



Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan

**Borough of Bernardsville,
New Jersey**

July, 2021



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan Borough of Bernardsville, New Jersey

Mary Jane Canose, Mayor

Thomas Czerniecki, PP, AICP, Administrator

Borough Council

Christine Zamarra, Council President

Councilman John Donahue

Councilman Matthew Marino

Councilman Jeffrey Hammond

Councilwoman Jena McCredie

Councilman Chad McQueen

Recreation Committee

Ted Dolan, Chair

Andrew Taylor, Vice Chair

William DeMilt

Heather Eich

Brian Gallagher

Laura Hartnett

Melissa Provost

Steve Reynolds

Louis Romano

Al Schaufler

Robert Steinkopf

Peg Trinter

Tom O'Dea, Council Liaison

Master Plan Steering Committee

Mayor Mary Jane Canose

Edward Dolan

Greg Degrandpre

Kerry Haselton

Mike Hoppe

Mike Long

John Macdowall

Pat McFadden

Dot Paluck

Thomas O'Dea

Heather Eich

Albert Schaufler

Andrew Taylor

Bob Markowick, Recreation Director

Borough Staff

Robert Markowick, Recreation Director

Leah Horowitz, Recreation Coordinator

Consultant Team



2360 Chauvin Drive
Lexington, Kentucky 40517
(859) 268-1933 VOICE
(859) 268-3341 FAX
Architect's Project No. 20039
July, 2021

Patrick D. Hoagland, ASLA, Principal in Charge
Tom O'Rourke, Recreation Consultant
Keith Rodenhauser, AICP, GISP, SITES AP, Senior Planner
Hannah Crepps, AICP, Planner
Lynda Gates, Administrative Assistant
Tyler Strader, Associate ASLA
Charles L. Schneider, P.E., AFO, Aquatic Engineer



ETC (Survey Consultant)

Jason Morado
Chris Tatham

© 2021 Brandstetter Carroll Inc. All rights reserved





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NEED FOR A PLAN

Bernardsville, New Jersey is one of the premier suburbs of New York City. Bernardsville Recreation is known for its family-friendly municipal pool, quality athletic fields, summer camps, and natural spaces. Residents of Bernardsville also enjoy access to parks and open spaces — like Lewis Morris County Park, Hacklebarney State Park, Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (Fish & Wildlife Service), and Somerset County's Natirar Park — provided by several other entities. Because of the many local resources and opportunities available to borough residents, this *2021 Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan* is important in part because it helps to clarify the department's responsibilities for delivering parks, facilities, and recreational choices to the community.

But beyond clarifying what role parks and recreation holds in the borough, this Master Plan serves as a guiding document establishing clear priorities that should inspire action over the next 10 years. This plan affirms Bernardsville Recreation as an important local provider of community spaces, athletic facilities, and close-at-hand nature access. Distinguishing departmental responsibilities from other area parks providers is critical for ensuring there are no duplicated services between the different agencies and that the Recreation Department is well-equipped to operate efficiently. In this way, residents are provided the most benefit and best service in a way that is fiscally responsible.

The residents of Bernardsville passed a referendum in 1998 to establish a Municipal Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Trust Fund with all proceeds to be used for land acquisition. In 2008 the residents approved a public question to allocate up to 20% of the funds to be allocated for the development of land. In November 2019, the voters approved a public question to allow for up to 100% of the Trust Fund to be allocated for development for

park and recreation purposes. With this new funding source for development, the borough desired this Master Plan to guide their use of the funds to meet the needs of residents.

While deferred maintenance, changing community needs, development goals, additional funding for development, and operational feasibility taken altogether are reason enough for producing a future-forward plan, 2020 ushered in an unprecedented layer of change and challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic that began with fervor in early March of 2020 in the United States has impacted communications, procedures, and everyday routine across all sectors of the economy. Besides dramatically altering daily life, the effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic are shaping the future of communities in ways as yet impossible to understand. Even before the pandemic began in the U.S., clear reporting existed about the value of parks and recreation.

As civic spaces, parks act as operational hubs for efforts to address chronic issues like physical inactivity, poor health, and access to nutrition. Just by living close to a park, an individual is more likely to have higher activity levels. Having even a simple connection to nature — like a small Neighborhood Park with healthy tree canopy — can relieve stress, improve mental health, and provide opportunities for interpersonal interaction.¹ Parks are part of hyper-local civic infrastructure, needed now more than ever, where citizens practice the “art of association” and do the work of knitting communities together.²

What has newly emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic is the vital role parks and recreation has played — and will continue to play — in the country's recovery. Six months into the pandemic, the National Recreation and Park Association published an extensive discussion of the myriad ways parks and recreation is both effected by and affecting the outcome of the pandemic.³ Budget cuts, canceled programming, over-crowded spaces, once-vibrant

¹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Health and Wellness,” <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/health-wellness/>, (December, 10 2019).

² American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020)

³ Dolesh, Richard J. *How Parks and Recreation Will Change Forever*. NRPA. (July 2020). <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/august/how-parks-and-recreation-will-change-forever/>

facilities shuttered to protect against the spread; communities across the nation are still feeling these stings.⁴ But agencies are also adapting and finding creative funding solutions,⁵ boldly stepping into the critical work of bridging inequity, safeguarding physical and mental health, and ensuring access.

In light of changing leadership and COVID-19 recovery, parks and recreation in Bernardsville will need to be adaptable and forward-thinking. This flexibility is exemplified in the substance of the recommendations included in this Master Plan. While it is impossible to decipher a single “correct” path into the post-pandemic future, this plan underscores the need for responsive action, elevated experiences, and reinforced civic infrastructure. As the economic impact of COVID-19 manifests, there will be temptations to recover costs and cut spending. This Master Plan maps the beginning of multi-dimensional recovery where parks and recreation is not only important but essential for building a strong, vibrant community in Bernardsville.⁶

EXISTING CONDITIONS OF PARKS AND RECREATION IN BERNARDSVILLE

For many residents, parks are primary entry points for interacting with the natural environment. As COVID-19 has made abundantly clear, equity fissures persist and can in part be remedied through fair, inclusive access to open park spaces and quality facilities. For all residents, parks provide a variety of passive and active outdoor recreational opportunities and close access improves community health and wellness. As mentioned previously, Bernardsville parks and recreation services are a critical thread in the borough's civic fabric and will be crucial for pandemic recovery.

In Bernardsville, the borough maintains 220 acres of parkland in total, with three Neighborhood Parks, one Community Park, and several Open Space properties. The department also oversees the historic Dunster-Squibb House. In addition to these borough properties, residents can enjoy access to many parks and open spaces managed by other entities (e.g., Somerset County, Mendham Township, etc.) either within or near Bernardsville.

Demographic and Benchmarking Analysis

A strong, proactive approach to department operations requires knowledge and understanding of community demographics. The findings of this Master Plan (Chapter 2) show the population has remained stable and is expected to stay about the same; the community is diversifying racially and ethnically with a declining White population and growing Black, Asian, and Hispanic populations; and the senior population (age 65+) is growing considerably, while the population under age 18 is experiencing a downward trend. Understanding past trends and projected changes will help identify present demand for parks and recreation and be useful for anticipating future need.

The analysis of existing conditions includes a benchmark comparison to 30 similar agencies using the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Park Metrics database. Benchmarking shows that the department has a reliable revenue stream from its aquatic facility and has close to double the median revenue brought in by benchmark communities. However, given the pandemic – both the effects already felt, and the likely greater impacts still to come – it is unclear when the department may return to its typical level of cost recovery.

Service Area Analysis (Gaps)

Maps of service areas for various parks and facilities were used to identify “Service Gaps” or underserved areas within Bernardsville. The planning consultant also created maps to illustrate levels of access to various park categories and facilities. The analysis indicated that a little less than half of Bernardsville residents live within walking distance of a park (41%), and roughly two thirds (61%) live within a short drive to a larger park.

Lastly, a composite service areas map (see next page) shows the overall level of service for parks (four types) and facilities (11 types), in turn revealing spaces of need and opportunity. Dark shades of blue indicate high service levels while red areas show the areas with the lowest level of service to parks and facilities. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Bernardsville residents live in the highest two categories – 32% live with medium to medium-low service levels – while 25% live in the lowest two categories combined.

⁴ Roth, Kevin. How COVID-19 Impacts Parks and Recreation Funding. NRPA. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/may/how-covid-19-impacts-park-and-recreation-funding/>. Accessed November 2020.

⁵ McCormick, Kathleen. Room to Roam: The Pandemic Has Underscored the Need for More Urban Parks; So What Comes Next? Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/articles/2020-10-room-roam-pandemic-urban-parks-what-comes-next>. (October 7, 2020). Accessed November 2020.

⁶ Marquis, Bridget. Infrastructure That Does More: Investing in Public Spaces for a Resilient America. Strong Towns. https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/11/23/infrastructure-that-does-more-investing-in-public-spaces-for-a-resilient-america?fbclid=IwAR2Aa8OXGjUpGNv3ibIDHC-W40ic9L9QjnXvix_kgFS0CtEoi5vhiqJ0bDg (November 24, 2020). Accessed December 4, 2020.

Composite Service Areas

Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Bernardsville, New Jersey

Service Level (Rank)	Population	Cumulative Population
High (80%-100%)	31%	31%
Medium-High (60%-80%)	34%	65%
Medium (40%-60%)	10%	75%
Medium-Low (20%-40%)	22%	97%
Low (0%-20%)	3%	100%

Legend

Service Level (Percentile)

- High (80%-100%)
- Medium-High (60%-80%)
- Medium (40%-60%)
- Medium-Low (20%-40%)
- Low (0%-20%)

Bernardsville Parks

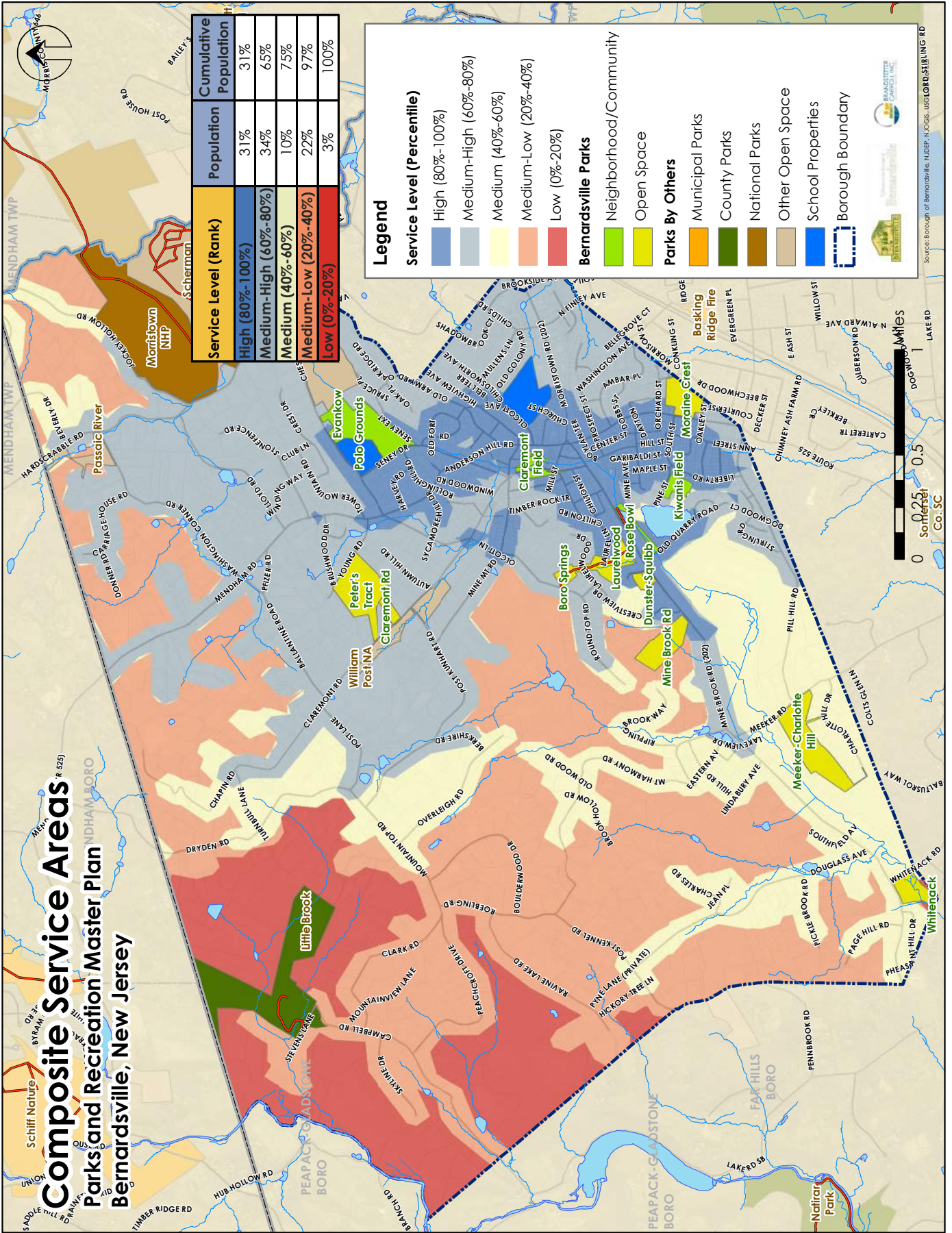
- Neighborhood/Community
- Open Space

Parks By Others

- Municipal Parks
- County Parks
- National Parks
- Other Open Space
- School Properties
- Borough Boundary



Source: Borough of Bernardsville, NJ DEP, NJOGS, USFORD, STIRLING RD



The eastern third of the borough is the most densely populated, which coincides with where the majority of the borough's parks and facilities are located. The lowest levels of service are primarily in the western portion of the borough, but this area is more rural in character and much less densely developed. The table below shows the percentage of the population by service level.

Service Level (Rank)	Population	Cumulative Population
High (80%-100%)	31%	31%
Medium-High (60%-80%)	34%	65%
Medium (40%-60%)	10%	75%
Medium-Low (20%-40%)	22%	97%
Low (0%-20%)	3%	100%

A CITIZEN DRIVEN PLAN

To make informed decisions moving forward, Bernardsville Recreation needs meaningful public input in addition to robust statistical and performance analysis. Including resident participation in this planning process gives actual park users a means to share their individual needed, perceptions, concerns, and desires for the park system they themselves use. This Master Plan process used several methods to connect with the community. As the department begins to implement this plan, sustained efforts will be necessary to continuously solicit public feedback about development projects; allowing direct participation whenever possible will ensure the community feels heard and has pride in their parks. As the community finds new balance amid the coronavirus recovery, engagement efforts should be flexible and creative, utilizing tools like on-site feedback (e.g., semi-permanent chalk or bulletin boards) and interactive online platforms (e.g., Mentimeter).

The summary below indicates the various ways the public was involved throughout this planning process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many normally in-person interactions were conducted via virtual conferencing.

Engagement Summary

- In-Park Interactions
- Stakeholder Conversations
- Statistically Valid Survey (by ETC Institute)
- Web Survey
- Online Engagement (powered by MindMixer)

1. Intercept interviews at three parks, in November 2020 – about 30 people were engaged
2. Meetings with stakeholder groups (September – November 2020)
3. Statistically valid needs assessment survey conducted by the ETC Institute – 310 total surveys received
4. Web survey – available on the Recreation webpage and shared on social media platforms – completed by 512 individuals (94% residents of Bernardsville)

WHAT BERNARDSVILLE RESIDENTS SAID

Information gathered from these public input methods was used to identify the needs of Bernardsville residents. A brief summary of the findings is provided below.

Stakeholder Groups

Discussions spanned diversity of issues:

1. Lighting on sports fields
2. An additional diamond ballfield
3. Adding a trail around Polo Grounds
4. Ability to host tournaments
5. Multi-use indoor space
6. Restrooms available at park sites
7. More shelters
8. Electronic display board for athletics
9. More trails and connectivity systemwide
10. Upgrade Memorial Pool – develop more aquatic programs
11. Develop a one-stop calendar for events and programs
12. Work on ensuring safer walkability throughout the community
13. Develop outdoor live performances
14. Build a more vibrant Downtown Bernardsville
15. Preserve land for habitat protection
16. Add concessions and restrooms facilities at Polo Grounds
17. Improve the condition of the sports fields
18. Add pickleball courts
19. Build capacity for year-round programming
20. Add a meeting space

Statistically Valid Mail Survey

Seventy-one percent (71%) of residents visited a park in Bernardsville at some point in the past year; 47% of these residents visited parks more than 10 times in that year. Polo Grounds & Evankow Tract was the most visited park (51% Mail Survey). Fifty-two percent (52%) of households reported visiting Somerset County Park Commission properties in the previous year. In addition to the more active-use parks, households report use of Audubon Trail (45%), Patriots Path (40%) and Cross Estate (37%).

The top reasons for not using parks or programs more often include (Mail Survey):

- Do not know what is offered (60%)
- Facility or program not offered (29%)
- Do not have time (27%)

Thirty-one percent (31%) of Web Survey respondents identified poor condition of facilities as preventing them from using the borough's offerings.

Theseresponsesuggestthatstrategiccommunication efforts, adjusted scheduling, and new offerings would likely help increase resident use.

The improvements households would most like to see to existing parks included (Mail Survey):

- Walking trails (58%)
- Hiking trails (48%)
- Restrooms (41%)
- Bike trails (34%)
- Drinking fountains w/ bottle fillers (33%)

These preferences suggest a desire for walkable and bike-friendly connectivity across the community, as well as elevated support amenities for quality on site experiences.

The most important parks and recreation facilities for households were (sum of top 3 choices):

- Walking trails (44%)
- Hiking trails (29%)
- Natural areas/nature parks (24%)

The results of the most important facilities were combined with the reported unmet needs to determine **high (top 3) priorities for investment:**

1. **Walking trails**
2. **Hiking trails**
3. **Natural areas/nature parks**

The most important parks and recreation programs for households were (sum of top 3 choices):

- Concerts/art performances (34%)
- Fitness & wellness programs (20%)
- Nature programs (17%)

The results of the most important programs were combined with the reported unmet needs to determine the **high (top 5) priorities for investment:**

1. **Concerts/art performances**
2. **Adult fitness & wellness programs**
3. **Outdoor movies**
4. **Nature programs**
5. **Special events**

And finally, respondents shared their level of support for the improvements and development covered in the survey. **Eighty-one percent (81%) of households were supportive of developing new recreation trails & connecting existing trails as well as upgrading existing parks & facilities.**

Engagement Key Findings

Results indicate that generally the Bernardsville community desires:

- Improvements to existing parks
- Preservation of and access to natural areas
- Connectivity and trails, including new trails, added sidewalks and walking paths, paved walking and bike paths, and more
- Year-round recreation & programming
- New outdoor aquatic facility
- Expanded programming & events
- Upgraded playgrounds with separate age 2-5 equipment and accessible, adaptive features
- Support amenities like restrooms, improved signage, shade, and seating
- Enhanced marketing and better promotion
- Continuation of existing capital funding provision

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES FOR PARKS AND RECREATION IN BERNARDSVILLE

The Master Plan Steering Committee, with support from the planning team, worked to craft a strategic plan. This facet of the document solidifies the daily purpose of the agency, its guiding values, and the long view of success.

Mission

Parks and programs that connect community and enhance quality of life

Vision

Building quality and dynamic parks and programs

Values

Community – Create inclusive opportunities to connect, share, and grow

Health & Wellness – Offer meaningful experiences to support everyone's overall wellbeing

Welcoming – Maintain quality spaces that meet the diverse needs of all

Opportunity – Ensure exceptional facilities and programs that encourage discovery and creativity

Commitment – Invest to provide lasting access to fun and fitness

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives will guide the operations, improvements, and services in parks and recreation in Bernardsville over the next 10 years.

Goal 1: Connectivity, Created & Sustained

Use connecting paths, community gatherings, & strategic outreach to bridge physical & social divides

Trails & Pathways: Ensure every citizen has access to multimodal routes throughout the community

Social & Cultural Encounters: Provide possibilities for interaction, fun, & memories

Marketing & Promotion: Utilize innovative & inclusive outreach to bring parks & recreation to everyone

Goal 2: Empowered & Healthy Lifestyles

Deliver programming & resources to nurture the community's physical health & mental wellbeing

Athletics: Innovate to provide access & opportunity

Active Living: Encourage exploration & growth through diverse recreational experiences

Community Vitality: Become a leading provider of wellness & culture

Goal 3: Excellent Spaces, Accessible to All

Foster community pride by enhancing the overall character of the borough's parks & facilities

Modernized Parks: Exceed expectations through upgraded site features & amenities

Gathering Spaces: Be creative to provide venues for community interaction

Sustainability: Practice environmental stewardship & fiscal responsibility with clear standards & recurring assessments

Goal 4: Legacy of Remarkable Service

Enrich the borough through responsible operations, signature offerings, & proactive improvements

Adaptability: Be flexible, responsive, & imaginative to serve the diverse needs of the community

Operations & Maintenance: Set the standard for responsible management to effectively attract resources & support

Staff Development & Retention: Cultivate a team of qualified & motivated professionals

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Public input (Chapter 4) and a needs assessment (Chapter 5) together informed the recommendations for improvement outlined in Chapters 7 and 8. The following items are the top priorities determined by the planning process and through regular consultation with the steering committee.

1. Add or improve restrooms and other support features throughout the parks
2. Prepare Park Master Plans for parks prior to development of facilities to ensure they are complementary and accessible
3. Expand and maintain field capacity by adding/replacing artificial turf and adding lighting
4. Develop the 271 Mine Brook Road property as a Community Park to meet a variety of community needs
5. Develop an outdoor stage or amphitheater and host more community events (concerts, movies, etc.)
6. Add trail loops within existing parks that lack and can accommodate this facility
7. Convert the house on Claremont Road to Recreation Department offices and program space to provide a much-needed venue for year-round programming

-
8. Prepare a feasibility study for a recreation center with gymnasium space
 9. Add nature programming at borough-owned natural areas, potentially through partnerships with Somerset County Parks and others
 10. Explore opportunities to grow the line-up of adult fitness and wellness programs and age 50+ programs
 11. Maintain continuous public engagement and engage neighborhoods throughout the implementation of this plan
 12. Expand marketing of programs and facilities to increase community awareness of opportunities
 13. Determine maintenance standards that include the number of employees required per acre of parkland or individual facility
 14. Institute an easy-to-understand Cost Recovery and Pricing Plan for everything that is offered

15. Explore and solidify contracted partnerships with outside vendors and organizations to produce more programming
16. Seek opportunities to expand partnerships with local organizations for improving access to recreation facilities and programs

This Master Plan provides capital improvement recommendations for each park in Bernardsville. These recommendations – together with cost estimates – can be found in Chapter 8.

ACTION PLAN

The *2021 Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan* concludes with an Action Plan of 129 strategies and recommendations. These action items, which can be found in Chapter 9, detail specific actions for Bernardsville Recreation and the borough itself to take in implementing this long-range Master Plan.







TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	THE NEED FOR A PLAN	1
1.2	THE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS	2
1.3	MASTER PLANNING PROCESS	3
1.4	EVALUATE	3
1.5	ENGAGE	4
1.6	ENVISION	5
1.7	PLAN	5
2	PLANNING CONTEXT	7
2.1	INTRODUCTION	7
2.2	POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS	7
2.3	BENCHMARKING COMPARISONS	11
3	INVENTORY OF PARKS, FACILITIES, AND PROGRAMS.....	21
3.1	INTRODUCTION	21
3.2	PARKLAND AND RECREATION AREA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM	21
3.3	INVENTORY OF BERNARDSVILLE RECREATION AREAS	24
3.4	NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	24
3.5	COMMUNITY PARKS	27
3.6	NATURAL AREAS & OPEN SPACE SITES	28
3.7	FACILITY SUMMARY	29
3.8	PARKS BY OTHERS	29
3.9	PROGRAMS INVENTORY	29
4	PUBLIC INPUT	33
4.1	INTRODUCTION	33
4.2	IN-PARK INTERACTIONS	33
4.3	STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	36
4.4	PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS	37
4.5	ONLINE ENGAGEMENT	58
4.6	CONCLUSION	61
5	NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION.....	65
5.1	INTRODUCTION	65
5.2	NEEDS, STANDARDS, AND GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND RECREATION AREAS IN BERNARDSVILLE	65

5.3	FACILITIES NEEDS ANALYSIS AND LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS.....	68
5.4	GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS.....	70
5.5	GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF FACILITIES	70
5.6	COMPOSITE GEOGRAPHIC PARK SERVICE AREAS.....	82
5.7	TRENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION.....	82
5.8	CONCLUSION.....	96
6	STRATEGIC PLAN.....	97
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	97
6.2	VISION	97
6.3	MISSION	98
6.4	VALUES FOR BERNARDSVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION	98
6.5	GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	99
6.6	STRATEGIES	100
7	SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS	101
7.1	INTRODUCTION	101
7.2	EXISTING PARK IMPROVEMENTS	102
7.3	OUTDOOR ATHLETIC FIELDS AND COURTS	103
7.4	TRAILS AND CONNECTIVITY	105
7.5	NEW PARK AND FACILITY DEVELOPMENT	106
7.6	NATURAL AREAS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURE EDUCATION.....	109
7.7	PROGRAMMING.....	110
7.8	OPERATIONS, MAINTENANCE, AND PROMOTION	113
7.9	BUDGET AND FUNDING	118
7.10	PARTNERSHIPS AND SPONSORSHIPS.....	122
8	INDIVIDUAL PARK RECOMMENDATIONS.....	125
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	125
8.2	NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	125
8.3	COMMUNITY PARKS.....	129
8.4	NATURAL AREAS & OPEN SPACE.....	130
8.5	PARK IMPROVEMENT COSTS.....	133
9	ACTION PLAN.....	137
9.1	INTRODUCTION.....	137
9.2	ACTION PLAN STRATEGIES	137
9.3	CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITY RATING	137
APPENDIX A - METHODOLOGY		
APPENDIX B - PARK AERIALS		
APPENDIX C - CORE GUIDELINES		
APPENDIX D - PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARIES		

APPENDIX E - STATISTICALLY VALID MAIL SURVEY REPORT
APPENDIX F - WEB SURVEY REPORT
APPENDIX G - SAMPLE DOCUMENTS

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Average Household Size (2000 to 2024).....8

Table 2.2: Median Age (2000-2025)9

Table 2.3: Population Age 65+ (2000-2025)9

Table 2.4: Population under Age 18 (2000-2024)9

Table 2.5: Population Under the Poverty Line (2010-2018)10

Table 2.6: Children Under the Poverty Line (2010-2018)10

Table 2.7: Household Income (2010-2025)10

Table 2.8: Educational Attainment Age 25 and Over (2010-2019)11

Table 2.9: Population Counts and Percentages by Race (2000-2020)11

Table 2.10: Benchmark Agencies.....12

Table 2.11: Parkland Information13

Table 2.12: Trail Information.....14

Table 2.13: Department Functions14

Table 2.14: Staffing15

Table 2.16: Capital Budget16

Table 2.15: Operating Budget16

Table 2.17: Programs.....17

Table 2.18: Facilities.....18

Table 2.19: Population per Facility (Outdoor)19

Table 2.20: Population Per Facility (Indoor)20

Table 3.1: Park Classifications.....22

Table 3.2: Parks and Recreation Resource Inventory25

Table 3.3: Recreation Facility Summary29

Table 3.4: Parks by Others30

Table 3.5: Participation Summary.....32

Table 5.1: Service Level Standards for Developed Acreage by Park Classification66

Table 5.2: Open Space Guidelines68

Table 5.3: Facility Level of Service Standards69

Table 5.4: Population by Composite Service Area82

Table 5.5: Nationwide Five-Year History of Selected Sports Participation (2013-2018)85

Table 8.1: Capital Improvement Projects.....134

Table 9.1: Action Plan138

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: borough of Bernardsville Population Change	8
Figure 2.2: Facilities Per 10,000 Population	20
Figure 3.1: Existing Parks and Trails	26
Figure 4.1: Parks Visitation Based on Intercept Interviews	34
Figure 4.2: Preferred Improvements or Additions at Parks Based on Intercept Interviews	35
Figure 4.3: Most Important Priorities for Investment	36
Figure 4.4: Visitation.....	38
Figure 4.5: Frequency of Visitation	39
Figure 4.6: Parks Visited	40
Figure 4.7: Condition of Facilities	41
Figure 4.8: Program Participation	41
Figure 4.9: Quality of Programming.....	41
Figure 4.10: Upgrades to Existing Parks	42
Figure 4.11: Need for Facilities	44
Figure 4.12: Estimated Number of Households with Unmet Facility Needs.....	45
Figure 4.13: Most Important Facilities	46
Figure 4.14: Facility Priorities for Investment.....	47
Figure 4.15: Need for Programs	48
Figure 4.16: Estimated Number of Households with Unmet Program Needs.....	48
Figure 4.17: Most Important Programs	49
Figure 4.18: Program Priorities for Investment.....	49
Figure 4.19: Support for Actions to Improve Parks and Recreation.....	50
Figure 4.20: Most Important Action for Improving Parks and Recreation in Bernardsville	51
Figure 4.21: Organizations Used for Parks and Recreation Activities	52
Figure 4.22: Ways Households Learn about Recreation and Activities.....	53
Figure 4.23: Ways Households Would Like to Learn about Recreation and Activities	53
Figure 4.24: Programs or Events Attended in the Past Year	54
Figure 4.25: Likelihood of Attending Proposed Events	55
Figure 4.26: \$100 Allocation for Park Improvements	56
Figure 4.27: Reasons for Not Using Parks, Facilities, & Programs	56
Figure 4.28: Household Demographics of Survey Participants	57
Figure 4.29: Household Income of Mail Survey Participants.....	58
Figure 4.30: Survey Respondent Locations.....	59
Figure 4.31: Favorite Park Activities	60
Figure 4.32: Mind Mixer Results – Improvements Needed (Most “Discussed” Topics)	61
Figure 4.33: Public Input Word Cloud.....	63
Figure 5.1: Neighborhood Park Service Areas (aka 10-Minute Walk to Parks)	71

Figure 5.2: Community Park Service Areas.....	72
Figure 5.3: Playground Service Areas.....	74
Figure 5.4: Basketball Court Service Areas	75
Figure 5.5: Diamond Field Service Areas	76
Figure 5.6: Multipurpose Rectangular Field Service Areas	77
Figure 5.7: Tennis Service Areas	78
Figure 5.8: Aquatic Center Service Areas	79
Figure 5.9: Dog Park Service Areas.....	80
Figure 5.10: Trail Service Areas	81
Figure 5.11: Composite Park Service Areas.....	83
Figure 5.12: Participation Rates by Generation	84
Figure 7.1: Ongoing Annual Operation Plan Diagram	111
Figure 7.2: Essential Marketing Communication Elements	115
Figure 7.3: Sample Event Flyer	116
Figure 7.4: Sample Brochure	116
Figure 8.1: Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park Concept	127
Figure 8.2: 271 Mine Brook Park Concept.....	131
Figure 9.1: Capital Improvement Priority Rating	145





INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE NEED FOR A PLAN

Bernardsville, New Jersey is one of the premier suburbs of New York City. Recreation in the borough is known for its family-friendly municipal pool, quality athletic fields, summer camps, and natural spaces. Residents of Bernardsville also enjoy access to parks and open spaces provided by several other entities – like Hacklebarney State Park, Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (Fish & Wildlife Service), and Somerset County's Natirar Park. Because of the many local resources and opportunities available to borough residents, this *2021 Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan* is important in part because it helps to clarify the department's responsibilities for delivering parks, facilities, and recreational choices to the community.

The residents of Bernardsville passed a referendum in 1998 to establish a Municipal Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Trust Fund with all proceeds to be used for land acquisition. In 2008 the residents approved a public question to allocate up to 20% of the funds to be allocated for the development of land. In November 2019, the voters approved a public question to allow for up to 80% of the Trust Fund to be allocated for development for park and recreation purposes. With this new funding source for development, the borough desired this Master Plan to guide their use of the funds to meet the needs of residents.

While deferred maintenance, changing community needs, additional funds for development and operational feasibility taken altogether are reason enough for producing a future-forward plan, 2020 ushered in an unprecedented layer of change and challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic that began with fervor in early March of 2020 in the United States has impacted communications, procedures, and everyday routine across all sectors of the economy. Besides dramatically altering daily life, the effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic are shaping the future of communities in ways as yet impossible to understand. Even before the pandemic began in the U.S., clear reporting existed about the value of parks and recreation. As civic spaces, parks act as operational hubs for efforts to address chronic issues like physical inactivity, poor health, and access to nutrition. Just by living close to a park, an individual is more likely to have higher activity levels. Having even a simple connection to nature – like a small Neighborhood Park with healthy tree canopy – can relieve stress, improve mental health, and provide opportunities for interpersonal interaction. Parks are part of hyper-local civic infrastructure, needed now more than ever, where citizens practice the “art of association” and do the work of knitting communities together.

What has newly emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic is the vital role parks and recreation has played – and will continue to play – in the country's recovery. Six months into the pandemic, the National Recreation and Park Association published an extensive discussion of the myriad ways parks and recreation is both effected by and affecting the outcome of the pandemic. Budget cuts, canceled programming, over-

crowded spaces, once-vibrant facilities shuttered to protect against the spread; communities across the nation are still feeling these stings. But agencies are also adapting and finding creative funding solutions, boldly stepping into the critical work of bridging inequity, safeguarding physical and mental health, and ensuring access.

In light of changing leadership and COVID-19 recovery, Bernardsville Recreation will need to be adaptable and forward-thinking. This flexibility is exemplified in the substance of the recommendations included in this Master Plan. While it is impossible to decipher a single “correct” path into the post-pandemic future, this plan underscores the need for responsive action, elevated experiences, and reinforced civic infrastructure. While the economic impact of COVID-19 manifests, there will be temptations to recover costs and cut spending. This Master Plan maps the beginning of multi-dimensional recovery where Recreation is not only important but essential for building a strong, vibrant community in Bernardsville.

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS

Parks provide numerous benefits and services to the community. Local agencies have the responsibility to manage and provide parks and recreation to champion the health, safety, and welfare of the community. A master plan is a key tool that can assist agencies and direct the management and provision of their resources. For many residents, parks provide their primary access to the natural environment and their most significant opportunities for social interaction. For all residents, parks have the potential to provide a variety of social, active, and outdoor recreational opportunities that improve quality of life and make viable, thriving communities. Most importantly, equitable access to parks and facilities ensures the health and wellness benefits from these resources is felt by the entire community.

In terms of driving economic impact, parks and recreation offer incredible potential. A major study conducted on behalf of the Trust for Public Land by John L. Crompton, *The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation*, investigates the impact of parks and open space on property taxes. Findings indicate property values were higher for parcels located near quality parks and open spaces than for similar properties located elsewhere. Additionally, recent surveys of home buyers by the National Association of Home Builders indicate that trails, parks, and playgrounds were three of the top five amenities that home buyers desire when considering a new home purchase. Furthermore, the findings of a recent study, *The Economic Significance of Local and Regional Park Systems' Spending on the United States Economy* (conducted by the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University (GMU) for the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) found that local and regional parks created \$140 billion in economic activity per year and supported nearly one million jobs in the United States.

In assessing overall quality of life, a community's parks and recreation system is considered a primary indicator; higher quality programming and spaces correspond to higher quality of life. To begin with, parks can play a critical role in a strategy for promoting health and tackling challenges like poor nutrition, hunger, obesity, and physical inactivity. Whether through programming or excellent amenities, park spaces can encourage physical and social activity. And proximity matters – even simply living near a park can encourage higher activity levels, and both teens and young adults with access to a variety of recreation facilities are less likely to be overweight and more likely to be in better health. Beyond impacting physical health, studies also illuminate the powerful connection between nature and improved mental wellbeing. Spending time in passive parks and natural open spaces can help relieve stress, nurture longtime respect for the environment, stimulate imagination, and restore mental balance. Parks can make tangible contributions to residents too – community gardens, often provided in partnership with or by agencies themselves, can provide residents direct access to fresh food.¹

In addition to all of these incredible individual benefits, parks can make an invaluable contribution to collective wellbeing. As gathering places for the community and hubs of connection, parks are where multiple interests and passions can play out at once – on game courts and fields, along trails and on playgrounds, and at shelters and picnic tables – helping to cultivate community ties. While less tangible, these collective benefits

¹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Health and Wellness,” <http://www.nrpa.org/About-NRPA/Impacting-Communities/Health-and-Wellness/>, (December, 10 2019).

increase the livability and desirability of our communities and help begin to address the sociopolitical divisions that challenge every municipality.²

Residents and political leadership in Bernardsville place a high value on parks and recreation. According to the Bernardsville Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey, 81% of residents support developing new trails, connecting existing trails, and upgrading existing spaces and facilities (see Chapter 4 for more information). Clearly, parks and recreation services are important to the borough. Through the implementation of this Master Plan, Bernardsville will ensure all residents can enjoy quality gathering places, excellent recreation facilities, and overall improved quality of life.

1.3 MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

The master planning process consisted of four phases and regular dialogue between representatives from Bernardsville and the consultant team. Bernardsville Recreation staff appointed the plan Steering Committee – members of which included staff, community leaders, and other stakeholders – to collaborate with and guide the consultant through the plan process. As each phase concluded documentation was submitted along with a presentation of findings. The following sections provide a summary of each phase in the process: Evaluate → Engage → Envision → Plan.

1.4 EVALUATE

The planning process launched with evaluation. This phase included gathering of information on borough demographics, a review of existing data, site visits and analysis, and the first Steering Committee meeting.

1.4.1 Demographic Analysis

Using information provided by the borough and other sources, the consultant team analyzed demographic and population characteristics of Bernardsville. Information included:

- Population trends and 5-year population projections
- Demographic characteristics (quantity, ages, race, etc.)
- Household size and composition
- Median household income and educational attainment
- Population diversity

1.4.2 Benchmarking Analysis

Using information provided by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Park Metrics program, Bernardsville Recreation was compared to 45 agencies located in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont (serving populations serving populations under 20,000) who participated in the Park Metrics program. Comparisons between park systems covered several criteria such as parkland inventory, department functions, staffing, budgets, facilities offered, and more.

1.4.3 Inventory of Parks, Facilities, and Programs

The purpose of the parks, facilities, and programs inventory is to obtain an accurate, comprehensive assessment of the system's current state. Comparing the findings of this inventory to the desires of Bernardsville residents is a critical step in evaluating needs later in the process.

Park Classification

As a first step, parks and related sites in Bernardsville were catalogued to better evaluate the overall recreation opportunities available to the public. In this updated inventory, sites are classified as Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks, or Natural Areas.

² National Recreation and Park Association, "Social Equity," <http://www.nrpa.org/About-NRPA/Impacting-Communities/Social-Equity/>, (December, 10 2019).

Parks, Open Space, and Facilities Inventory

The consultant team took stock of all existing parks and open space properties available in the borough of Bernardsville. Site visits enabled the team to identify existing conditions and assess opportunities for improvements. As part of this analysis each property was assigned an updated park classification. A comprehensive table provides a summary of the amenities offered at each. Maps prepared using GIS software serve to highlight the location of all the borough-owned parks and facilities.

The facility inventory included passive and active use amenities as well as resources provided by other entities in the community (e.g., the schools, Somerset County, and adjacent municipalities like Bernards Township).

Programs Inventory

The programs inventory described activities based on the Core Program Components:

- Broad appeal
- Administrative feasibility
- Coordination
- Settings and times
- Constructive nature
- Range of activities

1.4.4 Needs Assessment and Identification

Level of Service Guidelines

The consultant synthesized public input, benchmarking comparisons, and existing standards to develop level of service guidelines for parks and recreation in Bernardsville. These level of service guidelines were defined for each of park classification, recreation facilities, and for total acreage of parkland and open space.

Geographic Distribution – Service Gap Analysis

A critical step in the process, service gaps were identified by mapping locations and access for the system's existing facilities. The maps define service areas around specific facilities and park classifications, illuminating locations within Bernardsville that lack sufficient and quality access. In addition to two park service maps (Neighborhood Parks and Community Parks), eight other maps show service for specific recreation facilities. Finally, the Composite Service Areas map shows the combined level of service for parks and facilities across all of Bernardsville.

1.4.5 Trends

Extending the scope of analysis further, national trends in parks and recreation services were reviewed. This exploration helped point to new possibilities, underscore existing performance, and compare at a wider scale. The analysis included changes in demand, new programming efforts, emerging technology, and user experience advancements.

1.5 ENGAGE

The public input process employed a variety of methods intended to reach not only current park users but also non-users (i.e., potential users) to determine community needs, desires, and views on the future of parks and recreation in Bernardsville.

1.5.1 In-Park Interviews

In November 2020, the planning consultant hosted in-park listening sessions at three highly-trafficked parks in the borough. Held outside and with appropriate distance per the CDC health guidelines, the consultant

interacted with about 30 Bernardsville parks users. This layer of engagement was important as another way to hear from the community in real time, in a more relaxed and informal setting.

1.5.2 Stakeholder Groups

Bernardsville Recreation provided coordination support and collaboration to convene conversations with roughly 10 special interest groups, as well as meetings with various levels of Recreation staff. These discussions helped illuminate priorities from various perspectives. Facilitation questions were prepared in advance and approved by the Steering Committee.

1.5.3 Bernardsville Parks and Recreation Survey

A statistically valid mail survey (Mail Survey) was conducted by ETC Institute producing a total of 310 returned surveys. This portion of the public input was initiated early in the process (summer 2020). The survey was used to identify:

- Current satisfaction levels with programs and facilities
- Participation and satisfaction with current programs and events
- Parks currently used
- Needs for various facilities and programs
- Most needed facilities
- Interest in participating in proposed events
- Primary actions that should be taken by Bernardsville relating to parks, recreation, open space, trails, programs, and facilities

1.5.4 Web-Based Survey

The planning consultant team prepared an additional survey, in both handout and web-based formats. All residents and program users were invited to complete the survey. In all, 512 individuals participated in the survey, 94% of whom identified as residents of Bernardsville. Results are presented and examined extensively in Chapter 4.

1.6 ENVISION

Parks and Recreation Mission and Strategic Plan with Goals and Objectives

Following the above phases – Evaluate and Engage – Steering Committee members and Recreation staff convened to discuss the public input and overall findings. The planning consultant team facilitated a focused envisioning session to help formulate a strategic plan.

Through this open discussion and visioning, an agreed-upon vision emerged for the future of parks and recreation services in Bernardsville. This finalized Strategic Plan consists of core values, an updated mission statement, and a new vision statement, along with a series of goals and objectives for the system moving forward.

1.7 PLAN

In this final phase, a detailed action plan – informed by public and stakeholder input, data collected, service mapping, and Steering Committee guidance – was developed to direct Bernardsville Recreation in their efforts moving forward.

1.7.1 Recommendations

Systemwide improvements for facilities, programs, and operations (Chapter 7) were provided to direct parks and recreation over the next 10 years and beyond. Priorities were provided for improvements that apply to the entire system and Bernardsville as a whole, such as operations, programs, budgets, development

practices, and priorities for upgrades. Long-term needs for park development and land acquisition were also included in these recommendations. Recommendations for individual parks were also prepared and are included in Chapter 8.

1.7.2 Action Plan

This portion of the process focused on creating a detailed Action Plan including specific strategies for the implementation of this Master Plan.

The Action Plan provides specific recommendations for:

- Existing park improvements
- Trails and connectivity
- New park and facility development
- Outdoor athletic fields and courts
- Natural areas, open space, and nature education
- Programming
- Operations, maintenance, and promotion
- Budget and funding
- Partnerships and sponsorships

The strategies in this Action Plan were categorized under the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan developed during this planning process. The action steps for the implementation of the plan were categorized as short-term (0-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years), or long-term (6-10 years) strategies. Additionally, the plan identified the responsible party and potential funding source for each strategy.

Draft Master Plan

A draft of the *2021 Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan* was presented to Bernardsville Recreation Committee and the Steering Committee in June 2021. Master Plan findings and recommendations will be presented to the Borough Council on July 26, 2021.

PLANNING CONTEXT



2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Planning Context chapter provides a summary of factors and trends that may influence the delivery of parks and recreation services throughout the borough of Bernardsville. This chapter begins with a summary of population and demographic trends in Bernardsville and concludes with a benchmarking analysis comparing parks and recreation in the borough of Bernardsville with other municipalities throughout the United States.

2.2 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

An overall understanding of population trends in Bernardsville is necessary to identify current conditions and to anticipate future needs for parks and recreation services and facilities. Needs vary between demographic groups, and these needs also change over time. Each of the following demographic categories examines specific elements of the population.

2.2.1 Population Change

Figure 2.1 illustrates the population change in Bernardsville from 1980 to 2025. This table uses U.S. Census Bureau data and figures provided by Esri forecasts. These numbers indicate the population of Bernardsville has remained fairly stable since 1980 with a modest increase between 2000 and 2010, and a slight loss between 1980 and 1990. The population is projected to remain basically level into 2025 with a population of nearly 8,000.

Table 2.1 provides a different perspective, showing the percentage of change experienced across each decade since 1980, projected into 2025. Aside from an uptick in the decade between 1990 and 2000, Bernardsville has sustained – and will continue to sustain – a similar population throughout the last 40 years.

2.2.2 Household Size

Table 2.1 shows both the number of households (in 2020) and the average household size between 2000 and 2025 for Bernardsville, Somerset County, New Jersey, and the USA. The table shows how the household size in Bernardsville has actually grown (from 2.70 in 2000 to a projected 2.93 in 2025) where comparison geographies have remained stable. As of 2020, the household size in Bernardsville (2.92) is greater than Somerset County (2.73), New Jersey (2.68), and the USA (2.58). Whereas the state and nation both remain stable, Somerset County and the borough both have seen their average household size increase.

Figure 2.1: Borough of Bernardsville Population Change

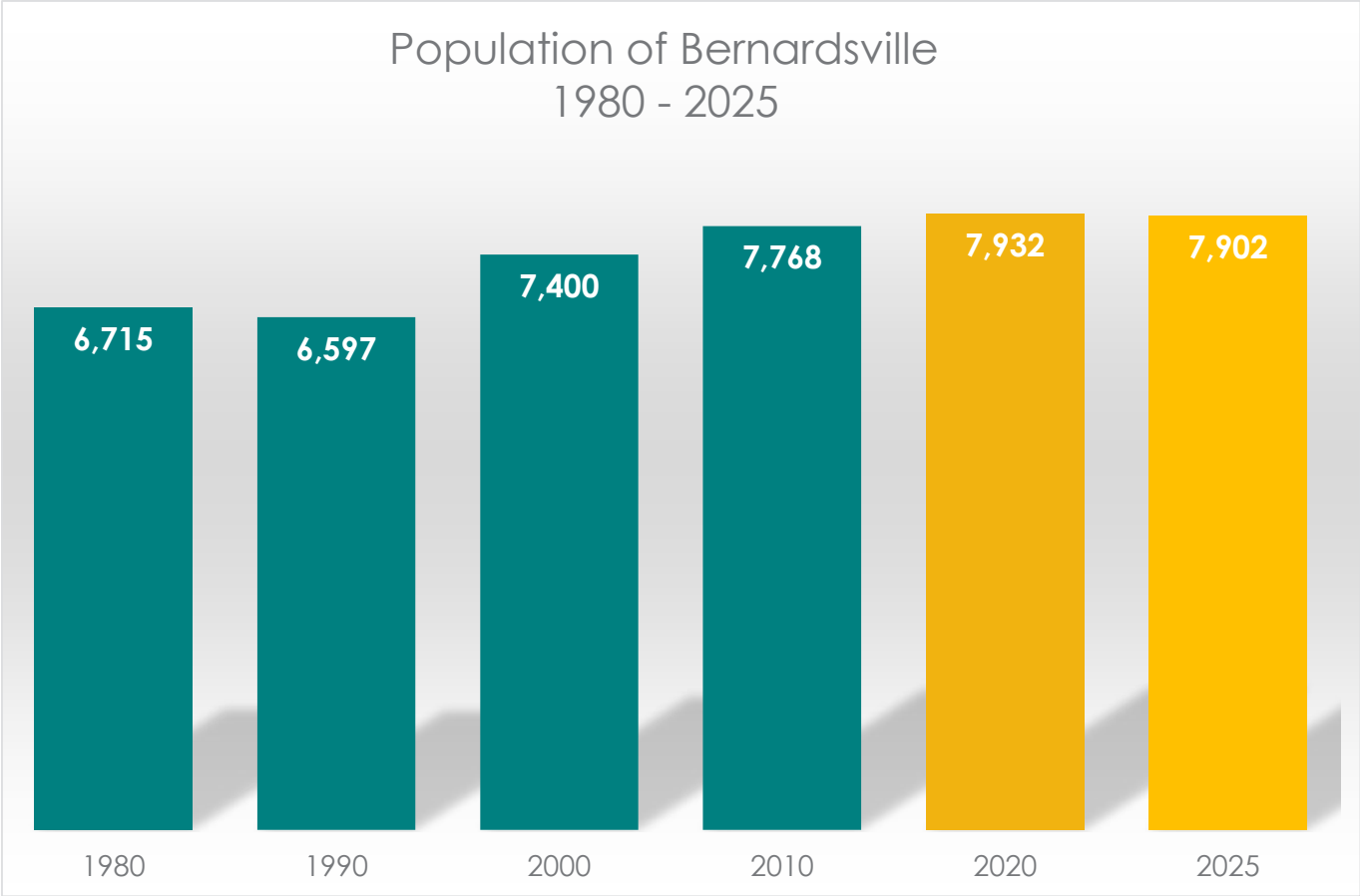


Table 2.1: Average Household Size (2000 to 2024)

	Households	Average Household Size			
	2020	2000	2010	2020	2025
USA	126,083,849	2.59	2.58	2.58	2.59
New Jersey	3,322,041	2.68	2.68	2.68	2.69
Somerset County	122,238	2.69	2.71	2.73	2.74
Bernardsville	2,715	2.70	2.87	2.92	2.93

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts

2.2.3 Age Makeup of the Community

Understanding the age characteristics of the community will enable Bernardsville Recreation to addresses any future development and opportunity in ways that best meet the needs of residents, whatever their age and ability.

Table 2.2 shows the median age for Bernardsville, Somerset County, New Jersey, and the USA from 2000 through 2025. The median age in Bernardsville has increased somewhat over the last three decades and is expected to remain the same into 2025. While the median age is increasing in all geographies, Bernardsville maintains a higher median age overall (42.1 in 2025 compared to the USA's 2025 projection, 39.3), although slightly below Somerset County.

Table 2.2: Median Age (2000-2025)

	2000	2010	2020	2025
USA	35.3	37.1	38.5	39.3
New Jersey	36.7	38.9	40.3	41.2
Somerset County	37.0	40.2	41.8	42.6
Bernardsville	40.0	41.1	42.2	42.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts

Table 2.3 displays the senior population (those age 65+) from 2000 to 2025 and shows that this age group has considerably increased over the last 20 years, with projected sustained increase (representing 19.2% of the population by 2025). The borough of Bernardsville follows a similar path of increase as New Jersey and Somerset County, with the county experiencing the greatest increase in population age 65+ since 2000. By 2025, Bernardsville is projected to have a greater percentage of its population over the age of 65 compared to Somerset County, and the nation (but just below New Jersey). This increase that Bernardsville is (and will continue) experiencing emphasizes the need for facilities and services that uplift and engage the 65+ population.

Table 2.3: Population Age 65+ (2000-2025)

	2000	2010	2020	2025
USA	12.4%	13.0%	16.6%	18.7%
New Jersey	13.2%	13.5%	17.3%	19.5%
Somerset County	11.2%	12.4%	16.2%	18.9%
Bernardsville	12.7%	11.3%	16.5%	19.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts

Table 2.4 presents the population under age 18 from 2000 to 2025. The table indicates that in Bernardsville the percentage of children decreased from 26.1% in 2000 to 24.5% in 2020; the percentage of the population within this age group is expected to continue decreasing (23.2%) by 2025. This trend is evident at the state, regional, and national levels. As of 2020, both Bernardsville and Somerset County have slightly higher percentages of youth population than New Jersey or the USA. By 2025, Bernardsville (and Somerset County) will still have a greater percentage of children than seniors (4% more). Both age groups are target users for parks and recreation services, so the borough will want to reflect on the needs of both in coordinating and pursuing new possibilities.

Table 2.4: Population under Age 18 (2000-2025)

	2000	2010	2020	2025
USA	25.7%	24.0%	22.0%	21.7%
New Jersey	24.8%	23.5%	21.5%	20.6%
Somerset County	25.5%	25.0%	22.8%	21.3%
Bernardsville	26.1%	28.7%	24.5%	23.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts

2.2.4 Poverty

Table 2.5 shows the percentage of the population living below the poverty line at each of the geographic levels. The table shows that the poverty level in Bernardsville is significantly lower by comparison. As of 2018, the borough and Somerset County each have a lower percentage living in poverty than the USA (12.3%) with 3.6% and 4.7%, respectively.

More noteworthy, the percentage of children living under the poverty line has doubled in the borough of Bernardsville between 2012 and 2018 (from 0% to 1.9%). While this percentage is still far lower than either the

county, state, or national levels, it is significant that the borough has experienced such a distinct increase.

These percentages deserve consideration, especially when exploring opportunities for additional services, programming, and community events. Any future programming and facilities development need to reflect the needs of all members of Bernardsville's community.

Table 2.5: Population Under the Poverty Line (2010-2018)

	2012	2018
USA	15.3%	12.3%
New Jersey	10.3%	9.2%
Somerset County	4.5%	4.7%
Bernardsville	2.3%	3.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 2.6: Children Under the Poverty Line (2010-2018)

	2012	2018
USA	21.6%	16.8%
New Jersey	14.0%	14.8%
Somerset County	5.5%	4.9%
Bernardsville	0.0%	1.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 1-year estimates, unless otherwise noted

2.2.5 Income and Educational Attainment

The median household income in Bernardsville (\$160,368 as of 2020) has risen since 2010 (compared to 2010 adjusted \$151,847) and is projected to increase by 2025 (\$168,857). In all comparisons, per capita income for Bernardsville is higher; 2025 projections indicate Bernardsville's per capita income will be more than double that of the USA and 25% above Somerset County, the next highest of the comparisons. Understanding per capita income levels in Bernardsville is useful for creating cost-effective solutions and accessible opportunities for all populations in the community.

Table 2.7: Household Income (2010-2025)

	2010	2010 Adjusted	2020	2025
Median Household Income				
USA	\$51,914	\$60,305	\$62,203	\$67,325
New Jersey	\$68,811	\$81,921	\$83,602	\$89,735
Somerset County	\$97,440	\$116,005	\$118,639	\$127,173
Bernardsville	\$128,333	\$151,847	\$160,368	\$168,857
Per Capita Income				
USA	\$27,334	\$31,752	\$34,136	\$37,691
New Jersey	\$50,781	\$60,456	\$43,560	\$47,830
Somerset County	\$47,067	\$56,034	\$58,628	\$63,946
Bernardsville	\$70,141	\$82,992	\$73,335	\$79,441

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010 ACS 5-year Estimates, Esri forecasts (2020-2025), BLS

As can be seen in Table 2.8, the educational attainment changes since 2012 vary between the different geographies. As of 2018, nearly three-quarters (73.4%) of Bernardsville residents age 25 and older have at least a bachelor's degree, and 31% of residents in Bernardsville age 25 or over have a master's degree or above. The percentage of Bernardsville's population with higher education is greater than Somerset County, New Jersey, and the USA. Overall, the borough of Bernardsville has seen a decrease in the percentage of

residents over 25 with no high school diploma (down to only 2%), as more people over 25 in the community have higher levels of education.

Table 2.8: Educational Attainment Age 25 and Over (2010-2019)

Educational Attainment (Highest Level)	Bernardsville		Somerset County		New Jersey		USA	
	2012	2018	2012	2018	2012	2018	2012	2018
No High School Diploma	5.0%	2.2%	7.0%	5.3%	12.1%	10.4%	14.2%	12.4%
High School/GED	17.2%	9.5%	22.3%	20.0%	29.2%	27.5%	28.2%	27.1%
Some College, No Degree	10.0%	10.2%	14.6%	14.1%	17.1%	16.6%	21.3%	20.6%
Associates Degree	3.1%	4.8%	5.6%	6.10%	6.2%	6.5%	7.7%	8.4%
Bachelors Degree	30.4%	42.4%	27.9%	29.6%	22.0%	23.8%	17.9%	19.4%
Graduate/Professional/Doctorate Degree	34.2%	31.0%	22.7%	24.9%	13.4%	15.1%	10.6%	12.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts, ACS 5-year estimates

2.2.6 Diversity

Table 2.9 shows the change in population by race and Hispanic origin between 2000 and 2021. In Bernardsville, the Asian population has grown the most (62.7%) between 2010 and 2020 (Table 2.9). Hispanic, Multi-Racial, and Black populations have also increased over the 10-year period (each by nearly 40%). This growth contrasts an overall decrease in the White population in Bernardsville (-2.2% change between 2010 and 2020). These changes in the community's population could correspond with different recreation preferences, especially compared to when the parks were originally constructed. While the White population still represents the largest percentage (87.6% in 2020), minority populations are projected to continue growing (despite often being undercounted). Engagement that reflects this diversifying population will be essential for the borough's parks and recreation to meet the needs of the whole population.

Table 2.9: Population Counts and Percentages by Race (2000-2020)

Year	Total Population	White Alone		Black Alone		Asian Alone		Other Race Alone		Two or More Races		Hispanic	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2010	7,768	7,108	91.5%	70	0.9%	249	3.2%	171	2.2%	163	2.1%	909	11.7%
2020	7,932	6,948	87.6%	95	1.2%	405	5.1%	238	3.0%	222	2.8%	1,245	15.7%
# Change	164	-159		25		156		67		59		336	
% Change	2.1%	-2.2%		36.1%		62.7%		39.2%		36.1%		37.0%	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts

2.2.7 Conclusion

These demographic trends indicate aging of the population and diversification of the population of Bernardsville. These trends are already working to shape the future of Bernardsville. The direction Bernardsville chooses for its parks and recreation will determine the availability of opportunities for residents and will help enrich the overall quality of life in the community for years to come.

2.3 BENCHMARKING COMPARISONS

One method for evaluating parks and recreation services offered in a community is to use benchmark comparisons to other communities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Park Metrics program provides a variety of data for use in benchmarking. The following analysis uses data from 30 agencies located in New Jersey, New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut (serving populations under 20,000) that participated in the Park Metrics program (Table 2.10). Additionally, NRPA provides an annual report¹ which includes national performance benchmarks, also used in this evaluation process.

¹ National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), "2019 NRPA Agency Performance Review Park And Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks," <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-agency-performance-review.pdf> (accessed December 30, 2019)

Table 2.10: Benchmark Agencies

Agency	State	Year	Population	Budget
Coventry Parks and Recreation Department	CT	2018	12,446	\$606,065
East Goshen Township	PA	2019	18,026	\$675,000
East Greenwich Parks & Recreation Department	RI	2018	13,200	\$1,195,175
East Hampton Parks and Recreation	CT	2018	13,000	\$388,824
East Lampeter Township	PA	2018	17,000	\$247,886
East Windsor (Town of)	CT	2019	11,395	\$289,057
Eatontown Recreation	NJ	2019	12,709	\$220,000
Exeter Parks and Recreation	NH	2019	15,082	\$1,198,329
Falmouth Parks & Community Programs	ME	2018	12,162	\$511,449
Hartford Parks and Recreation Department	VT	2019	10,000	\$1,500,000
Hebron Park & Rec Dept	CT	2018	10,000	\$90,000
Hilton-Parma Parks & Recreation	NY	2019	15,908	\$1,142,111
Holderness Recreation Department	NH	2019	2,100	\$45,371
Ithaca (Town of)	NY	2019	19,930	\$1,342,660
Jamestown (Town of) Parks & Recreation	RI	2018	5,500	\$526,465
Lewisboro Parks and Recreation Department (Town of)	NY	2019	12,500	\$1,800,000
Lincoln-Woodstock Recreation Department	NH	2018	1,345	\$403,834
Littleton Parks and Recreation	MA	2018	10,115	\$725,225
Long Hill Township Recreation Dept	NJ	2019	8,800	\$100,000
Medfield Parks & Recreation	MA	2018	12,845	\$60,000
Middlebury (Town of)	CT	2019	7,725	\$98,306
Municipality of Murrys ville	PA	2019	20,000	\$9,301,010
New Boston Recreation	NH	2019	5,800	\$320,000
New Castle (Town of)	NY	2019	17,500	2075433
Rumson (Borough of)	NJ	2018	7,200	\$512,000
Victor (Town of) Parks and Recreation	NY	2018	16,000	\$1,360,000
Wappingers Falls (Village of)	NY	2019	5,429	\$165,905
Weston Recreation Dept	MA	2019	11,500	\$1,739,395
Williston Recreation & Parks	VT	2018	9,578	\$594,660
Windham Parks And Recreation Dept	ME	2019	18,439	\$708,672

Bernardsville is not a participant in the NRPA Park Metrics program, and figures were calculated based on information provided by the borough. Because the data for other park systems was limited to parks and facilities managed by those agencies, only parks and facilities managed by the borough of Bernardsville are included in this analysis (other agencies, schools, and private facilities were not included). The figures used in this analysis for Bernardsville were for the calendar year 2019, and the figures for the comparison municipalities were those entered for 2018 and 2019.

The comparisons are organized into the following categories: parkland information, trail information, department functions, staffing, operating budget, capital budget, programs, and facilities. The following text details the findings of the benchmark analysis. The values presented in these comparisons are based on information reported to Park Metrics by the municipalities and may vary from actual budgets and measurements.

2.3.1 Parkland Information

Table 2.11 shows aspects of parks coverage managed by the borough of Bernardsville. For instance, the borough provides 24.8 acres of parkland per thousand population — (over two times the benchmark (10.3) and the national median (9.9). As a percentage of the entire jurisdiction, 2.7% of land is parkland, above the comparisons.

A higher ratio of parkland per 1,000 people and for parkland as a percentage of jurisdiction means that the borough has a high overall amount of parkland.

The borough of Bernardsville has 196.8 total acreage of parkland (nearly double the benchmark acreage 110.5), and only 21% of that available parkland is developed. Given this, there is great potential for developing these acres into more parks and expanding availability. This opportunity would help bring the number for population served per park (1,983) down even closer to benchmark levels (1,628) as the borough has many open space properties without public access that are not currently considered parks.

Table 2.11: Parkland Information

PARKLAND INFORMATION	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Acreage of Parkland			
Lower Quartile		16.6	
Median/Agency Value	219.5	110.5	N/A
Upper Quartile		232.5	
Acreage of Parkland per 1,000 Population			
Lower Quartile		3.5	2.1
Median/Agency Value	27.7	10.3	9.9
Upper Quartile		17.1	17.1
Population per Park			
Lower Quartile		901	1,316
Median/Agency Value	1,983	1,628	2,281
Upper Quartile		2,468	4,140
Parkland as a Percentage of Jurisdiction			
Lower Quartile		0.4%	
Median/Agency Value	2.7%	0.8%	N/A
Upper Quartile		2.1%	
Percent of Acreage Developed			
Lower Quartile		32%	
Median/Agency Value	21%	60%	N/A
Upper Quartile		100%	

2.3.2 Trail Information

The comparison of total miles of trails managed by the borough of Bernardsville (Table 2.12) shows 0.5 miles of trails, compared to the benchmark median of 5.0 miles. Total trail miles per jurisdiction square mile is a measurement that controls for differences in the physical size of comparative municipalities. Bernardsville has 0.04 miles of trails per square mile of the borough, considerably lower than the benchmark median of 0.4. The trail miles per 10,000 population measurement, which controls for the population difference between the benchmark communities, shows a value of 0.6 for Bernardsville, much lower than the benchmark median (7.0).

Taken on their own the benchmark comparisons suggest shortfalls. However, greater context indicates different service levels and future opportunity. Because there is a strong ratio of park acres to population already, along with a low level of development in those acres, Bernardsville has ample opportunity to better accommodate residents by developing trails in a way that connects to existing resources and elevates the borough's acres of natural area. Extensive trails are also offered by other agencies, including the National Park Service and New Jersey Audubon Society, within the borough, and many more nearby.

Table 2.12: Trail Information

TRAILS	Bernardsville	Benchmark
Total Trail Miles Managed or Maintained		
Lower Quartile		0.3
Median/Agency Value	0.5	5.0
Upper Quartile		11.5
Total Trail Miles per Jurisdiction Sq. Mi.		
Lower Quartile		0.2
Median/Agency Value	0.04	0.4
Upper Quartile		1.0
Total Trail Miles per 10,000 Population		
Lower Quartile		3.8
Median/Agency Value	0.6	7.0
Upper Quartile		10.9

2.3.3 Department Functions

The list of department functions in Table 2.13 shows the percentage of benchmark departments that conduct each service and whether Bernardsville currently conducts the service. The borough provides roughly a third of the services listed. The most notable function absent in Bernardsville is *operate and maintain indoor facilities*, something provided by 68% of benchmark communities. The borough does provide aquatics services (operate, maintain, or contract outdoor swim facilities/water parks) – offered by fewer than half of the benchmark comparisons.

Table 2.13: Department Functions

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
The agency...			
Operate and maintain park sites	✓	96%	96%
Provide recreation programming and services	✓	96%	93%
Conduct major jurisdiction wide special events	✓	92%	77%
Have budgetary responsibility for its administrative staff	✓	80%	83%
Operate and maintain indoor facilities		68%	88%
Operate, maintain, or manage special purpose parks and open spaces	✓	64%	72%
Operate, maintain, or manage trails, greenways, and/or blueways (TGB)		64%	77%
Operate and maintain non-park sites		64%	65%
Operate, maintain, or contract tennis center facilities	✓	48%	52%
Include in its operating budget funding for planning and development		44%	67%
Operate, maintain, or contract outdoor swim facilities/water parks	✓	40%	65%
Administer community gardens		40%	41%
Operate, maintain, or contract tourism attractions		28%	34%
Administer or manage tournament/event quality outdoor sports complexes		16%	56%
Manage large performance outdoor amphitheaters		16%	33%
Administer or manage farmer's markets	✓*	16%	19%
Operate, maintain, or contract indoor swim facility		12%	31%
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts center		12%	17%
Operate, maintain, or contract golf courses		4%	33%
Administer or manage tournament/event quality indoor sports complexes		4%	18%
Operate, maintain, or contract campgrounds		4%	18%
Manage or maintain fairgrounds		4%	5%
Administer or manage professional or college-type stadium/arena/racetrack		0%	9%

*By another department at NJ Transit parking lot

2.3.4 Staffing

Staffing metrics for Bernardsville as compared to benchmark communities are outlined in Table 2.14. Bernardsville employs three full-time employees, just below the benchmark median (4). Additionally, Bernardsville provides about five FTE employees for every 10,000 residents, somewhat less than the benchmark (7.3), and about half the national level (8.1). From a different perspective – acres of parkland per full-time employee – Bernardsville has a far higher ratio than the benchmark (51.8 acres per FTE vs 2.2 in comparison communities), due in part to the large amount of undeveloped open space. Taken together, the two metrics indicate that Bernardsville has significant parkland acreage for its FTEs to cover, compared to the benchmark level.

In general, Bernardsville has a relatively reasonable level of full-time staff but half the benchmark number of part-time employees and a high ratio of acreage to FTE employees. There is a sizable amount of acreage (in both community and nature park types) currently undeveloped; when pursuing the potential for development of these acres, the borough of Bernardsville will need to simultaneously reevaluate staffing levels.

Table 2.14: Staffing

STAFFING	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Full-Time Employees			
Lower Quartile		2.0	
Median/Agency Value	3	4.0	N/A
Upper Quartile		6.0	
Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employees			
Lower Quartile		4.0	
Median/Agency Value	3.8	6.7	N/A
Upper Quartile		12.7	
FTE per 10,000 Population			
Lower Quartile		3.0	4.5
Median/Agency Value	4.8	7.3	8.1
Upper Quartile		9.7	14.9
Acres of Parkland per FTE			
Lower Quartile		1.1	
Median/Agency Value	57.8	2.2	N/A
Upper Quartile		3.8	

2.3.5 Operating Budget

In 2019, the total operating budget (Table 2.15) for parks and recreation in Bernardsville was \$509,800, just shy of the \$560,563 benchmark median. The per capita operating expenditure for the borough of Bernardsville was \$64, close to but slightly higher than the \$59 median of benchmark municipalities.

Bernardsville's total operating expenditure per acre of parkland was \$2,323. This number is less than half the benchmark \$5,796. This disparity reflects the large amount of parkland and low quantity of facilities or developed land. In other words, Bernardsville spends considerably less than benchmark communities because there is currently comparatively less developed acreage to maintain.

The \$459,559 in earned revenue is comparable to the benchmark median (\$467,500). This revenue represents a full 90% of the Parks and Recreation budget, close to double the median revenue brought in by benchmark communities. Bernardsville generated \$58 non-tax revenue per capita (2019), more than twice the national median (\$21).

All of these values help to illustrate how the borough of Bernardsville Recreation has reliable revenue stream from its aquatic facility and also minimal maintenance costs due to less developed acres.

Table 2.15: Operating Budget

OPERATING BUDGET	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Agency's TOTAL Operating Expenditures for the Fiscal Year			
Lower Quartile		\$240,915	
Median/Agency Value	\$509,800	\$560,563	N/A
Upper Quartile		\$1,234,412	
Agency's TOTAL Non-Tax Revenue for the Fiscal Year			
Lower Quartile		\$161,311	
Median/Agency Value	\$459,559	\$467,500	N/A
Upper Quartile		\$673,424	
Revenue as a percentage of Total Operating Expenditures			
Lower Quartile		31%	
Median/Agency Value	90%	57%	26%
Upper Quartile		114%	
Operating Expenditures per Capita			
Lower Quartile		\$24	\$46
Median/Agency Value	\$64	\$59	\$81
Upper Quartile		\$92	\$150
Operating Expenditures per Acre of Parkland			
Lower Quartile		\$2,652	
Median/Agency Value	\$2,323	\$5,796	N/A
Upper Quartile		\$17,614	
Operating Expenditures per FTE			
Lower Quartile		\$42,819	\$70,329
Median/Agency Value	\$134,158	\$71,903	\$97,093
Upper Quartile		\$160,049	\$134,175
Non-Tax Revenue per Capita			
Lower Quartile		\$22	\$6
Median/Agency Value	\$58	\$41	\$21
Upper Quartile		\$75	\$50

*Average values used

2.3.6 Capital Budget

Table 2.16 shows capital budget comparisons to the benchmark communities. Bernardsville's capital budget for 2019, \$49,646, is about half the benchmark median \$90,000 (but twice the lower quartile benchmark value \$25,000). The median of the benchmark communities is \$924,625. The capital expenditures per capita in Bernardsville were \$6, about two thirds of the \$9 benchmark median but above the lower benchmark value (\$2).

Because this Master Plan is intended to provide direction for capital improvements for parks and recreation in the borough specifically, the 5-year capital budget has not yet been determined.

Table 2.16: Capital Budget

CAPITAL BUDGET	Bernardsville	Benchmark
Total Capital Park Budget for Next 5-Years		
Lower Quartile		\$250,000
Median/Agency Value	TBD	\$924,625
Upper Quartile		\$2,700,000
Total Capital Budget this Fiscal Year		
Lower Quartile		\$25,000
Median/Agency Value	\$49,646	\$90,000
Upper Quartile		\$350,000
Total Capital Costs per Capita this Fiscal Year		
Lower Quartile		\$2
Median/Agency Value	\$6	\$9
Upper Quartile		\$27

2.3.7 Programs

The list of program categories in Table 2.17 includes the percentage of benchmark departments that offer each type of program listed and whether Bernardsville offers them. The data is separated into two types of programs: "Activities," which cover programs intended for all users, and "Out-of-School-Time Activities," which include programs targeted for specific user groups (children, seniors, etc.).

Bernardsville currently offers a range of programming, many of those offered by at least 50% of the benchmark communities. The most notable exceptions include *themed special events* and *social recreation events* (both offered by 91% of benchmark communities). *Health and wellness education*, *visual arts*, and *martial arts* are all programs offered by over 50% of benchmark communities, and worth the borough's consideration when determining programming possibilities.

Of all the OST activities, Bernardsville only provides summer camp programming (100% of benchmark communities offer *summer camp* programs). Over 60% of benchmark communities provide *specific teen programs*, *specific senior programs*, and *after school programs*. In considering opportunities for expanding programmatic services, especially out-of-school, the borough of Bernardsville should concentrate development efforts of after school activities and programs that appeal to teens and senior residents.

Table 2.17: Programs

PROGRAMS	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Activities			
Themed special events		91%	88%
Social recreation events		91%	87%
Safety training	✓	86%	72%
Team sports	✓	82%	87%
Health and wellness education		82%	81%
Fitness enhancement classes	✓	77%	82%
Individual sports	✓	73%	74%
Trips and tours	✓	68%	63%
Visual arts		68%	59%
Performing arts	✓	64%	64%
Racquet sports	✓	64%	67%
Cultural crafts	✓	55%	61%
Martial arts		55%	60%
Aquatics	✓	50%	71%
Golf		50%	47%
Natural and cultural history activities		45%	59%
Out-of-School Time (OST) Activities			
Summer camp	✓	100%	83%
After school programs		82%	57%
Specific senior programs		68%	78%
Specific teen programs		64%	65%
Programs for people with disabilities		41%	62%
Preschool		36%	36%
Before school programs		23%	20%
Full daycare		0%	8%

2.3.8 Facilities

Similar to Table 2.17, Table 2.18 continues the benchmark comparison, indicating how Bernardsville's facility offerings compare to benchmark communities. Types of facilities are differentiated by outdoor and indoor areas. Bernardsville offers most of the outdoor facilities provided by 40% or more of the benchmark communities. Exceptions include *skate park*, and *diamond field (softball) for adults*. Bernardsville does offer

swimming pool(s), multipurpose synthetic field, and a football field, all things provided by less than 25% of the benchmark communities. There is no *dog park*, *skate park*, or *ice rink* in the borough's system – and very few benchmark comparisons provide these facilities – but what facilities there are (offered by other entities) are out of easy access to Bernardsville residents. In spite of the borough's open and more natural character of development, demand for a dog park is somewhat high; these kinds of facilities can serve as community hubs and gathering spaces, which can be appreciated and desired even in places with more rural development character.

Table 2.18: Facilities

FACILITIES	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Outdoor Activity Areas			
Playgrounds	✓	100%	94%
Basketball courts	✓	83%	87%
Diamond fields: baseball - youth	✓	83%	78%
Tennis courts (outdoor only)	✓	79%	81%
Rectangular fields: multi-purpose	✓	75%	65%
Diamond fields: softball fields - youth	✓	63%	59%
Community gardens	✓	50%	47%
Rectangular fields: soccer field - youth	✓	46%	47%
Diamond fields: softball fields - adult		42%	65%
Diamond fields: baseball - adult	✓	38%	53%
Rectangular fields: soccer field - adult	✓	33%	41%
Skate park		33%	38%
Ice rink (outdoor only)		29%	17%
Rectangular fields: football field	✓	21%	37%
Dog park		13%	63%
Swimming pools (outdoor only)	✓	13%	51%
Multipurpose synthetic field	✓	8%	19%
Rectangular fields: lacrosse field		4%	11%
Indoor Activity Areas			
Recreation centers		46%	61%
Community centers		38%	60%
Senior centers		38%	41%
Performance amphitheater		13%	35%
Ice rink		13%	15%
Teen centers		8%	14%
Nature centers		4%	29%
Gyms		4%	N/A

Of indoor facilities, Bernardsville currently offers none of the facilities listed. While at least 38% of benchmark communities provide *senior centers*, *community centers*, and/or *recreation centers*, the borough does not. Though indoor facilities on the whole are not as common across benchmark communities, Bernardsville does stand to benefit from developing some kind of indoor recreational space that could accommodate residents all year round.

Whereas Table 2.18 highlights how well Bernardsville compares to benchmark communities in terms of facilities provided, Tables 2.19 and 2.20 provide a comparison of population per facility to evaluate the existing supply. In other words, looking at population served per facility helps to identify new facilities that the borough may want to add in the future.

Tables 2.19 and 2.20 show the numeric values for a range of facilities plus upper and lower quartile values. A lower value indicates a higher level of service. Figure 2.2.² shows facilities per 10,000 population (converted

² The analysis was limited to these facilities due to availability of data for comparison departments.

from the numbers in Table 2.19) for playgrounds, tennis courts (outdoor), basketball courts (outdoor), ballfields (youth baseball, youth softball, and adult softball diamonds), and rectangular fields.

Table 2.19: Population per Facility (Outdoor)

POPULATION PER FACILITY (OUTDOOR)	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Playgrounds			
Lower Quartile		1,811	
Median/Agency Value	3,966	3,436	3,750
Upper Quartile		5,625	
Tennis Courts			
Lower Quartile		1,351	
Median/Agency Value	1,322	3,211	5,004
Upper Quartile		6,355	
Basketball Courts			
Lower Quartile		3,298	
Median/Agency Value	1,983	4,513	7,400
Upper Quartile		6,204	
Diamond Fields - Youth Baseball			
Lower Quartile		1,854	
Median/Agency Value	1,322	2,875	6,779
Upper Quartile		5,344	
Diamond Fields - Youth Softball			
Lower Quartile		5,027	
Median/Agency Value	1,322	9,578	11,511
Upper Quartile		15,908	
Diamond Fields - Adult Softball			
Lower Quartile		5,382	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	5,817	13,510
Upper Quartile		11,750	
Rectangular Fields (multi-purpose)			
Lower Quartile		1,238	
Median/Agency Value	2,644	3,202	8,150
Upper Quartile		8,219	
Multipurpose Synthetic Field			
Lower Quartile		n/a	
Median/Agency Value	7,932	14,600	49,493
Upper Quartile		n/a	
Swimming Pools			
Lower Quartile		10,000	
Median/Agency Value	7,932	11,500	35,837
Upper Quartile		15,082	
Skate Park			
Lower Quartile		6,281	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	12,298	49,500
Upper Quartile		15,702	
Dog Park			
Lower Quartile		10,000	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	11,395	45,899
Upper Quartile		12,709	
Community Gardens			
Lower Quartile		2,259	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	14,309	29,273
Upper Quartile		17,895	

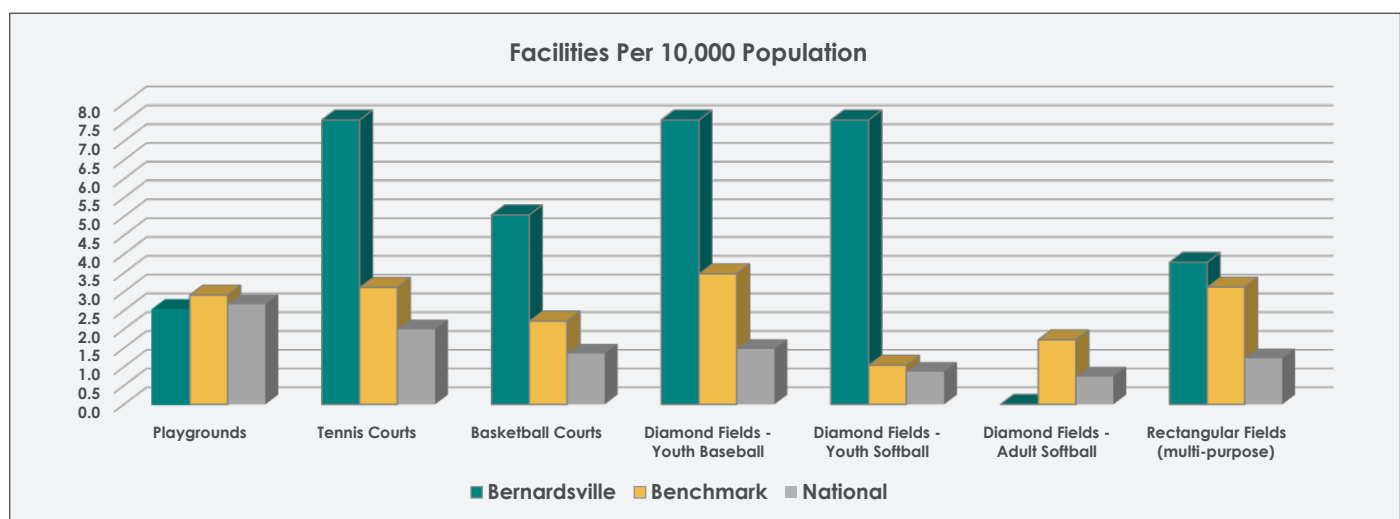
In terms of benchmark comparisons, Bernardsville has notably good service ratios (facility per 10,000 population) for the outdoor facilities offered by the department. For example, the diamond fields – youth softball facilities provide an incredibly high level of service (1,322 people in Bernardsville vs the median 9,578 in benchmark communities). Multipurpose rectangular fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, and swimming pools are all operating at high service levels. Playgrounds are the only outdoor facility provided by the borough that is serving residents below benchmark levels. As is evident in Figure 2.2, Bernardsville is far exceeding service levels for many of its facilities, most notably diamond fields, tennis courts, and basketball courts.

As has been discussed previously, Bernardsville currently has no indoor facilities within its inventory. In considering the possibility of future additions, a multipurpose indoor facility will likely have the greatest reach and highest potential for meeting more residents' needs.

Table 2.20: Population Per Facility (Indoor)

POPULATION PER FACILITY (INDOOR)	Bernardsville	Benchmark	National
Recreation Centers			
Lower Quartile		5,650	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	12,845	31,141
Upper Quartile		15,954	
Community Centers			
Lower Quartile		11,500	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	12,709	28,939
Upper Quartile		15,908	
Senior Centers			
Lower Quartile		7,750	
Median/Agency Value	N/A	12,162	60,513
Upper Quartile		15,495	
Gymnasiums			
Lower Quartile			
Median/Agency Value	N/A	3,182	N/A
Upper Quartile			

Figure 2.2: Facilities Per 10,000 Population





INVENTORY OF PARKS, FACILITIES, AND PROGRAMS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the Master Plan identifies existing conditions of parks and recreation facilities in Bernardsville. It begins with a description of park classifications to provide an understanding of their functions. An inventory of Bernardsville's parks and recreation facilities follows, including park locations, facilities offered, and other observations. The chapter concludes with an inventory of programs offered by Bernardsville Recreation.

3.2 PARKLAND AND RECREATION AREA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

A park classification system helps to evaluate the overall recreation opportunities that are available to the public. In some cases, communities may “meet the standard” in terms of acreage, but a single park may cover the provision in terms of acreage without actually providing for the entire community. A park system should be evaluated as a composite of recreation areas with each meeting a particular public need; the system should provide a combination of smaller Neighborhood Parks, larger Community Parks, and Special Use Parks.

The facilities inventory in this chapter identifies each park by its classification and lists the specific facilities it provides. Table 3.1 defines each park category by its typical size and service area, population served, typical features and facilities, and desirable characteristics. The categories and descriptions were adapted from “Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines,” published by the National Recreation and Park Association in 1987 and 1995.

Table 3.1: Park Classifications

PARK CLASSIFICATION	TYPICAL SIZE and SERVICE AREA	DEVELOPED ACRES/1,000 POPULATION	TYPICAL FEATURES/ FACILITIES	DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS
Local Space				
Neighborhood Park (NP)	<p>Size: 2-10 acres of developed parkland; 3-15 total acres</p> <p>½-1.0 mile service area</p> <p>10-minute walk</p> <p>To serve a population up to 3,000</p>	1.5 Acre/1,000	<p>Suited for intense development</p> <p>Typical facilities include athletic fields, game courts, playgrounds, drinking fountains, picnic areas/shelters, and walking trails.</p>	<p>Easily accessible to neighborhood population (safe walking and bike distance).</p> <p>May be developed as park/school facility or in conjunction with service agency facility.</p> <p>May not be needed in areas served locally by larger parks.</p>
Community Park (CmP)	<p>10-30+ acres of developed parkland; 20 or more total acres</p> <p>1.0-2.0 mile service radius</p> <p>5-minute drive</p> <p>To serve several neighborhoods with populations up to 10,000</p>	4.0 Acres/1,000	<p>Typical facilities include all those listed for Neighborhood Parks plus; major swimming pool, field or game court complex, major recreation or community center, etc.</p> <p>May include an area of natural quality for picnicking, walking, etc.</p> <p>May have an active or passive recreation focus or a balance of both - parks with passive focus will have a higher percentage of undeveloped land</p>	<p>Capable of providing a range of intensive recreational activities; or, provides one or two activities that attract users from multi-neighborhood areas.</p> <p>Park should ideally be located near schools.</p> <p>May meet Neighborhood Park needs for users within a 10-minute walk.</p> <p>Often include features that draw users from the whole community.</p>
Natural Area (NA)	N/A	N/A (but contributes to total open space requirement)	<p>Special use areas of low or limited development. Includes undeveloped areas, urban greenspaces, and small designated natural areas.</p> <p>May include urban greenspaces (mowed and landscaped areas) of any size. These areas are considered developed but have predominantly passive uses, few structures, and limited impervious areas.</p> <p>Typical facilities include walking/hiking trails, picnic areas, gardens, and open grass areas.</p>	<p>Includes undeveloped properties that may be developed in the future.</p> <p>May also function as small Nature Parks.</p> <p>Educational opportunities desirable in developed or undeveloped areas.</p>

Table 3.1: Park Classifications (Continued)

PARK CLASSIFICATION	TYPICAL SIZE and SERVICE AREA	DEVELOPED ACRES/1,000 POPULATION	TYPICAL FEATURES/ FACILITIES	DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS
Regional Space				
County Park (CP)	<p>Size: 50+ acres of developed parkland; 100 or more total acres</p> <p>3-5 mile service radius</p> <p>Travel time within 10 minutes (potentially longer depending on amenities)</p> <p>To serve most of the community or beyond but located regionally</p>	Met by Somerset County Park Commission	<p>Large properties that contain some active recreation facilities and a large percentage of natural or geographical features. Should include both active and passive features.</p> <p>Target size of 100 or more acres with up to 50% developed for recreation. Should be located near major roads.</p> <p>Destination-oriented parks. May contain picnic areas, any of the active elements found in local space, regional aquatic facilities, and regional indoor facilities. Should connect to linear park and trail system.</p>	<p>Capable of providing a range of specific recreational facilities. May include unique natural areas of ecological interest.</p> <p>May meet smaller park needs for users within those service areas.</p> <p>May be located in rural areas but should be readily accessible to most of the city and county population. Service multiple jurisdictions. May serve population outside of the county as well.</p>
Nature Parks or Preserves (NatP)	Size as needed to protect the resource	N/A (but contributes to total open space requirement)	<p>Majority of park to remain in its natural state (less than 20% developed)</p> <p>Facilities should focus on education by use of "nature activities" and should reinforce that philosophy by offering habitat enhancement, trails, nature centers, and interpretive signage. Should also include parking and restrooms.</p>	<p>The park should be of sufficient size to protect the natural resource and provide a buffer from offsite conditions. Should include unique natural areas with ecological interest.</p> <p>Typical size should be over 50 acres for management efficiency and to promote ecosystem services.</p>
State Parks (SP)	Size as needed to protect natural resources of State or regional significance	Met by New Jersey State Park Service	<p>Majority of park to remain in its natural state.</p> <p>The park should be of sufficient size to protect the natural resource and provide a buffer from offsite conditions.</p>	<p>Should include unique natural areas with ecological interest, lakes, or other features of state or regional interest.</p> <p>Serve state-wide area or beyond.</p> <p>Size will vary based on the area required to protect the resource.</p> <p>May have areas that function as Community Parks.</p>

3.3 INVENTORY OF BERNARDSVILLE RECREATION AREAS

Residents of Bernardsville are offered a variety of parks, recreation facilities, and programs. The Parks and Recreation Resources Inventory (Table 3.2) provides a summary of all the offerings in Bernardsville as well as the classification for each property.

The table indicates the location of the property by park type category as defined in Chapter 2. The Existing Parks and Trails map (Figure 3.1) shows the location of each of the parks and recreation areas offered by the borough. The following text provides a detailed narrative summary of these facilities. Aerial photos of each park can be found in Appendix B.

3.4 NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

A Neighborhood Park is a small but highly developed park located within a short (10-minute) walking or biking distance of residents with facilities such as game courts, playgrounds, picnic areas/shelters, athletic fields, and walking trails.

3.4.1 Claremont Field/Kuser Park (6.4 acres) – Neighborhood Park

Park Location

This park site is off Claremont Road (County Rd 502) and less than a quarter mile north of Morristown Road (Rte 202). While the immediate area is largely residential, there is commercial development including local businesses within walking distance.

Existing Features & Amenities

- Small diamond field
- Playground

Park Issues & Opportunities

- Playground is aged, has no ADA accessibility
- Bleachers and dugouts not accessible
- Fencing around ball field in disrepair in places
- Parking lot in fair to poor condition
- No entrance signage
- Exterior of the recreation building is unsightly and in poor condition



3.4.2 Kiwanis Fields & Playground (6.3 acres) – Neighborhood Park

Park Location

This Neighborhood Park is nestled off Pine Street, a block west of Liberty Road. A mix of residential and industrial lots abut three sides of the park with the quarry just beyond the westernmost edge.

Existing Features & Amenities

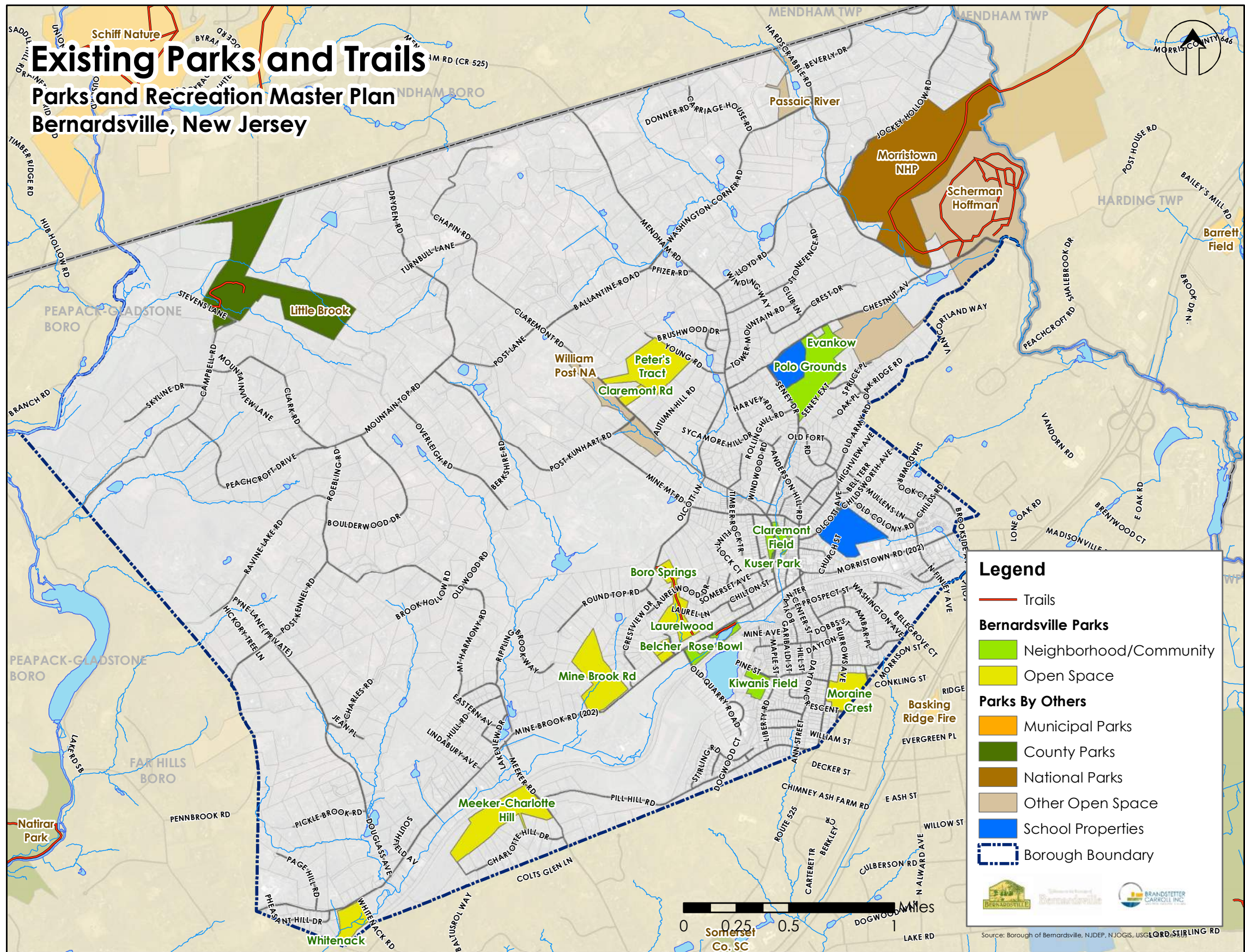
- 2 (recently renovated) diamond fields
- Playfield/T-ball with backstop



Table 3.2: Parks and Recreation Resource Inventory

PARK NAME	PARK TYPE	Acreage		Athletic Fields					Game Courts		Outdoor Facilities		Trails (Mi)		Natural Areas			Support				Special Feature/Notes
				Small Diamond	Large Diamond	Playfield/T-Ball (Backstop)	Large Rectangular	Artificial Turf	Basketball Courts	Tennis Courts	Playgrounds	Aquatic Center	Paved	Unpaved	Fishing Access	Lake/Pond/Stream	Natural/Wooded Area	Gazebos	Restroom Buildings	Concessions Buildings	Parking	
		Total	Developed																			
Bernardsville Parks																						
Neighborhood Parks																						
Claremont Field (AKA Kuser Park)	Neighborhood	4.1	3.2	1							1										X	Parking not marked; at recreation building
Kiwanis Fields & Playground	Neighborhood	5.0	4.8	2		1					1							1	1	1	64	
Rose Bowl/Lindabury Park	Neighborhood	3.1	3.1	1									0.1		x	x						Michael J. Nervine Memorial
Subtotal - Neighborhood Parks		12.2	11.1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.1	0.0	1	1	0	1	1	1	64	
Community Parks																						
Polo Grounds and Evankow Tract/Municipal Pool	Community	34.0	21.7	2	1		3	1	2	6		1					x				147	Artificial Turf w/ small diamond & large rectangle
Subtotal - Community Parks		34.0	21.7	2	1	0	3	1	2	6	0	1	0.00	0.0	0	0	1	0	0	0	147	
Natural Areas/Open Space																						
251 Claremont Road	Natural Area	5.1	0.0														x					
271 Mine Brook Road	Natural Area	30.2	10.5														x					
Belcher Open Space	Natural Area	2.4	1.4														x					
Borough Springs	Natural Area	4.1	0.0											0.2			x					
Dunster-Squibb	Natural Area	1.5	1.3														x					
Laurelwood Open Space	Natural Area	13.4	0.0											0.2			x					Includes Spring House Rd OS
Meeker Road Open Space	Natural Area	34.3	0.0														x					
Moraine Crest Park	Natural Area	16.1	0.0														x					
Peters Tract	Natural Area	30.4	0.7														x					
Whitenack Open Space	Natural Area	13.3	0.0														x					
Subtotal - Nature Parks/Natural Areas		150.6	13.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.4	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	
Total - Bernardsville Parks		196.8	46.8	5	1	1	3	1	2	6	2	1	0.1	0.4	1	1	11	1	1	1	211	

Figure 3.1: Existing Parks and Trails



- Playground (with swings – 2 belt, 2 tot)
- Small gazebo
- Restroom/concession building
- Monarch waystation with pollinator plants

Park Issues & Opportunities

- Lack of park identification sign
- No accessible route to gazebo
- Poor to no accessibility around ballfields and bleachers
- Gravel parking lot
- Inadequate lighting around all fields
- T-ball field in poor condition



3.4.3 Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park (7.5 acres) – Neighborhood Park

Park Location

Located off Rte 202, Rose Bowl ballfield and Nervine Park are sites connected by a tract of wooded land along Mine Brook. The Bernardsville Police Station and Bernardsville Community Garden are near this Neighborhood Park space.

Existing Features & Amenities

- Small diamond field
- 0.1-mile paved trail
- Pond and fishing access

Park Issues & Opportunities

- Site is difficult to access from parking area
- Insufficient parking
- Pond area floods



3.5 COMMUNITY PARKS

Community Parks are larger parks that serve multiple neighborhoods and offer a wider variety of facilities. Community Parks should be conveniently located (within approximately 5-minute drive) and easily accessible with facilities intended to occupy visitors for extended periods of time (field or game court complex, disc golf, etc.).

3.5.1 Polo Grounds & Evankow Tract/Municipal Pool (44.4 acres) – Community Park

Park Location

This Community Park is located adjacent to Bernardsville Middle School and Bedwell Elementary School and can be accessed from Seney Drive via Chestnut Avenue. Most of the development around this park is residential with lots varying in size. Just beyond Polo Grounds is a mostly preserved natural wooded area, included in the park site.



Existing Features & Amenities

- 2 small diamond fields
- Large diamond field
- 3 large rectangular fields
- Artificial turf field
- 2 basketball courts
- 6 tennis courts
- Aquatic center (Municipal Pool)
- Natural wooded area



Park Issues & Opportunities

- Playground (school property) not ADA accessible; gating also impedes accessibility
- Outdoor fitness area not ADA accessible
- Bleachers next to basketball court do not have handicap access
- Tennis courts need ADA access ramp
- Court surfaces are fair to poor, considerable cracking
- Gazebos on site are not ADA accessible
- Gazebo missing pickets in railing
- Lack of restrooms, especially at artificial turf field
- Baseball dugouts incomplete
- Some fields lack bleachers and accessible walkways
- No lighting
- No permanent restrooms except in the middle school
- Partial trail has overgrowth preventing a closed loop path

3.6 NATURAL AREAS & OPEN SPACE SITES

These sites are oriented around preserved and passive recreation in nature. They can range significantly in size and draw visitors from varying distances depending on the scale and purpose of the site. Residents of Bernardsville are situated near a number of other natural spaces managed by nonprofit and governmental organizations. Bernardsville Recreation specifically oversees 10 natural areas for a total of roughly 155 acres. Of these natural space acres, only two sites have unpaved trail (0.2 mile at each) with the rest remaining completely undeveloped.

- 251 Claremont Road (5.1 acres)
- 271 Mine Brook Road (30.2 acres)
- Belcher Open Space (2.4 acres)
- Borough Springs (4.1 acres) – 0.2-mile unpaved trail
- Dunster-Squibb (1.5 acres)
- Laurelwood Open Space (13.4 acres) – 0.2-mile unpaved trail



- Meeker Road Open Space (34.3 acres)
- Moraine Crest Park (16.1 acres)
- Peters Tract (30.4 acres)
- Whitenack Open Space (13.3 acres)

3.7 FACILITY SUMMARY

The table (Table 3.3) below provides a summary of the recreation facilities offered by the Bernardsville Recreation Department.

Table 3.3: Recreation Facility Summary

Athletic Fields	#	Trails (Miles)	#
Small Diamond	5	Paved	0.1
Large Diamond	1	Unpaved	0.4
Large Rectangular	3	Natural Areas	#
Outdoor Facilities	#	Fishing Access	1
Playgrounds	2	Lake/Pond/River	1
Basketball Courts	2	Natural/Wooded Area	11
Tennis Courts	6	Support Facilities	#
Aquatic Centers	1	Restroom Buildings	1
		Concessions Buildings	1
		Gazebo	1

3.8 PARKS BY OTHERS

The text in this section documents amenities offered at parks managed by other agencies in or near the borough in order to create a full inventory of all recreation amenities available to Bernardsville residents. If major improvements are made in any of these spaces, the borough and the owners of these spaces are encouraged to coordinate efforts so as to provide amenities that best address the recreation needs of the community and simultaneously avoid duplicated services. Table 3.4 shows six parks by others located within the borough limits, as well as those located near the borough. Whether managed by a nonprofit, like the Audubon Society, a school district, or government entity like Somerset County or the National Park Service, each of these spaces contribute to the full spectrum of recreational opportunities available to residents of Bernardsville.

3.9 PROGRAMS INVENTORY

Quality recreational programming is an important aspect of a vibrant and healthy community. Programs can be useful for meeting the specific needs of different groups in the community – like active adults, young children, families, or teenagers – in a way that is more creatively tailored. In fact, programs can be an essential access-point for users; offerings like fitness class, sports leagues, cultural crafts, and camps give residents unique ways to meaningfully interact with parks in their community. When properly managed and intentionally promoted, programs are an invaluable tool for strengthening social connectivity and enhancing the livability of a community.

3.9.1 Core Program Guidelines

The core program concept provides direction in the planning, scheduling, and coordination of community-based recreational activities. Involvement of community representatives, parents, participants, and advisory groups in the planning and development of program opportunities is critical for success.

The Core Program Guidelines include six components used as benchmarks for determining the quality of specific activities conducted at each program location. The level of Core Program offering may vary in activity type, intensity, and scope depending on such factors as size of the facility, equipment availability, and the number of staff required. The discussion below provides a description of the core program components as well as a summary of if, and how well, Bernardsville Recreation is targeting these components.

Table 3.4: Parks by Others

Facility Name	Agency	Playgrounds	Basketball Courts	Volleyball Courts	Diamond Fields	Multipurpose Fields	Swimming Beach	Picnic Shelters	Dog Park	Fishing	Boat Launch	Trails (Miles)
Parks by Others In Bernardsville												
Bedwell School Playground	Somerset Hills School District	1	1.5									
Little Brook Sanctuary	Somerset County Park Commission											0.4
Morristown National Historic Park	National Park Service											27.0
Passaic River Coalition	Passaic River Coalition											
Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary	New Jersey Audubon Society											2.2
William Post Natural Area	Raritan Headwaters Association											
Subtotal - Parks by Others In Bernardsville		1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29.6
Parks by Others Near Bernardsville												
Allen Street Gazebo	Bernards Township											
Barrett Field	Harding Township				1							
Basking Ridge Firemans Field	Bernards Township				1							
Lewis Morris County Park	Morris County Park Commission				1	3	1	6	1	x		22.1
Lord Stirling Park	Somerset County									x	x	6.2
Mosle Preserve and Recreation Area	Mendham Township				1	2						
Natirar Park	Somerset County									x		3.6
Patriots' Path	Morris County Park Commission											73.3
Schiff Nature Preserve	Mendham Township											9.5
Somerset County Senior Wellness Center	Somerset County											
Southard Park	Bernards Township	1	1	1	1	1		1		x		
Subtotal - Parks by Others Near Bernardsville		1	1	1	5	6	1	7	1	4	1	114.7
Total - Other Parks		2	3	1	5	6	1	7	1	4	1	144.2

Appendix C also provides an expanded description of each broad program category (component six). It includes possible program formats, identifies the primary values served by the activity, and lists specific program examples. The list can be a helpful resource for determining and developing programs in the borough of Bernardsville.

Core Program Components

The summary below uses the following abbreviations after each bullet point to describe whether Bernardsville is meeting the core program components:

- Y = Yes, offered by Bernardsville Recreation
- L = Limited offerings by Bernardsville Recreation
- O = Offered by partner organizations in Bernardsville
- N = No, not offered in Bernardsville

1. Broad Appeal

Parks and community centers should have broad appeal by conducting activities and special events for people young and old and of varying needs and skill levels. Target groups for programs include:

- Preschool – (L)
- Elementary school age – (Y)

-
- Teens – (L)
 - Adults – (Y)
 - Seniors – (L)
 - Intergenerational – (N)
 - Multiple ages – (Y)
 - Special needs – (N)

2. Administrative Feasibility

Activities should be administratively feasible, and the following factors should be considered as part of any program development process:

- Facility and equipment requirements – (Y)
- Safety – (Y)
- Cost vs. benefits – (N)
- Specialized instruction requirements – (Y)

Bernardsville has not yet completed a detailed analysis of the costs of programs. This type of analysis involves determining the cost of each program per participant in terms of dollars and staff time, then comparing those numbers to program outcomes and revenues. This type of an analysis can be especially useful for evaluating partnerships with other organizations.

3. Coordination

Program and service offerings should be of a coordinated nature within the community, thus serving to complement rather than duplicate activities already provided elsewhere by other organizations or agencies.

Bernardsville coordinates with several partner organizations to ensure complementary services. The borough partners with Somerset Hills Regional School District for use of their amenities at the Polo Grounds site. Additionally, the borough partners with adjacent communities, such as Basking Ridge and Bernards Township, for recreation programming, including athletic leagues.

4. Settings and Times

Activities should be conducted in a variety of settings and formats, both formal and informal. Programs should also be offered at a variety of times to meet the competing schedules of residents. For example, working adults may not be able to participate in programs until the evening or on weekends. Additionally, parents with children may benefit from availability of childcare or children's programs running concurrent to their chosen activity.

Settings and formats include:

- Instructional classes (Y)
- Progressive skill levels (Y)
- Drop-In (Y)
- Special events (N)
- Special interest clubs (N)
- Leagues and/or tournaments (Y/O)
- Outings and field trips (L)
- After school programs (L)
- Camps (Y)

Bernardsville offers programs in many of the settings and formats listed above. However, the Recreation Department does not offer special events or special interest clubs, and provides limited outings (except for a trip to Radio City in 2015, there have been no organized outings) and after-school program opportunities.

5. Constructive Nature

Programs should be constructive in nature and satisfy the creative, cultural, physical, and social desires of the participants.

6. Diverse Range of Activities

A diverse range of activities should be offered and should include a balanced mix of the following broad program categories:

- Athletics (Y & O) – Offered by Bernardsville Recreation and partners
- Community Events – (N)
- Creative Arts (L) – Only a few programs and/or low participation
- Cultural Performances (L) – Only a few programs and/or low participation
- Education, Life Skills, and Fun – (Y)
- Games – (N)
- Green Living/Environmental Education – (N)
- Health, Fitness, and Wellness Activities – (Y)
- Health and Wellness Education – (N)
- Heritage and History – (N)
- Nature/Outdoor Programs (L) – Only a few programs and/or low participation
- Performing Arts (L) – Only a few programs and/or low participation
- Volunteer Training – (N)

3.9.2 Bernardsville Recreation Program Participation

Bernardsville Recreation Department has offered a range of programs over the years. Since 2015, there have been offerings pertaining to athletics, cultural performances, life skills & fun, and health & wellness. Table 3.5 provides a summary of the participation rates in the four categories of programming that have been offered by the borough (between 2015 and 2019). The department does not currently offer programs in many of the categories identified above.

Table 3.5: Participation Summary

Participation Summary	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	5-Year Total	% Change
Athletics	276	187	204	331	354	1352	28%
Cultural Performances	48	0	0	0	0	48	-100%
Education, Life Skills, & Fun	378	392	372	297	213	1652	-43%
Health, Fitness, & Wellness Activities	42	38	0	79	24	183	-70%
Total	744	617	576	707	591	3235	-21%



PUBLIC INPUT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the processes used and the public input gathered throughout the planning process, summarizing the following elements:

1. In-Park Interactions
2. Stakeholder Conversations
3. Statistically Valid Survey (by ETC Institute)
4. Web Survey
5. Online Engagement (powered by MindMixer)

The public engagement process is essential for identifying the needs and preferences of Bernardsville residents. Thus, the findings of the public input process are integral to the Needs Assessment and Identification (Chapter 5) and serve as the foundation of the recommendations which come later in this Master Plan.

4.2 IN-PARK INTERACTIONS

The global COVID-19 pandemic necessitated significant innovation for reaching the community in Bernardsville and collecting input for this *2021 Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan*. While public meetings in larger community venues are a more traditional space for engagement, in-park interactions afforded the consultant team direct access to parks users in real time.

On November 7, 2020, the consultant visited Kiwanis Park and the Bernardsville Farmers Market to conduct a series of survey interviews with willing participants. Afterwards, there was a community listening session held at the Municipal Pool. The Bernardsville Farmers Market and Municipal Pool engagement opportunities were advertised to residents on the borough's social media and the Recreation Department's webpage.

4.2.1 Process In-Park Interactions

While maintaining safety protocol (as defined by the Centers for Disease Control for the prevention of coronavirus), BCI staff maintained a presence at three highly trafficked locations in the borough's park system.

At the Farmers Market and Kiwanis Park, passing individuals were encouraged to share their input via survey, and **27 individuals were engaged** in this manner. Interviewees were approached and asked permission before engaging in a short series of predetermined questions, including the following:

- Which sites do you use?
- How often do you visit the borough's parks?
- What is your favorite park? Why?
- Have you participated in any programs provided by the borough of Bernardsville?
- What improvements would you like to see?

At the Bernardsville Municipal Pool, residents joined a physically-distanced gathering to discuss the parks system, programs, and the future of parks and recreation in Bernardsville. These individuals were invited to share their thoughts through a modified series of questions, including:

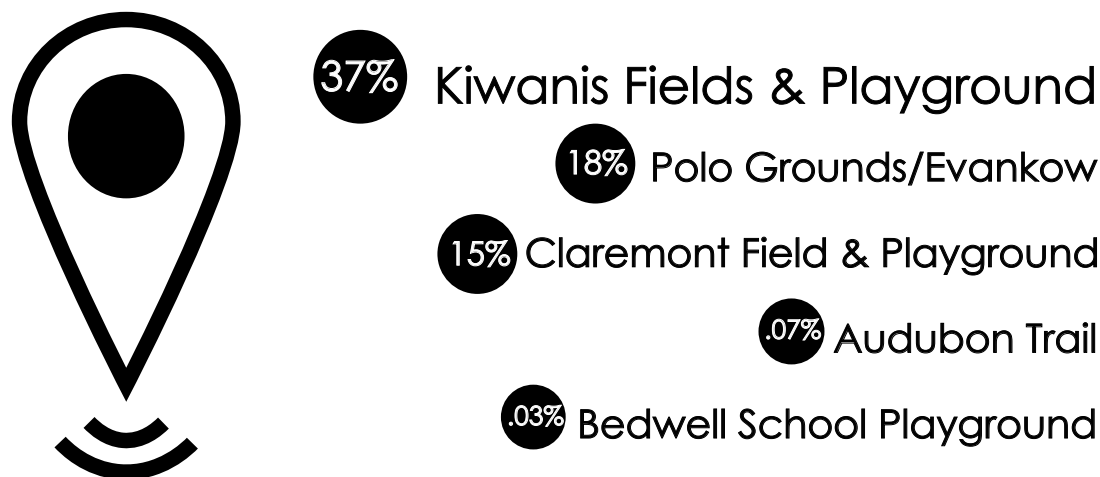
- What do you value about the borough's parks?
- What could be improved?
- Imagine it is the year 2030 and the department has successfully implemented its Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Master Plan. What does this success look like to you?

Interviewees were encouraged to share additional comments, ideas, and concerns as well. These different encounters often blended into informal conversation, giving the planning team invaluable qualitative data and clearer entry to understanding community perception of the parks and recreation in Bernardsville.

4.2.2 Visitation

Of the responses to these in-person interactions, **Kiwanis Fields & Playground was the most visited park site** (see Figure 4.1). Polo Grounds/Evankow Tract was the second most-visited site of these responses; Claremont Field was third.

Figure 4.1: Parks Visitation Based on Intercept Interviews



4.2.3 Requests for Improvements (Based on In-Park Interactions)

Overall, people expressed appreciation for the borough's existing parks and facilities. Asked what they liked about Bernardsville parks and recreation; interviewees mentioned a number of topics:

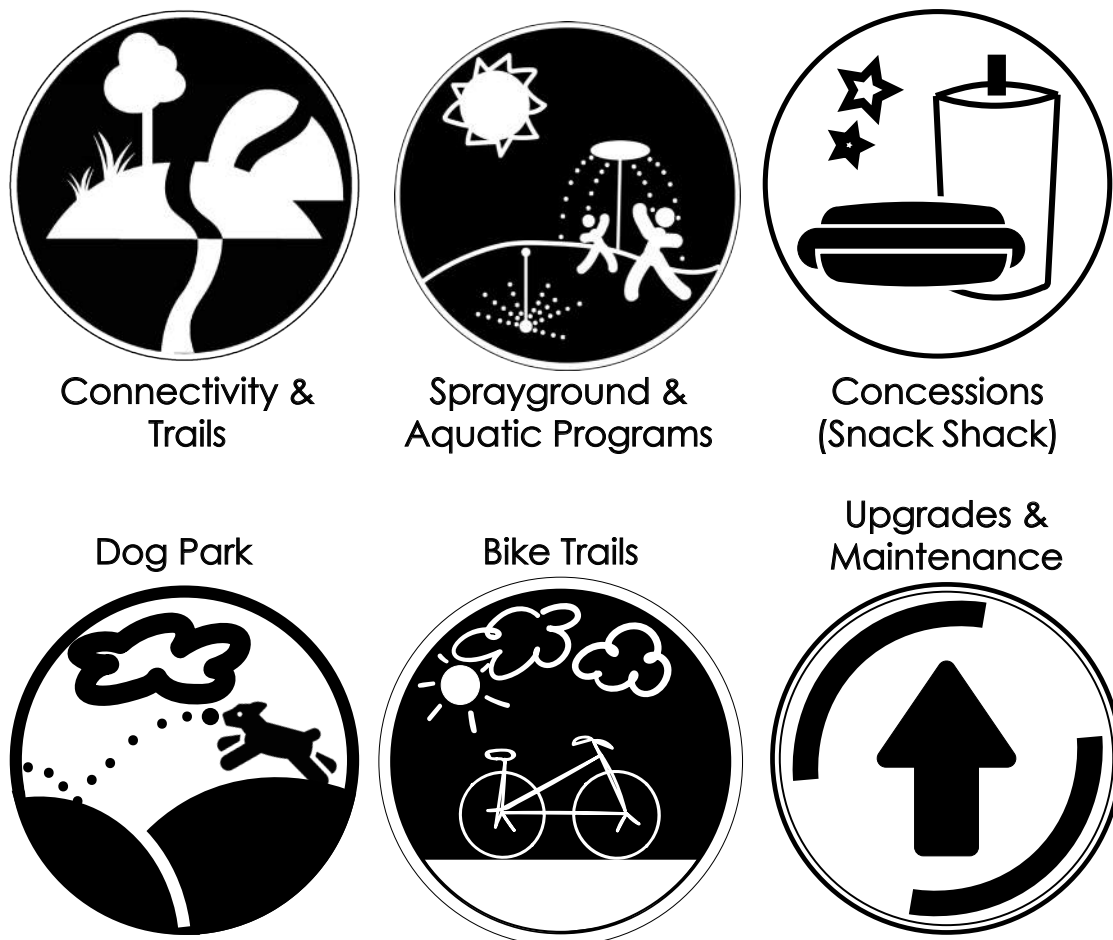
- Natural beauty and setting
- Central location of parks in town
- Sense of community
- Recreation meets community's needs
- Variety of playgrounds
- Municipal Pool and swim team program
- Variety of opportunities for all ages

- Connections to open spaces
- Audubon Trail
- Committed volunteers do great work on the trails
- Old Fort Road connection
- Kiwanis Park fields and playground – though there is room for improvement and upgrades
- The Snack Shack
- Area around the pool is really beautiful
- Basketball court program is well-used by community

Next, those engaged were encouraged to share their preferences and ideas for what could be better. Figure 4.2 illustrates the highlights of these contributions (for full details, see Appendix D). Of the myriad suggestions, the top themes were:

- More opportunities for water-based play and exercise (e.g., adding a spray ground and offering more aquatics programs at the pool)
- Dog-friendly spaces and more use of the existing dog park
- Snack shack (at the Polo Grounds) and improved concessions generally
- More extensive trails
- Connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Increased funding to support needed improvements and maintenance systemwide

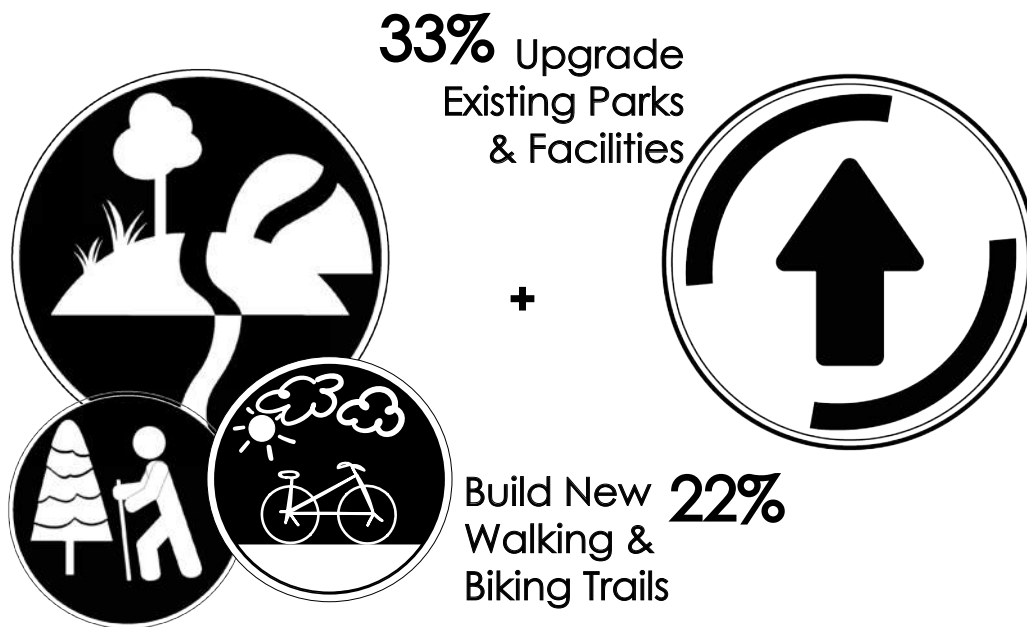
Figure 4.2: Preferred Improvements or Additions at Parks Based on Intercept Interviews



4.2.4 Priorities for Investment (Based on In-Park Interactions)

When asked their priority for making improvements to the parks system in the borough, in-park interviewees responded that upgrades to the existing system and added trails were the most important investments moving forward. Beyond general upgrades systemwide, specific preferences included adding lighting to the fields and updating the Municipal Pool. Additionally, people wanted paved bike trails and walking paths in particular.

Figure 4.3: Most Important Priorities for Investment



4.3 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated rethinking the stakeholder and special interest group engagement process. Due to travel restrictions and safety concerns, the consultant conducted dialogues with stakeholders during the fall and winter of 2020. Most of these conversations were conducted via virtual conferencing (Zoom). Fourteen stakeholder groups participated in these discussions – plus seven different sports groups – to contribute their respective visions to this Master Plan. At these meetings, stakeholders were asked a series of questions about Bernardsville parks, recreation facilities, and programs, beginning first with a discussion of strengths before moving on to a discussion of future opportunities. Summaries of the meetings with complete comments can be found in Appendix D.

4.3.1 Groups Engaged

The following stakeholder group meetings were held as part of this Master Plan:

- Staff
- Recreation Board
- Cultural Arts Committee
- Open Space Committee
- Environmental Commission
- Downtown Bernardsville
- Peters Tract Neighbors
- Baseball/T-Ball (Somerset Hills Little League)
- Football

-
- Lacrosse
 - Swim Team

4.3.2 Stakeholders Top Recommendations

- Lighting on sports fields
- Additional diamond ball field
- Add trail around the Polo Grounds
- Ability to host tournaments
- Multi-use indoor space
- Restrooms available at park sites
- More shelters
- Electronic display board for athletics
- More trails and connectivity systemwide
- Upgrade Memorial Pool – develop more aquatic programs
- Develop a one-stop calendar for events and programs
- Work to ensure safer walkability throughout the community
- Develop outdoor live performances
- Build a more vibrant Downtown Bernardsville
- Preserve land for habitat protection
- Add concessions and restrooms facilities at the Polo Grounds
- Improve condition of the sports fields
- Add pickleball courts
- Build capacity for year-round programming
- Add a meeting space

4.4 PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

The following pages summarize the findings of the statistically valid survey (Mail Survey) and an online survey (Web Survey). Because the Mail Survey results were collected using a statistically valid random sample, they are intended to represent the residents of Bernardsville as a whole, both users and non-users. On the other hand, the Web Survey results reflect the views of the respondents, not necessarily Bernardsville residents as a whole. The figures in this section display side-by-side the results from both surveys. Of the figures that follow, some show only the top results for a survey question; however, full results can be found in Appendices E and F.

4.4.1 Statistically Valid Survey - Overview and Methodology

ETC Institute conducted a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment survey (Mail Survey) during the winter and spring months of 2020 to help establish priorities for the future development of parks, trails, programs, and open space in Bernardsville. This Mail Survey was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the borough.

The Brandstetter Carroll Inc. project team worked with Bernardsville Recreation staff, and the master plan steering committee, on the development of the survey questionnaire. Through this collaborative effort a survey was created, tailored to issues of strategic local importance, that provided a critical tool for effective planning of the future of the parks, recreation, trails, and open space in Bernardsville. The 5-page survey was mailed to a random sample of households throughout Bernardsville. (As an alternative, households were also provided with a web address for completing the survey online.)

ETC Institute had a goal of 300 survey responses to ensure statistically valid results. ETC Institute met this goal with a total of 310 surveys. Based on this random sample of households, the overall results have a precision of at least +/-5.5% at the 95% level of confidence.

4.4.2 National Benchmarking

Since 1998, ETC Institute has conducted household surveys for needs assessments, feasibility studies, customer satisfaction, fees and charges comparisons, and other parks and recreation issues in more than 700 communities across all 50 states.

The results of these surveys have provided an unparalleled database of information against which to compare responses from households in client communities. This unique tool enables clients to see their results compared to national averages, assisting them in better decision making. This National Benchmarking summary is included in Appendix E with the full survey report. Select information for the benchmarking is described below.

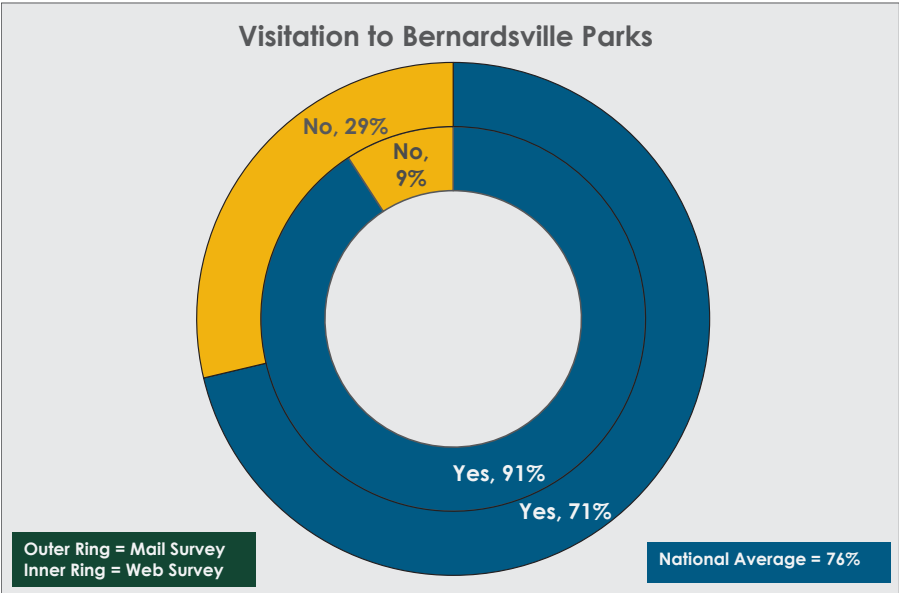
4.4.3 Web Survey - Overview and Methodology

In addition to the input-gathering conducted by ETC Institute, a Web (and handout) Survey was administered by BCI during the summer and fall of 2020. This Web Survey was similar to the Mail Survey; however, the overall length was reduced (two pages instead of five) for ease and improved likelihood of completion. This version was powered by Survey Monkey. A total of 512 community members participated in this survey. Ninety-four percent (94%) of those who responded said that they live within the borough of Bernardsville, and 91% had visited a borough park or facility within the last year. The full survey report can be found in Appendix F.

4.4.4 Results - Visitation of Parks Offered in Bernardsville

Respondents to the survey were asked about their visitation to parks in Bernardsville. Figure 4.4 shows the proportion of those who reported at least one member of their household had visited a borough park in the last year. According to the statistically valid Mail Survey (outer ring), **71% of households visited parks** in Bernardsville over the past year. In contrast, the national average for park visitation is 76%, according to ETC Institute benchmarking. Meaning, residents in Bernardsville use parks at a similar, or slightly lower, rate as other communities; comparably, of those who responded in the Web Survey, 91% had visited a park.

Figure 4.4: Visitation

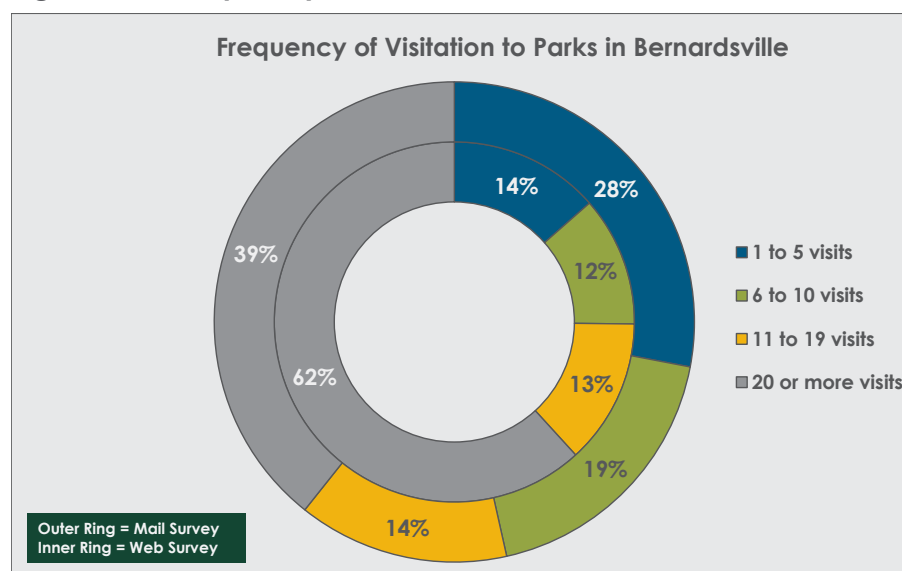


4.4.5 Results - Frequency of Visits to Parks & Recreation Facilities in Bernardsville

As a follow-up, respondent households that had visited Bernardsville parks and recreation facilities during the last year were then asked how often they have visited those facilities over that time. The results are presented in Figure 4.5.

According to the statistically valid Mail Survey, households who visited the borough's parks and recreation facilities in the last year likely visited many times. **Thirty-nine (39%) reported visiting 20 or more times.** Other results were: 28% visited 1-5 times, 19% visited 6-10 times, and 14% visited 11-19 times. Looking at the responses cumulatively, 53% of households visited parks 11 or more times, and 72% visited parks six or more times. **Web Survey respondents had higher rates of visitation with 62% of households visiting 20 or more times** in the last year.

Figure 4.5: Frequency of Visitation

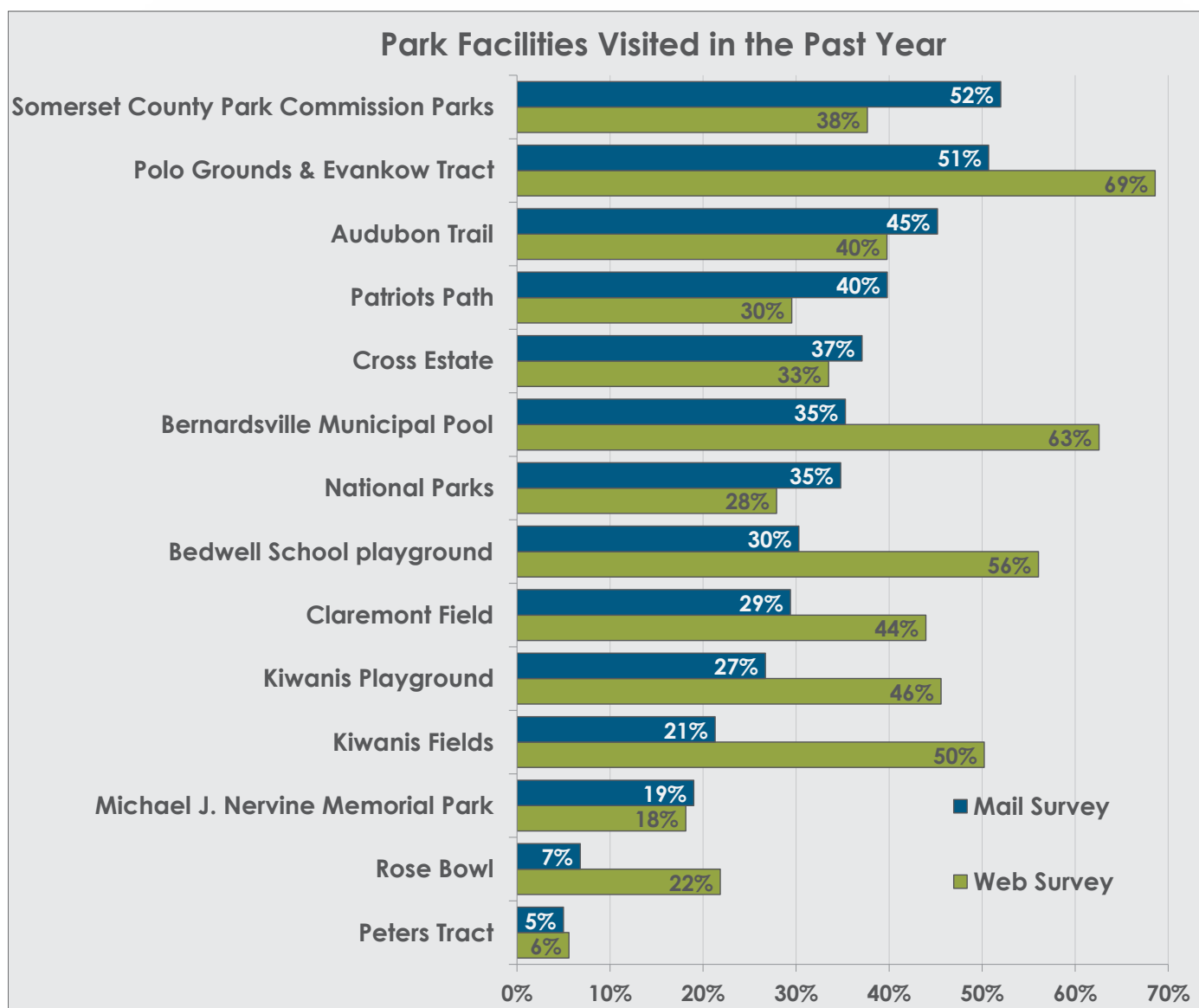


4.4.6 Results - Parks and Recreation Facilities Visited Over the Past Year

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which of the parks offered by Bernardsville their household visited over the past year. Figure 4.6 shows what percentage of respondents have used each park or facility in the past year, distinguishing between the results of each survey.

According to the statistically valid Mail Survey, **51% of households visited Polo Grounds/Evankow Tract** (respectively) in the past year, making it the most used park in Bernardsville. Somerset County Park Commission Parks were slightly higher at 52%, but this option represents multiple parks, potentially outside of the borough. The sites with the most difference between Mail and Web Survey responses were Polo Grounds (69% Web, 51% Mail), Bernardsville Municipal Pool (63% Web, 35% Mail), Bedwell School Playground (54% Web, 30% Mail), Claremont Field (44% Web, 29% Mail), Kiwanis Playground (46% Web, 27% Mail), and Kiwanis Fields (50% Web, 21% Mail). Again, these differences relate to the Web Survey being more likely to be filled out by active users or households with existing participation in the borough's programs.

Figure 4.6: Parks Visited



4.4.7 Results - Physical Condition of Facilities Offered by Bernardsville

Respondent households were asked to rate the physical condition of facilities they visited. Figure 4.7 shows respondents' ratings of the condition of facilities in Bernardsville. According to the Mail Survey, 50% of households who visited these facilities over the past year rated the condition of those facilities as good, **19% rated the condition of the facilities as excellent** with 16% rating the condition as fair and just 5% as poor. The *excellent* rating provided by Mail Survey respondents does, however, fall short of the national average (according to the ETC Institute) of 29%. Taken altogether, **(81% of Mail Survey respondents see the condition of Bernardsville's facilities as either excellent or good)**. Web Survey respondents offered condition ratings somewhat less favorably, with twice as many citing conditions as fair.

4.4.8 Results - Participation in Programs Offered by Bernardsville

Respondents were asked if any members of their household participated in programs offered by Bernardsville Recreation over the past year.¹ These results are shown in Figure 4.8. According to the Mail Survey, **only 22% of Bernardsville households have participated in programs offered**, while nearly 80% did not. This rate of participation is less than the National Average of 33% but is reasonable considering the limited amount of programming the borough provides.

¹ Results may have been affected by the covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Figure 4.7: Condition of Facilities

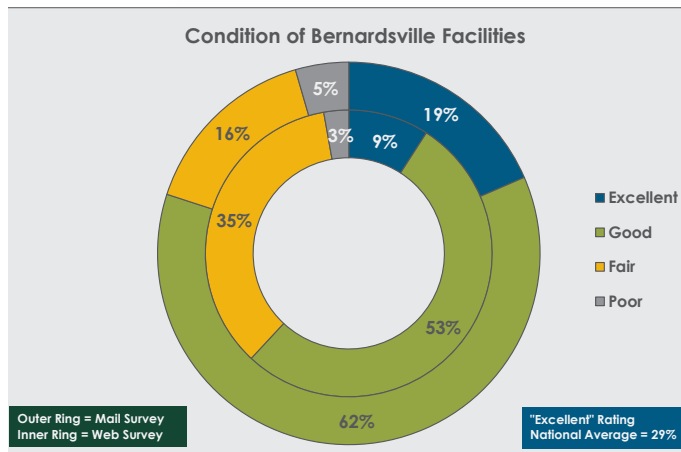
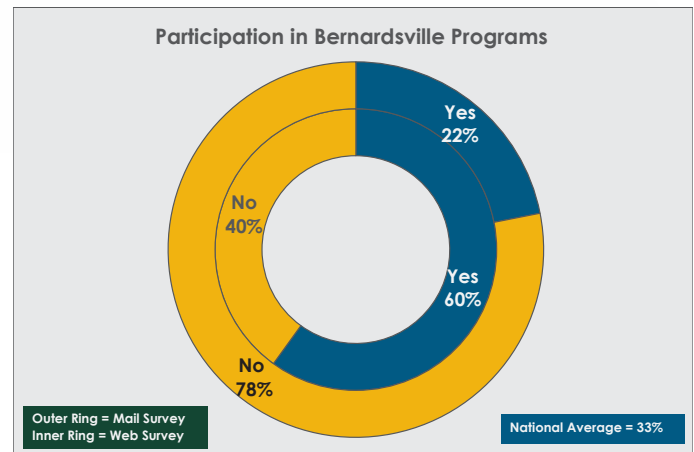


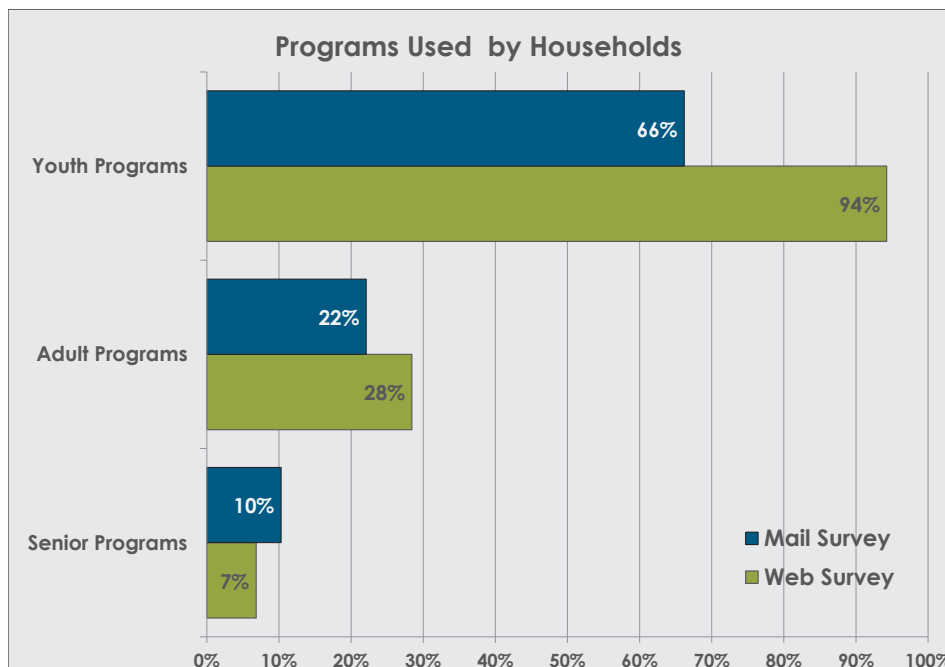
Figure 4.8: Program Participation



4.4.9 Results – Program Use

Next, those respondents who had participated in the borough's programming were asked what type of program they had utilized. Figure 4.9 illustrates the results of both the Mail and Web Surveys; youth programs had the highest percentage of participation (94% Web, 64% Mail). These results are reflective of the programming that is offered, as the vast majority of programs currently provided are youth oriented.

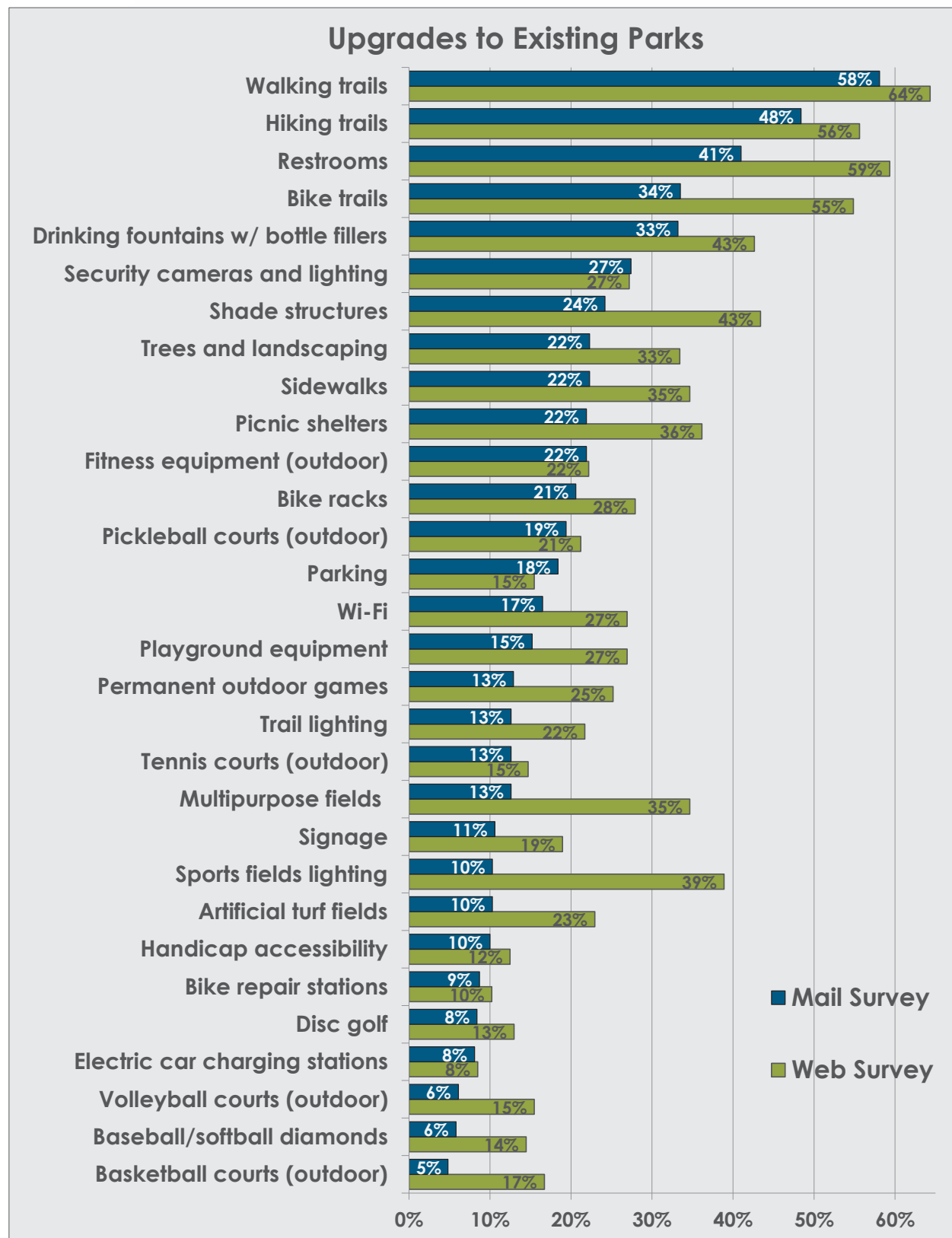
Figure 4.9: Quality of Programming



4.4.10 Results - Upgrades to Existing Parks

Following these preliminary questions, survey respondents were then asked to identify what upgrades their households would like to see to existing parks. Figure 4.10 shows responses. The **top two responses in the Mail Survey were walking trails (58%) and hiking trails (48%)**. The next priority ranked items were *restrooms* (41%), *bike trails* (34%), and *drinking fountains with bottle fillers* (33%). A full 26 of the 30 features ranked higher in the Web Survey, with some getting double or more the percentage. Most notable among these differences were *restrooms*, *bike trails*, *shade structures*, *multipurpose fields*, and *sports field lighting*. These differences commonly occur because Web Survey respondents are often more motivated to participate in the survey and intentionally offer their feedback either because of their higher-level use or their specific experience in the parks. In general, prioritization is similar for each set of responses. Plus, many are amenities that improve overall experience and can be included at nearly any park.

Figure 4.10: Upgrades to Existing Parks



4.4.11 Results – Household Needs for Parks and Recreation Facilities

Respondents of the Mail Survey were asked to identify (from a list of 29 different types of parks and recreation facilities) if any members of their household have need for any particular facility (i.e., do they make use of a certain facility, or would they if it were available). Figure 4.11 shows the results for each facility.

According to the survey, **the highest percentage of Bernardsville households (77%) have a need for walking trails** (i.e., they either do use or would like to use trails). *Natural areas/nature parks* (67%) and *hiking trails* (64%) ranked closely as second and third. *Large community parks, paved or gravel bike trails, and small neighborhood parks* were each ranked by over 40% of participating households.

In addition to outlining their general needs, respondents were also asked how well these needs are currently being met by the facilities provided by Bernardsville. Out of these responses, the percentage of households for which needs were met at 50% or less was combined with the total number of households in Bernardsville. Figure 4.12 shows the estimated number of households with needs met at 50% or less for the listed facilities.

The order of the items in Figure 4.12 largely mirrors the results of Figure 4.11. **The top three unmet needs – walking trails, hiking trails, and natural areas/nature parks – were all identified by over 1,000 households.** The similarity between the results of these two questions suggests that current community demand is exceeding the available supply for many facilities. Notably, *swimming pools/aquatic centers (outdoor)* were the eighth most needed facilities but the twentieth ranked unmet facility, indicating that needs for this facility are better met than most others. In contrast, ***stage or amphitheater (outdoor)*, was the eleventh most needed but the seventh ranked unmet facility, indicating that needs were met at a lower level compared to other facilities.**

The next component of survey questions pertaining to facilities gave participants an opportunity to specify which facilities are most important to them. Figure 4.13 presents the most important facilities overall (by percentage of respondents who selected the items as one of their top four choices). These items largely reflect the results shown in Figure 4.12 with **Bernardsville households choosing walking trails as by far the highest ranked “most important facility,” followed by hiking trails, natural areas/nature parks, and paved or gravel bike paths (all in the top 5 in Figures 4.11 and 4.12).**

The survey results provided by ETC Institute include a Priority Investment Ranking for each of the facilities that combine the level of unmet needs and the importance of facilities (see Appendix E for methodology). The results for the high and medium priority facilities can be seen in Figure 4.14.

Based on these results, the **top three facility priorities** for investment in Bernardsville are:

1. **Walking Trails**
2. **Hiking Trails**
3. **Natural Areas/Nature Parks**

4.4.12 Results – Household Need for Programs

Mail Survey respondents engaged with similar questions focusing on programs in Bernardsville. First, respondents were asked to choose which programs, from a list of 22 recreation program categories, their households have a need for (i.e., programs they participate in, or would if available.) Figure 4.15 shows the results for each program.

According to the survey, **concerts/art performances ranked first by nearly 60% of households** in Bernardsville. *Fitness & wellness programs (adult)*, *nature programs*, *movies (outdoor)*, and *special events* were all ranked by between 30% and 40% of households.

Figure 4.11: Need for Facilities

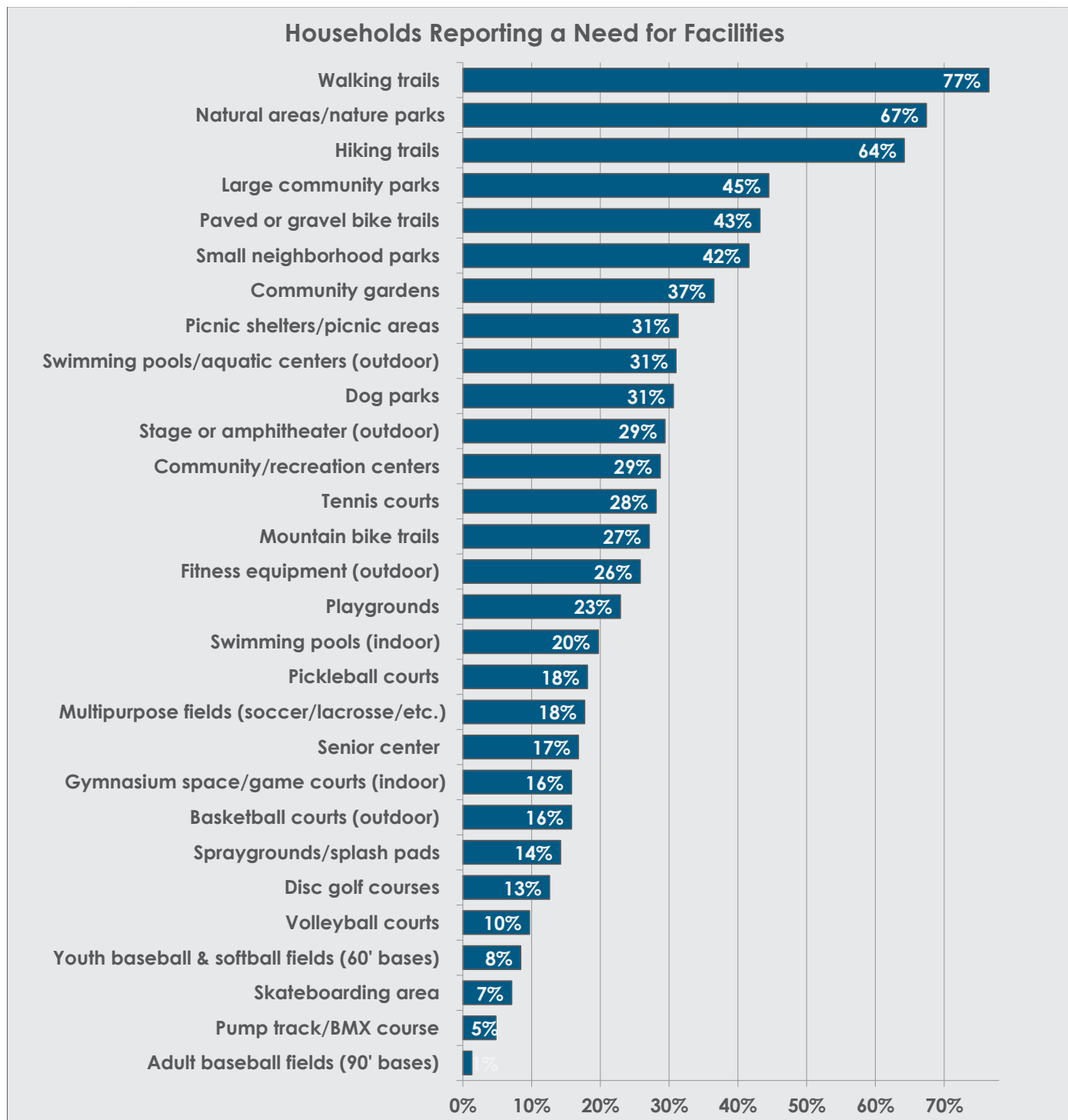


Figure 4.12: Estimated Number of Households with Unmet Facility Needs

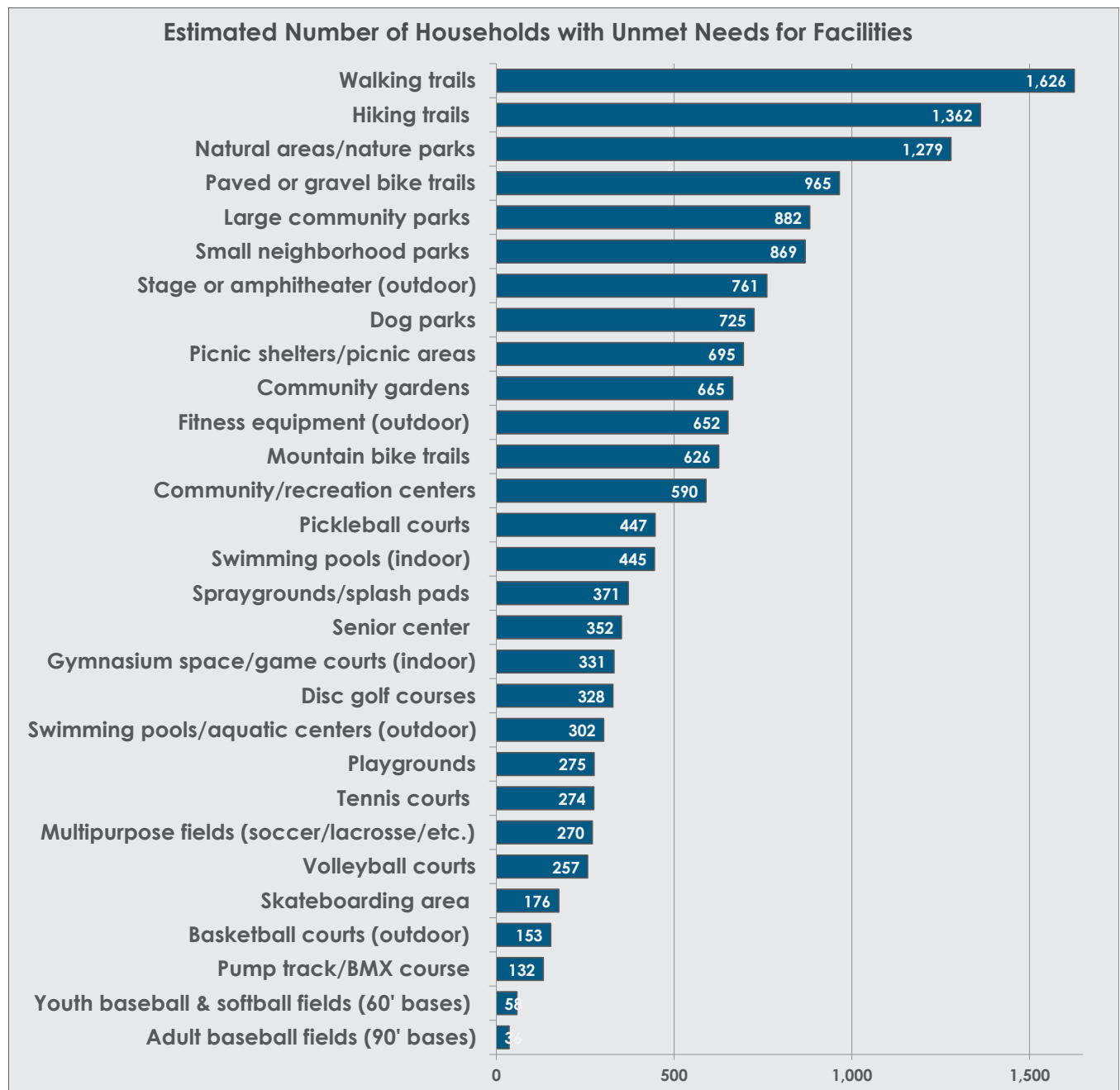
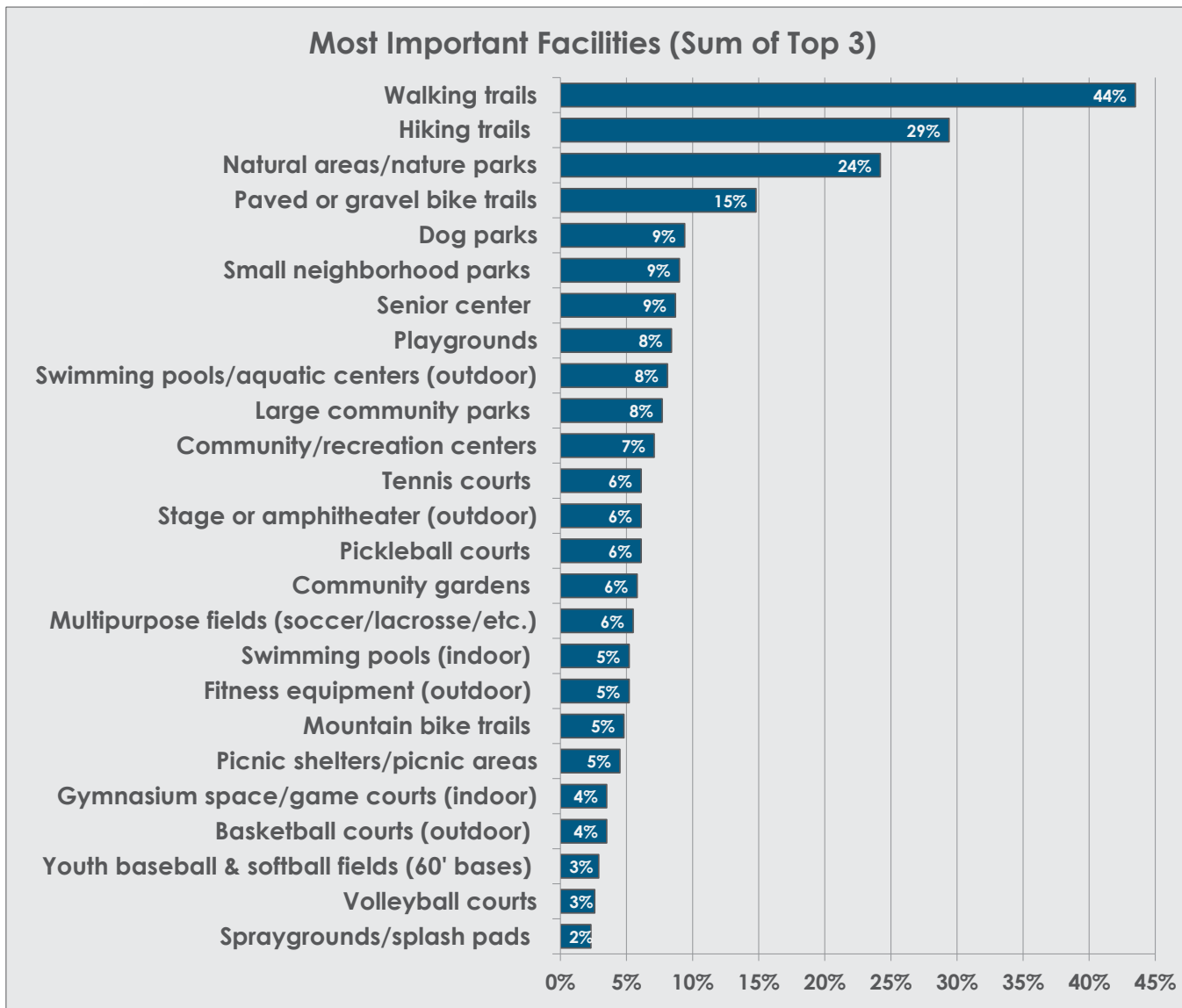


Figure 4.13: Most Important Facilities

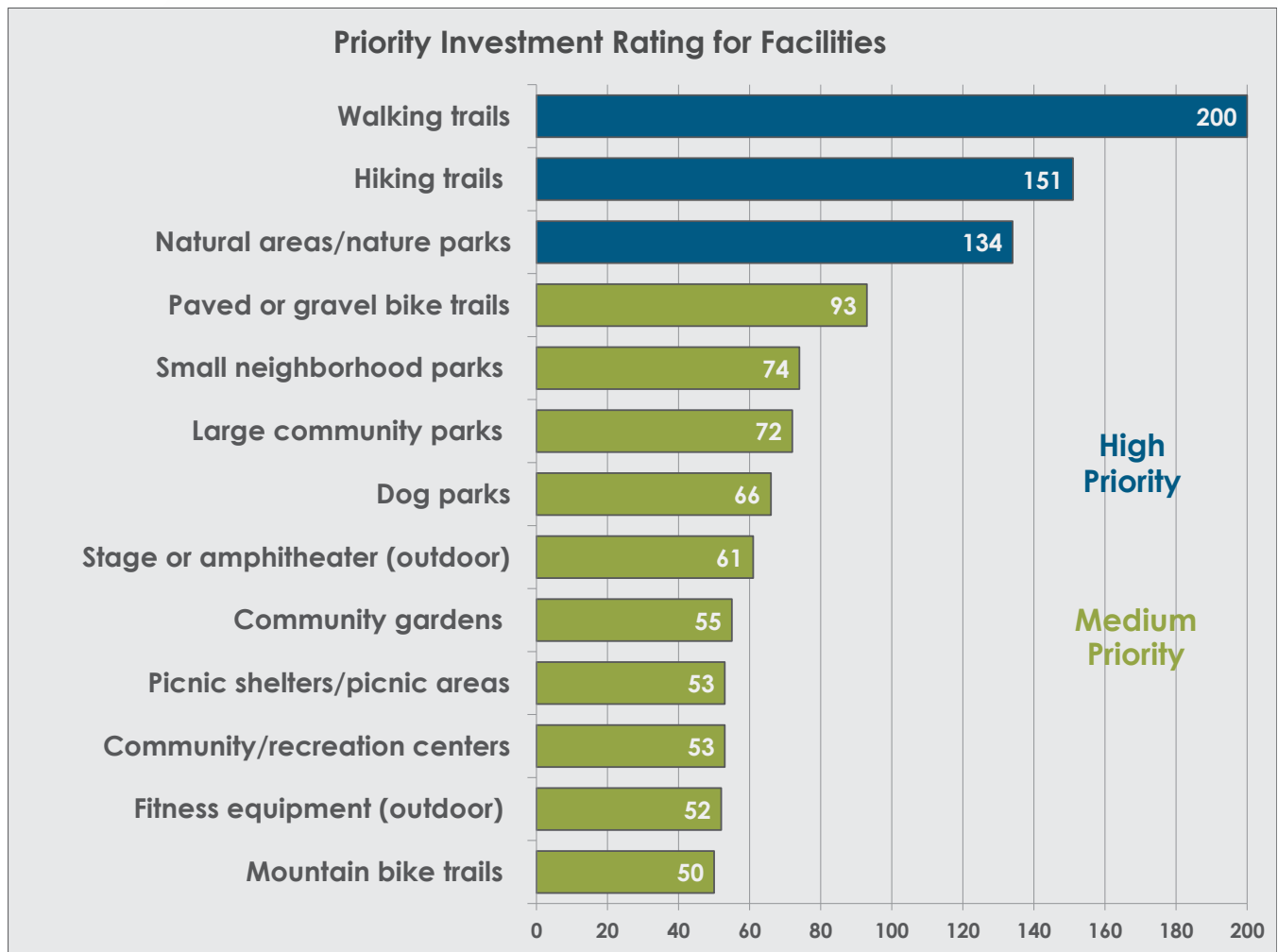


As with facilities, in order to determine the level of unmet need experiences, households were asked how well their needs are currently met by the recreation programs provided in Bernardsville; these results were then used to estimate the number of households for which need is met at 50% or less. Figure 4.16 shows the estimated number of households with unmet need for various programs.

The order of items in Figure 4.16 is similar to the list of needed programs in Figure 4.15 with the top five items appearing in both figures, although in different order. **Concerts/arts performances ranked highest with about 1,400 households indicating unmet needs.** Movies (outdoor) came up second (about 900 households); fitness & wellness programs (adult), special events, and nature programs (each around 800 households) rounded out the top five. The most notable discrepancies between the level of need and unmet need for programs were for sports programs (youth) and summer camp programs (youth), which were needed which dropped from eighth and eleventh to sixteenth and seventeenth, respectively, indicating needs met competitively well. In contrast, sports programs (adult) and bicycle/pedestrian safety programs jumped from thirteenth and sixteenth to eighth and ninth, respectively, indicating needs especially unmet compared to other program categories.

Following the inquiry into unmet needs, Figure 4.17 illustrates what program categories were identified by households as most important to them (sum of top three selections). **Concerts/arts performances was the most important program category, by far, with 34% of households selecting it in their top three.** The remaining four of the top five most important programs correspond to the ranking evident in the previous survey results.

Figure 4.14: Facility Priorities for Investment



That the same five types of programming appear at the top of each set of results suggests a twofold opportunity for Bernardsville Recreation to augment any existing offerings that align with these categories and to develop additional programs. Altogether, these results suggest a demand for greater sense of community, more resources for healthy living, and new opportunities to connect with nature.

In the same manner as with facilities, the survey results from the ETC Institute also include a Priority Investment Ranking for programs, combining the unmet needs ranking and most important programs ranking (Figure 4.17). Figure 4.18 shows the high and medium priority programs.

Based on these results, the **top five program high priorities** for investment in Bernardsville are:

1. **Concerts/art performances**
2. **Fitness & wellness programs (adult)**
3. **Movies (outdoor)**
4. **Nature programs**
5. **Special events**

Figure 4.15: Need for Programs

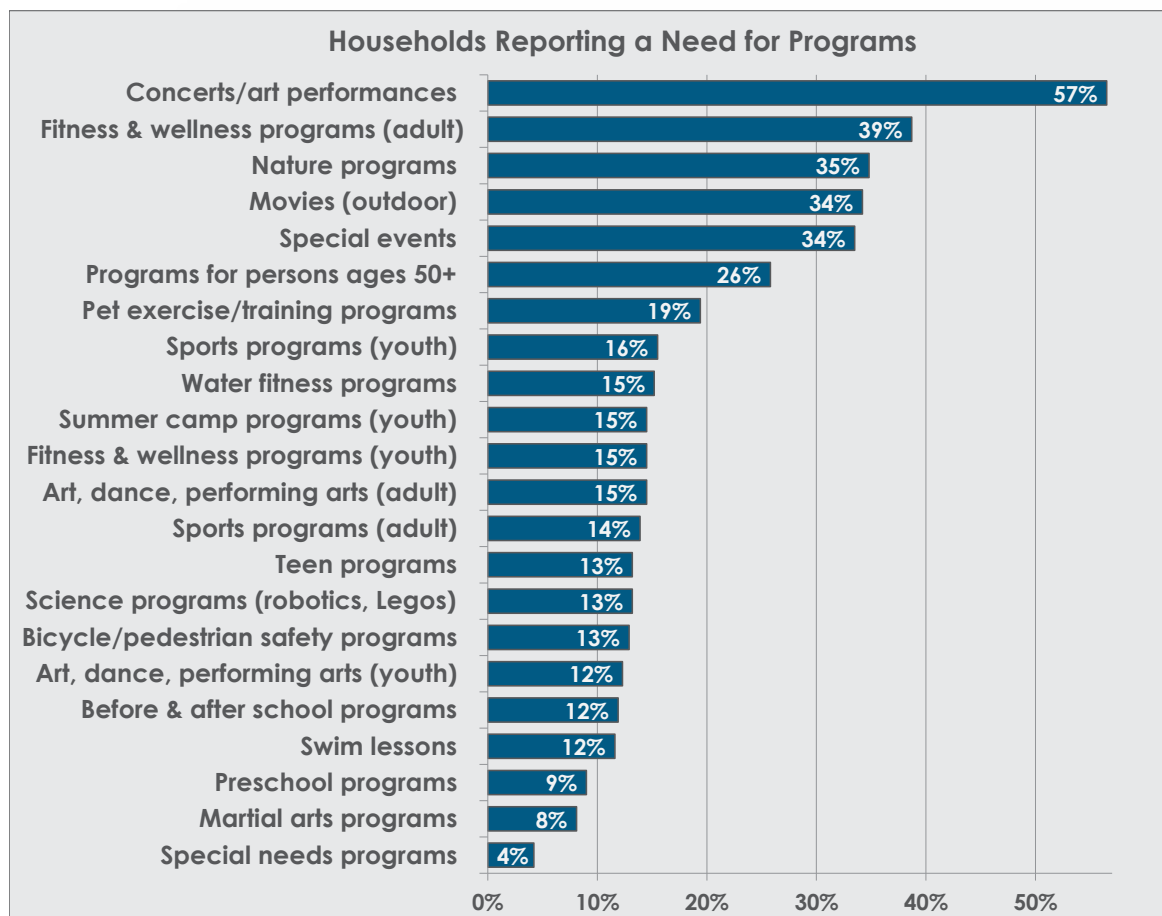


Figure 4.16: Estimated Number of Households with Unmet Program Needs

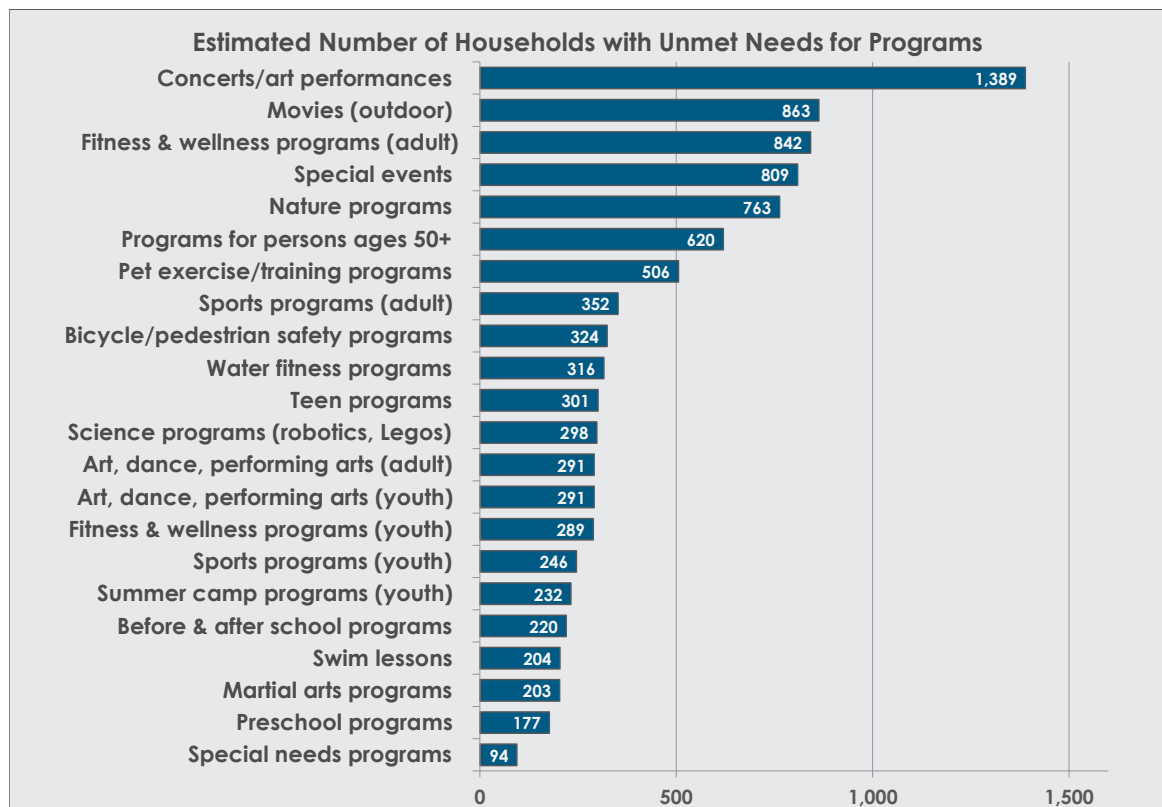


Figure 4.17: Most Important Programs

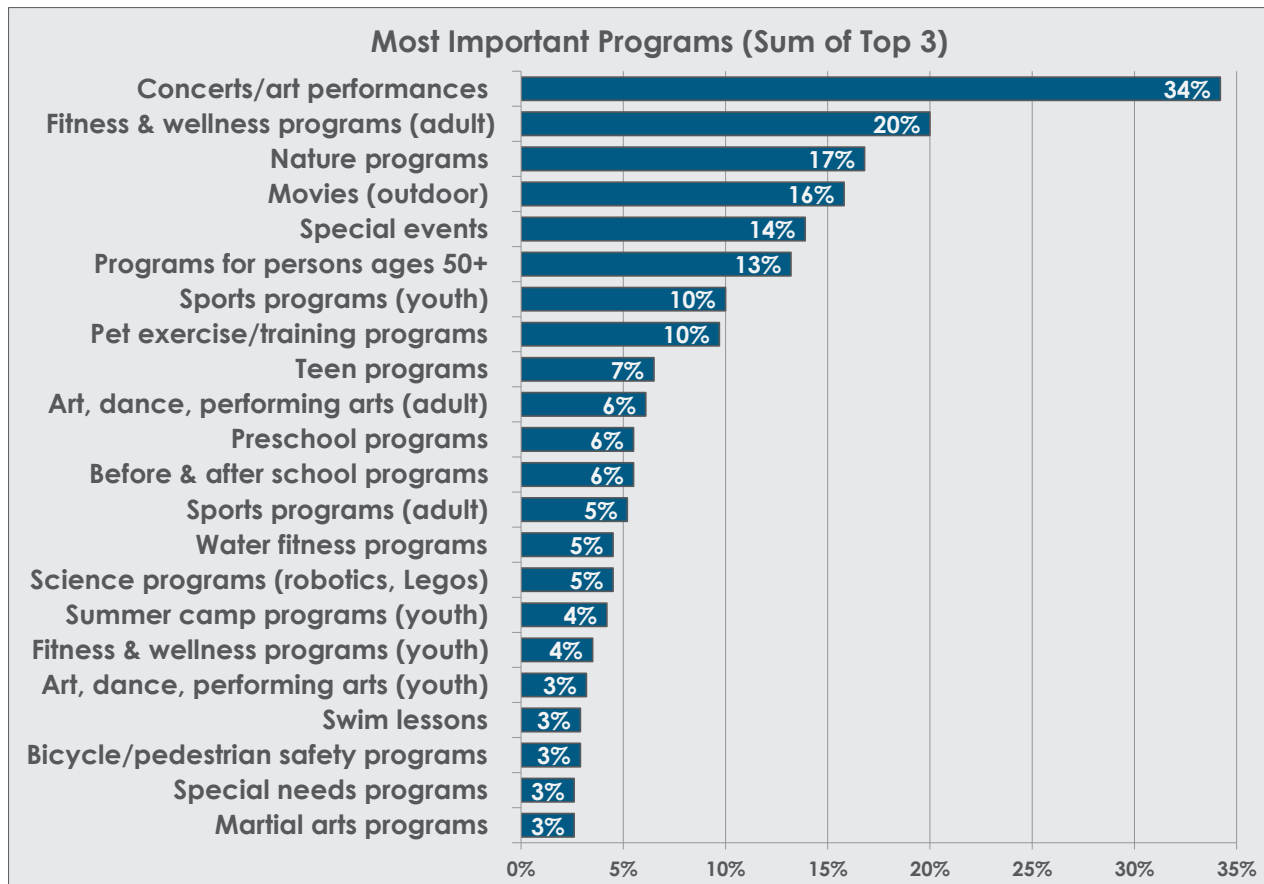
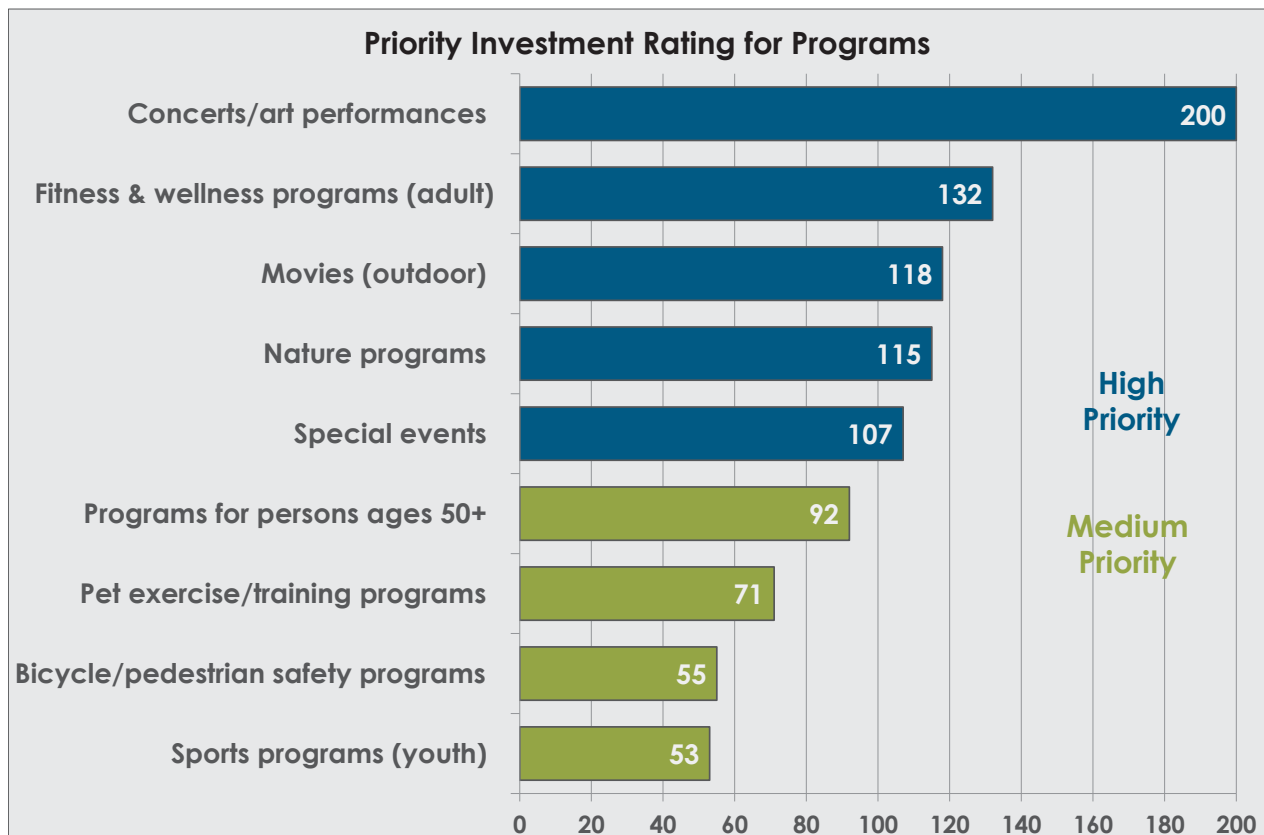


Figure 4.18: Program Priorities for Investment

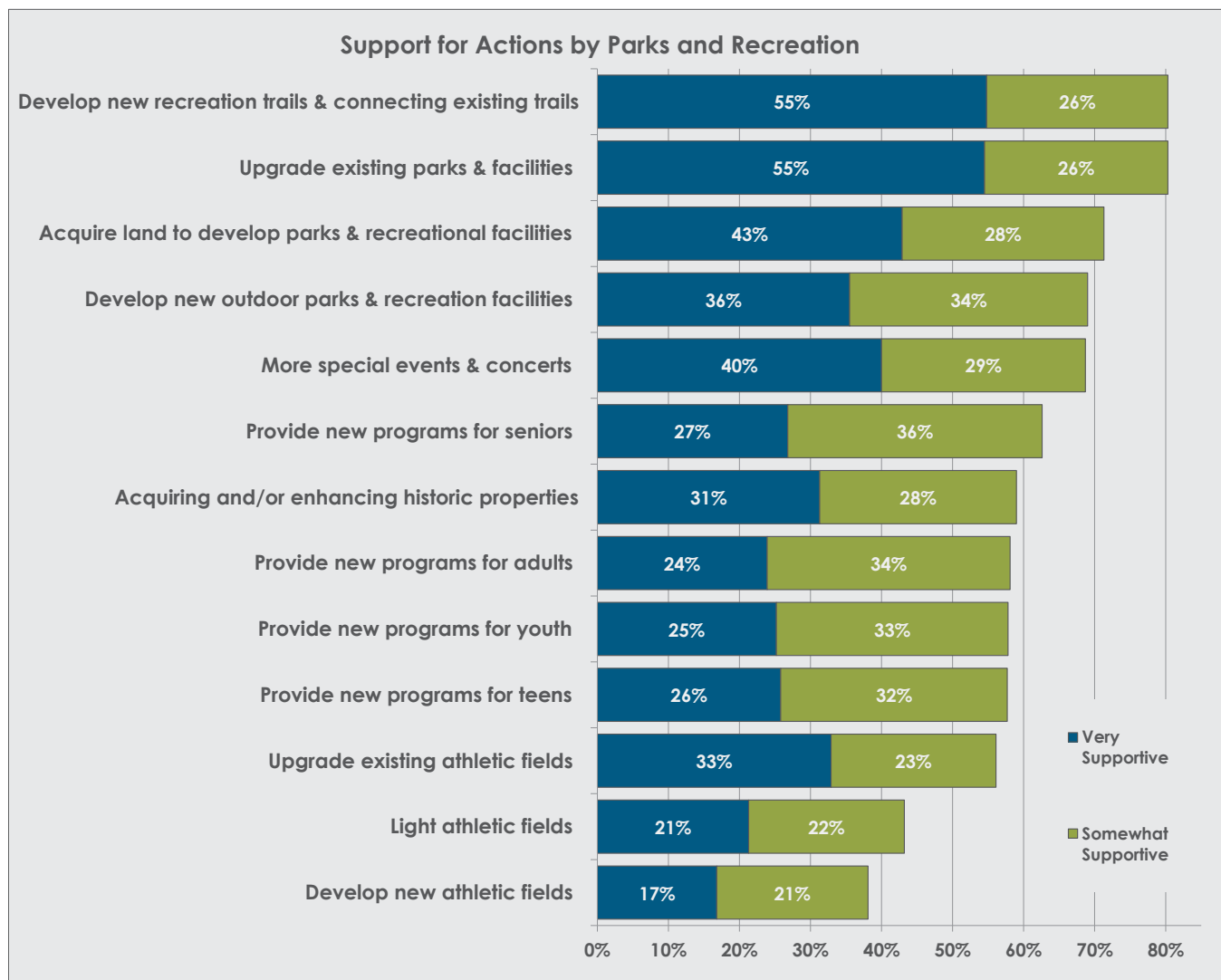


4.4.13 Results - Support for Park Improvements

Mail Survey households were asked to indicate whether they were *very supportive*, *somewhat supportive*, *not supportive*, or *not sure* of 13 different actions Bernardsville could take to improve their parks and recreation services. The results, displayed in Figure 4.19, show the combined total of *very supportive* and *somewhat supportive* responses.

Develop new recreation trails & connect existing trails and upgrade existing parks & facilities each received the highest level of support with 81% of respondents supporting this action (55% *very supportive*). *Acquire & preserve open space & natural areas* ranked third with 71% of respondents supporting this action (43% *very supportive*). *Develop new outdoor parks & recreation facilities* ranked fourth with 70% of respondents supporting this action (36% *very supportive*). More than 50% of respondents supported all but two of the actions, both related to athletic fields. Overall positive feedback illustrates general support from residents for parks and recreation improvements in Bernardsville.

Figure 4.19: Support for Actions to Improve Parks and Recreation

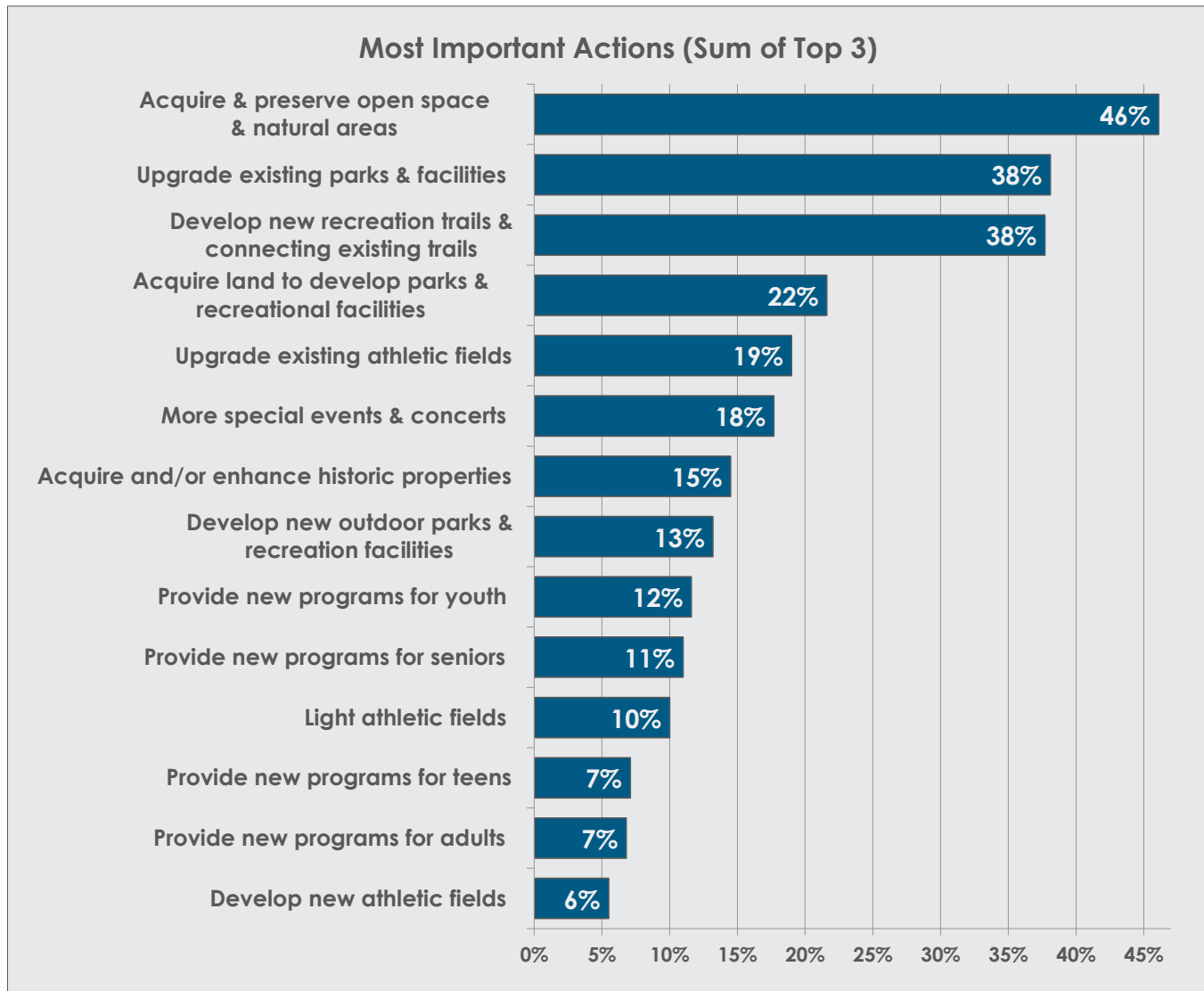


4.4.14 Results – Most Import Action to Take (Sum of Top 3)

Survey participants were asked to identify which of the actions were most important for Recreation to take to improve the quality of the system. Figure 4.20 shows the results of this question, revealing land acquisition and upgrades to the existing system as the most important actions the borough can take. **Forty-six percent (46%) of households identified acquire & preserve open space & natural areas as one of their top three**

actions, while 38% selected **upgrades to existing parks & facilities or develop new recreation trails & connect existing trails**. These results correspond to the unmet needs and investment priorities outlined above and illuminate clear preferences felt by Bernardsville households: connectivity across the community, access to and preservation of nature, and improvements to existing parks and facilities.

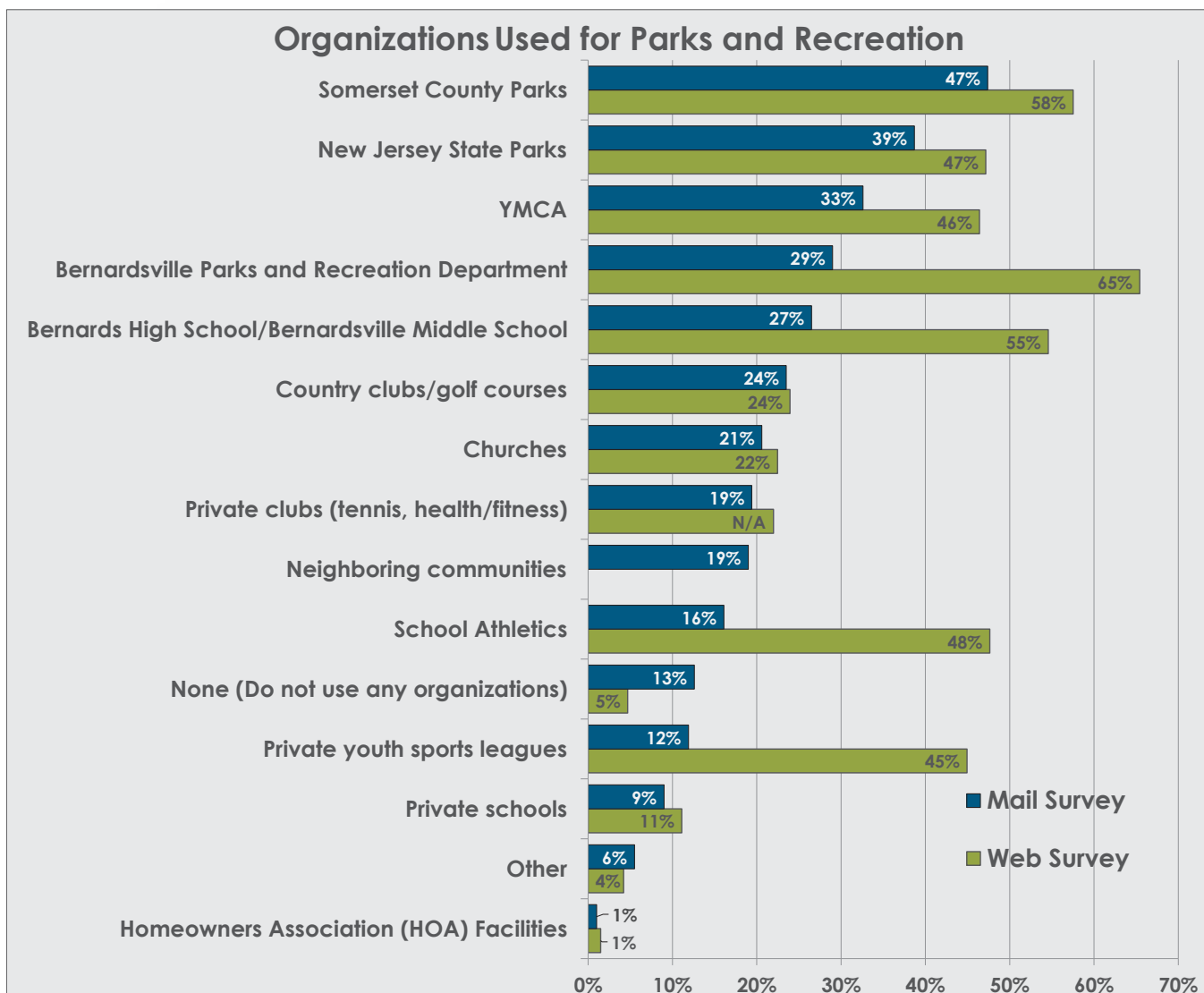
Figure 4.20: Most Important Action for Improving Parks and Recreation in Bernardsville



4.4.15 Results – Organizations Used for Parks & Recreation Activities

Building on the assessment of Bernardsville Recreation's offerings, both the Web and Mail Surveys asked respondents to identify which organizations they use to access recreational programs and activities. Figure 4.21 shows the results of these survey responses. According to the statistically valid Mail Survey responses, **Somerset County Parks, New Jersey State Parks, and the YMCA are the top three organizations used by Bernardsville residents to access parks and recreation resources**. Web Survey respondents – as previously pointed out, those who are often intentionally submitting feedback because they already engage with the borough's parks and recreation – returned higher percentages of involvement with several organizations, including the borough's Recreation Department. In fact, of the Web Survey responses, Bernardsville Recreation had the greatest percentage (65%) of any organization, suggesting that those already involved with the department are engaged and committed enough to share their input.

Figure 4.21: Organizations Used for Parks and Recreation Activities



4.4.16 Results - Learning about Recreation or Activities in Bernardsville

Households were asked to identify the ways they learn about Bernardsville Recreation programs and activities (Figure 4.22). Given the survey responses, **word of mouth is the most common way households currently learn about the borough's offerings with nearly two-thirds (59%) of households identifying this method of learning of offerings**. Email notifications and the newspaper were second and third (50% and 47%, respectively). Borough of Bernardsville website was one of the more common sources of information, though still less than the top three and social networking altogether.

As a follow up, and to glean useful insight into how Recreation might best communicate with the community moving forward, participants were asked what method they would prefer for learning about programs and activities (Figure 4.23). Responses to both surveys indicate the same preference trend, with **email notifications as the method most preferred (57% Mail, 83% Web)**. Social networking (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram) is the second most preferred (38% of Mail, 65% of Web responses), followed by the newspaper. There is a notable discrepancy in responses, with a higher percentage of Web Survey respondents selecting borough of Bernardsville website and school communications (52% and 32%, respectively). Figure 4.23 indicates an opportunity for the department to explore digital means, like email communication and social media, as an even more effective way to market services to residents.

Figure 4.22: Ways Households Learn about Recreation and Activities

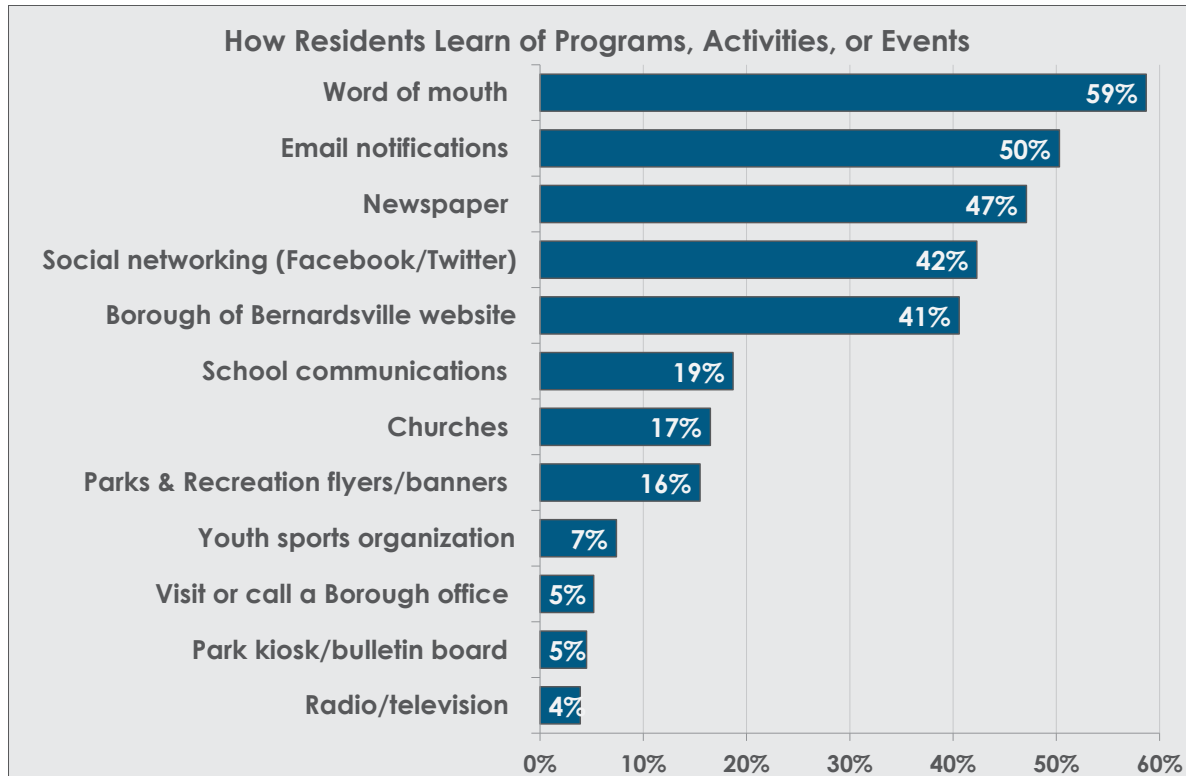
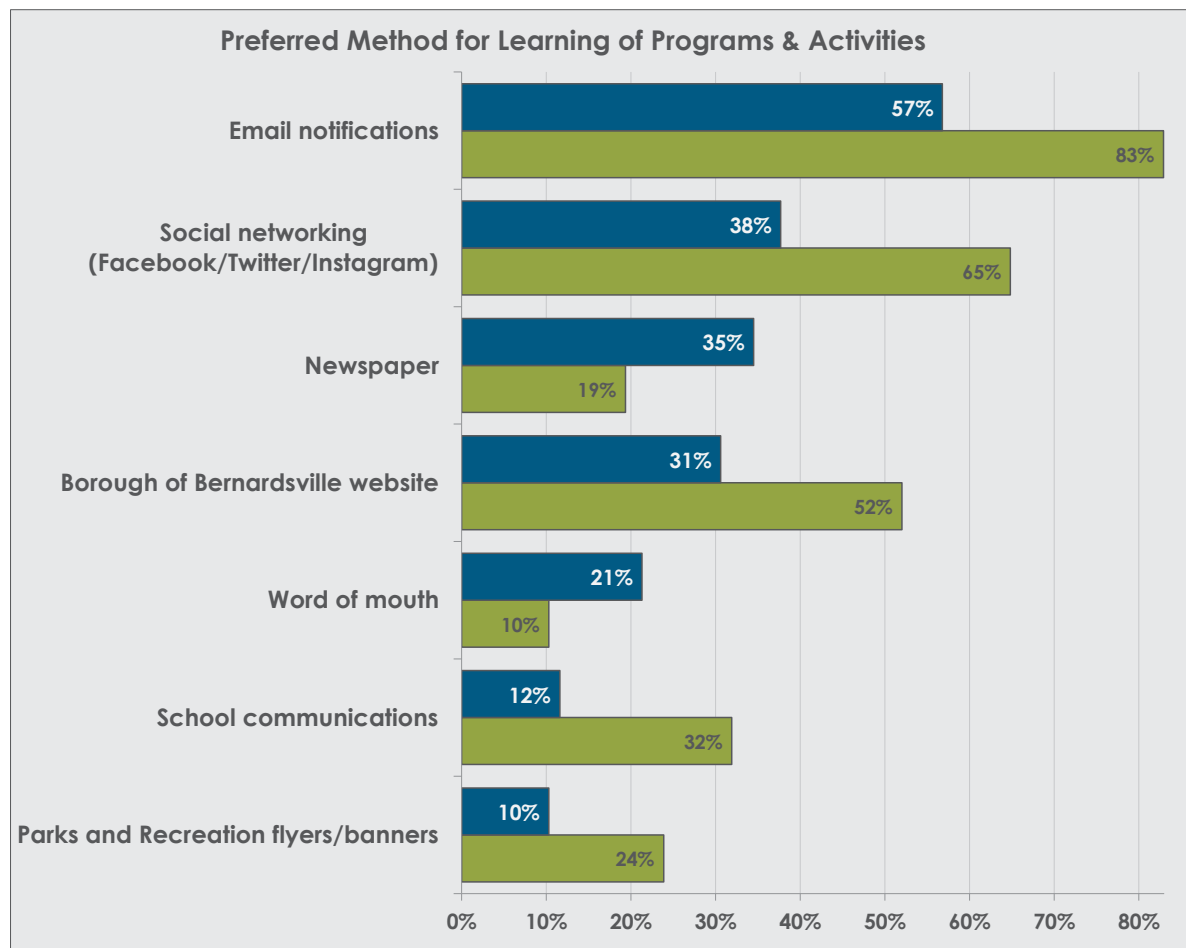


Figure 4.23: Ways Households Would Like to Learn about Recreation and Activities

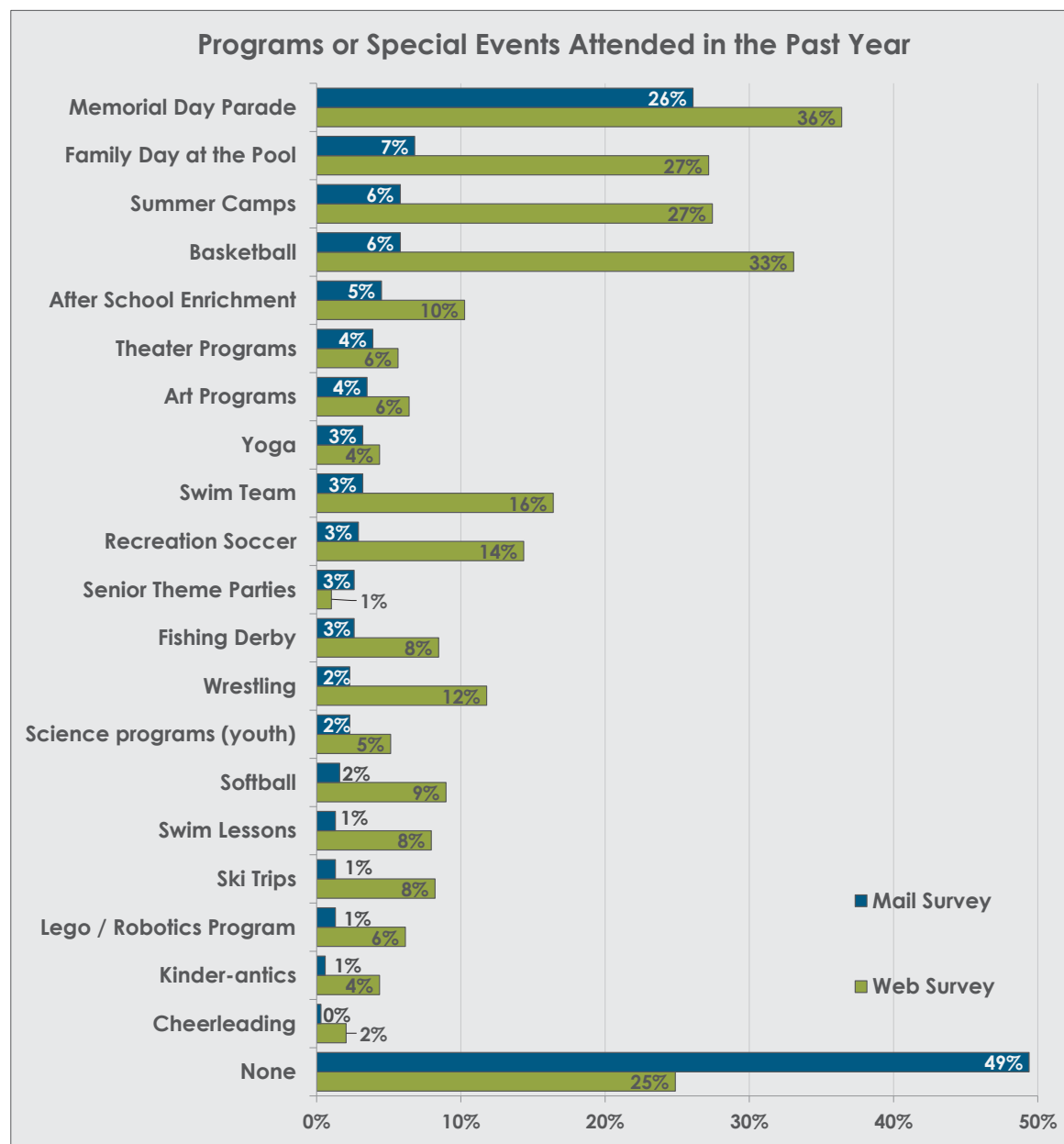


4.4.17 Results – Programs or Special Events Attended in the Past Year

Bernardsville Recreation partners with a number of organizations to offer or sponsor a variety of events for the community. To understand which programs or events have the highest attendance, the surveys asked households to identify attendance in the last year. These numbers highlight that signature community festivals – events that are unique in the area – draw the greatest numbers. **The top attended event by both sets of survey respondents was the Memorial Day Parade (26% Mail, 36% Web).** After that, less than 10% of the statistically valid Mail Survey responses said their households had attended any of the other programs or events. However, between 25% and 35% of Web Survey respondents had attended *Family Day at the Pool*, *summer camps*, and *basketball programs*. Only about 50% of households had not attended any of the borough's programs or events in the past year, contrasted with the roughly 80% who indicated they did not participate in programs; this disparity suggests households are more likely to use special events than programs.

Considering the percentage of households who do not participate in activities because they are not aware of what is available (60% of Mail Survey responses, see Subsection 4.4.20), opportunities likely exist to improve marketing and promotion.

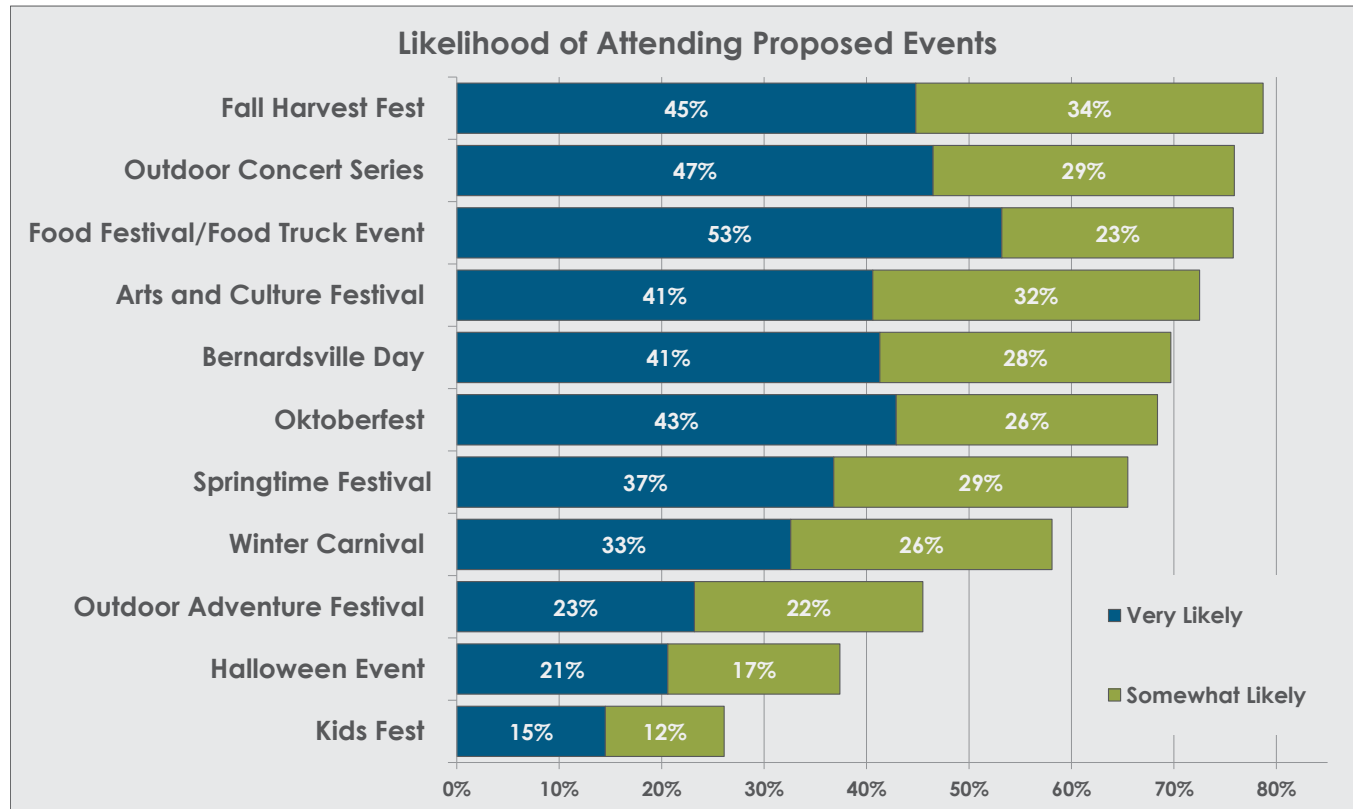
Figure 4.24: Programs or Events Attended in the Past Year



4.4.18 Results – Likelihood of Attending Proposed Events

To help the borough navigate future event programming efforts, participants were asked to identify from a list of 11 potential events which ones they would most likely attend. Figure 4.25 shows the **top event combining both “very likely” and “somewhat likely” selections was Fall Harvest Fest (79% of responses)**. The second and third events most likely to be attended were *Outdoor Concert Series* and *Food Festival/Food Truck Event*, each selected by 76% of survey participants. Interestingly, *Food Festival/Food Truck Event* had the highest percentage of “very likely” responses (53%). All but three of the potential events were selected by 50% or more of households as events they would be likely to attend. This information offers a great starting point for strategically pursuing vendors and partnerships to help the borough produce a successful lineup of events.

Figure 4.25: Likelihood of Attending Proposed Events



4.4.19 Allocation of \$100 Between Parks and Recreation Improvements

To further gauge the community’s priorities, survey respondents were asked how they would allocate \$100 between seven different potential parks and recreation improvements. Of the options provided (Figure 4.26), **residents would allocate the largest amount of the presented options (\$16) to build new walking & biking trails followed by build new parks as a close second (\$13)**. Other received the largest allocation at \$19, and the most requested were improvements were to existing facilities and specific new features (e.g., pickleball courts and dog parks).

4.4.20 Results – Reasons for Not Using Parks, Facilities, & Programs

To determine avenues of opportunity for how the department should best realign and move forward, survey participants were asked to share their reasons for currently not utilizing the offerings provided by Bernardsville Recreation more often or at all (Figure 4.27). **Sixty percent (60%) of Mail Survey households selected do not know what is offered as a reason for not using the borough’s parks, facilities, and programs.** Facility or program is not offered was the second highest reason (29% Mail, 34% Web). The different sets of responses follow a similar pattern, however. In the Web Survey, **31% cited the poor condition of facilities as a reason for not using the borough’s parks and recreation facilities.**

Figure 4.26: \$100 Allocation for Park Improvements

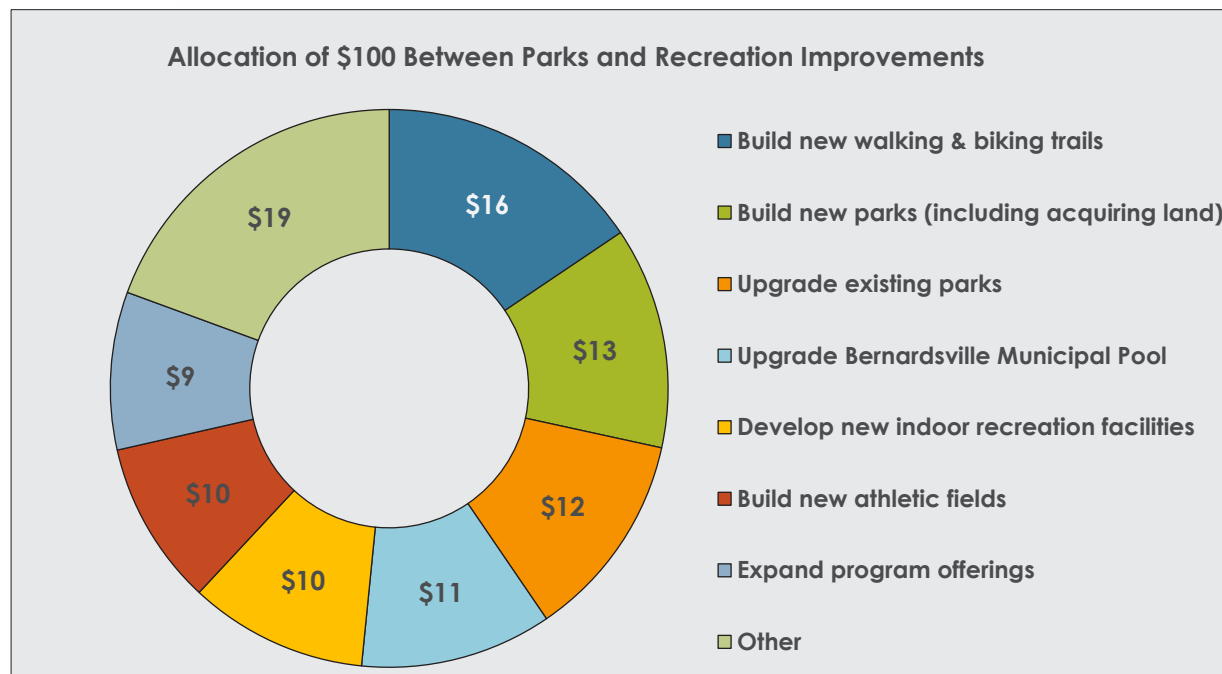
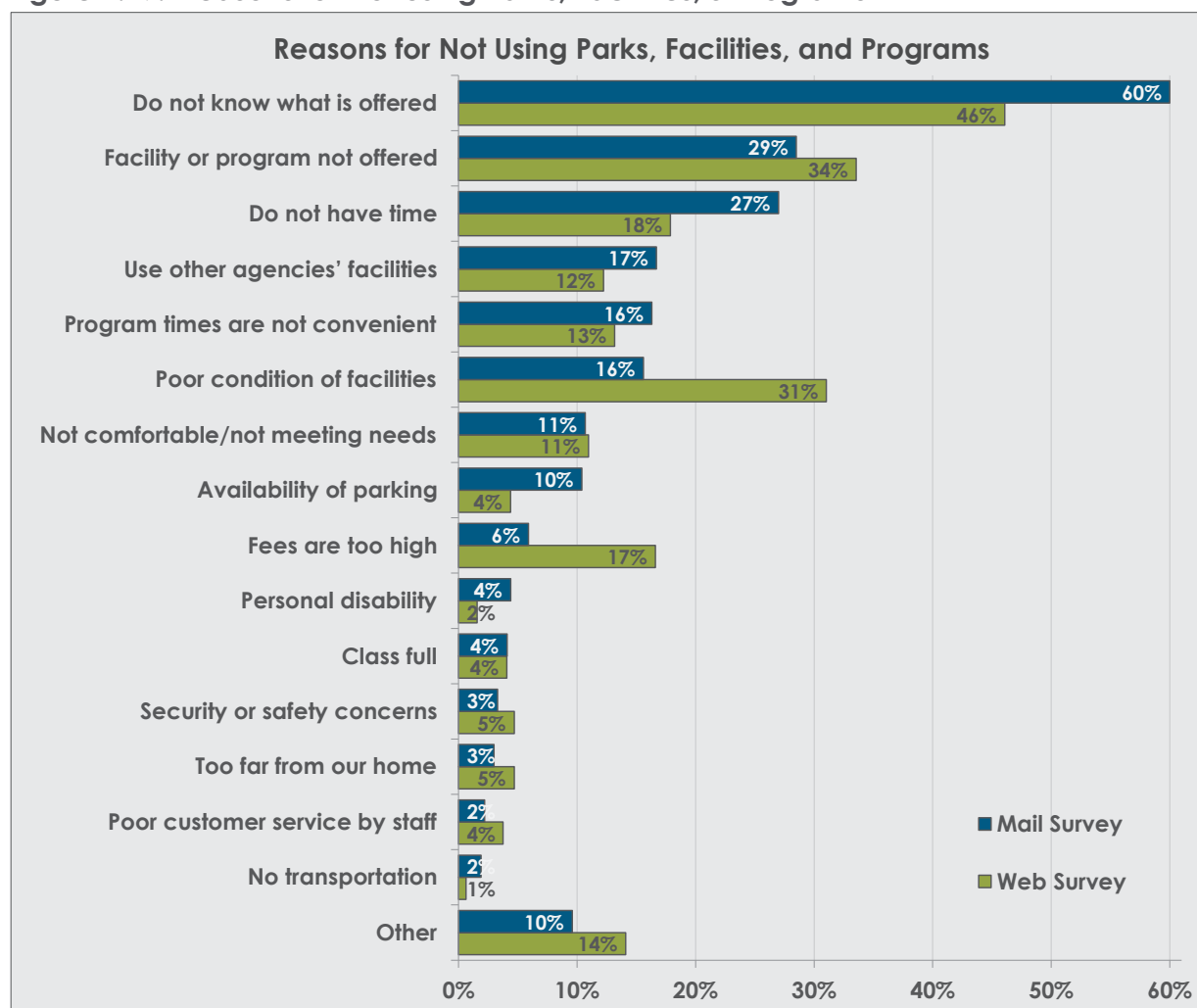


Figure 4.27: Reasons for Not Using Parks, Facilities, & Programs

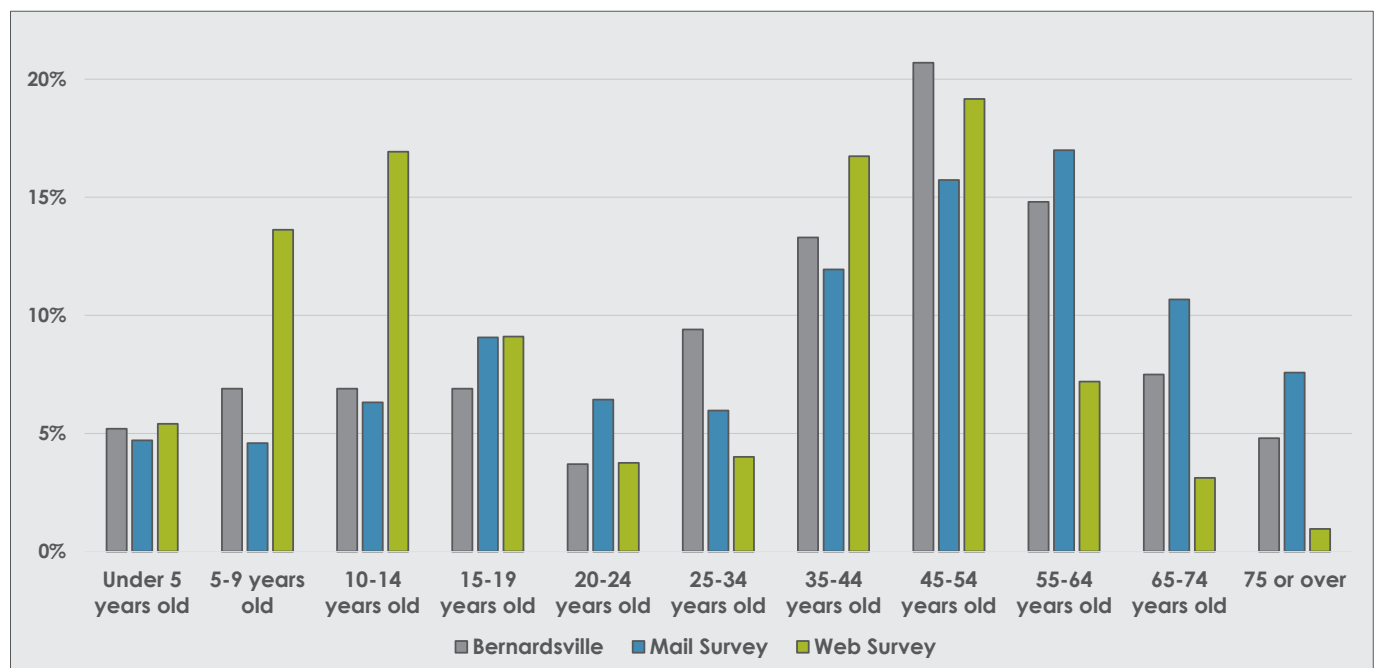


Taking into consideration how the community learns about opportunities, what amenities they use, event attendance, and how residents would like to connect with Bernardsville recreation, there is a clear opportunity for increased and more effective outreach. Establishing consistent email communication and increasing the department's social media presence are ways to improve connection with the community. Since 60% of households (statistically valid Mail Survey) do not even know what opportunities are available, the department should certainly reevaluate and streamline its outreach. And with around 30% of both surveys' participants citing a lack of available programming or facilities, the department should seek ways to develop more programming and facility resources, as well as improving the existing system.

4.4.21 Demographics of Survey Households

The distribution of age groups among respondent households was compared to the most recent population estimates² to verify the degree to which the demographic representation of the surveys correspond with the population of Bernardsville. Figure 4.28 shows the representation by age of survey respondent household members and the estimated 2020 Bernardsville population of each age cohort (the most recent available for these age demographics).

Figure 4.28: Household Demographics of Survey Participants

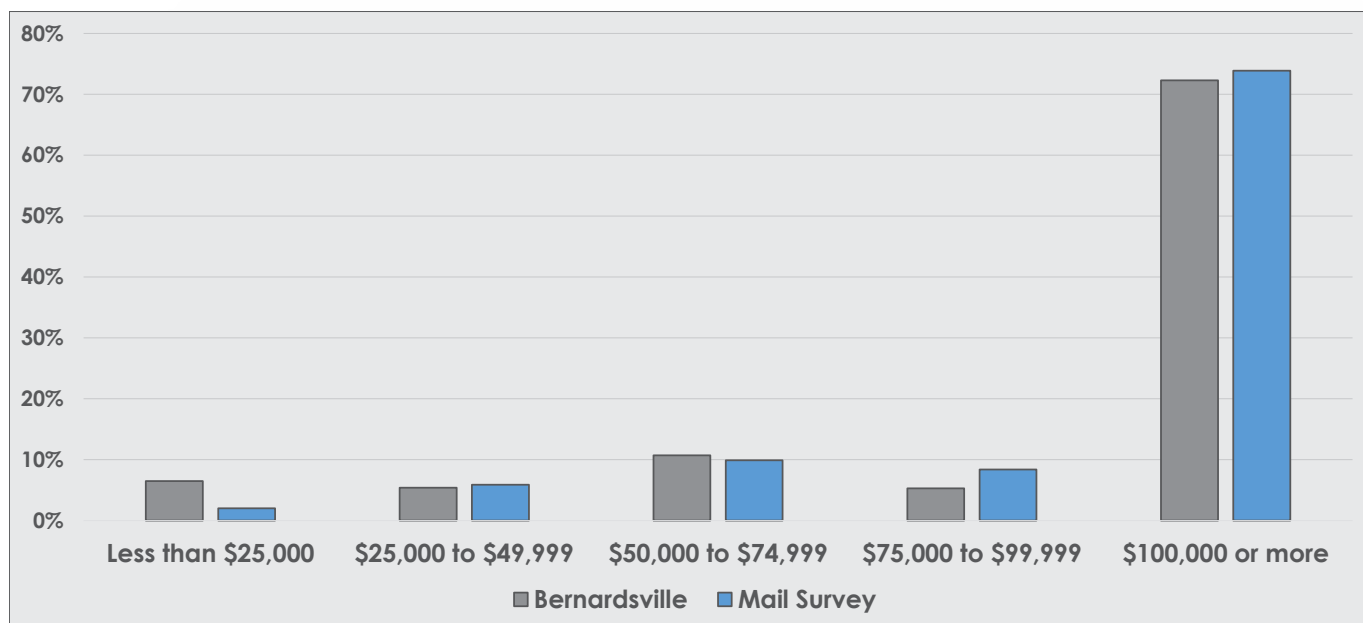


As shown in Figure 4.28, based on the comparison **respondents to the Mail Survey for the most part aligned with the age demographics of Bernardsville, ensuring an accurate representation of the community.** The Mail Survey reached many of the age cohorts at a higher relative percentage, with the exception of those age 25-34 which had the smallest representation overall. Other age cohorts with fewer returned Mail Survey responses, including 35-44 and 45-54, had more Web Survey responses to compensate.

Because the typical Web Survey respondent is already engaging with the park system, the results in Figure 4.28 provide information about the which age groups are the heavier users of Bernardsville parks and recreation offerings. Given the corresponding high percentages for Web Survey respondents age 5-14 and 35-54, it is likely that many of those were completed by families with children. As evident from other elements in this report's assessment, families with children are a major demographic for the borough to continue keeping in consideration.

² 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 4.29: Household Income of Mail Survey Participants



The household income levels of Mail Survey participants are indicated in Figure 4.29. These numbers indicate that the surveys were completed by households with overall similar income levels as the population as a whole. Only the lowest income level was underrepresented by more than 1%.

4.4.22 Distribution of Returned Surveys

ETC Institute provides data for the location of returned surveys (to the nearest block), the results of which are in Figure 4.30. This figure illustrates a relatively balanced distribution of responses throughout Bernardsville considering the population density varies from northwest to southeast. There are less households in the north and western portions of the borough, while the southeast has a higher concentration of development; the distribution of returned surveys reflects Bernardsville's overall population distribution.

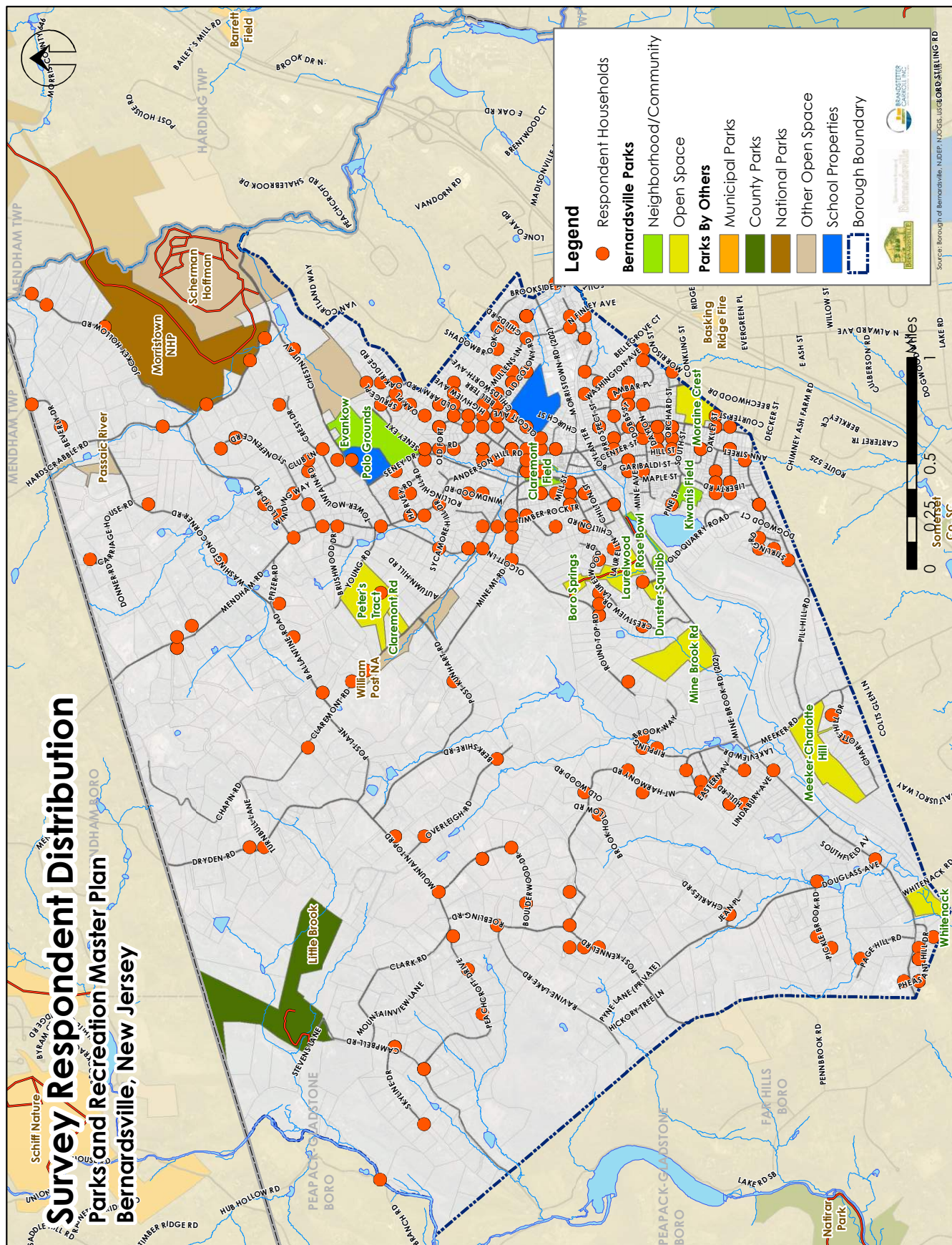
4.5 ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the plan's engagement phase Bernardsville incorporated an online civic engagement tool, MindMixer, as a way to give residents additional opportunities for providing input. Because MindMixer is web-based, individuals are able to access and interact at any time on any given day. The online platform focused exclusively on the Master Plan and created a space for residents to submit their ideas, provide input on priorities, engage in conversation with department leaders and others, as well as stay up to date on the plan's progress.

The MindMixer website was managed and updated by the planning consultants. Questions or "Topics" posted on the platform were meant to be dynamic, and intentionally reflected public dialogue occurring in other facets of the engagement process; doing so helped ensure relevancy and inclusivity. On the open-ended topics, participants could assign points (up to 5) based on whether they agreed with the comments of other users.

Two different types of interactions were used on the website: instant polls and open-ended questions. Over the course of the engagement period, the web-based MindMixer platform experienced a total of **165 interactions by 48 participants, with a total of 51 ideas generated**. The following subsections provide a summary of the results.

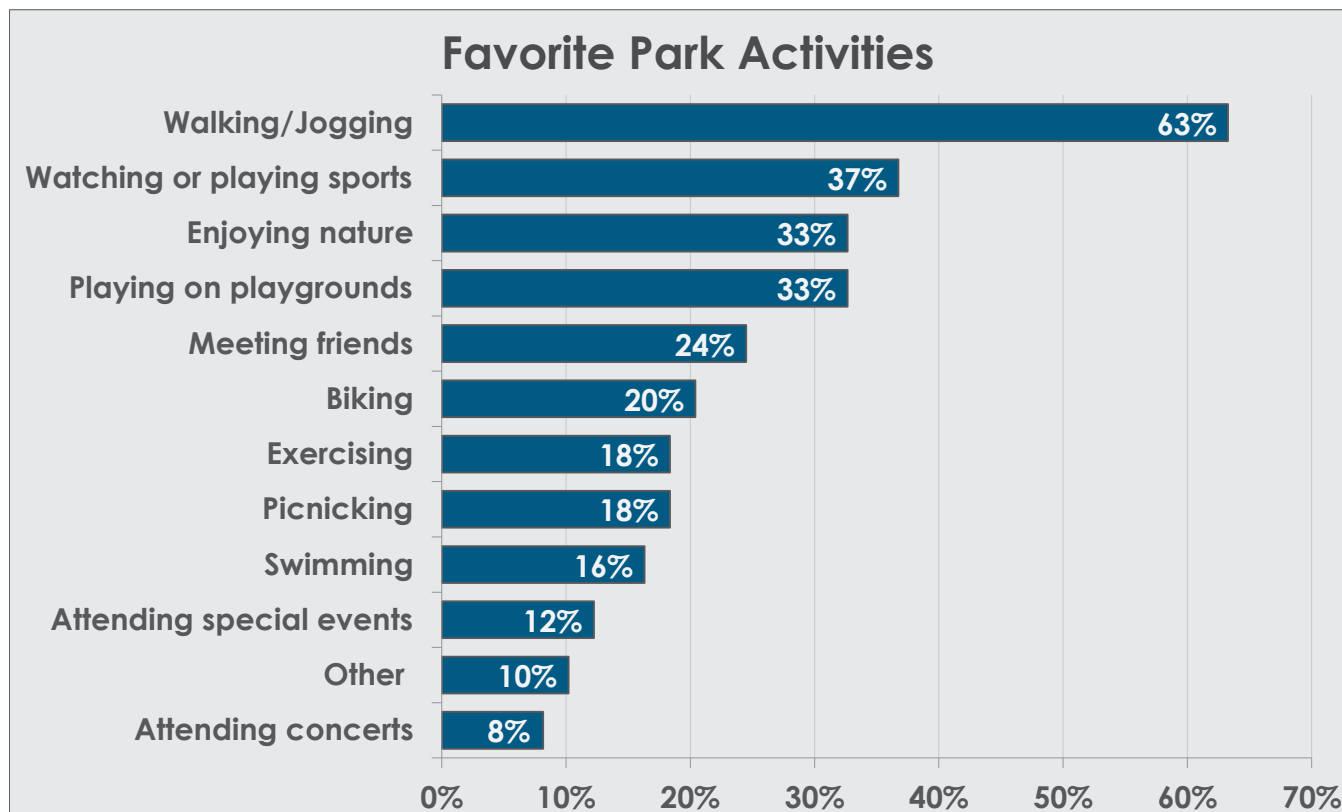
Figure 4.30: Survey Respondent Locations



4.5.1 Favorite Activities

One of the polls presented on MindMixer invited participants to share their favorite activities to do in Bernardsville's parks. Almost 150 different votes were cast for a total of 15 different kinds of activity. **The leading favorite was walking/jogging with 31 votes in total (63%),** followed by watching or playing sports (18 votes), playing on playgrounds (16 votes), and enjoying nature (16 votes).

Figure 4.31: Favorite Park Activities



4.5.2 Improvements to Parks

A range of different “topics” encouraged participants to define their vision for the borough’s future parks and recreation and to share that vision with the planning team, especially staff. The following were the open-ended topics available on the platform:

- During this COVID-19 pandemic, what do you miss most about your Bernardsville parks and recreation?
- If you had a magic wand, what one change would you make to improve parks and recreation opportunities in Bernardsville?
- How can the borough of Bernardsville improve parks and facilities?
- How can the borough of Bernardsville improve its trails and natural areas?
- How can the borough of Bernardsville improve opportunities for programs and events?

A distillation of the 51 ideas and 165 interactions generated by these questions is provided in Figure 4.32. The items outlined reveal the recurring themes pertaining to desired improvements (ideas which received 10 or more votes); they are listed in the order of frequency.

While the MindMixer engagement is a comparatively more limited selection of public input, the results in Figure 4.32 do complement the ideas, concerns, and preferences identified via other engagement methods. Walkable trails and connectivity, along with upgrades and improved amenities, were the most discussed issues on MindMixer; these coincide with the most important and unmet needs for facilities detailed in the Mail and Web Survey results above.

Figure 4.32: Mind Mixer Results – Improvements Needed (Most “Discussed” Topics)



4.6 CONCLUSION

As a whole, the public engagement process provided an abundance of information about the needs and desires of Bernardsville residents. While a variety of methods were used to collect data, several trends do emerge.

Comprehensive results indicate that, on the whole, the community desires:

- Improvements to existing parks
- Preservation of and access to natural areas
- Connectivity and trails, including
 - New trails
 - Added sidewalks and walking paths
 - Perimeter trails in existing parks
 - Paved walking and bike paths
 - Mountain bike trails
 - Trail lighting
- More community programs and special events
 - Concerts & live performances
 - Fitness & wellness classes (adult)
 - Nature classes & activities

-
- Special events continued and expanded: Memorial Day Parade, Family Day at the Pool, Summer Camps, Basketball Games/Tournaments
 - Support Amenities
 - Restrooms
 - Improve signage and wayfinding
 - More shade
 - More seating
 - Improved marketing and promotion
 - Regular e-blast email communication
 - Online registration

The word cloud image below, Figure 4.33, uses font size to show how frequently a word appears in the public comments (collected from stakeholder conversations, in-park intercept survey results, and Web Survey results). While value is not applied to any one word – for example, whether or not residents spoke in favor of a feature or site – the graphic is valuable because it visualizes the parks and recreation elements in Bernardsville that are most important, for better or worse, to the community. This image is provided in conclusion to reinforce the myriad comments, suggestions, and requests heard during the multifaceted public engagement phase.

PUBLIC INPUT







NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the Master Plan identifies and presents an assessment of needs for parks and recreation in Bernardsville. It consists of the following elements:

1. Needs analysis, plus level of service standards and guidelines for parkland and recreation areas
2. Needs analysis, plus level of service standards for facilities
3. Geographic analysis of the distribution of parks and recreation facilities
4. Examination of recent – and relevant – trends in parks and recreation

An analysis of the level of service for parks and recreation in Bernardsville requires various perspectives in order to tell a complete story. By one method of measurement, a particular service level might be described as adequate, but by a different method it is deficient. For example, acreage standards (i.e., measurement based on the total number of acres) are useful for determining the level at which the borough is providing parkland. However, total acreage alone does not account for where park acres are located, and, therefore, who actually has access. Accordingly, it is critical to consider the location of the borough's parkland in determining the level of service.

The following information, together with the public input collected (Chapter 4), make up the foundation for recommendations in this plan (Chapter 7). Additionally, analysis throughout this chapter makes significant use of the demographic and benchmarking data from Chapter 2.

5.2 NEEDS, STANDARDS, AND GUIDELINES FOR PARKLAND AND RECREATION AREAS IN BERNARDSVILLE

The Service Level Standards provided here are meant to describe achievable targets (e.g., specific acreage totals and service goals) that can realistically be met over the implementation timeline of this plan. Guidelines are offered to cover more general goals of improvement, acquisition, and maintenance. These standards and guidelines are meant for both developed parkland and total open space in the system. Tailored specifically for Bernardsville, they are intended to be obtainable but also ambitious enough to inspire Bernardsville Recreation in its continuing work of improving the quality of life for residents.

Parkland is generally either developed or undeveloped. Developed acres include features such as athletic fields and courts, picnic shelters, playgrounds, and any mowed areas, while undeveloped acres are those

in their natural state, including woodlands, prairies, wetlands, without developed features. When acquired and maintained at a beneficial ratio (specific to the locality) both types of park acre usage can have a tremendous positive impact on the human population and the environment.

5.2.1 Level of Service Standards for Developed Acres

Chapter 3 described the different classifications of parks and recreational areas (in general, these are consistent with the National Recreation and Park Association criteria but do include some modifications to match local circumstances) and provided an overview of facilities in Bernardsville. That inventory – combined with an examination of existing conditions and a thorough analysis of public input – assists with accurately defining the Level of Service Standards (acres per thousand population) for each park classification located in Bernardsville.

The chart that follows – Service Level Standards by Park Classification (Table 5.1) – offers a breakdown of the needs (or target acres) for each type of park in Bernardsville. This table includes only properties offered by Bernardsville Recreation. Also, the standards refer to developed acres only. Because these acres represent the improved land with amenities, they are the best basis for drawing a comparison between available features.

Table 5.1: Service Level Standards for Developed Acreage by Park Classification

Park Classification	Existing Developed Acres	Existing Developed Acres per 1000 Population	Target Acres per 1000 Population	2020 Developed Acres Target	2020 Surplus (+) Deficit (-)
Neighborhood	11.1	1.4	1.5	11.9	-0.8
Community	21.7	2.7	4	31.7	-10.0
Natural Areas	13.9	1.8	2	15.9	-2.0
Total	46.7	5.9	7.5	59.5	-12.8

1. See Chapter 2 for population estimates

2. Does not include parks by others or school grounds

Table 5.1 identifies the current developed park acreage for Bernardsville (see Chapter 2). While the population count is not projected to dramatically change, there has been a trend of diversification (see Chapter 2) that is likely to continue as populations of various racial and ethnic groups grow. Existing acreage per 1,000 population (Table 5.1) shows a slight deficit moving forward for Community Parks and Natural Areas. These deficits represent development of a Community Park at the 271 Mine Brook Road property and improved accessibility, trails, and signage at some of the open space properties.

These small deficits can largely be met through strategic, conscientious development of existing land, although limited acquisition in the long-term may be desired in specific portions of the borough. Taken together, this data indicates that Bernardsville Recreation should focus on upgrades to existing spaces with limited, targeted development where possible.

5.2.2 Guidelines for Open Space

Park systems provide invaluable benefits to public health,¹ economies,² local environment and ecology,³ community social fabric, and overall quality of life.⁴ Beyond an individual park's developed acreage, any given park system includes additional undeveloped open space and natural areas. These acres, while easily overlooked, have tremendous potential to benefit the community. Undeveloped open space, or even acres

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Parks, Trails, and Health Resources. cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/parks_resources.htm

² NRPA and Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University (2021). The Economic Impact of Parks: An Examination of the Economic Impacts of Operations and Capital Spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the U.S. Economy.

³ John L. Crompton (2008). Empirical Evidence of the Contributions of Park and Conservation Lands to Environmental Sustainability: The Key to repositioning the Parks Field. *World Leisure Journal*, 50(3), 154-172

⁴ John L. Crompton (2008). Empirical Evidence of the Contributions of Leisure Services to Alleviating Social Problems: A Key to Repositioning the Leisure Services Field. *World Leisure Journal*, 50(4), 243-258.

that are lightly developed as parks, can positively impact an entire community through improvements to air and water quality, increased biodiversity, wildlife habitat protection, noise reduction, reduction of erosion, and protection of water resources.⁵

Setting acreage targets – aiming for a certain number of parkland acres overall – is one way of achieving a desired level of open space. Target acreage can be a useful way for evaluating the progress of open space acquisition, but effective conservation requires more intentional acquisitions based on a specific resource and where it is found. In other words, looking at open space acquisitions through a conservation lens, the amount of land preserved depends on aspects of that particular resource not just on the number of acres. Land preservation in general has many benefits, such as increased quality of life for residents and elevated property values. In order for these benefits to be shared equitably – benefits typically are higher the closer the proximity – open space should be looked at from a holistic perspective taking into additional consideration natural resources and distribution. What follows is an examination of the current state of open space in Bernardsville.

Methods of Measurement

Two common metrics are typically used for measuring the level of service of open space: acres per population and percentage of total area. Both are provided below to serve as guidelines for evaluating and measuring open space available in Bernardsville. Table 5.2 identifies total acres of parks and open space acreage, both developed and undeveloped, in Bernardsville.⁶ The table shows inventory targets based on 30 acres per 1,000 population and 3% of the total acreage in the borough. The 30 acres per 1,000 is a slight but feasible increase from the current 28 value for Bernardsville, while the 3% of total area number is a similarly slight increase from 2.7%.

The values were chosen because Bernardsville is already well above the benchmark comparisons in terms of acres per population and percentage of area (see benchmarking in Chapter 2); also, the increase is small because it is meant to set a reasonable standard for the borough moving forward. The availability of land in Bernardsville is limited, and the cost is high. However, public input indicates that Bernardsville still has some need for open space acquisition.

The service area mapping provided later in this chapter (Sections 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6) shows some areas where service could be improved, and where the borough lacks parkland. Land owned by other agencies, including Somerset County Parks, the National Park Service, and nonprofit-owned land, is provided in Table 5.2 for reference only. This land is not included in the recommendations because the borough has no control over it, and parks by others were not included in the benchmark comparisons.

Acres per Population

Using the target of 30 acres per 1,000 population, Bernardsville has an open space deficit (as of 2020) of only about 20 acres. The target is meant to serve as a feasible goal over the next 5-10 years but is dependent on the availability of land.

Percentage of Total Borough Area

The percentage of total area is not tied to population, changing how the borough compares to the benchmarks based on the per population metric. In part because Bernardsville has a significant amount of more rural and less densely developed landscape, the borough is offering a comparatively large amount of open space to residents. Bernardsville parks currently represent 2.7% of the land in the borough, with Somerset County Parks providing another 1.3%, the National Parks Service providing 2.1%, and nonprofit-owned land 2.3%. As noted above, Table 5.2 includes targets for the borough based on this 2.7% of total area goal. This target would require the acquisition of roughly 30 additional acres, above the per population target and may require more than 5-10 years to accomplish.

⁵ F.D.B. (2007). The economic benefits of land conservation. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land.

⁶ These totals do include some structures, but these features represent a relatively small percentage of the total acreage.

Table 5.2: Open Space Guidelines

Open Space Category	Existing Acres	Existing Acres Per 1000	30 Acres per 1000 Population		Existing % Preserved	3% of Area	
			2020 Target Acres	2020 Surplus/Deficit		Target Acres	Surplus/Deficit
Bernardsville Parks	219.5	27.7	238.0	-18.5	2.7%	248.0	-28.5
Parks by Others							
Somerset County Parks	108.2	13.6	N/A	N/A	1.3%	N/A	N/A
National Park Service	175.8	22.2	N/A	N/A	2.1%	N/A	N/A
Non-Profits ²	191.9	24.2	N/A	N/A	2.3%	N/A	N/A
Bernardsville Total	695.4	87.7	238.0	-18.5	8.4%	248.0	-28.5

1. See Chapter 2 for population estimates

2. New Jersey Audubon Society, Raritan Headwaters Association, or Passaic River Coalition

5.3 FACILITIES NEEDS ANALYSIS AND LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Like the recommendations for parkland described previously level of service standards for individual park facilities are useful for determining the quantity of recreation facilities needed in the community, both at present and in the future. These standards emerge through examination of the benchmarking (Chapter 2) and the public input findings (Chapter 4); common industry standards and guidelines are also taken into consideration. Table 5.3 details the facilities by type and compares the available supply with the amount needed to meet the targets identified in the table.

5.3.1 Facility Level of Service Rationale

The following text provides the basis for the per population targets for each of the facilities in Table 5.3. Each section breaks down individual elements by describing how the per population target compares to the existing per population supply and makes justifications for any recommended change. As with previous elements in this chapter, the following analysis combines benchmarking data (Chapter 2) with public input (Chapter 4).

Outdoor Recreation Areas

- **Playgrounds** – Set at benchmark, slight increase from current
- **Picnic Pavilions/Shelters** – Set at increase due to demand and limited availability
- **Trails (miles)** – Set at increase due to demand and trends, between current and benchmark
- **Skate Parks** – Set at benchmark, none currently and likely insufficient population to support
- **Amphitheaters** – Set at 1 due to demand and trends
- **Dog Park** – Set at 1 due to demand and trends
- **Community Gardens** – Set at 1 due to demand and trends
- **Splash Pads** – Set at 1 due to demand and trends
- **Aquatic Centers** – Set at current, above benchmark

Outdoor Fields & Courts

- **Youth Baseball Fields** – Set at current, well above benchmark
- **Youth Softball Fields** – Set at current, well above benchmark
- **Multipurpose Fields** – Set at current, above benchmark
- **Artificial Turf Multipurpose Fields** – Set at current, above benchmark
- **Basketball Courts** – Set at current, above benchmark
- **Tennis Courts** – Set at benchmark, slight decrease, demand declining
- **Pickleball Courts** – Set at increase, trends indicate growth and none currently

Indoor Areas

- **Recreation Centers** – Set at 1, none currently, above benchmark
- **Community Centers** – Set at 1, none currently, above benchmark
- **Gymnasiums** – Set at increase, none currently, slightly below benchmark
- **Senior Centers** – Set at 1, none currently, above benchmark

Table 5.3: Facility Level of Service Standards

Facility	Per Population Target	Existing per Population	Existing Total Supply	2020 Target	2020 Surplus / Deficit
Outdoor Recreation Areas					
Playgrounds	3,400	3,966	2	2.3	-0.3
Picnic Shelters	3,400	N/A	0	2.3	-2.3
Trails (miles)	3,000	15,864	0.5	2.6	-2.1
Skate Parks	12,300	N/A	0	0.6	-0.6
Amphitheaters	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Dog Parks	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Community Gardens	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Splash Pads	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Aquatic Centers	8,000	7,932	1	1.0	0.0
Outdoor Fields & Courts					
Youth Baseball Fields	1,300	1,322	6	6.1	-0.1
Youth Softball Fields	1,300	1,322	6	6.1	-0.1
Multipurpose Fields	2,000	2,644	3	4.0	-1.0
Artificial Turf Multipurpose Fields	8,000	7,932	1	1.0	0.0
Basketball Courts	4,000	3,966	2	2.0	0.0
Tennis Courts	1,300	1,322	6	6.1	-0.1
Pickleball Courts	4,000	N/A	0	2.0	-2.0
Indoor Areas					
Recreation Centers	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Community Centers	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0
Gymnasiums	4,000	N/A	0	2.0	-2.0
Senior Centers	8,000	N/A	0	1.0	-1.0

1. See Chapter 2 for population estimates and benchmarking

5.3.2 Facility Level of Service Standards

The values in Table 5.3 illustrate potential need for various facilities. The largest current facility deficits (as of 2020) are for picnic shelters (-2.3), trail miles (-2.1), and pickleball courts (-2). Other deficits include amphitheaters (-1), dog parks (-1), community gardens (-1), splash pads (-1), and multipurpose fields (-1). As for indoor facilities, all types – recreation centers (-1), community centers (-1), gymnasiums (-2), and senior centers (-1) – are all at a deficit because Bernardsville Recreation currently has extremely limited indoor space.

While values in Table 5.3 highlight what additional facilities are needed to adequately meet the demand, they do not indicate where in Bernardsville these new facilities should be located. The next sections (5.4 and 5.5) help illuminate gaps in service and, therefore, potential locations for new facilities.

5.4 GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS

The spatial distribution of parks throughout Bernardsville is important to consider; residents are better able and more willing to utilize facilities that are close to their homes. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show existing parks with service areas for various park classifications. The methodology for this analysis (and the facility analysis in Section 5.5) can be found in Appendix A. These service areas do not necessarily represent all users of the parks; some users are willing to travel greater distances than those described in the figures. In general, however, the most frequent users live within the areas indicated and usage rates tend to decline sharply when residents have greater travel times.

A 10-minute walking distance represents about a half mile range and is a commonly used measurement for the walkability of an area as most residents can easily travel this distance without a car. The Trust for Public Land, NRPA, and the Urban Land Institute have all joined forces to develop the “10-minute Walk Campaign” which strives for healthy, walkable communities and easy access to Bernardsville space for everyone in the country. As part of the multi-pronged campaign, municipalities commit to ensuring that by 2050 all residents will have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. Mayors throughout the country have already taken the pledge, and more continue to do so. Several mayors throughout New Jersey have already committed: Bloomfield, Bound Brook, Camden, Eatontown, Elizabeth, Fair Lawn, Fanwood, Hoboken, Jersey City, New Brunswick, Newark, Paterson, Piscataway, and Teaneck.⁷

Across the whole borough, 41% live within this 10-minute walking distance of a park (a bit under half of the population), including 35% who can walk to a Neighborhood Park by the borough of Bernardsville. The majority of residents (61%) live within a short driving distance (5-minutes) of a larger park provided by Bernardsville or another entity. Given the community's expressed desire for more trails and connectivity, there is potential for enhancing existing connections and making new paths to ensure walkable access across the community.

Figure 5.1 shows the areas in Bernardsville where residents are within a 10-minute walk to a Neighborhood or Community Park (green), other Bernardsville open space properties (brown), or a park by another agency (orange). This visual illustrates walkable access is concentrated in the eastern and southern parts of Bernardsville. Access to the borough's parks is more limited in the western side of the borough.

Figure 5.2 shows how there is much more comprehensive driving access across Bernardsville. The map shows 5-minute (green) and 10-minute (yellow) drivetimes to Community Parks, including those by others. Nearly the entire borough is within a 10-minute drive to a Community Park, and the more populated areas are within a 5-minute drive. While there is considerable room for improving walkability, just about anywhere in the community is within a 10-minute drive of a park.

5.5 GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF FACILITIES

This portion of the needs analysis focuses on the distribution of facilities provided by Bernardsville for use by residents. Service areas for these key facilities within Bernardsville are illustrated in Figures 5.3 through 5.10. As with the geographic distribution of parks, both drive and walk times are used for defining service areas.

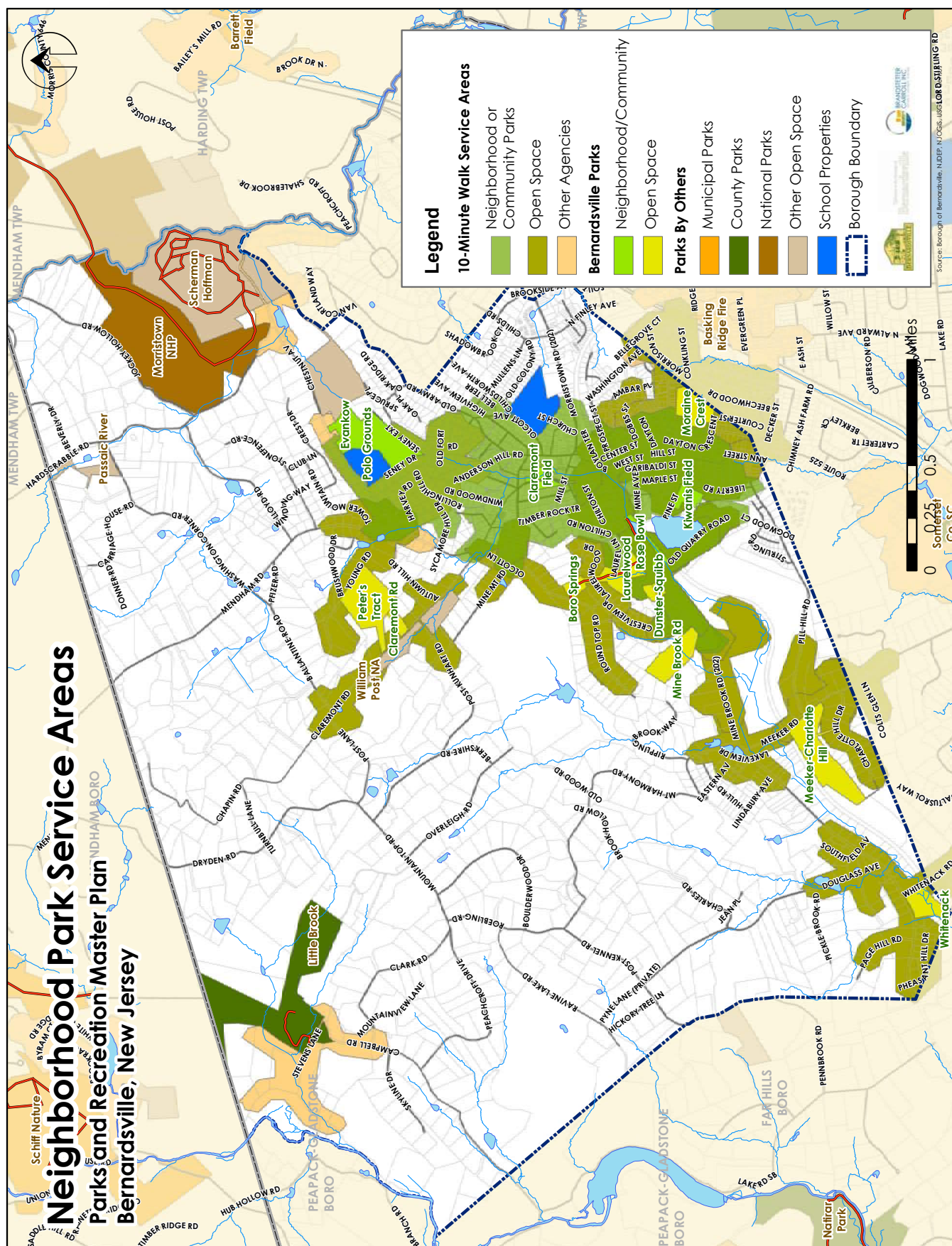
The metrics of access vary slightly, depending on the type of facility. Larger and unique facilities are intended to serve greater populations; typically, residents are willing to travel longer distances to access these amenities (i.e., drive, if necessary). In contrast, smaller and more common facilities usually serve more localized (smaller) populations and are more often within walking distance. The following sections outline the overall need for facilities in Bernardsville; though portions of the borough are highlighted that are located outside of facility service areas, a new facility is not necessarily recommended for these areas.

5.5.1 Playgrounds

Figure 5.3 shows service areas for playgrounds in Bernardsville – that is, what areas are within a 10-minute walk (green), a 5-minute drive (light green), and a 10-minute drive (yellow). The borough offers two playgrounds, one at Kiwanis Fields and another at Claremont Field (i.e., Kuser Park), as well as two more provided by other entities either in or near Bernardsville (e.g., Bedwell School and Southard Park). Walkable access to the playgrounds is concentrated around downtown, in the southeast corner of the borough. Playground

⁷ <https://10minutewalk.org/>

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION



72



service is the most continuous of any facility in the borough. Nearly all of the borough lives within at least a 10-minute drive of the playground, and because much of the western and northern parts of the borough are less densely populated, most of the community is within the 5-minute driving or 10-minute walking distance ranges.

5.5.2 Basketball Courts

As with playgrounds above, Figure 5.4 displays service areas for basketball courts measured by a 10-minute walk, 5-minute drive, and 10-minute drive. Bernardsville offers the community two basketball courts; there are two full courts and a half court offered by other entities within or near borough limits. The map shows that walkable access to basketball courts overlaps partially with playground access, similarly concentrated downtown between the schools, but it is much more limited. As with playgrounds, most of the borough is within a 10-minute drive of a basketball court.

5.5.3 Diamond Fields

Diamond ballfield service areas in Bernardsville (illustrated in Figure 5.5 with service again defined by 10-minute walk, 5-minute drive, and 10-minute drive distances) more closely align with playground access highlighted above. As evident in the figure, nearly all of Bernardsville is within a 10-minute drive (except for a small area in the northwestern most corner, where development is less dense). As before, most of the walkable and 5-minute drive access is concentrated around the borough's downtown. Bernardsville provides six diamond fields, and other entities (outside of but near the borough) offer another five.

5.5.4 Multipurpose Rectangular Fields

Figure 5.6 shows the service areas around multipurpose rectangular fields in Bernardsville. Service at all levels is nearly identical to the basketball court service levels (Figure 5.4). Bernardsville has three multipurpose rectangular fields located at Polo Grounds/Evankow Tract. Other entities near Bernardsville (e.g., Lewis Morris County Park) provide a total of six fields. Again, because of where Polo Grounds is located, walkable access is anchored near downtown in the southeastern corner of the borough. Nearly all residents of Bernardsville are within a 10-minute drive of a rectangular field.

5.5.5 Tennis Courts

Figure 5.7 shows that walkable service areas for tennis courts is more limited than for playgrounds and diamond fields but aligns almost exactly with basketball service. What walkable access there is does correspond to areas of greater population density (and where demand is likely greater). Nearly the entire borough is within a 10-minute drive of a tennis court.

5.5.6 Aquatic Center

Figure 5.8 shows the service area for Bernardsville's Municipal Pool. Because the pool is located at Polo Grounds, service areas are the same as the other similarly located facilities (e.g., tennis courts). Residents living in or near downtown are most likely to be within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk, at the most. Residents in the north and eastern half of the borough have the lowest service.

5.5.7 Dog Park

As the borough itself does not have a dog park within its parks system, the service area for borough households is very limited. Figure 5.9 shows how only the northeastern corner of the borough is within a 10-minute walk of the dog park at Lewis Morris County Park.

5.5.8 Trails

Figure 5.10 shows areas where there is 10-minute walk service to trails of any length or 5-minute drive service to trails of at least one mile in length. The borough parks system offers 0.5 total miles of trails, and other entities within or near Bernardsville provide residents access to more than 144 trail miles. The map shows more

74



Basketball Court Service Areas



Figure 5.5: Diamond Field Service Areas

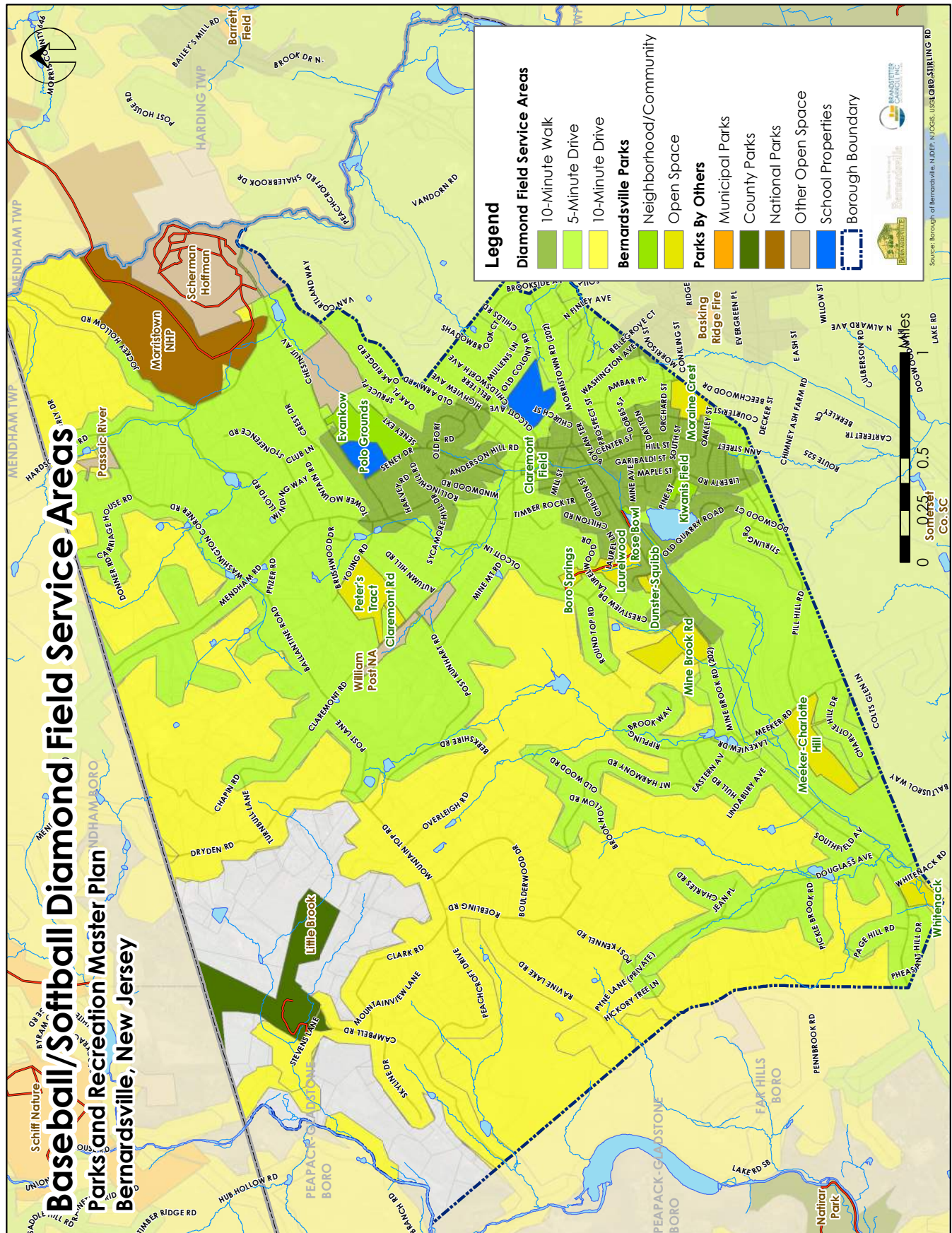


Figure 5.6: Multipurpose Rectangular Field Service Areas

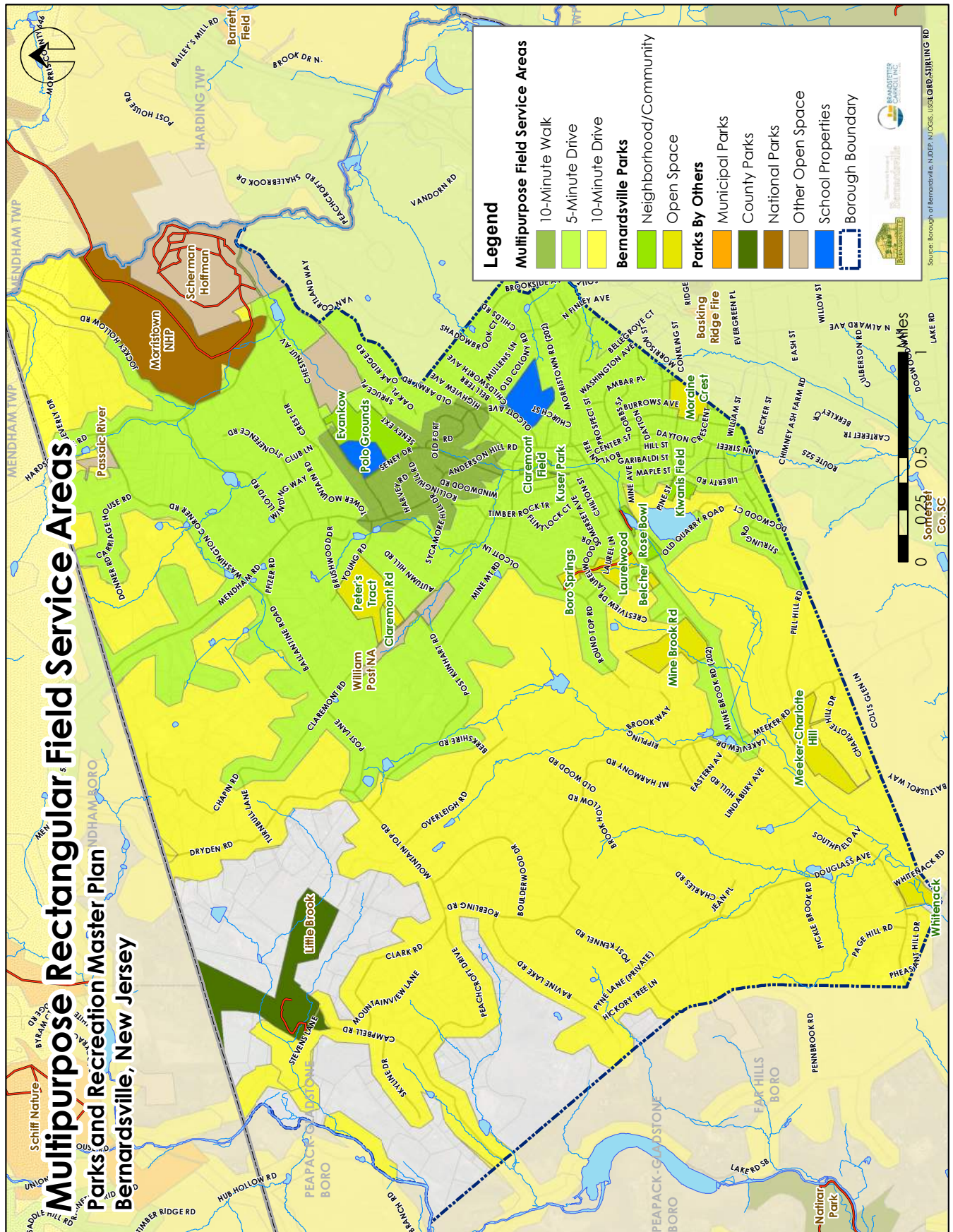


Figure 5.7: Tennis Service Areas

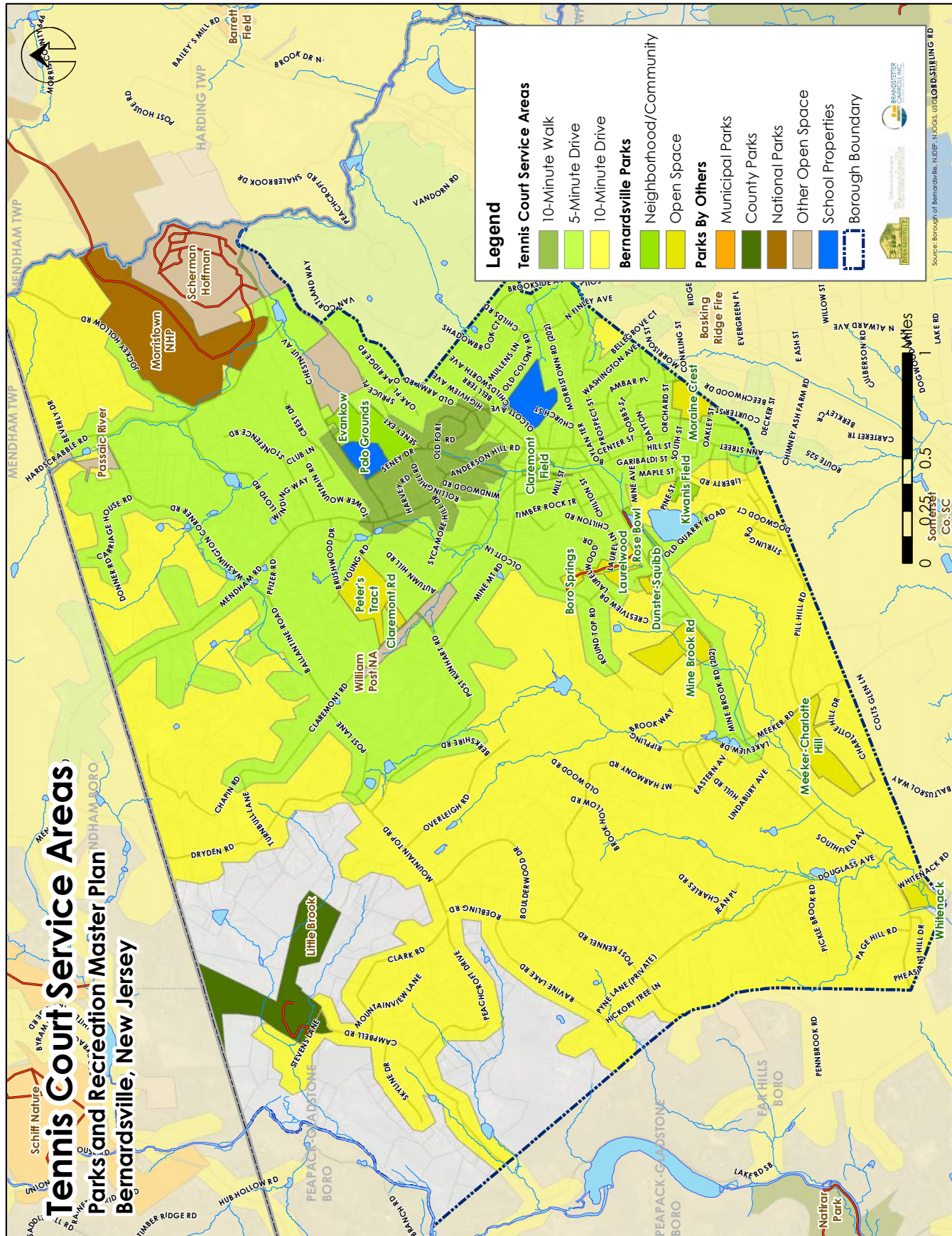


Figure 5.8: Aquatic Center Service Areas

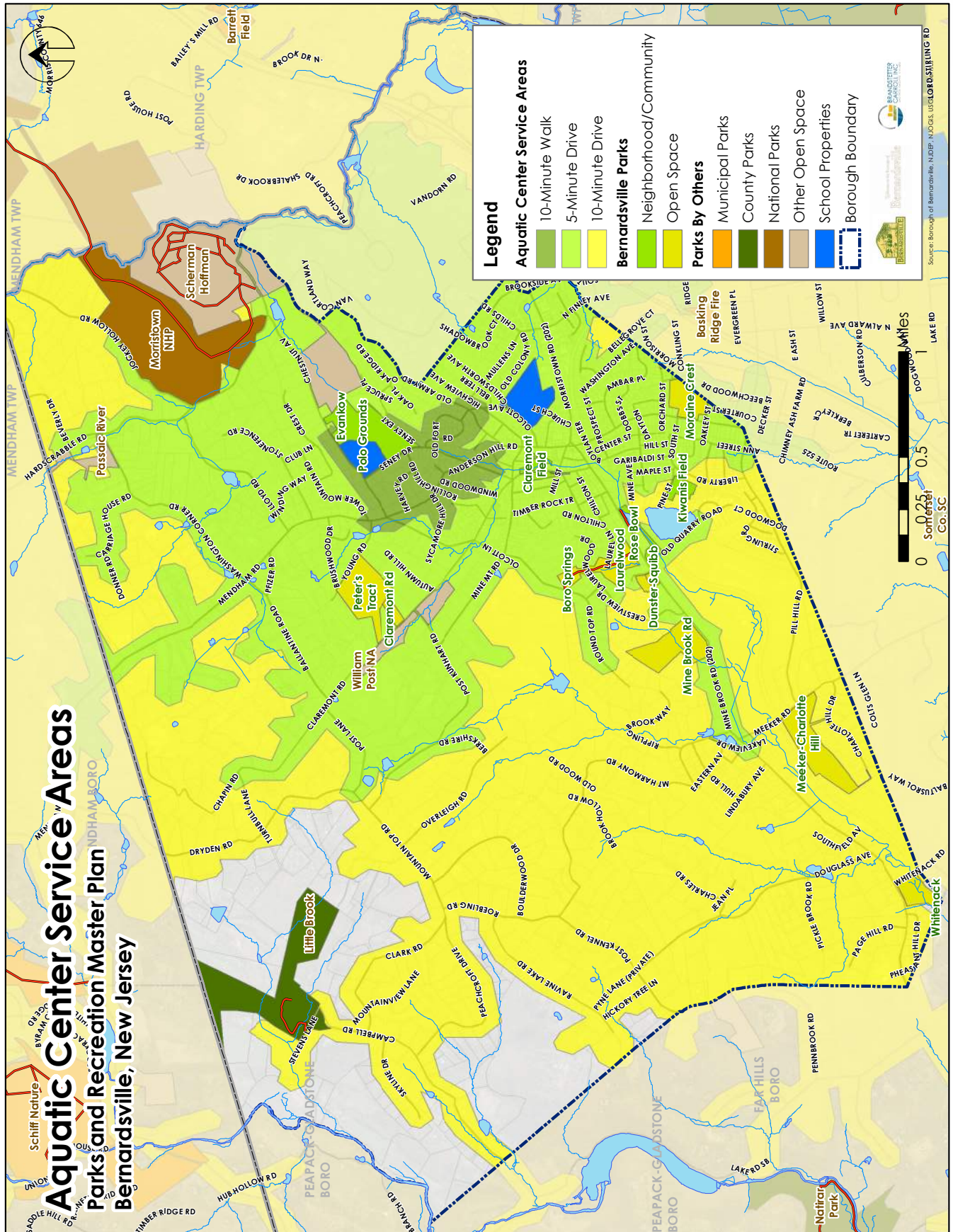


Figure 5.9: Dog Park Service Areas

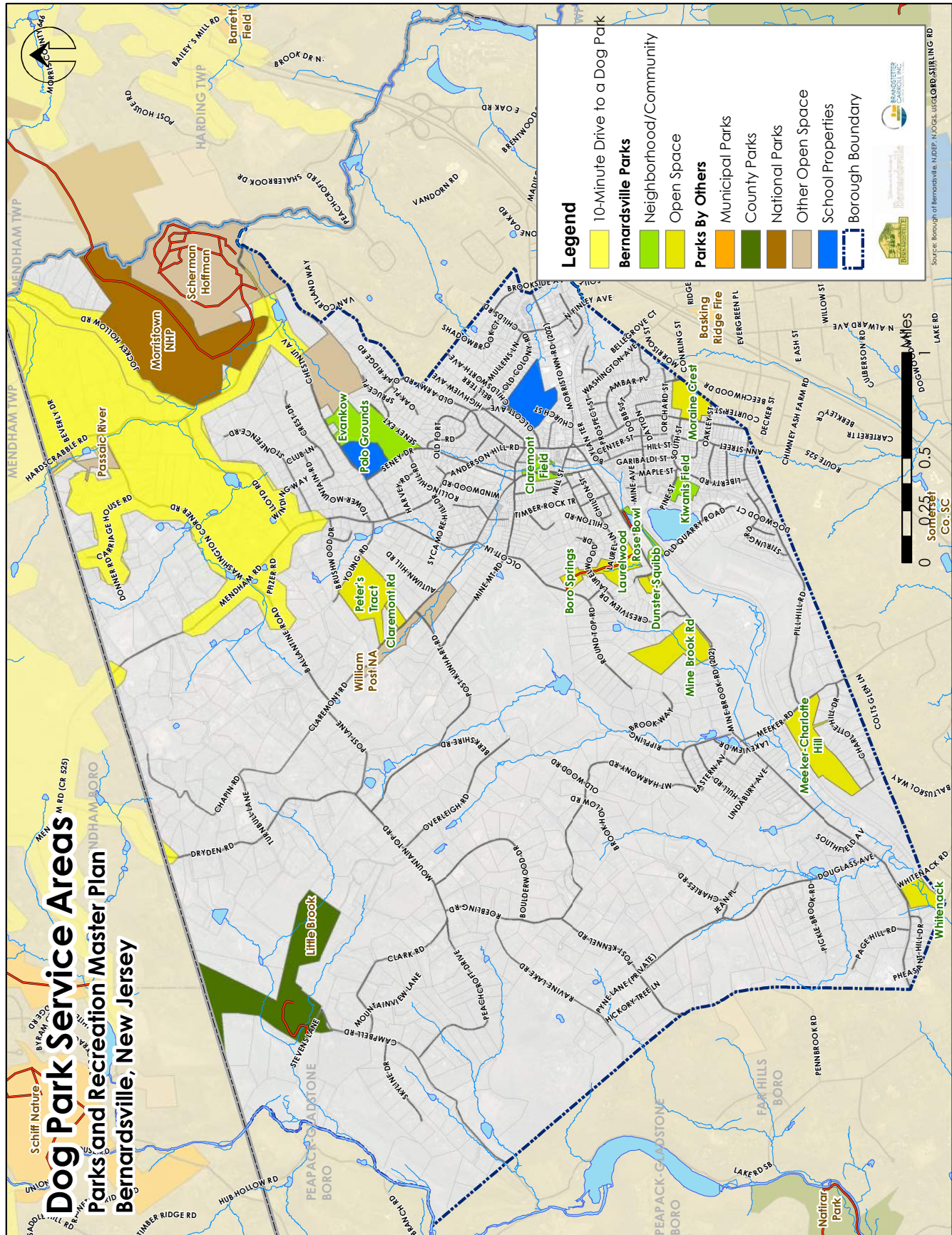
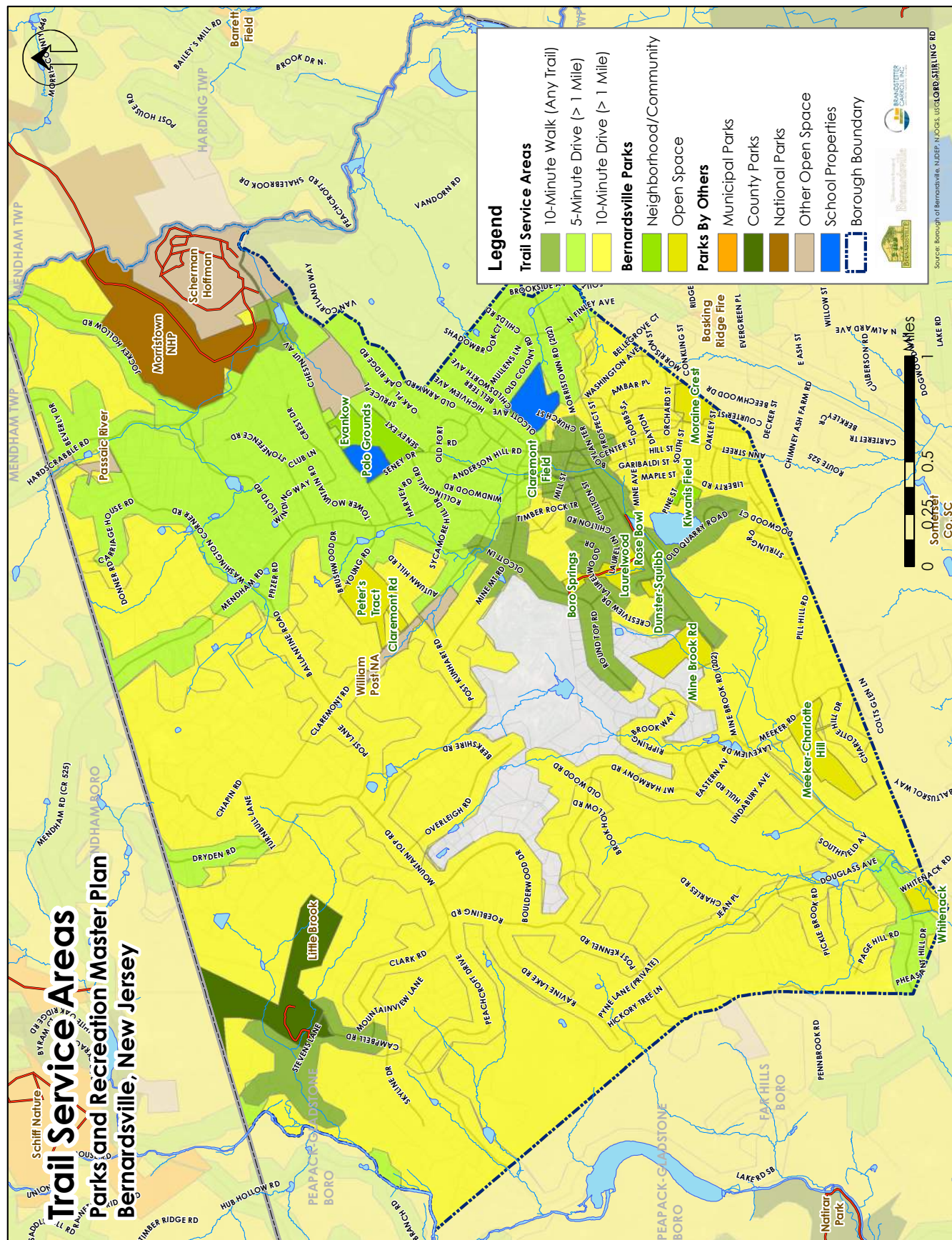


Figure 5.10: Trail Service Areas



extensive walkable service as compared to any of the other facilities outlined above. Except for a small area in the south-central part of the community, all the borough is within a 10-minute drive or less of walking trails. The area with the highest service is again in the eastern half of the borough, with walkability concentrated downtown. There is an additional area, located in the northwest corner of the borough, within which residents are a 10-minute walk from a trail.

5.6 COMPOSITE GEOGRAPHIC PARK SERVICE AREAS

While the preceding text outlined the level of access to parks and facilities by geographic distribution and type, a composite analysis provides a more robust depiction of the level of service residents experience across the borough. Service areas for four park classifications and 11 facilities (some not mapped in Section 5.5.) were assigned scores based on distance from the amenity (e.g., 5-minute drive vs. 10-minute walk), then GIS software (ArcGIS) was used to produce an overlay map with a combined score for all areas of Bernardsville. Figure 5.11 shows the composite service areas for the borough based on this multilayered analysis. A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in Appendix A.

In the figure, blue indicates a higher level of service for parks and facilities (the deeper the shade, the better), while red areas have the lowest level of service (similarly, the deeper the red, the lower the service). For example, a resident living within one of the dark blue areas would more likely be within a short walk to park and/or many of the facilities previously described (e.g., playgrounds and ballfields).

As shown in Figure 5.11, and reflective of service areas for the various facilities outlined above, the highest composite level of service is anchored near downtown and extending from the southeastern corner up into the northeast area of the borough. As the individual facility service level maps showed, high and medium-high level of service areas largely correspond to the areas of higher-intensity development. While there are residents living in all parts of Bernardsville, services and amenities (like commercial businesses and schools) generally follow this centralized pattern. The low service level occurring in the northwest corner corresponds to the lower-intensity development (and significantly less populous) part of the borough.

Table 5.4 reinforces these findings with greater detail. About two-thirds (65%) of the borough's population live in areas with medium-high to high level of service. The percentage of the population living in medium or lower service levels is 35%, with just 3% living in the lowest service areas. Areas within medium or lower service levels also have higher median household income and the smallest percentages of under 18 population by comparison.

Table 5.4: Population by Composite Service Area

Service Level (Rank)	Proportion at Composite Service Level				Median Household Income	Diversity Index	Under Age 18
	Population	Cumulative Population	Area	Cumulative Area			
High (80%-100%)	31%	31%	8%	8%	\$154,149	47	25%
Medium-High (60%-80%)	34%	65%	30%	37%	\$158,588	35	27%
Medium (40%-60%)	10%	75%	18%	56%	\$163,302	54	22%
Medium-Low (20%-40%)	22%	97%	32%	88%	\$171,181	48	22%
Low (0%-20%)	3%	100%	12%	100%	\$200,001	21	21%

5.7 TRENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION

The following text analyzes national trends in recreation, including types of activities and their associated facilities. It begins with a look at participation rates for various activities – using data from the Sport and Fitness Industry Association – and then provides a deeper dive into the latest trends (relevant to Bernardsville) occurring in programming and facilities across the nation.

There will be different emphasis and considerations particular to Bernardsville but also an exploration of overall patterns. Looking through a broader lens can provide insight into the origin and trajectory of more localized preferences. Understanding how trends in fitness, recreation, athletics, and cultural resources reflect in the

Composite Service Areas
Parks and Recreation Master Plan
Bernardsville, New Jersey

Service Level (Rank)	Population	Cumulative Population
High (80%-100%)	31%	31%
Medium-High (60%-80%)	34%	65%
Medium (40%-60%)	10%	75%
Medium-Low (20%-40%)	22%	97%
Low (0%-20%)	3%	100%

Legend

- Service Level (Percentile)**
 - High (80%-100%)
 - Medium-High (60%-80%)
 - Medium (40%-60%)
 - Medium-Low (20%-40%)
 - Low (0%-20%)
- Bernardsville Parks**
 - Neighborhood/Community
 - Open Space
- Parks By Others**
 - Municipal Parks
 - County Parks
 - National Parks
 - Other Open Space
 - School Properties
 - Borough Boundary

Scale: 0, 0.25, 0.5 miles
Source: Bernardsville, NJ DEP, NJDCS, USGS, STIRLING RD

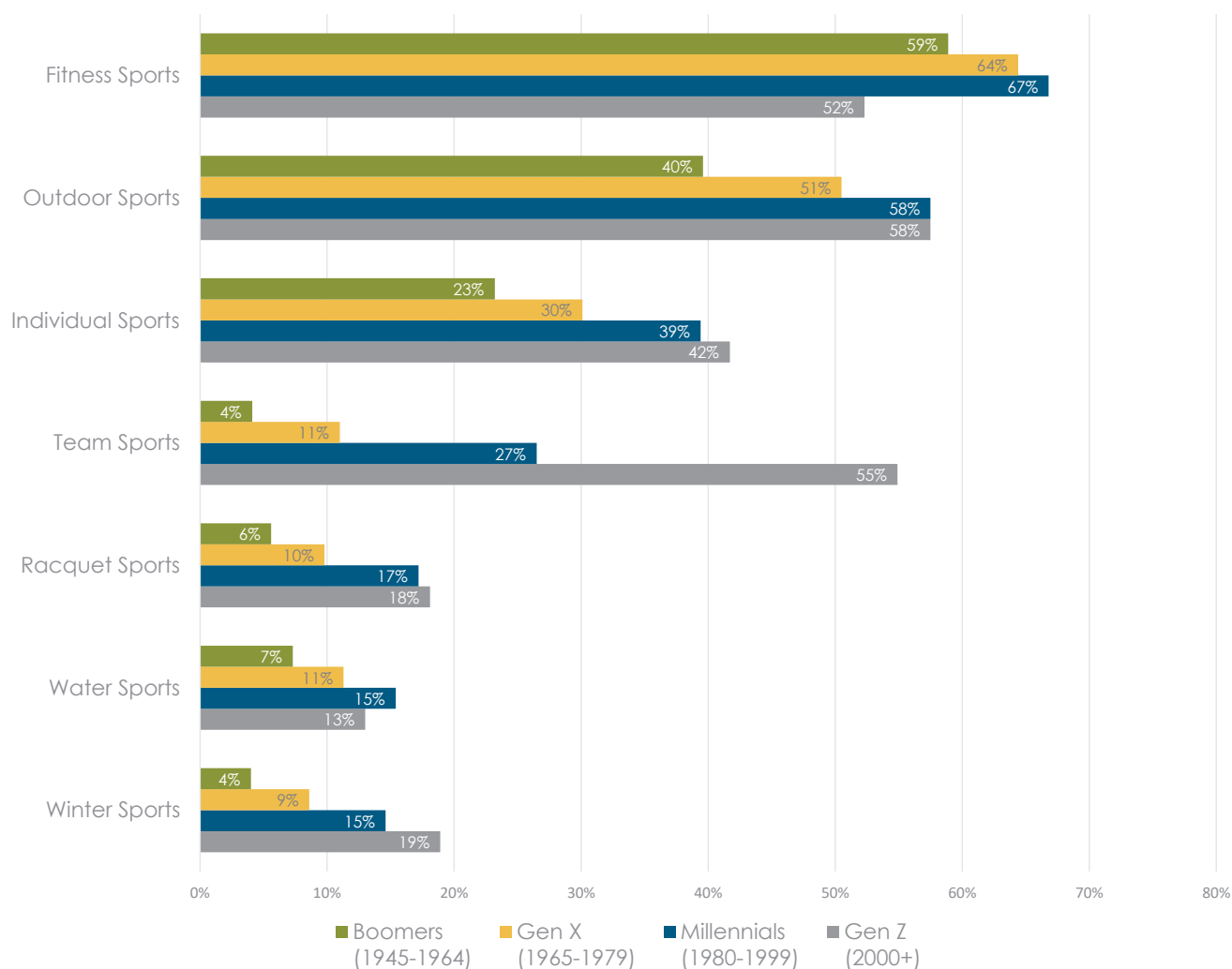
parks and recreation industry illuminates present conditions and future possibilities in Bernardsville. Equipped with industry context Bernardsville can better sustain, expand, and realign its existing parks and recreation offerings.

5.7.1 Trends in Recreation Participation

On an annual basis, the Sport and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) conducts a survey⁸ of individuals and households throughout the United States to determine participation in a variety of sports and fitness activities. By using a weighting technique, the survey produces results reflective of the total U.S. population age 6 and older; the 2018 sample consisted of 20,069 online interviews of households. The following text examines the findings of this SFIA report and connects relevant data to generate insights about Bernardsville.

Figure 5.12 shows the difference in participation rates between generations for seven types of sports. The youngest generation (Gen Z) had the highest participation rates for Individual Sports (e.g., archery, skateboarding, golfing, etc.), Team Sports (e.g., baseball, ultimate frisbee, soccer, etc.), and Outdoor Sports (e.g., hiking, trail running, bicycling, etc.). With each generation, participation rates dropped as age increased. While the other three generational groups had the highest participation rates in Fitness Sports (e.g., barre, weight-training, kettlebells, etc.) Gen Z had the lowest participation. The remaining three types of sports (Racquet, Winter, and Water Sports) have similar trends, Millennials and Gen Z representing the highest levels of participation.

Figure 5.12: Participation Rates by Generation



⁸ The 2019 Topline Report for the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) is produced through the partnership of the Physical Activity Council (PAC), a collaboration of eight of the major trade associations in U.S. sports, fitness, and leisure industries.

With high percentages of Bernardsville residents in the older two generations – and these numbers only increasing – demand for fitness sports programming is likely to increase into the future. Even though participation diminishes with age, outdoor sports remain popular with all age groups (40% of Boomers take advantage of outdoor fitness activities). Team sports are far more popular with the youngest generation (55% Gen Z and only 4% Boomers).

Table 5.5 displays the 5-year participation rates for 55 different sports and fitness activities. This table also shows the 5-year annual growth rate and highlights which activities show either significant growth or decline in participation rates. The fastest growing sports are highlighted in blue; *stand up paddling*, *cardio tennis*, *bicycling* (BMX), *pickleball*, and *trail running* show the fastest rate of growth over the last 5 years.

Walking for fitness, *treadmill*, *free weights* (hand weights), *running/jogging*, *hiking* (day-hikes) have the largest number of participants. *Walking for fitness* has by far the greatest number of participants (over 100 million participants nationally) and *hiking* is growing nearly 7% annually even with already high participation (nearly 50 million). Three of the top five activities are oriented around trails (bicycling too, ranked six). It is no surprise these facilities are in such high demand; Bernardsville residents are not unusual in expressing their strong interest in trail-based activities.

Table 5.5: Nationwide Five-Year History of Selected Sports Participation (2013-2018)

Sport/Fitness Activity	Category	Participants (In Thousands)						5-Year Average Annual Growth
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Adventure Racing	Individual Sports	2,095	2,368	2,864	2,999	2,529	2,215	2.1%
Aquatic Exercise	Aerobic Activities	8,483	9,122	8,226	10,575	10,459	10,518	4.6%
Archery	Individual Sports	7,647	8,435	8,378	7,903	7,769	7,654	0.2%
Badminton	Racquet Sports	7,150	7,176	7,198	7,354	6,430	6,337	-2.2%
Baseball	Team Sports	13,284	13,152	13,711	14,760	15,642	15,877	3.7%
Basketball	Team Sports	23,669	23,067	23,410	22,343	23,401	24,225	0.5%
Bicycling (BMX)	Outdoor Activities	2,168	2,350	2,690	3,104	3,413	3,439	9.8%
Bicycling (Mountain/Non-Paved Surface)	Outdoor Activities	8,542	8,044	8,316	8,615	8,609	8,690	0.4%
Bicycling (Road/Paved Surface)	Outdoor Activities	40,888	39,725	38,280	38,365	38,866	39,041	-0.9%
Birdwatching (>¼ Mile from Home)	Outdoor Activities	14,152	13,179	13,093	11,589	12,296	12,344	-2.5%
Cardio Tennis	Racquet Sports	1,539	1,617	1,821	2,125	2,223	2,499	10.3%
Cheerleading	Team Sports	3,235	3,456	3,608	4,029	3,816	3,841	3.7%
Elliptical Motion Trainer	Aerobic Activities	30,410	31,826	32,321	32,218	32,283	33,238	1.8%
Fishing (Fly)	Outdoor Activities	5,878	5,842	6,089	6,456	6,791	6,939	3.4%
Fishing (Freshwater)	Outdoor Activities	37,796	37,821	37,682	38,121	38,346	38,998	-0.4%
Football (Flag)	Team Sports	5,610	5,508	5,829	6,173	6,551	6,572	3.3%
Football (Tackle)	Team Sports	6,165	5,978	6,222	5,481	5,224	5,157	-3.1%
Free Weights (Hand Weights)	Strength	58,267	56,124	54,716	51,513	5,217	51,291	-2.5%
Gymnastics	Team Sports	4,972	4,621	4,679	5,381	4,805	4,770	2.5%
High Impact/Intensity & Training	Aerobic Activities	17,323	19,746	20,464	21,390	21,476	21,611	4.6%
Hiking (Day)	Outdoor Activities	34,378	36,222	37,232	42,128	44,900	47,860	6.9%
Ice Hockey	Team Sports	2,393	2,421	2,546	2,697	2,544	2,447	4.9%
Ice Skating	Individual Sports	10,679	10,649	10,485	10,315	9,998	9,721	-1.9%
Kayaking (Recreational)	Water Sports	8,716	8,855	9,499	10,017	10,533	11,017	4.8%
Kayaking (White Water)	Water Sports	2,146	2,351	2,518	2,552	2,500	2,562	3.7%
Lacrosse	Team Sports	1,813	2,011	2,094	2,090	2,171	2,098	3.1%
Martial Arts	Individual Sports	5,314	5,364	5,507	5,745	5,838	5,821	1.8%
Mixed Martial Arts for Fitness	Individual Sports	2,255	2,455	2,612	2,446	2,376	2,365	1.1%
Pickleball	Racquet Sports	N/A	2,462	2,506	2,815	3,132	3,301	9.7%*
Pilates Training	Conditioning	8,069	8,504	8,594	8,893	9,047	9,084	2.4%
Racquetball	Racquet Sports	3,824	3,594	3,883	3,579	3,526	3,480	-1.7%
Roller Hockey	Team Sports	1,298	1,736	1,907	1,929	1,834	1,734	6.9%
Rugby	Team Sports	1,183	1,276	1,349	1,550	1,621	1,560	5.9%
Running/Jogging	Aerobic Activities	54,188	51,127	48,496	47,384	50,770	49,459	-1.7%
Scuba Diving	Water Sports	3,174	3,145	3,274	3,111	2,874	2,849	-2.1%

Table 5.6: Nationwide Five-Year History of Selected Sports Participation (2013-2018) (Continued)

Sport/Fitness Activity	Category	Participants (In Thousands)						5-Year Average Annual Growth
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Skateboarding	Individual Sports	6,350	6,582	6,436	6,442	6,382	6,500	0.5%
Soccer (Outdoor)	Team Sports	12,726	12,592	12,646	11,932	11,924	11,405	-2.1%
Softball (Fast Pitch)	Team Sports	2,498	2,424	2,460	2,467	2,309	2,303	-1.6%
Softball (Slow-Pitch)	Team Sports	6,868	7,077	7,114	7,690	7,283	7,386	1.6%
Stand Up Paddling	Water Sports	1,993	2,751	3,020	3,220	3,325	3,453	12.3%
Stationary Cycling	Aerobic Activities	35,293	35,693	35,553	36,118	36,035	36,668	0.8%
Swimming for Fitness	Aerobic Activities	26,354	25,304	26,319	26,601	27,135	27,575	0.9%
Swimming on a Team	Team Sports	2,638	2,710	2,892	3,369	3,007	3,045	3.3%
Table Tennis	Racquet Sports	17,079	16,385	16,565	16,568	16,041	15,592	-1.8%
Tai Chi	Conditioning	3,469	3,446	3,651	3,706	3,787	3,761	1.7%
Tennis	Racquet Sports	17,678	17,904	17,963	18,079	17,683	17,841	0.2%
Trail Running	Individual Sports	6,792	7,531	8,139	8,582	9,149	10,010	8.1%
Treadmill	Aerobic Activities	48,166	50,241	50,398	51,872	52,966	53,737	2.2%
Triathlon (Traditional/Road)	Individual Sports	2,262	2,203	2,498	2,374	2,162	2,168	-0.6%
Ultimate Frisbee	Team Sports	5,077	4,530	4,409	3,673	3,126	2,710	-11.7%
Volleyball (Beach/Sand)	Team Sports	4,769	4,651	4,785	5,489	4,947	4,770	0.3%
Volleyball (Court)	Team Sports	6,433	6,304	6,423	6,216	6,317	6,317	-0.3%
Walking for Fitness	Aerobic Activities	117,351	112,583	109,829	107,895	110,805	111,001	-1.1%
Weight/Resistance Machines	Strength	36,267	35,841	35,310	35,768	36,291	36,372	0.1%
Yoga	Conditioning	24,310	25,262	25,289	26,268	27,354	28,745	3.4%

*Based on reduced time period. SFIA has not yet collected five years of participation for Pickleball.

Legend

	>3% Increase
	1-3% Increase
	Minimal Change
	1-3% Decrease
	>3% Decrease

5.7.2 Aging Communities

Throughout the United States and in Bernardsville, the median age of the population is increasing (currently 42.2 in Bernardsville and 38.5 in the USA). The number of persons in the age group 65 and over is growing rapidly. Census data indicates that the percentage of the Bernardsville population age 65 and older was 11.3% in 2010 but is expected to increase to nearly 20% by 2025 (see Chapter 2).

The relative health of these individuals is better than ever before, and they desire more active recreation than their predecessors. Senior centers are shifting from a focus on activities like card games to more active programming, such as fitness activities and outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, and nature programs.

While the aging population should inspire parks and recreation agencies to invest more in activities, programs, and facilities for older users such as walking trails, fishing areas, community gardens, and cultural and nature education programs, many of these more involved and nature-oriented activities are appealing to all generations.

The big picture data is certainly mirrored at the local level in Bernardsville. The surveys and other forms of public engagement (see Chapter 4) show community support for expanding programs and facilities to accommodate residents age 50 and older. While many of the borough's existing programs are oriented



"Why Communities Should Be Designing Parks for Older Adults"

around athletics and summer camp style activities, there are some 50+ recreational offerings provided either by the borough or other entities. However, many of the existing “senior” programs in the area are less focused on fitness and physical health. Bernardsville could explore a few tactics for encouraging greater participation and increasing satisfaction among older residents who seek to improve their health while finding social stimulation:

- Develop active options (e.g., group hikes, outdoor yoga, pickleball, etc.)
- Partner and uplift existing groups and organizations (e.g., Somerset County Senior Wellness Center) serving those age 50+ in Bernardsville
- Connect with adjacent communities (e.g., Morris Township, Somerset County, etc.) to develop more active lifestyle offerings
- Utilize local businesses (e.g., coffee shops) for advertising about department offerings
- Improve and market virtual offerings; explore ways to provide digital and remote alternatives for existing and potential programs

5.7.3 Universal Access

Many park systems are developing unique facilities that are designed to go well beyond the minimum requirement for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Park system administrators are uniquely positioned to set the best example for inclusivity. By creating an environment that is totally accessible to persons of all ages and abilities, parks and recreation agencies are changing the landscape not just physically but also culturally and in terms of mental health.

Some simple examples of physical treatments that go beyond the basic ADA requirements: textured edging on trails help to make the facilities more accessible for the visually impaired; fragrant plants and sensory gardens, as well as interactive displays provide a more hands-on approach to education and engagement; including therapeutic textures, ground-level features, and mobility-enhancing elements like ramps or bridges in playground equipment ensures all children – including those who are differently-abled – have space to play.



Ann Arbor's Universal Access Park

Universal access extends beyond the physical to include interpretive signage, buildings, and all programs. Providing barrier-free parks is an essential part of the process for any park improvement. The nearby Fragrance and Sensory Garden at Colonial Park sets an exemplary precedent for creating accessible, welcoming experiences for all.⁹

Public engagement (Chapter 4) generated results suggesting residents would like additional adaptive elements, ideally introduced at every playground across the borough. Because Bernardsville is in a position to acquire new equipment and expand play resources, there is a real opportunity for the borough to include adaptive and universally accessible features. A number of equipment providers are available for exploring options. Grant funding is potentially available to help pay for these improvements.¹⁰

5.7.4 Fitness and Wellness

Both state and federal level agencies have placed strong emphasis on improving the health and fitness of individuals throughout the United States. Many local level parks and recreation departments are building on this message.

Fitness facilities no longer have to be confined to indoor spaces; modern equipment exists that can be installed outdoors. Including outdoor fitness equipment in Neighborhood and Community Parks can serve as an alternative with added benefits of being outdoors. Bernardsville has no such amenities to date. As the

⁹ For more info: <https://www.somersetcountyparks.org/parksFacilities/colonial/FragranceSensory.html/>

¹⁰ For example: <https://www.playandpark.com/funding/grant-opportunities> via PlayCore

largest unmet need for programming (see Chapter 4) is for *fitness and wellness classes (adult)*, installing outdoor equipment like this would be a great step towards expanding opportunity and access. Recreation could utilize this equipment for targeted fitness classes.

Additionally – and perhaps most importantly – partnerships are key. Many agencies collaborate with community health providers to offer fitness facilities and programs, Bernardsville among them. The health benefits that can be provided by parks extend to mental health benefits as studies indicate that a connection to nature can relieve stress, improve interpersonal relationships, and improves mental health.¹¹

Bernardsville Recreation would best improve its service by first installing a limited set of equipment in a highly visible, well-trafficked location, then pursuing stronger collaborative efforts (e.g., marketing and promotion) with service providers and health organizations to generate activity around the equipment.



Parks and Recreation Wellness Station,
Kennesaw, GA

5.7.5 Technology

The use of technology is becoming increasingly common in parks and recreation. Many park users want to remain connected while visiting parks and expect instant access to information about facilities and programs at those parks. They also want to be able to register for the events and programs they discover on their mobile device. While there may sometimes be concerns about distraction, especially in nature-oriented spaces, technology – when applied intentionally – can be a tool to enhance park experience. Considering the extent to which technology is part of many user experiences across sectors, it is likely going to be an element necessary to keep people – especially youth – engaged.



Smart Trail Signage, Denison, IA

The use of technology in parks has many advantages. Wi-Fi access in parks enables users to stay connected via social media or other online activities, register for programming, and even interact more directly with staff (e.g., reporting maintenance issue or asking a question about scheduling). Installing device-charging benches gives people a place to keep those devices powered-up. Developing park-specific apps can inform visitors of opportunities at individual sites or system-wide. QR codes are yet another technological tool that visitors can use for quick access to information (e.g., tree and other plant identification, trail maps, park history and cultural context, park hours, etc.).

Employing technology in parks can supply helpful information for internal agency operations as well. For example, Wi-Fi hotspots record the number of connections or searches to create a picture of visitation trends.¹² Or, beacon counters can detect cellphone signals to help determine the number of users in an area.¹³ Sensors along paths can distinguish between walkers, runners, and cyclists, as well as record numbers for visitation frequency. Collectively, this type of data can describe information about popular visitation times, success of new features, and other descriptors.

Finally, social media is a means for interaction between park users, staff, and the park itself. When visitors post to social web platforms, they assist with park promotion and help to encourage future use. Park agencies and staff have employed social media as a “crowd-sourced, data-gathering tool” for efforts such as monitoring wildlife or vegetation, reporting invasive species, and identifying condition of trails.⁵

¹¹ National Recreation and Park Association, “Health and Wellness,” <http://www.nrpa.org/About-NRPA/Impacting-Communities/Health-and-Wellness/>, (April 8, 2019)

¹² National Recreation and Park Association, “Parks Using Technology to Engage and Inspire,” <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/may/parks-using-technology-to-engage-and-inspire/>, (May 1, 2017)

¹³ Dolesh, R. J. (2019, January). Top Trends in Parks and Recreation for 2019. Parks & Recreation.

Moving forward, Bernardsville will want to explore ways to increase its digital media presence in the community but also find opportunities to weave technology into its internal assessment and operational improvements. The borough should take incremental steps like installing Wi-Fi hotspots in specific active use spaces and including QR codes for easy registration on any new signage. Even these seemingly small actions will help the borough be more responsive and more accessible to the community.

5.7.6 Geocaching

Geocaching is a technology-based activity that has been growing in popularity since the early 2000s, when GPS technology improved significantly. Participants travel to local parks and open spaces to hunt for objects previously hidden by others using a set of coordinates and a digital GPS device (typically on a smart phone). Once found, participants generally exchange the now-discovered item for a new item, guaranteeing future use of the same geocache. The search can have varying levels of complexity – one cache leads to another or a puzzle must be completed.¹⁴

Geocaches are common in and near Bernardsville with a vibrant geocaching community active across the state of New Jersey. The Northern New Jersey Cachers is a locally organized nonprofit that could be a potential partner resource. Several web platforms exist for geocaching enthusiasts in and around the borough, but there is a real opportunity for the Bernardsville Recreation team to communicate and promote this activity further. The department could create its own caches, organize geocaching campaigns/events, and promote proper geocaching practice on its website. This hobby did not emerge in public input, but as an untapped activity, the department could benefit from regional geocaching interest by drawing in new users.



Geocaching

5.7.7 Environmental Education

There is a nationally expressed need for expanded environmental education, a trending demand that parks and recreation agencies have a considerable role to play in addressing. Environmental education centers throughout the country are having great success as communities are seeking out better access to engage with and learn from their natural environment. Potential subjects include natural processes, resource management, and wildlife habitats.

Environmental education cultivates understanding of the benefits of natural habitats and open spaces (including those in and near the borough of Bernardsville). Many park agencies develop outreach strategies to bring environmental curriculum into schools. Not only does this partnership promote and encourage greater use and appreciation of local parks in the community, but it also creates opportunity for collaboration between organizations, institutions, and advocacy groups and it helps instill a lasting connection to the natural world.

Nature programs were the third most important program ranked by households responding to the statistically valid Mail Survey and emerged as one of the top five priorities for program development (Chapter 4). Because nature



Environmental Education Signage, Basking Ridge, NJ



Environmental Education at Mammoth Cave, KY

¹⁴ National Recreation and Park Association, "How to Leverage Geocaching to Promote Park and Recreation Events," <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/october/how-to-leverage-geocaching-to-promote-park-and-recreation-events/>. (October 5, 2017)

education is something that engages all ages and abilities, nature-oriented programs are an effective way to create space for intergenerational encounters. Creating environmental education opportunities that appeal to the community involves considering formats like guided hikes, camps, community events, field trips, or special-interest classes and topics such as habitat restoration, wildlife identification, or invasive species removal. The Environmental Education Center at Somerset County's Lord Stirling Park is a local example – and potential resource – for building on these kinds of experiences.

Bernardsville has over 150 acres of natural area and open space within its inventory, plus public input highlights acquisition and preservation of natural areas as the most important action for the borough to take regarding parks and recreation services (46% of Mail Survey households). That said, partnerships (e.g., Somerset County Park Commission) will be key in any effort to address this emerging trend and meet community demands.

5.7.8 Birdwatching (or Birding)

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service nearly 50 million Americans participate in birdwatching (as of 2011) or about 20% of the population. The most common form of birding is watching birds near one's home; however, 38% of birders, or 18 million people, participate in birding away from the home. Participants in birdwatching tend to be older and more highly educated than the general population.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) report also includes an analysis of the economic impact of birdwatching activities. Birdwatchers direct substantial amounts of dollars into the economy because of trip-related (\$15 million) and equipment expenditures (\$26 million). The report finds that the birding industry, including indirect effects resulting from the multiplier effect, generates over \$100 billion annually throughout the United States and supports 666,000 jobs. These expenditures lead to an additional \$6 million in state tax revenues and \$7 million in federal tax revenues.¹⁵



Bernardsville residents interested in birdwatching likely already use park space to some extent. The New Jersey Audubon's Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary is a well-documented birding resource for the local community. More formal programs, developed and conducted in partnership with area agencies like the wildlife sanctuary would help expand interest, educate residents about species, and increase overall interest in natural areas within and around Bernardsville.

5.7.9 Environmental Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Many communities utilize parks as examples of best management practices (BMPs) to serve as models for minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing the sustainability of both park sites and operations. Parks and recreation agencies are in great positions to lead in the implementation of these practices because they are typically among the largest landowners (if not the largest) in their jurisdictions. To assist in the implementation of these practices, some park departments establish manuals detailing the BMPs which are generally divided into categories. Some potential categories include (with examples):

- Site Selection (which properties to acquire and protect)
- Design (strategies for management of stormwater, water quality, riparian/wetland buffers; use of vegetation; choice of building materials)
- Construction (controlling of pollutants, soil restoration, recycling of construction materials)
- Operation and Maintenance (practices for water conservation, use of organics, weed control, composting, energy use, etc.)
- Programs and Special Events (consider carrying capacity of facility, provide recycling receptacles)

¹⁵ Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis, Addendum to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013.

The Environmental Resource Inventory completed for the borough in 2019 provides a foundation for establishing set guidelines. The document makes clear what trends and changes have occurred in Bernardsville within eight different categories. Armed with the knowledge from that inventory report and the public input determined through this master planning process, borough officials are in a position to codify their response to environmental protection.

5.7.10 Trails and Connectivity

Demand has been growing all over the U.S., including in Bernardsville, for trails, trail linkages, and pathways that connect parks, open spaces, and other destination sites (like downtown districts). Where surveys have been conducted, there is almost always a high level of demand for connectivity. Communities with existing and extensive trail systems express pride and continued desire to build trails between neighborhoods and develop pathways to schools, shopping areas, other community attractions, and neighborhoods. Livable communities where residents report a high quality of life generally have robust trail systems and reliable connectivity that support active, engaged lifestyles.

The expressed need for trails, including all types of walkable connections, was clearly conveyed through the public input process (see Chapter 4). The two county park commissions (Somerset and Morris) also provide critical access to trails in the region at places like Natirar Park and Lewis Morris County Park. The borough's role is to ensure walkable and bikeable connectivity to existing trails via safe sidewalk and path extensions, to develop a connected trail network that expands across the borough, and to create walkable connectivity within all the borough's parks.



Don Valley Bike Trails

5.7.11 Nature Play Areas

Many parks and recreation agencies are placing increased emphasis on the availability of nature play areas and programming for children. The Natural Learning Initiative (NLI) and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) recently released a document titled *Nature Play & Learning Places*, which provides a series of national guidelines for the creation of places for children to interact with nature. The guidelines are meant to support communities in providing opportunities for children to learn about their natural environment and to develop healthy active habits. The guidelines also encourage incorporating natural materials like plants, stones, water, fallen trees, etc. to augment sensory experience and facilitate tactile play. According to the guidelines, a nature play or learning place is:



Silver Falls State Park, Oregon

"A designated, managed area in an existing or modified outdoor environment where children of all ages and abilities play and learn by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements, materials, organisms, and habitats, through sensory, fine motor and gross motor experiences."¹⁶

As Bernardsville's parks system includes a number of natural areas, most of which are largely undeveloped, there are opportunities to integrate nature play elements within the system. More active-use sites, like Polo Grounds, may not be suitable, but 271 Mine Brook Road and others could host a range of nature-based play features.

The following are examples of nature play features.

¹⁶ Moore, R. (2014). *Nature Play & Learning Places*. Creating and managing places where children engage with nature. Raleigh, NC: Natural Learning Initiative and Reston, VA: National Wildlife Federation. Version 1.6. (pages vii, 5, 7-8, 51, 65, 71-83).

Natural Play Structures

Permanent play structures can be constructed from natural materials such as logs and rocks. The guidelines recommend engaging local children to generate ideas. It is best to use indigenous (native) materials in the design to ensure longevity.

Multipurpose Lawns

Multipurpose lawns, depending on size, can support a wide variety of activities and events. These lawns can be utilized for programmed and unprogrammed play for both large and small groups.

Meadows and Woodlands

Meadows or fields of native grasses, flowers, and non-woody plants provide ecosystems where children – and even their caretakers – can explore and observe wildlife, especially insects and birds. These landscapes stimulate curiosity and offer dynamic learning moments in ways that a carefully managed lawn cannot.

Woodlands also offer diverse ecosystems similarly prime for creating quality educational and play experiences. Visitors can witness natural processes like seasonal change, photosynthesis, and animal behavior.

Vegetable Gardens

Hands-on garden beds give visitors opportunities to participate in the growth of vegetables, herbs, and other edible plants, not to mention the benefit of tasting fresh produce. Children can discover different kinds of fresh food, learn more about what it takes to grow from seed, and better understand the source of the food they eat.

Aquatics

Existing natural streams, ponds, wetlands, and marshes give children and others a chance to witness the dynamic cycles of water, weather, and the geology of a place. If not present naturally, these elements can be constructed to replicate these phenomena. Children can have multi-sensory interactions and even encounter new types of living creatures.

Gathering and Performance Structures

It is a vital role of parks to give community space to gather. These structures — decks, patios, or gazebos — encourage social interaction and can be utilized for programming. To accommodate performances, these spaces can include things like stages, campfire circles, and amphitheater seating. These settings are also useful for team-building and group presentations.¹⁷

Opportunities in Bernardsville

Bernardsville has great natural areas in and near the community, many under the borough's ownership but others provided by Somerset County, the National Park Service, the state of New Jersey, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well. Though a bit far for borough residents, the Loop Playground and the Fragrance and Sensory Garden at Colonial Park both provide regional examples of what elements – play campsites, shallow ponds, climbing logs and rocks, low mounds for rolling, etc. – could be added at passive natural parks in Bernardsville.



Charleston Parks Conservancy Community Garden



Hawn State Park Amphitheater

¹⁷ Moore, R. (2014). *Nature Play & Learning Places. Creating and managing places where children engage with nature.* Raleigh, NC: Natural Learning Initiative and Reston, VA: National Wildlife Federation. Version 1.6. (pages vii, 5, 7-8, 51, 65, 71-83).

5.7.12 Mountain Bike and BMX Facilities

Off-road bicycling activities are growing in popularity, although they still represent a relatively small percentage of all bicycling activities. Modern mountain biking originated in the 1970s in California with a group of enthusiasts who modified existing bikes for off-road use. These cyclists organized first downhill races which they called “Repack.” This name referred to the need to “repack” the brakes with fresh grease after each race due to the excessive heat from braking during the descent.¹⁸

During the early years of mountain biking, enthusiasts used single-track trails intended for hiking as bikes were not specifically forbidden from using these trails. However, as the sport gained in popularity, bikes have been banned from most hiking trails, and single-track trails designed specifically for mountain bikes have been established.¹⁹ More recently, a new style of trail called a “flow trail” has appeared which provides more predictable surfaces, banked turns, and a lack of obstacles. These trails require little peddling and minimal braking that appeal to a wider variety of users, including families. These trails can be designed to allow beginners to bypass any more technical trails.²⁰

Another trend in off-road bicycle facilities is the pump track. These tracks, which began to appear in the 2000s, are looping tracks that can be ridden continuously without the need to pedal. A user's speed is dependent on “pumping” the terrain transitions of the track. A pump track requires approximately 50' by 50' of space (minimum) and generally feature a series of rollers and steeply bermed corners.²¹ Unlike many of the other off-road facilities, pump tracks are usable by both mountain bike and BMX riders.

Bernardsville Recreation does not currently manage a mountain bike trail (MTB), but there are numerous trail facilities by others within reasonable driving distance of the borough. Somerset County Parks, like Natirar Park, offer MTB trail experiences. Public input indicated some unmet need for mountain bike trails in the community, but no land is available for their development. In order to meet the needs for these trails, the borough will need to partner with others to develop and promote their facilities.

The Bernardsville Recreation Department started a cyclocross program at the newly acquired 271 Mine Brook Road site in 2020 and 2021 with great success. The borough should continue to build upon this success.

5.7.13 Splash Pads or Spraygrounds

Splash pads or spraygrounds are a growing trend in aquatics. Many agencies around the country are replacing wading pools at larger aquatic facilities with these more accessible water attractions; however, they can also be built as new standalone wet playgrounds. When compared to pools, spraygrounds have several benefits: no standing water means lifeguards are not needed which reduces operating costs significantly; in most instances, spraygrounds recirculate water; when built conscientiously, spraygrounds and splash pads achieve significantly better accessibility.



Flow Trail



Pump Track

¹⁸ Marin Museum of Bicycling, “Mountain Biking History,” <http://mmbhof.org/mtn-bike-hall-of-fame/history/>, (April 8, 2019).

¹⁹ Singletracks, “Visiting the Birthplace of Mountain Biking: Marin County, California,” <http://www.singletracks.com/blog/mtb-trails/visiting-the-birthplace-of-mountain-biking-marin-county-california/>, (April 8, 2019).

²⁰ IMBA, “Flow Trails,” <https://www.imba.com/model-trails/flow-trails/>, (April 15, 2016).

²¹ Adventure Sports Journal, “Pumpin’: An Introduction to the World of Pump Tracks,” <http://adventuresportsjournal.com/pumpin-an-introduction-to-the-world-of-pump-tracks/>, (April 8, 2019).

While the borough currently offers the Municipal Pool to the community, there is potential for enhancing the space and increasing service levels by adding a splash pad somewhere in the borough. This feature would help distribute demand and reduce strain on the existing pool while at the same time addressing the community's desire for more water-based recreation.



5.7.14 Dog Parks

Dog parks are in ever-increasing demand throughout the country. These spaces help to improve the interaction skills of dogs, while also providing social opportunities for dog owners. Quality dog parks require careful planning and a fairly extensive operating budget to ensure adequate maintenance and upkeep.

Optimally, a dog park would be at least three acres in size and include three separate areas: one for large dogs, one for small dogs, and a rotating unused area to allow for regeneration of turf. Some dog parks include an additional area for agility and training. Many dog parks are larger, reaching well over 10 acres in size. Typical quality amenities include shade, seating, water (for both human and animal), and restrooms.



Photo: Northbrook Dog Park

Dog Park, Northbrook, IL

Bernardsville itself currently has no dog parks, but there are some spaces in the surrounding area, with the closest in Lewis Morris County Park. Dog parks were in the top ten facilities needed by Bernardsville households, but unmet need and priority investment ranking for dog parks was lower (Chapter 4). Because of the rural character throughout much of the borough, Bernardsville Recreation may consider marketing other available resources before developing its own dog park.

5.7.15 Creative Placemaking

The Trust for Public Land – a nonprofit organization with a mission to bring high-quality parks within a 10-minute walk of every person in the U.S. – is a leading champion of creative placemaking as a strategy for affecting change. Creative placemaking is a collaborative, community-based process that captures the power of art, vibrancy of local heritage, and potential of place to build memorable spaces rooted in culture and local identity. Parks and recreation agencies around the nation offer community connection in physical and social forms; creative-placemaking is just another tool for ensuring successful parks that equitably reflect the people who use them.²² Many agencies partner with local entities (like other government departments, nonprofits,



Photo credit: Biller Studio

Creative Placemaking in the Madisonville Neighborhood of Cincinnati (2015)

²² Trust for Public Land, Creative Placemaking, <https://www.tpl.org/our-work/creative-placemaking>

schools, places of worship, art institutions, and other groups) to put in place opportunities for resident-led installations, programs, and events.

Creative-placemaking can take countless forms. It may look like an outdoor sculpture walk at the center of the neighborhood park featuring resident and local artists' work. It might be an annual arts performance downtown that showcases immigrant and refugee cultures in the community. It can also be as low-profile as a pollinator garden including interpretive signage about the plants chosen and why. Whatever it may look like, it is essential that the community be inclusively integrated into every phase: ideation, selection (of artist(s), piece(s), feature(s), etc.), installation, activation, and long-term care.

When parks and recreation agencies prioritize local traditions, cultural identities, and native resources, making sure these are reflected in program and facility offerings, users will be more likely to participate and do their part to sustain the system. A reciprocal relationship forms, where community engages with parks and recreation to the extent that parks and recreation seeks to provide place-based resources.

Previous planning efforts, in addition to this master plan process, revealed an interest in the community for pocket parks and enlivened downtown public spaces. The former Audi car dealership is in the process of being redeveloped (as of Spring 2021) and is an ideal location for practicing placemaking. Due to its capacity and current responsibilities, Bernardsville Recreation is likely not in a position to spearhead a creative placemaking effort. Local actors in the arts and development fields should be sought out to ensure robust engagement and authentic implementation of any placemaking project, with the department serving as critical partner in terms of space and facilities. Any future efforts should focus and expand on the way the borough's parks represent and define Bernardsville's diverse community.

5.7.16 Drones

Since the late 2000s, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has increased tremendously. Used for both military and civilian purposes, these devices are having a considerable impact on parks and recreation agencies nationwide. A contentious activity, tensions exist around safety, privacy, and environmental impact, as well as applications (professional and recreational) like habitat and wildlife monitoring, photography, and map-making.

Popularity of drones is only growing, but regulations at the federal, state, and local levels have been slow to prevent, mitigate, or manage negative impacts. Many cities have enacted no-fly zones and other restrictions which means UAV-users – licensed or not – have limited available spaces. This then has led drone pilots to look to parks and public open space for flying opportunities.



Drone in Parks

Requiring permits (day or seasonal) and designating fly areas with set times for flying are tactics agencies are using.

These measures help legitimize UAV use and maintain safe park spaces; permitting is also a potential revenue opportunity. Since drone use is only increasing, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) offers useful insight into the future of drone-use in parks:

"[P]ark agencies will face increasing public pressure to look at allowing hobbyist flights and commercial-use drones in parks... By creating stronger guidelines and policies about how to fly drones in parks instead of adopting blanket restrictions, parks can give people an outlet and place to fly recreationally. New programming and events can be planned around drones, bringing in visitors and related businesses that benefit the parks...[K]eep it focused on safety and respect for all parties. [A]cceptance will protect the public and park resources and enable an exciting new form of recreation to take place."²³

²³ Wootton, Courtney; Bradley, Michael J.; Ray Neal NRPA. Drones in Parks: It's All About Perspective. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2018/december/drones-in-parks-its-all-about-perspective/>

Bernardsville Recreation does not have a designated location for launching drones, nor does it have a clearly defined, official policy for flying them in the parks (though the state of New Jersey has articulated its guidelines).²⁴ As their popularity continues to increase, the borough will want to either designate such an area or clearly communicate areas provided by others. Also, formulating and posting a policy for (or against) drone use within the park system will proactively address the rising trend.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an assessment of needs for parks and recreation services in Bernardsville. The analysis indicates a variety of parks and facilities are located throughout the borough; however, not all amenities are evenly distributed.

The level of service standards outlined at the start of this chapter – and developed based on public input from residents of Bernardsville – provide a foundational guideline for the number of parks, open space, and recreation facilities needed in Bernardsville. Overall, there is demand for trail connectivity, additional health and fitness opportunities, arts and cultural programming, community events, and more.

The geographic analysis of service areas identifies specific areas to target for investment in additional parks and recreation facilities. The mapping analysis shows higher levels of service around the more densely developed downtown with greater needs radiating outward north and west. **These findings, combined with public input requesting more trails and elevated outdoor experiences such as concerts, indicate that connectivity – both physical and social – as well as spaces for year-round activities and programming should be high priorities for this Master Plan.**

Bernardsville is in a good position to confront many of the trends discussed in this chapter that have not yet been addressed. Efforts to revitalize and rebrand the downtown area, and desires for upgraded facilities present a unique opportunity to incorporate relevant trends into improvements. The aging and diversifying population in Bernardsville provides additional incentive for the borough to address many of these trends, including expanded fitness programming, universal access, placemaking, and programs for the aging population. The analyses from this chapter and the preceding chapters provide the foundation for the specific recommendations presented later in this document.

²⁴ Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Coach website. <https://uavcoach.com/drone-laws-new-jersey/>



6.1 INTRODUCTION

The *2021 Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan* represents a collective imagination of the future. While the action plan component (Chapter 9) is a detailed account of all the recommendations developed – both operational and capital – to guide investment priorities, the strategic plan component in this chapter is intended to provide the department with a clearly defined purpose and underlying motivation for tackling those action items.

Developed out of all the input gathered during the engage phase, and with full support of the steering committee, this strategic plan articulates a freshly inspired vision, mission, and set of defining values. These strategic elements will help pilot implementation of actions identified in this Master Plan, and thereby shape the future of parks and recreation in Bernardsville. Also included at the end of this chapter are goals and objectives. These are incorporated later in the master plan in order to categorize and better define the wide range of recommendations in the action plan.

These strategic plan elements – vision, mission, goals, and subsequent objectives – will be instrumental for bringing the department's new vision and mission to life.

6.2 VISION

6.2.1 Purpose of a Vision

A vision describes a unique horizon, an intended outcome. It defines a clear standard of accomplishment and in so doing, helps unify effort. A vision should:

1. Provide clear direction
2. Focus effort
3. Guide long-term action
4. Illustrate the department's purpose
5. Inspire and motivate
6. Visualize an ideal

6.2.2 Proposed Vision for Parks and Recreation in Bernardsville

Fully informed by the values and visioning input generated by the steering committee, and with their support and approval, the following vision statement was crafted for Bernardsville Recreation:

Building quality and dynamic parks and programs

6.3 MISSION

6.3.1 Purpose of a Mission

A mission defines the daily work and an enduring purpose. More specifically, a mission should answer questions like what the department does, how, and why it does this. The mission is an action-oriented statement that informs day-to-day action.

Like the vision statement, the mission should be easy to remember and to share with others. It should be the foundation of all departmental decision-making.

6.3.2 Proposed Mission for Parks and Recreation in Bernardsville

Building from the foundational visioning exercise conducted with the Master Plan Steering Committee – and in consideration of the factors described above – the following is the proposed mission statement for Bernardsville Recreation moving forward:

Parks and programs that connect community and enhance quality of life

6.4 VALUES FOR BERNARDSVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION

6.4.1 Purpose of Values

An organization's values serve as a "lighthouse" of guiding principles, informed by personal and organizational beliefs. Values are straightforward phrases or words that should:

1. Direct staff conduct
2. Express department ideals
3. Reflect department personality
4. Complement community's aspirations
5. Communicate what is important
6. Ensure quality staff experience
7. Instill positive focus system-wide

6.4.2 Core Values

Core values should be unique to the department and indicative of the attitudes, ambitions, and focus shared by the department and the community. Using insights from the steering committee discussions, and feedback generated through public engagement, the following are offered as foundational values for guiding the future work of the department:

Community – Create inclusive opportunities to connect, share, and grow

Health & Wellness – Offer meaningful experiences to support everyone's overall wellbeing

Welcoming – Maintain quality spaces that meet the diverse needs of all

Opportunity – Ensure exceptional facilities and programs that encourage discovery and creativity

Commitment – Invest to provide lasting access to fun and fitness

6.5 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

6.5.1 Function of Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives identify areas of strategic priority and provide the broad, overarching organization for departmental actions. Together, goals and objectives:

1. Provide focus for actions and aspirations
2. Shape a designated timeframe for improvements
3. Create direction for investments of time, skills, and resources
4. Clarify what the department will and will not do

Generally, goals describe elements of the vision, defining what is achievable through the daily execution of the mission. Objectives – and therefore specific strategies or recommendations – fit within the scope of each goal.

Goals:

1. Overarching areas of strategic priority
2. Broad descriptions of intent
3. Rooted in outcome, rather than specific activity
4. Longest timeframe (i.e., as long as it takes to accomplish the vision)

Objectives:

5. Frame individual actions
6. More detailed description of what needs to be done
7. Measurable metrics (e.g., “increase,” “reduce,” “consolidate,” “improve,” “distribute,” etc.)
8. Variable timeframes (0-2, 3-5, 6-10 years)

6.5.2 Proposed Goals and Objectives for Bernardsville Parks and Recreation

The following goals and objectives are intended to help guide improvements, operations, and services in parks and recreation in Bernardsville over the next 10 years.

Goal 1: Connectivity, Created and Sustained

Use connecting paths, community gatherings, and strategic outreach to bridge physical and social divides

Objective 1.1 – **Trails and Pathways:** Ensure every citizen has access to multimodal routes throughout the community

Objective 1.2 – **Social and Cultural Encounters:** Provide possibilities for interaction, fun, and memories

Objective 1.3 – **Marketing and Promotion:** Utilize innovative and inclusive outreach to bring parks and recreation to everyone

Goal 2: Empowered and Healthy Lifestyles

Deliver programming and resources to nurture the community's physical health and mental wellbeing

Objective 2.1 – **Athletics:** Innovate to provide access and opportunity

Objective 2.2 – **Active Living:** Encourage exploration and growth through diverse recreational experiences

Objective 2.3 – **Community Vitality:** Become a leading provider of wellness and culture

Goal 3: Excellent Spaces, Accessible to All

Foster community pride by enhancing the overall character of the borough's parks and facilities

Objective 3.1 – **Modernized Parks:** Exceed expectations through upgraded site features & amenities

Objective 3.2 – **Gathering Spaces:** Be creative to provide venues for community interaction

Objective 3.3 – **Sustainability:** Practice environmental stewardship and fiscal responsibility with clear standards & recurring assessments

Goal 4: Legacy of Remarkable Service

Enrich the borough through responsible operations, signature offerings, and proactive improvements

Objective 4.1 – **Adaptability:** Be flexible, responsive, and imaginative to serve the diverse needs of the community

Objective 4.2 – **Operations and Maintenance:** Set the standard for responsible management to effectively attract resources and support

Objective 4.3 – **Staff Development and Retention:** Cultivate a team of qualified and motivated professionals

6.6 STRATEGIES

As already mentioned, specific strategies are provided for each of the objectives listed above later in this report. These strategies will be discussed in Chapter 7 (organized by category, like “programming” and “facility improvements”) as well as listed in the Action Plan (Chapter 9), which also identifies a timeframe, responsible party, and potential funding source.



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to impact government budgets for years to come. Already, agencies across the country are facing fiscal pressures or receiving requests to cut their spending.¹ However, unlike many other communities, the Bernardsville Recreation Department experienced minimal impact to its budget and did not have to lay off any staff, in part because of the small size of the department.

Many in the borough, however, did experience changes to how and if they were able to experience the parks. In this time of public health inequity, social rupture, and economic disruption, people everywhere are living out the effects of having (or not having) access to open space and parks.² As the coronavirus pandemic blazed an uncharted trail through communities in 2020, public parks and open space provided respite, solace, and connection. Parks have helped people cope – and they will help communities recover.³

It is vital that local governments resist the temptation to cut services especially as they begin to recover from the pandemic. The revelations emerging in this time of crisis will be no less true in the future. Families, seniors, youth, and everyone in between will always need ample opportunity to connect socially, to practice healthy habits, and to enjoy all the benefits of time in nature. Parks and recreation agencies across the nation have a critical role to play in a brighter, more equitable future.

Bearing all of this in mind, the recommendations in this chapter are intended to guide the borough of Bernardsville in a post-pandemic future because the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be felt for many years, even if not financially. The pandemic has changed how, and in some cases whether, people use parks. The following recommendations are presented with the vitality and durability of Bernardsville Recreation at the core.

¹ Roth, Kevin. How COVID-19 Impacts Parks and Recreation Funding. NRPA. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/may/how-covid-19-impacts-park-and-recreation-funding/>. Accessed November 2020.

² McCormick, Kathleen. Room to Roam: The Pandemic Has Underscored the Need for More Urban Parks; So What Comes Next? Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/articles/2020-10-room-roam-pandemic-urban-parks-what-comes-next>. Accessed November 2020.

³ A Trust for Public Land Special Report: Parks and the Pandemic. <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/Parks%20and%20Pandemic%20-%20TPL%20special%20report.pdf>

The following chapter presents observations and findings gained through the first three phases of this master plan – Evaluate, Engage, and Envision. The subsequent recommendations are divided into the following categories:

- Existing Park Improvements
- Outdoor Athletic Fields and Courts
- Trails and Connectivity
- New Park and Facility Development
- Natural Areas, Open Space, and Nature Education
- Programming
- Operations, Maintenance, and Promotion
- Budget and Funding
- Partnerships and Sponsorships

Recommendations by park are provided in Chapter 8, along with detailed cost estimates for the proposed improvements.

7.2 EXISTING PARK IMPROVEMENTS

7.2.1 Observations and Analysis

Public input indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction with Bernardsville parks. Sixty-two percent (62%) of households who visited parks over the past year rated them as good, and 5% rated them as excellent. Another 16% rated them as fair. The numbers for excellent are below the National Benchmarking by ETC Institute at 29%, indicating some room for improvement. According to the Mail Survey, 81% of households support upgrades to existing parks and facilities, the most of any action. Upgrades to existing parks and facilities were also the most important action.

For preferred upgrades to existing parks, a top response for both surveys was restrooms (second or third both surveys, after trail categories). Drinking fountains with bottle fillers ranked fifth (after only trail categories and restrooms) for improvements to existing parks, with more than a third of households desiring these upgrades. Security cameras and lighting were next, although few households indicated safety concern as a reason for not using parks and facilities (3% Mail Survey, 5% Web Survey). The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the transition from standard drinking fountains to bottle fillers.

Other support features such as shade structures, trees & landscaping, sidewalks, bike racks, and parking were also requested by many households. While some Bernardsville parks have these amenities, some need replacement, and residents tend to notice where they are missing. Accessibility deficiencies were noted throughout the park system during the park site assessments, often relating to the need for sidewalks. Some parks lack entrance signage, especially when the park has multiple entrances. Households identified the lack of a facility or program as one of the top four reasons for not using Bernardsville parks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the demand for outdoor gathering spaces. As many gatherings this past year were moved outside, rediscovered enjoyment of the outdoors will likely lead to continued demand for these venues in the future. Bernardsville offers no picnic shelters or pavilions in any of the parks. The closest shelters available for reservation are at Lewis Morris County Park, more than 10-minutes away from most homes in Bernardsville. Parks or open space properties in Bernardsville, including Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park and 271 Mine Brook Road, could accommodate outdoor venues, and public input indicated that more are needed (top 10 for improvements to existing parks). Any future picnic areas should be designed for rental and potential program use.

About two-thirds (65%) of the population live in areas with “High” or “Medium-High” service levels, and only a quarter (25%) live in areas with “Low” or “Medium-Low” service levels (see Composite Service Areas map, Figure 5.11 in Chapter 5). This high level of service explains the support for improvements to existing parks over the demand for the development of new facilities. Nearly 40% of households indicated existing park

improvements as one of the most important actions for the borough to take, compared to only 13% for new park development. Residents are generally happy with their parks, but they would like to see them updated and improved.

Bernardsville Recreation has not yet implemented many technology improvements at parks. As noted in Chapter 5, security cameras can measure activity levels in the parks in addition to providing security and preventing vandalism. Bernardsville still has room for growth in park technology with features like park apps and charging stations. None of Bernardsville's parks offer Wi-Fi hotspots, but many households indicated a need. The borough should investigate adding hotspots at parks and ensure signage is included to indicate the presence of these hotspots.

Individual parks with significant development should have master plans finalized prior to development or redevelopment to ensure that facilities are accessible, complementary features are located appropriately, and, most importantly, desired features fit on the site. Planning is a critical tool for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of maintenance, making it easier to be proactive versus reactive in the face of challenges and changing circumstances.

Finally, the borough should prepare design standards to guide future park development. These standards should include types of signs, benches, shelters, trash receptacles, and more with the goal of having a consistent look that identifies the borough as the provider of services.

7.2.2 Recommendations

1. Add support features throughout the park system such as drinking fountains, shade structures, trees & landscaping, parking, bike racks, and sidewalks
 - Include bottle fillers at all new drinking fountains and when replacing existing features
2. Add or improve restrooms throughout the parks
3. Add picnic shelters at parks to expand access to these facilities; make them inviting and promote opportunities for outdoor community gatherings
4. Provide Wi-Fi, especially in active parks, and help ensure users are aware of its availability
5. Upgrade and utilize technology in parks for patrons and staff (see Chapter 5, Technology, Subsection 5.7.5)
6. Pursue and implement an ADA Accessibility Audit of all facilities, programs, and communications
7. Improve ADA access throughout the park system, including walkways to all facilities and seating areas
8. Prepare Park Master Plans for existing parks and any future parks prior to development of facilities to ensure that added features are complementary and accessible
9. Prepare design standards for signage, benches, shelters, trash receptacles, etc. to guide future park development and improvements at existing parks
10. Acquire land contiguous to existing parks, if it becomes available, to allow for additional features and increase the total amount of parkland available to residents while still limiting impacts on operations and maintenance

7.3 OUTDOOR ATHLETIC FIELDS AND COURTS

7.3.1 Observations and Analyses

Compared to the benchmarks, Bernardsville provides a higher level of service by a substantial margin for all types of athletic fields. The borough also has a higher service level for artificial turf fields. The site assessments (see Chapter 3) indicate that many of the fields need improvements, and 56% of households (according to the Mail Survey) indicated support for upgrading athletic fields.

The two basketball courts offer a similar level of service to the benchmarks (one per 3,000 compared to a median of one per 5,300), while the six tennis courts provide a much higher level of service than the

benchmarks. The borough currently lacks opportunities for pickleball – a fast-growing sport that can be played on an existing court if lines are added.

As the makeup of the population of Bernardsville changes and the population continues diversifying, needs will shift. As parks are improved, there will likely be opportunities to meet these changing needs. Optimizing multipurpose space at both fields and courts will be an important tool for the borough to use in facing limited space for expansion.

7.3.2 Athletic Fields

Bernardsville has diamond fields at three parks with three fields at Polo Grounds, three at Kiwanis Fields, and a single field at Rose Bowl. Many of the fields in the system need improvements including new paved access to the fields and spectator areas and fencing improvements. The borough has three full-sized multipurpose rectangular fields, all at Polo Grounds/Evankow. One field has artificial turf. The outfields of two of the fields at Polo Grounds are also used as multipurpose rectangular fields. The fields generally lack the necessary accessible pathways and seating areas at the game fields. Because national trends indicate faster growth of sports that use multipurpose rectangular fields compared to those that use diamond fields, the current need for these fields will likely continue to grow.

The borough and Somerset Hills School District (SHSD) hired a consultant to prepare a *Sports Field Usage Analysis* report in 2014. The analysis considered the field needs for Bernardsville, SHSD, Far Hills, and Peapack-Gladstone. According to the report, the existing fields are quite overused with the diamond fields in use over twice as many hours as recommended (based on 20-24 hours per week or 680-816 hours per year).

The report was only able to identify one potential location for a new field in Bernardsville: the Chestnut property, adjacent to Polo Grounds. This property is currently wooded and has significant variation in elevation throughout the site. As a result, development of the new field was estimated at \$1.75 million. This cost will have increased over the 7-year period since this estimate, making it even more costly.

Other recommendations of the study included making improvements to expand usage by improving conditions at existing fields. The study recommended adding lighting and artificial turf to multiple fields in the borough. Artificial turf has since been added to the upper field at Polo Grounds, but no lighting has been added at any fields in Bernardsville.

Several stakeholder groups, including many of the athletic leagues, indicated needs for more field space. However, the survey results indicated lower levels of support from the community as a whole. Only 38% of households indicated support for developing new athletic fields, the lowest of 13 provided actions in the statistically valid Mail Survey. The next two lowest ranked items were also field improvements (upgrades to existing fields and lighting). Support was much higher in the Web Survey (not statistically valid) with over a third indicating desire for improvements to multipurpose fields and lighting at existing parks (compared to about 10% in the Mail Survey).

The potential to develop new fields at land owned by the borough is very limited. A field at 271 Mine Brook would take nearly the entire usable area and would still be undersized, while the proposed field at Chestnut is expensive. Because the cost to add the Chestnut field is exceptionally high and 271 Mine Brook is better used for other amenities, pursuing options to improve the existing fields will likely be a lower and more effective course of action for the borough to take. First, the addition of lighting at the Polo Grounds fields would extend the hours of usage. Second, the addition of artificial turf at the lower Polo Grounds fields (including the infields) would increase potential use, especially combined with lighting. Lastly, improved drainage at the lower field would also help by reducing the number of cancellations.

The borough should seek to acquire additional land that is suitable for field development rather than trying to develop fields in less-than-ideal locations. Optimally, the land acquired for new fields would be relatively flat, large enough to accommodate at least two to three fields plus parking, and already clear of most vegetation.

7.3.3 Game Courts

The current level of service for basketball and tennis courts appears to be sufficient. However, pickleball

courts are a rising trend, including in Bernardsville, due in part to their popularity with older residents. At the time of this report, Bernardsville does not offer any pickleball courts but lining could be added at existing tennis courts to allow for multiple uses. Sharing court space with tennis is a good opportunity to provide multiple uses of space, but it is recommended that the courts be lined not to share nets due to the different net height standards between the two sports. If the nets are shared, any pickleball game would fall short of the national guidelines for competition. Demand for these courts is likely to grow; therefore, the borough should put plans in place soon for developing dedicated courts to help meet this demand.

7.3.4 Recommendations

1. Expand and maintain field capacity at Bernardsville parks without adding new fields
 - Add artificial turf at lower Polo Grounds fields to expand use and improve turf conditions
 - Consider adding lighting at both Polo Grounds fields; ensure new lighting is energy efficient and calibrated to reduce light pollution
 - Improve drainage at the artificial turf field (upper) Polo Grounds
 - Consider developing the Chestnut field if other efforts are insufficient to meet field needs (long-term)
2. Seek to acquire additional land that is suitable for field development (i.e., relatively flat, large enough for 2-3 fields, limited vegetation)
3. Add pickleball courts at the parking lot on Seney Drive or lining at tennis courts at Polo Grounds to meet the growing demand for this sport
4. Ensure accessibility at all athletic fields and in every spectator area
5. Consider future field needs during renovation of parks and improvement of athletic fields – make fields multiuse wherever possible

7.4 TRAILS AND CONNECTIVITY

7.4.1 Observations and Analyses

Trails are consistently a top request for improvements throughout the country, even in jurisdictions with the most extensive networks of trails; Bernardsville residents are no different. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has only emphasized the demand for trails as park usage rates jumped, and trails provided opportunities for outdoor, socially-distanced activities. According to the benchmarking in Chapter 2, Bernardsville has 0.6 miles of trail per 10,000 population, well below the median of the benchmark communities (7.0). The borough also has fewer trail miles per jurisdiction square mile (0.04) than the benchmarks (0.4). Other nearby providers offer nearly 30 miles of trails, but most of those trails are located in Morristown National Historic Park at the northeastern end of Bernardsville.

Bernardsville residents strongly requested more trails through both the surveys and the stakeholder groups. Trails represented three of the top four improvements at existing parks (walking, hiking trails, and bike trails). These numbers indicate that well over half of households want trails added at parks. The highest percentage of Bernardsville households (77%) had a need for walking trails with 64% having a need for hiking trails. The facilities also ranked first and second for unmet needs (1,600 and 1,400 households, respectively). Bike trails (paved or gravel) ranked fourth for households with unmet needs for facilities (nearly 1,000 households).

Most households (81%) were supportive of developing new and connecting existing trails in Bernardsville. Additionally, walking and hiking trails ranked first and second in the Priority Investment Rankings by ETC. They also ranked as the two most important facilities, with walking trails number one by far (37% of households ranked as one of the three most important facilities; next most – hiking trails – received 29%). When provided funds to allocate, households would provide the most funding to building trails (according to the statistically valid Mail Survey).

About 40% of the population lives within a 10-minute walking distance to a park; the majority of residents live in the eastern portion of the borough, where most parks are located. However, many households indicated the desire for better connectivity, even with only 3% of households indicating they did not use parks because they were too far from their homes. In addition to support for trails and connectivity expressed in the surveys,

stakeholder groups indicated support for trail connections between parks and for better connectivity throughout all of Bernardsville. Trails and connectivity were also the most common theme on the MindMixer online engagement website.

Somerset County prepared the **Walk-Bike-Hike Somerset County Plan** in 2019. The plan recommends a shared use path to parallel US Route 202, Mine Brook Road and Morristown Road. This route would provide a spine through the borough that could then be used to connect to neighborhoods, parks, and destinations in Bernardsville. This spine would connect to the Somerset/Morris County line to the east and to Far Hills Borough and a north-south trail on the west.

The survey indicated that some Bernardsville households have unmet needs for mountain bike (MTB) trails. An estimated 600 households in Bernardsville have unmet needs for these trails, and they ranked as a medium priority for investment in the Priority Investment Ratings for facilities by ETC Institute. Additionally, no mountain biking trails are provided by others nearby. The wooded area at 271 Mine Brook may be suitable for these trails with its rugged topography. The borough should partner with the local chapter of the Jersey Off Road Bicycle Association (JORBA) to evaluate potential for development of MTB trails in Bernardsville.

Bernardsville has not yet developed a borough-wide planning document to provide trails and connectivity throughout the community. Such a document should identify potential corridors and linkages between parks and other destinations in Bernardsville. The document would provide design, signage, and maintenance standards that ensure that trail experiences are consistent throughout Bernardsville. The plan should consider the use of existing easements and rights-of-way as potential corridors. This effort to establish a trail system coincides with the “10-Minute Walk Campaign” – led by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), Trust for Public Land (TPL), and Urban Land Institute – a national movement supported by hundreds of communities across the country to ensure everyone has walkable access to parks and trails⁴. Trail and connectivity improvements in Bernardsville will create safe routes and increase access across the borough.

7.4.2 Recommendations

1. Develop a bike and pedestrian connectivity plan to define the alignment and feasibility of corridors and smaller connecting spurs and on-road elements
 - Consider linkages between parks when developing and implementing this plan
2. Add paved trail loops within existing parks that lack and can accommodate this facility (e.g., Rose Bowl and Polo Grounds) and in future parks or open space properties
3. Pursue a partnership with JORBA for the potential development of mountain bike trails
4. Implement a consistent, durable wayfinding signage program for all borough parks and open space properties
5. Improve connectivity to parks and open spaces from adjacent neighborhoods by adding connecting paths where possible
6. Consider signing on to the 10-Minute Walk Mission by the TPL and NRPA to show the borough’s commitment to connectivity and access to parks
7. Continue planning for the **Walk-Bike-Hike Somerset County Plan** and connections to Borough destinations, parks, and open spaces

7.5 NEW PARK AND FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

7.5.1 Observations and Analyses

Trends indicate a slowly growing population in Bernardsville from 1980 to 2010, stabilizing at just under 8,000 as of 2020. Limited growth is expected in the near future, but the composition continues to change. The borough has not met all of the changing needs of its residents, a primary reason for which this Master Plan was authorized.

⁴ NRPA, TFPL, and ULI’s 10-Minute Walk campaign: <https://10minutewalk.org/>

The median age in Bernardsville (42.2) has increased since 2000 (40.0); while higher than the USA, it is similar to the other comparisons. The population age 65 and over has increased as a percentage since 2000 and is expected to reach nearly 20% by 2025. At the same time, the percentage of children is expected to continue declining to about 23%. While facilities for children will remain important, demand for senior activities will only continue to increase.

Educational attainment, already higher than the comparisons, has increased in Bernardsville with nearly three-quarters of the population attaining a bachelor's degree or above. Income has also increased over this period, even when adjusted for inflation. Incomes in Bernardsville are much higher than in the county, state, or USA. The borough, although still largely white, has become more diverse since 2010 with the largest growth in the Asian population. These demographic changes will likely continue, leading to changing needs for recreation. The needs of specific groups should be addressed during the individual park master planning process.

According to the benchmarking presented in Chapter 2, Bernardsville provides many more acres of parkland per thousand population (24.8) than the benchmark median (10.3), but a much lower amount of the land is developed at (24% compared to 60%). These numbers indicate that, while Bernardsville has more parkland than other communities, most of the land is undeveloped open space. Much of borough population is well served by parks, however, according to the service area analysis (Chapter 5). That said, a couple of existing properties have the potential to provide even more service for the community.

7.5.2 New and Upgraded Parks

Developing existing properties could help improve service levels in specific portions of Bernardsville while providing space for desired features that can serve the entire community. The 271 Mine Brook site has the most potential to accommodate a wide variety of park features requested through the public input process. The Peters Tract has potential to offer additional trail and nature education opportunities.

While many opportunities exist to improve park and facility service levels using existing parkland, some improvements may require new parkland, especially new interims of field space. Bernardsville should continue to consider land for new parks if suitable properties become available, especially land able to accommodate high demand facilities or when new residential development is authorized.

Park amenities are needed in the downtown area and should be considered as part of new development. Urban plazas and open green space should be added where possible as land is developed. The Quimby Lane Program could offer some of these spaces and provide some amenities that are needed downtown.

7.5.3 Aquatics

The Municipal Pool at Polo Grounds is popular and heavily used. According to the Mail Survey, over a third (35%) of households visited the pool over the past year. The pool is largely meeting the needs of residents with a relatively small percentage of households indicating unmet needs. However, some improvements are needed to keep the facility operating. The pool house needs renovation, and the main pool needs new gutters, piping, and filters. Other upgrades, such as a slide, climbing wall, and shade structure, could make the pool more attractive, retain users, and keep the facility competitive as other nearby pools make improvements. Overall, the facility needs to be upgraded, and a detailed analysis of potential improvements is needed.

Splash pads are an emerging trend in aquatics across the country; they can either replace wading pools at aquatic facilities or be developed as standalone features in other park areas. They come in any size and may be limited to jets and sprays to preserve an open plaza space, when not in use, or they can include vertical interactive play features. Because splash pads do not require lifeguards or attendants, they have much lower operating costs than swimming pools. If one is added to the Municipal Pool, it could be open for a longer season than the rest of the aquatic center.

7.5.4 Indoor Facilities

The borough of Bernardsville has limited access to indoor recreation and program spaces. The building at Claremont Field is small, in need of improvements, and primarily used for storage.

Stakeholder groups indicated a high demand for indoor spaces that is not met by existing facilities. While the Mail Survey indicated that community/recreation centers were a medium priority for investment (according to ETC Institute), about 600 households indicated unmet needs for these facilities. The third ranked unmet program need, fitness and wellness programs (840 households), would utilize an indoor facility, as would age 50+ programs, the sixth ranked unmet program need (620 households).

Developing the house at 251 Claremont Road into a program facility, with Recreation Department offices would meet some needs for indoor space in the borough; however, the need for gymnasium space would remain. The borough gets some use of the gyms at Somerset Hills School District, but the use is limited and not meeting all of the community's needs. Gym space is in high demand and limited availability constrains potential program offerings by Recreation. Optimally, the department would have its own space to control. The borough could potentially build a recreation center at the 271 Mine Brook Road property. This type of facility will require analysis of potential revenue, operating costs, and attendance as well as potential partnerships. Partnerships could include naming rights, sponsorships, shared use of space, and more.

7.5.5 Other New Facilities

Outdoor Fitness

Facilities popular with seniors were requested throughout the public input. Facilities for active adults are a trend for parks and recreation agencies throughout the country. These facilities include outdoor fitness equipment, pickleball courts (see Section 7.3), and trails (see Section 7.4). Outdoor fitness equipment has become a popular addition to parks for users of all ages (in addition to active adults/seniors), and nearly a quarter of households (22%) requested them as improvements to existing parks. Groups of equipment can provide potential gathering spaces and venues for programs for adults (including seniors). This equipment can even be incorporated into playground development.

Disc Golf

Bernardsville Recreation currently offers no disc golf courses, and none are provided by others nearby. As noted in Chapter 5, disc golf is a growing sport throughout the country. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disc golf increased in popularity due to the outdoor and socially distant nature of the sport. While disc golf was not identified as a high priority in the surveys, a course was requested through the stakeholder groups. A disc golf course can be developed with limited impact on land unsuitable for other park facilities and many disc golf associations, like the North Jersey Disc Golf Club, often volunteer to construct or maintain these courses. Open space properties, including 271 Mine Brook, are a potential locations for a course.

Outdoor Stages/Amphitheaters

Bernardsville lacks a large amphitheater for hosting a variety of desired community events. Facilities are needed to meet the needs of residents of Bernardsville. While about 800 households indicated an unmet need for an outdoor stage or amphitheater, nearly twice as many (1,400 households) indicated unmet needs for concerts and art performances that would be held in such a facility, the top ranked unmet need. An additional 900 households indicated unmet needs for outdoor movies, ranking second. Both programs were high priorities for investment according to the ETC institute. Other programs such as fitness programs could also be hosted at an amphitheater.

Although land for a potential amphitheater is limited in Bernardsville, 271 Mine Brook could likely accommodate the facility, depending on what other facilities are developed at that property. Optimally, a location closer to downtown is desirable and would be more accessible, possibly as part of the Quimby Lane Program.

Dog Parks and Amenities

As noted in Chapter 5, dog parks are a growing trend in parks and recreation. Bernardsville does not offer a dog park, and few dog parks are provided by others nearby. According to the Mail Survey, nearly 800 households have unmet needs for dog parks, and they ranked as the fifth most important facility. Dog parks were also a medium priority for investment according to the ETC institute. None of the borough's existing parks are optimal for the development of a dog park; however, land at one of the open space properties, particularly 251 Claremont, may be suitable.

7.5.6 Recommendations

1. Utilize existing parkland to address unmet facility needs and to improve access to park features
2. Add outdoor fitness equipment at select parks to expand opportunities for improved community health
3. Develop the 271 Mine Brook property as a Community Park to meet a variety of community needs
4. Seek a site for developing a dog park to meet the growing needs of Bernardsville households
5. Develop an outdoor stage or amphitheater to host community events, such as concerts and movies, highly desired by residents
6. Upgrade the Municipal Pool to maintain operation, make it more attractive, and retain users
 - Conduct detailed analysis of potential improvements, including expansion, to the facility
 - Consider adding a splash pad at the Municipal Pool to expand access to aquatic facilities in the borough
7. Explore the development of disc golf courses in Bernardsville, potentially in partnership with the local disc golf association
8. Convert the house at 251 Claremont Road to Recreation offices and program space to begin meeting community needs for indoor space
9. Consider developing a recreation center with gymnasium space, following the preparation of a feasibility study and selection of a suitable site
10. Seek opportunities for new parkland to better meet the demands for desired facilities and to improve service levels for both existing and future residents

7.6 NATURAL AREAS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURE EDUCATION

7.6.1 Observations and Analyses

Despite the presence of large amounts of open space in Bernardsville, residents indicated a need for access to more natural areas and nature programs in the borough. Nature programs were a high priority in the Priority investment Ratings by ETC. According to the Mail Survey, over a third (35%) of households have a need for nature programs (they were the fifth ranked program type), and most survey respondents indicated these needs were unmet (representing nearly 800 households). Natural areas/nature parks were ranked as the third most important facility and a high priority for investment. Natural areas/nature parks were the third ranked unmet need in the Mail Survey with nearly 1,300 households indicating an unmet need.

Parks and recreation agencies are increasingly focusing on preservation and restoration of natural resources. Natural areas provide numerous benefits to the health and wellness of a community, including opportunities for all residents. Studies indicate that a connection to nature can relieve stress, enhance interpersonal relationships, and improve mental health.⁵ Because they are typically one of the largest landowners in their jurisdictions, park and recreation departments have the opportunity to lead in the implementation of sustainability or best management practices (BMPs), efforts that can double as both engagement and educational opportunities.

As noted in the trends section of Chapter 5, environmental education cultivates understanding of the benefits natural habitats and open spaces. Nature education provides opportunities to engage all ages and abilities

⁵ National Recreation and Park Association, "Health and Wellness," <http://www.nrpa.org/About-NRPA/Impacting-Communities/Health-and-Wellness/>, (April 17, 2020)

and provides great potential for intergenerational programming. The Somerset County Park Commission and New Jersey Audubon Society are obvious partners for environmental programs, including nature classes and activities (see Section 7.11). Potential programs — which could involve partnership with the school districts — include community events, field trips, or classes covering habitat restoration, wildlife identification (e.g., bird watching), invasive species removal, and more.

The borough provides natural areas at several open space properties, most notably Peters Tract. In addition to the 220 acres of open space provided by the borough of Bernardsville, other agencies and non-profits (including the National Park Service, Somerset County Park Commission, and New Jersey Audubon Society) own another 500 acres of open space. Opportunities exist to take advantage of these properties for educational purposes while also preserving natural resources.

7.6.2 Recommendations

1. Explore partnerships with Somerset County Park Commission to add nature programming at parks and open space properties across the borough
2. Incorporate nature play structures as part of playground development and replacement, especially in more passive park areas
3. Consider utilizing picnic shelters as outdoor classrooms for nature education programs
4. Establish Peters Tract and 251 Claremont as a passive use park with trails and educational opportunities
5. Consider offering nature programs in the house at 251 Claremont Road (Peters Tract) to expand nature programming and provide year-round opportunities
6. Develop interpretive signage throughout the park system (will require signage plans) to help visitors understand the natural features and history of Bernardsville parks
7. Implement conservation policies and sustainable practice guidelines for future development and management of park properties
8. Pursue opportunities for restoring natural areas within parks in ways that improve access to nature and reduce maintenance requirements
9. Elevate parks by setting examples for Best Management Practices (BMP) like stormwater detention, recycling, etc.
10. Promote conservation and sustainability efforts as they are implemented to encourage reduced levels of consumption and waste generation
11. Explore and establish partnerships to produce nature education programs within Bernardsville parks (see also Section 7.11)

7.7 PROGRAMMING

7.7.1 Observations and Analyses

Concerts and art performances were by far the most needed recreation program category in Bernardsville according to the Mail Survey (57% of households); adult fitness & wellness programs ranked a distant second (39%). Outdoor movies ranked fourth at 34% (nature programs were third). Each of these programs appeared in the top five most important programs.

Concerts/art performances were the top unmet need indicated by over 1,400 households, while outdoor movies ranked second (roughly 900 households), and adult fitness & wellness programs ranked third (about 800 households). Other unmet needs indicated by the survey include age 50+ programs (over 600 households) and special events (over 800 households).

Community/Family-Oriented Programs

Overall, Bernardsville residents desire the kind of programs that bring community together. Stakeholder discussions and other public input also emphasize providing more programs that appeal across the spectrum of ages. In addition to the program categories described above, households were asked about interest in

specific events. Of a list of 11 potential events, more than half of households indicated that they were either very or somewhat likely to attend eight of them. More than 50% of households indicated that they were very likely to attend a food festival (76% very or somewhat), making this event an obvious choice to plan as a new event. A fall harvest fest (79%) and an outdoor concert series (76%) also had very strong interest.

These programs provide opportunities for the people of Bernardsville to find common ground with their neighbors, feel pride in their community, and enjoy a high quality of life. Broad-interest programming can create possibilities for gathering and interaction between different groups, especially those that might not otherwise meet.

The proposed amphitheater at 271 Mine Brook Road would provide a venue for larger concerts and outdoor movies. The space could also be used to host many of the other events desired by Bernardsville residents. The borough should begin with those events that have the most interest according to the survey; the borough can expand offerings if the initial events are successful.

Given staffing and funding limitations, the department should consider outside partnerships where possible to achieve the events desired by the community. By releasing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for event coordinators in Bernardsville, the borough would expand its capacity for hosting an event series for the community. Upon selection, the department should negotiate with the selected event coordinator to determine specific types of events, when to schedule them, and how the revenue should be split between the borough and the event coordinator.

Branded Bernardsville-specific events hosted in partnership with existing groups, like the Bernardsville Chamber of Commerce, can help create broad appeal, expanding the departments audience base. These events should be contractually owned by the borough, and incentivized; if an event is successful and growing, the contract can continue. The borough will need to consider fresh approaches, like alcohol sales, fees, and shared responsibility. For the selected event coordinator to make enough to sustain the position, there will most likely need to be at least six events per year, or one every other month.

Senior Programs

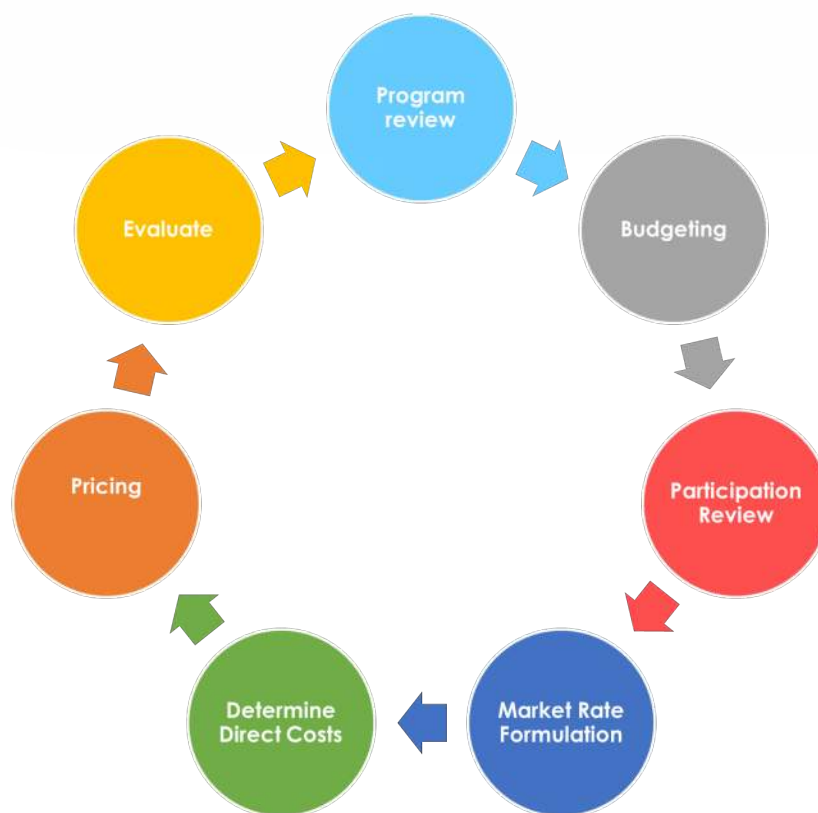
As noted in Section 7.4, Bernardsville, like most of the country, has an aging population and a large percentage of residents over age 65. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many survey respondents requested more senior programs. Bernardsville households were actually more supportive of new programs for seniors than for youth programs.

It is important to note that many citizens who qualify as “seniors” based on age (an arbitrary delineation) do not self-identify as seniors. They will sometimes elect not to participate in senior-targeted programs because of stigma or perception of aged people. Wherever communities advertise programs for “seniors” alone, there will often be this problem. Because some of the most active people in fitness and recreation are over the age of 50, it is important to separately brand and market programs geared towards active seniors (e.g., “Bernardsville Active Adults”). Programs that fit into this category are more likely to succeed when grouped together and marketed specifically to more active, physically sound seniors. Proposed features, such as outdoor fitness equipment and pickleball courts, provide opportunities for additional programs for these residents. Health care facilities, health insurance providers, and grocery store chains can all serve as potential sponsors for programs and events.

7.7.2 Annual Implementation Plan for Business Operations

The diagram below illustrates the ongoing evolution of a parks and recreation agency's working operations. Each cycle begins with an annual plan and ends with evaluation. Creating an annual plan allows the department to establish goals for both internal operations and external performance (i.e., programming). An annual operations plan is helpful for establishing pricing and costs, as well as for defining more specifically the ways which the agency will benefit the community; a yearly evaluation is critically important to ensure efficiency, appropriateness, and vitality. Hosting a year-end retreat for the department staff is a helpful way to collectively evaluate performance and to identify goals and objectives for the coming year.

Figure 7.1: Ongoing Annual Operation Plan Diagram



Bernardsville Recreation has offered the same (or similar) programming catalogue yearly for many years. While the current programming is generally popular and well-attended, both community and staff would significantly benefit from refreshing the programs. Considering operations in their entirety and determining what operations the department should “Stop, Start, and Continue” is a helpful technique for successfully realign services. Considering the condition of facilities, the success of existing programs, and how extended the current staff is, Bernardsville Recreation would do well to expand programming offered with minimal increase to the facilities maintained.

The following steps should guide the department in defining the purpose of its programming and the direction the agency would like to take moving forward.

Program Review

Review every program in the department for the following:

- What is the purpose of the program or activity?
- What is the program attempting to accomplish?

Using the answers to these questions, set specific goals for each program.

Budgeting

Use budget information to review actual direct costs from the previous year.

- Review part time wages, supplies, instructors' costs, etc.
- Separate the indirect costs of the full-time wages, maintenance costs, or utilities

Participation

Estimate participation based on historic data from previous years.

-
- Determine minimum number of participants
 - Determine maximum number of participants

Determine Direct Costs

Prior to determining pricing, the most important step is to determine direct costs. Calculate all direct costs and then establish a percentage of cost recovery for each program.

Pricing

Based on the calculations from determining direct costs and cost recovery, set price. Calculate the market rate and also the resident discount.

Evaluate

- Reflect on and assess the purpose of each program
- Establish a goal for participation numbers
- Establish a goal for cost recovery

7.7.3 Recommendations

1. Be a mission driven agency; pay very close attention to the mission of Recreation
 - Ensure every action and decision always connects back to the department's mission
2. Establish an annual assessment process to determine if Bernardsville should stop offering a program, continue offering a program, or start a new program (Annual Implementation Plan for Business Operations – Subsection 7.7.2.)
 - Consider an annual retreat as part of this assessment
3. Regularly evaluate program times to ensure programs are offered when community members can actually participate
4. Identify needs of underserved populations
5. Expand concert, movie, and live performance program offerings to address unmet community needs
 - Utilize the proposed amphitheater at 271 Mine Brook Road for additional and enhanced program opportunities
6. Consider releasing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for an event coordinator to develop and produce a consistent line-up of branded Bernardsville community events
 - Establish split revenue percentages with funding channeled directly to Recreation
7. Explore opportunities to grow line-up of adult fitness and wellness programs, as well as nature programs
8. Continue collaboration with the Mayor's Wellness Campaign to ensure programming efforts reach the widest audience and align with overall promotion of healthy living in the borough
9. Make full use of new facilities – amphitheaters, outdoor fitness equipment, picnic shelters, etc. – by programming and offering activities anchored around these sites
10. Develop more senior (age 50+) programming in light of the rapid growth of this demographic
11. Brand and market active senior programs together under a unique category (e.g., "Bernardsville Active Adults") – many can be offered outdoors
 - Strategically market these programs with support from partners and related service-providers
12. Monitor nationwide and regional recreation trends regularly, especially concerning growing population groups (50+ and BIPOC communities in Bernardsville) to best serve the needs of the whole community
13. Explore partnerships with nearby environmental and nature organizations (e.g., Somerset County Park Commission and New Jersey Audubon Society, etc.) to create nature-based group outings, participatory activities, and community events

-
14. Utilize the Core Program Guidelines in Appendix C as a source for potential program offerings
 15. Seek opportunities for additional teen programs, like Esports programs, to address demand
 16. Organize events and community-engaged activities around new trails and bike paths
 17. Promote online program calendar, including the ability to sync directly to personal calendars
 18. Ensure online program fliers include hyperlinks for ease of navigation and increased likelihood of registration

7.8 OPERATIONS, MAINTENANCE, AND PROMOTION

7.8.1 Observations and Analyses

On a per population basis, Bernardsville employs many fewer full-time equivalent (FTE) staff (3.8 per 10,000 population) than the benchmark median (6.7). However, the borough spends about twice the benchmark expenditures on each of these employees (\$134,000 vs. \$72,000). However, Bernardsville's revenue per capita is above the benchmark and more than twice the national level (\$58, compared to \$41 and \$21 respectively). The department's cost recovery of 90% is also well above the benchmark (57%). The recommendations that follow should help solidify success for the department.

7.8.2 Structure

The borough of Bernardsville is faced with challenges not unlike most American communities. Systemic issues – racial inequalities and historically discriminatory practices, struggles to create equitable opportunities for health and wellness, social divisions, and socioeconomic barriers – play out in everyday life in ways that entities like parks and recreation agencies have the power to directly address through seemingly insignificant but truly effective practices. Looking ahead into a new decade – and especially post-pandemic – how can park departments enter into the work of creating positive social change? Systemic challenges can be met, among many ways, through activities such as community events and programs (as described above). But in addition to these more external efforts, focused training can help staff learn ways to tackle these large issues through seemingly small but effective acts.

Thorny issues aside, staff and the department itself will benefit from continued training for leadership and cultivated growth within their respective fields. For example, the existing team can pursue appropriate certifications for overseeing parks and recreation operations, including Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP), Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) and Aquatic Facility Operator Certification (AFO). As needs arise, staff may pursue other relevant certifications. To accommodate staff seeking these credentials, Bernardsville must identify and allocate funding for professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences, training, memberships, etc.) with consideration to the licensure and requirements for certifications.

The current fee structures in Bernardsville are largely considered fair and acceptable by the community and elected officials. Any updates to the fee structure should be in accordance with the specifications of this agreement. That said, during unprecedented financial times and the ongoing strain due to the coronavirus pandemic, increasing program fees is not advisable at this time. The lack of significant population growth expected in Bernardsville is worth considering as it will mean more stagnant tax contributions.

Eventually, the borough will need to consider recovery models that will enable users to pay a fair share of increased programming costs. To do so successfully, it is essential the department maintain a clear understanding of all costs associated with each program. This understanding is the foundation of a true “cost-recovery” strategy which can guide the department into future endeavors. As part of this Master Plan for parks, recreation, and open space in Bernardsville, devising a fee structure as well as establishing cost recovery guidelines will be essential for implementing small but tangible improvements; incremental fee increases will help achieve adequate funding gradually instead of by a sudden dramatic increase.

Because it will be more difficult to expand staffing as the borough population remains level, the department should consider any opportunities for contracting with outside vendors or community partner to produce programming. Collaborating externally enables existing staff to oversee more programs ideally within a smooth, streamlined process. The borough needs the partnership of outside vendors and contractors to effectively

expand programs and events. That said, not all programs can or should be transferred to contractors. Any contracts pursued must remain consistent and formally structured in writing with clear parameters, ensuring benefits for the borough and contractor both.

7.8.3 Engagement and Promotion

The public has indicated a strong desire for continuous, ongoing engagement with Recreation to make sure that their needs are heard. The borough must maintain continuous public engagement throughout the years of implementing this plan, even as staff may change. Some of the specific park improvements will require local resident engagement to ascertain whether needs are effectively being met or if adjustments need to be made. Any improvement project – whether capital or operational – should incorporate outreach and engagement; following consistent standards of communication will ensure transparent accessibility.

Recreation should work with other agencies and organizations to improve awareness of programming opportunities. One important effort toward this end would be the creation and promotion of a common calendar for activities and events in Bernardsville, including opportunities for recreation, education, and tourism. This calendar could be utilized by a program for rescheduling events postponed due to rain and as part of promotion efforts. A conveniently located community bulletin board for the promotion of events and programs would provide another opportunity to improve awareness of programming opportunities. The department should also utilize social media, the website, and the existing online newsletter to better promote programs and events to residents and visitors.

According to survey responses, the chief reason people do not use parks and programs is that they do not know what is offered (60% of Mail Survey households). Bernardsville already uses Facebook to keep users updated and to spread information about available resources, but they could expand to other social media platforms. The department's webpage is also updated to reflect upcoming events or programs, league schedules, and relevant news (like the Master Plan effort). Yet, even with these efforts, there continue to be parts of the community left unaware. It should be noted that this issue is very typical for communities of all sizes across the country. That said, the communication issue is worth tackling because manageable solutions exist. For example, creating simple, branded templates will not only give staff a better starting point for promoting programs easily and effectively, but they can also make any outgoing messaging instantly recognizable in the community (not to mention, using templates helps maintain consistency even when there are personnel or leadership changes).

Figure 7.2 outlines three necessary elements that should be considered when conducting a successful marketing campaign. The top section, the first element, defines the department's identity. The middle section – the second element, containing the visual identity and messaging platform – describes what brochures, ads, flyers, and media will look like. The third element, at the bottom, lists a range of mediums for how the messaging can be shared.

Figure 7.2 is a big-picture guide for crafting a marketing strategy. The strategic plan in Chapter 6 defines most of the top section for Bernardsville Recreation, but the middle section is left to the discretion of the agency in terms of visual identity and messaging platform. Importantly, marketing must be easily implemented and standardized but flexible enough to be modified as needed. Figure 7.3 offers an example of a simple format that would be easily recognizable as messaging from the department. The title and images of a standard flyer or brochure can easily be changed to reflect what the agency wants to communicate or promote.

Figure 7.2: Essential Marketing Communication Elements



The standard event flyer format should include:

- Pictures (at the top and middle)
- Event name (in the front banner)
- Time and location (across the middle)
- Sponsors (at the bottom)
- Brand, logo, website and social media information

Any other materials, like the brochure in Figure 7.4, should incorporate similar visual identity and messaging structure. The same visual identity should also be used for online marketing, including social media and email notifications. Formalized, expanded marketing has the potential to attract additional users to the events, spaces, and programs offered by Bernardsville Recreation.

7.8.4 Recommendations

Structure

1. Adopt this Master Plan at the level of Borough Council; ensure commitment of legislative officials and borough leaders
2. Set priorities annually through a management retreat to articulate tasks and measure progress
3. Prepare an Operations Plan with Maintenance Standards
4. Improve maintenance at parks, following the development of maintenance standards
5. Develop a capital maintenance and replacement program (may require an increase in the Recreation capital budget comparable to other communities)

Figure 7.3: Sample Event Flyer



Figure 7.4: Sample Brochure



-
6. Increase maintenance budget to accommodate new facilities and programs
 7. Calculate maintenance impact when replacing features to verify that replacements reduce rather than increase maintenance requirements and cost
 8. Consider lease options when replacing equipment to avoid the need for costly capital expenditures
 9. Develop a permit process for field use when not needed by leagues to ensure access and prevent damage to fields
 10. Train staff
 - Create and implement professional and career development strategies for both management and supervisory staff
 - Identify and allocate funding for critical staff development opportunities (including conferences, training, memberships, etc.) with consideration to licensure and certification requirements
 - Encourage continued staff training for leadership and continued growth within respective fields
 - Encourage management level staff to attend professional development programs offered by state, regional, and national training organizations
 - Support staff members in pursuing Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP), Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI), and Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) certifications
 11. Add a staff member to oversee programming in the borough; potentially a new position as existing staff members retire
 12. Explore and solidify contracted partnerships with outside vendors and organizations to produce more programming
 - Broaden programming without having to hire additional staff
 - Address emerging requests from the public through partnerships with private vendors

Engagement and Promotion

1. Develop a Master Plan Implementation Committee (e.g., can include members of plan steering committee and/or Recreation Committee) to facilitate, market, and guide the implementation of the Action Plan component
2. Maintain continuous public engagement throughout the implementation of this plan
3. Establish a visual identity and messaging strategy for the department
4. Determine standard formatting for all marketing and promotional efforts (consider samples provided above) based on this platform
5. Identify a consistent brand as it relates to color, style, logo placement, and promotional materials
 - Ensure that park signage is consistent with this branding
6. Expand marketing of programs and facilities to increase community awareness of opportunities
7. Engage neighborhoods during park improvement processes
8. Maintain existing social media presence
9. Utilize video content whenever possible to meet increasing need for highly visual engagement
10. Develop an opt-in email blast for community members to stay informed and connected; can be part of program or event registration
11. Utilize this Master Plan to guide decision making – regularly monitor progress
12. Collaborate to create and promote a common calendar for activities and events in Bernardsville and even adjacent communities, including opportunities for recreation, education, and tourism
13. Collaborate with partners and other service-providers in the borough to cross-promote and share information about services
14. Explore development of mobile apps to enhance park user experiences

Contracts

1. Develop working agreements with each partner (all outside groups using Bernardsville facilities) with measurable outcomes and review every two years at a minimum
2. Understand all agency costs, both indirect and direct, before entering into agreements; understand how much investment a partner will commit to collaboration
3. Never permit private or not-for-profit groups to benefit financially from Bernardsville facilities without the borough receiving a share of gross revenue
4. Ensure all future contracts benefit the borough of Bernardsville and its residents, in addition to the partnering vendor or contractor
5. Require borough-owned properties remain available to Bernardsville residents when not in use by the lessee

7.9 BUDGET AND FUNDING

The total operating budget (see Table 2.15) for parks and recreation in Bernardsville for 2019 is just over \$500,000. The table also shows a per capita operating expenditure of \$64, just above the benchmark median of \$59 but well below the national benchmark of \$81. Proposed facility development, especially an indoor recreation center, and expanded program offerings could have a large impact on the overall budget of the department.

Generated revenue represents 90% of the Recreation budget, well above the benchmark of 57%. The per capita revenue in Bernardsville is similarly above the benchmark (\$58 compared to \$31). Due to the high level of cost recovery, an increase above the existing rate would be challenging. However, the existing level of cost recovery can be maintained even as programs and facilities are added to the system.

It will be a challenge for Bernardsville Recreation to sustain the growth identified in this plan without some changes to business operations. Applying these business management principals to operations, programs, and services will better prepare the department to tackle the financial challenges facing it in the future.

7.9.1 Management and Budget

Budget and financial performance analysis is needed but is not currently being completed. It is important for the department to have a firm grip on the costs associated with operating any given program or facility. Simply generating more revenue will not be beneficial if costs are not simultaneously controlled. If costs are not known, it is not possible to correctly calculate cost recovery. Instituting a cost recovery and pricing plan for all offerings (see next subsection) will help the department more efficiently tackle its budgeting.

Consistent Pricing for Programming

Programming fees should reflect the indirect costs of putting on the program. As department costs increase, these costs need to be explained and then distributed to the contractors conducting the programming.

Creating Revenue from Events

The borough's family-friendly reputation lends itself to a series of community-wide events that can generate substantial revenue through entrance fees, operations, and sponsors.

Gaining an Understanding of Maintenance Costs

The borough should know the exact cost to maintain outdoor parks. A maintenance standard by season should be set along with the number of people required to maintain one acre of parkland. If additional parkland is developed, the maintenance costs should be a part of planning and development discussions; having standards in place significantly helps with deliberation and enables proactive responses.

Vendors

In order to provide for the growing demands of programs and events identified through this planning process, the borough must consider using outside vendors and partners to perform some of the necessary tasks of program coordination. The borough will need to ensure these vendors are accomplishing objectives identified through this Master Plan. The vendor should provide their service for a split of revenues. Outside vendors and contractors can be obtained through an RFQ (Request for Qualifications), allowing the borough to choose the best people based on qualifications and previous experience. An example RFQ for programming is provided in Appendix G.

Rentals

Many agencies reserve picnics shelters on a daily basis, though most events last only two hours or less. Once shelters are constructed, a fee to reserve picnic shelters for half days (with an hour between reservations) will allow expanded use of those facilities. Tasks between rental sessions, such as emptying trash receptacles, will be required to maintain expected service levels. If borough staff are unavailable, this service may be outsourced with the cost included in the rental fee. The borough should add new shelters to the rental inventory as they are constructed and consider developing an online reservation platform including a calendar of availability.

Recreation Fund

This account is generated by collecting program fees which are in turn used to fund direct costs. This fund stays from year to year and does not go back into the general fund. The Recreation Fund provides some flexibility for the department to try new programs. The goal for the fund is to generate between \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually through program fees.

7.9.2 Potential Funding Sources

Financially sustainable parks and recreation agencies no longer rely on taxes as their only source of revenue generation. Bernardsville is no exception given that the department already recovers most of its operating costs. Thriving park systems of the future will continue developing creative methods for supporting both operational and capital needs. Bernardsville should start immediately to develop pricing policies for services (including cost recovery models) and to firm up any vendor partnership agreements.

There are numerous sources that will show ways to fund parks and recreation projects, but many of these strategies can be very hard to establish and take years to see any results. Examples of some of these ideas include maintenance endowment funds, conservation districts, license tags, transient occupancy taxes, income taxes, lease backs, real-estate transfer fees, land dedication and/or park impact fees, and park authorities. Although any of these strategies can be considered, the ideas below would have a more immediate impact on the operations of Bernardsville Recreation.

Formation of a Parks Foundation

Exploring a Bernardsville Parks Foundation, a separate 501c3 organization, is another opportunity Bernardsville can pursue. A foundation enables the borough and its programs and facilities to receive philanthropic funds. There are philanthropists in Bernardsville who want to donate to programs and services that add parks and recreation value to the borough. A foundation must be promoted and actively utilized to effectively fund park improvements. Funding opportunities exist not only for capital projects, but for programming as well. These funds could also serve to support volunteer recruitment and organization, introducing park ambassadors and other engaged members as part of the borough's parks and recreation service.

As noted previously, Bernardsville residents generally believe that program costs are fair. The fees are not high for the overall population that the department serves and are set at what is required for the programs to break even. However, the pricing for programs may still not be affordable for everyone in the community. A Parks Foundation can solicit donations for any participant that may not be able to pay for offerings, including covering program and user fees.

Volunteer Power

Park ambassadors provide directions, offer assistance, or remind visitors of park policies. They may also assist with maintenance activities, like litter pickup. The presence of ambassadors often helps visitors feel more comfortable in park spaces, and they can monitor sites to make sure people feel welcome and have good access to features of the park.

Adopt-A-Trail or Adopt-A-Park programs are another opportunity for volunteers to assist with park maintenance in Bernardsville. These programs help encourage residents to become involved in keeping their neighborhood parks clean. These programs give new possibilities for involvement to those residents who have the interest but need a formal opportunity.

Open Space Fund

The residents of Bernardsville passed a referendum in 1998 to establish a Municipal Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Trust Fund with all proceeds to be used for land acquisition. In 2008 the residents approved a public question to allocate up to 20% of the funds to be allocated for the development of land. In November 2019, the voters approved a public question to allow for up to 100% of the Trust Fund to be allocated for development for park and recreation purposes. With this new funding source for development, the borough desired this Master Plan to guide their use of the funds to meet the needs of residents.

The Open Space Fund currently has a \$4.7 million balance; however, most of the funds must be used for the purchase of land. The fund generates about \$500,000 per year of which about 100% can now be used for development. Accordingly, the borough will have roughly \$400,000 annually from this fund for park development. The anticipated balance available for park development after the July 2021 tally is estimated to be \$860,000. Bernardsville residents made it clear through the survey that they still support the acquisition of open space, so the borough should look for opportunities to spend the reserve allocated for acquisition on land that meets the needs of the community. These needs include not just natural areas but land that can accommodate other features such as athletic fields.

Grants and Application for Funding

Not all grants are beneficial; most are positive, but some require more work from staff than the grant's potential benefits. Bernardsville should continue to be on the lookout for grants that will enhance the park system. Applying to established foundations is often easier and has a higher acceptance rate. There are sometimes local foundations that are more amenable to giving locally. In all, grants can come from the federal government, state sources, and sometimes local entities. Indianapolis, for example, has received over \$100 million in foundation grants from the Lilly Endowment over the past 20 years for park related improvements.

Example Grant Sources:

- National Recreation Trails Program
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program
- Conservation Reserve Fund
- Community Forest and Open Space Program (Federal)
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Grants (USDA)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (Federal)
- AARP Community Challenge
- Green Acres Program (NJDEP)
- New Jersey Historic Trust (Historic Preservation)
- Somerset County Grants
- Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant Program

-
- Somerset County History Partnership Program Grant
 - Somerset County Local Arts Grant Program (Arts)

General Funding Sources for Parks, Recreation, and Sports Facility Operations

Below is a general list of ideas that communities have used to supplement costs of operations. Some of these may be more effective in Bernardsville than others.

- Official drink for parks and recreation
- Tournament fees – if an outside vendor makes money, the borough should as well
- Scoreboard sponsors
- Parking fees at events
- Field permits when outside groups are not using the fields
- Advertising sales
- Wi-Fi revenue through sponsorship, if a vendor provides the Wi-Fi
- Cell tower leases
- Privatization of various park and recreation programs and services
- Sports booster clubs
- Corporate sponsorship in exchange for advertising

7.9.3 Recommendations

Management and Budget

1. Know the value of assets (excluding land values); know where those assets are in their life cycle
2. Determine maintenance standards that include how many employees are required to maintain one acre of parkland; consider these standards when adding parkland to the system
3. Know the true costs to deliver services (direct and indirect costs)
4. Establish and adjust fees for programs according to direct and indirect costs
5. Classify services according to how they align with the agency's mission
6. Inform users, partners, and citizens of the true costs of services
7. Know the demographics of the citizens served
8. Track population trends
9. Control labor costs
10. Consider using outside vendors and partners, selected through an RFQ process, with a revenue split to perform some of the staffing tasks of a programmer
11. Maintain the Recreation Fund and expand the account with any percentage splits coming to Bernardsville through vendors and contractors

Cost Recovery

1. Maintain the existing level of cost recovery (90%) as programs and facilities are added to the system
2. Institute an easy-to-understand Cost Recovery and Pricing Plan for everything that is offered
3. Price services furthest away from the mission at full cost recovery levels
4. Analyze potential costs versus revenue before adding new features
5. Add picnic shelters to the rental inventory as they are constructed
 - Establish a fee to reserve shelters for partial days (with an hour between reservations) to allow the most efficient use of facilities
6. Consider online reservations for all rental facilities with a calendar to view availability

-
7. Identify potential revenue sources at community events, including sponsorships and entry fees
 8. Develop a program for recruiting and scheduling volunteer park ambassadors to promote wellbeing and provide assistance at parks
 9. Utilize volunteers to assist with park maintenance through efforts such as the adoption of sections of parks or trails in Bernardsville

Funding Sources

1. Find dedicated funding sources for parks and recreation that can be depended upon annually
2. Seek philanthropists in the community to support the agency's causes
3. Create a Bernardsville Parks Foundation to raise funds, recruit and organize volunteers, and promote the parks
4. Begin to utilize the Open Space Fund for park development to provide features requested by Bernardsville households and identified in this Master Plan
5. Seek opportunities to spend the Open Space Fund reserve allocated for acquisition of land that meets the community's needs
6. Continue seeking grants and apply to foundations for project funding that enhances the park system; be sure this is consistent with the park and recreation mission while also considering associated costs to the borough

7.10 PARTNERSHIPS AND SPONSORSHIPS

7.10.1 Observations and Analyses

Partnerships and sponsorships can help reduce costs or provide revenues to help expand parks and recreation opportunities for residents. Stakeholder groups indicated a need for more partnerships. Bernardsville currently partners with many organizations – including sports leagues, civic groups, business groups, and more – to offer programs and events in Bernardsville. Some new facilities will likely only be possible through partnerships with other organizations to cover both capital and operating costs.

Bernardsville currently maintains a good relationship and partnership with the Somerset Hills School District. However, opportunities may exist to further partner with the schools to expand youth programming and to utilize facilities at elementary schools for meeting growing field space needs and indoor programming. School districts and parks and recreation departments across the country partner to provide educational programs for students, either at the schools or at park facilities. As noted in the previous section, all partnerships and vendor agreements should be established and maintained at a consistent level.

Many of the passive activities residents seek are available for enjoyment at Little Brook Sanctuary (Somerset County Park Commission) and Morristown National Historic Park (National Park Service). Improved coordination between these agencies and the non-profits with land in the borough would provide greater opportunities for engaging with nature while permitting the borough to focus on the more active use and recreational offerings they are already successfully providing. The Morris County Park Commission, which manages the Lewis Morris County Park and Patriots' Path (beyond the borough to the northeast), could be an additional resource and potential partner. Encouraging and sustaining collaboration with these nearby nature-oriented, passive-use entities will help expand service while still avoiding duplication or inefficiencies.

Hospitals and health institutions are other potential parks partners; such collaboration is increasingly common across the country for helping develop health and wellness programming. Hospital systems customarily provide financial resources while parks and recreation departments conduct the programming.

7.10.2 Recommendations

1. Treat all vendors, contractors, and partners in a professional, consistent manner with legal, signed contracts containing the following:
 - Name, entity, and address

-
- Obligations of each party
 - Terms of the contract
 - Price — if any, and who pays for what
 - Representations and warranties – insurance, who owns what
 - Termination of the contract – when and by whom
 - Signed, witnessed, and reviewed periodically
2. Seek opportunities to expand partnerships with local organizations to improve access to recreation facilities and programs
 3. Continue to seek out partnerships with neighboring communities for programming opportunities
 4. Require a maintenance plan that identifies ongoing funding needs for partnership projects
 5. Establish policies for accepting sponsorships and selling naming rights
 6. Partner with Somerset County Park Commission, the National Park Service, Somerset Hills School District, and others for nature education programs throughout parks in Bernardsville
 7. Continue to seek out collaborative possibilities – in general – with neighboring communities
 8. Partner with local health care providers to promote and financially underwrite healthy lifestyles through parks and recreation



INDIVIDUAL PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes recommendations for individual park improvements including proposed new facilities and upgrades to existing parks. Each section reviews the findings explored in the park inventory (Chapter 3) and offers steps forward. These recommendations are presented as a starting point for future discussions with users, neighbors, partners, and the community at large. Before pursuing development, a deeper investigation into the capacity and potential of each of these parks will be needed to determine precise details like placement, materials used, and maintenance considerations.

This chapter also includes a suggested level of priority for each improvement recommendation; priority is based on public engagement, steering committee input, and the condition of facilities. Priorities should always be confirmed before implementation through community engagement. This process will be especially important as the borough recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the following recommendations for each park across the system, five parks were selected for a more detailed design analysis. Opportunity, community needs and input, and departmental goals all informed the selection of these specific sites. The two concept plans offered are intended to support any funding or development pursuits and to guide the improvement process. Parks are listed according to the park classification following the proposed improvements.

8.2 NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

8.2.1 Claremont Field (AKA Kuser Park)

Background

Claremont Field is a small Neighborhood Park on Claremont Road, just north of downtown Bernardsville. Despite its small size and limited features, the park is well visited with about 30% of households reporting use in the past year.

The following park issues and opportunities were identified through site assessments and public input:

- Playground is aged, has no ADA accessibility
- Bleachers and dugouts not accessible

-
- Fencing around ball field in disrepair in places
 - Parking lot in fair to poor condition
 - No entrance signage
 - Exterior of the recreation building is unsightly and in poor condition

Improvement Recommendations

1. Add ADA walkways to connect between site features, including the playground and field, and ensure sitewide accessibility
2. Pave spectator area at field to improve accessibility and appearance
3. Replace fencing and upgrade infield at the ballfield
4. Improve the parking lot
5. Add a drinking fountain with bottle filler
6. Remove existing building and replace with a new restroom building and expanded parking
7. Replace playground with fully accessible, engaging equipment
8. Add branded signage at entrances to improve navigability and effectively advertise site

8.2.2 Kiwanis Fields & Playground

Background

Kiwanis Fields & Playground is located near the southern boundary of the borough on Pine Street. This park offers two youth ballfields, t-ball field, and a playground. Most of the features have recently been improved, but some accessibility issues still need to be addressed.

The following park issues and opportunities were identified through site assessments and public input:

- No accessible route to gazebo
- Poor to no accessibility around ballfields and bleachers
- Inadequate lighting around all fields
- T-ball field in poor condition

Improvement Recommendations

1. Pave the existing parking lot
2. Upgrade t-ball field with artificial turf surface
3. Add a paved path from parking to playground for ADA access and to ensure sitewide accessibility
4. Add branded signage at entrances to improve navigability and effectively advertise site

8.2.3 Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park

Background

Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park includes the Borough Hall and offers a ballfield (Rose Bowl), walking path, and memorials.

The following park issues and opportunities were identified through site assessments and public input:

- Difficult to access from parking area
- Insufficient parking
- Pond area floods

Figure 8.1: Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park Concept





Improvement Recommendations

1. Develop a Park Master Plan with the concept plan (Figure 8.1) as foundation for conducting thorough local community engagement; ensure development coincides with long-term needs
2. Restore pond area into a natural stream corridor
3. Extend the trail to form a complete loop and improve site accessibility
4. Add sitting areas along the trail
5. Construct a picnic shelter to add a quality gathering place, meet local needs, and provide potentially programmable (and revenue-generating) space
6. Add a paved path to Rose Bowl Field for improved accessibility
7. Add a restroom building at the Rose Bowl

Concept Plan

The concept for Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park is presented in Figure 8.1. The concept shows the restoration of Mine Brook following the removal of the dam that creates Lindabury Pond. The image also shows a walking trail loop, a picnic shelter, and seating areas. On the Rose Bowl side of the property, the concept shows an accessible path and a new restroom building.

8.3 COMMUNITY PARKS

8.3.1 Polo Grounds and Evankow Tract/Municipal Pool

Background

Over half (51%) of Bernardsville households reported using Polo Grounds and Evankow Tract over the past year, easily the most of any of the borough's parks. By far the largest active park in the system, the site offers a wide variety of amenities, including multiple types of fields and courts, plus the Municipal Pool. The adjacent Bedwell Elementary School offers complementary features, including a large playground and fitness equipment.

The following park issues were identified through site assessments and public input:

- Playground (school property) not ADA accessible; gating also impedes accessibility
- Outdoor fitness area not ADA accessible
- Bleachers next to basketball court do not have handicap access
- Tennis courts need ADA access ramp
- Court surfaces are fair to poor, considerable cracking
- Gazebos on site are not ADA accessible
- Gazebo missing pickets in railing
- Lack of restrooms, especially at artificial turf field
- Baseball dugouts incomplete
- Some fields lack bleachers and accessible walkways
- No lighting
- No permanent restrooms
- Partial trail has overgrowth preventing a closed loop path

Improvement Recommendations

1. Extend the existing path to complete a perimeter walking trail
2. Add pickleball courts to address growing demand
3. Provide an accessible path from the Municipal Pool to Polo Grounds/Evankow fields and perimeter trail

-
4. Develop a restroom/concessions building with meeting space
 5. Add light at the existing artificial turf field to extend use and expand opportunities
 6. Pave area behind backstops and bleachers to improve accessibility
 7. Improve drainage at Lower Polo Fields
 8. Pave the parking lot at Seney Drive
 9. Develop a nature trail through the wooded portion of the property

8.4 NATURAL AREAS & OPEN SPACE

8.4.1 251 Claremont Road/Peters Tract

Background

The 251 Claremont Road property has a house with the potential to be used for offices or programming, while the adjacent Peters Tract is a wooded area that currently has some unofficial trails. The two properties offer nearly 40 acres of natural area with educational opportunities.

Improvement Recommendations

1. Develop a park master plan thorough local community engagement; ensure development coincides with long-term needs
2. Convert house to Recreation Department offices and meeting/program space
3. Add a parking lot
4. Construct an educational shelter to provide an outdoor venue for programs
5. Develop a nature trail loop with a trailhead
6. Consider developing a dog park to meet the growing needs of Bernardsville households
7. Add signage

8.4.2 271 Mine Brook Road

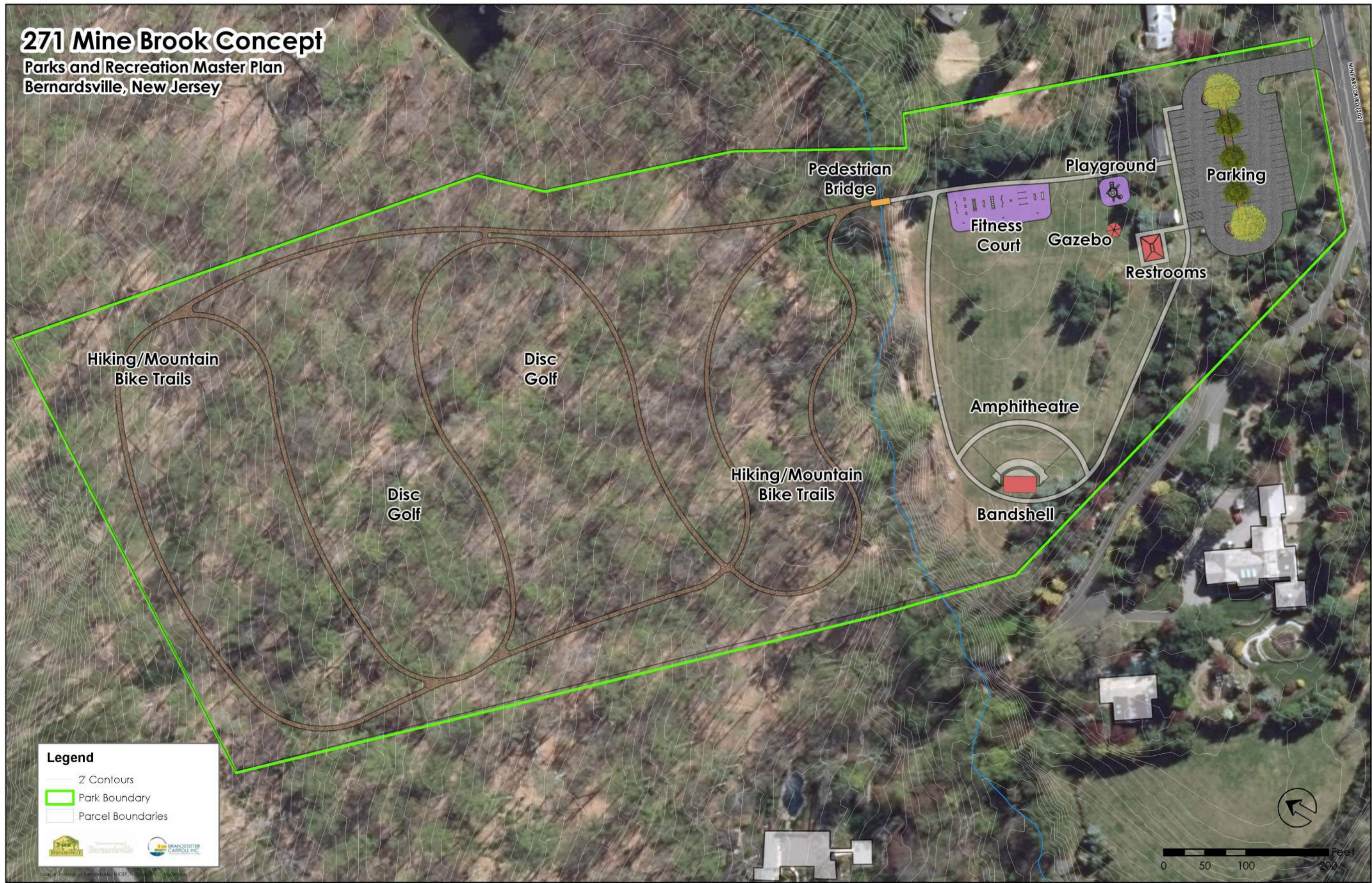
Background

The property at 271 Mine Brook Road has the best potential of any of the borough's open space properties for development of new active park features. A 5-acre area at the front of the property is relatively flat and mostly cleared of trees. The remaining portion of the property is wooded and characterized by steep slopes.

Improvement Recommendations

1. Develop a park master plan with the concept plan (Figure 8.2) as a foundation for conducting thorough local community engagement; ensure development coincides with long-term needs
2. Add entrance signage
3. Add parking near the entrance
4. Construct a restroom building to support extended use of site features
5. Develop an amphitheater or stage structure to host performances and educational programs, while also functioning as a picnic shelter
6. Construct a paved trail around the perimeter of the lower, developed portion of the property
7. Provide exercise and fitness stations
8. Add picnic shelters to address growing demand and improve service
9. Add hiking/mountain bike trails throughout the northern portion of the property

Figure 8.2: 271 Mine Brook Park Concept





-
10. Consider developing a disc golf course if conflict with trails can be avoided
 11. Consider developing a recreation center with gymnasium space, following the preparation of a feasibility study

Concept Plan

The concept plan (Figure 8.2) for 271 Mine Brook shows a potential arrangement of features if the property were to be developed as a Community Park. A paved path surrounds the developed park features and connects to the trails in the northern portion of the site. The concept shows an amphitheater, a playground, and a fitness area in the lower part of the property.

These features are supported by a restroom building and a parking lot near the park entrance. The concept shows trails and disc golf in the northern portion of the property. These features will require careful planning to minimize conflict between users. The amphitheater can be designed to also function as a picnic shelter and gathering space when not in use for classes or performances.

8.4.3 Dunster-Squibb/Belcher Open Space

Improvement Recommendations

1. Maintain as open space

8.4.4 Laurelwood/Round Top/Borough Springs

Improvement Recommendations

1. Add signage
2. Improve access to Mine Brook Road

8.4.5 Meeker Road Open Space

Improvement Recommendations

1. Maintain as open space

8.4.6 Moraine Crest Park

Improvement Recommendations

1. Formalize trails
2. Add signage

8.4.7 Whitenack Open Space

Improvement Recommendations

1. Maintain as open space

8.5 PARK IMPROVEMENT COSTS

The cost estimates for park improvements are presented in Table 8.1. These cost estimates include new park development and follow-up planning studies. The total cost for all improvements will depend on which of the recommendations are ultimately implemented. However, the total cost for the projects described in this chapter comes to about \$13.5 million. Land acquisition for new facilities or to expand existing parks is not included in these estimates.

Construction items include a 10% contingency and 12% for design, survey, and bidding. Grant opportunities exist and should be explored for many of these improvements, particularly trail system development. Seeking additional funding sources will help to reduce the required contributions by the borough of Bernardsville. Additionally, partnerships — including fundraising — should be considered as part of any improvement, particularly those with substantial capital costs.

Table 8.1: Capital Improvement Projects

Park Name		Term
		Term
Neighborhood Parks		
Claremont Field (AKA Kuser Park)		
1	ADA access to playground and field	Short
2	Drinking fountain	Short
3	Improve parking lot	Short
4	Park entrance sign	Short
5	Pave spectator area	Short
6	Remove building - Add restroom & parking	Short
7	Replace ballfield fencing	Short
8	Upgrade infield	Short
9	Playground replacement	Long
Kiwanis Fields & Peter's Park Playground		
1	Park entrance sign	Short
2	Pave parking lot	Short
3	Paved path from parking to playground for ADA access	Short
4	Upgrade T-Ball with artificial turf surface, fence, backstop	Short
Rose Bowl/Nervine Memorial Park		
1	Master Plan	Short
2	Loop trail	Medium
3	Footbridge at current dam location	Medium
4	Pave path to Rose Bowl Field	Medium
5	Restore pond area into natural stream corridor	Medium
6	Rose Bowl restroom	Medium
7	Trail along creek from Rose Bowl to Dam	Medium
8	Shelter/Pavilion	Medium
9	Sitting areas	Medium
Community Parks		
Polo Grounds & Evankow Tract		
1	Perimeter walking path	In Progress
2	Pickleball courts	In Progress
3	Path from Pool to Polo Grounds Field and trail	Short
4	Restroom/Concession/Meeting Facility	Short
5	Light the Upper Polo artificial turf field	Short
6	Pave area behind backstops and bleachers	Short
7	Lower Polo Fields drainage	Short
8	Lower Polo lighting	Short/Medium
9	Pave Seney Drive parking lot	Medium
10	Nature trail	Medium
11	Artificial turf at Lower Polo Fields	Long
Project Total		

Table 8.1: Capital Improvement Projects (Continued)

Park Name		Term
		Term
Municipal Pool		
1	Pool Master Plan	Short
2	Pool House renovation	Short
3	Main pool replace gutter, piping, filters	Short
4	Add slide and climbing wall to main pool	Short
5	Add zero depth and spray features to wading pool	Short
6	Reconfigure training pool w/ shallow water, shade, passive areas	Short
7	Extend fence to north with additional shade shelters	Medium
8	Shade shelters	Medium
Project Total		
Nature Parks/Natural Areas		
251 Claremont Road and Peters Tract		
1	Master Plan	Short
2	Convert house to office and meeting /program space	Short
3	Parking	Short
4	Signage	Short
5	Dog park	Medium
6	Education shelter	Medium
7	Nature trail loop	Medium
8	Trailhead	Medium
271 Mine Brook Road		
1	Master Plan	Short
2	Park sign	Short
3	Parking	Short
4	Road	Short
5	Amphitheater/bandshell	Medium
6	Disc golf course	Medium
7	Entrance	Medium
8	Exercise and fitness stations	Medium
9	Hiking/mountain bike trails	Medium
10	Paved loop trail	Medium
11	Large Playground	Medium
12	Picnic shelters	Medium
13	Restrooms	Medium
14	Future Recreation Center	10+ years
Moraine Crest		
1	Formalize trails	Short
2	Signage	Short/Medium
Laurelwood/Round Top/Borough Springs		
1	Signage	Short
2	Improve access to Mine Brook Road	Short

Table 8.1: Capital Improvement Projects (Continued)

Park Name		Term
		Term
Dunster Squibb and Belcher		
	Maintain as Open Space	
Meeker Road Open Space		
	Maintain as Open Space	
Whitenack Open Space		
	Maintain as Open Space	
Systemwide		
1	ADA Accessibility Assessment (Required)	Short
2	Feasibility Study for Indoor Program Facility	Medium
3	Land Suitable for Fields	Medium

ACTION PLAN

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan table on the following pages (Table 9.1) provides a detailed list of recommendations for the 2021 *Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan*. These are specific actions for the borough to take in implementing this plan to improve parks and recreation for the community.

9.2 ACTION PLAN STRATEGIES

These strategies are listed under the four goals and 12 objectives from the Strategic Plan (Chapter 6). The legend at the top of the table identifies the abbreviations used throughout the table. Checkmarks indicate the timeframe for the completion of each strategy within the time periods of 0-2 years, 3-5 years, or 6-10 years. Some strategies are indicated as “Ongoing” as they apply to all timeframes or represent more general actions that should always be considered. A total count of strategies by timeframe is located at the end of the table in the corresponding columns.

The other columns provide information regarding the implementation of each strategy. “Category” describes the type of action within the following four options: capital (capital improvements); policy (guidelines for the Borough Council and the Recreation Department, possibly including legislation); planning (long-term parks outlook, which includes conducting studies); or operations. The column for “Agency” indicates who is expected to implement the strategy, usually Bernardsville Recreation or another borough department. “Funding Source” indicates how the strategy should be funded or the type of funds used (operating or capital funds).

9.3 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITY RATING

The steering committee reviewed potential solutions and participated in an exercise to help verify capital improvement priorities for the Action Plan. Committee members were asked to rate each of the potential improvement projects through the engagement software Mentimeter on a scale of 0-5 (Highest Priority=5 and Not Needed=0. → “Highest Priority=5...”

The priority ranking was used to help rank the importance of improvements but not necessarily the order in which they should be developed. Figure 9.1, located after the Action Plan, identifies the capital improvement rating based on the average of the ranking for each item. These rankings were used as part of the process for recommending priorities along with public input and analyses completed throughout this master planning process.

Table 9.1: Action Plan

ACTION PLAN - 2021 Bernardsville Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan							
Legend of Abbreviations/Organizations							
Rec = Bernardsville Recreation		OP = Parks Operating Budget					
Borough = Borough Council, Other Departments		CIP = Capital Improvement Budget/Open Space Fund					
Partners = Outside Organizations (foundations, businesses, schools, civic associations, state/federal grants, etc.)		Revenue = Items that Generate Additional Revenue					
Goals, Objectives, and Strategies		Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
		0-2	3-5	6-10			
Goal 1: Connectivity, Created & Sustained							
Use connecting paths, community gatherings, & strategic outreach to bridge physical & social divides							
Objective 1.1 – Trails & Pathways: Ensure every citizen has access to multimodal routes throughout the community							
Strategy 1.1.1:	Add paved trail loops within existing parks that lack and can accommodate this facility (e.g., Rose Bowl and Polo Grounds) and in future parks or open space properties	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 1.1.2:	Develop a bike and pedestrian connectivity plan to define the alignment and feasibility of corridors and smaller connecting spurs and on-road elements	✓			Capital/Planning	Borough	CIP
Strategy 1.1.3:	Consider linkages between parks when developing and implementing the connectivity plan		Ongoing		Capital/Planning	Rec/Borough	CIP
Strategy 1.1.4:	Pursue a partnership with JORBA for the potential development of mountain bike trails	✓	✓		Capital/Planning	Rec/Partners	OP/CIP
Strategy 1.1.5:	Implement a consistent, durable wayfinding signage program for all borough parks and open space properties		Ongoing		Capital/Planning	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.1.6:	Improve connectivity to parks and open spaces from adjacent neighborhoods by adding connecting paths where possible		Ongoing		Capital/Planning	Rec/Borough	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.1.7:	Establish Peters Tract as a passive use park with trails and educational opportunities		✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 1.1.8:	Organize events and community-engaged activities around new trails and bike paths		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.1.9:	Consider signing on to the 10-Minute Walk Mission by the TPL and NRPA to show the borough's commitment to connectivity and access to parks	✓	✓		Policy	Borough	N/A
Strategy 1.1.10:	Continue planning for the Walk-Bike-Hike Somerset County Plan and connections to borough open spaces		Ongoing		Capital/Planning	Borough/County	CIP/County
Objective 1.2 – Social & Cultural Encounters: Provide possibilities for interaction, fun, & memories							
Strategy 1.2.1:	Consider utilizing picnic shelters as outdoor classrooms at for nature education programs	✓	✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.2.2:	Consider offering nature programs at the house at 251 Claremont Road (Peters Tract) to expand nature programming and provide year-round opportunities	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.2.3:	Consider releasing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for an event coordinator to develop and produce a consistent line-up of branded Bernardsville community events	✓			Operations/Policy	Rec/Borough/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.2.4:	Establish split revenue percentages with funding channeled directly to Recreation	✓			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.2.5:	Expand concert, movie, and live performance program offerings to address unmet community needs		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.2.6:	Utilize the proposed amphitheater at 271 Mine Brook Road for additional and enhanced program opportunities		✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.2.7:	Make full use of new facilities – amphitheaters, outdoor fitness equipment, picnic shelters, etc. – by programming and offering activities anchored around these sites		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies							
		Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
		0-2	3-5	6-10			
Strategy 1.2.8:	Seek opportunities for additional teen programs, including Esports programs, to address demand	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Objective 1.3 – Marketing & Promotion: Utilize innovative & inclusive outreach to bring parks & recreation to everyone							
Strategy 1.3.1:	Maintain continuous public engagement throughout the implementation of this plan	Ongoing			Operations/ Policy	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.2:	Establish a visual identity and messaging strategy for the department	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.3:	Determine standard formatting for all marketing and promotional efforts (consider samples provided above) based on this platform	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.4:	Identify a consistent brand as it relates to color, style, logo placement, and promotional materials	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.5:	Ensure that park signage is consistent with this branding	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.6:	Engage neighborhoods during park improvement processes	✓	✓		Operations	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 1.3.7:	Maintain existing social media presence	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Borough	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.8:	Utilize video content whenever possible to meet increasing need for highly visual engagement	Ongoing			Operations/ Planning	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.9:	Develop an opt-in email blast for community members to stay informed and connected; Can be part of program or event registration	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.10:	Develop interpretive signage throughout the park system (requires signage plans) to help visitors understand the natural features and history of Bernardsville parks	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 1.3.11:	Partner with Somerset County Park Commission, the National Park Service, Somerset Hills School District, and others for nature education programs throughout parks in Bernardsville	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.12:	Regularly evaluate program times to ensure programs are offered when community members can actually participate	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.13:	Promote online program calendar, including the ability to sync directly to personal calendars	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 1.3.14:	Ensure online program fliers include hyperlinks for ease of navigation and increased likelihood of registration	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.15:	Explore and solidify contracted partnerships with outside vendors and organizations to produce more programming	✓			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.16:	Expand marketing of programs and facilities to increase community awareness of opportunities	✓			Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.17:	Seek opportunities to expand partnerships with local organizations to improve access to recreation facilities and programs	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 1.3.18:	Continue to seek out partnerships with neighboring communities for programming opportunities	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 1.3.19:	Continue to seek out collaborative possibilities – in general – with neighboring communities	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 1.3.20:	Collaborate to create and promote a common calendar for activities and events in Bernardsville and adjacent communities, including opportunities for recreation, education, and tourism	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 1.3.21:	Collaborate with partners and other service-providers in the borough to cross-promote and share information about services	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.22:	Explore development of mobile apps to enhance park user experiences	Ongoing			Operations	Rec	OP/CIP
Strategy 1.3.23:	Develop working agreements with each partner (all outside groups using Bernardsville facilities) with measurable outcomes and review every two years at a minimum	Ongoing			Operations	Rec/Partners	OP

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies	Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
	0-2	3-5	6-10			
Strategy 1.3.24: Inform users, partners, and citizens of the true costs of services		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.25: Track population trends and know the demographics of the citizens served		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 1.3.26: Find dedicated funding sources for parks and recreation that can be depended upon annually		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.27: Seek philanthropists in the community to support the agency's causes		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 1.3.28: Continue seeking grants and apply to foundations for project funding that enhances the park system; be sure this is consistent with the park and recreation mission while also considering associated costs to the borough		Ongoing		Operations/ Policy	Rec/Borough /Partners	OP/Revenue
Goal 2: Empowered & Healthy Lifestyles						
Deliver programming & resources to nurture the community's physical health & mental wellbeing						
Objective 2.1 – Athletics: Innovate to provide access & opportunity						
Strategy 2.1.1: Explore opportunities to expand and maintain field capacity at Bernardsville parks without adding new fields		Ongoing		Capital/ Operations	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 2.1.2: Seek to acquire additional land that is suitable for field development (i.e., relatively flat, large enough for 2-3 fields, limited vegetation)		Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.3: Consider future field needs during renovation of parks and improvement of athletic fields – make fields multiuse wherever possible		Ongoing		Capital/ Operations	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 2.1.4: Improve drainage at the artificial turf fields at Polo Grounds (lower)	✓			Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.5: Consider adding lighting at both Polo Grounds fields; ensure new lighting is energy efficient and calibrated to reduce light pollution	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.6: Add pickleball courts or lining at tennis courts at Polo Grounds to meet the growing demand for this sport	✓			Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.7: Add artificial turf at upper Polo Grounds fields to expand use and improve turf conditions		✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.8: Consider developing the Chestnut field if other efforts are insufficient to meet field needs (long-term)			✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Objective 2.2 – Active Living: Encourage exploration & growth through diverse recreational experiences						
Strategy 2.2.1: Utilize existing parkland to meet unmet facility needs and to improve access to park features	✓	✓		Capital/ Planning	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.2: Develop the 271 Mine Brook property as a Community Park to meet a variety of community needs	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.3: Seek opportunities for new parkland to meet the demands of desired facilities and to improve service levels for existing and future residents	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.4: Explore the development of disc golf courses in Bernardsville, potentially as a partnership with the local disc golf association		✓		Capital/ Planning	Rec/Partners	CIP/OP
Strategy 2.1.5: Upgrade the Municipal Pool to maintain operation, make it more attractive, and retain users	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.1.6: Conduct detailed analysis of potential improvements, including expansion, to the facility		Ongoing		Capital/ Planning	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 2.1.7: Consider adding a splash pad at the Municipal Pool to expand access to aquatic facilities in the borough		Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies						
	Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
	0-2	3-5	6-10			
Objective 2.3 – Community Vitality: Become a leading provider of wellness and culture						
Strategy 2.3.1:	Add outdoor fitness equipment at select parks to expand opportunities for improved community health	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.3.2:	Develop an outdoor stage or amphitheater to host community events, such as concerts and movies, highly desired by residents	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.3.3:	Convert the house at 251 Claremont Road to Recreation offices and program space to begin to meet community needs for indoor space	Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 2.3.4:	Consider developing a recreation center with gymnasium space, following the preparation of a feasibility study and selection of a suitable potential site	✓	✓	Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 2.3.5:	Explore opportunities to grow line-up of adult fitness and wellness programs	✓		Capital	Rec	OP
Strategy 2.3.6:	Continue collaboration with the Mayor's Wellness Campaign to ensure programming efforts reach the widest audience and align with overall promotion of healthy living in the township	Ongoing		Operation	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 2.3.7:	Develop more senior (age 50+) programming in light of the rapid growth of this demographic	✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 2.3.8:	Brand and market active senior programs together under a unique category (e.g., "Bernardsville Active Adults") – many can be offered outdoors	Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 2.3.9:	Strategically market these programs with support from partners and related service-providers	Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 2.3.10:	Partner with local health care providers to promote and financially underwrite healthy lifestyles through parks and recreation	Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Goal 3: Excellent Spaces, Accessible to All						
Foster community pride by enhancing the overall character of the borough's parks & facilities						
Objective 3.1 – Modernized Parks: Exceed expectations through upgraded site features & amenities						
Strategy 3.1.1:	Prepare design standards for signage, benches, shelters, trash receptacles, etc. to guide future park development and improvements at existing parks	✓		Planning/Policy	Rec	OP
Strategy 3.1.2:	Add support features throughout the park system such as drinking fountains, shade structures, trees & landscaping, parking, bike racks, and sidewalks	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 3.1.3:	Add or improve restrooms throughout the parks	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 3.1.4:	Upgrade and utilize technology in parks for patrons and staff	Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 3.1.5:	Provide Wi-Fi in active parks to ensure users are aware of its availability	Ongoing		Capital/Operations	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 3.1.6:	Include bottle fillers at all new drinking fountains and when replacing existing features	Ongoing		Operations/Planning	Rec	CIP
Objective 3.2 – Gathering Spaces: Be creative to provide venues for community interaction						
Strategy 3.2.1:	Add and upgrade picnic shelters at parks to expand access to these facilities, make them more inviting, and promote opportunities for outdoor community gatherings	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 3.2.2:	Develop an outdoor stage or amphitheater to host community events, such as concerts and movies, highly desired by residents	✓	✓	Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 3.2.3:	Seek a site, potentially at 251 Claremont Road, to develop a dog park to meet the growing needs of Bernardsville households		✓	Capital	Rec	CIP

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies						
	Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
	0-2	3-5	6-10			
Objective 3.3 – Sustainability: Practice environmental stewardship & fiscal responsibility with clear standards & recurring assessments						
Strategy 3.3.1:	Implement conservation policies and sustainable practice guidelines for future development and management of park properties			Operations/ Policy	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 3.3.2:	Pursue opportunities for restoring natural areas within parks in ways that improve access to nature and reduce maintenance requirements			Operations/ Policy	Rec	OP
Strategy 3.3.3:	Elevate parks by setting examples for Best Management Practices (BMP) like stormwater detention, recycling, etc.			Operations/ Policy	Rec	OP
Strategy 3.3.4:	Collaborate to implement goals and guidelines of 2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)			Operations/ Policy	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 3.3.4:	Commit to 2016 OSRP goal of supporting the protection and enhancement of both greenways and blueways as a way to expand and preserve contiguous open space acreage			Operations/ Policy	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 3.3.5:	Promote conservation and sustainability efforts as they are implemented to encourage reduced levels of consumption and waste generation			Operations/ Policy	Rec/Borough	OP
Goal 4: Legacy of Remarkable Service						
Enrich the borough through responsible operations, signature offerings, & proactive improvements						
Objective 4.1 – Adaptability: Be flexible, responsive, & imaginative to serve the diverse needs of the community						
Strategy 4.1.1:	✓			Operations	Borough	N/A
Strategy 4.1.2:	✓	✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.1.3:		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Borough	OP
Strategy 4.1.4:		Ongoing		Capital/ Operations	Rec/Borough	CIP/OP
Strategy 4.1.5:		Ongoing		Capital	Rec/Borough	CIP
Strategy 4.1.6:	✓	✓		Capital/ Planning	Rec/Borough	CIP/OP
Strategy 4.1.7:		Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 4.1.8:		Ongoing		Capital/ Planning	Rec	CIP
Strategy 4.1.9:		Ongoing		Operations/ Planning	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 4.1.10:		Ongoing		Operations/ Planning	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 4.1.11:	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Strategy 4.1.12:	✓	✓		Capital	Rec	CIP
Objective 4.2 – Operations & Maintenance: Set the standard for responsible management to effectively attract resources & support						
Strategy 4.2.1:		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.2:		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.3:		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies	Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
	0-2	3-5	6-10			
Strategy 4.2.4: Establish and adjust fees for programs according to direct and indirect costs		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 4.2.5: Classify the agency's services according to how they align with the agency's mission	✓			Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 4.2.6: Establish an annual assessment process to determine if Bernardsville should stop offering a program, continue offering a program, or start a new program (Annual Implementation Plan for Business Operations – Subsection 7.7.2.)		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.7: Consider an annual retreat as part of this assessment		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.8: Utilize the Core Program Guidelines in Appendix C as a source for potential program offerings		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.9: Set priorities annually through a management retreat to articulate tasks and measure progress		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.10: Prepare an Operations Plan with Maintenance Standards	✓	✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.11: Acquire land contiguous to existing parks, if it becomes available, to allow for additional features and increase the total amount of parkland available to residents while still limiting impacts on operations and maintenance		Ongoing		Capital/Planning	Rec	CIP
Strategy 4.2.12: Know the value of assets (excluding land values); know where those assets are in their life cycle		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.13: Develop a capital maintenance and replacement program (may require an increase in the parks and recreation capital budget comparable to other communities)		Ongoing		Capital	Rec	CIP/OP
Strategy 4.2.14: Increase maintenance budget to accommodate new facilities and programs		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.15: Calculate maintenance impact when replacing features to verify replacements reduce rather than increase maintenance requirements and cost		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.16: Determine maintenance standards that include how many employees are required to maintain one acre of parkland; consider these standards when adding parkland to the system	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.17: Improve maintenance at parks, following the development of maintenance standards		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.18: Consider lease options when replacing equipment to avoid the need for costly capital expenditures		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.2.19: Develop a permit process for field use when not needed by leagues to ensure access and prevent damage to fields		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 4.2.20: Understand all agency costs, both indirect and direct, before entering into agreements; understand how much investment a partner will commit to collaboration		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 4.2.21: Never permit private or not-for-profit groups to benefit financially from Bernardsville facilities without the borough receiving a share of gross revenue		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 4.2.22: Ensure all future contracts benefit the borough of Bernardsville and its residents, in addition to the partnering vendor or contractor		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 4.2.23: Require borough-owned properties remain available to Bernardsville residents when not in use by the lessee		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 4.2.24: Maintain the Recreation Fund and expand the account with any percentage splits coming to Bernardsville through vendors and contractors		Ongoing		Operations	Rec	OP/Revenue
Strategy 4.2.25: Require a maintenance plan that identifies ongoing funding needs for partnership projects		Ongoing		Operations	Rec/Partners	OP
Strategy 4.2.26: Establish policies for accepting sponsorships and selling naming rights		Ongoing		Policy	Rec/Borough	OP/Revenue

Table 9.1: Action Plan (Continued)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies	Timeframe (Years)			Category	Agency	Funding Source
	0-2	3-5	6-10			
Objective 4.3 – Staff Development & Retention: Cultivate a team of qualified & motivated professionals						
Strategy 4.3.1:	Create and implement professional and career development strategies for both management and supervisory staff			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.2:	✓			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.3:	✓	✓		Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.4:	Encourage continued staff training for leadership and continued growth within respective fields			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.5:	Encourage management level staff to attend professional development programs offered by state, regional, and national training organizations			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.6:	Support staff members in pursuing Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP), Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) and Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) certifications			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.7:	Add a staff member to oversee programming in the borough; potentially a new position as existing staff members retire			Operations	Rec	OP
Strategy 4.3.8:	Treat all vendors, contractors, and partners in a professional, consistent manner with legal, signed contracts			Operations	Rec	OP
Totals by Timeframe						
Total Number of Strategies = 131				42	29	2
Ongoing = 83						

Figure 9.1: Capital Improvement Priority Rating

