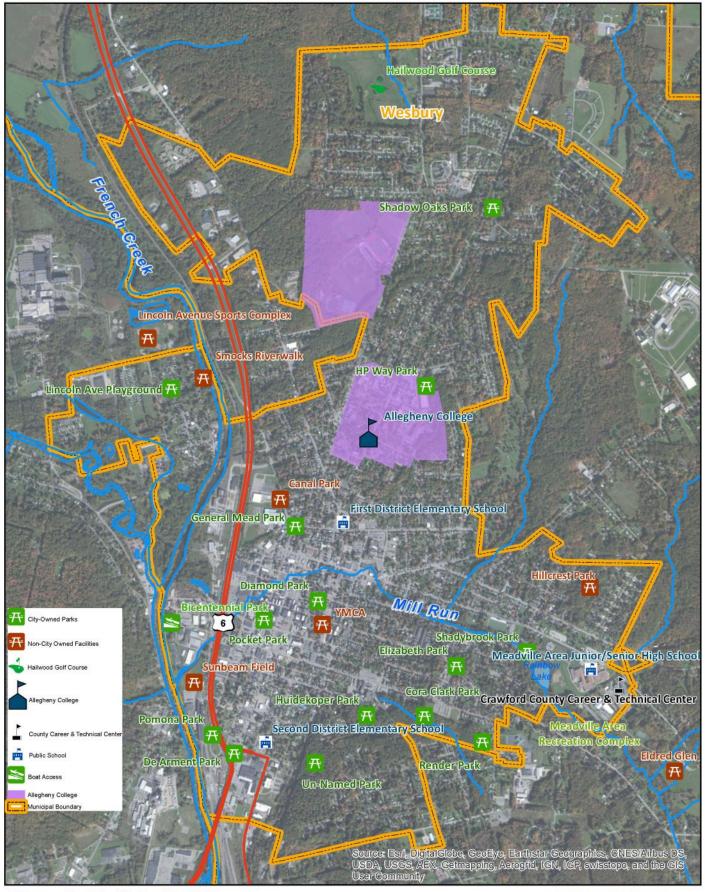
Currently the Ernst Trail does not come into the City boundaries, but there are projects underway to extend the trail from its existing termination into the City with the potential to develop a trail head at Bicentennial Park. The City should make every effort to support the trail extension and when it does link to Bicentennial Park, provide amenities such as signage, additional parking, benches, etc.

High Priority Action Item: Implement the Campus Loop Trail.

Providing safe and well marked connections from the Allegheny College campus into downtown Meadville and to Bicentennial Park will benefit the college population, the local businesses and other residents in the City. Throughout this planning process as well as the process that the City undertook in 2012 and 2013 for the Comprehensive Plan, these connections were consistently identified as high priority. Potential alignments as well as trail type (i.e. bike lane, share the road or combination) are shown on Map 2 at the end of this summary with additional detail for selected intersections. It is recommended that the City utilize these maps as a basis to undertake detailed studies to implement the connections. The local PennDOT representative will need to be involved as these routes do include state routes.

Action Item 8C: Implement the City / Oak Grove Loop Trail.

In addition to the route that connects the Allegheny College Campus to downtown, a route that connects the City to Oak Grove Park was identified as a priority. Similar to the Campus Loop Trail, the potential alignment with trail type can be found on Map 2 at the end of this summary. The recommendation is for the City to utilize this map and information to begin further detailed studies to determine the feasibility of the route.



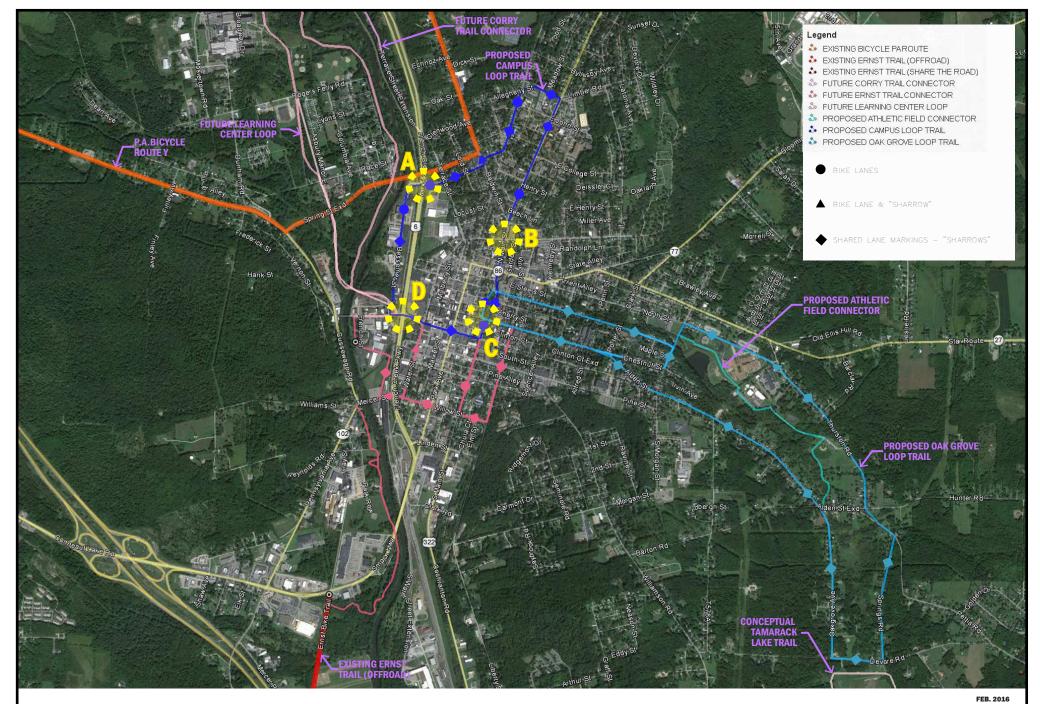
References: City of Meadville, PennDOT, PASDA

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Map 1: Existing Recreation Facilities City of Meadville - February 2016 Mackin Engineering Company RIDC Park West

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MAP 2 : MEADVILLE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, CRAWFORD COUNTY, PA **CITY CONNECTOR PLAN**



