

Allentown Parks Plan 2025 DRAFT

Our City in a Park



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Allentown Puerto Rican Day Festival, April Gamiz/The Morning Call

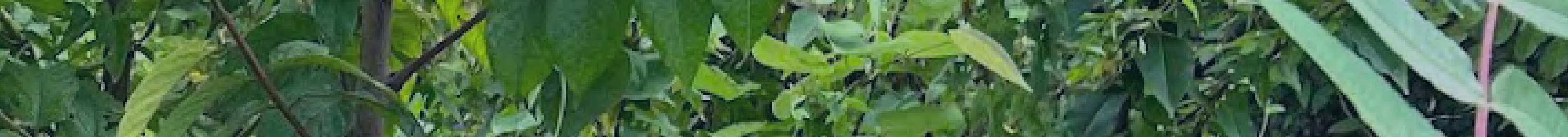


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DEFINITIONS

Accessibility – refers to the design of facilities and spaces to be usable by people of all abilities, including compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Easement – is a legal agreement that allows the use of land for a specific purpose(s), such as conservation or public access.

Floodplain – is an area of low-lying land adjacent to a stream or river which stretches from the banks of its channel to the base of the enclosing valley walls, and which experiences flooding during periods of high flows.

Greenway – is usually a linear corridor of land set aside/conserved for recreational use(s) and/or environmental stewardship.

Multimodal – refers to transportation systems that integrate multiple modes of travel, such as walking, biking, and public transit.

Naturalization – is the process of restoring land to a more naturally-functioning ecosystem, often by planting native vegetation, minimizing human intervention, and removing invasive species.

Open Space – are areas of land and water designated for use as active or passive recreation and/or for natural resource protection, including: parks, agricultural lands, natural lands such as wetlands, woodlands, etc., untended lands, and connecting greenways, blueways, and trails.

Passive Recreation – are activities that require minimal facilities, have low impact on the environment, and are commonly non-competitive, such as walking or birdwatching.

Active Recreation – includes play activities that involve physical exertion and often require structured facilities or equipment, such as sports or playgrounds.

Riparian – the interface between land and a water body such as a river, stream, lake, or wetland.

Stormwater Management – include practices and systems designed to control and reduce runoff from rain and storms to prevent flooding, erosion, and pollution of water bodies.

Watershed – is an area or region of land that drains into a specific river, river system, or other body of water.

Wetland – is an area of land where water covers the surface or saturates the soil for part of the year, and is characterized by the presence of water, specialized vegetation, and unique soil types.

ACRONYMS

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act

BMP – Best Management Practices

C2P2 – Community Conservation Partnership Program

CRPOSGT – Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, Open Space, Greenways, and Trails

DCNR – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

DEP – Department of Environmental Protection

DOT – Department of Transportation

DVRPC – Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund

MIP – Multimodal Improvement Plan

MTF – Multimodal Transportation Fund

NFWF – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

NSD – Neshaminy School District

PWD – Public Works Department

RCP – Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

SALDO – Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

SRTS – Safe Routes to Schools

SS4A – Safe Streets and Roads for All



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OUR CITY IN A PARK: ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

The Allentown community understands the importance of its historic municipal parks system.

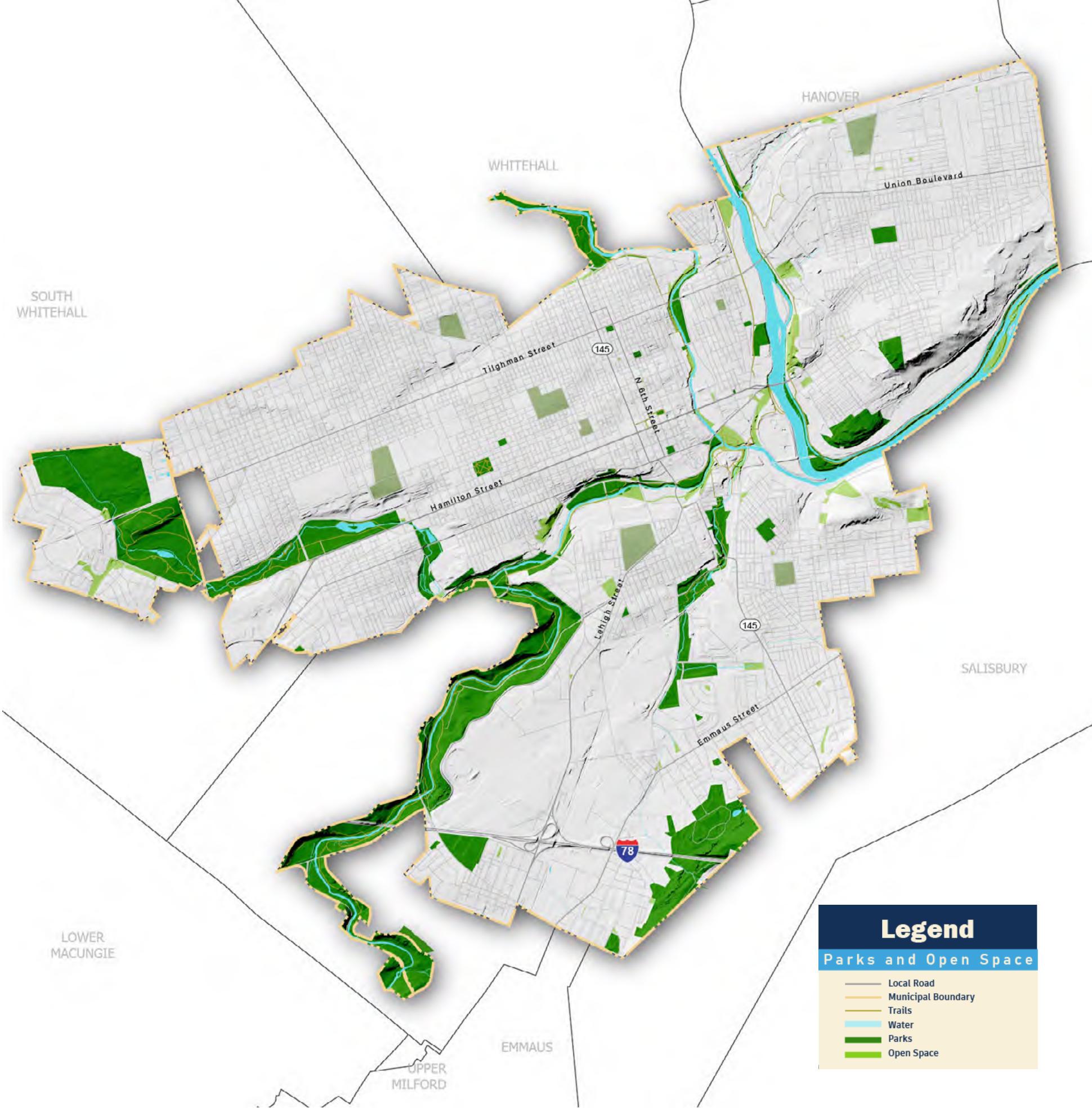
The previous municipal recreation plan of 2006 called Allentown a “City in a Park” – a tribute to the original ecological vision of Allentown’s legendary civic patron, General Harry Trexler. Trexler, with allied Allentown leaders, had the foresight and capability to set aside green spaces dedicated to public conservation of nature and recreation throughout the City.

Today, Trexler’s remarkable legacy stands as a cultural landmark that requires continuing commitments by the City and its partners to steward the public natural and recreation resources as an Allentown civic priority.

This **Allentown Parks Plan 2025** presents a comprehensive strategy to conserve and improve the City’s recreation, open space, and parks. This plan is dedicated to the people of Allentown, who have reconfirmed commitments to actively help steward their irreplaceable municipal parks through the first half of the 21st Century and beyond.

[Click here](#) to find out more about your parks.

Previous page: A family enjoys a picnic under the shade of a tree along the banks of Lake Muhlenberg at Cedar Beach Park.





Residents enjoying the newly renovated Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. (formerly Valania) Park. Amy Shortell, The Morning Call



Spring time brings out many users to take advantage of the Little Lehigh .

ALLENTOWN PARKS

Vision

The City of Allentown parks and open spaces are a legacy of environmental and human wellness; essential green infrastructure; and a visionary municipal achievement.

Collaborations between the City, neighbors and allied partners are essential to conserving these community assets for future generations.

Commitments

Declarations from many residents and City staff during the project visioning were assembled as a living statement of the Allentown community’s commitment to its public parks system.

Citizen Commitments

Citizens of Allentown, Pennsylvania cherish our “City in a Park.”

We understand the original foresight and investments to create our world-class system of public green spaces throughout our City.

Our City parks represent both physical resources and our collective cultural heritage of events and the generations of people of Allentown.

Allentown residents see good works underway to make improvements that are needed to rehabilitate treasured parks and open spaces – and we share in a united commitment to help City leaders and staff to:

- *care for, keep clean, and conserve existing parks;*
- *add public areas when possible;*
- *maintain and improve facilities,; and*
- *ensure that recreation resources and programs are universally-accessible.*

Residents have and will continue to actively keep City parks clean and safe by:

- *planning, improving, and protecting their ecologies;*
- *supporting investments in recreation facilities;*
- *supporting investments in recreation facilities; and*
- *participating proudly in the rich cultural programs that bring our City in a Park to life.*

Staff Commitments

We recognize and value the stewardship required to maintain our extraordinary common grounds for the benefit of all.

Features of our Allentown Parks system are tightly woven into the fabric of our City landscape, and are inseparable from our many other civic systems including our roads, sidewalks, transit, street trees; waterways, stormwater, and the City water and wastewater systems.

We know collaboration is possible to ensure that improvements to any of these systems will conserve and improve Allentown Park resources.

The Allentown Parks Plan 2025 describes the Allentown community’s recreation / conservation goals and opportunities that are possible to achieve through continuing partnerships over the next 10 to 20 years. The report was created to remain a flexible planning tool for the citizens of Allentown, so that their essential vision may be achieved, even as priorities inevitably evolve over the coming years. The City Council may adopt the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 as an element of the Allentown Comprehensive Plan to guide stewardship of the Allentown Parks system to meet current and future needs of Allentown residents and to welcome visitors.

OUR GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES: COMMUNITY IDEAS

Nine (9) major goals were expressed by the Allentown community, and are described under three (3) primary categories of park system stewardship:

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is the physical and organizational structures and facilities required for the operation of civic spaces and can be categorized as either grey, green or blue. Gray infrastructure typically includes traditional civic structures, such as roads, sidewalks, stormwater pipes/basins, utilities, dams, water/sewer systems, bridges, transportation systems, and most building structures.

Green infrastructure are natural or engineered sustainable systems that use vegetation and other natural resources. They are used to manage water, temperature, air and water quality and provide social and economic benefits to open space in the City.

Blue infrastructure is a term used to describe a network of interconnected water management systems – including both natural aquatic and man-made and hydraulic systems. Refer to [Section 3.1](#) for additional information.



Bridge and spray ground runoff structure at Old Fairgrounds Park

PROGRAMS

Programs relate to services, activities or events that provide organized recreational or relaxational enjoyment. They include games, sports, camps, classes, social events and other activities and are provided to people of all ages and abilities.

Programs can take place at parks, playgrounds, schools, civic institutions or at private facilities.



Arts Park Festival at Arts Park

MANAGEMENT

Management refers to the daily administration and oversight of the overall park system. It encompasses the work done by Parks and Recreation staff to maintain parks and park apparatus, equipment, fields, courts, support structures and other amenities, such as benches, lighting and water fountains.

Management also includes the planning of park improvements, the development and construction of those improvements, and the management of natural resources. On an administration level, it includes the hiring and training of full-time and seasonal staff and the annual development of the department's budget.



Volunteer tree planting along Cedar Creek. From [delawareandlehigh.org](#)

INFRASTRUCTURE (Goals 1-5)

Infrastructure can be categorized as either gray, green or blue. Gray infrastructure typically includes traditional civic structures, such as roads, sidewalks, stormwater pipes/basins, utilities, dams, water/sewer systems, bridges, transportation systems, and most building structures.

Green infrastructure is a broad category of civic improvements created to mimic natural systems to provide needed services such as stormwater managment, temperature control, clean air, and other benefits that effect both social and economic health.

Blue infrastructure is a term used to describe a network of interconnected water management “systems” – including both natural aquatic and man-made and hydraulic systems. Refer to Section 3.1 for additional information on infrastructure.

Goal 1: Safety – Allentown parks are modern and safe.

Opportunities for parks-related safety improvements include:

- **Safe, accessible pedestrian routes** – walkways / trails / crosswalks to reach park sites.
- **Traffic-calming measures** – on roads and in parking lots adjacent to parks.
- **Defensible public spaces** – places with visibility, minimized enclosures, and safety designed into the infrastructure including: restrooms, lighting, security, and other features.
- **Regular maintenance** – systematic inspections and facility repairs – especially restrooms.
- **Water’s edge-access locations** – rules and safety information clearly-delineated.
- **Park system rules** – clearly-stated with context explanations to encourage public participation.
- **Security** – regular police presence at park sites.

Goal 2: Public Access – Parks are linked to neighborhoods and to each other

Opportunities to improve public access via safe pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes to and through parks include:

- **ADA-accessibility within parks** – including: parking, travel routes, restrooms, inclusive play, etc.
- **Coordinated LANTA services** – to improve access via public transit to Allentown park sites.
- **New/improved sidewalks, crosswalks** – installed at entry locations where pedestrian access into parks, or access between parks is non-existent or where segments of travel routes are deteriorated.
- **Bike route system (citywide)** –design of the Allentown bike system will acknowledge parks as major civic destinations, not simply segments of travel corridors.

Goal 3: Recreation facilities – Strategic investments in park facilities

Increasing collaboration across City departments and with allied organizations is possible to help deliver park improvements for both recreation facilities and ecological infrastructure, including:

- **New pools / aquatic facilities / maintenance of existing facilities** – equitably located (maintenance and staff needs would need to be addressed).
- **New indoor recreation center** – centrally located in all neighborhoods in the City.
- **Inclusive play environments** – installed as typical features in City parks.
- **Public restrooms** – open regularly, clean, designed for safety, and accessible – in all Allentown parks, citywide.
- **Regulation soccer pitch** – create with support facilities to serve this growing recreation demand.
- **Access to natural waterway edges** – for safe and legal recreation (viewing sites, fishing/kayak/canoing access) and including safety/education features for riparian area recreation.
- **Additional basketball courts** – continue this City priority in areas where these facilities are missing.
- **Formalized community gathering spaces / pavilions**– improve/create multi-functional spaces in neighborhoods.
- **Shade** – increase tree canopy and shade structures to provide microclimate buffering within and adjacent to parks.

Goal 4: Ecology – Balancing earth’s natural systems, including people.

The Allentown network of parks include many green and riparian spaces – that were originally conceived to protect waterways running through the City and bring people closer to healthful nature.

Gen. Trexler understood that conserving Allentown riparian parks would enable them to function naturally as both **green** and **blue** infrastructure – in those critical places where nature’s hydraulic processes perform multiple, essential ecosystem services that benefit humans locally within the planet ecology needed for healthy human life on Earth.

Green and blue infrastructure improvements are critical elements of the Allentown Parks system and when protected complement the work performed by traditional human-made gray infrastructure features, like detention basins and storm system conveyance pipes. Opportunities for ecological improvements within City parks include:

- **Manage valley floodplains** – to help prevent / moderate flooding.
- **Protect water quality** – with sustainable vegetative buffers that benefit aquatic habitat.
- **Steward tree canopy** – to reduce neighborhood heat effects and support multi-species habitats.
- **Re-vegetate City parks / public rights of way** – to help protect local air quality in all neighborhoods.
- **Manage invasive species** - improve ecosystems by adding native diversity and reducing invasive pressures
- **Integrate stormwater management features at all sites.**

Goal 5: Open Space - Public spaces is made more effective.

Improving pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to and through existing public sites – and reducing the need for automobile trips will make those facilities more effective for neighborhoods, without necessarily adding park acreage. This can often be done during park renovations. Strategies for improving public access to Allentown park spaces within can be developed by the City, with partners, as basic tool to support equitable distribution of open spaces and recreation facilities throughout all Allentown neighborhoods. Opportunities to make existing public sites more accessible and to increase open spaces where appropriate include:

- **Reclaim previously under-utilized City-owned sites or utilize quasi-public sites** – for dedicated park uses.
- **Recognize and remedy “recreation-desert” areas** – in under-served neighborhoods.
- **Pursue priority partnerships to add parks/open spaces** – in priority under-served neighborhoods.
- **Create / restore missing connections** – from under-served neighborhoods to the nearest City park.
- **Consider mobile and pop-up recreation options** – such as Play Streets and “Park in a Truck”. Expand successful programs such as Monday Funday with partnerships.



Franklin Park is a priority park for redesign and rebuilding that is currently in the works.

PROGRAMS

Programs relate to services, activities or events that provide organized recreational or relaxational enjoyment. They include games, sports, camps, classes, social events and other activities and are provided to people of all ages and abilities.

Programs can take place at parks, playgrounds, schools, civic institutions or at private facilities.

Goal 6: Recreation/ education/ cultural experiences will continue to thrive

The Allentown legacy of recreational, educational, and cultural programs within its Parks system will continue to thrive. Parks & Recreation has and will continue to adapt program offerings as social and demographic conditions inevitably will change, and as public demands may evolve neighborhood by neighborhood. Opportunities to improve recreation/ educational/ cultural programming include:

- **Repair, maintain, and improve existing infrastructure** – to ensure that recreation programs may function at capacity for each park site.
- **Simplify administrative procedures required for non-city partners** – to conduct approved programs within City Park sites, keeping staffing and maintenance needs in mind.
- **Engage with partners who can contribute to events** – that can benefit both their programs and the City Parks system in general.
- **Ensure that recreational programs consider and meet the needs of underrepresented populations**, including youth, senior residents, and individuals with disabilities.
- **Continue to develop programming that promotes community wellness** – and addresses chronic conditions affecting public health.

MANAGEMENT (Goals 7-9)

Management refers to the daily administration and oversight of the overall park system. It encompasses the work done by Parks and Recreation staff to maintain parks and park apparatus, equipment, fields, courts, support structures and other amenities, such as benches, lighting and water fountains.

Management also includes the planning of park improvements, the development and construction of those improvements, and the management of natural resources. On an administration level, it includes the hiring and training of full-time and seasonal staff and the annual development of the Department budget.

Goal 7: Operations, maintenance, management, continue leadership history

City administrations will continue a history of leadership to deliver efficient maintenance, facility improvements, and management of the Allentown Parks system.

City residents recognize and appreciate the dedication of the Parks & Recreation Department staff.

Most citizens do not realize that the total park acreage that P&R staff must operate and maintain equals 16 acres of parkland for every 1,000 City residents. A comparison shows that Allentown maintains twice the park acreage as cities of similar size – but, the City struggles in 2025 with less than half the park staff of similar communities to accomplish the needed levels of service. Opportunities to improve operations and maintenance of Allentown Parks include:

- **Increase the number of parks maintenance workers** – employed by the City.
- **Educate residents about civic obligations** – as Allentown Parks users.
- **Conduct outreach and coordination** – with recreation-oriented organizations.
- **Continue periodic user surveys** – as a tool to stay abreast of community interests.
- **Enhancing health and wellness programming** - ensuring programming for seniors and residents of all abilities is readily accessible in order to improve quality-of-life in the City’s neighborhoods.
- **Coordinating with City, County officials, and local nonprofits** - to conduct outreach and advocacy for unhoused and displaced individuals in order to find shelter away from encampments in flood-prone areas along the City’s creeks which pose a risk to personal safety.

Goal 8: Governance – Parks & Recreation will manage City parks

The opportunities presented in this Plan can be used as a springboard to strengthen legislative and ordinance language in the City’s code to protect and promote parks and natural resources.

Opportunities to improve governance of the City Parks system include:

- **Collaboration between Parks and Recreation and Public Works** – input from Public Works can create citywide buy-in on projects.

- **Collaboration between Parks and Recreation and Planning & Zoning** – on ordinance updates that strengthen the protections of natural resources, ensure the continued management of stormwater, enhance existing safety measures and tie new development and redevelopment to recreational and community enhancement.
- **Collaboration between Parks and Recreation and Public Health and neighborhood organizations** - to provide opportunities for health and wellness programs, assist with violence prevention and substance abuse, and continue to provide economy development with job readiness summer positions.

Goal 9: Finance – Allentown to share in annual park / recreation funding

The City of Allentown will commit annual municipal resources toward its recreation and open space improvements, maintenance, and programming.

City residents and leaders know that municipal funds dedicated to recreation stewardship are essential to leverage investments from other funding partners – beyond the annual funding from Trexler Trust and occasional funding from the Parknership for certain programs or projects. City funds can match county, state, federal, non-profit, and corporate partner funding.

Allentown has historically been successful in attracting traditional funding partners – like PA DCED and PA DCNR, which partially-funded this Allentown Parks Plan 2025 plan. Opportunities to improve financing partnerships dedicated to the Allentown Parks system, include:

- **Advocate for additional operating and capital funding in the City’s budget** – as Allentown continues to grow
- **Match transportation funding sources with strategic funding for capital improvements at parks** – where transportation program goals coincide with recreation, civic and ecological funding programs (eg: stormwater, trail, public right of way, safety projects, etc).
- **Dedicate municipal stormwater fees to leverage other funds for parks improvements** – where program goals coincide (eg: municipal stormwater BMPs inside City park sites; stormwater improvements within City ROWs at critical locations, such as missing trail bike route alignments; etc.)
- **Target ecological priorities within the City Park system to secure habitat restoration funding** from environmental program partners, such as the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and the PA DEP Rivers Conservation Program.
- **Require development partners who will benefit from adjacent City parks to contribute fee in lieu development funding** and annual financial support for maintenance of the Allentown Parks.
- **Coordinate the annual budget cycles between the City and annual funding from Trexler Trust** – to solve previous issues arising from different fiscal year cycles.

OUR PRIORITIES: NEXT STEPS

A working list of community priorities for Allentown City Parks improvements is presented below as a “2025 snapshot” that is likely to evolve over time:

1. INFRASTRUCTURE – Repair / Replace

Repair / replace aging facilities – specifically: restrooms, area lighting, drainage, equipment, and benches.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE – Investments

Make strategic capital improvements – specifically: aquatic facilities, sports fields, additional new restroom facilities, and park “makeovers.”



Playground equipment at Keck Park.

3. PROGRAMS – Provider collaborations

Deepen partnerships and foster new collaborations with program providers – to expand the effects of COA staff-led programs and services.



Easter Egg Hunt at Bucky Boyle Park

4. MANAGEMENT – Planning with partners

Conduct a regularly-scheduled planning program with partners – to ensure communication, coordination, and achieving collaborative successes.

5. MANAGEMENT - Equity

Create an “equity criteria” to advise strategic City investments – about locations where priority capital improvements are needed to ensure that neighborhoods that under-served by existing recreation resources are considered – along with other essential selection criteria, including: safety, partnerships, and financing that all help guide project selections.



Residents providing ideas at the Allentown Parks Plan Public Meeting # 3

NAVIGATING THIS REPORT

Report Contents

This *Allentown Parks Plan 2025* report is structured as follows:

Section 1	Executive Summary
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	Finance
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HARRY C. TREXLER TRUST

SPECIAL THANKS

The Trexler Trust

General Harry Trexler, considered to be the Father of the Allentown Parks System, bequeathed in his will that the City parks system would receive, in perpetuity, significant contributions from his trust every year for *“the improvements, extension and maintenance of all its parks.”*

To date, the Trust has awarded nearly \$185 million to the City’s park system as well as many Lehigh County nonprofit organizations that provide services and awareness of education, social services and the arts.

The City recognizes and thanks its long-time partner, the Trexler Trust, for its decades of equity and annual financial commitments to the Allentown Parks system.



The Allentown Parknership

SPECIAL WELCOME

The Allentown Parknership

The Allentown Parknership, formed in 2024 to advance the goals of the Trexler Trust in direct collaboration with the City of Allentown to enhance the City’s parks system. The Trexler Trust provided the guidance and startup funding for the Parknership.

The board of the Parknership includes City leadership and representation from Allentown and Trexler Trust. Projects identified within this Allentown Parks Plan report are eligible to be advanced by the Parknership, where its capability to serve as lead project partner can strategically advance park improvement priorities in coordination with the City.

The Parknership worked with the Parks and Recreation Department to complete its first project by providing a new full court basketball court at Stevens Park.



Partners gather to celebrate park improvements to Stevens Park

Acknowledgments

This Allentown Parks plan was partially funded by a grant from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, and was prepared according to DCNR guidelines.



2

INTRODUCTION

2.1 ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Allentown is the third largest city in Pennsylvania, with a population estimated at 126,000 people, behind only Philadelphia (1.6 million - 2020 population) and Pittsburgh (303,000 - 2020 population) (Source: 2020 US Census).

Allentown was incorporated in 1867, and the City annexed several areas of surrounding townships since 1904 when annexations first began.

In 2025, Allentown captures 11,520 acres (18 square miles) within its municipal boundaries.

2.1.1 Where is Allentown?

The City of Allentown grew up around a dramatic bend in the Lehigh River, where multiple creeks and smaller tributaries converge and flow into the confluence of the Little Lehigh Creek and the River. The rolling topography of these local watersheds created multiple advantages for early settlers, including: river access for transportation and abundant water supply for powering early industrial mills.

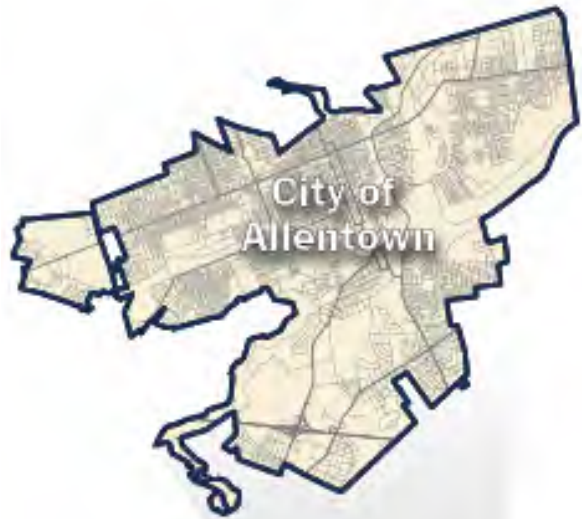
That Allentown landscape is now a regional center and seat of Lehigh County – with a broad variety of neighborhoods; a mixed economic base of large companies, manufacturers, and business startups; and an enviably diverse array of cultural societies and institutions. The Allentown Parks system was conceived as a major egalitarian public asset, and enjoys near unanimous support within the city and across the region.

Allentown is a Third Class city within Lehigh County – and is joined with neighboring Northampton County to form the Lehigh Valley. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the greater Lehigh Valley – which includes the historic industrial Cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton, where each follow the Lehigh River downstream to its confluence with the Delaware River that forms the eastern state boundary of Pennsylvania.

In 2025, the Lehigh Valley is experiencing a redevelopment renaissance, with industrial, institutional, and commercial businesses seeking to locate within the large highway transportation nexus where I-78; US 22; SR 33; and SR 309 all converge. Lehigh Valley has become a transportation and warehousing hub. Only 90 miles from New York City and 65 miles from Philadelphia, it offers a strategic location for the creation and designation of an “inland port.”

The increase in businesses in the Lehigh Valley, and in Allentown in particular, has created a steep demand for additional housing. With more residents and workers in Allentown, the City is facing growing demands on its municipal services and amenities – especially public expectations for its renowned but aging municipal parks system.

Previous page: View of Allentown skyline. Ultima_Gaina
Below: Birds Eye Map of The Lehigh Valley, courtesy of Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, in partnership with Penn Praxis and the Walk Works Program through the Pennsylvania Department of Health.



2.1.2 Who lives in Allentown?

Demographic data is provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Population and Projections

Allentown had a population of 125,845 in 2020, which was an increase of 6.6% from the 2010 Census count. The population in 2040, as projected by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, will be 129,585, which is an increase of 3% over the 2020 population. In comparison, Lehigh County experienced a population increase of 7% from 2010 to 2020 and is projected to increase by 8% between 2020 and 2040.

Using the 2020 population count of 125,845, and with 18 total square miles in the City, Allentown has a population density of 6,991 people per square mile.

Regional Population Comparison				
Municipality	1990	2000	2010	2020
City of Allentown	105,473	106,632	118,032	125,845
Bethlehem	71,428	71,329	74,982	75,781
Emmaus	11,157	11,313	11,211	11,652
Salisbury	13,401	13,498	13,505	13,621
South Whitehall	18,261	18,028	19,180	21,080
Whitehall	22,779	24,896	26,738	29,173
Lehigh County	291,130	312,368	350,008	370,802

Population Trends and Forecasts: 2010 - 2040				
	City of Allentown		Lehigh County	
Year	Population	% Change	Population	% Change
2010	118,032		350,008	
2020	125,845	6.21%	374,557	6.55%
2030	125,755	-0.07%	386,419	3.07%
2040	129,585	2.96%	404,790	4.54%

Age

The largest age group in the City is 25-34-year-olds, followed by the 35-44-year-old cohort. From 2011 to 2021, the largest decreases were in the 45-54 age group (-2.1%), and the 75-84 age group (-1.3%). Besides the 25-34 age group, the largest increase was in the 65-74 age group (+1.9%). Overall, the 55+ age group has grown, but the median age of Allentown is 32.4. This demographic information suggests that this plan needs to account for the recreational needs of both older and younger residents.

Population by Age - City of Allentown			
	2011	2021	
Age Group	%	%	% Change
Under 5 years	8.30%	7.70%	-0.60%
5 to 9 years	7.40%	6.70%	-0.70%
10 to 14 years	6.60%	7.40%	0.80%
15 to 19 years	8.20%	7.80%	-0.40%
20 to 24 years	8.60%	8.40%	-0.20%
25 to 34 years	14.30%	16.30%	2.00%
35 to 44 years	12.80%	12.00%	-0.80%
45 to 54 years	12.80%	10.70%	-2.10%
55 to 59 years	4.90%	5.70%	0.80%
60 to 64 years	4.20%	5.00%	0.80%
65 to 74 years	5.30%	7.20%	1.90%
75 to 84 years	4.60%	3.30%	-1.30%
85 years and over	1.90%	1.80%	-0.10%

Race

According to the 2020 Census, 54.2% of the City population identifies as Hispanic or Latino (a 12% increase from 2010), 30.2% as White (a 13% decrease), 10.5% as African American (a 1% increase), 2.3% as Two or More Races (a 0.3% increase), 2% as Asian (no change), 0.6% as Some Other Race (a 0.4% increase), 0.1% as American Indian/Alaskan Native (a 0.1% decrease), and 0.02% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (a 0.01% increase).

In Lehigh County, 61% of the population identifies as White (a 10.6% decrease from 2010), 26% identifies as Hispanic or Latino (a 7.2% increase), 6.1% identifies as African American (a 1.1% increase), 3.7% identifies as Asian (a 0.7% increase), 3% identifies as Two or More Races (a 1.5% increase), 0.5% identifies as Some Other Race (a 0.3% increase), 0.09% identifies as American Indian/Alaskan Native (a 0.04% decrease), and 0.02% identifies as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (no change).

Racial and Ethnic Composition: 2010 - 2020								
	City of Allentown				Lehigh County			
Race/Ethnicity	2010 Pop.	%	2020 Pop.	%	2010 Pop.	%	2020 Pop.	%
White	50,964	43.18%	38,033	30.22%	250,245	71.60%	227,994	60.87%
African American	11,336	9.60%	13,193	10.48%	17,230	4.93%	22,950	6.13%
Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	200	0.17%	150	0.12%	442	0.13%	337	0.09%
Asian	2,452	2.08%	2,498	1.98%	10,090	2.89%	13,725	3.66%
Native Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	11	0.01%	28	0.02%	65	0.02%	91	0.02%
Hispanic/Latino	50,461	42.75%	68,232	54.22%	65,615	18.77%	96,981	25.89%
Some Other Race	224	0.19%	805	0.64%	555	0.16%	1,779	0.47%
Two or More Races	2,384	2.02%	2,906	2.31%	5,255	1.50%	10,700	2.86%
Total	118,032		125,845		349,497		374,557	

Income

The median household income in Allentown was \$47,703 in 2021. This is lower than the median income of the surrounding municipalities and roughly 30% less than the Lehigh County median household income of \$68,738.

23.3% of the City population lives below the poverty level, which is defined as lacking enough income or material possessions to meet one's needs. This is nearly double the percentage in Lehigh County (12.1%). With a lower median household income and higher poverty rate, Allentown residents may not have the disposable income to spend on recreation as much as residents in other Lehigh County and Lehigh Valley communities.

Median Household Income/Poverty Comparison				
	Median Household Income		% of Pop. Below Poverty Level	
	2011	2021	2012	2021
City of Allentown	\$35,737.00	\$47,703.00	26.40%	23.30%
Bethlehem	\$48,725.00	\$61,535.00	10.70%	14.70%
Emmaus	\$57,585.00	\$75,750.00	8.50%	6.80%
Hanover	\$45,109.00	\$43,359.00	15.30%	9.40%
Salisbury	\$69,838.00	\$84,937.00	3.70%	9.90%
South Whitehall	\$66,498.00	\$86,158.00	4.40%	5.40%
Whitehall	\$54,800.00	\$68,273.00	7.70%	7.70%
Lehigh County	\$54,312.00	\$68,738.00	12.90%	12.10%

Education

42.3% of Allentown residents aged 25 and older have received at least some college education, and 16.6% have received a Bachelor’s degree or higher. These numbers are lower than the County educational attainment rates. In Lehigh County, 56.8% of the population has at least some college education, and 30.8% have received a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

Educational Attainment for Residents Over 25 Years of Age (2020)						
Educational Attainment	City of Allentown	Bethlehem	Emmaus	Hanover	South Whitehall	Lehigh County
No High School Diploma	19.5%	10.8%	9.2%	3.9%	6.2%	10.50%
High School Graduate	38.3%	32.2%	36.8%	24.6%	27.7%	32.70%
Some College, No Degree	18.4%	17.0%	16.5%	15.1%	13.7%	16.60%
Associate's Degree	7.3%	8.7%	10.5%	9.8%	8.5%	9.40%
Bachelor's Degree	11.1%	19.0%	17.4%	27.5%	25.0%	18.90%
Graduate or Prof. Degree	5.5%	12.3%	9.6%	19.1%	19.0%	11.90%
Residents with at least a High School Diploma	80.6%	89.2%	90.9%	96.1%	93.8%	89.50%
Residents with at least a Bachelor's Degree	16.6%	31.3%	27.0%	46.6%	44.0%	30.80%



Historic photo of Allentown in 1938 from the Penn Pilot Program.

The City Beautiful and Environs



2.1.3 Why is the Allentown park system remarkable ?

The Allentown parks system was envisioned in 1908 by General Harry Trexler, an industrialist, sportsman, Allentown resident, visionary and civic benefactor. General Trexler worked with then Mayor Fred Lewis to develop a park on land owned by the City water bureau between Turner, Linden, 15th and 17th Streets. He hired some of the most renowned design professionals of the day to enrich the park with amenities for the public, such as architect Horace Trumbower, to design the band shell, and landscape expert J. Frank Meehan, to layout the plantings and walkways, and in 1908, West Park became Allentown's first public park.

Trexler developed and endowed the public park system for the City of Allentown between 1908-1929, during a period of US history when people began to actively set aside and conserve park land in cities and rural areas – responding to a growing realization that the course of industrialization would consume all natural resources without major preservation initiatives by both private and public land holders. Around this same time, planners and landscape architects, such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., were envisioning works guided by the City Beautiful movement, which promoted beauty, grand monuments and the establishment of civic pride in cities and urban areas. Also, conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot, who was the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service and would later become governor of Pennsylvania, were promoting parks as a “social good” and worked for their protection as well as the understanding and appreciation of natural resources.



Above: 1911 photo of the shell at West Park, the first park in Allentown
Left: poster from 1928 celebrating the parks in Allentown.

Trexler created a large portion of the Allentown Parks system by conserving riparian corridors along the Lehigh River and its local tributaries – including: Jordan; Little Lehigh, Cedar; and Trout Creeks – which all flow into the Lehigh River within Allentown city boundaries.

Within these watersheds lie artifacts of original native American settlements; early colonial mills, farms and industrial commerce. Allentown parks feature irreplaceable cultural resources from the original Lehigh Navigation system – including sections of the original canal still watered, with extant locks and the towpath structure that now functions as part of the Delaware & Lehigh national trail system.

Upland parks of all kinds are located across the City – with some classically-designed civic squares, and other sites reclaimed from former landfills and railroad properties. Allentown parks include exquisite landscape architecture features from the 1930’s WPA civic era projects, including native stone amphitheaters, steps, walls, and monumental park structures.

The stream-side public parks in Allentown still attract people to the water, like they always have.



General Harry C Trexler in 1919.

In floodplain locations, swimming pools that were built, have since aged out and were lost – beyond the City’s capability at that time to maintain / replace those outdated, deteriorated, and capital-intensive aquatic recreation structures.

Some riparian parks, including former swimming pools have suffered from the increasing volumes of stormwater flood low-lying park locations – but which usually begin with unmanaged runoff far upstream.

During 2025, Parks & Recreation focused successfully on completing one new basketball court, renovations at two basketball courts, and a soccer mini-pitch facility. The Percy Ruhe Park master plan was completed in 2023 by Parks & Recreation as a major active recreation asset in Allentown – which stands ready to implement when the City elects it as a priority. In 2025, Parks & Recreation released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct a design process with the community with construction documents to rehabilitate Franklin Park.

The public participated actively to describe ideas, expectations, and express support for improvements during the Allentown Parks Plan visioning process.



The stage at Union Terrace Amphitheater was built as a WPA project in 1938.

2.1.4 Public Participation

What does Allentown need to conserve its parks and open spaces and continue to deliver high-level recreation services to City residents in the second quarter of the 21st century ?

In 2025, residents confirmed that “Our City in a Park” remains their preferred vision for how the municipal parks system is central to community life in Allentown.

The public outreach process for the project was a pivotal opportunity for a broad cross-section for people to champion the Allentown parks system, discuss history, and offer new ideas. Participants included: residents, visitors, Parks & Recreation staff, other city departments, open space organizations, and environmental stakeholders from across the Lehigh Valley.

People remain the greatest resource for Allentown, and conversations during the planning process highlighted multiple parks “champions” across the City, as well as recent success stories by Parks & Recreation staff and their partners.

The public meetings for this Plan were held at the following locations:

- Public Meeting #1: November 13, 2024, Bucky Boyle Training Room (Center City)
- Public Meeting #2: January 8, 2025, East Side Youth Center (East Side)
- Public Meeting #3: February 26, 2025, Ripple Church (Center City)
- Public Meeting #4: April 30, 2025, Theatre514 (West End)
- Public Meeting #5: June 25, 2025, Fearless Fire Company (South Side)

In addition, engagements were held with the public to discuss the site master plans for Bucky Boyle Park, Fountain Park and Roosevelt Park at the Easter Egg Hunt at Bucky Boyle Park on April 19, 2025 and the Earth Day Celebration at Cedar Beach Park on April 26, 2025.



Public Meeting #1 at Bucky Boyle Park.



Public Meeting #3 at Ripple Church.



Easter Egg Hunt festivities sponsored by The A's at Bucky Boyle Park.

Public Responses

Over 100 “person-contacts” were made between the consultant team and Allentown Parks stakeholders, and 15 Key Person interviews were conducted by the consultant team.

An active Project Committee met five (5) times over the course of the *Allentown Parks Plan 2025* project, and five (5) public meetings were conducted in different venues across the city over the 12-month project term. Notes for the Key Person Interviews, Project Committee and public meetings notes can be found in the Appendix.

A 36-question online public opinion survey (available in English and Spanish) was open from October 2024 to July 2025 as an additional way of obtaining comments and ideas from the public about park, recreation and open space needs. The survey received a total of 2,016 responses. Respondents were kept confidential, and responses were compiled together and analyzed. Full survey results can be found in the Appendix. Select responses are shown on the following pages.

Most respondents visit Allentown parks several days per week (37%). 14% visit City parks everyday. When respondents answered that they never visit City parks, 38% said it was because of a lack of amenities, while 36% said it was due to feelings of personal safety. This was followed by an inability to access parks by bike (25%), physical limitations (21%) and lack of shade (20%).

When respondents answered that they never participate in park programs or rent facilities, 28% said it was due to feelings of personal safety, echoing a reason why people never visit parks. 23% said it was because of cost, while 20% said there was nothing of interest to them. This was followed by a lack of amenities (19%) and programs/pavilion sign-ups filling up too quickly (17%).

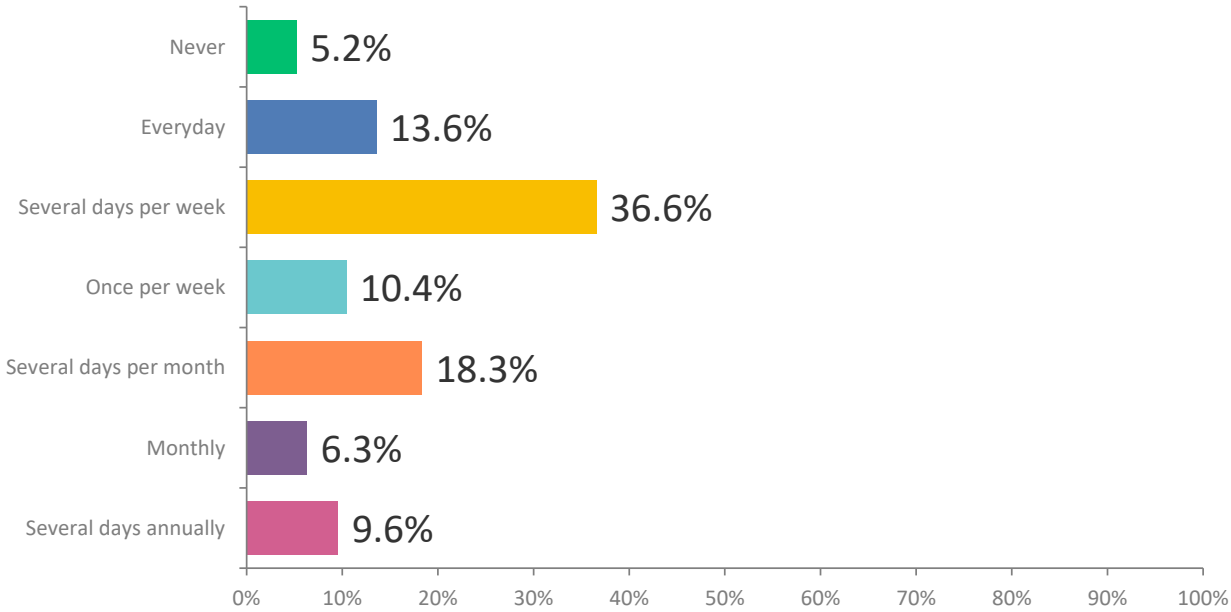
When asked for what purpose people visit park/recreation sites in Allentown, most respondents (65%) said walking/jogging/hiking. This is in line with statewide survey results, as most people in the state use parks for walking and hiking. Using parks for this type of activity increased during the Covid-19 pandemic as people wanted to find solace in nature in the face of isolation and social distancing. Other responses included relaxation (52%), exercise (50%), experiencing and enjoying nature (43%) and playground use (40%).



Project sign at Lil’Le Hi Trout Nursery.

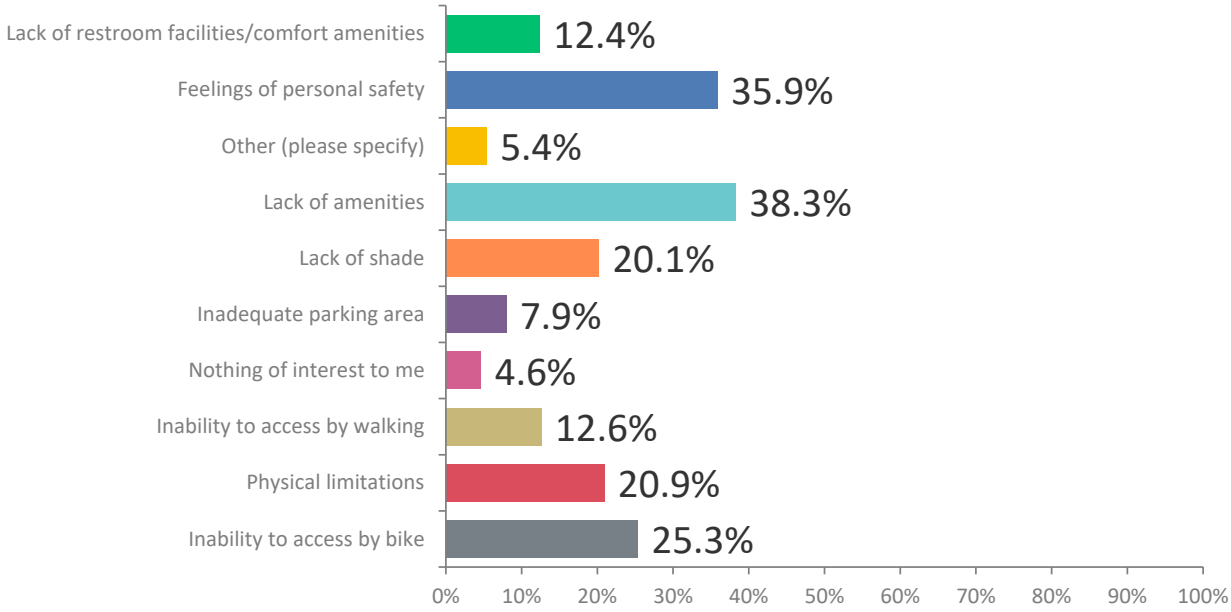
Q1: Generally, how often do people in your household visit parks in the City of Allentown?

Answered: 2013 Skipped: 3



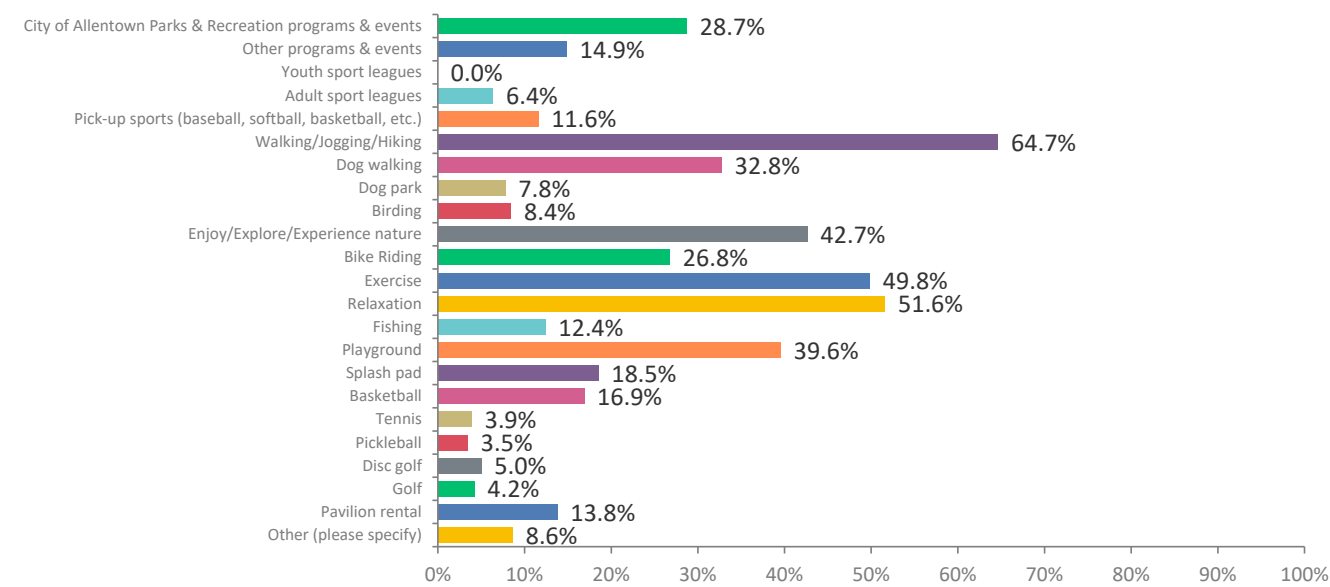
Q2: If you answered 'Never' in Question 1, what are the primary reasons that you DO NOT visit parks in the City of Allentown?Select all that apply.

Answered: 541 Skipped: 1475



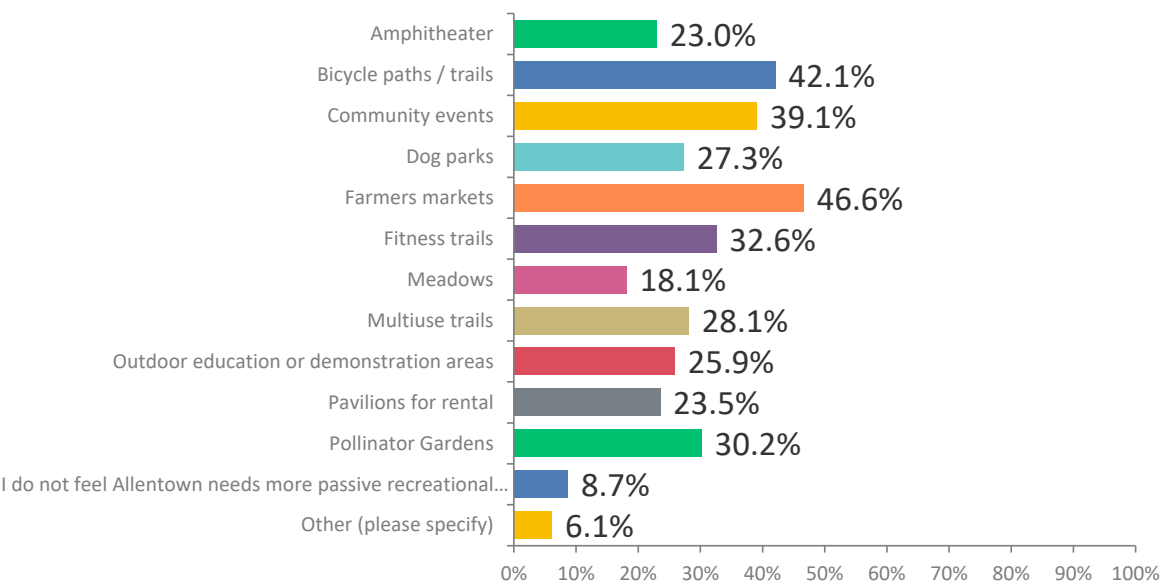
Q5: For what purpose(s) do people in your household visit park/recreation sites in the City of Allentown? Select all that apply.

Answered: 1587 Skipped: 429



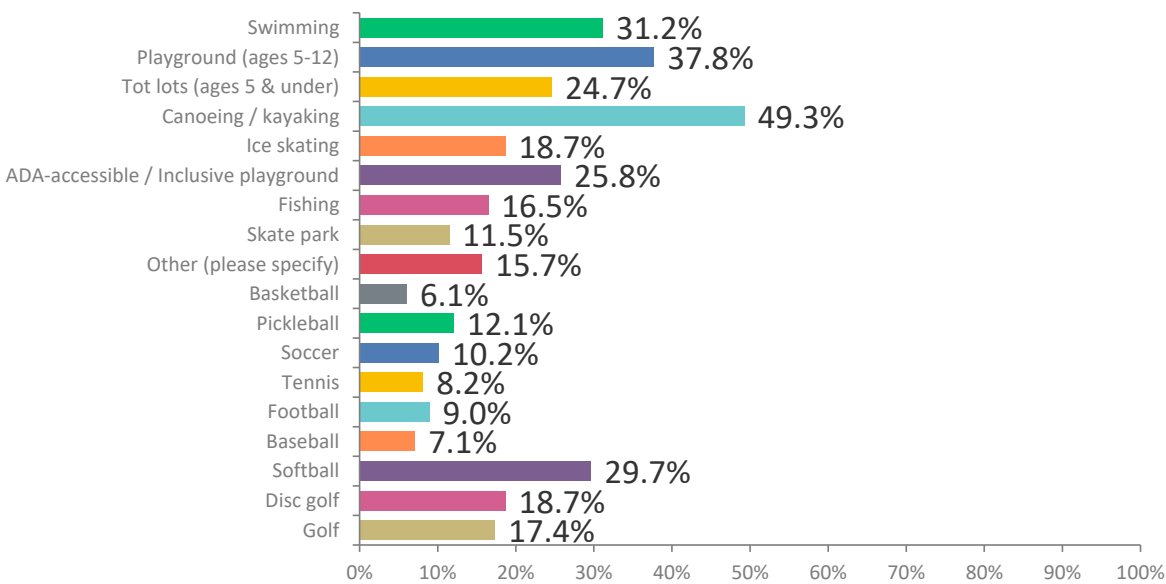
Q12: Do you believe that the City of Allentown needs more passive types of activity options? Passive recreational activities are more leisurely and do not require strenuous physical activity. Select all that apply.

Answered: 1240 Skipped: 776



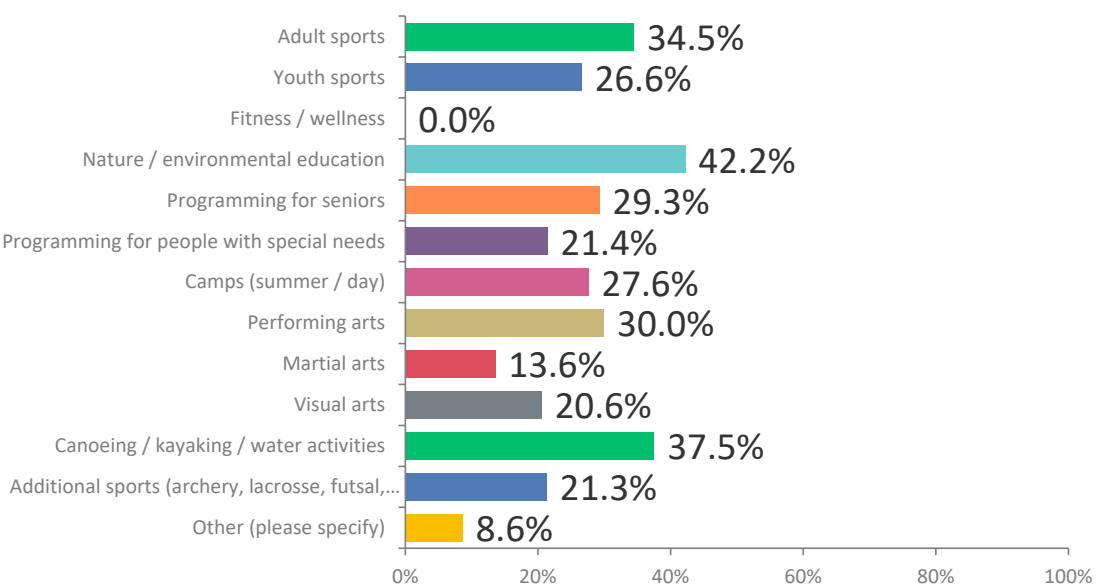
Q11: Do you believe the City of Allentown needs more active recreational facilities? Select all that apply.

Answered: 1139 Skipped: 877



Q14: What additional programming opportunities would you like to see introduced in the City of Allentown Parks & Recreation System?

Answered: 1148 Skipped: 868



Respondents were presented with lists of active (physical activity such as sports and bicycling) and passive activities (those that are more leisurely like walking and wildlife observation) and were asked if Allentown needs more of these types of facilities. The top responses for active facilities were: canoing / kayaking (49%), playground (ages 5-12) (38%), swimming (31%), softball (30%) and ADA-accessible / inclusive playground (26%). The top responses for passive facilities were: farmers markets (47%), bicycle paths / trails (42%), community events (39%), fitness trails (33%) and pollinator gardens (30%).

When asked what additional programming opportunities respondents would like to see, the top responses were: nature / environmental education (42%), canoing / kayaking / water activities (38%), adult sports (34%), performing arts (30%) and programming for seniors (29%).

2.1.5 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a tool that compares characteristics between municipalities of similar sizes.

It is understood that no two communities are alike and there is no single set of standards for parks and recreation to address the uniqueness of a community, but benchmarking comparisons are valuable for general context. Conditions in other similar municipalities provide a general sense of other conditions / practices – but these benchmarks are not “standards” that need to be met.

Municipalities with populations between approximately 100,000-250,000 were used to “benchmark” against the City of Allentown, including: Reading, PA; Erie, PA; Albany, NY; Syracuse, NY; New Haven, CT; and Bridgeport, CT. The metrics reviewed for each of those historic east coast cities were also compared to municipal averages nationally, based on standards established by the National Recreation and Park Association(NRPA). NRPA compiles park and recreation agency information from across the country and creates averages for total acres of parkland, total number of parks, facility type totals and average operating expenses to assist planners with addressing parks and recreation needs within a community.The populations for the benchmarked communities are as follows:

- Reading, PA 94,878
- Erie, PA 92,371
- Albany, NY 102,076
- Syracuse, NY 145,171
- New Haven, CT 137,173
- Bridgeport, CT 148,131

Observations from “community” benchmarking

Facilities surpluses –Allentown when compared to the similar-sized cities noted above has:

- an overabundance of handball courts.
- averages slightly higher for basketball courts, pavilions, and volleyball courts

Facilities deficits – Allentown when compared to the similar-sized cities noted above have:

- large deficits in tennis courts and playgrounds
- noticeable lack of recreation centers

Observations from “national” benchmarking (NRPA)

Note: In benchmarking against national averages, not as many amenities are noted by the NRPA.

Facilities surpluses – Allentown when compared to similar-sized cities have:

- overabundance of basketball courts.
- averages slightly higher for diamond fields, skate parks and pickleball courts

Facilities deficits – Allentown when compared to similar-sized cities have:

- noticeable deficits in playgrounds, tennis courts and multi-use fields.
- slight deficits in dog parks and community gardens

Observations for Allentown

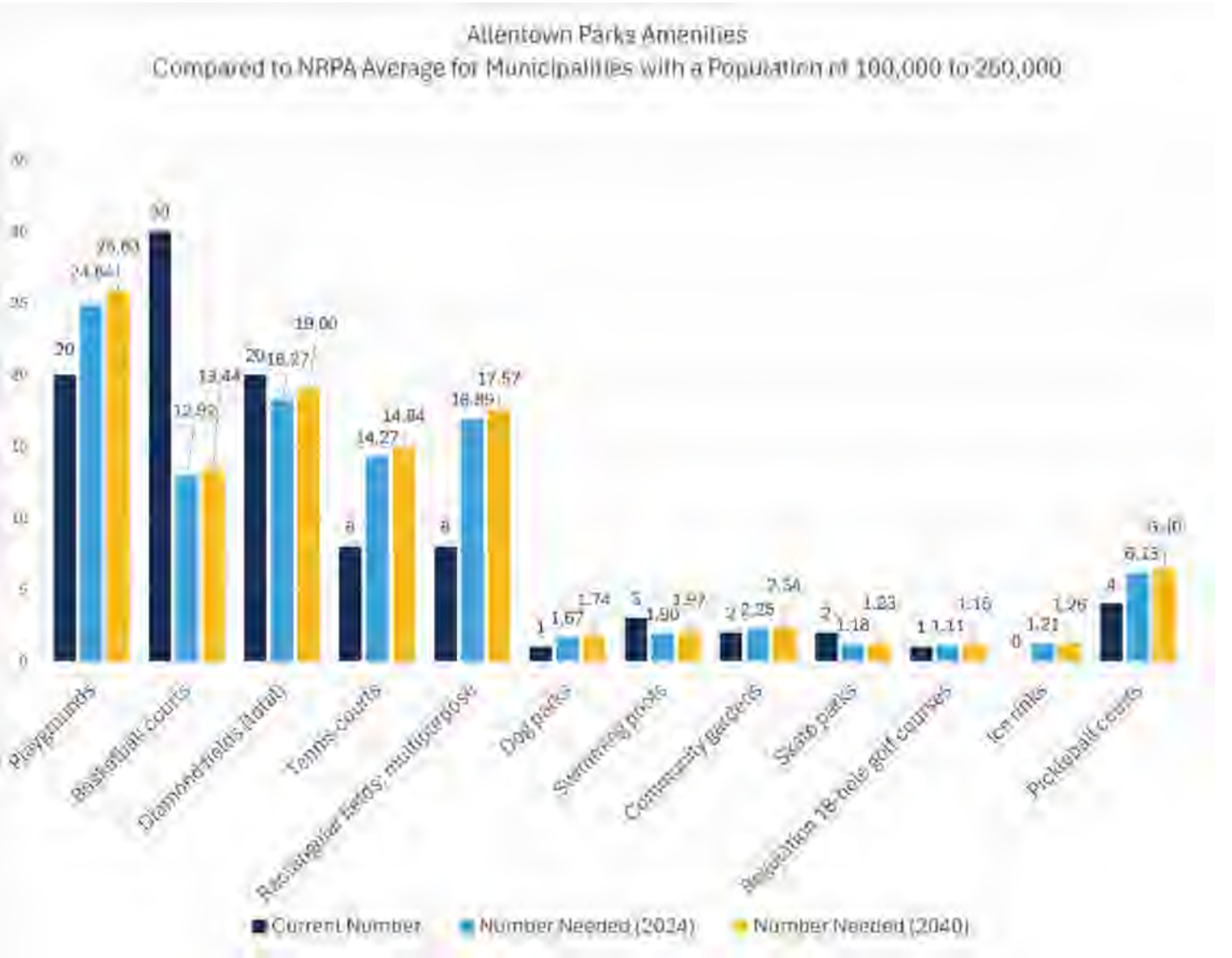
Demand for a recreation center was observed from the benchmarking and confirmed during the public participation forums.

A large number of residents in Allentown support additional multi-use fields that can be used for soccer and other field sports.

As Parks & Recreation looks at changes to provide new activities – the redesign of parks and/or elimination of overabundant/underutilized recreation facilities may help to make room for new elements that people want and will use.

NRPA also provides standards for park acreage/1,000 residents as well as standards for staffing needs based on park acreage.

Allentown’s park acreage is more than double that of the national standard (16 acres/1,000 residents vs. 7 acres/1,000 residents nationally). However, the Park & Recreation Department’s full-time employee (FTE) equivalent staff levels are 60% less than the national standard (7.2 FTE equivalent / 250 acres of parkland vs. 19.3 FTE equivalent/250 acre nationally) and annual operating expenses are half that of the national standard (\$7.3 million vs. \$14 million nationally).





3

INFRASTRUCTURE

3.1 MUNICIPAL SYSTEMS OVERLAP THE RECREATION LANDSCAPE

3.1.1 Public infrastructure systems are “gray, green and blue”

Public parks and open spaces are major elements of civic “infrastructure” systems that can be conceived as “gray, green and blue.” All three types contribute to sustainable modern societies, and Allentown parklands demonstrate how these systems overlap. Understanding how these systems can work best together is essential to growing the sustainability and resilience of the Allentown Parks system.

Gray infrastructure – generally includes traditional civic structures (eg: roads, sidewalks, stormwater pipes/basins; utilities; dams; water/sewer systems, bridges, transportation systems, and most building structures).

These structures are often located within public parks and/or impact civic open spaces (eg: sewer/water lines along riparian corridors, stormwater runoff) These systems are typically managed as “utilities” or sometimes “authorities” which in Allentown are administratively separate from park management and recreation services. Many municipalities successfully share resources between civic infrastructure jurisdictions (eg: Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments).

Green infrastructure – is a broad category of civic improvements created to provide needed infrastructure services while:

- reducing embedded energy and/or operational power costs;
- reducing carbon emissions; and
- using natural systems as treatment alternatives to previous gray structural solutions.
- vegetation is the backbone of multi-functional green infrastructure – cleaning air, moderating temperatures, holding soils, managing water.

Public parks and open spaces are almost always categorized as “green infrastructure,” however the level of green infrastructure “services” can vary widely from site to site, depending upon many factors.

Examples of green infrastructure may include:

- conserving floodplain lands to improve water quality;
- planting trees for both stormwater management and reducing heat island effects;
- reducing impacts of flooding, and
- protecting habitat of critical interconnected species.

Solar collection is an example of an intensive green infrastructure investment that helps reduce local electric reliance on burning fossil fuels.

Blue infrastructure – is a term used to describe a network of interconnected water management “systems” – including both natural aquatic and man-made and hydraulic systems. Water conservation and management systems are often called “blue” infrastructure.

Allentown is water rich – with the Lehigh River and multiple natural streams flowing through small valleys within the City boundaries. Every public “hydraulic system” is tied inseparably to these natural waterways – including: municipal drinking water; stormwater; and wastewater systems. The historic Lehigh Canal transportation system remains watered today as blue infrastructure that serves as public recreation and a stormwater management asset.

Blue infrastructure elements are always interconnected – beginning with the natural hydrological cycle. Various elements in Allentown’s water infrastructure are man-made (gray) elements – they include: dams that help siphon drinking water from the creeks flowing through Allentown parks; and water pipes and sewer mains that are buried beneath the stream banks inside Allentown parks; and stormwater runoff from developed areas upstream that can flood and scour Allentown park lands. Together, these systems are inseparable parts of the Allentown blue infrastructure system – and impact the management of the City park system.

Previous Page: Tilghman St Bridge over the Lehigh River



Stormwater is conveyed off of Franklin Park and into the streets by way of this deteriorated runnel system.



Educational signage at Trout Creek explaining the importance of stormwater management in partnership with the EAC, Friends of Allentown Parks, Wildlands Conservancy, and Water Resource Education Network. .

Many municipalities seek to plan and act collaboratively with partners as a comprehensive strategy to manage costs by conserving blue resources, including: water quality improvements; ecosystem/habitat services; stormwater management/flood prevention, and recreation/quality of life investments. Stormwater management has typically been performed by traditional “gray” infrastructure elements, such as pipes and detention basins.

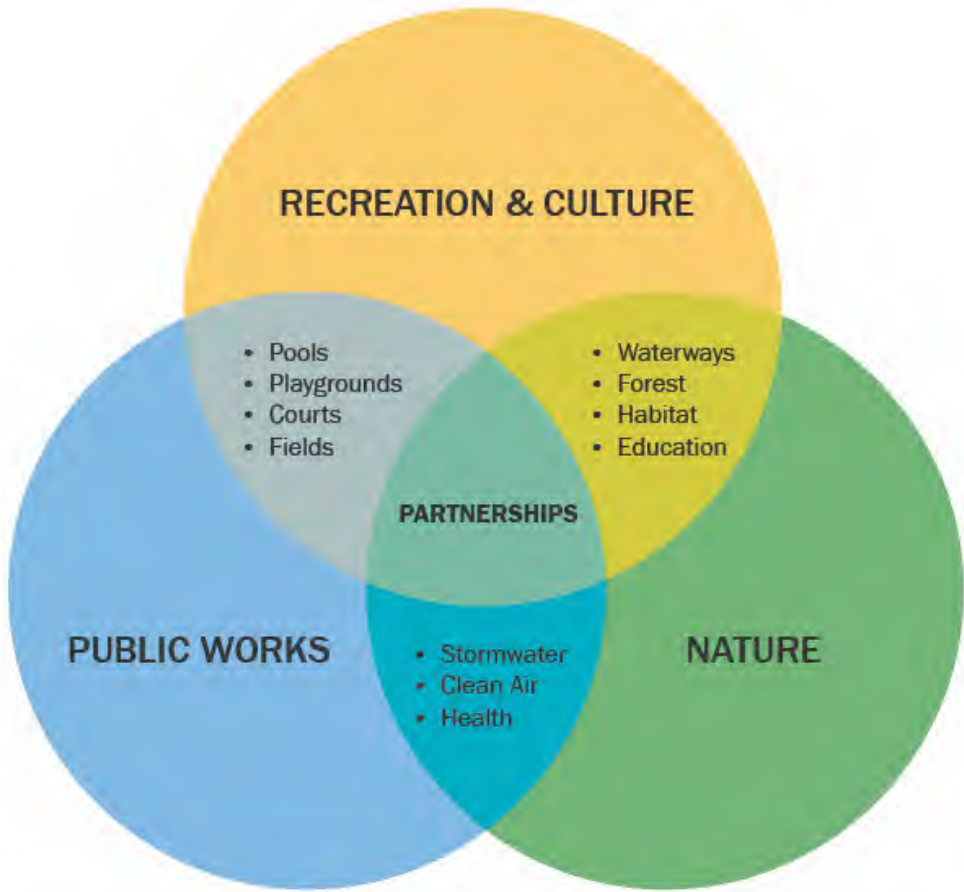
3.1.2 Stewardship “systems” – potential administrative collaborations

Stewardship of municipal infrastructure within Allentown is divided logically between multiple departments – each with its own staff and defined jurisdictional tasks. Allentown municipal departments/jurisdictions include:

- **Parks & Recreation** – is responsible for stewardship for nearly all Allentown municipal parks, pools, plaza, open spaces – and many recreation and cultural programs. Parks & Recreation staff perform most of the maintenance of these resources and also are responsible for emergency tree work, caring for all vegetated medians, and the Hamilton Street and Urban Corridor vegetation.
- **Public Works** – is the department responsible for engineering and maintenance of much of the Allentown’s “gray” public infrastructure, including streets, sewers, stormwater management, and maintenance of City facilities.
- **Planning** – proposed future shapes of development in Allentown are reviewed by the municipal Planning staff who recommend improvements that will benefit the City. Parks need to be represented actively during these review processes.
- **Authorities** – these are separate entities that have power over certain services and are able to make decisions independently of other governing bodies. In Allentown, water and wastewater systems are serviced by the Lehigh County Authority, but the City retains ownership of the Allentown System
- **Utilities** – the Bureau of Stormwater manages the Stormwater Utility Fee in the City. This fee is based on the amount of impervious area on a property, as areas with more hard surfaces will generate more runoff and introduce more pollutants into waterbodies. The fee helps to fund stormwater management in the City.



Trout Creek is forced through man-made infrastructure.



3.1.3 People “systems” – our partnership networks

The Allentown Parks & Recreation Department (P&R) has established relationships at the intracity, local, county, regional and state levels which help to meet departmental goals. Intracity partners can share information, technology, staff and equipment with P&R to save costs, reduce redundancies and improve service delivery.

Local partners, such as the Allentown School District, recreation providers, athletic organizations and nonprofit organizations can all provide valuable insight to P&R as to the recreational needs of their students and members. Partnering with the City can ensure that recreational facilities and programs are in place to meet the needs of both the organizations and the City’s residents. These groups can also provide volunteering opportunities to assist with park cleanup.

Regional and state partners can provide funding and assistance with planning efforts. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission is the regional planner that helps to plan for the growth of the Lehigh Valley and offers opportunities for communities to be involved in the regional planning network, including greenways, trails and transportation needs. State partners can provide important information to assist a municipality in successfully receiving funding for improvement projects.

Funders and donors can help to supplement department budgets for projects relating to short-term maintenance and operational needs to longer-term capital projects. The Partnership Network graphic illustrates the inter-relationship between the Parks & Recreation Department and its various partners. Additional information on specific partners can be found in Chapter 5. Go to section 5.5.1 to see our partnership network diagram.

3.2 INVENTORY / ANALYSIS

Existing conditions of Allentown Parks and open spaces and the surrounding conditions that affect them are assessed in three steps:

1. **Methodology** – describes how the data is collected and analyzed.
2. **Inventory** – is the collection of data from multiple sources including: on-site observations; previously documented studies; and communicating with residents and stakeholders in Allentown.
3. **Analyses** – are the assessments of the data to begin to determine options for how existing conditions of parks may be conserved or improved.

3.2.1 Methodology

Methods for inventory and analyses are described below and were vetted by Park & Recreation – with observations and options shared and reviewed together. The public meetings and cultural venues were key to community participation and guidance in planning process.

Data found within this report was compiled using the best available information. This included Geographic Information System (GIS) data from Allentown, Lehigh County, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, and Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA), which was used to prepare field maps and planning documents consisting of the base aerial photography, municipal boundaries, roadways, parcels, contour lines and other identifying land features. Other information included previous planning studies, field reconnaissance data, committee and public meetings, key person interviews, and the online public opinion survey.



The consultant team and Parks and Rec team meeting at Roosevelt Park.

3.2.2 Inventory

Overview of Allentown Parks

The planning team visited Allentown parks and open spaces multiple times during the project – including visits with staff; separate visits; information gathering from stakeholder sources; and review of previously developed information.

The Allentown planning concept of four major neighborhoods – West End, South Side, East Side, and Center City was used as a basic framework to organize the parks resource inventory.

The Allentown Park system is large – covering nearly 1415 acres within 40 public “sites” that include: greenways, passive and active recreation parks, and a golf course. Nearly 12% of the total land area in Allentown is stewarded by the Allentown Parks & Recreation Department. The beloved slogan “A City in a Park” is literal for Allentown residents – who favored keeping that idea from the previous plan.

Inventory is also categorized by parcel sizes and types of resources – to collectively describe basic physical characters of these public spaces

Large recreation and open space resources

Many early Allentown recreation sites were conceived and constructed along the edges of the five primary waterways that flow through the narrow City valleys, Cedar Creek, Little Lehigh Creek, Trout Creek, Jordan Creek, and the Lehigh River. These parks make up most of the large parks in Allentown such as Cedar Creek that covers 121 acres, Trout Creek 84 acres and Jordan Park 30.6 acres. Nearly 21.5 total miles of waterway run within Allentown limits. This riparian infrastructure is an extraordinary municipal asset and a challenge to steward – as weather events increase in frequency, volumes, and duration – and require significantly more robust resiliency investments to be prepared for future impacts.

Trexler Park is a premier Allentown park and is both riparian-based and an upland cultural landscape.

Examples of other larger parks in Allentown that are not along any of the five primary waterways include: Keck Park – 38 acres and Percy Ruhe 28.6 acres

Small recreation sites

Small public parcels are distributed across the City, and some may be considered mini parks of less than one acre. These neighborhood-scale spaces often include: simple paths/sidewalks, trees/vegetation, benches and minor amenities, and sometimes a sculptural element.

An example of a mini park is the small triangular parcel at College Heights Boulevard and Tilghman Street that features the “Hiker” monument – commemorating the Spanish American War. (Small parks are discussed in Section 3.2.3 Open Space.)

Park system identity

The City of Allentown accomplished a major public service goal by creating its signage “brand” as the compelling visual identity for its system of parks and open spaces.

Allentown parks signs are visually prominent throughout the City, and they collectively signal the commitment by City leaders and residents to steward the municipal recreation common wealth.

Signage in Allentown parks, greenways, and open spaces is a unifying “placemaking” element of the Cityscape.



Park branding signs distinctly identify the Allentown park system.

Historic / Cultural Resources

Many historic elements are located within City parks and open spaces.

Extant resources like canal, railroad, and mill structures / sites display the legacy of the Allentown industrial past. Other historic features like the WPA-era structures present artifacts of a cultural and economic period of struggle that played out in Allentown, similar to municipalities across the nation.

The water fountain in West Park and the WPA elements found in many of the parks are examples of historic resources that have been stewarded by City Parks & Recreation and continue to endure as beloved community features by each new generation of Allentown residents.

Maintaining historic resources is a more complex stewardship process than typical recreation facility maintenance – which requires consistent, advance-planning and often a high level of historic craftsmanship to effectively conserve the broad variety of artifacts within the City’s ownership.

Many cultural resources within the Allentown park system remain as vital existing artifacts and others endure as important stories to be retold. Together these resources explain the multi-layered heritage of Allentown, as they continue to shape the identity of the City and help describe a collective a sense of “this” place.

Parks are valuable venues to share history and culture – in interpreting artifacts, celebrating events, and keeping alive the community dedication to conserving things that remain important.

Cultural resources is a broad term for a social science of incredible importance. This Allentown Parks Plan 2025 presents a basic overview of some major categories directly relevant to parks and open space history of the City.

Types of cultural resources

Native culture – The Museum of Indian Culture located in the Little Lehigh Parkway is an information resource for understanding history of the original Lenape tribes in the region. Recently, the Delaware Nation; Museum of Indian Culture: and City of Allentown re-dedicated the Lenape Trail within the Parkway – with future plans to build a historic interpretation of a Lenape Village that will rebrand the location as “Lenape Village Park and Trail.” This will create an important historic/ cultural resource for understanding the chapters of local history before Allentown was founded. The Museum hosts an annual “Roasting Ears of Corn Festival” celebration that allows visitors to experience native American culture including dancing, art, and food.

A multi-cultural city – Allentown became a multi-cultural settlement with arrival of European immigrants, and has experienced many different waves of immigration in the centuries since, from Germany, Italy, Ireland, Syria, India, Dominican Republic, Belize and Mexico. The Special Events Department provides several programs throughout the year that celebrates the cultural divesity of the city including Juneteenth, Dia De Los Muertes, and Lights in the Parkway that includes Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannuka, Three Kings Day, Bomba, Fiesta, and others.

Legacy neighborhoods – Three historic districts are designated in Allentown: Old Allentown; Old Fairgrounds; and West Park.

- **Old Allentown** was laid out in the original plans for Allentown – which was first called Northampton Town. No Allentown parks exist within this district. A small pocket park at 8th and Gordon streets provides a nearby passive public space and is owned by the Old Allentown Preservation Association (OAPA).
- **Old Fairgrounds District** was the site of the Lehigh County Agricultural Society fairgrounds until 1888, when it relocated to its existing location in Allentown, and the original site was developed as a residential neighborhood known for Victorian-style homes. Both Stevens Park and Old Fairgrounds Park are within the boundaries of this district. Beyond the name of one of the parks, nothing in these parks notes the earlier history of this area.
- **West Park historic District** is centered around the Allentown’s first park - West Park which still retains much of its historical character. Plenty of history exists and a kiosk includes historic interpretation for residents and visitors.
- **Fountain Park** neighborhood is not registered as a historic district but celebrated today in many ways including the development of the Martin Luther King Trail and the Harry A Roberts Plaza that features the only stature in America that presents Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King together.



Roasting Ears of Corn Festival celebrates Native Heritage in the region. Micaela Hood - Lehigh Valley News



The historic Lehigh Canal infrastructure, among many others, provides unique recreation opportunities.



The Allentown Mural Arts Program (AMA) has provided opportunities for mural street art throughout the City. Ana Candelaria



The East Side Youth Center provides the community many recreational opportunities, but Allentown has yet to open its own Community Recreation Center. esycallentown.com

Industrial history – The Allentown parks system occupies multiple sites that were originally industrial sites from colonial mills through factories of the industrial revolution era. The Wire Mill Arboretum took its name the factory on this site that was a major supplier of barbed wire fencing.

The D&L (Delaware & Lehigh) Trail occupies the alignment of an early towpath-era canal system that was part of the first industrial transportation corridor system in America. Canal Park on the East Side is a logical place to interpret canal industrial history.

Multiple opportunities exist to interpret local industrial heritage within Allentown parks.

Art culture – The City of Allentown continues to advocate for public art in many forms – including outdoor sculptures in many parks. Murals have emerged throughout the City, including some parks like Fellowship East Playlot. Art can transcend culture and history and remains a vital means of expression for communities who seek to reinforce the “sense of place” at important locations.

Collective society – Works Progress Administration (WPA) – This landmark series of federal programs was a keystone of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal during America’s Great Depression in the 1930’s. Allentown benefitted greatly from this program and the historic artifacts that were built around the City and region include: the first terminal building at Lehigh Valley International Airport; the Lehigh Parkway, the Union Terrace Amphitheater; the stairs by Fountain Park, and many other projects that are revered by Allentown residents, and remain useful to residents today.

The WPA landmark achievements include works of American men and women of arts and crafts and industry. The program gave people paid work in their areas of expertise and helped to simultaneously rebuild the landscape and human spirit during a traumatic time in US history. Allentown parks still play an important part in telling these stories to connect residents to the past events that helped shaped today’s parks.

Community recreation center – a major initiative for the Allentown community

Allentown does not have a community recreation center and relies on School District properties and other recreational facilities, including non-profit partner venues, to provide spaces for indoor activities.

The City may elect to take a next step toward addressing this challenge by commissioning a feasibility study – that will present challenges and opportunities, such as what facilities might be included; where feasible locations may best serve the community; and how costs of construction, operation, and increased staffing might be covered for a new recreation center.

Modern community centers are often outfitted with gyms, indoor walking track, flexible classroom and other spaces that can serve activities like a dance studio. Many centers will also provide childcare services. A municipal recreation center offers the potential to dramatically expand year-round programming opportunities to serve the residents of Allentown.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Allentown Monday Funday

Monday Funday is an after-school pop-up series that provides Allentown residents with opportunities to explore new parks and meet new neighbors. The program was created in 2023 to provide programming that has low barriers to entry, no registration, no fees, and delivers a variety of activities that are fun. This model builds upon existing relationships with community organizations to create successful events. Each event includes activities with a focus on wellness, active play, or community cookout. Residents connect over activities like painting, lawn games, science experiments, and musical performances.

In 2025, Monday Funday events are planned for three Mondays each month throughout the summer in various parks throughout the City, such as Fountain, Stevens, and Bucky Boyle Park.



Service gaps

Even with the acreage and diversity of Allentown park resources, some neighborhoods in the City do not have a public park within a ¼ mile (10 minute walk). This radius is a commonly used metric to identify a general lack of recreation services. Different remedies are likely needed for each affected neighborhood.

Based upon the inventory of Allentown park locations, and analyses that show gaps (sometimes called recreation deserts) – a map was created to display locations of neighborhoods where municipal parks / facilities within a ¼ mile walk do not yet exist.

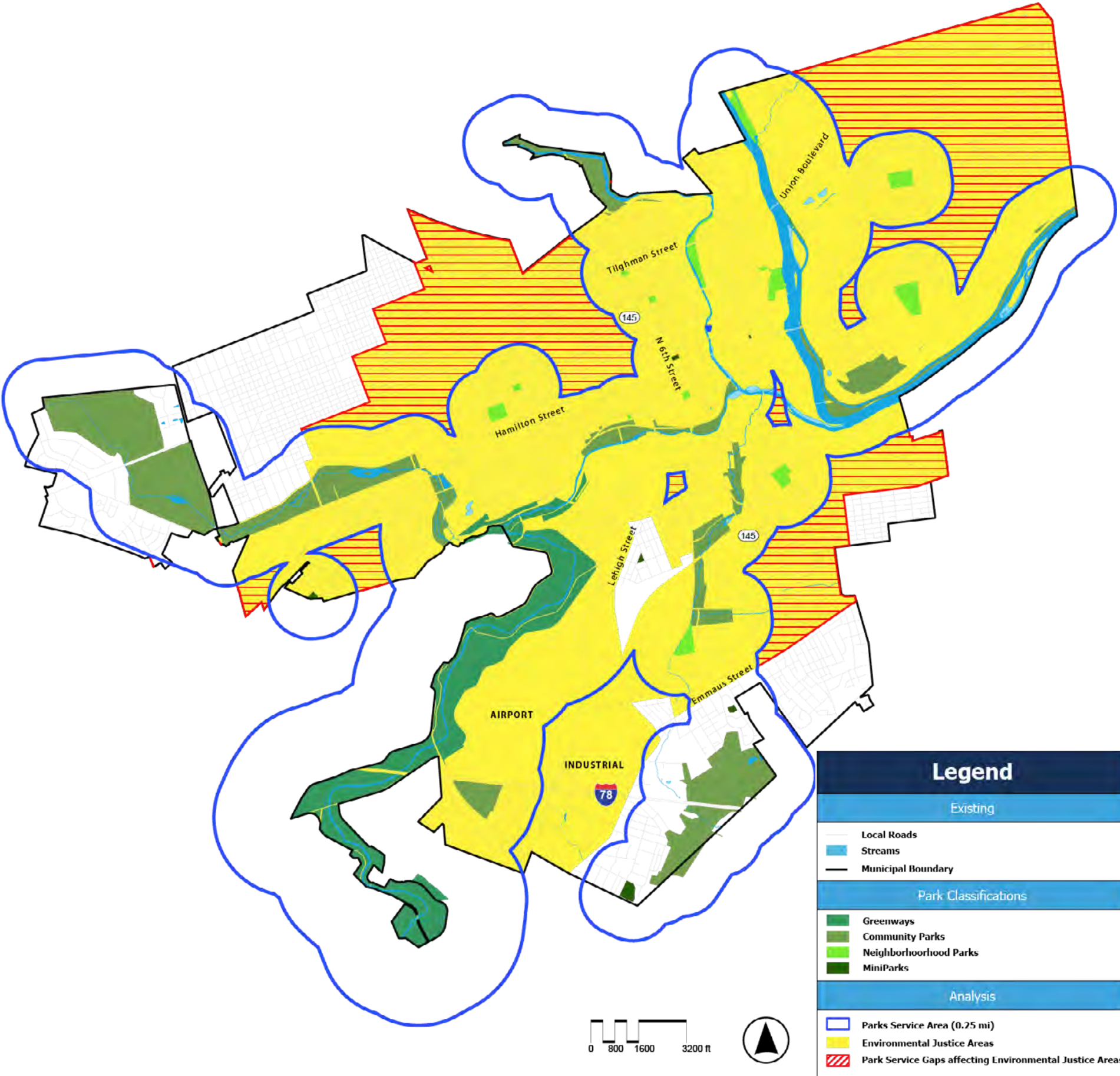
Those “distance” gaps were overlaid on a PA DEP Environmental Justice map (on the right) to show how and where these service gaps intersect with neighborhoods identified as vulnerable populations. The red hash notes areas outside the 1/4 mile walking distance of facilities that are within environmental justice areas.

“Environmental Justice” (EJ) areas are generally defined as places within of a municipality that are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards – which can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation. EJ scores are based on level of environmental exposures and effects (pollution burden) and sensitive population and socioeconomic characteristics (population characteristics). Block scores of 80+ percentile qualify as EJ areas. More information can be found at <https://gis.dep.pa.gov/PennEnviroScreen/>.

Parks and public green spaces can help mitigate some environmental effects – such as improve air quality, reduce potential flooding; and lower the “heat Island” effects in dense and paved urban areas.

Observations from analyses of park service areas and EJ locations in Allentown include:

- Several significant areas are both outside of a ¼ mile distance from a park and within the Environmental justice areas in Center City and East Side neighborhoods.
- Different remedies may be required for each neighborhood – since adding new park area is most difficult where neighborhoods are built-out and densely-developed.
- Adding new park area to the Allentown system needs to be evaluated carefully to ensure that the operation and maintenance requirements can be handled within Park & Recreation budgets.
- A majority of respondents to the public survey felt there was an adequate number of Allentown parks already.
- Potential remedies to underserved areas include, but are not limited to:
 - Adding additional park space – starting with micro “pocket” park options.
 - Considering how unprogrammed space or other parcels might be utilized.
 - An example or re-imagining spaces might be the parking lot on 226 N 9th St.
- Alternative programs that have helped other communities address “park gaps” include:
 - **Play Streets** – used in cities across America (New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Milwaukee, Seattle, Los Angeles, etc.) provides child friendly, safe accessible areas within public rights of way that are closed down during periods for dedicated recreation. “Green alleys” can serve this purpose in some communities.
 - **Park in a Truck program** – is a community-led initiative that assists residents with transforming vacant lots into small mini parks. The program is a step-by-step guide for communities to design, build, and maintain their own neighborhood parks. The program emphasizes community engagement, local involvement, and sustainability practices. The program was born in Philadelphia by Thomas Jefferson University, and is quickly gaining world recognition. Melon Street Park and Cecil Street Community Garden in Philadelphia are great examples of how this program can work successfully.



(Source: Pennsylvania DEP, Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Mapping and Screening Tool (PennEnviroScreen) Methodology Documentation 2023)

Aquatic facilities / pools / water play opportunities

There once were eight (8) municipal swimming pools operated by the City of Allentown until the early 1990s. In 2025, three (3) pools are operated by Parks & Recreation – at Cedar Beach, Mack Pool, and Irving Park.

The current availability of pools in Allentown matches the national municipal average when compared to cities of similar size. The difference today is that the open pools are not located “nearby” to previously-served neighborhoods – and, many residents remember days when more pools served more neighborhoods.

Remnants of former pools still exist and remind people of how times have changed. Fountain and Jordan Parks still have pool shells, decks, and structures remaining, and discussions for what to do with them are ongoing.

Fountain Park pool has been closed since 2009, and Jordan Park pool was closed in 2019. Cedar Beach Pool, originally built in 1952, had to be closed down for a period of repairs in 2014 and ultimately renovated and reopened in 2018. Irving Pool was once the oldest pool that was built in 1939, but the pool was completely demolished and the new pool was opened in 2024. Mack is now the oldest pool and need constant maintenance to keep it open. Built in 1962, the pool still uses the original filtration system. A recent assessment of Mack noted that the old shell has about five years of life left to it and may need to be closed for a time if there isn’t significant investment made.

The primary issue for most municipalities is the costs of constructing and operating modern outdoor pool facilities – especially when most operate only three months annually. Secondary issues include siting the replacement / new pool facilities so that they will not be subject to previous impacts – such as flooding from adjacent waterways.

Since 2021 the City has added spray pads at Bucky Boyle, Old Fairgrounds, and in 2023 added one at Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park. These are well-loved features, especially for children, and their locations help equitably distribute access to water play features during summer months across Allentown.

The challenge remains that delivery of spray pads as critical summer cooling facilities does not create opportunities for children to learn to swim – which remains a human life lesson and important cultural practice for all people.

Every summer, many people of Allentown seek cooling refuge in the waterways that flow through Allentown Parks. These park waterway locations are loved, and for many people, represent a low-cost alternative to public neighborhood pools that have been closed.

Public waterways through Allentown are clearly posted “no swimming” for safety reasons. Challenges to inform, prevent, and rescue bathers caught in the unpredictable and sometimes deadly hydraulics of local waterways falls on Parks & Recreation staff to inform and attempt to enforce the restrictions with users – and to City emergency responders to waterway distress calls.

Building new pools will not stop cultural uses of the Allentown waterways by people seeking water play during hot summer months. Education and enforcement of municipal rules need to be consistent, highly prominent, and enforced by the City to eventually change attitudes.



The pool at Fountain Park has laid in disrepair since 2005.

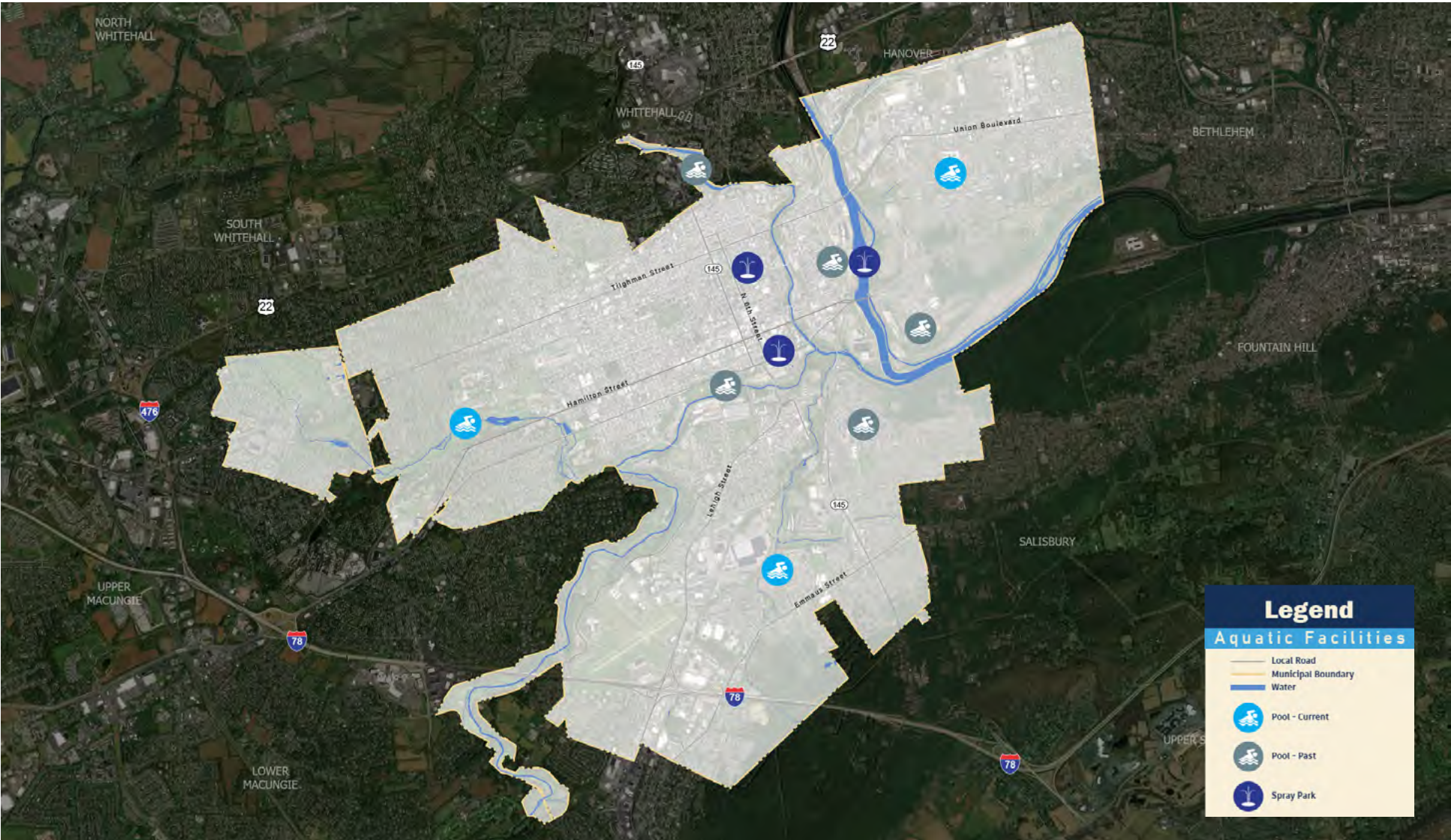


Fig. 3.1 Water Facilities Map
The map to the right notes where pools and spray pads are either currently located, or where they once were. Two pools are considered past since neither have been functional since 2018.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Annual Special Events

Throughout the year there are approximately 200 permitted events that serve tens of thousands of people. These permitted events are run by applicants and can range from small private events to major regional festivals and large community celebrations. The Parks and Recreation Department engage with the Partners to run events such as Fiesta on Hamilton, Blues Brews and BBQ, Christmas Tree Lighting & New Years Eve Celebration and Concerts at Union Terrace Amphitheater. The team runs seven City events including the Annual Egg Hunt, Memorial Day Block Party, Juneteenth Celebration, 4th of July, Classics and Cruisers, Halloweekend that includes a walking parade and Dia De Los Muertos, and the 8 week Lights in the Parkway event.



Restrooms

The need for public restrooms is universal. The Parks and Recreation Department understands this but face minimum staff and funding challenges even as the costs of providing and maintaining restrooms persist to rise.

Currently, not all Allentown parks have restrooms, and often existing restrooms are not regularly open. Restroom locations can be found through Allentown’s open map resources: <https://allentownpa.maps.arcgis.com> on the City of Allentown Parks Locator Map. More detailed information is available and should be shared in the open map resource so people can learn when the restrooms are open.

A consensus priority that was expressed in every public stakeholder venue was the need for reliable restroom facilities.

The current policy to provide more restroom access is to add porta-potties and install timers on restroom doors at selected parks. Having a reliable schedule for restrooms to be open across the City parks system can assist in addressing some additional challenges. Parks and Recreation Department can develop a strategy for upgrading restroom facilities that are universally accessible and ecologically sustainable, while providing a feeling of safety. Currently, the Parks and Recreation Department is working with Public Works to a facility assessment that includes the restrooms. This is a first step into having a comprehensive look at the existing conditions of the restrooms and other facilities, and start to plan on what it would cost to in staffing and improvements to expand restroom access. Capital improvement costs can attract funding partners, but perpetual maintenance of these park facilities is a cost to be borne by the City with continued support from financial partner, the Trexler Trust.



New bathroom facilities at Irving Pool

A City restroom facilities improvement program for Allentown parks might begin with a targeted capital investment into a modernizing and standardizing a restroom facility “module” that is engineered to help reduce life-cycle maintenance demands. These facilities could be planned all at once and programmed to come online in priority parks over a multi-year timeline.

For special events, the Parks and Recreation Department provides porta potties, but outside special events requires special event providers to secure their own portable restroom facilities, but no mechanisms currently exist to ensure that restrooms are actually provided and with a stretched Parks and Recreation Department, assuring that these minimal comforts are in place will continue to be difficult.

Connections to parks

Integrating Recreation and Transportation improvements

During the course of this planning project, led by Parks & Recreation, the City also conducted two related “transportation” planning projects. The **Allentown “SS4A” Safe Streets for All** and the **Citywide Bike Plan** were completed in 2025 through the Department of Public Works.

Both of those transportation-focused plans included goals that overlap with Allentown Recreation and open space goals – most specifically walking and biking access to the City Parks resources.

Both transportation plans expand strategies to improve the “multi-modal” transportation network in Allentown – to create a safer, more accessible, and more equitably connected city. The SS4A identifies many roads and intersections that are most dangerous to walkers, bike riders, and passengers in motor vehicles. The SS4A plan provides conceptual ideas for fixing those challenging rights of way – including traffic calming ideas that improve pedestrian features on public streets.

Solving the Lehigh River “barrier” between east and west Allentown

One of the biggest barriers noted in the SS4A plan is crossing the Lehigh River. This is both a transportation/general mobility issue for Allentown – and an equity / access issue for those without motor vehicles to safely access municipal parks and open spaces.

The SS4A Plan addresses the Lehigh River “barrier” issue by proposing a solution that depends on the ultimate rebuilding / widening of the Hamilton Street Bridge. From a recreation perspective, this strategy to postpone walking and biking access improvements until the existing river bridge is replaced may prove too long for some.

A shorter-term alternative possibility is to conduct a feasibility study for how lane and walkway geometries on the existing Hamilton Street bridge deck might be modified – including possibly consolidating/alternating traffic lane geometries to yield a wider and safer travel lane dedicated to bikes and pedestrians on the existing deck.

Access improvements to make the Hamilton Street Bridge safer in the short term for ped-bike travel could also help acknowledge and relieve the historic differences between the distribution of City park areas on the east and west sides of the Lehigh by improving access in both directions for all.

The two transportation plans provided conceptual ideas for better travel connectivity, however neither considered Allentown parks as primary destinations for new travel routes. The **Allentown Parks Plan** can supplement those transportation plans with strategies based on public opinions regarding parks and access to Allentown open spaces.

A considerable majority of the participating public identified safe connections to parks as a high priority in their responses to the public survey.

Public comments are supported by data from the online program Strava which features maps created by users to map local exercise routes and details. The Strava maps display where people who walk, run, and bike in Allentown feel most comfortable throughout the City. (maps are found on page 33)

As the City considers which elements of all three plans to implement, there is a fundamental advantage to convene all relevant departments in a joint planning process so that goals, possible improvements, and resource sharing opportunities can be collectively assessed for budgetary and service benefits to Allentown residents.

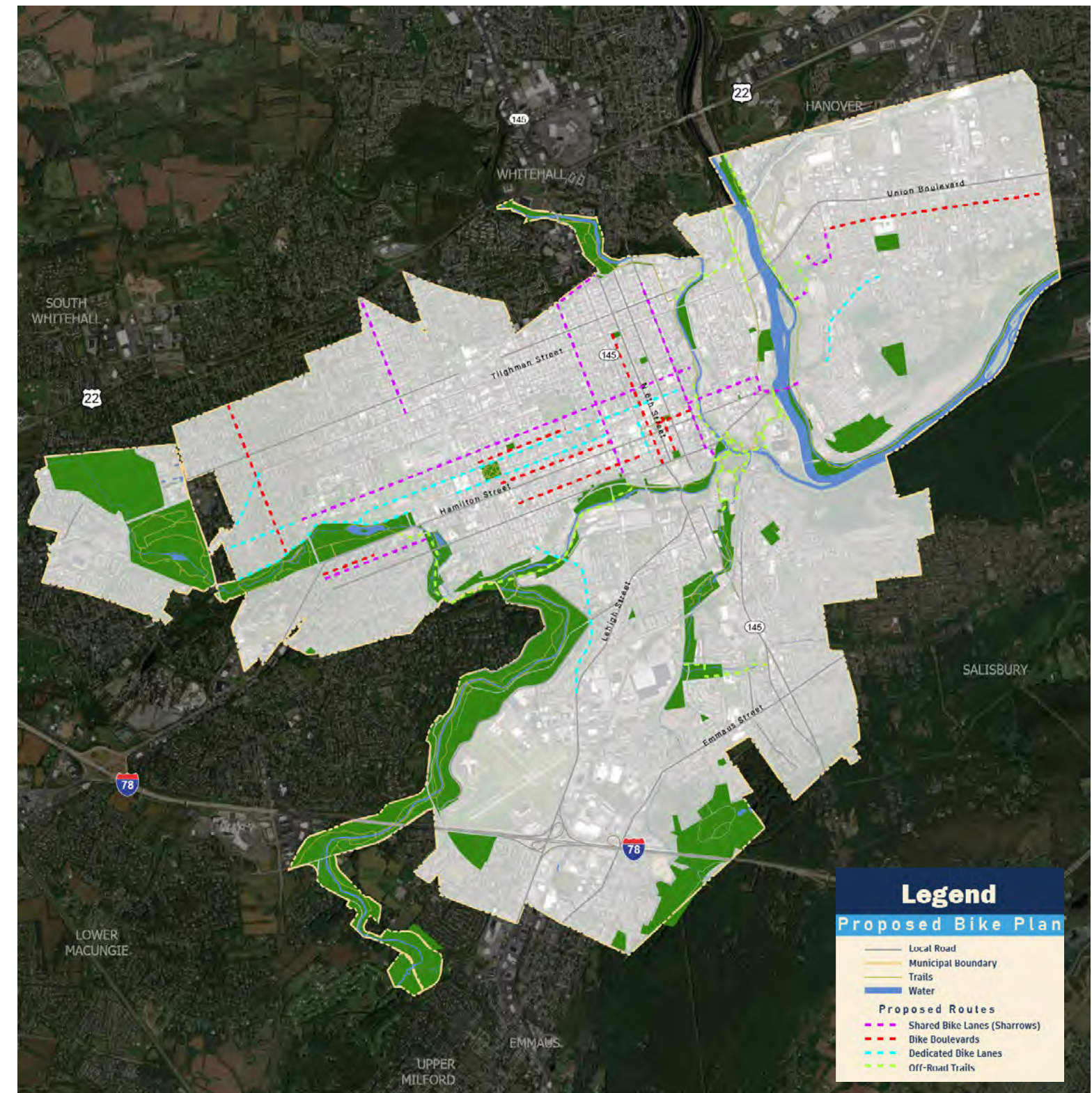
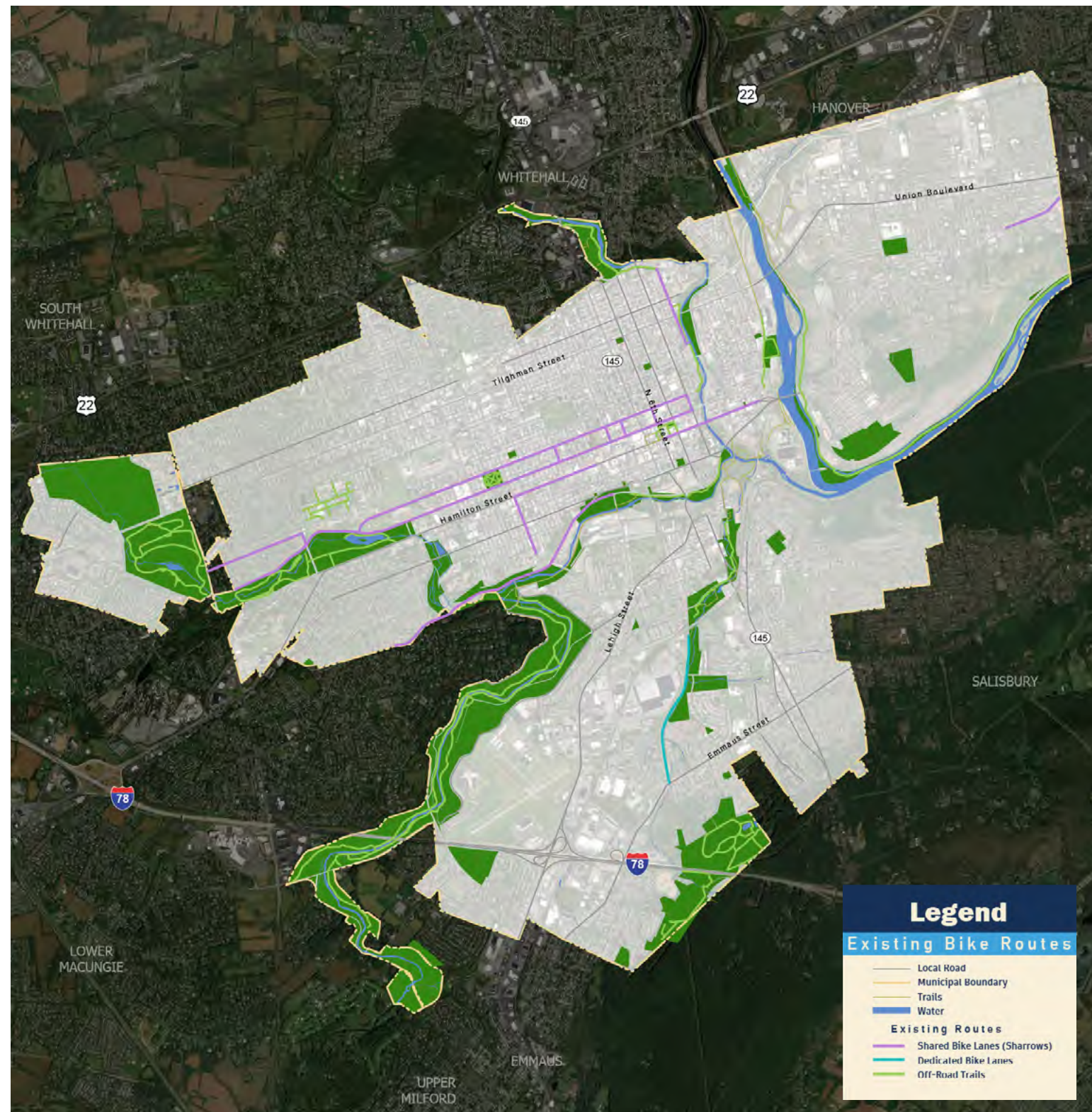


Fig. 3.2 Bike Route Maps
The maps show existing and proposed bike route information taken from the recently completed Allentown Citywide Bike Plan, June 2025.

Trail/Greenway Linkages

Allentown residents also benefit from larger, dedicated greenway / trails systems such as: Little Lehigh, Jordan Creek, Cedar Creek, Trout, and the D&L. Gaps still remain, including:

- **Cedar Park to Trexler Memorial Park** – Residents have described a “missed opportunity” to connect these two parks with a modern ped-bike linkage, when PennDOT made the improvements to the intersection of the Parkway Blvd and N Cedar Crest Blvd. Currently there are plans in the works to address this intersection through the Parks and Recreation Dept.
- **Martin Luther King Drive Trail** – Phase one new construction connecting Little Lehigh to Martin Luther King Trail at Fountain Park is in the works. Phase two of this greenway trail will connect the Little Lehigh to Cedar Beach and is out for bid to complete the design and engineering needed to build this connection. The City can focus on opportunities to connect this trail with Jordan Creek, Trout Creek, and D&L Trail – so that all the major greenways are interconnected to deliver a seamless off-road trails network through the City.
- **Allentown State Hospital** – Redevelopment plans for the former state site moved closer to completions over the course of the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 project. The City can negotiate with the developer to set aside a significant percentage of open space for the public – as well as negotiate how trails may be connected to Keck Park and the D&L trail to provide more off-road connections within the East Side of Allentown, where there are currently no major trail links and only on-road facilities proposed in the recent bike plan.
- **The Little Lehigh** – The greenway system can continue at the southern end from Fish Hatchery Road to Kecks Bridge by extending the trail to enable people to enjoy this part of the Creek without being forced to use the narrow Keystone Rd.



Fig. 3.3 Strava Maps
The two Strava maps show how people use the greenways and streets that they feel most comfortable for recreation. The map on the right is running/walking and the one on the left is bicycling. The more intense the red color, the more people are using that route.



The Lehigh Parkway is a popular greenway with trails that follow along the Little Lehigh Creek.



The Million Clicks Walking Program provides incentive for residents to come out and use their trails in which many are along the greenways in Allentown.

Descriptions of park “types”

Community, neighborhood, mini, and greenways/trails

- **Mini Parks** – have minimal programming and usually offer 1-3 recreation elements that do not require much space. Most mini parks are generally less than 1.25 acres, although sometimes small, minimally-programmed spaces lie within larger parcels. Typically mini parks tend to serve a specific function, age group, or a limited population area and may also be called “pocket parks.”
- **Neighborhood Parks** – can range between 1-10 acres, though some spaces with minimal programming within larger parks may be considered as a “neighborhood park.” Most neighborhood parks use the limited available space to fill many different programming needs.
- **Community Parks** – are larger public recreation areas of typically 10+ acres that can provide both passive and active recreation opportunities. Some larger parks may only have one program such as a passive park with an extensive trail system, or a municipal golf course. Most community parks share a “destination” status that attracts visitors from outside the municipality.
- **Greenways / trails** – are usually linear “corridors” of open space with waterway and or trail “spines” that serve multiple recreation and conservation functions, including connecting people to parks, historic sites, recreation and conserving natural areas. Greenways can vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of trail spine linking nodes of natural spaces to wide corridors encompassing multi-layered landscapes and wildlife habitats.

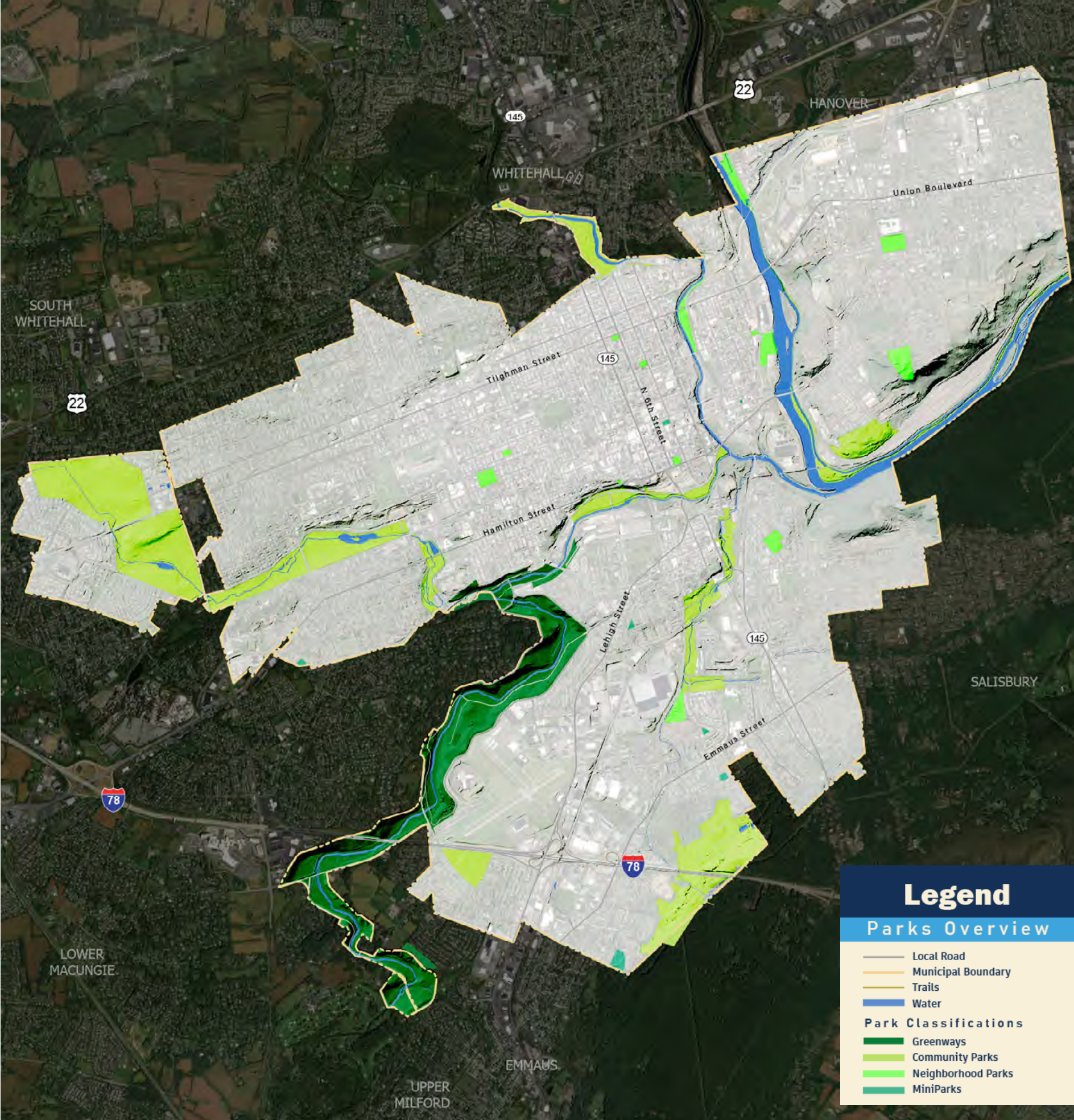
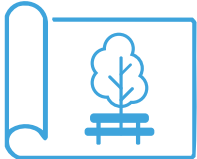
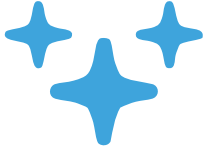
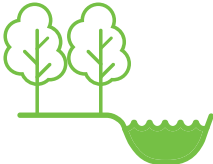
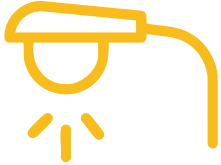


Fig. 3.4 Parks Overview Map

The map to the right shows locations of the parks in Allentown and how they are classified. Some parks are classified under two types, such as Jordan Park. It is a community park, but also part of the larger Jordan Creek Greenway.

PARK IMPROVEMENT TOOLBOX

The Park Improvement Toolbox delivers options for Parks & Recreation and its partners to consider each time a park enters the active planning and design phases. This Toolbox identifies “types” of improvement opportunities that might be used at any Allentown park. Every Allentown park is assessed in this section.

SAFETY/ACCESS		RECREATION/FACILITIES		ENVIRONMENTAL/ECOLOGY	
					
Access to Parks	Speeds	Master Planning for Parks	New Equipment	Riparian Buffer	Habitat
					
ADA Accessible and Universal Elements	Signage	Repair Existing Park Elements	Water Access at Streams and Rivers	Stormwater Management	
					
LANTA Service	Lighting	Upgrade	Additional Programming		

SAFETY / ACCESS



Access to parks - Access is a Citywide concern, and lack of crosswalks to reach parks is evident in many areas of the City. Data to support this is noted in the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan and the Allentown Crash Dashboard.

- **Gateways** can create a graceful sense of entry into a space, as well as help prevent bottlenecks at ped-bike intersections through smart design decisions.
- **Crosswalks** and trails/walkways should align with a gateway whenever possible.
- **Trails** - Differences sometimes depend on space available, but higher user populations in urban areas generally require wider multi-use trails to accommodate the greatest diversity of travelers while minimizing conflicts. Multi-use trails to and through parks are minimum 6-10’ wide and 3-6’ wide for pedestrian walkways.



Speeds - Excessive speeds around parks and on trails can cause safety issues, which is more intensive with the popularity of electric bikes and scooters. Collaboration with local organizations like Community Bike Works can help teach and promote trail etiquette.

- **Traffic calming** – are physical design features that tend to influence drivers to reduce motor vehicle speeds. These tools may be used around park entrances and trail crossings for safety. The SS4A plan includes ideas for traffic calming – especially in locations where traffic is not influenced to stop or slow down around parks, creating dangerous situations.



ADA accessible and universal elements – ADA accessibility is an uncompleted goal for the Allentown Parks system. Uneven trails, non-compliant crosswalks, playgrounds that don’t have universal play elements still pose some challenges for people with disabilities to enjoy the park facilities. The destination playground at Cedar Beach is an example of a popular playground with many universal play elements – which parents with disabled children prefer. The destination playground is one of the few parks that include universal play elements. Because other playgrounds lack these elements, the equipment here becomes crowded.



Signage – Allentown has a highly visible park identity signage system, but other typical park signage features including: wayfinding to and through the park; public notice kiosks for information; and educational signage can be added to provide needed information.



LANTA service has gaps in helping to deliver people to some park locations. Where there are not service lines or LANTA stops close by, such as Fountain Park and Keck Park, coordinating to provide stops at key locations would benefit visitors to the parks that rely on public transportation.



Lighting for safety and/or extend use into the night and/or winter is warranted in some park locations. Lights along trails and parks are generally for safety and not for night time uses, since the parks close between dusk and dawn.



The Martin Luther King Jr Trail going under the Alberus L. Meyers Bridge. As sections get completed, this will be a major trail to parts of the City. Width should be considered to avoid conflicts with users. Stephanie Sigafos - Lehigh Valley News



The playground at Cedar Park in Allentown is a great example of a playground with universal play elements for children of all abilities, but with so few of these elements existing in other parks, this park can get overcrowded, creating other issues for children with disabilities.



Properly lighted paths can provide opportunities for people who like to exercise later in the evening or in the winter when it is dark outside sooner. Some paths are very important for commuters who may travel when it is dark outside.

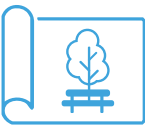


Using art on the street can be a very effective way to create traffic calming while providing wayfinding and branding opportunities such as this intersection in Durham, NC.



Kiosks are great ways to provide information and help define the gateway of the park.

RECREATION / FACILITIES



Master planning for parks – three master plans are included in this report. These plans document community concerns and suggest remedies to park issues. Allentown can make implementing its existing park plans City priorities. Planning projects can proceed concurrently with implementation projects – judiciously to balance finite staff time with implementation projects – to keep the improvement “pipeline” moving. Parks that need a complete makeover warrant a master plan process to ensure public input and a comprehensive stewardship strategy moving forward.



New equipment – some facilities are worn out beyond safety or beyond usefulness and need new replacement equipment or additional facilities to serve greater demands. Safety, costs, lifecycles and priority locations are all factors in deciding on new equipment. If possible, there may be advantages for Parks & Recreation to select families of various equipment so that repairs and service agreements are consolidated to help simplify management and repairs across the entire park system.



Repair existing park elements – Some park elements may be repaired as a cost-effective option to replacement. Amenities likes benches, wood edges, trails, and play equipment – when in good repair can register big impacts by making a park feel more cared for, safe and well used.



Water access at streams and rivers – Approximately 90% of the Allentown park system has a waterway either bordering or running through a park. Access to these waters has always been a part of the experience and culture for park users. Differences in uses determine whether and how people may enter the natural waterways that flow through Allentown. Kayaking and boating are recognized and allowed. Fishing while wading is not prohibited and walking along and touching the water’s edges is not prohibited. But swimming and bathing of any kind is prohibited in the Commonwealth waterways inside Allentown city limits. In 2018, swimming in waterways throughout the City was made illegal unless in designated areas, but currently no areas are designated. Some areas people are using for swimming can be extremely dangerous where hydraulic conditions change quickly - or existing infrastructure such as areas around existing dams (eg: Fountain Park) are notorious for unseen water currents beneath calm water surfaces. Emergency responses can be thwarted by users during peak period overcrowding at Canal Park where it is difficult for responders to reach someone in trouble. The City may consider installing and teaching about safety devices – such as a flotation ring available for events when rescuers are not available. Safety signage around dams and hazards need to be maintained.

- **Riparian sites as group attractions** – Allentown residents and visitors have a history of congregating and recreating along the edges of the City parks. Beyond the rule for no swimming or bathing is the rules and civil expectations for park users to clean up after themselves and not leave piles of trash or scattered refuse that damages the riparian edges. Respect for public hygiene and revered park amenities is a civic expectation. Disrespectful practices of littering and not obeying City rules create burdens on already stretched Allentown staff, including Parks & Recreation, police, and first responders,



Master plans like the one above for Percy Ruhe can help address issues within parks once implemented.



Fixing broken benches, walkways, and other amenities can go a long way in help create good impressions of a park.



Newer equipment is designed to provide more fun and challenges for users.



Residents will often flock to the creeks in Allentown for relief from hot summer days, but some of these areas can be dangerous like this dam at Fountain Park.



Upgrade – some parks have elements that if upgraded, could provide more recreational opportunities. Making some areas larger and adding more age diverse equipment to playgrounds and spray parks is considered an upgrade.

Additional programming – some parks have space that is under-utilized or can serve multiple functions to provide additional programming or amenities. These considerations are often addressed at the project master planning stage.

ENVIRONMENTAL / ECOLOGY



Riparian buffers – Approximately 90% of the municipal park area in Allentown is linked to one of the waterways flowing through the City. Past efforts have been made to limit mowing up to the waterway edges, but this best management practice (BMP) creates other issues that require solutions. Maintaining a vegetated natural edge along waterways is a multi-functional conservation practice with benefits that include: flood mitigation; stormwater management tools, soil erosion protection, water quality cooling, and multiple inter-species habitat protections. Some people see natural vegetation buffers as “messy.” Some people do not want to bushwack through “weeds” to reach the water’s edge. This desire can be satisfied by maintaining specific locations for human-water interaction where science and ecology can support the more intensive uses. In some communities, staff is “accustomed” to mowing everything as a traditional maintenance practice. This issue is a matter of education and practice transition for staff. When designed well and people are trained well – stewarding a healthy, native, and resilient riparian edge can look beautiful and require less maintenance to provide multiple important ecological functions. Riparian access locations can be planned to acknowledge both terrestrial and waterway conditions. The strategy to partner with skilled volunteers to maintain intentional riparian edges can be explored by Parks & Recreation.



Habitat - Creating, conserving or enhancing habitat will improve overall ecological functions within Allentown parklands, including food sources, improved air and water quality, moderated climate and reduced energy demands. Habitat stewardship should embrace biodiversity to help build resilience and serve multiple functions in the changing world.



Stormwater management – Impervious areas increase the amount of stormwater runoff that enters streams. Large mown lawn areas are not the most effective vegetation to detain and infiltrate stormwater – especially as frequency, intensity and duration of large rain events are visibly increasing. Naturalized green stormwater infrastructure – like rain gardens, bioswales, small check dams, increased tree canopy, reduced impervious surfaces and reduced lawn areas can all help slow down and mitigate the volumes of stormwater that directly enter waterways, as well as reduce flooding that happens regularly after even average rain events. The opportunities for stormwater management deserves a facilitated learning session led by experts to help all Allentown departments work together to develop a comprehensive municipal stormwater strategy for the City parklands.



Upgrading amenities such as the tennis/pickleball courts and ball field at Andre Reed Park can promote use.



Riparian edges are important to the health of any waterway, but often, invasive plants and mowed edges reduce the environmental services a waterway can provide.



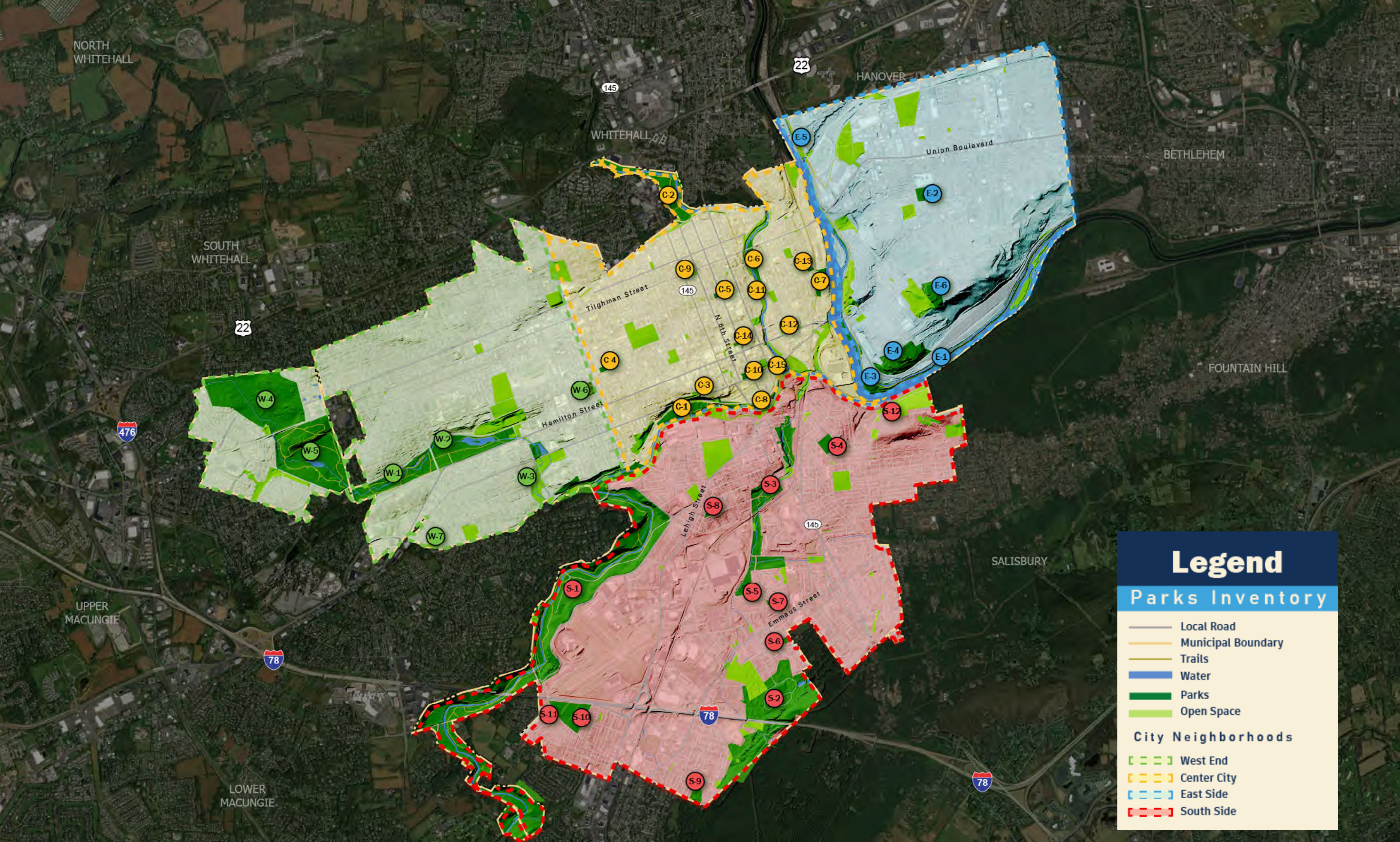
Addressing stormwater in the parks can provide more opportunities for infiltration and filtration of rain water runoff, and address issues caused by channelizing runoff like at Keck Park.



The play area at Mack Pool offers very little for programming. Adding elements that can provide more opportunities can help bring this space alive.



Many of the animals we share our open spaces with need native plants for diversity and health, like this bumble bee enjoying the nectar of our native yellow wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*) in Jordan Park.



Legend

Parks Inventory

- Local Road
- Municipal Boundary
- Trails
- Water
- Parks
- Open Space

City Neighborhoods

- West End
- Center City
- East Side
- South Side

PARK INVENTORY

Park and recreation resources are grouped within one of the four districts of the City of Allentown. Park numbers correspond to the City Parks map on the previous page.



The skatepark at Jordan Park is quickly becoming a regional draw with the second phase completed in 2025.

Center City

The Center City District has the largest number of parks, including three community parks, scattered throughout with a fair number of neighborhood parks that offer mostly active recreation opportunities. A few small mini parks scattered offer both active and passive recreation. Some of these parks are extremely important as they offer the only open space in densely populated areas. Some of the parks have been updated recently and others are under stress from surrounding development that can change how these open spaces function. Trees and shade are extremely important.

Jordan Creek runs through the middle of this section and meets up with the Little Lehigh that borders along the South Side District. The 1st and 6th Wards separate Center City from the East Side. The Lehigh River runs between the two sides. Some of the waterways are part of the park amenities in the system, providing greenways/pathways and other passive recreation opportunities such as fishing and habitat watching.

Fig. 3.5 Parks Inventory Map
This map locates all the parks in the City. Map numbers indicate pages describing each park.

Center City				
Classifications: G = Greenway C = Community Park N = Neighborhood Park M = Mini Park				
#	Park Name	Size	Classification	Park Improvement Opportunities
C-1	Fountain Park	20.8 ac	C	See Section 6.1.1 for more details
C-2	Jordan Park	30.6 ac	C	
C-3	Jackson Street Park	0.7 ac	N	
C-4	Franklin Park	1.1 ac	N	
C-5	Old Fairgrounds/5th Street Spray Park	1.1 ac	N	
C-6	Jordan Meadows	8.5 ac	N	
C-7	Bucky Boyle Park	9 ac	C	See Section 6.1.1 for more details
C-8	Wire Mill Meadow Arboretum	11.6 ac	N	
C-9	Stevens Park	0.9 ac	N	
C-10	Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park	1.3 ac	N	
C-11	Turner and 4th Playlot	0.37 ac	M	
C-12	Fellowship East Playlot	0.16 ac	M	
C-13	Samuel McHose Memorial	0.7 ac	M	See Section 6.1.1 for more details
C-14	Arts Park	0.73 ac	M	
C-15	Harry A Roberts Park	0.4 ac	M	

= Access to Parks = Speeds = ADA Accessible and Universal Elements = Signage = LANTA Service = Lighting

= Master Planning = New Equipment = Repair Existing Park Elements = Water Access = Upgrade = Additional Programming

= Riparian Buffer = Habitat = Stormwater Management

C-1

FOUNTAIN PARK

C

(20.8 acres) This community park is bounded by South 10th Street; Martin Luther King Jr. Drive along the north side; and the Little Lehigh where Center City District meets the South Side District. Fountain Park had a pool that dated back to 1929 when the park was built on the site of the former sewage treatment plant. It was the first artificial pool in Allentown with a circulation system. The sewage pumping station was converted into the pool house in 1931. The pool did receive repairs in 1982, but as more problems arose, the pool was shut down in 2009, and plans for the pool is ongoing. The pool house was used in the winters during 2018-21 as a warming station for the unhoused.

A master plan for this site has been completed and is located in Section 6.1.1

Existing park conditions contains:

- 3 diamond fields
- 2 basketball courts
- 1 multi-use field
- 1 playground
- Restrooms
- 1 volleyball court
- MLK Drive Trail

Pictures:

1. Multi-use field looking east
2. Newer basketball court on west side of the park
3. One of the diamond ball fields. The fields see a lot of use.



Below is the master plan for Fountain Park. Go to section 6.1.1 for more information



C-2

JORDAN PARK

C

(30.6 acres) This park is located on the northern side of the Center City District and is bounded by Jordan Creek and North 6th Street Extension. The park lies within the larger Jordan Creek Greenway and was named after Elder Jordan Senior, who donated much of the land and was an advocate for African American rights. Elements of the park date back to the WPA era – when workers helped build the park in 1939. The park includes three diamond fields; two basketball courts; four handball courts; a pavilion; 1 playground; restrooms; an exercise park; the Jordan Creek Greenway Trail; and a skatepark that draws many from around the region. The greenway trail is part of the larger Jordan Creek Greenway Trail proposed to connect Allentown to Trexler Preserve. The Trail currently ends at West Turner Street, just north of Linden Street and it is one of the few completely lighted trails in the park system. A pool structure exists, but the pool has not been operational since 2019. Future plans to add a mini pitch are in the works and expected for 2026.

- Contains:
- 3 diamond fields
 - 2 basketball courts
 - 4 handball courts
 - 1 pavilion
 - 1 playground
 - Restrooms
 - Exercise park
 - Jordan Creek Greenway Trail (with lights)
 - Skatepark

- Pictures
1. Jordan Creek Greenway Trail
 2. Basketball court directly next to exercise area
 3. Playground
 4. Old bleachers next to diamond field
 5. New skate park



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access - no crosswalks exist to reach park but there is a crosswalk where the Jordan Creek Trail crosses Sumner Ave., no gateways, ADA features – trails are compliant, but access to playground and other elements are not, Signage – is hard to find. Wayfinding and park maps are needed.
RECREATION FACILITIES		Repair – ball fields and other amenities need repair. There should be more space between exercise park and basketball courts for safety. Decision is needed for pool, Water access – channelized waterway through park can create more hazardous conditions, wall along edge is falling apart in some areas, one area in northern part of park already shows signs of high access activity, Additional programming – There are areas of space that may accommodate additional programming if needed, without pool – how much parking is needed?
ECOLOGY		Riparian buffers – reduce mowing in some areas along creek to improve riparian plantings on both sides - management, Habitat – the greenway is an important habitat. Reduce lawn and invasive species and promote vegetation diversity, Stormwater management – seek ways to reduce impervious areas and investigate infiltration potential

C-3

JACKSON STREET PARK

N

(0.7 acre) This neighborhood park was added to the Allentown system in 2015.

- Contains:
- 1 pavillion
 - 1 playground
 - 0.25 miles of walkway

- Pictures:
1. Parking lot and pavilion at top of the hill
 2. Age 2-5 playground area
 3. Age 5-12 playground area with wood ties retaining wall and seating.
 4. Bench along pathway approaching the playgrounds
 5. View across the long lawn space along the very tight Spring Garden St.



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Speed - Traffic calming at active intersection with no stop from Union St, ADA features – has ADA parking but no universal play elements and trails/ play surface are not ADA compliant
RECREATION FACILITIES	   	New equipment – upgrade old equipment and add new play elements, Repair - benches and walkways, Additional programming – plenty of open space that may be able to have more elements and some parking
ECOLOGY	 	Habitat - reduce lawn on steep hillside and replace with native plantings, Stormwater management – add more trees

C-4

FRANKLIN PARK

N

(1.1 acres) This neighborhood park is mostly asphalt-surfaced and also serves as a parking lot on Sundays. Community Bike Works does bike safety programming for kids at the park and hopes to continue to use the park as they take over the former electrical shop as a storefront organization across the street. Currently the park is going through design for construction documents and should work with the Franklin Park Neighborhood Association and other local groups during the design process.

- Contains:
- Small community garden (maintained by Ripple Church)
 - 1 pavillion
 - 1 playground
 - 1 small exercise park

- Pictures:
1. Community Bike Works program
 2. Exercise equipment
 3. Tree offering some much needed shade
 4. Small community garden
 5. Playground area



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – needs crosswalk to access park, Speed – slow down traffic especially by entrances into park, ADA features – playground does not contain any universal elements. Staired entry from street is not ADA compliant- only entrance that allows for ADA access is from chained entrance for cars to enter, Signage – wayfinding for the park, Lighting - only two lights exist from edge of park
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master planning – currently going to process for redesign, Additional programming – as improvements are being completed – Community Bike Works should be involved to allow them to continue to provide important services to the community
ECOLOGY		Habitat – existing planting should be replaced with native planting – more ground cover to reduce erosion, keep the community garden since this is an important program for the residents of the Franklin Park neighborhood., Stormwater management – stormwater exits park at corner and runs through concrete shoot out into N 14th St. – reduce nonpermeable surface and find ways to keep stormwater on site

C-5

OLD FAIRGROUNDS PARK INCLUDES 5TH ST. SPRAY PARK

N

(1.1 acres) This neighborhood park was built in 2004 as 2/3 play area and 1/3 parking area managed by the Allentown Parking Authority. The 5th St. Spray Park was added in 2008. There is a playground surrounded by fencing and plenty of seating areas. The elevation changes in the park creates unique views through the park.

- Contains:
- 1 playground
 - 1 spray park
 - Several seating areas

- Pictures:
1. Nice gateways into the park
 2. Several benches, but are not ADA compliant
 3. One of several play areas
 4. Runoff for the spray ground
 5. Spray ground



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – needs crosswalk to access park, ADA features – accessibility issues throughout the park, mulch levels in play areas create steep drop offs , Lighting – only a couple of lights shine in from the edge
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – play equipment have reached age to be replaced, replace some old benches, Repair – walls and walkways need repair, Upgrade – consider working with the Parking Authority to reduce parking area to expand park space, Programming - look for opportunities to add more programmed events
ECOLOGY		Habitat – replace nonnative shrubs with native, create more diversity plantings, Stormwater management – investigate how to create more infiltration, not so much run off from spray park

C-6

JORDAN MEADOWS

N

(8.5 acres) This neighborhood park is bordered by Jordan Creek on the west and American Parkway on the east. In 2025, the Ice Rink was replaced with a soccer pitch. The park also has a basketball court, a multi-use field, and two handball courts. The Jordan Creek Greenway is accessed by crossing West Gordon Street Bridge.

Contains:

- 1 soccer pitch
- 1 basketball court
- 1 multi-use field
- 2 handball courts
- New soccer mini pitch
- Lights

Pictures

1. Basketball court
2. Lighted multi use field with football posts
3. Entrance with WWII monument
4. New soccer mini pitch placed over removed hockey court
5. Jordan Meadows is bordered by American Parkway, a very busy road.



SAFETY/ACCESS	 Access – needs crosswalk to access park, continue walkway through park to multi-use field, Speed – American Parkway is fast moving and separates the land it borders since there are no walkways or bike lanes making it more difficult to access the park by alternative means and makes many feel unsafe as noted in public meetings.
RECREATION FACILITIES	New - add restrooms
ECOLOGY	 Riparian buffer – enhance buffer – walkway can provide educational opportunities, Habitat - add more trees along American Parkway add low shrub layer and remove lawn outside the fence

C-7

BUCKY BOYLE PARK



(9 acres) This community park is along the Lehigh River and serves multiple active recreation needs and is the venue for many community events. The park was named after George "Buck" Boyle, a former pro baseball player from Allentown. Resources on-site include: a small community building with exterior restrooms; a large playground; splash pad; pavilion, 2 diamond fields with a multi-use field in the center; and two basketball courts. The basketball courts were refreshed in 2025 and lights and a fence by the diamond fields were also recent additions. River access is reserved for Lehigh University's rowing team. Hamilton Street Dam directly downriver, creates a slower and deeper pool that extends back to about Rt 22. Boats from Adams Island and G.H. Frick boat club also take advantage of this part of the river.

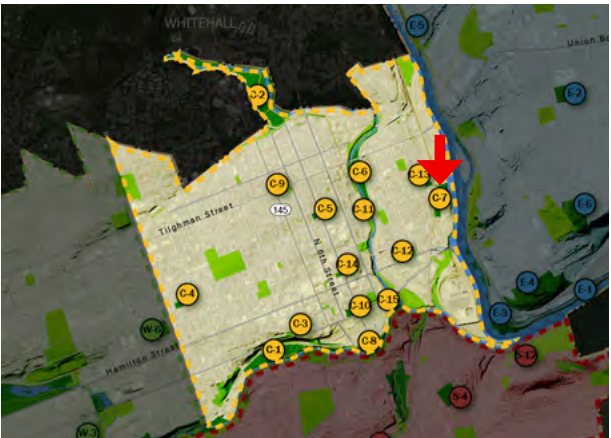
A master plan for this site has been completed and can be found in Section 6.1.1

Existing park conditions contains:

- 2 diamond fields
- 2 basketball courts
- 1 multi-use field
- Pavilion
- Playground
- Sprayground
- Restrooms
- Trail
- Small community building

Pictures

1. Sprayground, Ash Bailot - Morning Call
2. stormwater remains an issue as mulch runs across the playground
3. View of the Lehigh River with the pavilion on the right, from the Lehigh University dock



Below is the master plan for Bucky Boyle Park. Go to section 6.1.1 for more information



C-8

WIRE MILL MEADOW ARBORETUM

N

(11.6 acres) This neighborhood passive park on the site of the old wire mill was dedicated as an arboretum in 1985. The Little Lehigh borders the south side and MLK Drive Jr. Drive borders the north. The Martin Luther King Jr. Trail runs through the Arboretum that is home to many tree species and features sculptures. This is a passive park and has a small parking lot.

Contains:

- MLK Drive Trail
- Art installation
- Trails and benches
- Small parking lot

Pictures

1. Wildlife in the arboretum
2. Trail and bench
3. Art installation
4. Flag dedicated to the Allentown Garden Club
5. MLK Jr. Trail along planting beds



SAFETY/ACCESS		Signage – there is a park sign by the flag pole but its not easily visible from the street, educational signage, Lighting – currently no lights – should have lights at the parking lot minimum
RECREATION FACILITIES		Additional programming – educational, historical
ECOLOGY		Riparian buffer – enhance riparian buffer for better stormwater management, Habitat – add more diversity of native plants, reduce lawn and replace lawn areas with meadow

C-9

STEVENS PARK

N

(0.9 acre) This neighborhood park is bordered by Tilghman Street and was renovated and reopened in 2017. Recently, a full court basketball court was added in the lawn area. The park also has a half basketball court; a pavilion; and playground. A center stage area may be considered an underutilized space in the park. Safety concerns is ongoing in the park. Drug use and undesirable activity continue to make people not want to use the park or feel unwelcomed. Besides facility upgrades, maintenance and policing need to play an important role in making sure that the community feels safe in the park.

Contains:

- 1 full basketball court
- 1 half basketball court
- Playground
- Pavilion
- Center stage
- Lights

Pictures:

1. Larger play area
2. Smaller play area
3. 1/2 court basketball with community mural *Oliver Lois Economidis The Morning Call*
4. Entrance and raised stage area
5. New full basketball court



SAFETY/ACCESS		Lighting - adding more lights will help keep the dark areas lit
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	Repair - continue to fix facilities as needed Additional programming – find program use for center stage area or remove it for more open area within the park. Requests for swings have also been made. There is also open lawn space that could be used for additional amenities or programming.
ECOLOGY		Stormwater management – with more impervious surface added with basketball court, address stormwater on site, add more trees

C-10

CLYDE E. BOSKET, SR. PARK (FORMALLY KNOWN AS VALANIA PARK)

N

(1.3 acres) This neighborhood park was originally dedicated in 1976 and named after a former Allentown School District Principal, John Valania. It was recently renamed in September 2025 to Clyde E. Bosket, Sr Park to celebrate a leader of the community that better reflected the heritage of the park. Recent renovations in 2023 include the “JoJo” Smith basketball court and grandstand named after the passionate advocate for inner city youth sports. The park also features a playground; spray pad; restrooms; and seating areas.

Contains:

- Basketball court
- Grandstand
- Playground
- Spray pad
- Restrooms
- Seating areas
- Lights

Pictures:

1. New play equipment
2. Gaming tables
3. Basketball court
4. Restrooms and bright colored furniture
5. Spray pad bordered by boulder seating in natural beds and lighting



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – address crosswalks by streets to park, ADA features – there are some universal play elements, but surfaces make it difficult with some users
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – add more seating in shady areas of park
ECOLOGY		Stormwater management – new system is showing some flaws and needs to be addressed to reduce issues with erosion

C-11

TURNER AND 4TH PLAYLOT

M

(0.37 acre) This mini park features a basketball court next to the Jordan Creek Greenway Trail at the corner of North Jute and West Gordon Streets. There are no signs and no parking lots for this little park.

Contains:

- Basketball Court
- Jordan Creek Trail and Greenway

Pictures:

1. Basketball court under the shadow of a larger billboard sign
2. Basketball court
3. Jordan Creek Trail runs between the court and Jordan Creek
4. Someone taking advantage of the off road trail. Notice the nice lighting fixture.
5. Crossing W Gordon St



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – there are no existing parking for the site, Signage – currently no signs to let people know this is a public facility
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	Repair - the basketball court should be repaired, Upgrade – large parking lot next to it, could partial acquisition happen to expand use of area and add additional facilities
ECOLOGY		Stormwater management – adding trees or at least natural plantings will help strengthen the riparian buffer and manage stormwater coming off the streets and parking lots before entering Jordan Creek.

C-12

FELLOWSHIP EAST PLAYLOT (ALSO KNOWN AS 2ND AND HAMILTON OR LA PLACITA)

(0.16 acre) this parcel is not a “playlot” but features a beautiful mural and a sculpture at the corner of North 2nd and Hamilton Streets. There is pressure from the unhoused in the park. The general rule is that there is no camping allowed in the parks and when such instances come up, the Parks and Recreation Department will work with Public Works and other agencies to find a safe space for someone who is camping on park land.

Contains:

- Seating
- Mural
- Sculpture

M

Pictures:

1. Looking into the park towards Hamilton St.
2. Beautiful mural, part of the Allentown Mural Arts Program
3. Plantings along the edge of the park
4. Unknown sculpture piece
5. Uneven brick edges and surfaces



SAFETY/ACCESS	 Signage – no signage identifying it at part of Allentown Parks
RECREATION FACILITIES	 New equipment – add nice seating and fence for children safety; Additional programming - explore programs to help activate the space such as game tables
ECOLOGY	 Habitat – update the landscape and use native plantings

C-13

SAMUEL MCHOSE MEMORIAL PARK

M

(0.7 acres) This passive mini park is considered as a neighborhood gateway to Bucky Boyle Park. The park serves as a transition thoroughfare and community gathering space with large trees. The site is facing private interest pressures by new developments in limbo on both sides of the park.

A master plan has been completed for this site can be found in Section 6.1.1

Existing park conditions contains:

- Monuments
- Trail
- Sitting areas
- Large lawn areas

Pictures

1. McHose Memorial with seating
2. Steps leading to Bucky Boyle Park
3. Seating area by Front Street



Below is the master plan for Samuel McHose Memorial Park. Go to section 6.1.1 for more information



C-14

ARTS PARK

M

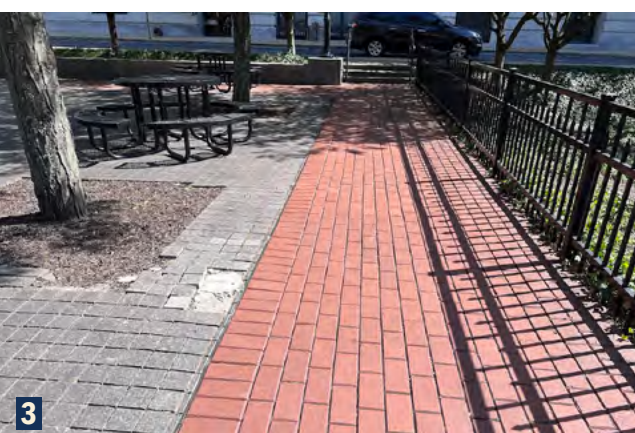
(0.73 acre) this mini park is located across the street from the Allentown Art Museum and features a lawn area / event space and a patio with a fountain and seating area. The park is continued by the urban greenway called Arts Walk, that ends at 7th St. Parks and Rec is responsible for all these areas and more in the Downtown area.

Contains:

- Lawn area for an event space
- Patio with a fountain and seating area
- Artwork
- Lights

Pictures

1. Patio and fountain
2. Lawn area that hosts community events
3. Patio blocks broken or missing
4. Arts Park continues with the Allentown Arts Walk
5. One of the many planters that Parks and Rec must water on a regular basis



SAFETY/ACCESS		Signage – there is a kiosk, but no signage identifying it at part of Allentown Parks
RECREATION FACILITIES		Repair – patio area needs blocks replaced, additional maintenance on custom wood seating along Art Walk Additional programming – add programs to bring people to park
ECOLOGY		Habitat - use more native plantings

C-15

HARRY A. ROBERTS PLAZA

M

(0.4 acre) This mini park was dedicated in 2011 in the triangle between Union, South 4th Streets and Martin Luther King Jr Drive. The site features the only sculpture in the United States with Martin Luther King Jr and his wife Coretta Scott King together. The plaza is named for Harry Roberts, an Allentown civic and project leader.

Contains:

- Memorial sculpture
- Paths

Pictures

1. ADA walkway to the memorial
2. Harry A Roberts plaque
3. Sculpture of Martin Luther King Jr and wife Coretta Scott King
4. Plaza up to the memorial
5. Great example of colored crosswalk and blinking beacons creating more safe road crossings



SAFETY/ACCESS		Signage – no signage identifying it at part of Allentown Parks
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – needs seating
ECOLOGY		Habitat – use more native plantings in open lawn spaces

East Side

The East Side District has the fewest number of parks of all four Allentown districts. Five parks currently exist east of the Lehigh River in Allentown, and of those, only two provide recreational opportunities. The service area map (Section 3.2.2) shows multiple gaps in the 10-minute walk service areas of parks on the East Side, primarily on the northern and eastern parts of the East Side. Currently, the East Side is in demand of additional programming such as Monday Funday. The Lehigh River has historically been perceived as a barrier which has contributed to an East Side community “identity.” Tilghman Street Bridge is a fully walkable and bikeable connection across the Lehigh River.

The primary Allentown corridor of Hamilton Street becomes an obstacle at the bridge over the Lehigh River that connects to Hanover Street on the East Side. The existing pedestrian facility does not meet modern standards and bike riders share that sidewalk instead of riding the bridge cartway with vehicular traffic. Interim traffic management solutions can be explored by the City with PennDOT District 5 to study options for a “road diet” or alternating lanes to create more area on the existing deck for a dedicates ped-bike “trail” facility – until the bridge is ultimately replaced.



Irving Pool, part of Andre Reed Park, is a popular place to visit during the hot summer days in the East Side. April Gamiz/The Morning Call

East Side				
Classifications: G = Greenway C = Community Park N = Neighborhood Park M = Mini Park				
#	Park Name	Size	Classification	Park Improvement Opportunities
E-1	D&L Trail	X	G	
E-2	Andre Reed Park	9.8 ac	C	
E-3	Canal Park	13.3 ac	N	
E-4	Keck Park	38 ac	C	
E-5	Kimmet’s Lock Park	4.5 ac	N	
E-6	East Side Reservoir	13.1 ac	N	
= Access to Parks = Speeds = ADA Accessible and Universal Elements = Signage = LANTA Service = Lighting = Master Planning = New Equipment = Repair Existing Park Elements = Water Access = Upgrade = Additional Programming = Riparian Buffer = Habitat = Stormwater Management				

E-1

THE D&L TRAIL

G

This linear “park” runs along the east side of the Lehigh River through Allentown, which is a small segment of a little over 4 miles of the 165-mile regional trail system that connects the Seven Tubs area near Wilkes-Barre to Bristol Borough in Bucks County.

Missing sections of the D&L through Allentown are in the planning and engineering phases. The most difficult walk-bike connection is between the D&L Trail at Canal Park and the Hamilton-Hanover Bridge over the Lehigh, which is identified in the Allentown bike plan.

The D&L resource is also a watered canal system in sections – and provides opportunities for boating and fishing. Wildlands Conservancy has boating programs in the canal. Currently, plans are in place to create the connection from North Bradford Street to Kimmett’s Lock. The connection along S. Albert Street should be addressed to create a safe passage.

- Contains:
- Trail and trail amenities

- Pictures
1. D&L sign along the trail by Canal Park
 2. Trail head by Overlook Park
 3. Trail head off of N Bradford St
 4. Portions of the trail are still on road like here at N Bradford St
 5. Kimmett’s Lock is also a trail head for the D&L Trail



SAFETY/ACCESS	Access – both ends of the trail in Allentown need to improve for safety, Signage – no signs to get to trail heads,Lighting – no parking lot lighting at trail heads, needed for the late night rider, runners, or walkers
RECREATION FACILITIES	New – continue to link the missing connections of the trail including from Kimmetts Lock to Hanover Twp and Riverside Drive Loop connection.
ECOLOGY	Riparian – improve the riparian edges between the canal and the Lehigh River, Habitat – the canal and trail serves as an important source for ecological diversity, Stormwater – there is precedent in using canals to assist with stormwater management

E-2

ANDRE REED PARK & IRVING POOL

C

(9.8 acres) This community park is used heavily by the adjacent Louis E Dieruff High School directly to the north. Irving Pool was originally built in 1939 and was recently rebuilt and opened in 2024. The pool was updated with many new features including beach style entrance; wading pool; and water features. Andre Reed Park features: two diamond fields; a multi-use field; two basketball courts; a newer playground; four tennis courts (striped for pickleball too), and restrooms.

Contains:

- New pool facility
- Multi use field
- 2 diamond fields
- 2 basketball courts
- 4 tennis courts also striped for pickleball
- Playground
- Restrooms

Pictures

1. Basketball courts
2. Infield from one of the diamond fields
3. Bleachers at the tennis courts
4. New play equipment
5. High School marching band practice on the multi-use field



SAFETY/ACCESS		ADA features – lack of universal elements in playground – most pathways are not ADA compliant, Lighting – no lighting besides street lighting in park
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – add seating under area of tree canopy, Repair – walkways, tennis courts, small diamond field, WPA elements – steps
ECOLOGY		Habitat – include some planting areas with native plants, Stormwater management – add trees, address stormwater that is running across small diamond field and into the tennis courts

E-3

CANAL PARK

N

(13.3 acres) This neighborhood park lies directly between the Lehigh River and the Lehigh Canal and offers river edge open space with dramatic views. The park features a boat ramp; pavilion (WPA); a canal boathouse; parking area; and few other amenities.

The site is located on a bend in the Lehigh and is a compelling attraction for residents and visitors – especially during hot summer months with users looking for water access to escape the city heat. This site will always be a major public attraction, however is located within a cluster of historic industrial infrastructure that is failing and constricts public access with outdated geometric clearances for modern vehicular traffic.

An active railroad corridor cuts off direct access between Canal Park and the East Side neighborhoods including the underutilized and dramatic Keck Park.

Canal Park requires a feasibility study, including major engineering elements to comprehensively solve all the infrastructure, access, boat launch, and ROW obstacles in cooperation with multiple stakeholders, both public and private. Creating modern, safe and accessible multi-modal access to Canal Park is an Allentown imperative to make it functional as a major East Side Park; as a favorite Allentown place; and a regional destination.

Contains:

- D&L Trail
- Delaware Canal
- Boat launch
- Pavilion
- Restrooms

Pictures

1. Train, canal, and road infrastructure combine to cause a tough entrance into the park
2. Road down to boat launch
3. WPA pavilion



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – extend the D&L Trail to be off from S. Albert St, improve trail along canal, need better connection between park and D&L, Speeds - need to address driveway into the park, trail etiquette, ADA features – no handicap parking, paths, Signage – signs to get to the park are small, plenty of signs telling you what not to do. Nothing educational, LANTA services – no public access – ¾ mile walk to closest Lanta stop, lack of sidewalk connections, Lighting – currently no lighting except at the pavilion
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master planning – the City had put out RFP for design services, expectations are that the park will go through a masterplan and development phase, New equipment – not much here, but benches, picnic tables, swing gate to keep people out in off hours, Repair – boat access is in disrepair, maintenance on WPA pavilion, restrooms need repairs before being opened, Water access - swimming is not permitted, but still happens, providing safety vests or other precautions should be considered, Additional programming - prime area for educational and historic programming
ECOLOGY		Riparian – improve the riparian edges between the canal and the Lehigh River, Habitat – the canal and trail serves as an important source for ecological diversity, Stormwater – there is precedent in using canals to assist with stormwater management

E-4

KECK PARK

C

(38 acres) This community park was named after Andrew S. Keck and his sister Maria B. Keck whose grandchildren jointly donated the land in 1941. The park is built on top of a former landfill site. The park is home to the popular Keck Park skatepark that took over unused tennis courts and has seen recent upgrades in 2021. Keck Park once had a pool, but it closed in 1992.

Community Bike Works also is located at Keck Park and stewards a community garden. A pilot mountain bike trail was built in 2017 by Community Bike Works and LV Mountain Bikers – but the alignments are not yet mapped.

Keck Park is located on a prominence above the bend in the Lehigh River and features panoramic views of the valley, including from a rock outcrop that is underutilized as a natural feature. Stormwater issues plague Keck Park causing erosion from adjacent blocks that drain directly into the park. Investments in Keck Park would directly benefit the East Side and Allentown as a whole.

Contains:

- Handball courts
- Basketball court
- Playground
- Restrooms
- Community building with community garden
- Diamond field
- Multi use fields & football field
- Skatepark on old tennis courts
- Trails
- Pavilion

Pictures

1. Old playground elements add a unique character to the park
2. Pavilion and fields offer beautiful views towards South Mountain
3. Handball courts
4. One of the trails that wander through the park
5. Skate park has seen some recent upgrades



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – develop a better trail system to take advantage of views and topography of park, various entrances to the park, promote mountain bike trail, ADA features – no ADA access from street in front of playground, universal play elements, Signage – no internal signage to find all the amenities in the park, LANTA services – no public transit, Lighting – only existing lights are at the basketball court
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master planning – should go through a master planning process to take advantage of space and address the needs of the nearby neighborhood, New equipment – playground is in desperate need of an upgrade, Repair – existing paths, Upgrade – grade smaller fields so that can be used for smaller soccer or multi use fields, Additional programming – master planning can help provide more programming bring programs across the river
ECOLOGY		Habitat – take care of existing woodland and canopy cover – remove invasive pressure and add more native diversity, Stormwater management – there are opportunities to address stormwater

E-5

KIMMETT'S LOCK PARK

N

(4.5 acres) This neighborhood park currently features parking and boat ramp on the Lehigh River – and serves as a trailhead for the D&L Trail. The Park is cut from the Lehigh River by an active rail line that has a waterway culvert for boaters. The site is surrounded by business parks to the east. Engineering plans are being completed to connect the missing segment of the D&L Trail from Kimmett’s Lock site downstream to Canal Park. Kimmett’s Lock Park, like Canal Park, has seen an influx of overcrowding and dangerous river use by boaters and jet skies.

Contains:

- D&L Trail
- Boat launch
- Large parking lot

Pictures

1. Boats go under old train infrastructure to enter the Lehigh River
2. Another view of the boat launch
3. Allentown Parks & Recreation sign with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor



SAFETY/ACCESS	  	Access – continue D&L connection to Hanover Canal Park to the north, ADA – currently there are no ADA elements, Lighting – currently no light s in the parking lot
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	New equipment – reduce amount of parking and create picnic grove area and/or other passive amenities, Water – improve the existing boat launch to have ADA kayak launch, this will require dredging.
ECOLOGY	 	Habitat – Take advantage of tree line remove invasive and add diverse planting, Stormwater management – opportunities to address stormwater before entering the river

E-6

EAST SIDE RESERVOIR

N

(13.1acres) This neighborhood park is one of two very large City reservoirs that were constructed in the mid-1930s as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. The reservoir holds about 10 million gallons of water and is covered, vented and nothing can be built on top of it. The park offers a pavilion and is mostly woodlands.

- Contains:
- Pavilion
 - Horseshoe pits

- Pictures
1. Pavilion on the upper side
 2. Views into the city and Lehigh Valley from the top of the reservoir
 3. Steep hillside to bottom of the reservoir,
 4. WPA water fountain, and it works
 5. Degraded forest floor



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – needs defined trail system, fix driveway entrance to upper lot; Signage – there currently are no signs for the park, educational signage
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	Repair - fix pavilion at upper lot; Upgrade – partner with School District that owns the large parcel of woodland on the west side of the park to create a larger passive woodland park and provide educational opportunities.
ECOLOGY		Habitat – work to remove invasive pressures and add native diversity

South Side

The parks of the South Side easily totals the largest amount of recreational space of all four City districts, however the vast majority of that total park space is within the largest park in the Allentown system – the Little Lehigh Parkway. Another smaller greenway system, Trout Creek, offers opportunities for people to engage in both passive and active recreation. Multiple areas in South Side do not have 10-minute walking access to parks, but some of these are in the airport and industrial areas.



The Little Lehigh Parkway is a well-loved park and greenway in Allentown and surrounding municipalities. Many enjoy the trails, fishing, and other amenities the parkway offers.

South Side				
Classifications: G = Greenway C = Community Park N = Neighborhood Park M = Mini Park				
#	Park Name	Size	Classification	Park Improvement Opportunities
S-1	Little Lehigh Parkway	629 ac	G	
S-2	South Mountain Reservoir	5.4 ac	N	
S-3	Trout Creek Park	84 ac	C	
S-4	Roosevelt Park	7 ac	N	See Section 6.1.1 for more details
S-5	Mack Pool & Dixon Dog Park	10.7 ac	N	
S-6	Walden Terrace Playlot	0.7 ac	M	
S-7	Benton Street Playlot	0.74 ac	M	
S-8	Keck Triangle	0.8 ac	M	
S-9	Ithaca Playlot	4.3 ac	M	
S-10	Percy Ruhe (Alton) Park	28.6 ac	C	
S-11	Alton Playlot Park	0.4 ac	M	
S-12	Walking Purchase Park	6.3 ac	N	

= Access to Parks = Speeds = ADA Accessible and Universal Elements = Signage = LANTA Service = Lighting

= Master Planning = New Equipment = Repair Existing Park Elements = Water Access = Upgrade = Additional Programming

= Riparian Buffer = Habitat = Stormwater Management

S-1

LITTLE LEHIGH PARKWAY & LI'L-LE-HI TROUT NURSERY

G

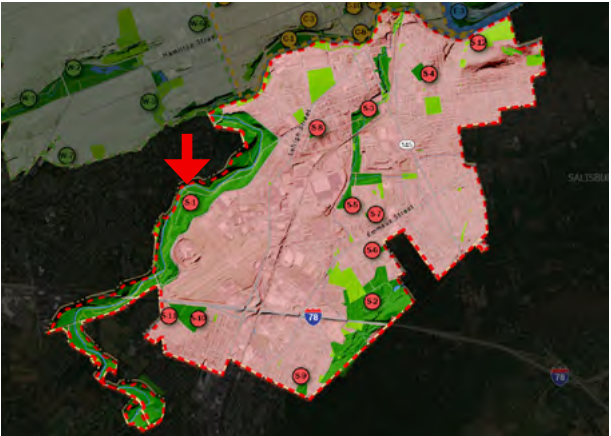
The Little Lehigh Parkway encompasses 629 acres and provides over seven miles of scenic pathways along Little Lehigh Creek – with connections to many points of interest including: the Museum of Indian Culture; Bogert’s Covered Bridge; and Lil’-Le-Hi Trout Nursery, one of the oldest continually-operated trout nurseries in the nation. Other activities include fishing; a disc golf course; short mountain bike trails; and an exercise trail. The disc golf course is popular and a regional draw. WPA-era structures such as stone walls; a boat landing; Parks and Recreation Maintenance and the Allentown Police Academy also lie within the Parkway. Future trail connections will link the Little Lehigh Trail to the MLK Drive Trail.

Contains:

- Trails
- Disc golf
- Exercise park
- Restrooms

Pictures

1. Exercise equipment along the trail
2. WPA elements in the park
3. Disc golf course
4. Tepee at the Museum of Indian Culture
5. Visitors feeding the fish at the nursery



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – need parking gateway at the north end of the park, sidewalk/trail from LANTA stop at Park Dr., Signage – need more wayfinding signage - kiosks, Lighting – add lights along path to extend use especially in winter and make it safer for those who use it for commuting.
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – replace old equipment and benches, Repair – maintenance of trails, WPA elements, Water access – fly fishing allows for access – provide safety devices in popular access areas, Additional programming – educational programming
ECOLOGY		Riparian buffers – continue to improve riparian edges while still allowing access to creek at key areas to assist with stormwater management, Habitat – remove invasive, increase tree canopy, and improve diversity

S-2

SOUTH MOUNTAIN RESERVOIR

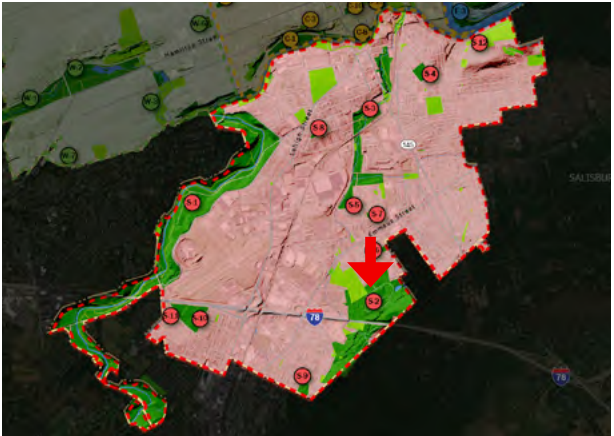
N

(5.4 acres) This neighborhood park lies within the South Mountain range that borders the city on the South Side. This WPA-era reservoir holds approximately 30 million gallons of water and is significantly more developed as a park site than the East Side Reservoir.

The park has trails and mountain bike routes. The pavilion and picnic tables are WPA-era projects. Mountain bike routes can be found online (on sites like trailforks.com) however, there is no existing signage on site. Great views toward the City could be a draw for this park.

- Contains:
- Old diamond field
 - 2 pavilions
 - Trails
 - Mountain bike trails

- Pictures
1. A small pond just off the road
 2. View into the little used diamond field
 3. WPA era picnic table and pavilion
 4. Old metal pavilion
 5. One of the many unmarked trails in the area



SAFETY/ACCESS	  	Access – work with Mountain Bike groups to enhance and promote existing trails (Spring Lane Climb, Dustin’s Trail) that connect to more extensive trail system at Wildland’s Conservancy South Mountain Preserve, add more trails around woodland areas, currently no parking areas, ADA features – currently no ADA compliant anything, Signage – there are no kiosk, trails, educational signage
RECREATION FACILITIES	   	Master planning – could be a candidate for master planning to take advantage of resources, New equipment – add nature-based playground, replace old not WPA pavilion, Repair – or remove diamond field, maintenance of WPA pavilion and elements, Additional programming – nature, educational
ECOLOGY	 	Habitat – remove invasive and add diversity, Stormwater management – enhance bioswale on site, other opportunities for stormwater management

S-3

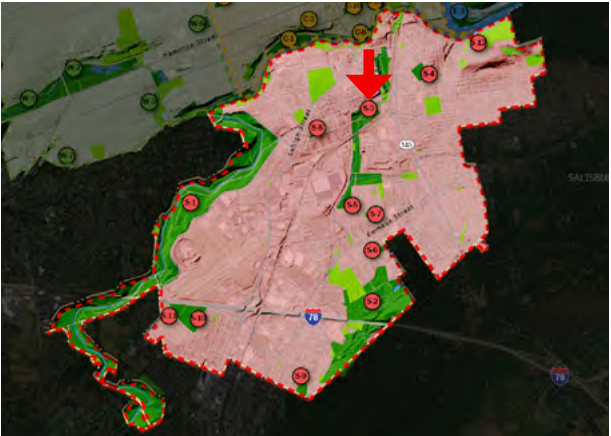
TROUT CREEK PARK

C

(84 acres) This community park that is also a small greenway. The park is nestled in woodlands with the clear spring-fed creek running through the park. Trout Creek Park also includes the new Resilience Park, a partnership between the Lehigh County Conservation District and Allentown Parks and Recreation -which provides nature-based activities, including a sapling food forest; nature based play elements; pollinator garden; and outdoor classroom. A mile-long trail runs through the park and along the creek.

- Contains:
- Trails
 - 2 diamond fields
 - 1 full and 1 half court basketball
 - Playground
 - Volleyball court
 - Restrooms
 - Community garden (cared for by Promise Neighborhoods)

- Pictures
1. Trail wanders through the park and along Trout Creek
 2. What used to be a ball field could be a much needed soccer field
 3. Basketball court
 4. Playground and restrooms are across the street
 5. Resilience Park is just starting with plans for more improvements continuing such as a new trail into the woods



SAFETY/ACCESS	Access – need crosswalks on Park Rd, widen existing trail for more use, Speeds - Traffic calming needed especially in area where most active recreation elements are split by Park Rd, delineate parking along road, ADA features – no access to playground, no ADA parking, Signage – need signs for parking areas, educational, Lighting – should be added along trail and at other elements for extended use, safety
RECREATION FACILITIES	New equipment – playground need to be updated, Repair – volleyball court and trails, Water access – it’s a beautiful stream and people are drawn to it, Additional programming – continue nature-based programming at Resilience Park and expand through the park, as the City looks for more areas for more requested sports like soccer, looking at the ball fields here that see little action could be a solution.
ECOLOGY	Riparian buffers – continue to enhance riparian buffers for better stormwater management, Habitat – work to remove invasive species and provide more diversity

S-4

ROOSEVELT PARK

N

(7 acres) This community park once had a pool that operated until 1992 and was filled in where tennis courts now exist since 2005. The former pool house is planned to be demolished in 2025. Roosevelt sits at the top of its neighborhood topography but suffers from erosion that threatens canopy street trees. Stormwater BMPs are possible remedies at this site.

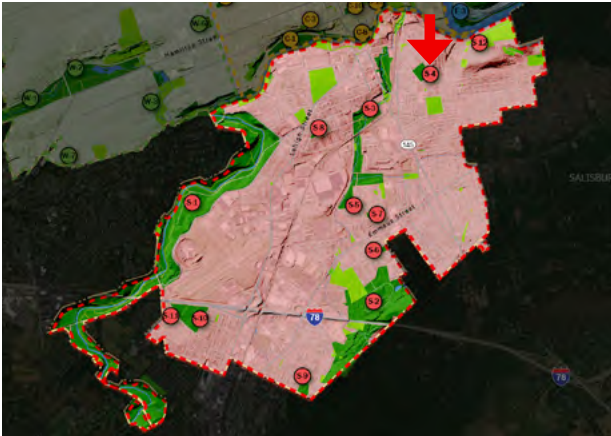
A master plan for this site was completed and can be found in Section 6.1.1

Existing park conditions contains:

- Playground
- 2 basketball courts
- Restroom
- 4 tennis courts with pickleball lines
- Diamond field
- new pavilion

Pictures

1. Tennis courts where the pool once was
2. The basketball courts are popular
3. New pavilion being built late August 2025



S-5

MACK POOL & JUDGE MEMORIAL DOG PARK (FORMALLY DIXON ST. DOG PARK)

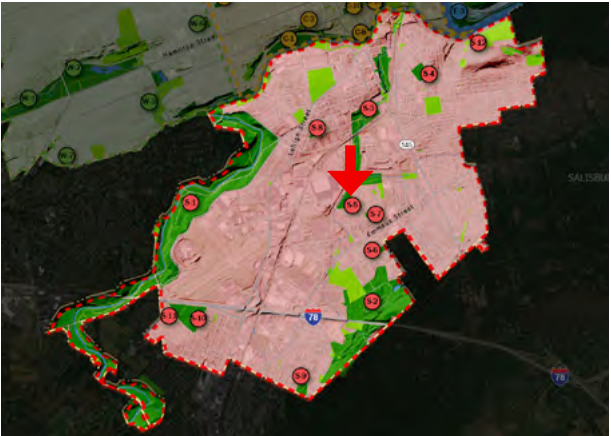
(10.7 acres) This neighborhood park includes a dog park. Mack pool is a large swimming facility including: an Olympic pool with a deep end; a wading pool; and a ‘kiddy’ pool 2-3 feet deep. Very little shade exists around the pools. A small playground offers little for play and is fenced off, making it feel unwelcoming. The pool is surrounded by a large parking lot with no shade. Parks & Recreation is currently seeking funding for pool renovations as the pool continues to leak and is reaching its useful life span.

The popular Judge Memorial Dog Park was opened across from Mack Pool in 2018 It was renamed from Dixon St to Judge Memorial in 2025 to honor Judge, a well rounded labrador retriever that served 7 years on the K-9 unit in investigation, deterrence, and education. Access is controlled by registered key fobs. The facility offers some exercise equipment and some shade canopies. Adding more trees would be welcomed by both dogs and owners.

- Contains:
- Olympic sized pool
 - Two smaller pools
 - Playground
 - Restrooms at the pool
 - Dog park

N

- Pictures
1. Play area by pools
 2. Close up of play equipment
 3. Mack pool
 4. Pools getting prepped in the spring
 5. Dog enjoying the dog park



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – Connect this area to Trout Creek Greenway Trail – would need to make Mack Blvd under pass wider. Provide trail along Trout Creek, ADA features – new pool renovations should include ADA access, Signage – wayfinding is needed to get to pool, Lighting – add lighting at dog park to extend use in winter months
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master planning – parking lot, playground and pool house entrance could benefit from a master plan, New equipment – need to upgrade playground, as part of a recent assessment, it was noted that the pool is in need of major renovations. The Parks and Recreation Dept is currently looking for funding for these much needed renovations.
ECOLOGY		Riparian – continue to enhance riparian edges, Habitat – continue to enhance naturalized area by dog park, Stormwater management – look to reduce impervious and control more stormwater from site

S-6

WALDEN TERRACE PLAYLOT

M

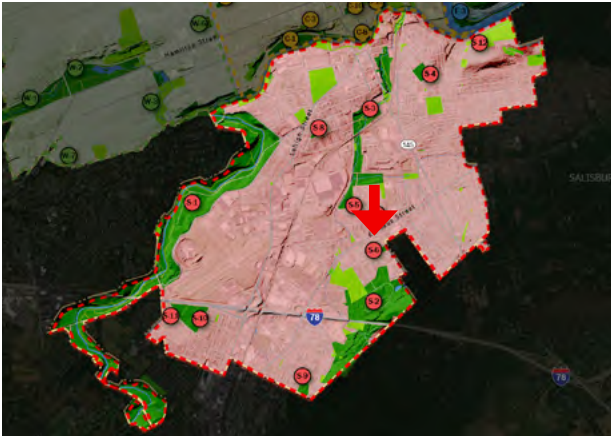
(0.7 acre) This mini park features: a pavilion; playground; basketball court; and a porta john. This park sits off South Carbon Street within a single home neighborhood.

Contains:

- Pavilion
- Playground
- Basketball court
- Porta john

Pictures

1. Old pavilion
2. Basketball court with poorly painted lines
3. Older playground
4. Larger open field in between spaces
5. Old overgrown asphalt swale



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – no real entrance to the park, ADA features – need ADA paths to any elements
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	New equipment – pavilion, playground, Upgrade - basketball court is getting two hoops and repairs in the fall of 2025
ECOLOGY	 	Habitat – provide planted buffer to neighbors, plant more trees and more natural plantings in areas; Stormwater management - remove old asphalt swale and replace with Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater systems

S-7

BENTON STREET PLAYLOT

M

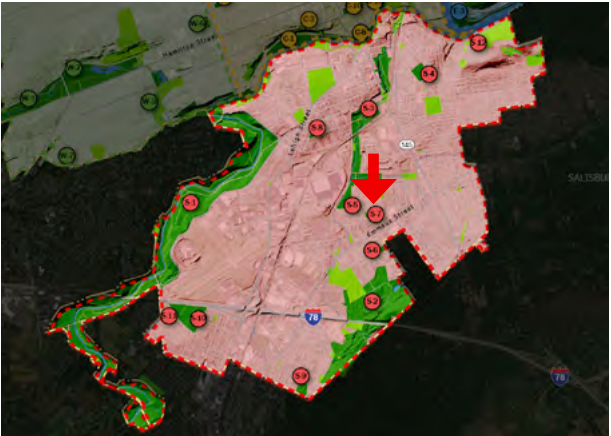
(0.74) This mini park is located in between Benton, South Delaware, Vine, and Lumber Streets – and is surrounded by apartment buildings and townhomes. It features a playground and some open space.

Contains:

- Playground

Pictures

1. No real defined entrance to the park
2. Playground
3. More playground elements
4. Large lawn area
5. Playground elements



SAFETY/ACCESS	   	Access - gateway and paths to playground; ADA features – paths to playground and playground surface, Signage – wayfinding signage – not one sign from street to guide you to the park , Lighting – add lighting for safety
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	Repair – old equipment and add some new universal play elements, Additional programming – use open space to add some more play elements
ECOLOGY		Habitat – add more native trees for shade and habitat

S-8

KECK TRIANGLE

M

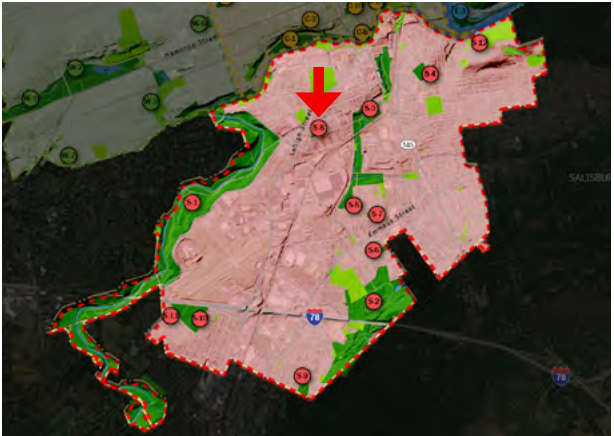
(0.8 acre) This mini park is surrounded by a single home residential area that is bounded by Keck, South Howard, and Juniata Streets. The park features a playground and open lawn.

Contains:

- Playground

Pictures

1. Landscaping in the park
2. Open lawn space
3. Playground and swings
4. Handicap water fountain that is not handicap accessible
5. Unique geological survey marker in the park noting the elevation of 374.5



SAFETY/ACCESS	   	Access – currently no crosswalks and few sidewalks throughout the neighborhood, add paths, ADA features – no ADA access nor universal play elements in park, Signage – no signage identifying as a public park, Lighting – safety and extended use
RECREATION FACILITIES	  	New equipment – swings and playground should be replaced, Repair benches and wood edge, Additional programming – plenty of area to add other play elements
ECOLOGY	 	Habitat – reduce lawn space and replace with native plantings, Stormwater management – add trees and native plantings to help manage stormwater

S-9

ITHACA PLAYLOT

M

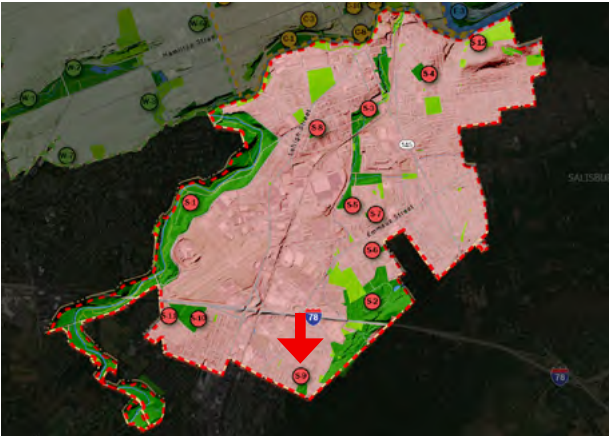
(4.3 acres) This mini park is located at the southwest corner of the City and is much larger than most mini parks. Much of the park site is woodland that include an entrance for the Wilderness Trail that connects to the larger South Mountain Preserve, stewarded by Wildlands Conservancy. There is also a cut through trail connecting residents from the Whitestone Apartments.

Contains:

- Playground
- Basketball court
- Trails

Pictures

1. Park along Ithaca St
2. Basketball court has seen better times
3. Playground
4. Large lawn area
5. South Mountain Trail entrance



SAFETY/ACCESS	   	ADA features – paths to and through park, Signage – trailhead, LANTA services – work for creating a stop, Lighting – safety and extended use
RECREATION FACILITIES	  	New equipment – play equipment and more seating; Repair – basketball court, Additional programming – add parking for trailhead, educational
ECOLOGY		Habitat – enhance woodland area, remove invasives

S-10

PERCY RUHE (ALTON) PARK

C

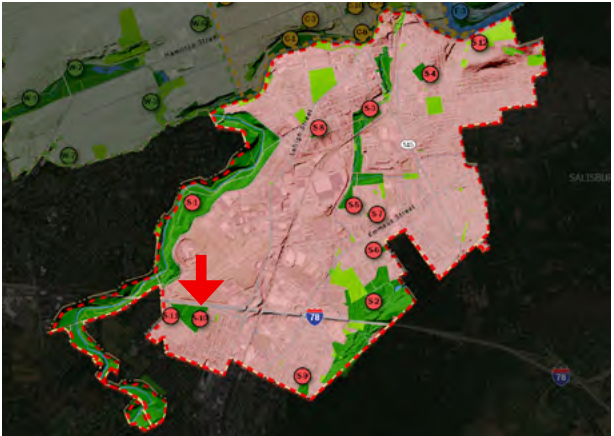
(Formerly Alton Park) (28.6 acres) This community park is located in the southeast portion of the City and was dedicated in 1962 and named after Percy B. Ruhe – a central civic figure in the creation of the modern Allentown Park system. A recent Master Plan reflected the public consensus of needs for the park that included updated sports facilities, recreational assets for older users, maximize amenities, provide ADA access, improved parking conditions, and integrated stormwater management.

Contains:

- 4 diamond fields
- 3 basketball courts
- Multi use field
- 2 handball courts
- Restrooms
- Pavilion
- Playground
- Trail
- Art

Pictures

1. Playground
2. Wallball court
3. Basketball court
4. Stone trail through park
5. Sculpture, *The Joggers*



SAFETY/ACCESS		ADA - features and access
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master Planning- a master plan was recently completed for the city with public participation and could be used for future improvements, New - add updated sports facilities, Repair - fix or replace old restrooms, snack building, pavilions, playground, Additional programming - add programs for older users
ECOLOGY		Stormwater management - use stormwater BMPs to help address water before it enters into the Little Lehigh

S-11

ALTON PARK PLAYLOT

M

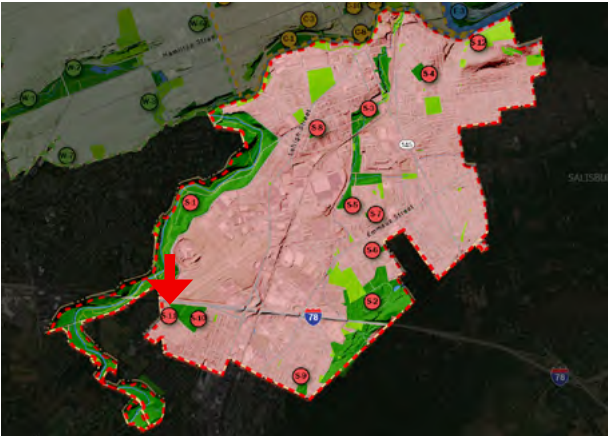
(0.4 acre) This mini park features a playground and is located across from Percy Ruhe Park on Salisbury Drive.

Contains:

- Playground

Pictures

1. No parking lot or sidewalks to the park
2. Old play equipment
3. Swings
4. Nice shady area with a picnic table
5. Open lawn space



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – create entrance to park, paths, Signage – no signage noting that this is a public park
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – start to prepare for new equipment as some of the equipment starts to age out
ECOLOGY		Habitat – reduce lawn and plant native plants

S-12

WALKING PURCHASE(LEHIGH MOUNTAIN) PARK

The City of Allentown owns 6.3 acres of land along the south side of the Lehigh River. It is part of a larger complex that includes Lehigh County and Salisbury Township lands that consist of over 10 miles of multi-use and single track trails that are currently maintained by the Valley Mountain Bikers group and Wildlands Conservancy. If there are trails in the Allentown part, they are hard to find. The park has quickly become a destination place for hikers, trail runners, and mountain cycling enthusiasts, but unfortunately, it is also popular for illegal garbage dumping. A 2010 report provided ideas for improvements including a gated entrance to deter illegal dumping, development of a conservation plan, and install signage.

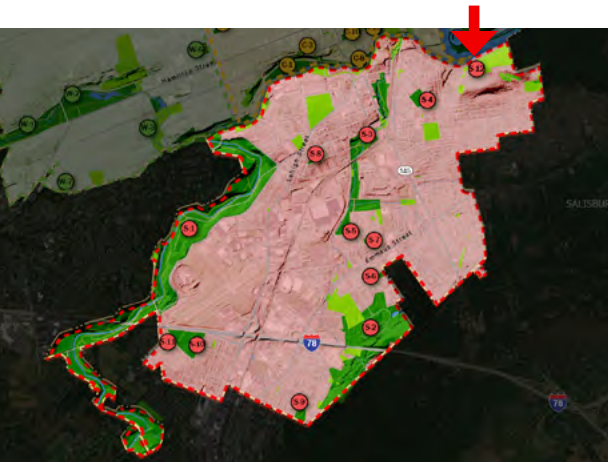
N

Contains:

- Trails

Pictures

1. Sign noting the park and partners
2. An old Allentown border marker
3. Constitution Drive is a narrow stone road
4. Old stone work graffiti
5. Illegal garbage dumping



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	Access – working with Mountain Bike Groups, more trails should be developed, Signage – there is no wayfinding , parking or park use and regulations signs
RECREATION FACILITIES		New equipment – bike fixing stations, bike racks and picnic tables could all be added elements to enhance the park users experience
ECOLOGY		Habitat – this is important woodland areas that can be enhanced for habitat. Since there are a lot of north facing slope, protecting sensitive species should be a priority

West End

The West End District of Allentown includes a large percentage of the total City park acreage but much of it is primarily dedicated to passive or special recreation uses. The two largest parks – Allentown Municipal Golf Course and Trexler Memorial Park are adjacent and together comprise over 300 acres of the 451 total City park acreage in the West End. Cedar Creek Parkway is another large park resource that features the highest concentration of active recreation resources.



Trexler Memorial Park is a place many people visit for a nice walk in a park experience. April Gamiz / The Morning Call

West End				
Classifications: G = Greenway C = Community Park N = Neighborhood Park M = Mini Park				
#	Park Name	Size	Classification	Park Improvement Opportunities
W-1	Cedar Creek Parkway	121 ac	G	       
W-2	Cedar Beach Park	72.7 ac	C	     
W-3	Joseph S. Daddona Lake and Terrace Park	15.3 ac	C	         
W-4	Allentown Municipal Golf Course	151.3 ac	C	No recommendations at this time
W-5	Trexler Memorial Park	155.8 ac	C	        
C-6	West Park	6.5 ac	N	    
C-7	South Street Playlot	1.2 ac	M	    
 = Access to Parks  = Speeds  = ADA Accessible and Universal Elements  = Signage  = LANTA Service  = Lighting				
 = Master Planning  = New Equipment  = Repair Existing Park Elements  = Water Access  = Upgrade  = Additional Programming				
 = Riparian Buffer  = Habitat  = Stormwater Management				

W-1

CEDAR CREEK PARKWAY WEST, MALCOLM GROSS MEMORIAL ROSE GARDEN, & ROSE GARDEN PAVILIONS

G

(48.3 Acres) – This large community park functions as a segment of a Cedar Creek greenway system that begins in South Whitehall Township and flows into Allentown. The 121 acres of “greenway” within Allentown features 3+ miles of hiking trails; the famous Rose Garden; the Rose Garden Pavilions; and restrooms.

Parks & Recreation offices and maintenance storage barn are located along this revered stretch of public open space. The Malcolm Gross Rose Gardens is maintained by a city professional horticulturalist/rosarian and is a destination for photo shoots and marriage ceremonies. The Rose Garden was named for the long-serving Mayor Malcolm Gross, who conceived of the garden in 1929 and opened it to the public in 1931. Recently, Wildlands Conservancy, the Little Lehigh Watershed stewards and Parks & Recreation partnered to plant about 100 native trees along the north side of Cedar Creek.

- Contains:
- Trails
 - Pavilions
 - Outdoor exercise equipment
 - Volleyball court
 - Art
 - Restrooms
 - Rose Gardens

- Pictures
1. Trail going over Cedar Creek
 2. Painting in the Rose Garden
 3. The current home of Parks and Recreation
 4. One of the Rose Garden pavilions
 5. Exercise station along the trail



SAFETY/ACCESS	Four yellow icons: a pedestrian walking, a car, a signpost, and a street light.	Access – there is only one crosswalk across Parkway Blvd., need connection to Trexler Memorial Park, Speed - Traffic calming needed along Parkway Blvd, Signage – kiosks, wayfinding, and educational, Lighting – safety and extend trail usage in winter months
RECREATION FACILITIES	Two blue icons: wavy lines representing water and a plus sign.	Water access – small access points to Cedar Creek, Additional programming – Are there other activities to engage open spaces
ECOLOGY	Two green icons: a group of trees and a hand holding a single leaf.	Riparian buffers – enhance riparian edge for better water management, Habitat – reduce invasive species and provide diversity with natives

W-2

CEDAR BEACH PARK

C

(72.7 acres) This community park is larger segment within the larger Cedar Creek Greenway south of North Ott Street. Cedar Beach is a destination for many events and features multiple active recreation facilities that attract residents from every corner of the City, and from areas surrounding Allentown.

Cedar beach has a major Allentown pool and pool house, that was once the site of a community “beach” for swimming along the Creek. The site features: nine basketball courts (recently re-coated); two pavilions; a large destination, fully accessible playground; four volleyball courts; an exercise park, and restrooms. A walking trail surrounds Lake Muhlenberg, with scenic views.

At the southeast corner, Cedar Creek flows under Hamilton Boulevard toward Union Terrace Park. This riparian segment demands ecological restoration and a physical trail connection as a priority to make the greenway corridor connected, safe, modern, and environmentally sustainable.

Contains:

- Playground - universal play
- 4 basketball courts (an additional 5 temporary courts are available, two on unused hardcourt volleyball courts)
- 2 pavilions
- Pool
- Restrooms
- Trails
- Outdoor exercise equipment
- 4 sand volleyball courts
- Art

Pictures

1. Destination playground with universal play elements
2. People in line for the snack stand at the pool
3. Rock climbing features
4. Lake Muhlenberg
5. The basketball courts were refreshed in 2025



SAFETY/ACCESS	Access – more trails along roads and through park to connect to surrounding streets and thorough other open spaces such as the arboretum, Signage – kiosk, wayfinding, and educational
RECREATION FACILITIES	Repair – parking areas, walkways, and some hard courts
ECOLOGY	Riparian buffers – improve riparian buffer around lake and creek, Habitat – reduce lawn and add meadows – especially around arboretum , Stormwater management – add more tree canopy, improve bioswales, and investigate keeping more water on site

W-3 JOSEPH S. DADDONA LAKE AND TERRACE PARK

(15.3 acres) This community park contains the Union Terrace Amphitheater that was created as a WPA-era project - which features extant artifacts of stone amphitheater, stairs, walls and a lake created by a diversion of Cedar Creek. The park was completed in 1938 and improvements included the removal of two large pillars from the west entrance on Liberty St, and the rebuilding of them on either side of the new stage across the creek from the audience seating terrace.

The park was renamed Joseph S. Daddona Lake and Terrace in 2002, in honor of the former Allentown mayor. The two sides of the park site are separated by Union Street and Cedar Creek runs through the entire park. A rarely used multi-use field exists on the opposite half of the park. The amphitheater was recently repaired and now home to free summertime concerts in partnership with ArtQuest.

C

Contains:

- Trails
- Theater
- Multi-use field
- Restrooms

Pictures

1. Cedar Creek running through the Terrace theater
2. Stage and seating area at the Terrace theater
3. View of Daddona Lake through sculpture
4. Pedestrian bridge next to historic Reading Road bridge
5. One of the pillars at the end of the stage



SAFETY/ACCESS	   	Access – connect the terrace to Cedar Beach Park and Little Lehigh Parkway, wider sidewalks to accommodate concert attendees, Speed - Traffic calming needed Union St, S St Elmo St. and Walnut – entrance at Walnut and S St Elmo, ADA features – no existing ADA paths, elements, Signage – wayfinding, educational – historic
RECREATION FACILITIES	   	New equipment – bridge crossings to connect park without having to enter streets, Repair – WPA stonework, Water access – add access areas and crossings along Cedar Creek on south side of park, Additional programming – playground, larger multi-use field instead of diamond field
ECOLOGY	 	Riparian buffers – continue to enhance riparian buffer, Habitat – remove invasive and plant for diversity

W-4

ALLENTOWN MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE

C

Allentown Municipal Golf Course (151.3 acres) This municipal property is an 18-hole Championship Golf Course that opened in 1952. The golf course also has a driving range and short game area. The golf course is operated by the City of Allentown employees that are a dedicated crew within Parks & Recreation Dept. The facility continues to see improvements, but no recommendations are needed at this time.

Contains:

- 18 hole - golf course

Pictures

1. Golf course
2. Golf course
3. Aerial of the course
4. Cedar Creek running along the course
5. Historic card showing old golf club building



SAFETY/ACCESS	No recommendations
RECREATION FACILITIES	No recommendations
ECOLOGY	No recommendations

W-5

TREXLER MEMORIAL PARK

C

Trexler Memorial Park (155.8 acres) This is a beloved passive recreation park named after General Harry C. Trexler, who donated the land and was the civic leader in creating the original core sites of the Allentown Parks system. Approximately three miles of trails weave through open fields and clustered woodlands. Little Cedar Creek runs through the heart of the park, with a segment dammed to create a small pond for waterfowl. The pond is now sedimented in and must be dredged to maintain its original purposes of habitat, water quality and aesthetics. A public restroom and historic elements including the Trexler Spring house are present on site.

Contains:

- Trails
- Historic sites
- Restrooms

Pictures

1. Formal landscaping and trails in the park
2. General Trexler monument
3. Historic buildings
4. Wide trails through the park - Oliver Lois Economidis - The Morning Call
5. The pond at Trexler is a popular spot to see ducks



SAFETY/ACCESS		Access – trail to LANTA stop, Speed – trail etiquette share the path – help reduce bicycle speeds, Signage – wayfinding, educational, Lighting – safety and extended use in winter - connections to Cedar Park
RECREATION FACILITIES		Master planning –revisit master planning process, Repair – dam at lake, trails, and dredge pond Water access – access exists at lake but not along Little Cedar Creek
ECOLOGY		Riparian buffers – enhance riparian buffer for stormwater, Habitat – reduce lawn areas and create more meadows and other ecosystems to enhance wildlife viewing opportunities

W-6

WEST PARK

N

(6.5 acres) This neighborhood park was the first park dedicated to the City in 1909. The site is the shape of a traditional municipal “square” and was conceived and cultivated as an arboretum of specimen canopy trees. A Beaux Arts-style bandshell hosts concerts throughout the summer and currently work to include it as part of the National Registration for Historic Places is underway. Features include: a historic water fountain: a Civil War Memorial; and a kiosk with a replica of the Liberty Bell to note its history of being hidden from British Forces in Allentown in 1777. A central cast iron water fountain was recently removed. The West Park Civic Association helps Parks & Recreation with park maintenance. Recently, the West Park Civic Association partnered with William Allen High School Environmental Club to install a pollinator garden.

Contains:

- Trails
- Arboretum
- Band shell
- Restrooms
- Art

Pictures

1. Fountain at the center of the park
2. Historic band shell
3. Kiosk with history of hiding the Liberty Bell
4. Walkways through the park
5. Still functional historic water fountain



SAFETY/ACCESS	 	ADA features – provide ADA compliant benches, Signage – at gateways
RECREATION FACILITIES	 	Repair - walkways, Additional programming – add programming for all ages (puppet shows, plays, etc.), Identify partners to offer a performing arts camp
ECOLOGY		Habitat – continue working with local groups to provide native plantings to help provide more habitat

W-7

SOUTH STREET PARK

M

(1.2 acres) This mini park is surrounded by single residence homes and features a playground and a small open field area.

Contains:

- Playground

Pictures

1. Playground
2. Sign within landscaping
3. Remnants of half court basketball
4. Open lawn area
5. Playground



SAFETY/ACCESS	  	Access – add trails to elements, ADA features – add universal play elements, Lighting – safety
RECREATION FACILITIES		Repair – repair or remove half court basketball court
ECOLOGY		Habitat – add more tree canopy and reduce lawn

3.2.3 Open spaces

Other sites within the City boundaries offer recreation and open spaces resources and are owned by others including Lehigh County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and the Allentown School District. Some of these sites are not developed; some are developed for parking or recreation purposes, some are cemeteries, and others are used for stormwater management.

These “other green parcels” tallied, add 275+ acres to the nearly 1415 recreation acreage owned by the City within Allentown boundaries.

Other owners

On the East Side of Allentown, considerable open spaces exist with the potential to serve recreation and conservation purposes – like connecting parks and greenways; enlarging habitats; and developing active recreation facilities in the future. Examples include:

- **Adjacent to East Reservoir Park** – Nearly 23 acres of woodland is currently owned by the Allentown School District. When tallied with the park these areas configure approximately 36 acres of natural lands.
- **North of East Reservoir Park** – A wooded site is currently privately-owned and is vulnerable to commercial development. Considerations should be for preserving some of the woodlands when the site is developed.
- **The east side of the Lehigh River** – Lands that abut Overlook Park and the park itself, are owned by the City of Allentown, but function more like private parkland for the surrounding residents. The D&L Trail also passes through these parcels and serve as important riparian habitat.
- **Sterner Island** is a 12.3-acre island in the Lehigh River, and an important parcel owned by Allentown that provides natural habitat within the Lehigh River.
- **Walking Purchase Park** is a large complex that has land owned by Allentown, Lehigh County and Salisbury Township. This is an area known for mountain biking and hiking and users seek to extend trails into areas owned by Allentown. The City of Allentown owns 6.3 acres of land along the south side of the Lehigh River.
- **Allentown School District** owns nearly 30 undeveloped acres that connect to the South Reservoir Park, making this collective swath of natural space in the South Mountain range important for future partnership conservation.
- **On the south side of the Little Lehigh**, the City owns various parcels that can help in efforts to protect and buffer the edges of the creek.
- **Large parcels in the West End** are owned by the City that are used for stormwater management and include public trails. The parcels are separated from the Trexler Preserve by Springhouse Road, but connecting these open spaces for future preservation should be considered.
- **Allentown School District owns Hamilton Park Playlot**, a 7.8 acre parcel open to the public. The District also owns other fields throughout the city that provide recreation opportunities.
- **Allentown-owned land through Center City**, include parcels that can be used to extend riparian buffer improvements along Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks. Some of the spaces are small slivers of undevelopable land, but one parcel at the corner of West Chew and North Law Streets is a City property called Alliance Park, that is not identified in the Allentown park system inventory.
- **An Allentown-owned parcel just above American Parkway** is nearly 7 acres and offers the potential to add recreational facilities such as soccer fields to the City park system.

Cemeteries are large “open” spaces not immediately imaged as open space, but a trend is resurging of a former use in communities that steward cemeteries as “cultural” parks.

East Side Youth Center has a diamond field; multi-use field; and an indoor basketball.

Mountainville Memorial Youth Center has indoor basketball; a multi-use field; two diamond fields; and lease two other diamond fields from Allentown.

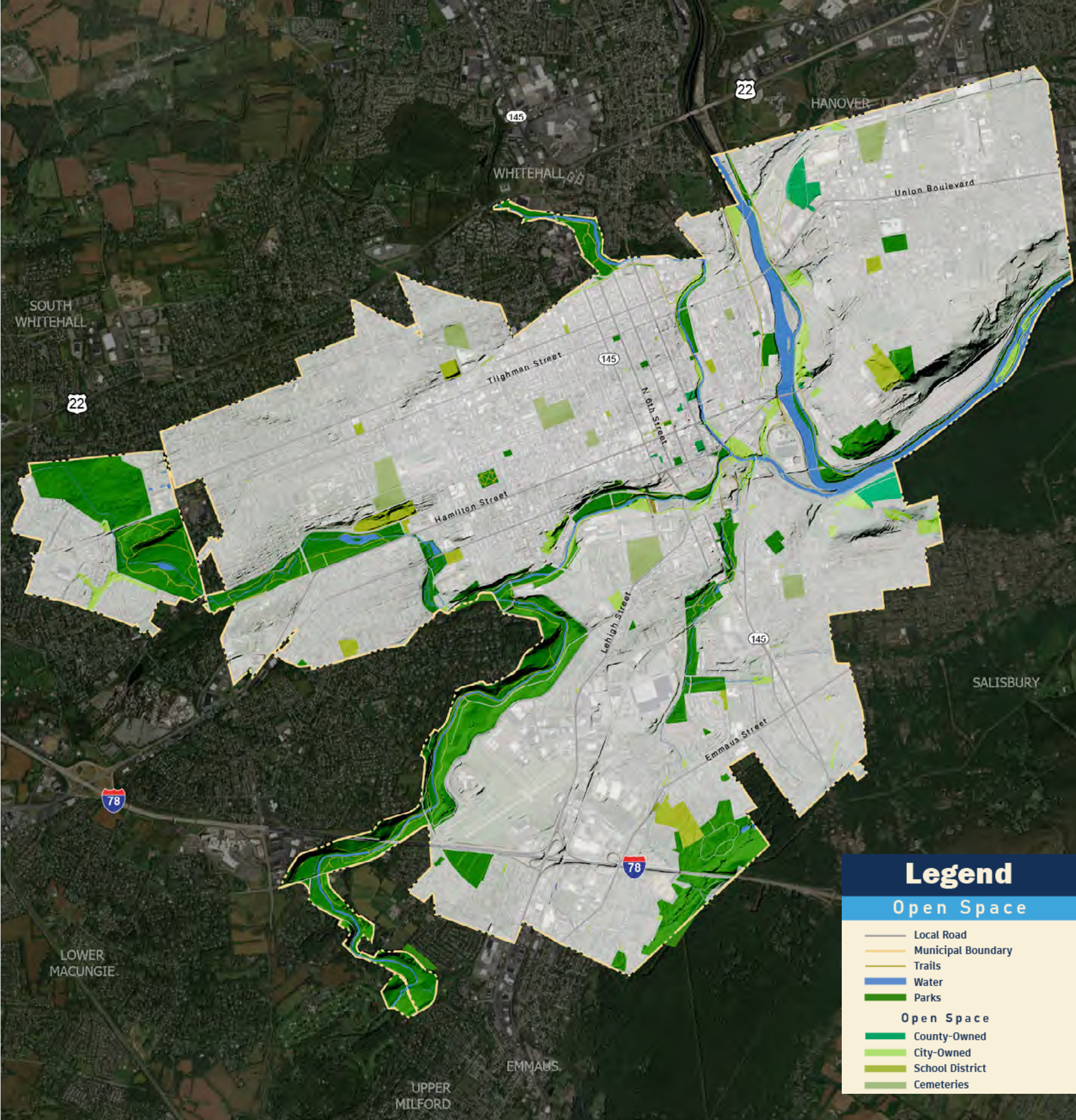
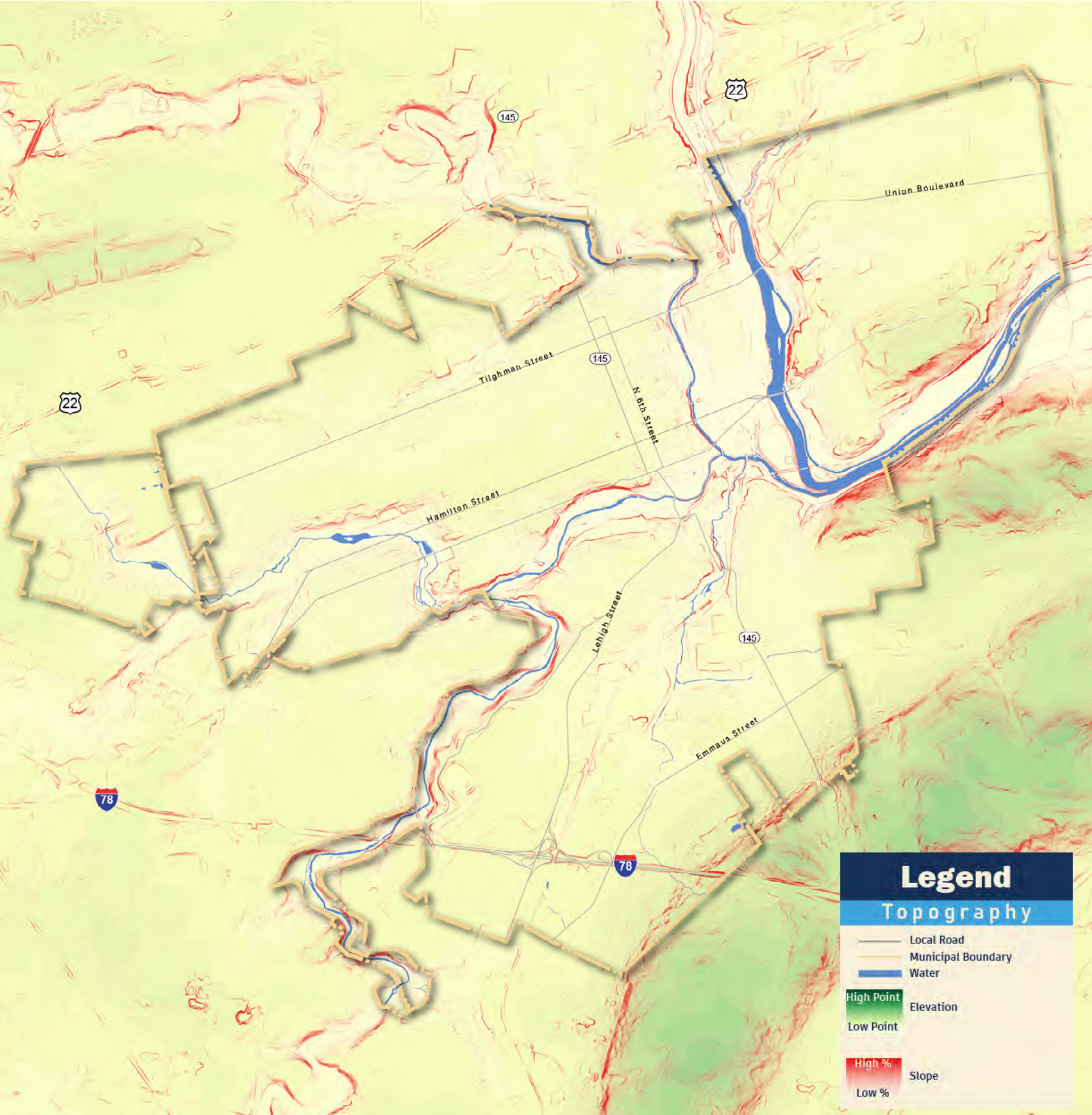


Fig. 3.6 Open Space Map



Bicentennial Park is owned by Allentown and leased to Muhlenberg College, and in return, the college provides some recreation opportunities open to the public. Additionally, just north of the ballpark is a softball park and playground that is run by the Allentown Patriots, a community-oriented group that provides outdoor recreation through softball.

When these sites are added to the public open space area within Allentown the tally equals approximately 16% of Allentown land functions as open space and/or recreational uses.

The belief of a “City in a Park” is reinforced by this metric.

Additionally, the former state hospital is going through planning process, and when it is completed, it is expected that more open space will be open to the public.

3.2.4 Natural systems that affect public parks and open spaces

The visionaries and planners who conceived and assembled all the elements of the original Allentown parks “system” understood the importance of protecting native waterways and the natural spaces surrounding them. This early awareness remains even more important in the 21st Century as natural resources are increasingly impacted by the results of climate change and larger populations.

These systems are important for human health and well-being and deliver imperative ecological functions – especially within urban communities.

Section 127 of the Pennsylvania Constitution guarantees people’s right to clean water and air, and the preservation of natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. The continued preservation of natural spaces is crucial to the health of the Allentown, the region, and the Commonwealth.

Elevation / Slope

Allentown is a city of rolling hills – within a larger valley that is divided by multiple waterways whose watersheds all contribute ultimately to the Lehigh River. The Lehigh Valley is created by South Mountain to the south and Blue Mountain to the north.

The average elevation in Allentown is about 340 feet above sea level – with the lowest area at 226 feet are the Lehigh River and the highest elevation at 759’ atop South Mountain Reservoir Park.

Areas of steep slopes (greater than 25%) run along some waterway edges and these are vulnerable ecosystems that need to be protected from vegetation clearing, development, erosion, landslides, and subsidence. The elevated sites can offer dramatic views of the City and the ridges themselves are treasured visual resources for people of Allentown and people of the Lehigh Valley.

Karst Geology

The Lehigh Valley is known for limestone sinkholes and complex underground drainage systems through the karst bedrock geology.

Karst geology is characterized as areas that contain large amounts of carbonate bedrock, primarily limestone and dolostone. These formations are subject to dissolution from the weak, natural acid mixture of rainwater water and carbon dioxide – which can etch voids in the alkaline stone and form subterranean voids, faults and fractures – sometimes resulting in surface sinkholes. Loss of property and utility infrastructure from sinkholes is a real threat for communities above limestone bedrock.

Groundwater recharge also occurs from surface runoffs that flows directly into the voids where these

Fig. 3.7 Elevation Map

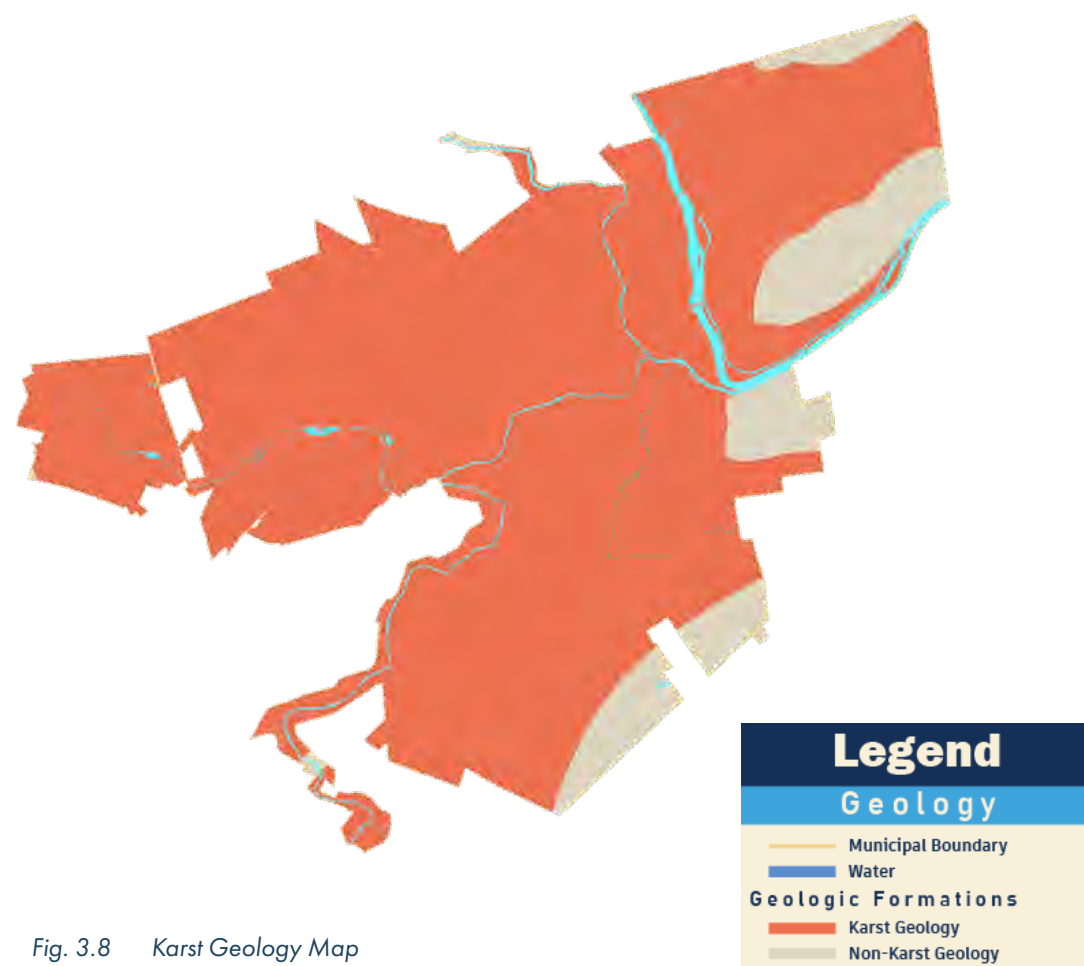


Fig. 3.8 Karst Geology Map

stone formations serve as a stormwater management function that contributes to potable water aquifers.

Protecting surface water resources in the Lehigh Valley becomes especially important where surface stormwater is laden with pollutants that are delivered directly to public subsurface reservoirs. Pollutants include chemical compounds from lawns and roadways; biological threats from sewage systems, and erosion sediments are unfortunately common contaminants today that pose public safety concerns.

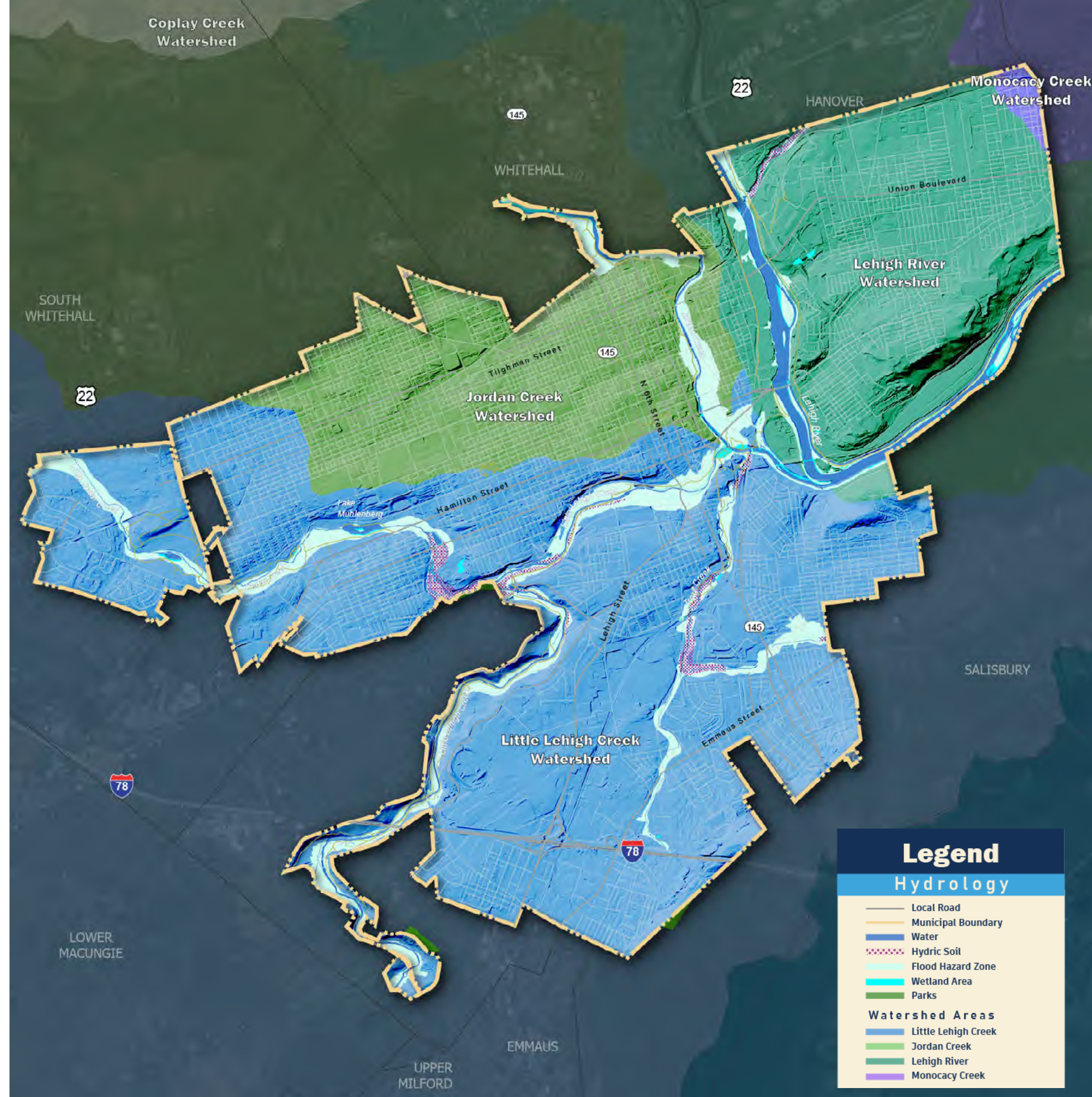
Protecting surface waters in Allentown was an original goal in creating the Allentown parks system. Technological and human resources today have grown along with the unfortunate prevalence of water pollutants. The City of Allentown can continue to focus on stewardship of the riparian sites under their control as a best practice to protect surface and subsurface water resources.

Soils

Nearly 25% of Earth’s biodiversity lives within soils. The fragility of this part of the ecological web is not well understood. Parks and open spaces represent the most valuable enclave of soil cultures that remain most intact from modern society – compared to the subdivided, and overcultivated, and developed parcels of land that surround them.

Parks and open space resources can be considered as conservation “reserves” in this way – by using soil health as a measure of sustainable stewardship that is equal to any other metric or demand on many public sites.

Fig. 3.9 Hydrology Map





Visitors at Cedar Beach take advantage of the lawn coming to the edge of Cedar Creek.



Many people enjoy observing wildlife along the waters of Allentown.

Simple techniques can be relearned to conserve and actually build soil habitats in public parks. Best practices include: preventing / stopping erosion; adding restorative plant species; keeping biomass debris on-site. These practices collectively help create a healthier soil culture that reduces human energy needed to encourage revegetation and infiltrate groundwater. These strategies can be introduced over time with staff who perhaps have not previously considered the values of “dirt” as a public resource.

Most of the city’s soils are considered Urban complex that reflect human development activities. While some parent material may remain, most of these soils have been altered through mixing, material importation, and contamination through construction practices. Where native soils exist are along steep elevations and along greenways where construction practices typically do not exist.

Most native soils in Allentown are derived from primarily the Allentown Formation bedrock that consists of dolomite and limestone and fluvial fills from the many streams that run through the City. Both Washington and Duffield Series make up most of the existing native soils. They are deep well drained silt loam soils.

There are also some hydric soils. Hydric soils are formed under conditions of regular saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic (absence of oxygen) conditions within the upper layers. These soils typically support wetland ecosystems, and are found in areas along Cedar Creek, Little Lehigh Creek, and Trout Creek.

Hydrology

“Our creeks are our Parks.” - a public meeting attendee.

Approximately 90% of the Allentown Parks system has a waterway either bordering or flowing through the site. In Allentown, waterways have always been central to their City park experiences – historically bathing, fishing, and relaxing. Protecting Allentown waterways is a consensus strategy for City residents. This level of stewardship requires partners.

Allentown is served by four watersheds. Jordan Creek and Little Lehigh Creek (which includes Little Cedar Creek, Cedar Creek and Trout Creek) all flow in from the west side into the Lehigh River. A small fraction of the East Side of Allentown lies in the Monocacy Creek watershed which drains into the Lehigh River east of the City boundaries in Bethlehem.

An unnamed tributary with headwaters near the Lehigh Valley International Airport makes its way north of American Parkway before entering the Lehigh River – which is the mainstem of the Lehigh River Watershed.

All but the Monocacy Creek watershed in Allentown has a park, trail, or greenway that share those smaller riparian corridors.

All Allentown waterways are impacted by “Urban Stream Syndrome,” where they are affected by the urban environment including stormwater runoff, pollution, manipulation of natural waterway flows, or loss of important riparian habitat.

Large areas of impervious surface from land developments disrupt the capability of soils to infiltrate stormwater; increase runoff volumes and velocities and contribute directly to the degradation of water quality.

Siltation, a result of erosion of soil into waterways is a ubiquitous cause of stream impairment including in Allentown. Siltation degrades healthy biological activity within streams and reduces floodway capacities.

All waterways in Pennsylvania are assigned a classification code under PA Chapter 93 that sets water quality standards for surface water – which are based on uses to be protected, and are classified under the five categories, including: Aquatic Life; Water Supply; Recreation and Fish Consumption; Special Protection; and Other.

Under the Federal Clean Water Act, PA Department of Environmental Protection is required to assess all surface water within the state every two years for how standards for protected uses are being met. The assessments fall under three general levels: attaining, impaired, and unassessed.

The assessed waters then fall under different categories, depending on issues or non-issues identified by the assessment. These biannual “Integrated Water Quality Reports” can be found on the PA DEP website.

All Allentown waterways are considered impaired (mostly for aquatic life), and all but Little Cedar Creek fall under Category 5, which requires a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Plan under the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Program. The waterways are affected by urban runoff, siltation, pollutants, and storm sewer discharges. Some are additionally affected by agriculture practices from the headwaters.

Little Cedar Creek, Cedar Creek, Little Lehigh Creek and Trout Creek are all classified as High Quality – Cold Water Fisheries, meaning they are to be protected as high-quality waters that maintain or propagate both animal and plant species that are indigenous of cold-water habitats.

Jordan Creek is classified as Trout Stocking Fish, meaning these waters are maintained for stocked trout annually from February 15 to July 31st and the waters quality is suitable to maintain or propagate both animal and plant species that are indigenous to warm water habitat. Jordan Creek is impaired for aquatic life, but is “attaining or supporting fish consumption”, recreation, and potable water, and is also classified as Category 5.

The unnamed tributary on the east side of the Lehigh River is classified as Cold Water Fish but is impaired and classified as Category 5.

All these waters eventually flow into the Lehigh River that is classified as Warm Water Fish, meaning it maintains and propagates both animal and plant species that are indigenous to warm water habitat.



Channelized streams and having lawn up to the edges can create issues with waterways such as introduction of non-point pollutants and flooding when the floodplain has been removed.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Move It Mondays - Lights in the Parkway

During the Parks and Recreation Dept’s Lights in the Parkway event, every Monday people are invited to walk, run or bike through the lights rather than drive through them, providing a much richer up-close experience and providing fitness to a typical driving event.



The Lehigh River is impaired for aquatic life but is “attaining” for fish consumption – and it is also classified under Category 5. The major reason for impairment of the Lehigh River is organic enrichment where the water body receives an excessive amount of organic matter, such as fertilizers, agricultural runoff, industrial wastewater, and sewage discharges that fuel microbial activity and causes depletion of available oxygen – a condition harmful to aquatic ecosystems.

All waterways must be monitored and measured to protect and improve water quality for the uses under their classifications. In Allentown this work is accomplished through the municipal MS4 Program that describes the goals and schedule of actions to manage and reduce discharges of pollutants into waterways. Public education and construction of stormwater best management practices (BMP) facilities are typical elements of a MS4 Plan – which in Allentown is administered by the Bureau of Stormwater, a division of Public Works.

Several regional watershed groups help educate; conduct riparian cleanups, plant trees, and perform related services to help protect and restore the Lehigh Valley watersheds.

The Watershed Coalition of the Lehigh Valley is an organization that assists local watershed groups throughout the region, including collaborations with conservation groups such as Wildlands Conservancy and County Conservation Districts.

Locally, the Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards (LLWS) is active in doing trash removals; removing invasive species and delivering public education opportunities. These groups are a valuable human resource and partner in caring for the precious waterways of Allentown.

Floodplains

Floodplains are low-lying land areas adjacent to streams, rivers, or waterways – and are subject to periodic complete or partial flooding during rain events. Floodplains are meant to be naturally inundated as part of hydrologic cycles. Boundaries of floodplains are typically irregularly-shaped and often meander through communities – generally unnoticed until a flood event. Flooding under normal circumstances is a natural part of the hydrological cycle and is not supposed to be dangerous, but when development approaches these areas, risk of damage and possible loss of life increases, especially as heavier rain events are a normal occurrence. Smart design can allow for parks to function as integral parts of floodplain system – helping to manage floodwater with the resilience to resume serving recreation demands after flood waters recede. Using flood tolerant plant materials and flood resilient design allows a park to be inundated with floodwater and quickly become usable again by the public as floodwaters reside.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) produces flood zone maps to identify regulatory floodways; 100-year; and 500-year flood zones. These flood zones are identified on the *Hydrology Map*. 100-year floods do not mean that a rain event will cause flooding that will only occur every 100 years - but rather, there is a one percent chance that a certain amount of rain will fall in a particular location over a set amount of time in a given year.

A 500-year flood has a 0.2% chance of occurring within any given year. Allentown has suffered from major flood events – the last one in 1996, but smaller flash flooding events continue to be a part of life in Allentown - and the City parks within the floodplains have incurred damage from the floods including the loss of swimming pools that were built in the floodplains.

Greenways

Greenways are integral to the Allentown parks system and the regional investments in Lehigh Valley ecology. It is important to acknowledge what they are and ways they can function to help communities.

Greenways are conceptions that tend to encompass natural and human systems within a physical area. Greenways don’t always but often follow riparian corridors – where natural conditions are sufficiently extreme to prohibit most human development, except for minor improvements like trails.



Flooding conditions can put historical structures at risk of severe damage. Cedar Creek flooding at Terrace Park. Rich Rolen / The Morning Call



Park amenities need to be able to withstand flooding like here at Jordan Park. Rich Rolen / The Morning Call



Flooding can create a lot of issues especially for those who rely on the trail systems along the creeks to get to their destination. The Morning Call

Greenways capture the geography and quality of natural corridors and foster practices that nurture environmental resiliency – which often depends on the biodiversity of a specific greenway ecology.

As open space “corridors” greenways may vary in scale from narrow strips of “green” spaces that run through developed areas to wider corridors that may incorporate natural, cultural and/or scenic features.

Greenways are an important component of modern landscape, because they retrieve and create defenses for areas of naturalized landscapes that might otherwise succumb to ill-advised development or be treated as a series of abandoned and disconnected parcels – instead of logical, natural ecologies that fare better when interconnected.

All open spaces and waterways are valuable resources, but comprehensive conservation strategies improve natural and passive recreational values and build collective resiliency when greenway parcels are physically linked and managed together.

A greenway like the Little Lehigh Creek, can support habitat for more diverse wildlife species than a green swath only 200 feet wide - like most of Jordan Creek.

Ultimately of size does not matter as much as continuity of greenways where narrow segments can connect larger more viable ecosystems. Jordan Creek has larger areas of green space north of the City and when completed will deliver people via trail to Trexler Preserve, and major regional ecological reserve.

Similarly, the Little Lehigh Creek, Cedar Creek, Trout Creek, and Jordan Creek all connect as ecological connections to the Lehigh River and the vast natural upland ecology along South Mountain.

Ecosystems

Imperative for urban areas – living ecosystems deliver essential green “infrastructure” services that purify air and water; temper heat islands; sequester carbon and manage stormwater.

Keeping ecosystems contiguous and functioning intact is key – because fragmented habitats will not support equal levels of services, diversity, or resilience. Human impacts concentrated in urban areas over generations have fractured many ecosystems – especially aquatic habitats.



The Trout Creek Greenway serves as an important riparian habitat and recreational area for Allentown. In some sections, remnants of an old walkway remain.

In Allentown – because the original park system was conceived to protect riparian areas, today’s stewards have a significant advantage in restoring the City’s urban water-centric ecosystems.

Parks & Recreation can partner with selected, skilled stakeholders to increase collective ecological planning and to build discrete environmental restoration projects within the City’s jurisdiction, as the Department continues central focus on delivery of recreation facilities and programs to the Allentown community. Currently, there is a Climate Action Plan being completed. The following ecosystems when healthy and resilient will play an important role in mitigating issues from climate change.

Allentown parks ecosystems

Several archetypal ecosystems exist across the Allentown urban landscape.

Urban forest: At the most fundamental level, an urban forest is a collection of trees within the urban environment. These “forests” can be envisioned to include: street trees; trees in parks; trees in backyards; trees on private properties; and wooded areas. These “massings” of canopy species can collectively create a small, dynamic nucleus of an ecosystem to perform all the major ecological services - in miniature. Once urban forests are understood as mini-ecosystems, it is easy to understand how conserving soil ecosystems helps keep the green canopy infrastructure alive.

Trees are an important part of addressing climate issues such as stormwater management, urban heat island effects, and carbon storage. Just as important is understanding biodiversity and species selection needs to be understood to provide a healthy and diverse tree canopy. Currently a Urban Forest Master Plan is being completed.

An example of urban forest in Allentown might be Hamilton Boulevard – where the majestic street trees are working ecologically together with Cedar Beach Park trees as an integrated urban forest.

Meadow/shrubland: Urban meadows and shrublands work as low-impact, self-sustainable communities of grasses and flowering plants in many cases to reduce areas of turfgrass and create habitat for wildlife.

Lawns are needed for recreational space, but much of the lawn spaces are not used for recreation. The goal of reducing mown lawn areas can help reduce chemical, energy, and environmental impacts – and may decrease maintenance costs, if a meadow conversion process if well-planned and executed.



The woodland area by East Resevior has a diverse collection of both native and non native trees. This small urban forest helps with air and water quality, habitat, temperature control, stormwater management, carbon storage, and more.



Meadow plantings, even in tight spaces can provide ecological advantages.

Urban meadows may be a cost-effective solution – with the awareness that within typical urban environments, it will take time, training and effort to establish these ecosystems to that they are more self-sustainable. All cultural landscapes will always need to be managed, but as a well-executed meadow ecosystem becomes resilient, management levels will decrease. Training and staff acceptance of different maintenance protocols is essential to transitioning to these ecosystems in public spaces. Special-skill volunteer partners may play important parts in Allentown ecosystem projects.

Human modified: Most environments within urban areas can be considered as “human-modified” – which tend to be homogenized landscapes that are greatly simplified with greater numbers of non-native plants. Large areas of paved hardscapes and/or lawn have reduced soil cultures, biodiversity, and resiliency of these sites. Modifying these sites to be more naturally sustainable space will require a toolbox of ecological approaches that can be tailored to the demands of each site.

Master planning and design phases of future projects should address these considerations. A palette of best practices for Allentown Parks & Recreation could begin to develop after a couple of ecological restoration projects are moved through construction into system maintenance.

Riparian/wetland: A Riparian ecosystem is the transitional zone between aquatic and terrestrial environments along streams, rivers, lakes, and other water bodies, consisting of unique vegetation and soils that can live between occasionally inundated flooding and drought. The Allentown parks system is rich with these ecosystems.

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil continuously or periodically throughout the year with often hydric soil and adapted plant communities. The values of the environmental services delivered by wetland ecosystems cannot be overstated as natural blue and green infrastructure.

Specifically, riparian zones and wetlands improve water quality by filtering pollutants from stormwater before urban runoff enters the waterways. Wetlands provide vital habitat; absorb and mitigate flooding and support passive, nature-based recreation activities.

Freshwater aquatic: These systems of water “bodies” support plants, fish, amphibians, micro-invertebrate and other species that live in or at edges that are water dependent. Aquatic systems are integrated with terrestrial systems and together play a crucial role in the earth hydrological cycle. The aquatic systems rely on the riparian ecosystem to filter water before it enters the pool.



The Rose Gardens is a perfect example of Human modified landscapes.



Riparian ecosystems provide multiple ecological services and are generally considered as blue infrastructure.



The Little Lehigh Creek is an important resource for Allentown as a place for recreation and the ecological services it provides.

Aquatic ecosystems are sources of food and water supply for the entire food chain – and deliver multiple ecological services including water storage “reservoirs,” habitat, recreation, and aesthetic values that are priceless in City environments – where these systems are always stressed by development, pollution, and human activities including overuse for recreation.

In Allentown, many people use the natural creeks as places to bathe, although it is not permitted by City rules. Aquatic environments have been historically impacted by human manipulation of the natural waterways with dams and diversions – dramatically changing the hydraulics of streams and the ecosystems of the waterways themselves and the riparian areas around them.

The complex history of manipulated waterways begins with early water mills and continues today with public dams that serve Allentown’s potable water system affecting park landscapes that surround some of them. Other human activities that affect these ecosystems in every city are sanitary sewer, municipal stormwater, and industrial discharges.

These conditions must be recognized by a “City in a Park” – with mostly water-based recreation sites.



4

PROGRAMS

4.1 RECREATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

4.1.1 Summer Playground Program

Concluding its 111th season in 2025, Allentown’s historic Summer Playground Program remains a cornerstone of the City’s recreation offerings.

The program, which is free to residents, includes free lunches for participants and culminates in the beloved Romper Day Celebration—an enduring tradition that connects generations of Allentown families. Romper Day marks the end of the Program for the season and was heralded by General Trexler, who was instrumental in organizing the first Romper Day in 1914.

A remarkable achievement of the program is the high return rate of tenured staff – which provides consistency and institutional knowledge. 63 seasonal staff participated in the Program, including 7 supervisors and 56 instructors.

The program is eight weeks long, open to kids ages 7 to 15 and takes place at ten City playgrounds and 7 elementary schools throughout the City, including:

- Andre Reed Park
- Ithaca Playlot
- Jordan Park
- Keck Park
- Percy Ruhe Park
- Roosevelt Park
- Stevens Park
- Trout Creek West
- Clyde E. Bosket Sr. (formerly Valania) Park
- Walden Terrace Playlot

Participants also enjoy field trips to local destinations such as Dorney Park, Wildlands Conservancy as well as City pools.

Additions to the program in subsequent seasons could include a focus on specific themes, such as:

- S.T.E.M. activities that involve simple experiments and coding challenges
- Environmental and outdoor education where kids can go on hikes and participate in nature-themed scavenger hunts
- Arts education involving painting, music and dance
- Themed “weeks” where a specific topic or idea is the feature for the whole week, such as Nature Week or Allentown History Week (to celebrate the legacy of the program)

The program can also partner with other City departments, such as Police and Fire, to teach kids about safety and first aid, as well as with local institutions such as the library to teach kids about the importance of reading while school is out, and local museums, whose staff can present small artifacts or conduct demonstrations.

Previous page: concert at Terrace Park - Allentown Parks & Recreation

4.1.2 Health and Wellness activities in parks

Community feedback from the planning process revealed a strong desire for health and wellness programming within the Allentown Park system. Residents identified a range of activities, including yoga, Tai Chi, walking groups, and farmers’ markets —as valuable offerings that promote physical activity, mental well-being, healthy foods, and community connection.

Similar activities are currently offered through Parks & Recreation’s Wellness Wednesdays program. The goal of this program is to educate and give individuals the opportunity to take care of their mind, body and soul through different forms of recreation and leisure activities. The program runs from October to December, and activities include yoga, bouquet making, plant therapy, paint therapy, meditation and journaling.

Wellness programs support public health goals and help activate public spaces, encourage multigenerational engagement, and improve overall quality of life in neighborhoods. These activities can be especially important for residents who may face barriers to accessing traditional fitness facilities, healthcare resources, and access to fresh foods.

4.1.3 Intergenerational Parks and Senior Programming

Allentown has begun to work toward achieving “Blue Zone” status and enhancing programs and recreational opportunities for older adults is one critical step. Community feedback emphasizes the importance of reducing social isolation and promoting physical, mental, and social engagement among seniors to support longer, healthier lives.

The goal of the Blue Zones Project is to improve the overall well-being of a community – specifically, the measure of a person’s overall physical, social, and emotional health.



Residents preparing for Tai Chi at Ceder Creek Park. Amy Herzog /The Morning Call

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Free Swim Safety Lessons

In partnership with River Crossing YMCA, two 4-week sessions are provided to children, teens, and adults to learn essential skills for safety in and around water. The programs are held at both Cedar Beach Pool and Irving Pool. This program has also let to a high return rate for seasonal staff.





Residents enjoying one of the Wellness Wednesday events offered by Parks and Recreation.

One strategy is to reimagine recreation spaces as intergenerational parks—places intentionally designed to foster connection and community value across all age groups (Atterbury, *Designing Parks That Bring Generations Together*, Parks and Recreation, May 2025).

This inclusive idea is an alternative to building parks around singular uses, such as children’s play or organized sports – which when smartly conceived enable these spaces to support multiple recreation features that attract diverse users.

Intergenerational design features may include:

- **Sensory play areas** – climbing and swinging structures
- **Unstructured gathering spaces** – pavilions, shaded seating, and walking/bike trails
- **Interactive features** – game tables (chess/checkers), art installations, and musical elements
- **Flexible use spaces** – for concerts, food events, movie nights, and programs / classes

Programming recreation activities is as essential as recreation infrastructure for communities.

Regular public events, cross-generational activities, and health and wellness programs can transform park spaces into *nexus points*—hubs of shared activity and interaction between residents of all ages (Atterbury, 2025).

4.1.4 Sports and other Activities

The Parks & Recreation Department offers a variety of sports programming for younger residents. The City also organizes a number of community and special events which are well received and well attended. Sports programming includes:

- PAL Basketball (Winter): Boys/Girls Grades 3-6th
- Winter/Summer Youth Basketball: Boys & Girls Grades 3-8th grade
- King/Queen of the Court Basketball – Skills & Drills: Boys & Girls Grades 6-12th and Spring/Fall programming
- K-5 Biddy Basketball – Skills & Drills: Boys & Girls Grades K-8th
- Youth Wrestling – Boys & Girls: Partnership with Muhlenberg College Wrestling team
- Youth Soccer – Boys & Girls (K-8): Partnership with Eastern PA Youth Soccer (Fernando Carrizo)
- Youth Tennis – Boys & Girls: Partnership with US Tennis Association
- Winter Volleyball League (Trexler Middle School): 36 total teams (Men’s, Women’s, Co-Ed), 12 teams per division

Events include:

- Movies in the Park
 - 12 movies throughout summer at various park locations (3 movies at each city pool)
- Summer Concerts
 - Traditional Allentown Summer Concert Series at West Park
 - Midway Manor concert Series
 - ArtsQuest Concert Series at Union Terrace Amphitheater
 - Bomba at the Beach (Cedar Beach)

In addition to what the City offers, Allentown Youth Organizations United to Help (A-Y.O.U.T.H.) is a group of Allentown-based youth organizations that also offer participation in various sports throughout the year. Offerings include football/flag football, cheer, basketball, baseball, softball, wrestling, soccer, and volleyball.



Children learning about aquatic ecologies during an event. Allentown Parks & Recreation



Game tables, such as the ones at Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park (formally Valania Park) can provide intergenerational park interaction.



Children joining in for group exercise during an event at Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park (formally Valania Park). Parknership



Outdoor movies in the parks are popular programs that many can enjoy. Allentown Parks & Recreation

4.1.5 Aquatics

The City of Allentown operates a very popular and successful aquatics program. Not only do pools provide respite and enjoyment during the summer months, they also offer low-cost and free recreational options for families who may not be able to afford home pools and allow for community building and engagement and access to swimming lessons, a critical life skill.

In 2025, the City operates three outdoor pools – Cedar Beach, Irving and Mack Pools. The City also has occasional access to an indoor pool at Allen High School and uses it to certify lifeguards.

A private provider currently leases the indoor pool at Allen High School, but there may be opportunities to expand public access in the off-season if access to a year-round facility is established. Lifeguards who work summers might be retained for part-time evening or weekend roles during fall and winter months – to allow the City to offer swim lessons and water aerobics year-round. In 2025 Allentown retained a complete team of summer lifeguards in comparison to shortages of guards in many other communities.

Partnerships with local colleges might help fill the swimming resource gaps. For example, the City may look to collaborate with local colleges, such as Muhlenberg or Cedar Crest Colleges, to identify opportunities for year-round swim education. Cedar Crest College, already offers public swimming instruction, and might be another natural partner. Even if formal partnerships aren’t possible, these programs can be highlighted in City newsletters and program guides, so residents are fully aware of local opportunities.

In 2025, the City completed a successful free learn-to-swim summer program with the River Crossing YMCA at Irving Pool that will expand in subsequent seasons. The program is open to anyone between 3-12 years of age, as well as teenagers and adults. The City also offers Free Days at the Pool on Independence Day and Juneteenth as well as Morning Adult Lap Swim at Cedar Beach Pool. Anyone 18 and older can participate and it is free for Season Pass Holders, \$2 per visit for residents without a Season Pass and \$4 for non-residents without a Season Pass.

To increase participation and personal investments in learning to swim, Allentown might consider models used by other cities—such as the Salvation Army Kroc Center in Philadelphia—that charges a nominal upfront fee – which is partially refunded for each session attended. This approach encourages commitment while remaining accessible.



The City of Allentown hosts many community events such as the 4th of July Celebration. Toolshed Creative

Parks and Recreation might explore partnerships with national programs such as Swimmable Cities; USA Swimming’s - Make a Splash; and the American Red Cross’s - WHALE Tales. These programs offer structured curriculum and resources to support swim education. WHALE Tales might be integrated into the rotation of activities at Allentown Day Camp programs, expanding aquatic education beyond the pool deck.

Allentown Parks & Recreation operates spray pad water playgrounds at Bucky Boyle, Old Fairgrounds and Clyde E. Bosket SR.(formerly Valania) Parks. In planning for the future, the City might consider upgrading the spray ground at the 5th Street Spray Park to include areas for older children and teens and expanding the spray park at Bucky Boyle as noted in the master plan for the park. When exploring where to add additional spray grounds, an environmental justice lens such as PennEnviro Screen and heat maps can be used to identify neighborhood priorities that are clearly underserved.

Once regular indoor pool access is established, Parks & Recreation may consider converting the current Aquatics Manager position from a part-time seasonal position to a full-time year-round position. The full-time position could focus on developing and maintaining year-round pool access; indoor & outdoor swim lessons; and lifeguard training programs - as well as seek to expand aquatic program opportunities.

A focus on aquatic program expansion helps address the greater public health goal of reducing drowning. Upgrading the position to full-time also empowers that person to effectively plan short and long-term aquatic goals with recreation program staff and with the police and rescue responders to help foster communication – especially during the peak outdoor swim season.

Sadly, drowning remains a serious public health issue, with studies showing that people of color drown at disproportionately higher rates than white counterparts. Education contributes to personal safety, but limited swim competency also restricts access for many to enriching water-based sports and recreational activities—making this gap both a matter of life and death and quality of life and equity.

Allentown may strategically leverage partnerships, available facilities, and national resources, with the goal of improving water safety; expanding recreation access; and promoting equity in its aquatics programming.

In 2024, after issues with overcrowding and illegal swimming at hot spots such as Canal Park, Fountain Park and Jordan Park, Parks & Recreation coordinated with the Police Department on measures to curtail such activities that support current codes and help prevent drowning incidents. These included the installation of gates, monitoring by Park Specialists and the increased presence of police officers.

4.2 PROGRAMMING CONSTRAINTS

4.2.1 Limited personnel / staffing needs for recreation programs and special events

Allentown Parks & Recreation currently operates with only eight full-time “equivalent” (FTE) staff dedicated to programming - while serving a population of approximately 124,800 residents.

Considering the extensive Allentown park system with its numerous recreational amenities and the demands of year-round programs and special events – the City Parks & Recreation Department is significantly understaffed.

According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), municipalities that serve comparable populations have a median of 130.5 full time Parks and Recreation employees (FTEs), with approximately 31% of that entire staff assigned to recreation programming.

In contrast, Allentown has just 67 total FTEs, with eight (12%) focused on recreation programming – a resource falling well short of national standards.

In 2025, the eight current staff are stretched to cover summer and year-round programs, and special events. This condition results in staff fatigue and burnout during the most critical programming season and greatly limits the ability of Parks & Recreation to offer more and develop new programs to service the community.

The total acreage of City parks and open spaces is more than double that of the national standard for a municipality of similar size – but the Allentown Parks & Recreation Department has only 50% of the staff of similar-sized municipalities - stretching existing staff to perform the day-to-day operations, administrative, and maintenance tasks.



Da Vinci Science Center provides science based programs in partnership with Parks and Rec. Jason Addey / Lehigh Valley News

This “under-staffing” is compounded by the City’s poverty rate at 23.3% - which is nearly double the national average of 12.4%. All these factors, combined with growing needs of senior populations and individuals with disabilities, create intensive demands on Parks & Recreation staff – and underscore the urgency to invest in additional recreation program staff.

4.2.2 Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity Through Recreation

Parks & Recreation might play a transformative role in advancing workforce development, economic mobility, and youth employment. Allentown Parks & Recreation Department is working toward expanding its contribution as a provider of community wellness programs to help youth gain meaningful career experiences, particularly for under-represented and under-employed populations.

Career Pathways in Parks & Recreation

Career ladders, from entry-level roles to stepping up into positions of greater responsibility, have long been a hallmark of the parks and recreation field.

Allentown already supports this concept by employing teens and young adults in seasonal roles within aquatics programs and day camps. These early work experiences build confidence, develop soft skills, and often lead to year-round employment, including opportunities in Out-of-School Time (OST) programs and day camps, such as the Summer Playground Program. These positions may be part-time or seasonal in nature but provide a crucial entry point to City employment and public service careers.

Building on its existing efforts, Parks & Recreation might consider integrating programs like AmeriCorps VISTA, which supports community-based service job placements that are designed to alleviate poverty and strengthen local capacity. With thoughtful partnerships and program design, VISTA participants might support recreation initiatives such as:

- Direct outreach to underserved residents;
- Assisting with youth sports leagues (coaching, officiating, scorekeeping);



Partners provide great opportunities for recreation such as the Allentown Police Department Police Athletic League. Stephanie Sigafos/WLVR

- Leading walking clubs and community fitness groups;
- Organizing and promoting Farmers’ Markets and community events.

In the realm of natural resource management and park maintenance, programs like the DCNR Outdoor Corps and AmeriCorps Power Corps offer scalable models that combine paid work experience, environmental stewardship, and skills development. These seasonal crews can support trail maintenance, park cleanups, invasive species management, and other critical functions—while also providing a stepping-stone into long-term employment or further education. Integrating such programs does require Parks & Recreation staff oversight.

Aligning with Allentown Works

The recent award of the U.S. EDA Recompete grant to the City of Allentown presents a timely opportunity to enhance and expand these workforce initiatives. Recompete funding launched the Allentown Works program which is designed to address chronic employment gaps in economically-distressed communities and aligns with several Parks & Recreation priorities, including:

- **Expanding wellness programming in public parks** through free or low-cost fitness classes (e.g., yoga, Tai Chi, walking groups) to promote public health and provide employment opportunities for local instructors or recreation leaders.
- **Developing workforce pathways by employing youth, young adults**, and career changers to support wellness programming, facility maintenance, and event coordination.
- **Formalizing School-Age Child Care (SACC) & Youth Development** is worth investigating.
- **Access to affordable, high-quality childcare** remains a critical need for many families across Allentown. In response, Parks & Recreation might explore opportunities to formalize its role as a provider of School-Age Child Care (SACC) by pursuing certification through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW). Certification would allow the City to offer licensed after-school and summer programming for school-age children – which aligns with state standards, elevating the quality of care. This might be an option at sites where Parks & Recreation uses



Philadelphia PowerCorps helps provide training for the new instructors as well as the workforce behind the growing green jobs sector. Philadelphia PowerCorps

School District facilities other than the outdoor facilities to provide programs. This approach could enhance the position of Parks and Recreation as a key contributor to community well-being and economic resilience by:

- **Supporting Working Families:** The goal is offering consistent, affordable childcare during out-of-school hours so that parents and caregivers may be better able to maintain employment, pursue job training, or further their education.
- **Creating Workforce Opportunities:** Expansion of SACC services could generate part-time and seasonal jobs in childcare, youth development, and recreation programming.
- **Promoting Child Health and Wellness:** A certified program allows for integration of evidence-based enrichment programs, including: outdoor play; nature-based exploration; and trauma-informed wellness programming such as yoga and mindfulness practices.
- **Increasing Access and Equity:** Formalized childcare offerings could prioritize neighborhoods with the highest needs; reduce disparities in access to safe after-school environments; and offer protective factors that reduce the long-term impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

DPW certification requires significant internal capacity—particularly in staff qualifications; facility standards; and compliance requirements—to align with the broader Allentown vision of serving the whole family and advancing long-term economic mobility.

Opportunities for collaborating to mitigate the “operational lift” and ensure program sustainability – include advancing collaborative partnerships, such as:

- **School District and educational institutions:** might explore shared space uses, coordination with school calendars, and academic program alignment.
- **Nonprofit and behavioral health providers:** may co-develop trauma-informed programming and training for childcare staff.
- **Workforce Development and early childhood networks:** could help recruit, train, and retain a qualified childcare workforce within the Allentown community.
- **State and federal funding agencies:** can be explored for cost recovery and grant opportunities via Child Care Works, Keystone STARS, and other early childhood education funding streams. The PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency BOOST supports SAC and youth/teen recreational programming.

4.2.3 Recreation resource management staffing

Programs including the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Outdoor Corps and AmeriCorps Power Corps offer compelling models that Allentown Parks & Recreation might adapt locally. These initiatives are designed to provide career-connected education – paired with paid, temporary work experience, specifically targeting teens and young adults who are unemployed, underemployed, or seeking direction in their careers.

Participants in these programs gain hands-on experience in areas such as land stewardship; trail construction; ecological restoration; sustainability practices; and infrastructure maintenance—all while making tangible contributions to their community’s public spaces. Beyond skill development, these programs foster a deep connection between participants and the local environment, encouraging a sense of ownership and civic pride.

Tailoring such an approach to Allentown might advance Park & Recreation environmental and sustainability goals – and serve as a strategic investment in the City’s youth workforce pipeline – by helping to prepare the next generation of resilient environmental professionals, Parks and Recreation staff, and civic leaders who are rooted in the community.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Summer Playground Program

The Summer Playground Program is a free eight-week summer program for children ages 7 to 15. The program runs on Mondays from 1-3:30 and Tuesday through Friday 9-3:30. It provides various programs and free lunches throughout city parks and elementary schools. At the end of the program, everyone is invited to Romper Day that features games, dances, may pole, and races. It has been a tradition since 1914, when General Trexler and his wife Mary started the annual event.





5

MANAGEMENT

5.1 MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Allentown Department of Parks & Recreation is:

“to improve the quality of life through clean, safe and beautiful parks and trails. We provide access to fields, pavilions and park resources. We develop engaging recreation opportunities and exciting events for all.”



Allentown Parks and Recreation preparing for events.



Juneteenth basketball competition organized by Allentown Parks and Recreation and the Juneteenth Committee.

5.2 ADMINISTRATION

The Department of Parks & Recreation operates within a traditional administrative structure that is composed of five (5) Bureaus – Recreation; Special Events; Park Maintenance; Golf Course; and Sustainability – and each bureau functions as a division. This means they each function as a specific unit within the overall department, responsible for their own specialized tasks and operations.

Administrative positions of the Department and Bureaus include:

- **Director**, Parks & Recreation
- **Deputy Director**, Recreation & Special Events Bureau
- **Parks Superintendent**, Maintenance Bureau
- **Manager**, Golf Course Bureau
- **Coordinator**, Sustainability Bureau
- **Manager**, Recreation Bureau
- **Manager**, Special Events Bureau

Recreation Bureau and Special Events Bureau

Recreation and Special Events Bureaus focus on year-round recreation programs and producing special events for the residents of Allentown. In addition to traditional programming, the Special Events Bureau also administers the permitting process for non-department special events conducted within all City-owned land and coordinates any city services needed for each permitted activity.

All other recreation operations are managed by the Recreation Bureau and those responsibilities include: operations of City pools; coordination of programs such as the Summer Playground Program; and working with the Maintenance Bureau to address facility needs.

Maintenance Bureau

The Maintenance Bureau staff includes a majority of the Department full-time employees, and commands approximately 70% of the Department annual budget. Maintenance is responsible for all the upkeep of City parks; the extensive trail system; and specialty beautification areas (ex. Rose Garden and Hamilton Street hanging flower baskets); as well as providing assistance for Department special events.

The Bureau assists the Public Works Department with the care and trimming of trees within the City rights-of-way, and snow removal on streets, sidewalks, and bridges.

The Project Coordinator of the Maintenance Bureau is responsible for submitting funding applications and administering park-related grants and capital project management and oversight.

The position of Director of Parks & Recreation is located within the Maintenance Bureau but that leadership role includes management oversight over all Department bureaus.

Golf Course Bureau

The Bureau manages the Allentown Municipal Golf Course – an 18-hole course that also features a lighted driving range; a short game practice area; practice putting greens; and a restaurant that is operated by a third-party vendor.

This Golf Course Bureau coordinates work with the Maintenance Bureau, but operates quasi-independently and typically generates a positive net revenue.

Sustainability Bureau

The Sustainability Bureau was established in 2024, as a new bureau-level section within the Parks & Recreation Department. This Bureau has one staff member – the Sustainability Coordinator – whose goal is to advance the City’s multiple

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Completed Major Capital Projects

The Parks and Recreation Department have a long list of needs for the parks and continue to work hard to provide the best facilities for the citizens of Allentown. Recent projects that are completed or nearly completed are Irving Pool, the Mini-Pitch at Jordan Meadows, Phase 2 of Jordan Skatepark, building full court basketball at Stevens Park, and securing funding to complete trails such as the D&L Trail connections and the Little Lehigh Parkway. The Martin Luther King Jr Trail and the Cedar Creek Trail will provide off road connections through the City, with investment in historic park infrastructure including WPA structures at Union Terrace Amphitheater, Malcolm Gross Rose Garden and Lehigh Parkway, and renovations to the West Park Bandshell.



“sustainability initiatives” that are focused on environmental, economic, climate change mitigation, and social well-being for current and future generations.

The work of the Sustainability Coordinator includes: developing / implementing sustainable practices and operations across all City departments; securing grant funding for related projects; and fostering community engagement in environmental issues. The sustainability coordinator serves multiple City departments, from a position housed within Parks & Recreation. The Bureau will be working with Allentown’s Environmental Advisory Committee to prepare a Climate Action Plan for the City.

5.3 PERSONNEL

The 2025 Operating Budget for Parks & Recreation accounted for 67 full-time and 183 seasonal employees across all four Bureaus. Some position responsibilities cross over multiple bureaus and include sharing personnel.

5.3.1 Staff - by Bureau

Maintenance Bureau

53 Full-time staff, 6 - 12 Seasonal staff (as budget supports and can be onboarded)

- Parks & Recreation Director (1)
- Parks Superintendent (1)
- Operations Manager (1)
- Chief Maintenance Supervisor (1)
- Maintenance Supervisor (5)
- Project Coordinator (1)
- Clerk (1)
- Various Service Employees International Union (SEIU) staff (42)
- Seasonal Laborer (6)

Sustainability Bureau

1 Full-time staff, 2 Seasonal interns

- Sustainability Coordinator (1)
- Seasonal Interns (2)

Recreation Bureau and Special Events Bureau

8 Full-time Staff, 167 Part-Time Staff

- Deputy Director – Parks & Recreation (1)
- Event Manager (1)
- Recreation Manager (1)
- Outreach Coordinator (1)
- Events Coordinator (1)
- Recreation Specialist (2)
- Clerk (1)
- Aquatics Staff various (80 – includes Aquatics Manager, Lifeguards, and Cashiers)
- Playground Staff various (80 – includes Summer Playground Program Manager)
- Field Rangers (4)
- Interns (3)

Golf Course Bureau

5 Full-time, 31 Part-time staff

- Golf Course Manager (1)
- Golf Course Superintendent (1)
- Greenskeeper (1)
- Maintenance Worker (2)
- Seasonal Laborer (10)
- Proshop Attendants (7)
- Starters (8)
- Driving Range Attendants (6)

5.3.2 Staffing considerations

Over recent years, the Parks & Recreation Department has reorganized with several important changes, including:

- some existing staff were reassigned to other existing positions,
- staff promotions,
- new staff was recruited and trained, and
- new positions were created.

Recent changes have enabled the Department to operate more effectively to serve the residents of Allentown – including the hiring of a new Director of Parks & Recreation. This action immediately strengthened internal operations of the Department, which has helped retain personnel; recognize staff commitments; deliver program consistency; and advance priority City initiatives.

Filling unstaffed Department positions will always be an imperative for fulfilling the Parks & Recreation mission.

Changes in the Department have also helped Recreation & Parks to be better prepared to collaborate with staff in other City departments where project’ jurisdictions overlap.

5.4 MAINTENANCE / OPERATIONS

5.4.1 Facilities / Equipment

Space / facilities limitations affect programming

Gyms, fields, pools and meeting rooms are precious recreational facilities in Allentown to and additional future facilities will likely be needed to accommodate growing public needs, especially during peak season.

In Allentown, many strong cultural connections to the game of soccer have sustained adult pickup games; informal leagues; and community-based tournaments. Soccer continues to grow among youth populations and is supported by school and neighborhood league programs.

Expanding access to soccer opportunities directly supports equitable recreational access for residents of all ages and backgrounds. Soccer was identified clearly during public meetings as a highly popular activity that does not yet have a tournament-level facility managed by the City.

Another activity in demand is swimming. The City was lacking a pool in the East Side for five years before the renovated Irving Pool at Andre Reed Park reopened in 2024. The new pool has a zero-depth beachfront entrance area, 3-foot-deep wading space for smaller children, a whirlpool and other amenities.

An additional active pool in the City provides a space for all people to learn how to swim in a controlled and safe environment,

Another highly popular activity is walking and trail usage. The City is meeting this need with the planned improvements to the Martin Luther King Drive Trail. The first phase will extend the trail west from Fountain Park to the Lehigh Parkway and is slated for construction in 2025. Later phases will extend the trail west to Cedar Beach Park and east to the D&L Trail. This extension will allow several neighborhoods to access recreational resources, schools, retail establishments, grocery stores and other businesses and offices in different parts of the City without the use of automobiles, providing for a sustainable and affordable means of travel.

Aging infrastructure

All facilities require managers to periodically assess conditions to identify specific details where outdated or fatigued resources may not meet current safety, accessibility, or program standards – and require remedy. Decisions to “repair or replace” are a major responsibility for Parks & Recreation.

The Department is improving recordkeeping of its recreation facilities – including a major update to the Parks & Recreation facilities inventory developed under this *Allentown Parks Plan 2025*.

Regular future updates of the facilities database by Parks & Recreation will enable the Department to: improve how it monitors conditions; maintain its recordkeeping; and help inform the annual repair/ replacement schedule across the entire park system.

Maintenance issues

Deferred maintenance is not unusual for recreation providers whose resources are stretched thin. Deferred maintenance / replacements can often result in recreation deficiencies such as unusable swimming pools, inadequate ADA safety matting, and limited restroom access. Allentown has been known for its maintenance capabilities in arbor and landscape maintenance, budgets are currently stretched to maintain park restrooms at levels adequate to keep all open regularly.

Facility Access & Shared Use Constraints

Parks & Recreation is reliant on the Allentown School District for access to gymnasiums and indoor spaces to conduct public recreation leagues and activities. This dependency creates scheduling and availability challenges, particularly during peak seasons or when schools host their own events. Options include revisiting terms of previous sharing agreements – including school uses of City park resources.



Allentown Parks and Recreation crew working on mulching parks to get them ready for spring. Rick Kintzel / The Morning Call

5.4.2 Safety

Safety in Allentown parks is paramount – and safety insecurities can stem from both physical and psychological factors.

Physical factors may include non-functioning equipment, lack of lighting, and unrepaired facilities.

Periodic physical safety issues can result from events, such as heavy traffic around and through parks, vandalism, and high-water events through the City riparian sites. Long term degradation of facilities without preventative maintenance or repair can also result in safety issues. All causes require continued immediate actions by Parks & Recreation to demonstrate responsiveness – including informing the public where to avoid safety issues – and timely, reliable statements on when the safety issues will be resolved.

Psychological factors include inadequate area lighting, poor visibility, and lack of security surveillance. “Indefensible spaces” is a term that describes the physical designs of places that are narrow, dead ends, desolate, or have obscured sight lines. Many of these defensibility issues can be solved with changes to physical designs of challenging places.

Some issues may be solved with emphasis on increased surveillance, including cameras in specific locations, and operational changes such as adding area light fixtures, and replacing dead lamps promptly.

Maintenance, in general, is a proactive safety measure – for both physical and psychological reasons. Attention to conditions, regular maintenance, and rapid repairs all signal that the site is under observation. Parks & Recreation manages parks vegetation regularly so that it is not overgrown or perceived as derelict.

Finally, the more people using a space, the more likely there will be a collective sense of security and many “eyes” on the place. Recreation programs and events are a great way to engage and bring people together, in addition to leisure use of parks. The Parks & Recreation dedication to keeping parks maintained is the foundation for people feeling safe in Allentown parks.

5.4.3 Trash

Trash is a major issue in most American cities, and park spaces can become overwhelmed by the shear volume of waste produced and disposed of improperly by citizens and visitors.

Limited parks staff and even more limited weekend staffers are available to perform trash cleanup – especially after many park visitors leave trash on the ground or piled near a trash can when visiting a park – rather than carrying it home and disposing of it properly.

Some changes to trash facilities may be considered in parks – such larger receptacles – which during non-peak periods may help reduce the frequency that trash cans are emptied – however, this does not resolve existing habits of littering, whatever the excuses. This issue becomes even more problematic when large groups visit the parks.

Changing people’s perceptions and reassessing their personal practices requires a marketing campaign beyond just the Parks & Recreation Department. A clean City is a matter of civic pride, and how best to instill this value into residents will require City-level time and focus. Perhaps the way to change bad public habits is to link actions directly to the degradation of the parks that people love – coupled with very simple ways to take ownership and personally care for parks, public streets, and the City overall.

Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. (formally Valania) Park is an example where nearby residents take personal time to clean up the park after events or weekends – so that the site is cleared of litter and trash is ready for Parks staff pickup. It provides these volunteers with a sense of civic pride. That strong stewardship ethic in practice by the neighbors of Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park may be the model for other neighborhoods across Allentown.

Looking at examples elsewhere in Pennsylvania, community members and officials in Wabash Valley enacted new approaches to curtail park littering. In addition to installing new trash bins, they include placing the bins and containers in easier-to-access locations, adding cigarette and recycling bins, installing new signage and covering bins to prevent wild animals from getting inside.

5.5 FINANCING

The Parks & Recreation Department 2025 operating budget totals \$8,087,937. This total represents about 5% of the Allentown total annual budget. Comparing this to national NRPA standards, jurisdictions with 100,000 to 250,000 residents have a median operating budget of \$13,552,112. Parks & Recreation’s full-time employee staff levels are 60% less than the national standard, while annual operating expenses are half that of the national standard.

Operating expenditure per capita for Allentown is approximately \$64. This is lower than the median of \$87 for jurisdictions with 100,000 to 250,000 residents.

Parks & Recreation current annual revenue tallies are minimal with primary generators being:

- \$290,000 Light in the Parkway (between admissions & sponsorships)
- \$250,000 Swimming Pool Fees
- \$ 92,000 Recreation Fees
- \$ 20,000 Special Events/Rentals/Permits
- **\$652,000 Total** (Source: 2025 City of Allentown General Fund)

The Allentown Municipal Golf Course operates its finances independently from the Parks & Recreation Department budget – and typically generates a positive net revenue ranging between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 depending on annual costs of course capital improvements and other course-related expenses.

The Department has been successful recently in securing various grants to support recreation programming efforts and capital improvements to its parks. The Project Coordinator position ensures that the Department is constantly seeking and applying for grants as well as overseeing the administration of grants and the capital projects they are funding.



Nearby residents of Clyde E. Bosket, Sr. Park volunteer their time to clean up trash to keep the park looking clean.

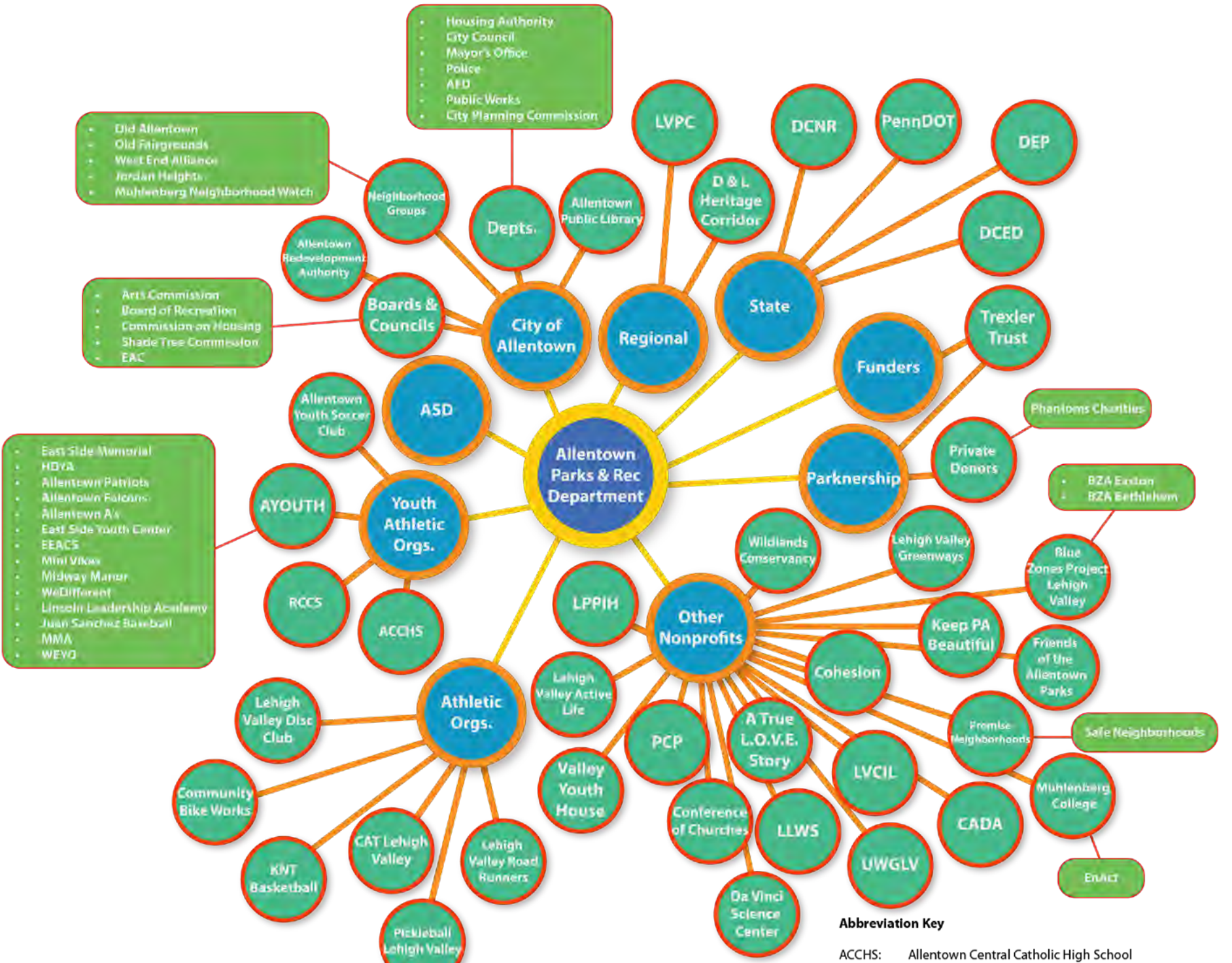


Fig. 5.1 Partnership Diagram

This partnership diagram was derived from discussions with staff and input from public meetings, but it does not represent all partners. It begins to show the reach and impact of the Parks and Recreation Dept across many user groups in the City and region.

5.5.1 Partnerships

Allentown is blessed with a broad cross-section of active partners, including two unique collaborating non-profits: The Trexler Trust and the Allentown Parknership



Trexler Trust

Begun in 1935, the Trexler Trust has awarded nearly \$185 million to the City of Allentown’s Parks and charitable Lehigh County organizations serving children, elders, and adults in the areas of education, socials services and the arts.

This funding includes more than \$61 million to the City of Allentown for the “improvements, extension and maintenance of all its parks.” General and Mrs. Trexler’s generosity towards the citizens of

Allentown and Lehigh County continues through this Trust. <https://trexlertrust.org/>



Allentown Parknership

The Allentown Parknership was founded in 2024 as a nonprofit corporation dedicated to collaboration with the Allentown Parks & Recreation Department.

Based on its charter, the Parknership will promote significant partnership opportunities that align City goals with multiple allied organizations dedicated groups to achieve community health, safety, wellness, and recreation goals.

The Parknership brings additional fundraising capacity as an Allentown partner and can serve as an advocate for Parks & Recreation during municipal budget discussions with a level of flexibility often unavailable to government agencies.

The Allentown Parknership builds on the legacy of General Trexler. The Trexler Trust provided the guidance, management expertise and seed funding to bring the Allentown Parknership to life as an independent entity. <https://allentownparknership.org>



D&L National Heritage Corridor

Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (DLNHC) is both a nonprofit organization preserving the historic pathway that carried coal and iron from Wilkes-Barre to Bristol to fuel America’s Industrial Revolution, and a multi-use trail spanning 165 miles from the mountains of northeast Pennsylvania through Bucks County. Today, the D&L Trail connects the region to its industrial heritage as well as health and wellness, nature and the

environment, and more than \$250 million in economic impact.

The Corridor traverses through Allentown and the Lehigh Valley, where the discovery of coal to the north spawned prosperous iron and steel industries.

The D&L is a true public-private partnership. Passionate residents and volunteers work alongside local, regional, and national entities to conserve cultural and natural resources in the five-county region of eastern Pennsylvania. <https://delawareandlehigh.org/>



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) was formed by Lehigh and Northampton counties in 1961 to create a comprehensive plan to guide orderly growth in Lehigh and

Northampton counties. They maintain a professional staff that is able to provide a wide variety of planning services to municipalities in the region.

The purpose of the LVPC is to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the Lehigh Valley region in accordance with the provisions of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The LVPC also conducts reviews and provides input on municipal comprehensive plans, comprehensive recreation, open space and parks plans and other planning projects to ensure they align with regional planning goals and objectives. <https://lvpc.org/>



Lehigh County

Allentown is the county seat of Lehigh County. The County is comprised of 347 square miles of rolling hills including over 18,000 acres of preserved farmland and a network of more than 17,000 acres of outdoor recreational parks that offer extensive leisure opportunities.

Lehigh County’s Department of Community and Economic Development(DCED) is committed to creating a vibrant Lehigh County by focusing on economic growth, revitalization of County cities and boroughs, regional partnerships with its twenty five municipalities, and enhancing the quality of life of its community. <https://www.lehighcounty.org/>



PennDOT

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is committed to investing in the communities in which their projects are located and involving these communities at the beginning of the planning process. Through its PennDOT Connects initiative, PennDOT

and its planning partners meet with local governments to discuss details for community projects prior to developing project scopes and cost estimates. All mobility needs are considered through the process, including bicycle, pedestrian, community health, stormwater management and green infrastructure needs.

<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/penndot/research-planning-and-innovation/penndot-connects>



Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards

Little Lehigh Water Stewards (LLWS) are volunteers who act to protect, preserve and restore the ecosystem and wildlife of the Little Lehigh Creek Watershed, through projects, advocacy, public education and engagement.

LLWS coordinates litter clean-ups along creeks in the Little Lehigh Watershed, including creeks in Allentown. In 2024, they removed 2,700 pounds of trash from multiple creek sites. They also monitor road salt impacts to the Little Lehigh and Jordan Creeks. <https://www.littlelehigh.org/>



Wildlands Conservancy

The mission of Wildlands Conservancy is to protect and restore critical natural areas and waterways, and educate the community to create a legacy of a healthy, sustainable, environment for future generations.

Wildlands Conservancy has preserved more than 60,000 acres of land on and in proximity to South Mountain, the Lehigh River Corridor, the Kittatinny Ridge (Blue Mountain), and the Pocono portion of the Lehigh River watershed. They also improve water quality and protect habitat through stream restoration, native plantings, and land protection.

<https://www.wildlandspa.org/>

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Cultural Programming

The Parks and Rec Department continues to increase support for and provide different cultural programs such as the Juneteenth, Three Kings Day, Bomba at the Cedar Beach, and Día de los Muertos. Additionally at Light in the Parkway Christmas, Hannukka, Kwanzaa, Three Kings, are all celebrated. These programs provide opportunities for people to enjoy and learn about cultural food, music, dances and celebrations.



April Gamiz/The Morning Call



April Gamiz/The Morning Call

Volunteers

Volunteers have long supported the Allentown Parks & Recreation Department with passion, stewardship, and pride. Parks & Recreation can explore opportunities to coordinate efforts with volunteer organizations – based upon realistic capabilities of both organizations.

Volunteers have demonstrated successful collaborations with government recreation partners across the nation with services that include: enhancing programs and special events, supporting staff efforts to improve natural spaces; specific assistance related to clean-up and litter removal; and education in multiple appropriate subject areas.

Volunteer contributions help strengthen community connections and in-kind labor contributions may also serve as valuable matching shares toward cash grants to municipal partners.

Seasonal initiatives like *Spring into Your Park* and *Fall into Your Park* might begin with program support from volunteers – with potential to grow into a sustainable model that celebrates and empowers community volunteers who help “champion” the hard work and dedication of the Allentown Parks & Recreation staff.

Organizations such as the Allentown Arts Commission help the Parks & Recreation Department with special events in the City. In the past, they have assisted with children’s art events for Monday Funday and installed murals at the basketball court at Stevens Park and at Fountain Park.

Educational institutions, such as the Baum School, a community visual arts school located next to Arts Park, focus much of their community programming on events and youth programming in Arts Park. In addition, conservation groups, such as the Lehigh Gap Nature Center, provide environmental education to children enrolled in the Department’s summer playground program.



Getting ready to play basketball at Roosevelt Park.



Blue Zones Project Lehigh Valley

<https://bluezonesprojectlehighvalley.com>

The Blue Zones Project Lehigh Valley is a community-led initiative focused on improving overall well-being by encouraging healthier lifestyles, stronger social connections, and supportive environments. Its mission is to transform communities through evidence-based strategies that promote longevity and quality of life – which is an international initiative that may be a natural partner in helping Parks & Recreation to meet its health and sustainability goals. Collaborating with the Blue Zones Project offers the potential to enhance the City’s outreach and leverage community engagement to maximize impacts.



Da Vinci Science Center

The Da Vinci Science Center, located in downtown Allentown, got its roots in 1992 when Lehigh University in Bethlehem formed the Science Model Area Resource Team (SMART) to provide interactive science experiences for local students. Its vision is to be a leader and partner advancing science learning, quality of life, and economic development in the Lehigh Valley area, in part, by delivering enjoyable experiences for families and schools that encourage interest in science and contributing to social and economic vitality.

<https://www.davincisciencecenter.org/>



Interdepartmental Partnerships

Department of Public Works

The Department of Public Works (DPW) assists Parks & Recreation with upgrading park sidewalks, and installing ADA ramps and pedestrian lighting at park sites. They also serve a supporting role in park capital projects and provide guidance on small-scale construction documents and plans.

City Planning Commission

With the completion of the *Citywide Bike Plan*, the *Safe Streets for All Action Plan*, and this *Parks Plan*, the City Planning Commission and Parks & Recreation will be able to partner on ways to integrate the open space and connectivity opportunities presented in these plans with land development and the long-range planning process in the City.

Emergency Services

The Allentown Police Department, Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services cooperate on responding to safety concerns and enforcing regulations and rules within the parks. The Police Department also participates at special events throughout the year and sets up informational table where community members can meet and interact with the officers who keep their parks safe. The Police Athletic League’s (PAL) summer camp also partners with Parks & Recreation to host campers at park facilities, such as the Cedar Beach Pool.

Environmental Advisory Council

The Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) supports Parks & Recreation on sustainability initiatives, provides input on planning projects, including this Parks Plan, and assists with park cleanup events.



5.5.2 Potential funding strategies

Most public projects are funded and built in phases, and usually with multiple partners. Fortunately, the City of Allentown has a strong record of securing project funding from multiple sources for various planning and implementation projects.

It will be essential for the Allentown Parks & Recreation Department to continue these strategic partnerships that match the types of projects with those mission-aligned funding partners. More than one project may be advanced simultaneously, depending on project types, funding sources available during specific periods, and the sources of matching funds that the City can raise internally or by leveraging partners.

In some cases, Allentown may be able to match funds from one partner to meet the requirements of another – a strategy that, when possible, helps stretch finite local dollars further.

Forming a clear understanding of which type of project is to be advanced will help greatly toward defining which funding formula options are realistic to develop into matching partnership applications that can advance a clearly achievable phase of a specific project.

A close review of the potential partner funding sources that are described in this chapter will identify which partners will fund what types of projects – as well as what phases of projects they will fund, such as planning, design/engineering, and/or construction.

5.5.3 Potential Funding Sources

Federal Sources



US Department of Transportation (DOT) (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program (RCP)

In 2022, \$1 billion was announced to be available over 5 years as planning and capital construction grants to fund projects that restore community connectivity by retrofitting, removing, or mitigating barriers imposed by transportation infrastructure, including roads, highways, and rail lines, among others. Applications from economically disadvantaged communities are given priority and state DOTs must provide them with technical assistance through the Reconnecting Communities Institute.

For more information, visit: <https://www.transportation.gov/reconnecting>

Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)

Starting in 2022, \$5 billion in funding is available over 5 years for planning and implementation projects that improve roadway safety by preventing deaths and serious injuries. Allentown has developed an Action Plan as defined by DOT and will be able to apply for funding through the SS4A program, so long as the plan is focused in part on the roadway network within Allentown.

For more information, visit: <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/SS4A>



National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (DWCF)

The Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund was launched in 2018 to conserve and restore natural areas, corridors, and waterways on public and private lands that support native fish, wildlife, and plants, and to contribute to the vitality of the communities in the Delaware River watershed. Priority strategies for on-the-ground implementation include sustaining and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat; improving and maintaining water quality for fish, wildlife, and people; sustaining and enhancing water management to benefit fish and wildlife; and improving outdoor recreational opportunities within the Delaware River watershed.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/delaware-river-program>

Delaware River Restoration Fund

The Delaware River Restoration Fund was launched in late 2013 to help community-based nonprofits and government agencies work together to clean up and restore polluted waters and improve habitat for target species, including eastern brook trout and river herring, in the Delaware River Watershed.

The Fund awards at least \$2 million per year in competitive grants, geographically focused on three priority strategies: (1) stewardship of working lands; (2) restoration of wetlands, floodplains and stream corridors; and (3) promoting the adoption of green infrastructure in urban / suburban landscapes.

Since 2014, the Delaware River Restoration Fund has awarded 90 grants totaling roughly \$14.7 million. These investments leveraged more than \$23.36 million in grantee matching funds to fund agriculture conservation, green stormwater infrastructure and innovative projects to improve the water quality of the Delaware River. To date, the fund has implemented more than 23,500 acres of best management practices to improve water quality and restored more than 190 acres of wetlands and 60 miles of riparian habitat.

The Delaware River Restoration Fund is administered by NFWF in cooperation with the Delaware River Watershed Initiative, with major funding from the William Penn Foundation.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/delaware-river-program>



The beautiful Lehigh River, seen here from Canal Park, is part of the larger Delaware River Watershed and often work on the river can be funded through various sources such as NFWF DWCF. April Bartholomew / The Morning Call



PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), Commonwealth Financing Agency (CFA)

Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program (GTRP)

The Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program (GTRP) provides funding for: constructing public park and recreation area projects, greenway and trail projects, and river or creek conservation projects. The program requires a 15% local cash match of the total project cost and applicant requests for DCED share of funding must not exceed \$250,000. Annual applications to DCED are typically due in late May.

For more information, visit: <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/greenways-trails-and-recreation-program-gtrp/>
Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF)

The DCED Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF) is administered through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and provides grants to encourage economic development by ensuring that a safe and reliable multimodal transportation system is available to the residents of the Commonwealth. Funds may be used for preliminary engineering tasks, as well as development, rehabilitation, and enhancement of transportation assets within existing communities – such as streetscape, lighting, sidewalk enhancement, pedestrian safety, connectivity of transportation assets, and transit-oriented development.

MTF grants are available for projects with a total cost of \$100,000 or more, and grants shall not exceed \$3,000,000 for any project. The CFA will consider grant requests over \$3,000,000 for projects that will significantly impact the CFA's goal to leverage private investment and create jobs in the Commonwealth. Financial assistance under the Multimodal Transportation Fund shall be matched by local funding in an amount not less than 30% of the non-federal share of the project costs.

For more information, visit: <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/multimodal-transportation-fund/>



PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2)

The Community Recreation and Conservation Program through the PA DCNR Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2) provides funding to

municipalities and authorized non-profit organizations for recreation, park, trail and conservation projects. These grants may fund planning for feasibility studies, trail studies, conservation plans, master site development plans, and comprehensive recreation park and open space and greenway plans. The program also provides funding for land acquisition for active or passive parks, trails and conservation purposes, and construction and rehabilitation of parks, trails, and recreation facilities. Most of these projects require a 50% match, which can include a combination of cash and/or non-cash values. Grant applications for the C2P2 program are accepted annually—usually in April.

For more information, visit: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dcnr/programs-and-services/grants/community-conservation-partnerships-program-grants>

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program, established in 1965, is a federal source of funding distributed to all states by the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service. The program provides matching grants for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. DCNR administers the LWCF Program for Pennsylvania.

For more information, visit: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dcnr/programs-and-services/grants/land-and-water-conservation-fund-grants>



Pennsylvania
Department of Transportation

PA Department of Transportation (PennDOT)

Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Program

PennDOT administers the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation Alternatives - TA Set-Aside Program under the Surface Transportation Program (STP) for community-based “nontraditional” projects that are designed to strengthen the cultural, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of the nation’s intermodal transportation system. The program seeks to provide funding for the construction of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation. Non-motorized forms of transportation include sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety related infrastructure, and transportation projects to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

There is a minimum award of \$50,000 for construction projects and a maximum award of \$1,500,000, although higher awards can be justified for “exceptional” projects. No applicant match is required, but all engineering and environmental clearances must be completed with non-FHWA funds to enable the TA funds to be used for construction and construction inspections. This source of funding is at risk due to policies of the Trump administration.

For more information, visit: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennDOT/research-planning-and-innovation/transportation-alternatives-set-aside-program>

Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS)

The SRTS program is administered by PennDOT through the federal TA Set-Aside program. SRTS is a national and international movement to create safe, convenient, and healthy opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to school. By getting more children to walk and bicycle to school, communities are helping children be healthier, reducing fuel consumption, alleviating traffic congestion, and improving air quality. SRTS programs are built on collaborative partnerships among many stakeholders, including educators, parents, students, elected officials, engineers, city planners, business and community leaders, health officials, and bicycle and pedestrian advocates.

Eligible activities include new or reconstructed sidewalks or pathways, pedestrian and bicycle signs or signals, transportation projects that achieve ADA compliance, such as curb ramps, bike parking facilities or bus bike racks, shared use paths, side paths, trails that serve a transportation purpose, crossing improvements, and traffic realignments, road diets, or intersection changes. This source of funding is at risk due to policies of the Trump administration.

For more information, visit: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennDOT/research-planning-and-innovation/transportation-alternatives-set-aside-program/safe-routes-to-school>



Partnering with groups like Wildlands Conservancy can bring opportunities for tree plantings and restoration work.

Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF)

PennDOT administers Federal Highway Administration funds as a state Multimodal Transportation Fund program to provide grants that ensure that a safe and reliable system of transportation is available directly to the communities and residents of the Commonwealth. The program is intended to provide financial assistance to municipalities, councils of governments, businesses, economic development organizations, public transportation agencies, rail freight, passenger rail, and ports to improve transportation assets that enhance communities, pedestrian safety, and transit revitalization. Grants are available for projects with a total cost of \$100,000 or more. Grants normally do not exceed \$3,000,000 for any project.

The PennDOT Office of Multimodal Transportation will consider grant requests over \$3,000,000 for projects that will significantly impact PennDOT’s goal to leverage private investment and create jobs in the Commonwealth. Financial assistance under the Multimodal Transportation Fund shall be matched by local funding in an amount not less than 30% of the amount awarded. These federal funds cannot be matched by other federal funding.

For more information, visit: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/penndot/programs-and-doing-business/multimodal-transportation>

Municipal Budgets – Capital and Operations

The City of Allentown’s General Fund, which receives its revenues through taxes, primarily earned income taxes, real estate taxes and business privilege taxes, allocates funds to various City departments, including the Parks & Recreation Department. These funds are budgeted toward administrative operations, maintenance, special events, organized sports, aquatics and capital projects.

The City also receives approximately \$2 million annually from the Trexler Trust, which goes toward administrative operations, maintenance and capital projects.

Municipal Bonds

The City can also fund park costs through the issuance of municipal bonds. The type of bond that would most commonly be issued is a general obligation bond, which is backed by the full faith and credit of the City. In 2024, the City received an upgrade in its general obligation debt rating from an A3 to A2, and in August 2025, City Council approved a plan to issue up to \$134 million worth of bonds to help fund capital projects. \$17,655,988 will be going to park capital projects that include a new maintenance facility, Franklin Park construction, courts and fields upgrades, Mack Pool renovations, MLK Trail connections, Fountain Park improvements, and Canal Park improvements.

Volunteers

As discussed throughout this report, local organizations and nonprofit groups assist with park cleanup and programming. These groups can also help raise funds for individual parks and also be a conduit for tax-deductible donations if they are established as a 501(C)3 nonprofit group. While the amount of funds raised may be relatively small, the process builds constituents and support for the parks and recreation system.

In-kind Donations and Technical assistance

The parks system can also receive support from in-kind donations, which are non-monetary contributions of goods and services, as well as technical assistance / experience. Donated goods can include plants for landscaping, tools for improvements and building materials for upgrades, and professionals such as landscape architects and designers can donate their technical skills to help design park plans and landscape plans, while support professionals, such as web designers and marketing experts, can donate their time in developing materials or social media posts to promote new park programming, infrastructure upgrades or facility improvements.



Renaissance Park in Trout Creek Park was done in partnership between the City of Allentown and the Lehigh County Conservation District.



Two of the many Parks and Recreation staff dedicated to successful programs and safe and clean facilities are Kyle Zimpfer, Recreation Program Specialist (left), and Darren Benson, Jr., Park Specialist (right).



6

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities are choices the City of Allentown may elect to advance priority improvements to its Parks, Recreation and Open Space system. Opportunities are categorized by: **Infrastructure**; **Programs**; and **Management**.

City Council and the Administration, including the Department of Parks and Recreation may select opportunities to pursue each year based on multiple factors, including but not limited to:

- available funding
- geographic distribution
- service priorities
- equity
- other criteria per Council discretion

Opportunities	
6.1 Infrastructure	
6.1.1	Parks and Recreation Facilities - Advance Park Master Plans
a	Bucky Boyle Park
b	Roosevelt Park
c	Fountain Park
d	Samual McHose Memorial Park
e	Other recreation infrastructure
6.1.2	Street meets Park
a	Continue the Legacy of Allentown Tree Stewardship
b	Continue pursuing comprehensive safety improvements
6.1.3	Waterways in Parks
6.1.4	Utilities in parks
6.1.5	Stormwater Management and Parks
6.1.6	Cultural Resources within Parks
6.1.7	Trail & Greenway Connections to Parks
6.1.8	Ecosystems of Public Spaces
6.2 Programming	
6.2.1	Programming Partnerships
6.2.2	Serving the Under-represented
6.2.3	Integrating Recreation Programming
6.3 Management	
6.3.1	Policies & Procedures
a	Seek Rec TAP or DCNR Peer Grant for Management Assessment
b	Document Dept Policies & Procedure clearly
c	Simplify Administrative Procedures for Non-City Planners
d	Continue Periodic Public Involvement Venues
e	Continue Periodic User Surveys
f	Revisit Agreements Between City and School District
g	Educate Residents About Their Civic Responsibilities
h	Improve Intra-department Communications
i	Plan Collaboratively Across City Agencies
j	Evolve the Details of the City-Parknership Collaboration
6.3.2	Operation and Maintenance
a	Compile and Regularly Update a Procedures Manual

b	Maintain Up-To-Date Records of Facilities and Procedures
c	Repair, Maintain, and Improve Existing Park Infrastructure
d	Pursue a Single, Central Maintenance Building Solution
e	Retain Current and Increase the Number of Park Staff
f	Opportunities for the Golf Course
g	Opportunities for Aquatics/ Pools
h	Formalize a Parks Maintenance Manual
6.3.3	Governance
a	Consider non-profit partnerships to help supplement services
b	Formalize Inter-Department Planning in Allentown
c	Foster External Agency Partnerships
d	Strategically Balance Investments with Maintenance Efficiency
6.3.4	Finance
a	Align Budget Cycles of Trexler Trust with City of Allentown
b	Seek to Increase Income Generation Opportunities
c	Increase Collaboration with Funding Partners
d	Advocate for additional Operating/Capitol Funds
e	Match Transportation Funding Sources with Strategic Funding for Capital Improvement of Parks
f	Use Municipal Stormwater fees to leverage other funds for parks
g	Target Ecological Priorities within the Parks to Secure Habitat Restoration Funding
h	Require Development Partners to Contribute to Improvements
i	Bring Services to the Parks
6.4 Partnership Dreams	
a	Historic Industrial Infrastructure - Canal Park
b	Riparian Restoration of Cedar Creek where MLK Trail will Connect Cedar Beach and Union Terrace
c	Multi-Modal Highway Retrofits - Cedar Creek Trail between Cedar Beach and Trexler Park
d	Road Diet for Safe Ped-Bike Travel on Hamilton Street Bridge
e	Private Contributions to Public Access Improvements – Bridges, Ramps, Stairs
f	Private Property Donations to the Allentown Parks System
g	Highway Safety Improvements to Connect People to Parks - a Jefferson St. / Tioga St. / Lehigh Pkwy. / Park Dr. Roundabout
h	Deepening the Relationship Between Allentown Residents and their Park System

6.1 INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES

General

Parks are more than civic spaces with facilities for recreation.

Parks combine diverse elements of public infrastructure - “gray, green, and blue” – which can function together to deliver multiple levels of resilient public services when smartly designed and well maintained.

Well-maintained parks require the combined skills of those who manage recreation facilities (gray infrastructure) with the experience of those who steward natural resources (blue and green infrastructure.) Allentown has a tradition of managing facilities and caring for natural resources in its parks. This can be observed in the historic and continued City stewardship of its majestic canopy trees in both Allentown parks and along its public streetscapes.

The parks of Allentown are legacy hubs for community activities. Parks unite people behind shared values of safety, access, and inclusion. And those physical spaces present a collective *sense of place* for people to belong.

Well-managed parks and natural infrastructure may be the most recognizable civic face of Allentown’s commitment to its people. The conditions of park infrastructure signal Allentown community values.

6.1.1 Parks and recreation facilities

This **Allentown Parks Plan 2025** presents the work of City staff, residents, and stakeholders to describe a collective vision for the future of the entire Allentown Parks and Recreation system – that was developed through a public process that is generally called a “Comprehensive Recreation and Open Space Plan” (CROSP).

This Plan report addresses infrastructure and programming and management opportunities at the *City-wide* level.

Infrastructure Opportunity 1-1 – Advance park master plans

Master plans engage additional public participation and dive into deeper levels of analyses and opportunities for park infrastructure – which also informs programming and management opportunities at that specific site.

The City of Allentown selected three parks for master planning within the scope of this municipal-level CROSP project. Allentown selected four parks for master planning as part of the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 process:

- Bucky Boyle Park
- Roosevelt Park
- Fountain Park
- Samuel McHose Park

The products of these four master plans include: records of specific public participation; preferred site plans; and master plan-level cost estimates for each park. Brief narrative descriptions of each park and potential improvements for each are described below.

All four parks, and previously-completed master plans stand ready as opportunities for the City to advance into the design/construction-phases of infrastructure projects.

Refer to the Appendix for master plan site plans and costs.

Previous page: *Stretching at Fountain Park*

Opportunity 1-1a Bucky Boyle Park (C7)

Bucky Boyle Park is a 9-acre community park that lies along the Lehigh River and is a revered place for many who grew up and live in Center City – as well as a destination for residents across Allentown. The public survey revealed that Bucky Boyle Park is the third most-visited park in the Allentown system.

Recently, the park received upgrades to the play field and parking lights; basketball courts were rehabilitated; and fencing was installed along the third baseline and part of the outfield of the diamond field nearest to Riverside Drive.

During public engagement sessions, residents expressed their love for Bucky Boyle Park but noted the need for many elements to be added, fixed, or made larger to improve service to the entire City.

The Master Plan for Bucky Boyle presents opportunities to address infrastructure improvements based on comments from the public, advice from the project steering committee, and observations by the planning team. The Bucky Boyle Park Master Plan acknowledges possibilities for Allentown at this site, and identifies future infrastructure improvements including:

- **Redesign entrance** – to improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation beginning with a more legible and safer entrance. A small, and otherwise unusable, parcel of land between the park and Riverside Dr. may need to be acquired.
- **Realign parking** – to add 32 more parking spaces, without encroaching on existing recreation or ecological resources.
- **Make ADA access improvements in public right of way** – at the existing crossings at Riverside Drive and Pump Place to improve universal accessibility into the park and to reinforce traffic calming.
- **Upgrade existing community building** – that can be redesigned to continue to function as an important community space for events, but with modern safety, amenity, utilities, and aesthetic improvements.
- **Update public restrooms** – with modern systems and to meet ADA requirements. This might be accomplished as a discrete project based on the urgent public demand for these facilities to be open regularly, where they currently are not at this heavily used site.
- **Improve / simplify entry plaza** – for multiple reasons, including aesthetics; re-imaging potential uses for this civic space, and the ecological / energy mitigations that may be achieved by optimizing canopy vegetation to temper this space from heat island extremes.
- **Redesign existing pavilion plaza** – to provide more space in front of the pavilion for programming or seating area. The railings of the pavilion facing the open space might be removed so that the pavilion may serve as stage for different programs. The pavilion needs minor repairs and updating.
- **Increase playground area** – to include sensory play facilities that create a more inclusive play space at this major community park. A fence around the play area can improve safety.

- **Improve existing spray pad** – by increasing its size and functions to accommodate a broader range of users and more users at one time.
- **Increase swing area** – to include different swing types that can provide a variety of experiences for different age groups and abilities who all love swings.
- **Formalize park trail** – where it wraps around the play fields to: provide easier pedestrian movement throughout the park; facilitate vendor uses; and provide loop alignments for exercise. Trail improvements will all be ADA-compliant and include benches along the routes.
- **Repair existing structures (below pavilion)** – to create riverside access with opportunities for additional programming such as boating, fishing, and wildlife viewing.
- **Formalize / reopen public access to the Lehigh River** – including repairing the existing steps and creating an ADA-accessible route along the river edge between the boat house and the riverside pavilion trail along the Lehigh River.
- **Provide naturalized planting areas** – where lawn is not needed and where possible for stormwater BMPs. Some planting beds may be designed for aesthetics/low maintenance needs near the community building and play elements. Protection measures should be considered as part of the design of the beds.
- **Begin riparian ecosystem management** – along the Lehigh River where invasives need removal to enhance biodiversity, habitat, and stabilize the streambank.
- **Add canopy trees** – along the trails and incorporated into play areas to deliver much-needed shade.
- **Integrate stormwater management facilities** – where possible in places stormwater washes away mulch in planting beds. A future site design project can include stormwater BMPs as an element of the comprehensive site rehabilitation.

Related management and programming opportunities specific to Bucky Boyle include:

- **Collaborate with clubs on sports facilities** – to coordinate ballfields and basketball court that are constantly used and not only for sports events. Clear coordination between users is important.
- **Manage sports fields for health and longevity** - consider irrigation and adopting resting times for fields so that they continue to serve as needed and periods of time for repair are minimized.
- **Evolve program offerings** – Bucky Boyle Park is the site for many beloved community programs, including: Movies in the Park; Easter Egg Hunt; Lehigh Valley Children’s Festival; and more. A renovated community building will support additional programs for all ages. People identified a farmer’s market as a potential program for Bucky Boyle.

Master Plan-level Costs-Bucky Boyle Park – The master plan-level estimate to implement improvements identified for Bucky Boyle is approximately \$3.5 million in 2025.



Expanded park size can provide more inclusive play elements like this park in Upper Providence Twp. General Recreation, Inc.



Larger swings areas can provide different types of swinging. Albert Yee/Fairmount Park Conservancy



Tree lined paths provide comfort during community programs



Native planting beds, once established, benefit both humans and animals. Monarch Gardens



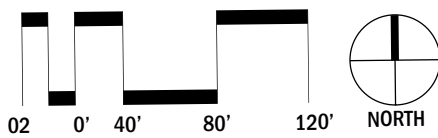
The Riverwalk in Chicago is one of many urban examples of public water access. Patrick L Pyszka/ City of Chicago



Fig. 6.1 Bucky Boyle Park Masterplan

Bucky Boyle Park Master Plan

Allentown Parks Plan 2025



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COLLINS
Project #: 22028.10

Opportunity 1-1b Roosevelt Park (S4)

Roosevelt Park is a 7-acre community park in the South Side of Allentown between Trout Creek and the Lehigh River. Roosevelt is surrounded by residential homes, except on the southwest side where the Mercy School for Special Learning is across South Woodward Street.

Roosevelt once featured a swimming pool that was backfilled to create the existing tennis courts. The remaining pool house is slated for demolition in 2025, and a new pavilion is planned to be added.

Little interaction regarding this park occurred during public events, though people responded in the public survey with ideas they would like – including reliably-open restrooms and remedies for erosion caused by stormwater runoff.

The Roosevelt Park Master Plan identified preferred future infrastructure improvements including:

- **Add walking path throughout park** – for ADA accessibility and amenity, with benches along the route.
- **Add picnic tables and shade.**
- **Rehabilitate the basketball courts.**
- **Create a community garden** – with partners, that may be modeled after the Lehigh County Community Garden Plots, to provide neighborhood access to garden space where the community can produce healthy food and promote sustainable gardening practices. Consider incorporating a pollinator garden.
- **Plant shade trees next to the basketball courts** – that can formalize an allée planting treatment at the park entrance and shade seating and a gathering space with picnic tables. The surface of the gathering space can be chipped stone to reduce issues with mud and soil compaction.
- **Create a larger playground area** – to add universal play elements. Mercy School might be approached as a potential partner in developing this playground.
- **Tap into existing facilities** – where possible, when adding a new splash pad for water play near the old pool house location.

- **Add a pavilion** – near the play area for shade and possible rental venue for gatherings / parties.
- **Modernize existing restrooms** – to be functional and ADA-compliant, with additional rest facilities.
- **Install ADA crosswalk features at park entrances** – where they do not exist at corners and at select midblock locations to improve safety and support traffic calming
- **Improve parking lot** – by adding a bumpout for safety where South Firr Street enters the parking lot. Stripe a drop-off area at the driveway curve as a staging area for community garden materials.
- **Plant additional trees throughout the park** – for more shade and habitat.
- **Add rain gardens / bioswales** – where possible to address stormwater erosion issues that are visible below the area proposed for the new spray pad.
- **Consider modifying the ball field area to a multi-use field** – that can also accommodate soccer.
- **Revisit tennis court viability** – based upon mixed reactions, citing minimal use and the issues with court maintenance. Tennis courts have been repainted to also serve pickleball uses. (Note: Allentown is noticeably deficient in tennis courts as noted in benchmarking. Section 2.1.5 pg 19)

Related management and programming opportunities specific to Roosevelt include:

- Continue public involvement – During the (next) design phase, the Parks & Recreation team can engage in additional community involvement to complete the neighborhood collaboration for the final design.

Master Plan-level Costs-Roosevelt Park – The master plan-level estimate to implement improvements identified for Roosevelt is approximately \$2.5 million in 2025.



Seating under trees is a great amenity in any park. Deeproot



Small community gardens in a park can provide opportunity for all ages.



Pavilions are great for small events or just getting out of the sun.



Rain gardens help with stormwater and habitat for pollinators.



Benches along paths provide places to rest, observe and converse.



Fig. 6.2 Roosevelt Park Masterplan

Opportunity 1-1c Fountain Park (C1)

Fountain Park is a 20.8-acre community park that will also host a critical new segment of the Martin Luther King Jr. Trail – where it will connect to the Little Lehigh Parkway Trail. This improvement will significantly increase the number of people who can safely access the park by means other than by car.

Fountain is physically divided by both South 10th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive – and the Master Plan reflects many ideas offered by residents at project events and through the online survey.

People remain passionate about Fountain Park, as many remember when the neighborhood had a functioning swimming pool (not operational since 2009), and deteriorated aquatic facilities remain a visible reminder. Calls over the years to reopen the pool have not resulted in pool replacement or rehabilitation – for multiple reasons, including the highly vulnerable flood plain location. Public interest in recreation infrastructure improvements at the beloved Fountain Park site are not singular to pool replacement.

A large number of participants recognized Fountain Park as an opportunity to add a community recreation center facility – which was identified as a major city-wide need. Any investments in large infrastructure improvements at Fountain Park must consider the physical reality that the entire park lies within the floodplain. The strategy to explore a new community center facility at Fountain Park recognizes the potential for a new community center structure to be constructed above the flood level.

Also of great public concern is the combination of natural and man-made infrastructure along the Little Lehigh Creek waterway – which attracts bathers in the Little Lehigh Creek at the dam location directly behind the closed swimming pool. The existing dam is a typical gray infrastructure element that is an essential part of the Allentown drinking water system. The dam structure cannot be easily modified to make the waterway around it safer for bathers. Controlling public use of Allentown waterways for bathing remains a City safety priority.

Fountain Park ballfields and the multi-use fields are actively used. The public noted that when Fountain Park is busy, parking can be an issue, and the 25 MPH speed limit along this stretch of Martin Luther King Jr Drive is largely ignored.

The Fountain Park Master Plan identified future infrastructure improvements including:

- **Remove the old pool / bath house structures** from the site.
- **Build a new community recreation center** – elevated above the floodplain (parking below).
- **Create additional parking** – around a new community center building and possibly under an elevated Central structure.
- **Add a cool misting station** – on the east side of the park with shade sails to provide for cooling during summer months.
- **Build a new pavilion with restrooms** – near the misting area and adjacent to the existing basketball court.
- **Improve adjacent street crossings for safety and accessibility** – including signalization improvements and traffic calming measures were feasible.
- **Add walkways to improve connectivity and accessibility** throughout the park, including:
 - Extend walkway on MLK Drive to the intersection at South 10th Street
 - Add a loop trail around the existing ballfields
 - Create an Art Walk trail adjacent to a new Art Wall
 - Build a nature trail that connects the proposed MLK Trail extension to a new boardwalk
 - Consider a “story and art trail” next to the WPA stairs across Martin Luther King Jr Drive
- **Add a new playground with updated, universal elements** – on the west side of the multi-use field, including:
 - a perimeter fence for security
 - a restroom between the playground and field
 - gaming tables for chess/checkers and other popular games.

- **Renovate the existing basketball court and add another basketball court** to provide more opportunities for tournament play.
- **Relocate / renovate the existing volleyball court** – with a new pavilion.
- **Add a walking trail across Martin Luther King Jr Drive** – with the idea of partnering with the library to provide a “storybook trail” and highlight the existing WPA stairway.
- **Make improvements to site vegetation** – including: adding trees; restoring streambank stability and biodiversity; and adding rain gardens for stormwater management.
- **Plant a tree grove with picnic tables / benches** – on the east side near the existing basketball court to provide shade and comfort for users / gatherings.
- **Add pavilion(s) with an area for outdoor games** – like cornhole, ladder toss, or spikeball between the new extension of the Martin Luther King Jr. Trail and the Little Lehigh Creek.
- **Build a sustainable boardwalk structure** – along a strategic section of the creek for fishing, wildlife observation and relaxation.
- **Install signage around the park** – to educate users about history, ecology and recreation.
- **Collaborate with authorities to create safety measures** – such as signage, fencing, and buoys to keep people from swimming near the dam. Safety flotation devices can be installed as an immediate response to help anyone who is in danger in the waterway.
- **Consider art to help re-establish a sense of place** – using color, lighting, and materials to visually link all the sides of the park that are separated by roads.
- **Collaborate with local artists to paint the existing flood wall** on the west side of the park. Recently the wall has been painted and brings bright color. Opportunities to let local artists add to the painting still exists.
- **Incorporate local art into the Community Center façade** – one side might be a mural wall.
- **The existing ballfields will be left as is**, although they are not in the optimum orientation. If the fields are to be improved in the future, geometric modifications may be considered – as per official baseball guidance – the desirable line from home plate through to second base should run east/northeast – so that the setting sun will not interfere with the batter during evening games.
- **Stabilize streambank areas where needed** - using natural materials such as stone slabs to help armor the streambank to reduce erosion and create a more stable access location to the water’s edge.
- **Make drainage improvements** – including regrading and underdrains to make sure the field area is as useable as possible throughout the seasons.
- **Add a tree grove with seating** – for shade and gathering opportunities long the hillside, north of the multi-use field.
- **Consider the area of Little Lehigh for fishing access and wildlife observation** – west of the 10th Street Bridge. This area is also more visible, and acknowledged recreation uses may help deter illegal activities.

Related management and programming opportunities specific to Fountain include:

- **Revisit City management strategies for natural waterway safety** – that include combinations of education, monitoring and enforcement of no bathing regulations in the Little Lehigh Creek and other natural waterways that flow through Allentown. Controlling public use of Allentown waterways for bathing remains a City management priority.
- **Revisit City management strategies to reduce littering** – some locations known for bathing in creeks are also considered notorious for park users littering and leaving behind mountains of trash. Bathing and litter may be best addressed as separate stewardship challenges.

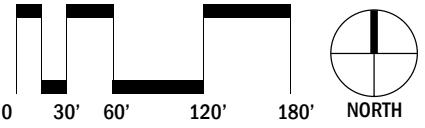
Master Plan-level Costs-Fountain Park – The master plan-level estimate to implement improvements identified for Fountain is approximately \$18.5 million in 2025. Note: The estimated cost of a new community center facility accounts for a significant percentage of this total project estimate.



Fig. 6.3 Fountain Park Masterplan

Fountain Park Master Plan

Allentown Parks Plan 2025





Misting station does not use as much water as a splash pad, but is still refreshing. habitat



Picnic tables under trees are a great place to gather and relax. Stockcake



This boardwalk along the stream is in Gardiner Maine.



Recent painting on the flood plain wall has brought new life to the otherwise bland concrete wall.



Storybook trails are great partnerships with the Library and can be changed periodically. Becca Mathias

Opportunity 1-1d Samuel McHose Memorial Park (C13)

Samuel McHose Memorial Park is 0.7-acre passive park that is considered by many neighborhood residents as the community gateway into Bucky Boyle Park, which is located directly across Riverside Drive.

Parks & Recreation requested that McHose be added to the three original master plans in this **Allentown Parks Plan 2025** – based on pending plans for neighboring sites by private developers – including proposals to modify the small park without conducting the essential community engagement process.

Developer plans proposed for McHose Park included major changes to transform the site from its historic, passive gateway park character to a formalized public plaza design with extensive hard paved surfaces, casting much of the site in shade most of the year by the 8-story building proposed directly south of the park. The developer plan was not favored in public responses.

Master plan visioning was conducted with the public at meetings and during an event at Bucky Boyle Park, where consensus was confirmed that the site should remain similar to its current configuration – with major ADA access improvements incorporated in the rehabilitation design. Tree canopy and large open lawn space was preferred by people living west of Front Street

The Samuel McHose Memorial Park Master Plan identified future design improvements including:

- **Install ADA improvements in the public rights of way** – added to the crossings at North Front Street and Pump Place to improve accessibility to the park and support traffic calming.
- **Widen the sidewalk on Front Street** – at the upper gateway location
- **Improve (existing) seating plaza** – that will be shaded and invite users into the passive park.
- **Feature the existing McHose monument** – at the center of the park and highlight the existing memorial at the top of the park.
- **Add new sidewalk section along Pump Place** – to create a better connection to Riverside Drive / Bucky Boyle Park.
- **Improve internal paths** – to move users around the McHose monument to generous new steps and ADA ramp that land at the Riverside Drive crosswalk.
- **Add two small new plazas with tables** – near both sides where the new developments are to be constructed.
- **Reimagine planting bed design** – to enhance aesthetics, increase biodiversity, and describe open lawn areas for smaller gatherings and informal activities.

Master Plan-level Costs-Bucky Boyle Park – The master plan-level estimate to implement improvements identified for Bucky Boyle is approximately \$700,000 in 2025.

Opportunity 1-1e Other recreation infrastructure

- **Basic comfort facilities** are the most-requested infrastructure improvements expected across all Allentown parks. Creating consistently-open, functioning, safe and clean restroom facilities across the entire Allentown Parks system is a fundamental goal for Parks & Recreation and consistent incremental achievements will demonstrate that people are heard. Restrooms are an element that might be addressed as a comprehensive improvement project across the entire system – and conducted as a major management strategy, where restroom improvements may be an independent city-wide initiative, rather than waiting to bundle them as a minor physical elements in large park infrastructure improvement projects.
- **Playgrounds, walkways, simple seating, and vegetative shade** are the civic infrastructure elements expected at most parks.
- **Water fountains and safety lighting** are universally expected in Allentown parks, according to public responses.
- **Allentown community center** was identified as a public priority – including appropriate indoor recreation space for sports and other programs – and is considered by many to be essential to serve community needs. An acquisition strategy may be needed – depending upon a preferred site, to create this major new recreation infrastructure.
- **Regulation soccer field** – was strongly supported by residents as a major City need – so that Allentown teams can host competition-level games and tournaments. The completed Percy Ruhe Master Plan describes options to upgrade existing fields to include a regulation soccer facility at that site. Other potential locations may be explored by Parks & Recreation.
- **Individual parks** – The first full inventory of Allentown Parks was created by Parks & Recreation under this **Allentown Parks Plan 2025**. Refer to the Inventory section for a complete master plan-level list of all parks, greenways, trails and open spaces owned by the City of Allentown. A description of general conditions, images, location, and potential improvement opportunities are included on each park page. Future master plans may be considered by Parks & Recreation for specific parks.

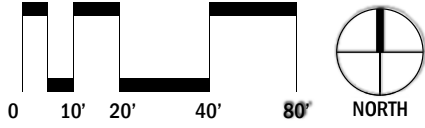
Costs for improvements in individual parks may be estimated prior to a master plan, by interpreting costs developed for the four park master plans in this report.



Fig. 6.4 Samuel McHose Plaza Masterplan

Samuel McHose Plaza Master Plan

Allentown Parks Plan 2025

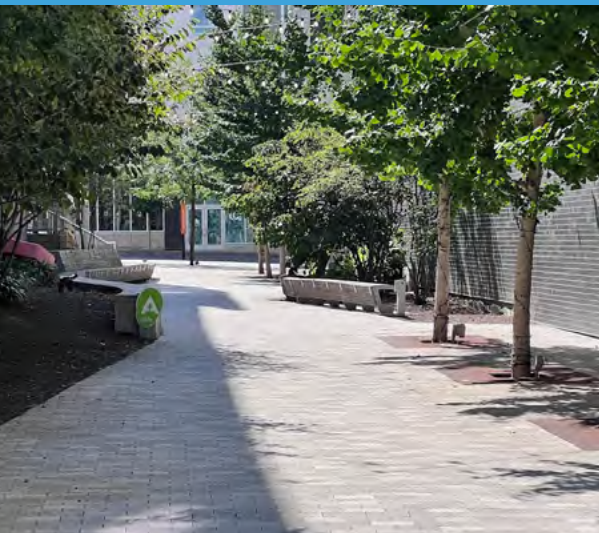


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COLLINS
Project #: 22028.10

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Sustainability Coordinator Position

The creation of the Sustainability Coordinator in 2024 supports the City's goals for energy and water conservation, waste minimization and sustainable development. The first coordinator is already working with the Environmental Advisory Council to create a Climate Action Plan and an Urban Forestry Master Plan for the City, as well as applying for funding for energy saving projects, procuring the City's first EV Fleet of 8 electric vehicles for Public Works, and supporting projects focused toward the City's young adults interested in climate change.



6.1.2 Streets meet parks

Infrastructure Opportunity 2-1a – Support Public Works stewardship of street trees where appropriate

The Department of Public Works is responsible for managing and maintaining the City's street trees located in the public right-of-way. The Parks & Recreation Department does provide support.

In 2024, the City received a nearly \$1 million grant through the USDA's Urban & Community Forestry Program to complete a full inventory of the City's street trees and complete an Urban Forestry Master Plan. Another aim of the project is to plant 600 additional street trees throughout the City's underinvested communities. This project will be managed by the Department's Sustainability Bureau and is expected to continue through Spring 2028.

Infrastructure Opportunity 2-1b – Continue pursuing comprehensive safety improvements

Safety is imperative for all elements in and surrounding Allentown parks – including transportation, waterway, and recreation facilities – and these are often managed by more than one overlapping jurisdiction. Where streets meet parks, transportation safety challenges are always an immediate focus.

Improving safe access to parks is underway in Allentown, including new ADA crosswalks installed in streets surrounding City parks and schools – a result of the collaborative effort between Public Works and Parks & Recreation to coordinate improvements on municipal lands.

The **Allentown Safe Streets For All (SS4A) Plan (2025)** provides tools to address public travel routes that are needed but do not yet exist, or are not yet compliant with current standards for public safety and access.

Opportunities to integrate safety improvements where streets meet parks include:

- Accessible routes – sidewalks, bump-outs, crosswalks, trail, walkways, bike routes
- Park entry portals – roads, sidewalks, trails, bus stops

Locations where safety improvements for streets and parks may be integrated include:

- Hamilton Boulevard- Hanover Ave
- Tilghman Street – Union Boulevard
- Parkways,
- other rights of way

6.1.3 Waterways in parks

About 90% of Allentown parks have a waterway either flowing through or bordering. Stewarding all aspects of these natural waterways is central to the Allentown park system – including riparian ecology for both plants and animals.

Waterways are different than aquatic recreation – Creeks and ponds are very different than public pools. Swimming in waterways is not allowed in the City of Allentown, yet people still do.

Infrastructure Opportunity 3-1 – manage waterways for both recreation and ecology

- **Watersheds** – are the entire drainage areas of natural waterways, and they present opportunities for partners to plan collaboratively with stewards of upstream and downstream segments of the waterways flowing through Allentown municipal boundaries.



The tree-lined Hamilton Boulevard along the southern edge of Cedar Beach Park gives a sense of the green space extending to the neighboring communities.

- **Streambanks** – may be protected and restored in public riparian locations by pursuing partnerships goals to integrate appropriate recreation access to waterways – combined with ecological restoration and conservation of natural habitats.
- **Floodplains** – are green infrastructure that can be protected and restored to improve their multiple ecological functions. A location where a floodplain can be restored is where Cedar Creek flows between Hamilton Boulevard and Union Terrace – and a derelict commercial building sits within the floodplain, encroaches into the stream channel, and former streambank armoring has failed and is a waterway obstruction.
- **Dams** – these legacy infrastructure elements are complex human interventions in natural waterways – and in Allentown, dams in the creeks still function to pool water that is siphoned and treated for City drinking water. Ecological partners – including Wildlands Conservancy, have focused on dams in the Lehigh Valley that no longer function as essential civic infrastructure and may be removed. Dam-related projects are typically multi-partner efforts.

Locations where waterway stewardship may benefit recreation:

- Cedar Creek
- Jordan Creek
- Little Lehigh
- Lehigh River
- Trout Creek
- Lehigh Canal

6.1.4 Utilities within parks

Allentown parks and greenways host many overhead, surface, and subsurface utilities within those municipal recreation lands – including electric, city gas, water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer,

and communication cables. Other utilities that impact parks both directly and indirectly include historic infrastructure, like railroad structures, roads, and dams. Utilities require easements to co-occupy public lands and each has different legal and maintenance requirements.

Parks & Recreation, Public Works, and Planning Departments can collaborate to plan proactively so that Allentown parks benefit from these utilities’ actions, beyond normal fees. Potential partnership opportunities include normal restorations after any utility work, such as landscape and tree replanting and the repairing of trails, paths and pavement. Disruptions caused to parks by utility maintenance programs may be possible to help improve parks – if they are planned for cooperatively with the utilities.

Infrastructure Opportunity 4-1 – integrate parks improvements with utility infrastructure planning

Examples may include:

- **The railroad will need to be engaged for Canal Park** master planning as an active stakeholder – in terms of access under the overhead rail structure. Planning recreation improvements should “think” long-term and comprehensively in collaborating with major utilities.
- **When utilities work in and around Lehigh Parkway**, it may be possible to include select improvements that are installed during the process of restoring the site after excavation. Options may include an improved alternative alignment and/or surface improvements – such as walkways and additional trees as a comprehensive approach to infrastructure projects during any construction or site work.

6.1.5 Stormwater management and parks

Flooding is historically a common occurrence in many Allentown parks – as a direct function of those original park designs being centered along waterways and the adjacent floodplain lands.



Flooding near the Rose Garden along Cedar Creek.

All conditions contributing to increased stormwater runoff have continued to intensify as the 21st Century begins its second quarter – including; impervious land cover; loss of soils permeability; reduced tree canopy; construction encroachment on flood plains; and increased intensity and duration of storm events.

Many Allentown parks are riparian in nature with their locations downhill / downstream from higher ground, in areas that receive direct impact from concentrated stormwater discharges draining from neighborhood and regional watersheds above.

Allentown parks like the Little Lehigh Parkway, Jordan Creek Greenway and Cedar Beach all receive major stormwater impacts that largely emanate from locations upstream, and largely from outside the City. Mitigating stormwater impacts in these parks requires a regional partnership approach – sometimes accomplished through multi-municipal agreements.

Other Allentown parks are located at higher elevations near the tops of local headwaters where site stormwater runs off into adjacent areas of the City. Roosevelt, Franklin, and Percy Ruhe Parks are examples of stormwater management challenges where runoff emanates from within an Allentown park site and drains to riparian corridors that run through the City.

The differences in Allentown park landscapes are important to the level of independence the City of Allentown has to manage various stormwater conditions.

Infrastructure Opportunity 5-1 – integrate stormwater management with park improvements

Allentown recreation sites that may be most administratively practical for the City to pursue modern stormwater management are parks located near the tops of neighborhood watersheds. This is good, because stormwater best management practices (BMPs) are typically most effective when they detain and infiltrate stormwater near the tops of watersheds.

Stormwater is managed by the Department of Public Works as an Allentown municipal system – and recent stormwater improvements have been installed by DPW primarily within City street rights of way – where most of those stormwater features have been gray infrastructure engineered to detain and convey stormwater.

Collaboration on stormwater management between Parks & Recreation and Public Works offers great potential for two major City departments to collectively solve key parts of a civic ecological infrastructure challenge that affects all of Allentown.

Interdepartmental collaboration creates the capability for Allentown to install useful, modern stormwater features within its public parks – and improve the resiliency of its recreation infrastructure.

Allentown can invest its municipal stormwater fees to leverage other sources of funding for recreation-based stormwater improvements in parks and public green spaces – where green stormwater BMPs like soil infiltration and forested areas treat stormwater naturally and most cost efficiently.

Understanding DPW jurisdiction. The Bureau of Stormwater, is a branch of Public Works, that oversees management and maintenance of the Allentown stormwater systems to improve water quality of stormwater runoff. The City operates separate sanitary sewer and stormwater systems, but there are times when the sewer system may experience overflows during heavy rain events where stormwater enters the system through aging infrastructure. Allentown stormwater management ordinances - particularly Stormwater Management Ordinance Article 4387 includes Low Impact Development (LID) practices – which are approaches to stormwater management that feature on-site natural processes to treat runoff and protect water quality. By mimicking natural drainage patterns, LID practices can increase infiltration, evapotranspiration, and storage of stormwater where it falls by using rain gardens, green roofs, bioswales, permeable pavement, among other green infrastructure systems to reduce the volumes and rates of stormwater entering the streets and into the piped system. This ordinance also promotes the removal of impervious surfaces and adding green roofs.

Locations where parks may integrate modern civic stormwater BMPs:

- Cedar Beach – receives untreated stormwater from neighborhoods above Hamilton Boulevard
- Percy Ruhe – discharges un-managed stormwater onto Oxford Drive and into the I-78 ROW
- Keck Park – receives neighborhood stormwater that is unmanaged and erodes the lower park
- Roosevelt Park – needs green BMPs to stop sediment erosion that runs directly into the street
- Franklin Park – the elevation and topography of the site can physically integrate green BMPs

6.1.6 Cultural resources within parks

Cultural resources are a critical part of the Allentown civic identity, including the historic City park system.

Conserving historic artifacts and cultural assets is a priority for Parks & Recreation – whose work includes: curation, maintenance and repairs to legacy infrastructure and cultural event opportunities, historic interpretive features such as monuments within Allentown park sites.

Allentown residents cherish their local history – especially local history prominently embedded within their parks – beginning with beloved park names including but not limited to: Percy Ruhe, Bucky Boyle, Trexler Park, Irving Park and the newly renamed Clyde E Bosket Sr. Park (formally Valania Park).

The City continues to be an advocate for public art as outdoor sculptures are prominently featured in open spaces and parks. More recently, murals have been popping up throughout the city and some parks including at Fellowship East Playlot. Art is a great way to celebrate the culture and history of a place.

Cultural resources inside Allentown Parks

- Union Terrace – WPA artifacts that function as an amphitheater for the City
- Cedar Beach – historic location of diverted creek community swimming beach
- Canal Park and Delaware & Lehigh Canal Trail – canal / railroad artifacts
- Fountain Park – home of the first artificial pool in the City in 1929
- West Park – the Band Shell is eligible to be placed on the National Historic Registry
- Little Lehigh Parkway – acquired through historic City annexation with many WPA artifacts
- Arts Walk - located within the Art District, it celebrates art throughout the City
- Murals and other art throughout the Allentown parks system
- Monuments throughout the City, including the monument of Martin Luther King Jr and Coretta Scott King, believed to be the first monument of the two together, and The Hiker - a Spanish-American War memorial.
- Indian Heritage Museum

Infrastructure Opportunity 6-1 – Benefit from diverse expertise to advise on historic resources

Historic preservation is a practice of conservation, because artifacts require care to slow down inevitable deterioration. Interpreting history is the companion art to conservation, and both require an informed rigor to conduct well.

Parks & Recreation have practiced conservation of historic Allentown artifacts for decades to the credit of staff and their professional support. There are usually multiple approaches to the treatment of historic resources, and weighing a variety of respected opinions is valued by most conservators. The City is fortunate to have several groups that work to preserve historical and cultural built elements. The Allentown Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), Office of Historic Preservation, and Allentown Preservation League are existing pools of technical expertise who are all capable of offering guidance toward City decisions on historic and cultural resources in parks and public places in Allentown.

6.1.7 Trail & greenway connections to parks

The system of greenways and trails, existing and planned throughout Allentown is remarkable and forms the keystone of a regional trail network being developed across the Lehigh Valley. Many different elements are required to create a complete pedestrian and bicycle system in any town.

The riparian public parks in Allentown form the spines of a system where modern trail improvements are able to be created based on the original green corridors conceived along waterways by park founders. Major greenway/trail corridors through Allentown include:

- Lehigh River
- Jordan Creek Greenway
- Little Lehigh Greenway
- Cedar Creek Greenway
- D&L Trail

The City is actively creating local ped-bike connections to its parks system and schools by installing incremental infrastructure improvements that include sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, and bike routes. Currently, connections between the Lehigh Parkway and Martin Luther King Jr Trail are approaching construction phase and the connection between the Lehigh Parkway and Cedar Beach Trail are moving into design and construction documentation phases.

Infrastructure Opportunity 7-1 – Continue city and regional ped-bike improvements concurrently

Some missing ped-bike connections to parks are as straightforward as the City DPW installing safe and accessible crosswalks and ADA curb cuts at intersections that have not yet been modernized – such as the streets surrounding Roosevelt Park.

Other critical ped-bike safety and accessibility improvements to connect trails and parks are likely to be part of major, multi-partner infrastructure rehabilitation projects – like the connection improvements needed to create safe and accessible walking, biking, driving and trailhead connections where Canal Park and the D&L Trail serve the Hanover Street neighborhood on the East side. Other connections should be explored, including linking Jordan Creek Trail to Martin Luther King Jr Trail to close the gaps in the major ped/bike corridors in the City .

6.1.8 Ecosystems of public spaces

Increasing ecological management of public landscapes is the future of park stewardship – especially for park systems the size and complexity of Allentown legacy green spaces. Riparian ecosystems of the valley parklands that meander through Allentown may appear wild, but are intensively impacted by the densely-developed urban environment surrounding them, and by the quality and quantity of water that flows through these lowlands from sources outside the City.

Parks & Recreation is rightfully proud of its history of landscape maintenance, which features decades of dedication to arboriculture practices; manicured treatments of horticultural environments like the rose garden, maintenance of sports fields, and mowing large areas of Allentown parks lawns.



Upper Dublin Township assigns their Natural Resource Manager to help protect and enhance the natural systems at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve that has become a favorite spot for birds and birdwatchers.

Municipalities embrace ecological management practices first in areas where costs can be reduced, and then in locations where chronic ecological degradation continues and changes in landscape management practices are imperative.

Infrastructure Opportunity 8-1 – Begin pilot ecosystem management of select park areas with capable partners

Parks & Recreation might consider hosting an ecological landscape management charrette where experts with real-world practical experience are invited to interact with City staff – to discuss management options, costs, and ways to monitor and maintain pilot ecological improvements.

The charrette process can inform ecological pilot projects selected by Parks & Recreation with capable partners. Ecological management experiments may include:

- **Urban forestry** – is a critical ecological practice for cities, even regular care and replacement of lost trees in-kind. This basic level of stewardship can be broadened in multiple ways to include consciously designing new forest ecosystems in select locations where legacy trees are waning or where existing forested areas can be buffered, expanded, supplemented, and/or fostered to increase sustainable bio-diversity.

Parks & Recreation Dept is currently preparing an Urban Forestry Master Plan and a Species Selection plan. Also there is the effort to update the tree inventory. These plans should provide a strong case for investment in managing and maintaining the urban forest matrix and protecting residents from unhealthy trees. The City might consider an urban forest division to help implement new plans as they come online.

- **Soil conservation** – is not a priority in many urban green spaces, although soil health remains the foundation of ecological viability – especially in urban lands. Erosion from wind, water, wear and tear all degrade soils, and the intensity of urban impacts tends to accelerate the loss of organic matter and the invasion of species that further deplete soils. Sustainable soil conservation practices are important for all ecosystem including riparian, meadow and forests.
 - Mowed lawns may retain soil, but maintenance requirements do not generally replenish soil quality. Demonstration / pilot opportunities for soil conservation include adding compost to parks; exclosures to exclude human and deer



Riparian edges along Trout Creek were cut down in late August, based on limited resources, however the buffer height is too low at a time that negatively effects pollinator habitat, nesting birds, and seed production.

impacts for select locations to regenerate; and proactive erosion control measures can all contribute to a conservation ethic for public soils that will directly benefit Allentown forest initiatives.

- **Riparian buffers** – science-based designs of riparian buffers are generally not well understood by the public – with many people expecting romantic mowed lawns to the water’s edge as an idealized image of a public park. This mowed edge treatment is needed in select locations where the waterway edges are physically capable of withstanding this human impact. However, extensive mowing to the edges of waterways is not a modern best management practice for public or private lands.
 - Sustainable BMPs for riparian buffers generally include a combination of invasives removals with dedicated maintenance periods; restoration of resilient native species; installation of canopy species; and mechanical erosion controls where needed. Riparian buffers are integral parts of larger forest management strategies.
 - Riparian buffer pilot projects for Allentown can dovetail with related initiatives by stakeholder partners and can often be integrated with public infrastructure projects – such as streambank restorations coupled with trail projects.
 - Resiliency and self sustaining should be goals for management of any natural system. This requires understanding best practices for management such as when to mow and how to manage invasives. Options include planning and working with professional partners such as Wildlands Conservancy or through hiring a Natural Resource Manager.
- **Trash management** – is a city-wide challenge, perhaps more difficult to accomplish within parks than keeping public streets clean from debris. Trash is a local ecological impact that occurs when the combination of personal responsibility and municipal collection/disposal systems are not working as needed. More and larger trash cans and more city maintenance staff will not solve the problem alone. .
 - A collective sense of civic hygiene is an ethic that can be instilled by communities through sense of ownership in parks and neighborhoods. Education about impacts and benefits of this stewardship consciousness can be advanced through programming events. Parks & Recreation can continue to work with citizens who want to help and celebrate those who are helping to keep parks clean. Education regarding citizen practices and ecological impacts of trash pollution can be included in many public forums.
- **Stormwater management** – green stormwater management encompasses a wide range of ecological functions, including: recharging groundwater; nurturing native species, and reducing soil erosion. Because stormwater management is a regulated City service, the improvement strategy for this municipal system can include best practice improvements within City parklands in ways that are integrated with sustaining and enhancing natural resources in Allentown.
- **Allentown Climate Action Plan** is administered by a new bureau within the Parks & Recreation Department. The Sustainability Coordinator and the Allentown EAC can both advise the City how short and long-term ecological initiatives might be implemented. All of the ecological opportunities described above regarding parks qualify as important actions for climate change mitigation and adaption.



Continued education about the importance of the riparian ecosystems and water quality benefit future generations and resources.

6.2 PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2025, Allentown Parks & Recreation Department conducted scores of recreation programs and activities using in-house staff who cater to adults and youth through various sports leagues, summer camps, seasonal events, and wellness classes. Additional programs were conducted by partners within City park lands.

Public expectations for municipal programs in parks continually evolve, as demand also increases. With the given number of Parks & Recreation staff, the best option for increasing programs in public parks is for the City to continue to grow the staff that provides these important programs as they also find ways to increase thier partnerships with outside program providers.

6.2.1 Program partnerships

Programming Opportunity 1-1 – Explore programming partnerships with the regional community

Multiple opportunities may be possible for partners of the Allentown community to provide recreational, educational, cultural programming within the City park system, including, but not limited to:

- **Health and Wellness** – Many communities partner with local hospitals and health providers to create content and manage collaborative programs. These partnerships can engage outside expertise and sometimes help negotiate funding opportunities. Parks & Recreation can explore opportunities to expand current wellness-focused programs within the Allentown parks system. A community recreation center might be a flagship venue for such a partnership enterprise. An example of health / wellness programming in Allentown is the partnership between Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute and Allentown Parks & Recreation in the “Million Clicks for Million Hearts” program – where 10 clicking stations across Allentown Parks engage users who exercise and possibly win monthly prizes.
- **Education / science** – The Da Vinci Science Center is a non-profit hometown provider of science-based educational programming. Da Vinci delivers regular educational programming for school children at its center city destination site on



Children involved in Allentown Summer Playground Camps participate in the yearly Romper Day celebration that has been a tradition since 1914. The event is the grand finale that has children racing and dancing, and ends in the Maypole competition.



Police Athletic League provides active recreation while teaching important leadership skills. Allentown Police Department

Hamilton Street and provides mobile programs for youth. Da Vinci Center is looking to expand its program offerings in collaboration with Parks & Recreation to reach youth in the City of Allentown. Science and ecological subjects are central to the Da Vinci mission.

- **Art / culture** – Art and culture are integral to the Allentown Parks system since its conception. Programs benefit the community when they are grounded in relating local history and culture to the next generation – who, in turn, contribute the next layer of history and artistic expression within the public domain. Multiple partners exist who may be engaged to collaboratively develop programming in the realms of history and arts cultures.
 - Engaging students and artists in community initiatives can be successful in the broadest range of venues – from ephemeral art projects like chalk art and art class construction-phase billboard posters to large-scale, permanent murals and sculptures that are integrated with park rehabilitation and capital projects. Art initiatives often germinate from grass roots partners and may be embraced by institutional partners to provide support for the demands on Parks & Recreation to administer such partnerships. Two active partners include the Allentown Mural Arts (AMA) and Lehigh Valley Arts and Cultural Alliance (LVACA) working to increase artworks in the City.
- **Ecology** – Multiple partners are operating at different levels within the City of Allentown environmental sphere including, but not limited to: Wildlands Conservancy, Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards, and the Da Vinci Science Center. Other partners with capacity might be engaged to partner in ecological programs within Allentown parks that are related, but outside the primary tasks of Parks & Recreation – like streambank restoration and forestry pilot projects.
- **Recreation** – This area of programming is a legacy success story for Parks & Recreation and its partner providers. Evolving public recreation and sports expectations require regular collaborative planning between Parks & Recreation and its partners to adapt programs and add new offerings as needed. Some programs may be added / adapted within the existing parks infrastructure. Other programming goals require major planning and infrastructure funding campaigns – like a new community center facility that can deliver various year-round programming, where there are currently no such venues available. Institutional partners can assist the City – beginning at the planning stages for major projects that can dramatically improve delivery of recreation programs – such as a community center and a regulation soccer facility. The Allentown Police Department - Police Athletic League is a very popular program for youth sports that teaches sports and leadership to City youth.

6.2.2 Serving the under-represented

Programming Opportunity 2-1 – Assess recreational programs to serve the under-represented

- **Inter-generational Parks and Senior Programming** – is a beneficial evolution in delivering modern recreation for diverse communities. Planning, design and programming best practices include but are not limited to:



Community groups are a great resource for helping Parks & Recreation to understand the needs of these neighborhoods.



Play Streets has been an ongoing popular program in many of the major cities in the US. Ken McFarlane/ Philadelphia Parks & Rec

- **Engaging / articulating community disability / adaptive needs** – to create the baseline for developing recreation infrastructure and training recreation providers to integrate abled and disabled facilities in common areas. (*SCORP Priority Area: Supporting Access and Inclusion- Goal 2 Action Item C)
- **Creating an accessibility field guide** for senior recreation users and those experiencing disabilities or chronic conditions. (*SCORP Priority Area: Supporting Access and Inclusion- Goal 2 Action Item E) Coordinate and publicize existing walking programs that are intergenerational in nature.
- **Aligning “Wellness Wednesday” programs** with multiple demographic partners to leverage program funding support. Senior adults and individuals with disabilities can benefit from participating in these programs with a broad spectrum of their community neighbors.
- **Conducting mobile health clinics** and targeted health events in local parks and recreation spaces to educate community members about the health benefits of recreation. (*SCORP Priority Area: Advancing Health and Wellness Goal 2 Action Item C)
- **Working toward achieving Blue Zone status** can enhance recreational opportunities for older adults in Allentown. Community feedback has emphasized the importance of reducing social isolation promoting physical, mental, and social engagement among seniors; and supporting healthier lifestyles.

Day Camps – have been historically conducted by the Department of Parks & Recreation. Evolving these offerings is essential to ensure that Allentown day camp experiences continue to meet the needs, interests, and expectations of Allentown youth. Parks & Recreation can rededicate precious staff planning resources to an annual programming review and evaluation. This process helps explore opportunities to diversify program offerings by incorporating new themes; new skills-based activities; cultural enrichment features, and intergenerational recreation components. Parks & Recreation staff are experienced in adapting programs that honor this community tradition while re-imagining its future to ensure continued relevance and future successes. “Romper Day” is an example of Parks & Recreation program success stories.

Play Streets - To complement existing day camp programming, the City may consider a Playstreets program and/or a Mobile Recreation Van. These flexible, mobile options can bring structured recreation, games, and enrichment activities directly to underserved neighborhoods, especially those lacking parks within walking distance or summer programs. Strategically targeting these service areas can help expand access; increase equity; and enable more children to benefit from safe, supervised play during the summer months. A play street program that requires temporary sequestering of a public right of way is a collaborative administration project between Parks & Recreation, Public Works, and the Allentown Police Departments.

Water Safety training – combines recreation and safety training, and helps generate potential future Parks & Recreation system lifeguards. These programs enable Parks & Recreation to train and populate a portion of its own summer season work force. The maturity required to participate in water safety training programs also serves an older youth demographic that is sometimes difficult to satisfy and often looking for ways to earn money.

Typically, the YMCA and the American Red Cross are providers of certified water safety programs – such as the YMCA Safety Around Water program in Allentown; Lifeguard, and Water Safety Instructor programs. (*SCORP) Priority Area: Advancing Health and Wellness. Goal 3, Action item C.)

* SCORP – stands for *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* – a document outlining state priorities for outdoor recreation planning, funding, and projects, often focusing on resource management, public access and equity, health and wellness, community engagement, infrastructure and maintenance, and sustainability.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

WPA Repairs at Union Terrace Amphitheater

Friday Free Concerts are back

Completing the repairs on the historic WPA infrastructure at the Union Terrace Amphitheater enables Parks & Recreation to partner with Artsquest to bring free family-friendly concerts back on Fridays.

6.2.3 Integrating recreation programs

Within Parks & Recreation, the Recreation Bureau staff offers several long-running and cherished programs and events, as well as new, reoccurring recreation opportunities that are delivered in both program and special event formats.

Recognizing the constrained Department budgets, staffing, and lack of access to indoor facilities, Parks & Recreation staff work to serve the Allentown community adequately, and some opportunities may exist for improvements within current resource limitations.

Recreation Bureau programming staff can draft an integrated recreation programming plan that documents the basics of its entire palette of programs. This plan can outline the Bureau’s desired goals and outcomes; its basic service neighborhoods; a simple list of demographic diversity served in each neighborhood, and a roster all programs and events in each season – with days and times offered.

Senior staff can lead conversations with all program staff to critically assess “why, when, and how” programs and events are being offered.

Once in-house documentation is completed, Bureau staff may also document non-City programs and events that are offered in the parks – as a way of creating a comprehensive internal view of all city-wide (permitted and pending) programs in Allentown parks.

Parks & Recreation does not need to provide all programs for all residents at this stage, but an integrated recreation program plan will serve immediately useful as the historic reference when considering options to modify programs each year.



Maintenance truck at Walden Terrace Park.

6.3 MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Management responsibilities conducted by Parks & Recreation Department include:

- Policies and procedures
- Operations & maintenance
- Governance
- Finance

6.3.1 Policies & procedures – Opportunities

The Parks & Recreation Department of Allentown currently operates with fewer staff to cover more park acreage – with less funds than most other comparable cities.

These combined circumstances create a fast-paced, “what’s next” working environment where every day, staff are juggling to find critical administrative time to create, update, and maintain department policies and procedures.

All Department activities can benefit from periodical policy reviews and reconsiderations, including: Infrastructure. Program, and general Management policies.

Management Opportunity 1-a – Seek RecTAP or DCNR Peer Grant for management assessment

Parks & Recreation can continue to seek funding assistance to help plan for internal management efficiency through competitive funding application(s) to the programs noted above.

The DCNR Peer Grant program helps municipalities contract with professionals to complete special-purpose plans, which include capacity-building opportunities, strategic, facility, revenue, and operations plans.

The City of Allentown did receive a RecTAP grant award to create policies and procedures, and the work is expected to begin in October 2025. The Recreation and Parks Technical Assistance Program (RecTAP) grant is funded through DCNR and administered by the Pennsylvania Recreation & Park Society (PRPS). This program helps organizations receive professional / peer advice on maintenance, recreation, park and trail issues. The program matches park and recreation professionals with municipalities to provide short-term peer assistance.



Family swinging together at Fountain Park.

Management Opportunity 1-b – Document Department policies & procedures clearly

Documenting simple, clear policies and procedures provides operational consistency – especially during those times of staff transitions when management communication is especially challenged. Guidance from a Peer grant advisor can assist Parks & Recreation to structure a policy document that is tailored to the needs of Allentown Parks & Recreation staff. If possible, Department staff at all levels may be valuable to involve in periodic reviews of Department policies and procedures, recognizing that policy and procedures will always evolve, and that on-the-ground staff often hear comments first-hand from park users.

Management Opportunity 1-c – Simplify administrative procedures for non-city partners

Parks & Recreation staff are proud of their service delivery to Allentown residents and visitors, and they understand how clear, caring communications are a key to nurturing mutual trust and respect between the community and the Department. Periodic internal reviews of management procedures can include communication tools to help everyone. Tools may include, but are not limited to:

- **Annual schedule** - for all Department events
- **Partner checklist for events** – all agreement requirements
- **Park user permit** – step by step process
- **Summer Playground / Play streets Program** – handbook for parents
- **Emergency Action Plan** – for all event types

Management Opportunity 1-d – Continue periodic public involvement venues

These sessions are important to hear public ideas and needs, and create opportunities to help educate residents on how Parks & Recreation operates – especially about those decisions that are often based on multiple constraints from being annually under-staffed.



Bad user behaviors, like leaving trash in parks, cost the City in staff time and tax dollars to clean up. Education and enforcement are essential to change costly behaviors by a relatively few.

Regular public involvement venues create opportunities for Parks & Recreation and partners to help modify park user behaviors through education or make needed improvements to programming or park facilities. Public venues create opportunities for City staff and residents to speak candidly about personal and municipal responsibilities that can help Parks & Recreation to keep municipal parks clean, open, vandalism-free, and safe.

Management Opportunity 1-e – Continue periodic user surveys

Current, well-documented data will always be needed to stay ahead of public park and recreation preferences. Surveys can supplement public anecdotal input at face-to-face meetings to help document community recreation needs and expectations. A comprehensive survey can be useful when circulated every 3 to 5 years.

An online public survey was conducted in 2025 for this Allentown Parks Plan. A similar level of survey can be valuable between 2028 and 2030 – to update the data available from half a decade earlier.

Results will provide a measurable comparison of how public expectations change over time, and as well as an internal benchmark for achievements by Parks & Recreation – and identify those elements still to be completed.

General online survey platforms are efficient and easy for users and sponsors. Care and experience is valuable in crafting the survey questions. A public survey conducted by Parks & Recreation might include questions about the details of a specific program or park.

Shorter exit surveys may be conducted by Parks & Recreation to query participants after a program or event is over to take that special opportunity to ask for post-experience impressions and suggestions.

It is also important to gain feedback from the broadest cross-section of the Allentown community, not only individuals participating in City programs. It may be possible to reach larger pools of respondents if questions on parks & recreation subjects are incorporated into surveys of other related subjects – such as community connectivity, civic issues or whatever other guidance Allentown might be seeking.

Management Opportunity 1-f – Revisit agreements between City and School District

All agreements between these two partners might be consolidated into a single instrument – such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is reviewed and reconfirmed annually by the partners – to help prevent conflicts, improve collaboration, and mitigate issues.

To ensure consistent and equitable access to these City facilities, clear communication protocols and formal terms between the City and the School District are essential and should delineate:

- Scheduling procedures based on negotiated priorities
- Responsibility sharing for staffing and supervision
- Maintenance and custodial responsibilities
- Liability and insurance provisions

Management Opportunity 1-g – Educate residents about civic responsibilities

Inappropriate uses of the parks, especially littering has resulted in excessive staff time dedicated to remedying the results of these misuses. A consistent, city-wide education effort might be dedicated to reducing litter in the streets, parks, and waterways.

This effort may include:

- Frequent social media posts highlighting issues and soliciting feedback from residents on how to address littering.
- Increase education signage in parks about what happens to litter if not picked up.
- Restore some overtime funds for weekend litter detail by Maintenance Bureau staff.
- Empower Allentown Park Rangers to educate people they encounter in the parks about civic duties to help keep Allentown clean.

- Hold regular litter patrol events throughout the park system on holidays and weekends to supplement staff labor.
- Require and enforce a security deposit, which includes excessive trash, for all permitted activities in the parks.

Management Opportunity 1-h – Improve Intra-department communications

In any large organization, ensuring that regular, daily communications are effective can be challenging. The Allentown Parks & Recreation Department staff is composed of a mix of new and longer-tenured employees from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds. Maintaining clear communication internally across bureaus and ensuring that key staff are kept well-informed are essential to the Department operating at maximum effectiveness, creating an environment where staff feel knowledgeable, and may best serving Allentown residents.

Actions by administrative staff to improve communication with the Parks & Recreation Department may include:

- Regular meetings between Bureau leadership and Director & Deputy Director, with Bureau leading the meetings
- All-Department email list
- Monthly list of events circulated, with updates as needed.
- Annual all-department meeting
- Ensure staff have a general understanding of the Department budget – both revenue and expenses

Management Opportunity 1-i – Plan collaboratively across City agencies

Planning collaboratively across City departments can improve the effectiveness of the Allentown community in managing multiple projects that often transcend a single department jurisdiction.

Examples of typical areas of jurisdictional overlaps include:

- Parks & Recreation officially comment on all proposed development that might impact parks or recreation services – to address changes to future user populations, and to prevent development encroachments that will affect City park resources.
- Police and EMS providers comment on park / trails plans regarding safety, access, and space defensibility.
- Departments of Parks & Recreation and Public Works collaboration – beginning at planning stages and following through project construction. Areas of stewardship overlaps include: ped-bike improvements within public ROWs and parks; Street tree stewardship within public ROWs; and stormwater management BMPs within public park lands.

Planning can be approached at two basic levels - master site planning and strategic planning.

Master site planning – Parks & Recreation has a history of producing master site plans for specific parks. This Allentown Parks Plan 2025 includes four park master site plans – for Roosevelt, Fountain; Bucky Boyle, and McHose Park.

As the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 was being completed, Parks & Recreation began the revitalization of Franklin Park through a project that includes a master site planning task with the community – before the design specifications are completed for a construction contract in the next phase. All these methods represent different ways to accomplish essential master site planning.

Strategic planning – usually transcends the jurisdiction of any single department – especially in communities the size of Allentown. This Allentown Parks Plan 2025 is a strategic level planning effort that covers the entire City park system. A city-wide Tree Master Plan is a strategic level of planning that is happening currently. A stormwater management assessment of stormwater BMPs within the City park system would be a collaborative strategic-level planning project between Parks & Recreation and Public Works.

- Perhaps the best example of partners cooperating in regional strategic planning is the success of the trails network planned, built, and under development through Allentown and the greater Lehigh Valley – as conducted by multiple public and private collaborating stakeholders LVPC, D&L National Heritage Corridor and LVPC.

Feasibility studies – are specialized planning projects that help analyze options to determine if and how specific projects might advance – technically and financially. PA DCNR and other agency funding partners recognize the value of investing in feasibility studies – especially for large capital investment and/or adaptive reuse projects.

Examples of relevant types of feasibility studies may include:

- City-wide pool/aquatics feasibility study
- Recreation center feasibility study
- Golf course adaptive reuse feasibility study
- Tournament-level soccer facility

Management Opportunity 1-j – Evolve the details of the City-Parknership collaboration

The Allentown Parknership came on line during the course of the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 – including the hiring of a new director for the non-profit that is dedicated to assist the City of Allentown to improve its parks system.

The Parknership board includes seats for the Allentown mayor and director of the City Parks & Recreation Department – and this reflects a landmark collaboration, where the City maintains final say over park system improvements, while engaging a partner with financial and technical agency to help plan, fund, design and administer specific parks improvement projects. The details of how this collaboration will fully develop will be determined over time.

Planning requires time and resources to coordinate, communicate, and follow through to produce work that moves effectively into implementation. Given the amount and complexity of City-wide recreation improvements that were identified during the Allentown Parks Plan public process, Parks & Recreation staff may be stretched thin to administer all the additional planning work needed.



The new basketball court at Stevens Park completed in partnership with Parks and Rec and the Parknership.

In 2025 the City and the Parknership collaborated to build a new basketball court at Stevens Park, where recreation opportunities have long been needed.

Strategic planning focuses on longer term decision-making, and this might be an area where the capabilities of the Parknership can dovetail effectively with the expertise inside Parks & Recreation. The close association of City leadership that sits on the Parknership board may be an opportunity for the Parknership to conduct tasks of administering strategic partnership planning – including, hosting city departments annually for joint strategic planning session.

A collaboration like this could create a regular venue to discuss and coordinate all city infrastructure projects that may impact parks and recreation resources. A coordinated planning process will help the City be efficient and most competitive in securing project funds – and help partner(s) decide which entity might be best to advance specific projects.

Other opportunities that can result from regular collaborative planning might include strategies with utilities, as noted previously in section 6.1.4.

Strategic planning will help the City and its partners to create a logical pipeline of infrastructure projects that can be advanced continuously through planning, funding design and construction.

6.3.2 Operations & Maintenance – Opportunities

Management Opportunity 2-a – Compile and regularly update a procedures manual

The Allentown Park Maintenance Bureau features a dedicated and knowledgeable staff who have effectively managed the extensive City parks and trail system for decades. To maintain that high level of service as seasoned staff retire and new staff are hired, it is important that the institutional knowledge and processes are documented and not lost during the staff transition.

Review current staff policies / procedures - Where appropriate, develop a policy manual and procedure guidelines to deliver consistent operating guidance to work teams (e.g. Aquatics, Day Camps, Special Events, Golf Course). This will support consistency in program and facility succession planning.

Management Opportunity 2-b – Maintain up-to-date records of facilities and procedures

This **Allentown Parks Plan 2025** helped improve the inventory system of Allentown parks and sets the stage to continue formalizing record-keeping within Parks & Recreation.

Next steps can include staff assessments of existing conditions of specific facilities in each park – including general estimates of life expectancies for various families of facilities – such as play equipment, site furniture, and lighting.

This level of record-keeping will inform strategic planning for funding and implementing facilities replacements over time. An example is estimating replacement dates for play equipment – where typically heavy usage and regularly-updated safety standards require a systematic and documented approach to stewardship.

By estimating service lives for primary equipment at each site, Parks & Recreation can better plan systemwide – to approximate when and how much facilities may cost to be taken offline, repaired and replaced. The inventory developed under the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 forms the initial basis for this record-keeping system by Parks & Recreation.

The level of record-keeping will also serve as a valuable database for Parks & Recreation to rationally assess the life-cycle values of historic facility investments and to use that data to help decide which investments are best at a given time.

Management Opportunity 2-c – Repair, maintain, and improve existing park infrastructure

Both capital and operating budgets (including maintenance) support public infrastructure, but often the differences are not well understood by the public.

Capital improvements – are often considered easier to fund than maintenance improvements because capital improvements are perceived as an investment and can often be shared with multiple partners outside the City.

Facilities maintenance – costs can too easily be perceived as liabilities when they are essential costs of staying in business for every operation. Because maintenance budgets are usually borne by the municipality alone, deferred maintenance is a tool that has been used by many recreation stewards to balance annual budget shortfalls. The deferred maintenance tool should be considered for emergencies only. Otherwise, maintenance needs can quickly backlog, which often results in facilities being taken out of service or requiring even larger costs to make them serviceable again.

By developing a systematic replacement schedule for all facilities, the City can make prudent cases to increase maintenance budgets in critical years – based upon the cost effectiveness of making specific types of repairs that are clearly more cost-effective than maintenance by capital replacement.

To assist Parks & Recreation to plan future operations costs, the City may seek to include a task in all park facilities design contracts – which requires professionals to deliver a maintenance budget / life-cycle replacement cost for all the facilities being upgraded under that specific contract. Parks & Recreation can create a simple database system to maintain these records, and a template can be provided to design teams to deliver project data in an easily-up loadable format.



Similar installation dates of playground equipment in the park system were placed around the same time. This may lead to these play elements aging out around the same time.

PARK SUCCESS STORY

Continue to Grow Partnerships

The Parks & Recreation Department continues to grow partnerships with many organizations that include: the Trexler Trust; the Allentown Parknership; the Friends of the Allentown Parks; the Wildlands Conservancy; the Da Vinci Center; Lehigh County Conservation District; Promise Neighborhoods, and others.



Management Opportunity 2-d – Pursue a single, central Maintenance Building solution

Based upon discussions with Parks & Recreation the current maintenance building at Lehigh Parkway is not a long-term solution to enable staff to deliver the levels of operations that are required. Issues include:

- Parks Maintenance staff do not have a safe, efficient location to prepare for snow events
- A centralized location to store and maintain all equipment is needed.

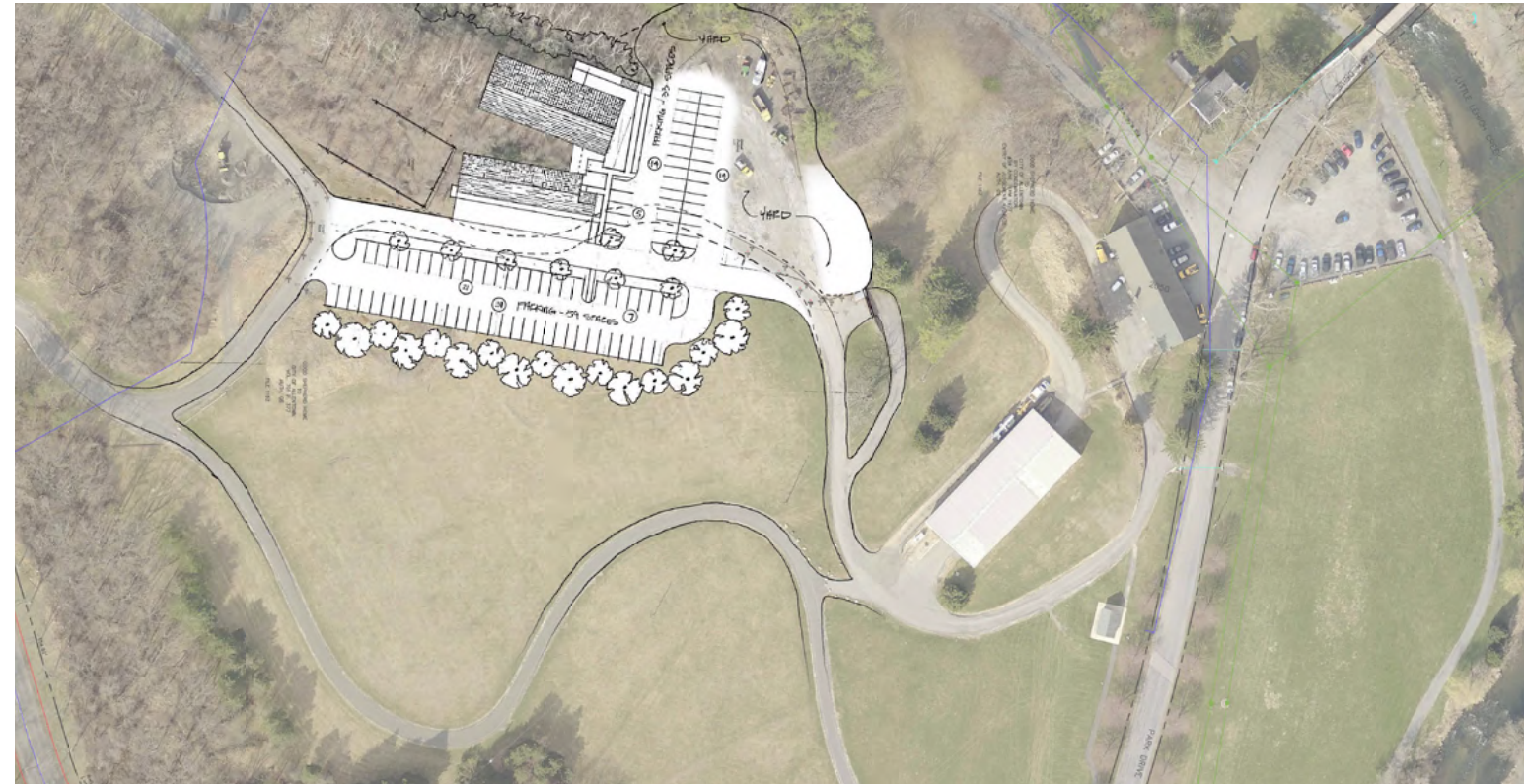
Parks & Recreation has completed a feasibility study for a new maintenance building and design is underway. The City may already control a preferred location, or a potential location search may be required. Either case will affect multiple aspects of the particular site and the area directly surrounding.

Management Opportunity 2-e – Retain current and increase the number of park staff

Recruiting new qualified and retaining current staff is imperative to ensure the continuity of institutional knowledge and minimize the precious staff time needed to train new staff. Parks & Recreation core staff are seasoned and dedicated, and perhaps the most difficult challenge is recruiting and keeping seasonal laborers.

Staff reported that the employment application process, specifically for seasonal laborers, can be cumbersome and difficult. If possible, Parks & Recreation can collaborate with the Allentown Human Resources Department to develop an easy-to-complete application – preferably by submission on a smartphone. In this case, a technology-savvy approach may help attract younger candidates and encourage more applications.

Parks & Recreation staff are great ambassadors of public service in Allentown and may be able to clearly describe the benefits of working in a municipal setting. Opportunities to make a difference in the community; fringe benefits; pension; and stability are all aspects to emphasize in recruiting for future Parks & Recreation staff – a path common for many parks professionals who started their work histories as summer recreation staff.



A conceptual design study for a new Parks and Recreation Operation Facility. Prepared by Phillips & Donovan Architects, LLC

Retaining quality staff contributes to positive organizational morale, operational efficiencies, and cost savings. To help retain staff, the City / Department and associated labor union can reexamine the 7-year pay-step program and seek to reduce the number of years to reach full salary. Staff reported that some staff have left Allentown to pursue lesser positions for more money in surrounding communities. A simple assessment of wages and other employment incentives in surrounding municipalities may help determine where Allentown may adjust to remain competitive in the labor market.

Succession planning is important across the Department, and with a special imperative that a plan be in place for the Maintenance Bureau – where technical skill levels required to complete certain tasks are essential to operations. This is especially true for those skill-based positions that require electrical; plumbing; pool operations; and playground inspection experiences.

Projecting when a key senior employee will retire is important for the Department to forecast budgets; prevent declines in service; and schedule training. Exploring a Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) for union labor staff is a proactive opportunity that may enable the Department to begin training up existing staff or recruiting external candidates once a retirement date is known.

Specific opportunities for staffing

- **Increasing staff** - A reasonable staffing goal is to add a minimum of eight (8) entry-level, full-time professional recreation and event staff. This is supported by NRPA standards noted in section 2.1.5. This increase will enable more equitable and responsive program delivery, while also enabling senior-level staff to focus on building partnerships, overseeing volunteer efforts (without conflicting with union responsibilities), and mentoring emerging professionals through active event participation. Creative partnerships that address mutual goals will help to address this challenge and help Allentown approach parity with parks staff in similar communities.
- **Pursue CAPRA Accreditation** - To ensure that the Parks & Recreation Department meets national standards in terms of the quality of operations, management and service to the residents of Allentown, it can pursue accreditation through the NRPA Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). This system works to improve efficiencies in all activities and pledges the Department to best practices and standards. It can also increase the chances of receiving outside funding for short-term and capital projects. More information can be found at <https://www.nrpa.org/certification/accreditation/CAPRA/>.
- **Recreation Resource Management** - Enhance recruitment for and expand the use of the PA Outdoor Corps and other early career opportunities. (SCORP Priority Area: Addressing Infrastructure and Maintenance, Goal 1 A)
- **Staff Training** - Onboarding for new employees should be aligned for all bureaus.

Management Opportunity 2-f – Opportunities for the Golf Course

The City golf course is managed as a separate bureau and operates as an independent profit center. Potential opportunities include:

- Organize policies and standard operating procedures into a single document.
- Consider long-term succession planning for golf course operations, as current operation appears to be dependent upon the existing manager.
- Work with partners and/or the Recreation Bureau to develop more programs that address disability or underrepresented participants in the game of golf. Start small and build upon success.

Management Opportunity 2-g – Opportunities for Aquatics/Pools

Modern swim and water play and safety programs and equipment in Allentown Parks are extensive enough to increase dedicated staffing. Opportunities include:

Aquatics Manager reassigned to a full-time position, with focus on multiple aspects of service:

- Focus on year-round swimming lessons to improve skills and access to this important life skill

- 30 hours per week during non-summer
- Increase hours to oversee all pools during summer swim season
- Oversee year-round lifeguard training opportunities
- Expand aquatic programming opportunities
- Coordinate with programming staff
- Coordinate with APD to ensure police presence at appropriate facilities during needed hours/days of the week

A dedicated aquatics manager is important because most other staff do not know the details of running pool operations. This leads directly to the need to train multiple other staff to each learn a facet of the pool systems and aquatics services.

- Aquatic staff can advise on decisions for free pool days.
- Staff often hear feedback from users or through social media.
- Issues identified include:
 - The pool sites are overwhelmed when it is very hot.
 - Some people express that they are not being heard.
- Events / programming details need to be communicated to pools staff ahead of the date – which enables proactive scheduling of pool staff.
- Administrative staff/supervisors need to be present at pools during the pool season, not only in response to emergencies.
- Capacity policies need to be followed with proactive public communication methods working – online, and at points of entry.
- All currently open pools need standardized policies and procedures – with additional information included for each specific pool.

Management Opportunity 2-h – Formalize a Parks Maintenance Manual

An Allentown “Parks Maintenance Manual” can be developed to memorialize the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual maintenance activities required to keep the system running smoothly. These documents are very important to recreation providers – especially the size of the City of Allentown.

The work to compile this document is worth the investment – to preserve and codify the hard-earned institutional knowledge



Community event at Arts Park.

within the ranks of the dedicated staff. The document can be tweaked annually as needed to account for changes in maintenance practices over time, and it will serve as the foundation for leadership transitions that inevitably happen over time.

This effort may be coordinated by the Maintenance Bureau, with involvement from all department administrative and maintenance staff. An alternative is to develop the document using a RecTAP grant from PA DCNR to retain a consultant to prepare the plan.

6.3.3 Governance – Opportunities

Management Opportunity 3-a – Consider non-profit partnerships to help supplement services

Parks & Recreation is the lead management agency for Allentown parks, open spaces, and greenway/trails – and beyond its stewardship of recreation and ecological infrastructure, the Department is the lead agency for municipal recreation programming.

Parks & Recreation has a successful history of partnering with capable non-governmental organizations (NGOs,) and this experience can foster increased partnerships if program management and delivery are skillfully shared. Wildlands Conservancy and Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards are examples of long-time stewardship partners of Allentown riparian environments.

A simple process might be started that enables an annual review of existing, and the negotiation of new partnership programs and services between the Parks & Recreation and current / prospective partners. Partnerships with the greatest potential for success are the ones where external organizations bring capacities to manage and execute agreements with the City that do not require extensive volunteer coordination by Parks & Recreation staff.

Partnership programs in science and nature education might be increased through collaboration with teaching partners (e.g.: DaVinci Center and Blue Zones.) Health program collaborations between communities and medical care institutions have many models. The City and partners can outreach to local “eds and meds” organizations such as St. Luke’s Hospital; the Lehigh Valley Health Network; Muhlenberg College; and Cedar Crest College to explore where their missions might align with Allentown Parks & Recreation.

Management Opportunity 3-b – Formalize inter-department planning in Allentown

Annual collaborative planning will benefit Parks and Recreation as a municipal department and the City of Allentown at large – as a venue for cooperative resource sharing and coordination of work projects and funding. Observations over the course of the Allentown Parks Plan 2025 project indicate that creating a consistent process of coordinated planning between municipal agencies will help build Allentown successes – beginning at the conceptual stages and carrying through construction and maintenance of infrastructure.

Examples where collaborative inter-departmental planning can help Allentown include:

Parks & Recreation review of development proposals before the Planning Commission – is very important so that potential new demands on existing resources are clearly understood and negative impacts to the Allentown parks and recreation system are denied or mitigated during the formal City review process. A real-time 2025 example where this collaboration was needed is the development proposal for the site directly adjacent to McHose Park.

Collaboration between the Departments of Parks & Recreation and Bureau of Planning & Zoning (within the Department of Community and Economic Development) might begin as reviews of individual development proposals that are submitted to the City, and evolve into a proactive planning partnership – where Parks & Recreation actively contribute strategies to an annual City-wide planning process led by the Planning Commission.

Parks & Recreation can collaborate with Planning & Zoning Bureau on ordinance updates to strengthen protections of natural resources; ensure modern management of stormwater; enhance existing safety measures; and tie new development and redevelopment to recreational and community enhancement.

One way to ensure that development in Allentown delivers recreational enhancements is by incorporating land dedication standards or a fee-in-lieu of contributions as alternative to land dedication for eligibility of land development applications. Preferred standards can be included in the Allentown Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) which require

developers to set aside useable land for public uses, such as park space. Alternatively, a developer can pay a fee-in-lieu of land dedication to fund the acquisition, operations, or maintenance of recreational facilities that are accessible to the public and reasonably accessible to the development location.

Parks & Recreation worked with Planning & Zoning on land dedication standards for the current draft of the Allentown SALDO update (June 12, 2025). The revised language includes standards for how much land is required to be set aside, or what fee is required for each dwelling unit or nonresidential development.

Parks & Recreation begin regular planning in collaboration with Department of Public Works – to coordinate approaches to funding and developing infrastructure improvements. Cooperation is based on a commitment to convening regularly to discuss current and future project goals – starting at the conceptual planning stages for projects or initiatives and maintaining current communications.

Areas where jurisdictions of the two departments overlap include: streetscapes; stormwater management; ped-bike improvements; and pursuits to fund various projects. Observations indicate that both departments seek collaboration, with a major challenge described as the lead time needed to adequately plan all aspects of a joint project.

Examples of collaborative planning and implementation projects might include: a comprehensive replacement program for City street trees within public rights of way; and implementing municipal stormwater management BMPs within Allentown parks and open spaces. Collaboration begins with the two departments creating a framework for how they might cooperate – so that specific project ideas can be discussed, decided, and developed proactively.

Park design should always consider reducing short- and long-term maintenance and the ability to manage public spaces in the most sustainable manner. The Parks & recreation Maintenance Bureau assists the Public Works Department in maintaining street trees in the municipal rights-of-way, with some responsibilities between departments not entirely clear. Regular planning meetings will enable the departments to address both their general collaborative framework and specific project details that clearly identify and assign duties to complete priority tasks.

Allentown Department of Parks & Recreation will remain the lead agency to administer the City parks and recreation facilities



Currently, the Martin Luther King Jr Trail ends at the intersection of S 4th St and Martin Luther King Jr Dr. There is no continuation of the bike path from this point. This could be a great collaboration project by using bike lanes and streetscaping to provide a nice connection to Jordan Creek Trail via S 4th St to W Turner St.

and programs. Parks & Recreation can continue its collaborations with other city agencies, as well as non-profit, corporate, and other partners where jurisdictions overlap or expertise can complement Parks & Recreation capabilities.

Proactive planning with Police / Emergency Responders – can occur annually to review Parks & Recreation short and long-term plans with these public safety partners – and to solicit guidance regarding ideas that can make Parks & Recreation operations and physical designs safe for the public.

During the course of the Allentown Park Plan 2025, Canal Park was in the news about overcrowding and emergency access to the site during peak periods. Multiple layers of historic infrastructure constrain ingress-egress at this cul-de-sac site, and safety ideas from police, fire and EMS during the planning and redesign of this site will be invaluable to Parks & Recreation, the City and Allentown residents.

Management Opportunity 3-c – Foster external agency partnerships

The City of Allentown has a successful history of collaboration with multiple trail development partners in the Lehigh Valley region. Both the City and the Parknership can continue to grow these historic and new relationships with state agencies, county partners, healthcare providers, and non-profit agencies.

Active support from external partners is often critical to the success of recreation initiatives and to securing funds that match City investments in recreation and natural resource infrastructure.

External partners can also actively advocate for public commitments to appropriate park user behaviors, respectful recreation facility uses, and personal stewardship actions by users – which are all essential to sustain the community ethic that supports City of Allentown civic investments in park infrastructure and helps ensure that improvements serve their longest possible lives.

Management Opportunity 3-d – Strategically balance investments with maintenance efficiency

Investing in higher capital costs to reduce maintenance costs – Park & Recreation has the difficult task of both delivering operations and maintenance services within its annual operating budgets – and attracting partners to help match City investments in capital improvements within Allentown parks. Parks & Recreation must discern where strategically increasing capital costs to upgrade specific infrastructure improvements will likely reduce lifecycle operating costs for those elements.

Bridging silos – One example to explore potential inter-departmental cooperation is managing municipal stormwater in City parks.

Allentown has several immediate opportunities to integrate both basic and innovative stormwater best management practices (BMPs) into degraded parks which are community priorities for rehabilitation – by using a strategy that invests municipal stormwater fees for skillful BMP improvements inside park boundaries.

Other municipalities have used this model successfully, where Public Works collaborates with Parks & Recreation to leverage municipal stormwater fees to fix drainage problems inside parks. This funding strategy of targeting municipal stormwater fees for BMP improvements inside parks enables Allentown to leverage park improvement investments and conservation funds from other partners, by using local funds that are raised through user service fees, not tax income. Many other municipalities are building landmark, multi-functional infrastructure projects using this investment model – which requires a commitment to collaboratively planning together, regularly.

Developing a preferred materials palette – can help in life-cycle budgeting when families of infrastructure materials are standardized within the stewardship department. Parks & Recreation has begun to assemble a preferred palette of products and materials that deserve repeated uses – based on multiple factors including: minimum service requirements; life expectancy; replaceability; sustainability; and costs.

Sometimes selecting a uniform palette of materials and/or families of facilities will help manage maintenance costs – such as standardizing items like fencing, lighting, benches, and even restroom modules. Investments in items that clearly deliver longer service lives and/or economies of scale by purchasing in quantities are part of the work performed by Parks & Recreation. The options change constantly – and these management decisions are made based on annual assessments of

past performances of facilities – and will often require research by Parks & Recreation.

Each facility requires individual assessment to determine if higher initial investments in specific infrastructure can result in meaningful cost reductions over the life of the item. Infrastructure amenities may be selected based on a combination of community preferences; expected service lives; and initial and maintenance costs. Parks & Recreation can review options across all bureaus annually – to confirm / change selections based on performance, or periodically products are discontinued or modified by manufacturers. Simple record-keeping of decisions will be invaluable to making future selections.

6.3.4 Finance – Opportunities

The Allentown Parks & Recreation system requires significant capital investments and an adequate annual maintenance budget to continue to deliver the legacy services residents love and new services that are currently preferred. Allentown is very fortunate to have two dedicated non-profit funding partners – The Trexler Trust and the Allentown Parknership.

The budget for the Parks & Recreation Department in 2025 was \$8.1 million for all operations – iincluding: staff, compensation, administrative costs, program costs, and maintenance costs. This is a low amount for a municipality of Allentown’s size. According to the NRPA, jurisdictions similar to Allentown (100,000 to 250,000 residents) have a median park and recreation operating budget of \$13.6 million.

Funding capital improvement projects – such as large park rehabilitation projects and major infrastructure upgrades are usually achieved through funding partnerships that leverage financial resources from outside the annual Allentown budget as matches to the local seed commitments from either the City or other stakeholders.

The Trexler Trust – is a long-time financial partner with the City of Allentown, whose original endowment of \$12 million was established by civic patron General Harry C. Trexler and his wife, Mary Trexler, to create and sustain the Allentown parks system. On average, the Trexler Trust has donated approximately \$730,000 annually since it began in 1934. The yearly donation amount is based on the earnings of the endowment annually. The annual Trexler donation to the City is allocated as 70% toward maintenance costs and 30% towards capital improvements.

The Allentown Parknership – was formed in 2024 and builds on the legacy of General Trexler and the Trexler Trust, which provided \$500,000 as seed money to support the start-up of the non-profit, followed by a contribution of \$75,000 from the Rider Pool Foundation. The Parknership focuses its mission on capital projects, such as physical structures, stream bank remediation and trail improvements, as well as additional programming needs. The Parknership is not involved in parks maintenance or the day-to-day decisions of parks management or staff.

2025 Allentown Bond Issue for parks and recreation improvements – in August 2025, Allentown passed a bond issue for \$134 million - with \$17.7 million committed to parks-related improvements - to help fund upgrades and maintenance to municipal infrastructure, public safety facilities, including new fire and police headquarters, parks and other city-owned facilities. The projects the bonds will fund include:

- Parks maintenance facility construction costs
- Franklin Park construction costs
- Court and field upgrades
- Mack Pool design and construction costs
- MLK Trail Phases 1 and 2 construction costs
- Fountain Park design and construction costs
- Canal Park improvements
- Andre Reed Park improvements
- Mini-pitch

Finance Opportunity 4-a – Align budget cycles of Trexler Trust with City of Allentown

The fiscal years of the Trexler Trust and the City of Allentown are not aligned, and it has been noted that current rules in place for both entities narrows the effective window of time that Trexler funds can be used by the City in a given year. The City may consider estimating the donation amount from Trexler Trust each year, to enable Parks & Recreation to have more time each

year to prepare and spend the funds – and prevent funding backlogs. Trexler will consider appeals to spend its funds beyond its general requirement to expend all annual donations in the same fiscal year.

Finance Opportunity 4-b – Seek to increase income generation opportunities

Observations indicate that City of Allentown can increase special user fees to ensure that actual department costs are covered at minimum. Fees can be raised incrementally as needed, with the goal of competitively pricing valuable municipal resources to achieve net positive incomes. This will require a review by Parks & Recreation and may be initiated as a graduated fee increase over multiple years.

Increase fees for non-City festivals and permitted special events/tournaments in parks – to help increase Department revenue, after the direct maintenance expenses incurred by hosting these activities are completely covered – trash clean-up, special labor services, and a percentage built-in to cover wear-and-tear on facilities (overhead).

Charge for expedited services like in the case of last-minute permits or special requests.

Workforce Development – as described in Chapter 4, the Parks & Recreation Department can support economic opportunity in the City by advancing work development and youth empowerment. The Department hires teens and young adults for seasonal positions where they learn critical workforce skills, which they can then transition to more permanent positions elsewhere in careers related to public service.

These hires can also be given additional responsibilities and assist the Department in creating a task force to explore options to expand the Out-of-School Time (OST) program, which involves reaching out to state funding sources, healthcare providers and non-profit agencies, so that the program’s benefits are available to a greater number of the City’s youth.

Finance Opportunity 4-c – Increase collaborations with funding partners

The City of Allentown operates its park system with assistance from two major funding partners – the Trexler Trust and the Allentown Parknership.

Many past partnerships with the City of Allentown have been initiated, with funding secured by active government and NGO partners – including: PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR); Friends of Allentown Park; Lehigh County; Lehigh Valley Planning Commission; the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor; and others.

Wildlands Conservancy has initiated and conducted conservation projects across the Lehigh Valley and there are possibilities for future collaborations with the City of Allentown – especially to restore resilient, ecologically sound riparian edges to the



Mack Pool requires investment to continue service and comply with current standards.

waterways the run through the City.

Other partners that work with the City of Allentown include Friends of the Allentown Parks, Allentown YMA, the Boys and Girls Club and Allentown School District.

Funding from county, regional, state, federal, and non-profit partners does not all need to be granted directly to the City of Allentown for those resources to directly benefit the citizens of Allentown. Parks & Recreation can collaborate with the Parknership to nurture funding partnerships and to proactively plan collaboratively.

Inviting Parks and Recreation to the Recompete Grant planning team may open collaborative opportunities for the Department as well as the citizens of Allentown. The Recompete Grant is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Finance Opportunity 4-d – Consider additional operating/ capital funds for parks

The Parks & Recreation Department can use this Allentown Parks Plan 2025 to present the case for the City to add additional funding to the annual Department budget – specifically demonstrating needs that link those investments directly to community goals – while illustrating the risks of underfunding staff and infrastructure maintenance. Recent successes by Parks & Recreation are highlighted in this Allentown Parks Plan 2025, and the Department can be its own best advocate by citing specific returns on the investment that accrue from recent improvements to the recreation system. Internal records of users served, and costs saved are invaluable in successfully advocating for parks as essential civic infrastructure.

The Department can highlight inefficiencies related to inadequate funding allocations, such as infrastructure that is unsafe, outdated, and how limited staffing results in deferred maintenance. Equally important is how programming may risk a loss in quality or access due to underfunding. Program participants will likely help advocate for adequately funding recreation staffing, resources, and programs.

The Department may illustrate to Council how additional funding will specifically deliver preventative maintenance to help reduce capital investment demands by prolonging the lifespans of facilities.

Parks & Recreation can also align additional partnership funding strategies to implement many opportunities presented in this Plan. Park funding might be integrated with other citywide initiatives, such ped-bike improvements identified in the Safe Streets for All Action Plan and the Citywide Bike Plan – where transportation and recreation goals align. The Percy Ruhe Master Plan suggests opportunities to combine recreation, transportation and ecological improvements financially and logistically.

Operating funds include costs of frequently-used supplies that may benefit from discounted bulk purchases.

Full-time staff may also contribute to the annual budgeting process – to capitalize on their direct experiences and help train staff.

Finance Opportunity 4-e – Match park capital improvements funds with transportation funds

Allentown can continue to align transportation funding with capital improvement funding for parks and recreation – by presenting trails, access, and connectivity projects as transportation infrastructure projects, that also qualify as eligible matches for recreation projects.

Multiple eligible funding sources exist for multi-modal transportation projects including: the Department of Community and Economic Development Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF) and the PennDOT MTF and Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TASA). These well-known funding sources can support park-related projects and initiatives when they deliver mobility improvements, such as funding for sidewalk connections, crosswalks, bicycle lanes, signage, safe routes to schools, off-road trails, and related stormwater features – that can all meet primary transportation needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

When applying to transportation funding sources for funds that match recreation-related improvements – the grant requests can be structured to clearly identify what elements are transportation and what are recreation. General rule of thumb is that transportation utility of a trail or another transportation facility must deliver users between two active destinations (making a loop trail inside a park is a recreation amenity, not a transportation facility). Stormwater management can qualify for transportation funding – if it directly serves transportation functions, and if so, the BMP facilities may be appropriately sited within parks.

Finance Opportunity 4-f – Use municipal stormwater fees to leverage other funds for parks

Allentown stormwater fees can fund stormwater management improvements within municipal rights of way and within municipally-owned parcels – such as City parks and open spaces.

Stormwater best management practices (BMPs) may be considered blue and/or green infrastructure – depending upon the level of ecological viability – such as investing in forested bioswales rather than mown stormwater basins. Ecological stormwater approaches can help leverage assistance from environmental and recreation funding partners.

Integrating stormwater improvements, BMPs, appropriately into park and open space projects can help retain, infiltrate, and evaporate stormwater and enhance water quality, as green infrastructure improvements can be designed to contribute directly toward Allentown MS4 compliance requirements.

Municipal stormwater fees can also leverage transportation funding and multiple other potential sources to create partnership formulas that are capable of funding complex capital projects, such as multi-tiered improvements to the greenways along Allentown’s creeks that enhance flood mitigation, provide for pedestrian and bicycle mobility and create new recreational opportunities.

Municipal stormwater fees are highly valuable to rehabilitate both Allentown’s aging stormwater and park infrastructure systems.

Finance Opportunity 4-g – Target ecological priorities within the City park system to secure habitat restoration funding

With the help of ecology partners, Allentown can prioritize sensitive habitats, including wetlands, riparian corridors, forested canopy areas, and pollinator habitats, and update its natural resources inventory, using mapping tools and database software to identify and locate areas at-risk and of extreme sensitivity .

The City can collaborate with partners to focus these priorities toward ecological funding sources to protect/restore critical



Maintenance requires immediate safety first actions, but deferred maintenance should not incur user dissatisfaction.

habitat systems; habitat biodiversity infrastructure; and the City’s and water surface water supplies. Potential sources for ecological projects include PA DCNR and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Finance Opportunity 4-h – Require development partners who will benefit from adjacent City parks to contribute to improvements

Allentown parks are invaluable assets to developers who capitalize on marketing these public amenities to new buyers and tenants of properties adjacent to City Parks.

Over recent years, development has advanced rapidly in specific areas of Allentown, with little formal acknowledgement of how proposed new construction projects may affect existing municipal recreation resources.

During the course of the **Allentown Park Plan 2025** project, the planning team delivered draft language for a fee-in-lieu of ordinance that will mandate minimum contribution requirements to the Allentown parks system from every new proposed development. The draft ordinance was being considered by the City within a comprehensive ordinance review.

Parks & Recreation can serve as a public advocate to seek creative developer partnerships that can include improvements beyond minimum compliance; improvements that use private development fees to leverage public funds toward select shared projects; and the negotiation of perpetual maintenance of the recreation improvements by the developer/owner.

Finance Opportunity 4-I – Bring services into the parks

Concessions – there may be possibilities in the future for the City to increase concessionaire leases within its park facilities – whether by collaboratively retrofitting existing facilities, and/or designing service spaces within new facilities – such as a new recreation center or soccer complex. The City can help committed concessionaires to secure assistance for essential infrastructure improvements that will serve the City goals and resident’s needs.

Vending permits – is a strategy to raise funds dedicated to parks and recreation by delivering services into recreation spaces where there are no commercial alternatives. One example might be creating physical provisions for food trucks in the revitalization plan for Bucky Boyle Park, at a beloved location where multiple sports and special events take place, but where food and drink services do not exist nearby. A permit system could enable Parks & Recreation to realize income and control vendor operations within city parks.

Adjacent recreation service areas – there may be locations adjacent to recreation sites that can be developed / enhanced as local community development initiatives – to provide hubs with services needed by parks and trail users, including food services, bicycle repairs, equipment rentals, etc.

This strategy might be a collaborative municipal-private partnership to identify locations where targeted improvements can benefit neighborhoods and park users. One general area that might be considered as an example is where the Martin Luther King Trail is planned to cross Hamilton Boulevard – directly between the intensively-used Cedar Beach and Union Terrace Parks.

The commercial nature of Hamiton Boulevard at this crossing location is conducive to a community re-visioning of what new recreation / community services might be viable if this place were conceived as a major trail hub between two major City parks. A derelict commercial building currently abuts Cedar Creek in this location and repurposing that site might serve as the conceptual anchor for Allentown to accomplish several goals – including: ecological restoration of public flood plain open space; appropriate recreation-oriented small businesses that support neighborhood identity.

Sponsorships – are possible, especially for larger capital projects, such as an Allentown Community Recreation Center. This process is a widely popular way to secure investments from allied private and non-profit stakeholders in exchange for branding and marketing opportunities.

Events – can bring people to parks and bring people together – such as, job fairs, outreach by social workers, or and introductions to regional healthcare providers into Allentown public spaces. These types of events do not usually generate profit for a park steward but are important community partnership-building opportunities that can generate direct secondary economic benefits such as recruitment of future Parks & Recreation staff.

6.4 PARTNERSHIP DREAMS – OPPORTUNITIES

Dreams

Dreams are ideas that come from various sources which may not fit within current Park & Recreation Department capabilities or priorities, yet they deserve recognition as types of recreation and trail partnerships that have been successfully created through partnerships across the US and around the world.

Dreams are big ideas, and the dreams described below will require partners with capacities that can support the City of Allentown Parks & Recreation Department, not overburden it.

Dream Opportunity 4-a – Historic industrial infrastructure – Canal Park

Partners are at work with the City on rehabilitation planning for the incredibly popular Canal Park on the Allentown East Side.

What if the project were approached as a comprehensive re-imagining of the complex of historic infrastructure, industry, and recreation that was developed over many decades and is now aging out at various rates ?

Active freight rail operations are adjacent and an overhead rail alignment crosses the access drive, the Lehigh Canal/ towpath, and the Lehigh River at Canal Park. The existing geometries of all these transportation structures are obsolete – and addressing one at a time does not solve the cluster of public safety and access issues that they pose collectively. River access improvements are not highly functional until users and boaters and emergency responders can first access the site safely – especially during peak periods.



Photosim showing how multiple historic infrastructure could be reimagined to work together and provide a safe entrance into Canal Park.

Dream Opportunity 4-b – Riparian restoration of Cedar Creek where MLK Trail will connect Cedar Beach and Union Terrace

This location poses risks of flooding caused by past commercial development in the floodplain and a derelict building constructed directly into Cedar Creek. Concrete slabs were constructed as streambank armoring, but have become dislodged and pose an immediate risk to be swept downstream and block the hydraulic opening of the City’s historic stone arch bridge that carries Walnut Street over Cedar Creek directly above Union Terrace.

Imagine if dedicated riparian steward partners of Allentown focused on the ecological streambank restoration of Cedar Creek in this location, directly downstream of the Hamilton Boulevard Bridge. A streambank restoration project here could be dovetailed to support the City’s active engineering project to align the new segment of the MLK trail through this small valley corridor.

Dream Opportunity 4-c – Multi-modal highway retrofits – Cedar Creek Trail between Cedar Beach and Trexler Park

When the intersection of Cedar Crest Boulevard and Parkway Boulevard was rebuilt as a state project by PennDOT District 5, cross walks and curb cuts were included – but not trail approaches that would enable walkers and cyclists to safely reach the intersection from the existing trails within Cedar Creek Park or Trexler Park. Today, this decision would not qualify as a multi-modal improvement.

The missing walkway / trail connections total less than 300 linear feet but were identified as a major impediment to the City trail network during the public meetings for this Allentown Parks Plan 2025.



Dislodged, obsolete concrete slab embankment armoring threaten the historic Walnut St Bridge. City-partnership investments to solve these erosion/floodplain issues are essential to protect MLK Trail improvements to be installed directly downstream through Union Terrace Park.



Intersection of Cedar Crest Boulevard and Parkway Boulevard. Google Maps

A relatively straightforward remedy is possible, if a partnership elevates this project as a community priority for Allentown. An engineering assessment will be required to determine if an H&H study will be needed to grade a short trail approach on the downstream side of the intersection. Other engineering considerations would also be discussed with PennDOT on-site.

Funding for this highway safety/accessibility retrofit project could come through several sources. State funding sources may be more expedient for this project – to not trigger the higher compliance layer of a “4f” impact determination that federal funding requires when projects potentially impact recreation resources. In this case the trail approaches inside park boundaries would be considered potential impacts of a federally-funded trail improvement project.

Dream Opportunity 4-d – Road diet for safe ped-bike travel on Hamilton Street Bridge

The Allentown Citywide Bike Plan, 2025 recommends that a future replacement structure for the existing Hamilton Street Bridge includes a dedicated ped-bike facility on deck. This is a distant future strategy that does nothing to help solve the long-standing disconnect for pedestrians and cyclists needing to travel between Center City and the East Side.

An immediate feasibility study is recommended to assess options for a “road diet” on the Hamilton Street Bridge to determine if alternating lane directions during peak periods can enable a dedicated walking-biking lane to share the existing bridge deck until some future decade when the existing bridge is ultimately replaced.

The real / perceived disconnections between Center City and East Side are Allentown history. Pedestrian improvements were made to Tilghman Street Bridge during its rehabilitation – and the Bridge banners exhibit the civic pride in making that connection.

An engineering feasibility study will provide answers to the physical and financial feasibility of making (reversible) multi-modal modifications to the existing Hamilton Street Bridge deck – and will demonstrate City responsiveness to public expectations for safe non-motorized travel across the Lehigh River in Allentown. Work accomplished as part of this feasibility study will contribute to partnership planning efforts to access Canal Park; to create a walking loop on both sides of Lehigh River between the Hamilton and Tilghman Street Bridges; and will contribute valuable engineering analyses to the ultimate redesign of the Hamilton Street Bridge.

Dream Opportunity 4-e – Private contributions to public access improvements – bridges, ramps, stairs

What if – as an alternative to a one-time fee-in-lieu of contribution, owners of developments adjacent to public parks, trails, and open spaces help the City build and maintain new structures that enable their tenants and the public to move between public spaces where currently no mobility access exists ?

Innovative partnerships may be possible where improvements benefit both the private sector and the public. An example where a connection is sorely needed is between the walkway on Tilghman Bridge and the Lehigh Riverwalk directly below it. Could a future private developer of the parcel next to Tilghman Bridge construct a public ramp, stairs, elevator that connects the two segments of a future river loop trail – and serves new tenants ? Could this connection be included on the Allentown Official Map?



Hamilton Street Bridge over the Lehigh River

Similar to the concept for revenue generation with solar panels described above, one potential way this could work is amending the SALDO to allow for in-kind improvements, in addition to fees-in-lieu. A list of access improvements, such as ramps, stairs, trailheads, crosswalks, sidewalks, bike lanes and ADA upgrades could be included and the value of built improvements would have to be equal to or greater than the fees collected for residential and nonresidential developments.

If the improvement is built on private land, a public access easement would be recorded to ensure public access in perpetuity.

Dream Opportunity 4-f – Private property donations to the Allentown Parks system

Private property donations might be possible for conservation and recreation purposes within the City of Allentown, especially in locations such as flood plains and steep slopes where current ordinance prohibit new development.

Contributions of land might be most beneficial to all parties if transfers are through NGO conservation partners. An example of a previously developed site is the derelict commercial building located directly in Cedar Creek below the Hamilton Boulevard Bridge. This structure should be razed and the site returned to function as ecological floodplain. A conservation partner might help negotiate this acquisition as a donation so that site restoration can be completed as a partnership.

Dream Opportunity 4-g – Highway safety improvements to connect people to parks – a Jefferson St. / Tioga St. / Lehigh Pkwy. / Park Dr. roundabout

The Little Lehigh Parkway is a major green infrastructure asset for the City of Allentown – and the trail system in this corridor is largely constructed and safe for users. Access to this park in locations has never been addressed for pedestrians and cyclists who access the south side from adjacent neighborhoods. An exceptionally complicated roadway location is where Jefferson Street, Tioga Street, Lehigh Parkway South, Lehigh Parkway East and Park Drive all meet in a 5-point intersection. Public comments describe this location as a nightmare for drivers to navigate – and an impossible location for pedestrians and cyclists to safely reach the park/trail.

In 2025, the City received DCED grant funding to begin to address safety and accessibility concerns on South Jefferson Street. It is recommended that this be complimented by a feasibility study to identify the alternatives for a roadway roundabout or other modified highway geometry that will enable safe ped-bike access to this regional trail and City park. This effort can be managed and led by Public Works.



Derelict building constructed into Cedar Creek

Dream Opportunity 4-h – Deepening the relationship between Allentown residents and their park system

The dreams listed below can help to strengthen the relationship that the citizens of Allentown have with their treasured and beloved park and recreation system to continue the tradition of a welcoming, safe and well-maintained system that can be enjoyed by current and future residents of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

- **Equitable investment in parks in Allentown**– Ensure that City park investments are distributed equitably, to serve neighborhoods with the greatest need, so that every resident—regardless of zip code, race, or income—has access to safe, clean, and high-quality green space.
- **Increase the number of residents within a 10-minute walk of a high-quality park by 15% over the next 3 years.** — Work with Public Works to identify high quality parks as they implement safe route improvements.
- **Strengthen the visibility and public perception of Allentown’s parks** by implementing a coordinated marketing and communications strategy that highlights safety, cleanliness, and diverse opportunities for recreation and community connection. Perhaps launch a citywide “Love Your Parks” campaign by Summer 2026 to showcase park improvements, events, and stories of community impact.
- **Expand and improve the experience for young adults working summer jobs** – Build job readiness skills and training for Allentown Parks & Recreation summer staff, preparing them for future employment while strengthening park operations.

Looking Ahead

The dreams presented may or may not be priorities for Parks & Recreation, but they empower the community to look beyond limitations and constraints of the present day and imagine or “dream” about the places and environments future generations can inherit - parks that continue to be places of community, connection, culture and health.



Parks and events bring people together.