

**County Chief Executive Dan Onorato  
Parks Action Plan  
Park Town Hall Meetings  
White Oak Park  
Saturday, March 1, 2008**

Over 75 people joined Chief Executive Dan Onorato to discuss park planning and park projects for White Oak Park at his third Parks Town Hall meeting.

An overview of the newly formed Parks Foundation and the role of the organization as it relates to parks is presented. An opportunity for comments, questions and discussion is held by Mr. Onorato. This report summarizes the County Chief Executive's remarks as well as the comments provided by residents.

**County Parks  
A Priority  
Dan Onorato**

Several years ago, a new form of county government was implemented which included elected councilman. This representation provides a voice for the Valley. There are many assets in the Mon Valley and one of these is White Oak Park.

In September 2007, an independent non profit foundation was formed that will provide the fundraising expertise to raise money for our county parks. One of the reasons the foundation was developed is because there are millions of dollars of deferred maintenance in our park system. We had a Revenue Study completed that reviewed our parks. This study showed that we need to find innovative ways to raise money so we can invest in our park systems.

Over the past 30+ years, our parks have suffered due to budget cuts and neglect. One of the first departments cut during budget troubles, our county parks have been slashed. 10 million dollars are committed right now for investment. This 10 million is going to be used as matching funds.

The foundation recently met and will begin to lay the structure for the foundation.

Parks are an important to economic development and quality of life. So important that we need a foundation to raise money to maintain our parks.

In addition to the foundation, the other part of this effort is the establishment of public private partnerships to operate some of the parks' major amenities and attractions.

White Oak doesn't have these large amenities, but there are several examples of partnerships – such as the Botanical Garden, that could be formed. The County is looking for partners that will help support the parks.

White Oak Park has large undeveloped land. There are some beautiful places in the park – the wedding garden (where the Mayor has married several couples) and of course the Angora Gardens and the rabbits. (Angora Gardens is a partnership with Mon Yough Services). There is also a planned water park.

The vision is that with 12,000 acres of parks Allegheny County will be one of the state's premier park systems that provides recreational and educational opportunities for the residents.

### **Comments from Residents**

- Serenity is attractive, but there are a lot of roadways. Will the county open up the roadways for commercial activity?
- Traffic control and signage directly off route 148 is necessary
- Can county fund road improvements at Lincoln Way entrance
- Need additional trails – use the old tractor roads
- Forget about the waterpark, keep it natural
- Put waterpark near the McClintock Playground
- If you do put in a water park, don't put it by the dog park
- Develop a sufficient walking trail near roadways. People walk the park and walk on or near the road.
- Maintenance and need for more park jobs

Mr. Onorato responded to this question by answering that there wasn't going to be any additional employees – that's why we need partnerships with our major assets. We need to find innovative ways to partner and raise funds.

- Post the names of the foundation board members on the web site
- What's the process for the RFP's?
- Open Angora Gardens at night so groups can visit the facility
- We have a problem with skateboarders. Should we have a skateboard facility?

Mr. Onorato talked about the skateboard parks the county has invested in over the past couple of years. Skateboard parks get kids of the roads and parking lots and these facilities are really used?

- Wildlife management plan. There needs to be a wildlife management plan for the parks.
- Hunting. White Tail Management is too narrow in it's scope. Should explore other organizations.

Hunting is one of the issues discussed at the previous 2 parks. The county currently uses controlled hunting to manage the deer population. This is the type of issue that the county needs guidance and ideas.

- This is a great park and a great staff. It's a collection of small farms that became parks. Many homes sit right next to the park
- Illegal hunters are in White Oak Park. We need to find a way to give access to hunters, but not overhunt and don't allow for too many.
- There are lots of gas wells in park and near by. How about the possibility of timbering the land?
- The drilling that is going on nearby is bothersome. If there is drilling in the parks, can it be done during daylight hours?

Mr. Onorato made it clear that the county is not privatizing the parks, but privatizing the management of selected assets. He emphasized that residents and stakeholders still have a very important role in making policy decisions for the parks.

The foundation will work with the county to raise money and we will all identify projects in the parks to complete.

- Are there opportunities for naming rights within the park
- We love the dog park but the grass and turf needs to be cleaned and re-seeded. Is there any way we can "rest" this section of the dog park and can the county identify another area to put the dog park?
- Need to formulate a plan to manage the parks and conservation and maximize revenue. We can raise revenue through select cuts of the timber.
- Speeding is a problem in the park.
- There is an area in the park that is a natural amphitheater. Will you have concerts and movies?

- Investment in the park has been ongoing for several generations. Don't destroy the pristine nature of the park. Adjoining homes have invested in our property and our lives.

Mr. Onorato stated that any actions in the park – any significant changes or facilities would go through a transparent public process for input.