WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP

EXTON PARK MASTER PLAN

Executive Summary

Brief History
The 713-acre tract now referred to as Exton Park was purchased cooperatively by Chester County and West Whiteland Township in 1994 for $12,000,000 from the Church Farm School. Focusing on open space preservation as well as the recreational needs of a rapidly growing community, the Township and County developed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the details of the sale as well as a commitment to mutual cooperation in the park planning process.

In 1996, an Agreement of Principles was reached between the County and Township, enumerating issues related to the park development project, including the subdivision of the park land, a $500,000 contribution to the Township from the County to offset some of the costs of developing the active recreation facilities within the Township section of the park, the use of park land for spray irrigation, and further reinforcing the principles of cooperation between the two entities.

In 1996-97 a Study Committee worked with Rettew Associates and Toole Recreation Planning to develop a conceptual or bubble plan. Three alternative concept plans were developed and a final plan, combining the best aspects of the three alternate plans, was approved in 1997.

A task force composed of Township and County elected officials, Park and Recreation Commission members and staff began work in 1999, refining the Conceptual Plan into a Master Plan for the Park. LDR Inc. was retained to assist this group with the preparation of the Master Plan.

Elements of the Plan
The Master Plan Study was initiated in December of 1999 and is intended to build upon the findings and recommendations of the Conceptual Study to further refine the park and recreation program and infrastructure proposed for Exton Park. The Master Plan furthers the recommendations of the Conceptual Plan by:

- updating the demographic profile of the potential user group and confirming current recreation trends;
- providing enhanced analysis of the site's natural resources and the associated opportunities and constraints;
- refining the Park, Recreation, and Infrastructure Program;
- developing recommendations for the management of the site's natural resources;
- developing an illustrative Master Plan that defines the program and infrastructure elements proposed for the park;
- determining appropriate construction phases and associated costs for the development of both the County and Township portions of the park;
- estimating the Operation and Maintenance requirements and Revenue potential for both the County and Township portions of the park; and
- Creating a concise, usable document using graphics, tables and charts to guide the implementation of the Master Plan.

Natural Resources Management
One of the most topical issues in open space planning is biodiversity; that is, the number of kinds of species that inhabit a given area. Maintenance, enhancement, or restoration of native biodiversity is increasingly identified as a desirable goal in many user surveys. An area of ancillary concern is the control of population levels of potentially undesirable species Habitat preservation and enhancement have been identified as major objectives related to natural resource management within the park.

A 12-acre farm pond exists on site and will undoubtedly become a popular destination for visitors to the park. People are naturally drawn to the water and will want to gain access to it for fishing, viewing and "touching." In addition to the trails included in this plan, a fishing pier is proposed along the south edge. This structure would be a simple wood dock structure built on pilings with beam and joist construction.

Active Recreation Opportunities
The West Whiteland Township portion of Exton Park is heavily programmed with active recreation uses. These uses included large sports fields, hard-court facilities, playgrounds, trails and supporting restroom and parking facilities. In addition, there are several less intense uses proposed for the site such as fields for spray irrigation and a wastewater storage lagoon, proposed as part of the Township's water treatment program. There also exists a 12-acre farm pond, a stream with associated natural and man-made wetlands and several areas of existing trees. The goal of the Master Plan is to site the mix of active and passive uses identified in the Conceptual Study on the property in a manner that preserves the general character of the land and is sensitive to the site's existing natural resources. This has been accomplished by locating the various active and passive uses on the most suitable areas of the site based on existing topography, visibility and sensitivity to important natural resources.

Spray Irrigation
There are a total of approximately 96 acres of land reserved for the future application of spray irrigation. The 96 acres excludes required buffer areas. Every effort has been made to balance the desire to achieve the full active recreation program with the need to reserve adequate areas for spray application utilizing the best soils. Tatman & Lee, the Township's wastewater consultant, estimates that the Master Plan as shown offers capacity of 438,500 gallons per day (gpd) on soils which they have tested and an additional 14,000 gpd on soils that they have not tested.

The areas reserved for future spray irrigation may be managed in a number of ways. The Township may continue

to lease the land for crop production in the short term. Even after the installation of the spray systems crops could be cultivated for live stock feed. Because the spray fields are mostly adjacent to roads, managing them as crops would contribute to the goal of maintaining the agrarian character of the property, particularly as viewed from the local street network. These spray fields could also be maintained as native grassland/ wildflower meadows. These could then be harvested for hay following completion of the nesting cycle for birds in the fall. If haying were not to prove viable the meadows could simply be mowed at the end of the nesting cycle for birds and left. This would keep the spray areas in a perpetual meadow condition, not allowing natural succession. The two latter options would also contribute to the goal of maintaining the open field/agrarian character of the property.

Trails

A variety of trail types are proposed in the Township portion of the park. Trails are provided that connect to surrounding communities and land uses, provide multiple circuit opportunities within the Township portion of the park, and that connect with the expanded trail network in the County portion of the park:

- Twelve-foot (12') wide paved trails are intended as all-purpose paths to accommodate foot traffic as well as bicyclists and roller bladders.
- Eight-foot (8') wide paved trails are provided to create important connections within the park and are intended for foot traffic only. These paths will need to be signed to indicate the intended use restrictions.

There are several paths identified as primitive trails with stabilized surfaces. These are located around portions of the existing pond, around the wetland area at the southwest corner of the park, and through the easement area intended for storm water management and wetland creation by the Valley Creek Corporate Center project.

Phasing and Estimated Costs for Development

The development and operation of the Exton Park Site will be a major investment. The cost will be substantial and the shear size of the park will necessitate a phased approach to implementation of the proposed improvements. It is likely that full build-out of the facilities may take 15 years or more. The phases have been developed taking several factors into account including:

- The expressed need for certain recreation facilities.
- The need for coordinated and controlled access.
- That there are economies of scale associated with constructing like-facilities at one time, such as ball fields and trails.
- The development of key facilities such as a contact station.
- The desire to make a variety of programs and facilities available (not build-out all of one type of facility before starting another).
- An understanding that everything cannot be constructed at once and that costs must be spread out over time.
- That some facilities are stand-alone and could be developed at any time.

The development has been proposed in four phases. Each phase is envisioned as being approximately four to five years in duration. This period of time will allow for the identification and procurement of funding as well as for the time needed for design and construction.

<u>Phase 1</u>

The Township's Phase 1 development is focused on providing active recreation sports fields. This is based on the need for these facilities, which has been stated by the public and the Township throughout the Conceptual and Master planning processes. These are some of the facilities that are currently most lacking in the Township. The field area south east of the pond is proposed for initial development. This would include the four youth soccer fields and two regulation instructional soccer fields along with the associated parking. This phase also includes some early trail development including a combination of trail types to provide access all the way around the pond. *Estimated Development Costs: $1,017,100.00)*

<u>Phase 1A</u>

Phase 1A is proposed as the work associated with the pond rehabilitation. It is suggested that a detailed analysis of the pond be conducted to better understand the level of improvement required. Any pond improvements could be staged in the open field area to the west. This phase would be made up of any required dredging, recontouring and reconstruction associated with the pond. It also includes any necessary patching of the trail installed in Phase 1 as well as the construction of the fishing pier. Depending on the cost of this effort, Phase 1A could be a stand-alone phase of work, or could be accomplished as part of Phase 1 or Phase 2. *Estimated Development Costs: $550,000.00-$1,000,000.00*

<u>Phase 2</u>

As part of Phase 2 the Township would be responsible for the construction of the eastern-most roundabout. Development of the seven regulation soccer fields, three softball/baseball fields and one multi-use field are proposed along with the supporting roads and parking. Additional Phase 2 costs include initial park signage, stabilization of the site surrounding the active recreation improvements with seeded lawn and seeded meadow, and a 12' wide multi-use trail connection from the Chester Valley Trail through the site to the western roundabout. This is to join with the County's Phase 2 trail, which provides a regional connection to the Uwchlan Trail. Construction of the concession/restroom building and the adjacent playground are also proposed as part of Phase 2. *Estimated Development Costs: $2,233,660.00*

As part of Phase 2, a portion of the entrance road that extends from the eastern roundabout to the north is proposed. This section of road would connect with the gravel drive extending from the County's event parking area to allow for an additional means of ingress or egress.

<u>Phase 3</u>

Phase 3 is focused on the development of the hard court facilities north of Swedesford Road. This includes the road, parking, concession and restroom facility. Several trail connections are also proposed as part of this phase. *Estimated Development Costs: $1,162,260.*

Phase 4

The open field area north of the proposed spray irrigation lagoon is reserved for future recreation needs. This area is large enough to accommodate a variety of other active or passive recreation uses.