



# Executive Review: Allegheny County Parks Action Plan



Dan Onorato  
County Executive



# COUNTY OF ALLEGHENY

## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Dear Friends:

Allegheny County's nine regional parks have the potential to be one of the finest park systems in the country. In order to enhance recreational opportunities in our parks, I launched the County Parks Action Plan, which includes the creation of a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to raise private funds for the regional parks, as well as the establishment of public-private partnerships to operate some of the parks' major amenities and attractions.

The Allegheny County Parks Foundation will raise funds for improvement projects in the County's parks, which span more than 12,000 acres. In order to assist the Allegheny County Parks Foundation, I have directed \$1 million from the County's budget to the new organization for its startup and committed to matching its initial fundraising efforts dollar-for-dollar with \$10 million in County capital funds.

With the establishment of the Allegheny County Parks Foundation, we will be able to implement many of the goals and recommendations in the Allegheny County Parks Comprehensive Master Plan. By matching private giving, we will also double the amount of funds for deferred maintenance, recreational improvements and facility enhancements.

Exploring additional public-private partnerships will allow us to take advantage of the private sector's creativity, energy and resources to help us maximize the potential uses of our major park facilities, and further enhance the development of our parks.

Thank you for your interest in helping to transform and improve our park system.

Sincerely,

Dan Onorato  
Allegheny County Executive

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# Foundation – the basis or groundwork of anything...

In September 2007, County Executive Dan Onorato announced the formation of the Allegheny County Parks Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan, independent organization to preserve and improve the County Parks System through resource development, community planning and advocacy. The Foundation works with Allegheny County to ensure the County Parks System continues its legacy of excellence and progress.

Why a foundation? In 2002, the County completed a comprehensive master plan for the parks that demonstrated there were millions of dollars worth of deferred maintenance in the park system. While there has been ongoing work in the parks, the needs greatly outweigh the County's ability to provide capital funding.



The Foundation was the first and most critical step, followed by a commitment of County capital funding. This money will be used to match dollar-for-dollar funds raised by the Foundation. The collaborative efforts point the County in a direction to find creative solutions to raise money for parks.

The Allegheny County Parks Foundation board of directors was appointed and includes ex officio members County Manager Jim Flynn, County Public Works Director Joe Olczak and County Parks Director Andy Baechle.

## Board of Directors 2007 - 2008

John Surma, Chair

Carol Brown, Vice Chair

Chip Babst, Treasurer

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Dan Onorato, County Executive

Rich Fitzgerald, County Council President

# Parks Action Plan – Park Town Hall Meetings

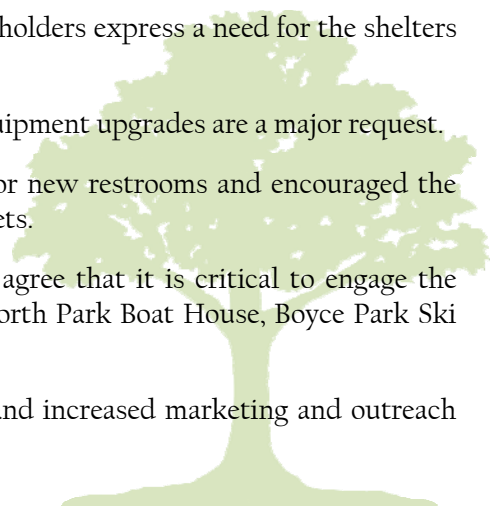
Between January and June 2008, County Executive Dan Onorato held town hall meetings in Allegheny County's nine regional parks. More than 1200 residents and stakeholders attended these meetings and shared important questions and feedback regarding the state of our parks.

With more than 12,000 acres, Allegheny County has one of the largest amounts of green space in the region. These parks are critical to our quality of life and economic development.



At each meeting, suggestions and questions from the residents and stakeholders were similar. This is important because it helps to prioritize funding and projects for the nine regional parks. We found the following:

- Residents enjoy and use the park system regularly, however, overall park maintenance was an item of utmost concern. Assistance in maintenance, using programs and organizations such as Adopt-a-Park and the Pittsburgh Trail Advocacy Group, are important partnership opportunities for each park's Council of Friends and users.
- There is a great appreciation of the recreational opportunities in the parks, but just as great is the need to maintain natural undeveloped areas within the parks. A conservation management plan for each park should be undertaken.
- There are many trails that serve a variety of uses, such as biking, hiking, walking and horse riding. Residents have conflict over uses in some parks. Shared-use must be discussed in order to overcome these challenges.
- There is significant wildlife in our parks, and while most agree that this is a sign of a healthy ecosystem, residents ask that wildlife management for both geese and deer be explored and acted upon.
- The creation of the Allegheny County Parks Foundation is a welcome addition to our parks structure and residents would like to be a part of the process of determining projects and improvements.
- Facilities within each park are used a great deal. Residents and stakeholders express a need for the shelters to be upgraded and better maintained.
- Playgrounds are a critical component of the parks, and playground equipment upgrades are a major request.
- Residents and stakeholders overwhelmingly spoke about the need for new restrooms and encouraged the County to look at ecological friendly systems such as sweet smelling toilets.
- While the County has many public-private partnerships, residents agree that it is critical to engage the private sector to invest in some of our major park assets, such as the North Park Boat House, Boyce Park Ski Slopes and Four Seasons Activity Center, among others.
- The parks are well used, but residents ask for local advertisements and increased marketing and outreach concerning programs, hours and other park opportunities.



# Parks Action Plan – Comments from Residents

## *Harrison Hills – January 15*

- ✓ Connect the Rachel Carson Trail with the Butler Freeport Trail and the Pittsburgh to Erie Trail
- ✓ Purchase adjacent properties
- ✓ Develop a new parking lot near the Environmental Learning Center
- ✓ Develop the walking trail near the overlook into an accessible trail
- ✓ Provide electricity to groves and shelters

## *Boyce Park – February 2*

- ✓ Expand the activities center to include a Turnpike Visitor's Center
- ✓ Transform trails in the park and connections made to rail trails
- ✓ Establish a dog park
- ✓ Permit park use after dark and use of ski slopes and lifts for biking during warmer months
- ✓ Advertise more of the activities and events

## *White Oak – March 1*

- ✓ Make improvements to Lincoln Way entrance
- ✓ Increase traffic control and signage
- ✓ Develop a sufficient walking trail near roadways
- ✓ Explore opportunities for naming rights within the park
- ✓ Create a natural amphitheater for concerts and movies
- ✓ Consider timbering the land

## *Settler's Cabin - March 8*

- ✓ Investigate traffic concerns at the intersection of Noblestown Road
- ✓ Reconsider the log cabin and house for renovation
- ✓ Develop a sports complex, deck hockey and a water park near the wave pool
- ✓ Add parking near the wave pool

## *Hartwood Park – March 29*

- ✓ Convert Hartwood into an equestrian park/center with horse shows
- ✓ Improve maintenance of the trails for biking, hiking and horseback riding
- ✓ Consider volunteer park rangers
- ✓ Increase patrols by County Police
- ✓ Work to designate the stables as a historical site
- ✓ Convert stables into an education center

## *Deer Lakes – April 23*

- ✓ Build a paved walking path/trail to and around the upper lake
- ✓ Develop night fishing permits monitored by the County Police
- ✓ Consider removing lighting surrounding the Wagman Observatory to lessen the impact on star visibility
- ✓ Increase partnerships with the school districts and youth groups
- ✓ Enhance ball fields and develop a permanent concession stand

## *North Park – May 10*

- ✓ Consider cabin rentals
- ✓ Leave areas in a natural state for enjoyment
- ✓ Increase the number of garbage cans and improve system for trash collection
- ✓ Increase traffic control in the morning hours
- ✓ Improve maintenance along bike/walking paths
- ✓ Place recycling cans within the park

## *South Park – May 17*

- ✓ Renovate tennis courts
- ✓ Bring back the County Fair
- ✓ Increase snow removal and road maintenance
- ✓ Rebuild the South Park Lodge that was lost in a fire
- ✓ Deny requests to strip mine
- ✓ Connect Montour Trail to South Park
- ✓ Add new restrooms near tennis courts and fields

## *Round Hill Farm – June 10*

- ✓ Build a swimming pool
- ✓ Add recreational activities for children
- ✓ Build a concession stand for the field area
- ✓ Repair the duck pond ecosystem
- ✓ Add more horse trails
- ✓ Create an Adopt-an-Animal Program to engage children

# Parks Action Plan – Public/Private Partnerships

The County is looking for creative partnership opportunities to aid in and/or provide solutions to existing park issues. County Executive Onorato has pledged not to sell parkland or assets, but to make certain that there are checks and balances available in the County's infrastructure to ensure the best deals are made for residents.

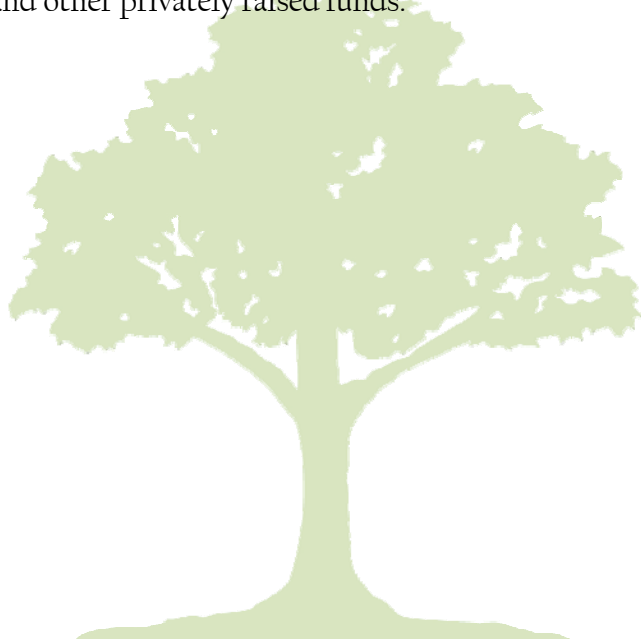
There are five significant facilities that are the focus of a proposal: North Park Boathouse; Hartwood Stables; South Park Fairgrounds; Boyce Park Winter Sports Area; and tennis courts. Over the years, these facilities have become run down due to deferred maintenance, but public-private partnerships create an investment opportunity.

Some partnerships have already begun to take shape. For instance, the County is addressing acid mine drainage at Settler's Cabin Park by partnering with the Botanical Gardens of Western Pennsylvania. A company will reclaim the site and remediate the acid mine drainage, and a botanical garden will be built using revenues from the project and other privately raised funds.

Another example focuses on Allegheny County's two golf courses at North and South parks. National Gold Foundation will work in conjunction with County staff to determine how to operate these golf courses more efficiently and effectively.



The County Executive has touted the success of the National Aviary on Pittsburgh's North Side as a model for public-private partnerships. This institution, once slated to be closed, is now working on its third renovation.



# Partnership Participants



Public-private partnerships with Allegheny County Parks work. Engaging organizations to provide the very best service and programming is one of the major goals of the Parks Action Plan.



Throughout the years, these initiatives have grown into ongoing programs. For example:

- The Pennsylvania Trail Advocacy Group (PTAG) provides maintenance on trails throughout many of our parks. These all-volunteer efforts also provide improvements to biking trails in Boyce, Hartwood, North, South, Deer Lakes and Harrison Hills parks.
- At Harrison Hills Park, the Friends of Harrison Hills is an active volunteer group that has recently completed the Environmental Learning Center in partnership with the County. The Center is staffed by volunteers who provide hundreds of hours to distribute information and offer nature programming opportunities.
- The Hartwood Mansion Tours are one of the longest running public-private partnerships. In conjunction with the Friends of Hartwood, visitors can take a tour with a knowledgeable and friendly volunteer docent.
- South Park is host to many long-time partnerships; including the South Park Theater, BMX Track and Martial Arts Center, to name a few. The Theater maintains and operates a venue in the park and provides adult and children's shows. The volunteer Martial Arts Center has been operating for more than 20 years in a space fully maintained by the Center and offers low-cost opportunities to learn a variety of martial arts. The BMX Track, rated number one in the United States for three years, is run entirely by volunteers. This track hosts national competitions and provides an alternative recreational opportunity for children and adults.

A complete listing of partnerships can be found on the web site at [www.alleghenycounty.us/parks](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/parks).



For additional information, contact the Allegheny County Parks Department at 412-350-2460 or via the web at [www.alleghenycounty.us/parks](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/parks)