

PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

Report: Public Opinion Survey on Parks and Recreation 2005-06

I. Introduction

Whitemarsh Township conducted a direct mail survey to assess public opinion about the parks and recreation. The Township wanted to determine the opinions, ideas and concerns of the residents to serve as a foundation for the **Park and Recreation Plan**. By understanding the citizens' needs and interests, the Township will be able to direct its efforts and resources to benefit public as well as to conserve the natural resources and scenic beauty of the community most effectively.

II. Process

Organization, Goals and Survey Instrument – Whitemarsh Township retained Gannett Fleming and Toole Recreation Planning to conduct the public opinion survey. The Whitemarsh Township Parks and Recreation Department, the Plan Study Committee, and the consultants worked together collaboratively throughout the survey process. A CPRP (Certified Park and Recreation Professional) developed the survey instrument in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department and the Plan Study Committee. The goal was to obtain citizen input regarding:

- Parks and recreation facilities
- Trails
- Preferences regarding the future parks and recreation improvements
- Programs and services

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- Level of satisfaction with the parks and recreation system
- Attitudes towards township support of parks and recreation
- Public priorities for future directions in parks, recreation and open space

Random Sample: Return Number Matters - A random sample of 1,500 households was drawn so that every household in Whitemarsh Township had an equal chance of participating in the survey. Furthermore, the Township was divided according to planning districts that included the northern, central, river and Miquon areas of the Township to insure that citizens in all areas of the Township received a survey. The goal was to achieve a return of 361 completed surveys so that the survey findings would have a high level of confidence and a low margin of error.

Distribution – Respondents received a pre-survey letter informing them that they would be getting a questionnaire the following week. The pre-survey letter informed the respondents about the project, the importance of their response and the time frame. The survey was mailed out via first class mail along with a cover letter and a self-addressed stamped reply envelope the next week. One week after the surveys were mailed out, a follow-up post card was sent as a reminder for people to return their surveys or thanking them if they already had.

III. Survey Follow Up

In addition to the postcard reminder, follow up included telephone calls to the respondents who had not yet returned their surveys. Toole Recreation Planning is licensed by the PUC in accordance with the “Do Not Call” regulations to make telephone calls to survey participants. Up to three calls were made to a random group of non-respondents asking them to complete and return their questionnaire. The phone calls yielded the following:

- Unreachable: 25 of the survey sample who had not returned a questionnaire were unreachable. That is they did not respond to the survey or any of the telephone calls.
- Refusals: 22 non-returned questionnaires refused in telephone follow up. Of the refusals, some were “hang ups” while others refused after listening to the purpose of the call. The main reasons given for refusals were happy with the parks and recreation system in Whitemarsh Township, too busy, or lack of interest.
- Reachable and Non-refused: 25 of the survey sample contacted said they would either fill it out or they asked for another questionnaire which was then mailed to them. Interestingly, those contacted who had not yet returned the survey stated that they thought that the parks and recreation system was just fine and that there was no need to comment on it.

IV. Return

Of the 1,000 surveys mailed, 72 were undeliverable due to incorrect addresses, changes of address, refusals and deaths effectively reducing the sample to 928. Completed questionnaires returned totaled 408 within the response period. Another 27 were returned after that for a total of 435 completed surveys for a return rate of 47 percent. The yield produced exceeded the number required to achieve a statistical level of confidence of 95 percent +/- 5 percent.

The follow up phone calls determined that the citizens randomly selected for the survey did not respond to a great extent because they were satisfied with the parks and recreation system. Comments focused on four areas:

- Need to preserve open space
- Need for an indoor recreation center
- Lack of information about parks and recreation
- Non-use of the parks due to lack of time and interest

Respondent Characteristics

Respondents provided demographic information that included their gender, age group, educational level, and household composition.

Respondent Age Group

About 70 percent of the respondents were 24 to 59 years of age with about an equal split between 25 to 44 and 45 to 59 years of age. The next largest responding group consisted of 21 percent in the 65 years and older cohort. About nine percent were 60 to 64. The age group of 18 to 24 made had no respondents.

Gender of Respondents

Of those who answered the question about respondent gender, 41 percent reported that they were males and 34 percent females. About 25 percent did not report their gender. Males were over-represented in the survey responses in comparison to the population as whole.

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Household Composition

Respondents reported the following household members:

- Pre-schoolers – 15 percent
- Elementary school students – 21 percent
- Middle school students – 11 percent
- High school students – 11 percent
- College students – 9 percent
- Adults – 71 percent
- Senior Citizens – 28 percent
- People with disabilities – 5 percent

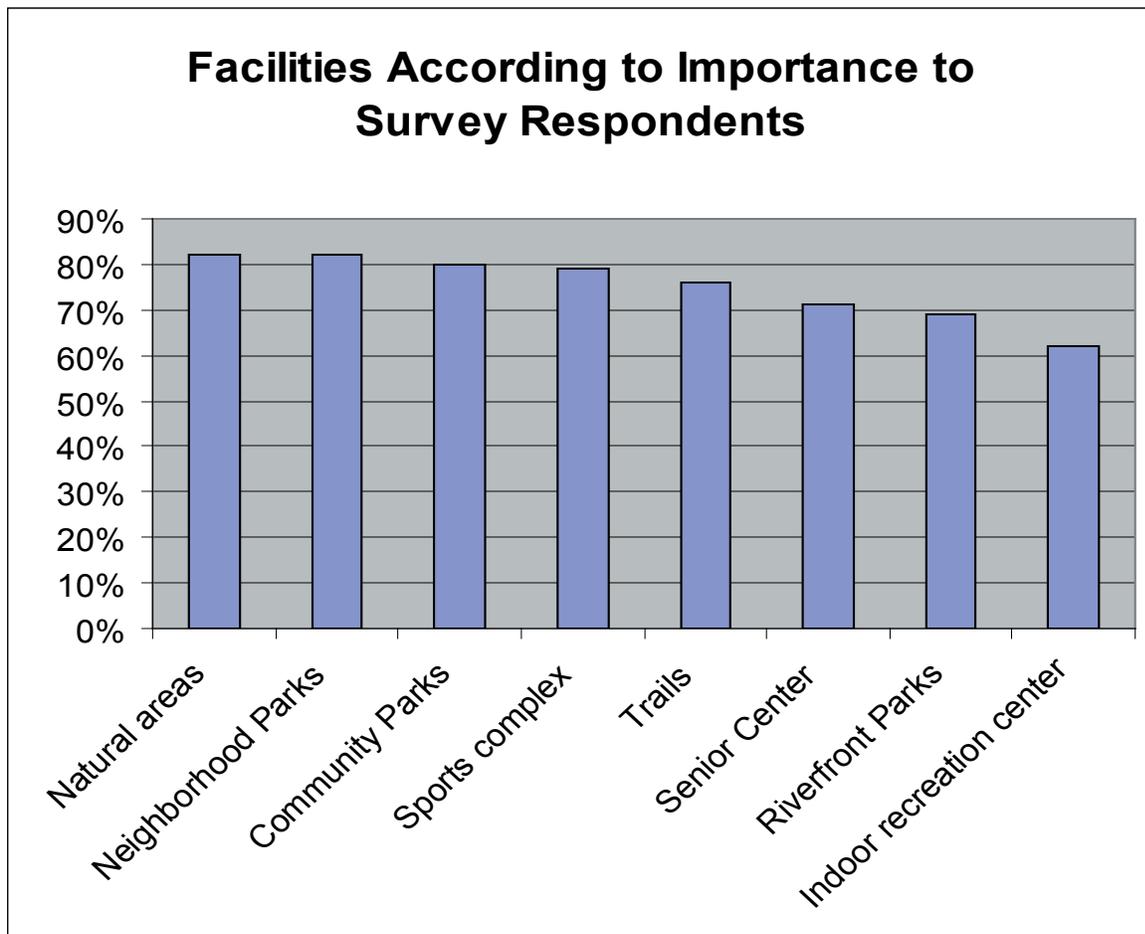
V. Summary of Overall Findings

The eight major findings of the survey include the following:

1. The most popular recreation pursuits were exercise and fitness and special events. The performing arts and exercise and fitness are the two areas that respondents would most like to participate in.
2. The respondents have an overall favorable impression of Whitemarsh Township's recreation programs with 63 percent of the respondents rating them as good to excellent. About fourteen percent indicated that they were not familiar with township programs. Without the respondents who could not rate township services, the rating of good to excellent increases to 77 percent. The target of good to excellent could be 80 percent showing most positive findings in citizen ratings of the park system. About one in three respondents participates in township programs.
3. Miles Park is by far the most frequently visited park with about three out of four respondents reporting that they use this park frequently or occasionally. Cedar Grove was the second most popular park. Parks that respondents reported as in infrequent use tended to be small neighborhood parks such as Kline and McCarthy as expected. About 61 percent of the respondents rated the parks overall as good to excellent. Setting a goal of achieving an 80 percent response within the next five years would be a desirable goal. About 74 percent of the respondents rating them as good to excellent in terms of cleanliness, 64 -69 percent good to excellent in attractiveness, safety and location and 55 percent on condition of park equipment. The lowest rating of

parcs went to the type of facilities available at 43 percent. This finding makes sense since respondents wanted facilities that are not available now such as paths, natural areas and landscaping such as shade trees.

4. The priority for the future focus of parks and recreation in Whitemarsh Township, according to 77 percent of the respondents, should be natural resource protection and achieving a balance of parks, services, trails and indoor recreation facilities.
5. The type of park facilities rated as important by respondents is shown in the figure below:



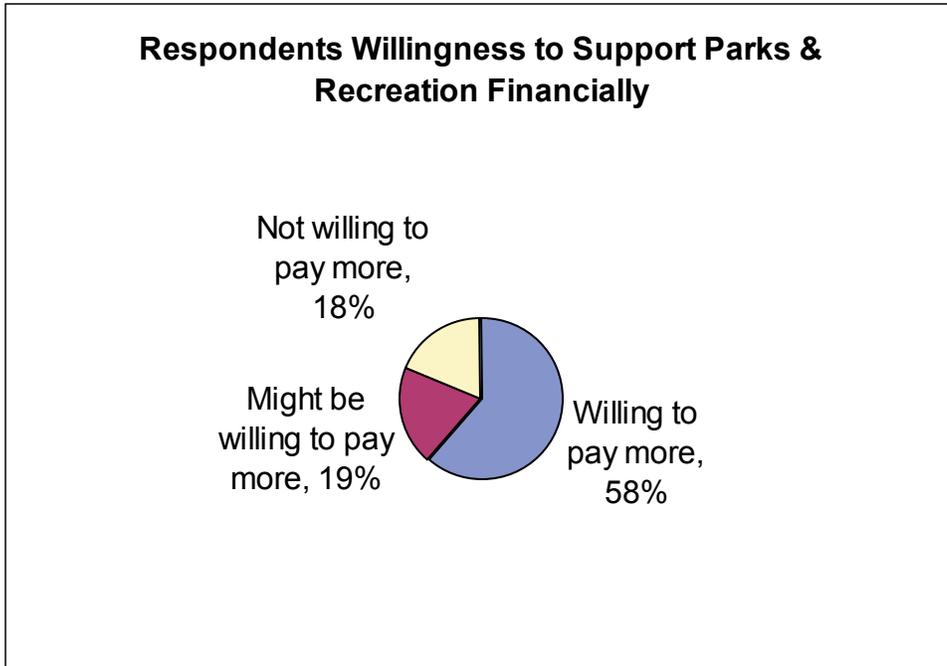
6. Top facility preferences which the respondents would like to see developed 2006-2011 include:
 - Walking paths – 73%
 - Bike paths – 71%

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- Comfort facilities (restrooms, benches etc.) – 70 percent
 - Natural areas – 67%
 - Shade trees – 64%
 - Parking – 61%
 - Senior Citizen Center – 61%
 - Playgrounds – 60%
7. About 58 percent of the respondents said they'd be willing to pay more in taxes for parks and recreation and 18 percent would be willing to pay user fees and charges ranging from \$5 to \$20 per year in addition to the current per capita amount of \$19.78. About 19 percent indicated that they might be willing to pay more if they had more information. Only 18 percent said no that they would not be willing to pay more.
8. Follow up telephone calls revealed that many non-respondents were satisfied with the parks and recreation system and saw no need to complete the questionnaire.
9. **The Recreation Newsletter** is the most important method for getting the word out about parks and recreation in Whitmarsh Township as reported by 76 percent of the respondents. Newspapers (36%) and word-of-mouth were the next most important forms of promoting parks and recreation in the Township. The internet is expected to become increasingly more important in terms of distributing information with about 29 percent expecting it to be their preferred source in the future. It is important to continue to monitor this over time and respond to changes in public preferences.

VI. Survey Implications

Survey findings provided an overall sense of direction for Whitemarsh Township in parks and recreation. Survey findings “take the pulse” of the general public. The findings and implications are important because they represent the opinions of the silent majority. While it is important to take into consideration the opinions of citizens that are organized according to special interests, it is equally important to balance those needs with those of the public at large.



Support the Township Commitment to Parks and Recreation

The citizens sent a strong message of being pleased with the Whitemarsh Township parks and programs. About three out of five survey respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay more for parks and recreation. This finding is important as the Township begins to plan for the financing of major capital improvements and land acquisition.

Protect the Natural Resources, Open Space and the Schuylkill River

Manage public lands from a natural resource conservation perspective rather than as traditionally mowed and manicured facilities. Provide public education about this change. Continue to focus on riverfront planning with the goal of securing public access, views and preservation of the riverfront. Collaboration with neighboring municipalities will be crucial to

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attain the Whitemarsh Township residents' desire to have a protected riverfront with adjoining trails for walking and biking.

Establish Pathways for Walking and Biking

Continue planning on trails and connections, especially to get residents to Fort Washington State Park and the Montgomery County bike paths in the township and the region.

Make the Parks More Park-Like

Add improvements to the parks that would make them more park-like: trees, benches, paths, playgrounds, sitting areas, gathering areas, public art and so on. The survey respondents rated the parks lowest on the types of facilities available. It is assumed that the current park sports orientation generated this rating.

Expand Programs and Services

Promote opportunities and information about what to do. Focus on fitness and wellness, special event and environmental education.

Provide Education and Outreach

Informing the residents about recreation opportunities including programs and facilities is important. Park awareness was low with only a 40 percent good to excellent rating. About half of the respondents rated their awareness of parks as average, fair, poor or no impression.

VII. Survey and Raw Response Statistics



What do you think about Parks & Recreation in Whitemarsh Township?

Your opinion counts here. Your response can help our Township provide the kinds of parks, recreation facilities and programs citizens in our community want. Please answer all of the questions right away. It will only take a few minutes. Then return the survey in the enclosed addressed and stamped envelope.

Thank you for your help!

1. The following is a list of recreation activities. *Please circle your response to indicate if your household participates or would like to participate in each of the following activities.*

	Yes	No	Would like to	NA
a. League sports (e.g. baseball, soccer, etc.)	25%	50%	11%	14%
b. Non-league sports (e.g. golf, tennis, etc.)	22	47	14	16
c. Exercise and fitness	36	26	28	10
d. Nature – environmental programs	20	40	26	13
e. Special events (concerts, holiday events)	38	25	28	10
f. Performing Arts (Music, Arts, Drama, Dance)	18	42	26	13
g. Pre-school programs	9	65	8	18
h. Summer Camps	11	61	9	14
i. Education and self-improvement programs	17	37	31	14
j. Other				

2. What is your impression of Whitemarsh Township’s recreation services? *Circle one response.*

- a. 18% Excellent
- b. 45% Good
- c. 13% Average
- d. 5% Fair
- e. 1% Poor
- f. 14% Not familiar with the Township’s recreation services

Total Good to Excellent: 63%

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3. What prevents you from using Whitemarsh Township’s parks and recreation services or facilities?

Circle all that apply.

- a. 29% Nothing, my household already participate in Whitemarsh recreation programs
- b. 26% Too busy
- c. 9% Not interested
- d. 21% Don’t know about them
- e. 2% Don’t like them. Why? _____
- f. 2% Too expensive
- g. 1% Too far away
- h. 1% Too crowded
- i. 12% Use facilities or programs elsewhere. Where? _____
- j. 7% Don’t have what I want. I’d like _____
- k. 6% Other: _____

4. The following is a list of parks in Whitemarsh Township and the area. Please circle how often your household uses each park or recreation facility.

Did Not Know About Park	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Township Parks			
a. 4% Miles Park, Germantown Pike & Joshua Road	26%	48%	19%
b. 15 Cedar Grove Park, Cedar Grove Rd.	5	31	52
c. 15 Cedar Grove Barn, Cedar Grove Rd.	4	25	56
d. 15 Whitemarsh Community Arts Center	2	19	64
e. 44 Leeland Park, North Lane & Jones Street	1	5	79
f. 25 Valley Green Park,	8	14	66
g. 61 Kline Park, Off of Ash Lane.	1	2	83
h. 59 McCarthy Park, off Fairway Road.	1	4	81
i. Area Parks or Recreation Facilities			
j. 8% Colonial School District facilities - outdoor	10	24	51
k. 8 Colonial School District facilities - indoor	10	16	60
l. 9 Greater Plymouth Community Center	11	26	48
m. 17 Montgomery County Trails	11	23	52
n. 13 Montgomery County Parks	11	30	48
o. 3 Valley Forge National Historical Park	5	44	38
p. 6 Fort Washington State Park	14	33	22
q. 2 Fairmount Park: Valley Green, Forbidden Dr., Wissa.	31	35	22
r. Other: _____			

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5. Please go back to Question 4. Place a checkmark on the line in front of the name of any park that you do not know about.

6. How important is it to have the following kinds of parks in Whitemarsh in the future?

TOTAL Very Important/ Important	Very	Of Little	Not	
	Important	Important	Importance	Important
a. 82% Natural Areas with trails and scenic features.	53%	31%	6%	3%
b. 69% Riverfront parks and recreation	34	35	15	6
c. 80% Large community parks with natural areas and recreation facilities	41	39	8	2
d. 9% Sports complex with fields, game courts, playgrounds	41	37	9	4
e. 82% Neighborhood parks close to home.	43	39	5	2
f. 76% Trails	36	40	9	3
g. 62% Indoor recreation center with gym, pool, fitness & activity facilities, programs	31	31	13	4
h. 71% Senior Center	30	41	14	6

7. Please give us your impression of Whitemarsh Township parks. Circle one response for each feature.

TOTAL Excellent + Good	No					
	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	Impression
a. 74% Cleanliness	33%	41%	9%	2%	0%	7%
b. 65% Attractiveness	24	41	14	4	.2	8
c. 64% Safety	22	42	11	3	.2	11
d. 69% Location	25	44	11	3	5	8
e. 43% Types of facilities available	10	33	24	9	3	11
f. 55% Condition of park equipment	14	41	16	5	.5	14
g. 40% Your awareness of parks	9	31	22	12	11	6
h. 61% Overall rating of Twp. parks	14	47	18	4	.2	8

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8. When do you think the following facilities should be established or expanded? Circle one response for each.

Total through 2011		Immediately	In 5 Years	In 10 Years	Never
a.	73% Walking paths	45%	28%	7%	3%
b.	71 Bike paths	37	34	9	3
c.	67 Natural Areas	33	34	10	4
d. s.	64 Shade/tree	32	32	11	5
e.	54 Picnic pavilions	19	35	17	7
f.	43 Bandshell/Amphitheater	12	31	21	16
g.	60 Playgrounds	23	37	11	6
h.	55 Sports Fields	20	35	14	7
i.	42 Volleyball	11	31	20	14
j.	50 Tennis	18	32	17	11
k.	47 Basketball	17	30	17	12
l.	36 Street hockey	10	26	18	23
m.	34 Skateboard park	11	23	14	30
n.	40 Outdoor pool	17	23	15	26
o.	46 Indoor pool	22	24	14	19
p.	40 Ice Rink	16	24	19	21
q.	43 Dog Park	23	20	12	24
r.	58 Indoor recreation center with gym, pool, etc.	32	25	16	9
s.	61 Senior Citizen Center	30	31	15	8
t.	70 Comfort facilities: restrooms, benches	47	23	6	4
u.	61 Parking areas	35	26	9	5
v.	Other _____				

9. How should Whitemarsh Township prioritize parks and recreation initiatives in the future? Please circle one choice for each item.

	High Priority	Priority	Low Priority	Not Necessary
a. Enhancing programs and services	22	43	13	2
b. Upgrading existing facilities	25	43	11	2
c. Developing new parks	9	24	35	13

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d. Developing trails	25	28	21	6
e. Providing more indoor recreation facilities	28	28	21	6
f. Protecting natural resources	49	28	5	3
g. Achieving a balance of all the above	41	36	5	4

10. What is your *CURRENT* method of getting information about the Township’s recreation opportunities? How would you prefer to do so in the *FUTURE*? Circle all that apply.

CURRENT		FUTURE	
a. 76%	Recreation Newsletter	a. 21%	Download Recreation Newsletter
b. 17	School packet information	b. 62	Continue to receive Recreation Newsletter in the mail
c. 9	Township WEB Site	c. 13	School packet information
d. 5	E-mail newsletter	d. 29	E-mail newsletter
e. 36	Newspapers	e. 30	Newspapers
f. 34	Word of Mouth	f. 25	E-mail specialty flyers/announcements
g. 3	Other: _____	g. 17	On-line registration
		h. 18	Cable TV Station 22
		i.	Other:

11. Whitemarsh Township spends about \$19.78 per person annually to operate parks and recreation. The average municipal investment in Pennsylvania is about \$23.00. Would you be willing to pay additional taxes to increase the amount of township spending on parks and recreation in Whitemarsh? Circle one response.

- a. 21% Yes, up to \$5 per year
- b. 15 Yes, up to \$10 per year
- c. 18 Yes, up to \$20 per year
- d. 4 Yes, Other _____ per year
- e. 18 No
- f. 19 Maybe, with more information

Total willing to pay more: 58%

12. If we could do one thing to improve Whitemarsh Township through parks and recreation, what would you want that to be? Please print your response below.

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13. Who lives in your household? *Circle all that apply.*

- a. 15% Preschoolers
- b. 21% Elementary students
- c. 11% Middle school students
- d. 11% High school students
- e. 9% College students
- f. 71% Adults
- g. 28% Senior Citizens
- h. 5% People with disabilities

14. As the person completing this survey, please tell us your age group and gender. *Circle your gender and age group.*

- a. 41 %Male
- b. 34% Female
- 25% - No Answer
- c. 0- 18-24 yrs
- d. 35% 25-44 yrs
- e. 34% 45-59 yrs
- f. 9% 60-64 yrs
- g. 21% 65 yrs +

15. How long have you lived in Whitemarsh? *Circle one response.*

- a. 17% Less than 5 years
- b. 20% 6-10 years
- c. 22% 11-20 years
- d. 37% Over 20 years

YOUR TURN! Please use this space to make any other comments you wish.

Number of Responses by Planning District:

Northern – 88 responses
Central – 304 responses
Riverfront – 6 responses
Miquon – 7 responses

Optional

If you are interested in helping to assist the Township from time to time in parks and recreation, please provide your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address if available.

Name _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Address _____

Topic of Interest _____

Thank You!