

# PARK, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE PLAN

## PALMER TOWNSHIP

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

**A Plan for Recreation Facilities, Recreation Programs, Open Space Preservation and Conservation**

**August 2, 2004**

**Developed by the Palmer Township  
Board of Supervisors, Recreation Board, Planning Commission and  
Environmental Steering Committee**

2004

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Special thanks to Ted Sales and Brett Millburn for their help.

This Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan was recommended by the Palmer Township Recreation Board, Planning Commission and Environmental Steering Committee and adopted by the Palmer Township Board of Supervisors on August 2, 2004.

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## FOREWORD

This Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan presents ways to further enhance the quality of life of Palmer Township residents. This Plan has two major objectives: to preserve an open space and conservation character in areas of the Township and to provide excellent recreational opportunities within the township to Palmer residents.

This Plan lays out the steps that are needed to develop the "active" recreational facilities, such as athletic fields and tennis courts, and more "passive" areas, such as greenways and woods, needed to serve our present and future residents. Also, additional types of recreational programs are suggested for consideration by township recreational groups of the Township.

Ways of preserving the natural character of areas of the Township are also recommended. In addition, methods to preserve environmentally sensitive lands, especially lands along the waterways and steep slopes are also suggested. The township administration is responsible for providing adequate maintenance, security and safety within the Township's lands, and to keep the public well-informed.

The Township officials have an important role to carry out this Plan. Cooperation will be essential between residents, community organizations, local businesses, the Easton Area School District and the Township. Through these efforts, Palmer Township will continue to be an even better place to live, work and play.

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Important background information has been collected and mapped to provide a foundation for the policies and recommendations of this Plan, including:

- Maps showing existing parklands, schools, environmentally sensitive areas, steep slopes, flood-prone areas, recharge areas and forests.
- A detailed inventory of all public and school district recreational facilities and lands.
- An analysis of the future population and housing trends of Palmer Township that relate to recreation.
- Reviews of recreation comments made in the township's 2003 survey of all Township residents.

Most of these materials have been incorporated into the body of this report, while others are found in the appendix.

## PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THIS PLAN

This plan was developed and evolved during a set of workshops with a committee consisting of members of the Recreation Board, Planning Commission, Environmental Steering Committee and other key Township officials. The plan was then returned to the respective board, commission and committee for their comments. Then, public comment was invited at a combined major public meeting. Finally, the Plan was recommended by the Township Recreation Board, Planning Commission and Environmental Steering Committee for adoption by the Township Board of Supervisors.

## PURPOSES OF THIS PLAN

This plan will help to accomplish the following major purposes:

- provide direction for development of recreation programs within the township,
- provide direction for acquisition of land and development of facilities, especially in deciding how new developments should be required to meet the Township's requirements for recreation land and/or fees-in-lieu of land.
- provide guidance and recommendations on methods of preserving and conserving important open spaces and
- fulfill the requirements of the PA Municipalities Planning Code, which requires an officially adopted "Recreation Plan" before a municipality can require developers to dedicate recreation land and/or fees-in-lieu of land.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Action Plan** - A plan that summarizes the many recommendations for activities and projects resulting from community input.
- **Active Recreation** - Recreation facilities programmable for organized activities such as ball fields, tennis courts & soccer fields.
- **Conservation Area** - Environmentally sensitive areas with characteristics such as steep slopes, wetlands, flood plains, high water tables, forest areas, endangered species habitat, or areas of significant biological productivity or uniqueness that have been designated for protection from any activity that would significantly alter their ecological integrity, balance or character.
- **Environmentally Sensitive areas** - Areas that contain native vegetation and natural features and/or natural resources.
- **Flood Plain** - A relatively flat or lowland area which is subject to partial or complete inundation from an adjoining or nearby stream, river or water course; and/or any area subject to the unusual and rapid accumulation of surface waters from any source.
- **Greenways** - Contiguous parcels of land that connect wild life habitat, stream buffers and passive recreation areas.
- **Natural Area** - A preservation of land for providing wildlife habitats, forests or scenic natural features that involves no buildings other than a nature education and/or study center.

- **Official Map** - Any official map that may be adopted or amended by the Board of Supervisors in accordance with the PA Municipalities Planning Code.
- **Open Space** - The area of a tract of land unoccupied by principal or accessory structures, streets, driveways or parking areas; but includes areas occupied by walkways, playgrounds, outdoor recreation or play apparatus, gardens or trees.
- **Passive Recreation** - Recreation facilities programmable for non-organized activities such as walking, picnicking, biking, etc.
- **Recharge Areas** - Open space that allows storm water to infiltrate into the ground water table.
- **Riparian Buffer Zone** - The land area along waterways providing shade and habitat that provide erosion prevention and the absorption of storm water pollutants.
- **Steep Slopes** - Those areas having slopes of 15% or more.
- **Waterways** - Lakes, streams, creeks and rivers.
- **Wetlands** - Those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas.

## DIRECTION: THE GOALS OF THIS PLAN

As part of this planning program, the following major goals were established to provide the overall guidance and direction for the plan.

### RECREATION PROGRAMS GOALS

- Improve the township's excellent youth athletic programs, while seeking expanded programs for other age groups and the handicapped.

### RECREATION FACILITIES GOALS

- Provide adequate opportunities for both active and passive recreation, with adequate distribution throughout the township.
- Plan for major community parks emphasizing active, programmed recreation and several well-distributed smaller neighborhood parks emphasizing more informal recreation.
- Maximize use of existing indoor and outdoor public school facilities and the Charles Chrin Community Center of the Township.
- Plan development patterns and road improvements that promote bicycle and pedestrian circulation.

### GOALS TO PUT THIS PLAN INTO ACTION

- Cooperation and good communications with neighboring municipalities, the Athletic

Association, other recreation groups, the Easton Area School District and the Bushkill Stream Conservancy to carry out this plan.

- Carry out this plan through continuous program of citizen involvement, planning and action.

### OPEN SPACE/CONSERVATION GOALS

- Use creative means of preserving wooded areas and land along the waterways and steep slope areas, including clustering of homes, conservation easements and maintenance by homeowner associations.
- Locate and design recreational areas to make them safe and secure against crime and vandalism, and include native plants and "no mow" zones to reduce maintenance.
- Ensure that all development respects the natural features of the land, especially the waterways, wetlands, flood-prone areas, wooded areas and steep sloped lands.
- Preserve lands that are physically unsuited for development in public, homeowner association or private open space. This especially includes areas along the Lehigh River, the Bushkill Creek and the Schoeneck Creek.

## RECREATION PROGRAMS

Before a community decides what recreation facilities it needs, it is essential to plan what types of recreation programs should be offered by both the community and local organizations. Everyone in every community needs to keep in mind that "recreation is more than ball fields."

Recreation programs include not only competitive athletic programs for young people, but also leisure programs for persons of all ages.

Recreation programs are extremely important to help people make the most worthwhile and enjoyable use of their leisure time. These are many of the major values of recreation and leisure programs:

- Promoting physical fitness and health,
- Developing the spirit of teamwork and fair play,
- Building feelings of accomplishment, self-fulfillment and self-expression,
- Offering worthwhile uses of leisure time that provide long-term satisfaction,
- Developing useful skills, mental abilities and creativity,
- Providing enjoyable social experiences,
- Promoting wholesome activities for youth.
- Providing oversight for children of working parents during the summer and after school.

- Allowing opportunities for people to learn to relate to different types of people and
- Encouraging the best possible use of available recreation facilities.

### EXISTING PALMER TOWNSHIP RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

Palmer Township Athletic Association (AA) - The Palmer AA offers excellent youth organized sports programs. A summary of these programs are provided on the chart on page 11. These programs primarily involve baseball, softball, basketball, cheerleading, football, soccer and wrestling. The AA's programs are restricted to residents of Palmer Township.

The AA is partially funded by Palmer Township through the Township Recreation Board. Township funds are primarily used for uniforms, equipment and officials' fees. The children on each team also participate in fundraising to help fund additional miscellaneous costs. The coaches are all volunteers.

EXISTING RECREATION PROGRAMS  
PALMER TOWNSHIP - 2004

PROGRAM	FEES	LOCATIONS	WHEN OFFERED	LENGTH (weeks)	APPROX. ATTEND.
<u>Sponsored by Palmer Township:</u>					
Summer Playground Program -- (arts & crafts, games and picnics; for ages 5 to 15)		Fairview Park Old Orchard Park Stephens St. Park Wolf's Run South - Howard Lane	Summer (morning and afternoon sessions)	8	
<u>Sponsored by Palmer Pool:</u>					
Swimming Lessons - Beginners - Advanced Beginners	\$10	Palmer Pool	Summer (offered every week)	1	100
Swimming Team Ages: 5 - 18 (part of Penn-Jersey League)	--	Palmer Pool	Summer	8	100
<u>Palmer Softball Association</u>					
Adults - (18 - 60)		Riverview Park	Summer	16	200
Adults - (50 + over)		Tracy School	Summer	12	150
Adults - (35 + over)		Keystone Park	Summer	12	150
<u>Adult Volleyball League</u>					
Adult Teams		Keystone Park	Summer	6	30

PROGRAM	FEES	LOCATIONS	WHEN OFFERED	LENGTH (weeks)	APPROX. ATTEND.
<u>Sponsored by Palmer Township Athletic Association:</u>					
Baseball/Softball Ages: 6-19	--	Palmer Ath. Complex Keystone Park Tracy School Penn Pump Park Briarcliffe Park Old Orchard Park	Spring (April to June)	13	500-800
Basketball Boys/ Ages: 8-16 Girls	--	Palmer School Tracy School Shawnee School (Forks Twp.)	Winter (Dec. to March)	15	200-250
Cheerleading - Football - Wrestling Ages: 7-14	--	Palmer Ath. Complex (Aug. to Nov.) (Dec. to Feb.)	Fall Winter	12 12	80-120 20-40
Football Ages: 6-14	--	Palmer Complex	Fall (Aug. to Nov.)	12	120
Soccer Boys/Girls Ages: 6-16	--	Palmer Complex Tracy School	Fall (Aug. to Nov.)	12	360
Wrestling Ages: 6-14	--	Easton Area HS Palmer School	Winter (Dec. to Feb.)	12	50

Source- Palmer Township Athletic Association

Palmer Pool - The Palmer Pool is financed through pool memberships, daily admission charges, snack bar sales and admission for special events.

#### Special Interests

Hobbies, clubs, collector groups, chess, games, gardening, foreign languages and cooking.

#### RECOMMENDED TOWNSHIP PROGRAMS

The vast majority of needed recreation programs can probably best be carried out by providing adequate land and facilities at cost or for free for non-profit recreational and leisure groups, leagues and clubs. The township already offers affordable indoor meeting space at the library and the township building to leisure organizations.

It is important that recreation programs serve persons of all age groups one needs.

Certain additional programs should be considered by the Athletic Association or other groups as the township's population and facilities expand, including the following:

- Nature Education Program- Programs geared towards all ages, but especially young teen-agers, should be in place to make people more aware of nature. This should include interpretative walks, self-guided walks, displays and trips. Portions of this program might best be conducted along township bike/walking trails and waterways and other natural areas of the township. The Wildlands Conservancy, the Roving Nature Center, the Bushkill Stream Conservancy, and other area organizations which provide local nature education programs should be contacted to seek their participation.
- Special Events- Certain additional special events could be sponsored such as an outdoor concert during the summer, with families encouraged to bring a picnic lunch. Ideas concerning a possible outdoor amphitheater are discussed in the "Recreation Facilities Plan" section of this document.
- Outdoor/Indoor Volleyball Teams- This should emphasize play by participants of all ages. The

program preferably should be separated into teams at two or three different skills levels.

- Aerobics and Fitness Classes- These could be designed to be self-supporting, with the township's role mainly to provide adequate space, choosing qualified instructors, and helping with publicity. The instructors could be in charge of administering the program.
- Races- An annual race for runners and joggers along rural roads in the township and/or the township bike/walking trail. One race could be intended to be longer and more competitive, while another could be shorter and intended for a wider variety of persons, especially senior citizens and children. A non-competitive bicycling event should also be considered.
- Senior Programs- In cooperation with the area senior citizen organizations, the township should conduct programs aimed directly towards the interests of senior citizens. This could, for instance, include arts and crafts classes and senior fitness classes.
- Possible Community Center Activities -

#### SOCIAL ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Card Club  
Youth theatre  
Youth dances  
Square dancing  
Provide offsite meeting location for area businesses  
Hobby seminars  
Space for organizations to conduct meetings  
Organized after-school programs for youth  
Space for birthday parties, showers, family gatherings  
A location for indoor walking  
Arts and crafts  
Fitness programs geared toward individuals, teams and families  
Public interest seminars such as travel seminars, job fairs, financial planning, higher education, etc.

Clinics/camps for various sports;  
Basketball, volleyball, wrestling, etc.  
Educational tutoring  
Civic events such as fundraisers, food,  
clothing and blood drives  
Emergency/disaster location if necessary  
which will reduce the impact to the  
public school system should a disaster  
occur  
Aerobics classes scheduled to the level and  
convenience of various age groups  
Public speaker forums  
Activities to be coordinated by a  
professional staff

#### SPORTING ACTIVITIES

Organized basketball in conjunction with  
Palmer Athletic Association and intramural  
adult leagues  
Wrestling room will provide a facility for  
Palmer's wrestling team to practice and  
hold meets  
Room to be used for cheerleading practice  
and karate  
Fitness center equipped with a variety of  
basic exercising equipment  
Volleyball leagues and instructional classes  
for beginners  
Indoor soccer leagues and clinics  
Pre-season baseball clinics with the use of  
nets and cages in conjunction with area  
colleges, high schools, and semi-pro  
instructors

#### HEALTH RELATED PROGRAMS

Health education classes in conjunction with  
area hospitals presented by physicians

or qualified healthcare professionals,  
i.e., reduce stress, healthy eating.  
Conduct prepared childbirth classes  
Community health fairs with participation of  
local healthcare providers  
Meeting place for the Easton Hospital Senior  
Circle program

It will be important to regularly monitor trends in  
program participation and citizen requests to  
respond to the desires and needs of residents.

The following concepts should be kept in mind during  
design of all the programs:

Avoid Duplication - The township should emphasize  
providing types of recreation programs that are not  
currently being provided, and coordinating existing  
efforts by local groups. This township  
responsibility might include types of recreation  
programs, such as aerobics and fitness classes, that  
local groups such as the Athletic Association are  
less likely to undertake.

Self-Supporting - It is desirable to seek to have  
adult programs be self-supporting, after the initial  
start-up costs. Children's programs should pay for  
actual expenses for materials and supplies.

Fees and Demand - One method of handling periods of  
peak demand for facilities is to charge fees or  
charge higher fees only during these periods of the  
day, week and year when there is the most demand.  
This will encourage groups to schedule their  
activities during off-peak hours when the facility  
might normally be unused.

## RECREATION FACILITIES PLAN

Three major factors affect the recreation facilities that Palmer should provide. These are the type of programs that will be provided, the facilities and land needed for unprogrammed activities and the suitability of the available land for different facilities.

### TYPES OF PARKS

There are five main types of public recreation areas, based generally upon the standards of the National Recreation and Park Association, as follows:

- "Regional Parks" - These are large, primarily passive parks typically of over 200 acres that are developed by the County or the State. The nearest examples include the Jacobsburg State Park & Environmental Education Center and Louise Moore Park.
- "Conservancy Lands" - These are passive lands that are set aside primarily to preserve important natural areas, and not primarily for recreation. These usually include creek valleys and wooded steep areas. The size of these areas will depend upon the amount of these resources in a community.
- "Community Parks" - These are parks typically of over 20 acres that include a wide variety of active and passive recreation, and that emphasize facilities for organized recreation programs, such as athletic fields. These parks mainly serve a large portion of a municipality. This type of park usually includes three or more good quality athletic fields, two or more picnic pavilions, three or more tennis courts, basketball courts, trails, woods, volleyball courts and children's play equipment. The Palmer Athletic Complex on Green Pond Road serves as a community park.
- "Neighborhood Parks" - These are parks of typically 3 to 12 acres that primarily serve the surrounding neighborhoods and that emphasize more informal "pick-up" recreation as opposed to organized programs. These parks typically include a youth athletic field, basketball courts, volleyball courts, a picnic pavilion, benches and children's play equipment. LaBarre and Old Orchard Parks serves as neighborhood parks.
- "Tot lots" - These are small play areas averaging one acre in size that mainly serve small children from nearby homes and that are built around children's play equipment. An example is the Stephen's Street Playground, west of Route 248.

TYPE AND NAME OF RECREATION AREA (W/ownership And Map No.)	ACRES (Including buildings)	ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	SUPPORT FACILITIES	COMMENTS
Berks Street Garden Area Map #1					Various lots owned by Palmer Township. Privately owned lots dispersed throughout. Enough contiguous land is not available to use for recreation.
Briarcliffe Park & Palmer Municipal Pool Map #2	17.6	Adult 360,000 gallon pool w/2 diving boards; 1 baby pool; 3 softball fields; 1 basketball court; 2 practice basketball backstops; volleyball court; children's play equipment; 1 tennis court	Landscaped passive open spaces and 2 pavilions; picnic tables and benches	Restrooms, snack bar and 2 storage buildings; off-street parking.	Pool built in 1965. Township pool ownership began in 1995.
Charles Chrin Community Center Map #3	35.5	1 baseball field; 1 soccer field; 1 soccer/football field/ 1 tot lot; 3 basketball courts; 2 tennis courts; 1 ice skate rink; 1 fitness trail	1 band shell, 3 picnic pavilions	2 bleachers; snack bar; restrooms; off-street parking	Community Center to be developed in 2004-2005; other facilities to follow
Chrin Commerce Center Bird Sanctuary Map #4	58.4***				Bird sanctuary to be built by Chrin Development co. in 2005-2006
Easton Area High School Map #5	17.8**	1 practice football field w/track; 4 tennis courts; 1 baseball field		Off-street parking	
<p>*Leased From EASD  ** Owned by EASD  ***Privately Owned  ****Owned by St. Jane's Church</p>					

TYPE AND NAME OF RECREATION AREA (W/ownership And Map No.)	ACRES (Including buildings)	ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	SUPPORT FACILITIES	COMMENTS
Easton Area High School Athletic Complex Map #6	31.8**	1 baseball field; 2 softball fields; 1 lighted soccer field; 1 field hockey field; 1 band practice field; 1 cross country course/nature trail & pond		Off-street parking	
Fairview Park Map #7	14.3	1 softball field; 1 hardball field; 2 lighted basketball courts; 4 shuffleboard courts; 4 lighted tennis courts; children's play equipment	2 pavilions; picnic tables; landscaped open space w/play mounds; bike/walking trail to north of park	Grills; off-street parking; equipment shed; restrooms; snack bar	
Fox Run Map #8	24.55		Schoeneck Creek conservation area	Off-street parking	To be built in 2005
Hillcrest Acres Map #9	.3				Tot lot to be installed by Developer in 2004
Keystone Park & Tracy School Map #10	10.5 11.0*	3 softball fields; 2 volleyball courts/lighted; children's play equipment; multi-purpose room in school; 6 soccer fields (2 are dual use)	Passive open space; picnic tables	Off-street parking; rest rooms; snack bar; bleachers at softball fields; pavilion	
LaBarre Park Map #11	6.1	1 softball field; children's play equipment; 1 basketball court; 1 sledding mound	Pavilion; benches; passive open space	Off-site parking Restrooms; fountain	Off site parking to be formally built by developer in 2004-2005
Newburg Park Map #12	1.3	1 basketball court; children's play equipment; 1 tennis court	Benches; open grass free play area	On-street parking	Park is separated by local street; portion of park is under high voltage electric lines
Old Orchard Park Map #13	3.7	1 softball field; 1 multi-purpose field; 1 ½ basketball courts; 1 tennis court; children's play equipment	Benches; passive open space	On-street parking	
*Leased From EASD ** Owned by EASD ***Privately Owned ****Owned by St. Jane's Church					

TYPE AND NAME OF RECREATION AREA (W/ownership And Map No.)	ACRES (Including buildings)	ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	SUPPORT FACILITIES	COMMENTS
Palmer Athletic Complex Palmer Township Elementary School Map #14	20.3* 19.2**	2 batting cages; 1 football field lighted; 8 baseball fields; 1 outdoor basketball court; 3 children's play equipment areas; 1 multi-purpose room	Pavilion; passive green open space	Bleacher at football field; snack bar; press box; scoreboard; off-street parking; field house; restrooms; storage rooms	Land for ball fields leased from EASD adjacent to Rt. 22. Main township facility for athletic programs; water tower on site.
Parkview Estates Map #15	4.39 .9	Tot Lot	Landscaped passive open space		To be built in 2005
Penn Pump Park Map #16	8.0	1 softball field; children's play equipment	Picnic pavilion; picnic tables; passive open space	Restrooms; off-street parking	Adjacent to the Bushkill Creek, softball field reserved for groups reserving pavilion. Alcoholic beverages are allowed w/permit.
Riverview Park Map #18	23.03	2 softball fields lighted Children's play equipment	Fishing pier; passive open space; benches; grills, picnic tables	Off-street parking; snack bar; restrooms; storage rooms; pavilion	Lehigh River Trail and Palmer/Bethlehem Townships bike trail begins at Riverview Park along Lehigh River. Police firing range adjacent to park.
St. Janes Church fields Map #19	8.7****	4 soccer fields; 2 future baseball fields			
Stephens Street Park Map #20	0.5	1 basketball court; children's play equipment; passive open area	Passive open area	On-street parking pavilion	
Villages at Mill Race Tot Lot Map #21	.47	Tot Lot		Off-street parking	Children's play equipment to be installed in future phase of development
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TYPE AND NAME OF RECREATION AREA (W/ownership And Map No.)	ACRES (Including buildings)	ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	SUPPORT FACILITIES	COMMENTS
Village at Mill Race Park – Map #22	33.4	1 street hockey court; children's play equipment; 2 soccer fields	Passive open space	Pavilion; off-street parking; rest rooms	Environmental retention area; bike/walking trail on west edge of park
Weller Place Complex Map #23	27.6		Passive open space	On-site parking	Tract includes library, fire station, police station and municipal building. Rear of tract remains open
Wolf's Run North Map #24	1.172	2 basketball courts; children's play equipment	Picnic tables	Parking lot	Large grass strip of open space under high voltage lines
Wolf's Run South Map #25	25.11	Children's play equipment; 2 tennis courts	Pavilion; picnic tables; benches; narrow walking trail; grass free play area	On-street parking	
Wolf's Run Conservation Area Map #26	7.335		Schoeneck Creek Conservation Area		Includes a main drainage swale; includes natural open space along Schoeneck Creek
<p>*Leased From EASD  ** Owned by EASD  ***Privately Owned  ****Owned by St. Jane's Church</p>					

TYPE AND NAME OF RECREATION AREA (W/ownership And Map No.)	ACRES (Including buildings)	ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	PASSIVE RECREATION FACILITIES	SUPPORT FACILITIES	COMMENTS
Palmer Township Bike/Walking Trail					
Bushkill Creek Bike/Walking Trail Map #27	32.4				2.97 miles long. To be paved 12' wide in 2005-2006
Lehigh River Bike/Walking Trail Map #28	25.8	10' wide paved trail			2.37 miles long
25 <sup>th</sup> St. Bike/Walking Trail Map #29	6.9	12' wide paved trail			.57 miles long
Palmer/Bethlehem Townships Bike/Walking Trail Map #30	18.0	8' wide paved trail			Is a "National Recreation Trail", runs from North 27 <sup>th</sup> Street west through Bethlehem Township, along Chain Dam Road, down to the Lehigh River and then to Riverview Park – a total of 6.6 miles includes steep hills down to river.
Penn's Grant Bike/Walking Trail Map #31		8' wide paved trail			.44 miles long
*Leased From EASD ** Owned by EASD ***Privately Owned ****Owned by St. Jane's Church					

## EXISTING PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The tables on the preceding pages list the major recreation facilities in Palmer Township. Recommendations concerning many of these recreation areas are included in the "Recommended Recreation Improvements" section at the end of this "Recreation Facilities" portion of this report.

### FACILITY NEEDS AND REQUESTS

Numerous methods provide insight into what types of recreation facilities are most needed and desired by residents. These include requests by residents and groups, comparisons with national standards, types of existing and planned recreation programs and actual current use of facilities. An additional alternative would be to conduct a resident recreation survey, which would most probably involve a "mail-back" survey of either all households or a random sampling of residents.

The best way to determine needs is to look at the actual amounts of use that different facilities receive, and how many requests for facilities that cannot be met. As new facilities develop, their amount of use should be monitored so that plans can be revised in response if needed. In addition, the distribution of recreation facilities is equally important.

According to the 2000 U. S. Census, Palmer Township had 16,808 residents. It is estimated that in year 2020, the population will increase to 20,169.

Based upon standards of the National Recreation and Park Administration (NRPA) a community should have between 6.75 and 10.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. If the recreation areas of the Palmer and Tracy Elementary Schools and Easton Area High School are included but not private recreation areas, the township has 405.87 acres of parkland. This is more than sufficient to meet current needs, according to the NRPA standard suggesting between 113.47 and 176.51 acres, as of 2000. To accommodate the Township's eventual "build out" population, according to the standard, Palmer should have a total of 136.15 to 211.79 acres of parkland. It currently has sufficient parklands to satisfy the national standard through year 2020.

The NRPA guidelines recommend the following for fields and courts:

softball/baseball fields - 1 per 5,000 resident  
football/soccer fields - 1 per 20,000 residents  
basketball courts - 1 per 5,000 residents

tennis courts - 1 per 2,000 residents  
volleyball courts - 1 per 5,000 residents

The township inventory indicates that there are more than sufficient fields and courts to satisfy the national standard. However, the reality of the township's needs with respect to the organized athletic association and adult leagues, etc., indicates that additional fields may be needed in different parts of the township. Future population statistics will dictate the number of new fields and courts that may be needed in the future.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF FACILITIES

Athletic Fields- Additional athletic fields are needed. Fields should be intended to be easily adaptable to softball, football and soccer. The fields need to be oriented with careful attention to the angles of the sun.

Pavilions- There is extremely strong demand in Palmer for additional picnic pavilions. Pavilions are especially important to provide shelter from both rain and the Summer sun, especially for large group picnics. Pavilions function best when they are adjacent to restrooms, children's play equipment and informal play areas. A major question with pavilions is whether alcohol should be allowed.

Sledding - Formal steep sledding areas are not encouraged because of liability concerns. However, it may be possible to incorporate modest sledding hills within Township parks for sledding by small children, provided that the downhill area is completely free of obstructions.

Pools - The Palmer Pool is grandfathered at present time with regard to the design. At some time in the future, the pool will have to be reconstructed to incorporate overflow recirculating gutters along with a new wall configuration in the diving well and a handicapped ramp. This work would be extensive and the township should pursue a grant to cover the costs.

Fencing - Fencing should surround any area intended for use by small children, especially between play areas and major roads. Proper backstops are needed not only to protect players, but also spectators.

Movable fencing should be considered to make it easier to use the same fields for both football/soccer and outfields for

baseball/softball during different seasons.

Tennis Courts - It is preferable for several public courts to be concentrated at one or two locations so that people can have easy access to them while waiting for one to become free, instead of having to go between several locations looking for an open court. It also is much more cost effective to construct (and periodically repave) a few courts at one location than to do the same work at single courts at many locations.

Play Equipment - Play equipment should be available within a relatively safe walking distance of all of the denser neighborhoods in the Township.

Support Facilities - It is important to provide certain support facilities as part of any major park. These include restrooms, water fountains, benches, bleachers for spectators, security lighting, trash and recycling cans and paths or roads suitable for use by emergency vehicles.

#### EDUCATION/RECREATION CENTERS

The Palmer Elementary, Tracy Elementary Schools and the Kunkel tract should continue to be thought of not only as a place for young people during the day time, but also as a center for both education and recreation for the entire community.

As a general concept, the Township and the School District should continue to regularly work together to seek the fullest use of all school facilities by responsible, supervised groups during hours of the day, week and year when they are not needed for school activities. It is recognized that most of the senior high school facilities are in almost constant use just for school programs. The school district currently makes the gyms, multi-purpose rooms and athletic fields available to the Athletic Association and other groups when they are not needed for school district activities. Officially, the facilities are only available to groups that predominately include residents of the school district. A written application and school board approval is needed for use of the facilities. Religious activities are not allowed. In addition to any fees for use, the group is also required to pay for any overtime for custodians. Custodians must be present unless the school principal certifies that adequate adult supervision will be present. The district generally requires that the organization using the school facilities have insurance for bodily injury and property damage, with the insurance covering both the outside organization and the school district.

The education/recreation concept is economical because it serves two important public programs with only one area of land and one set of improvements. Because of careful planning

for multi-purpose use, the taxpayers buy maximum education and recreation. They get almost twice the value for their tax dollar as compared with the cost of providing two comparable separate facilities.

Joint use also helps in holding down maintenance costs and in making it easier to provide security. Also, it is much easier to provide recreation programs at a few key central sites, instead of widely scattered sites. This also makes it easier for families to deliver their children to the sites of recreation programs, and makes it easier for entire families to enjoy recreation at one location.

The schools have many of the facilities needed to efficiently and safely provide for public recreation. These include parking, security, equipment storage, maintenance personnel and equipment, restrooms, lighting, public water and sewer hook-ups, and water fountains. If Township recreational facilities are not adjacent to a school, most of these support facilities must be duplicated.

#### DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The "Open Space Plan" of this report addresses ways development regulations can be used to help provide adequate open space, recreational lands, conservation and recreation facilities.

As part of this planning program and to comply with changes in state law, several revisions to the Township's Subdivision and Land Development ordinances are needed to assist in providing needed recreation. These include the following suggestions:

- require larger amounts of land per dwelling if land is only suitable for passive open space;
- base the recreation fees on the average value of the amount of land that would otherwise be required; this is important to ensure fairness among developers, so that one developer is not required to dedicate very valuable land while another developer is only required to pay a small amount in fees;
- establish a system to ensure fairness among developers who dedicate floodplains or wetlands versus those who dedicate prime developable land;
- establish a system to ensure that recreation fees are spent in an area that will be accessible to residents of the development that paid the fees except where a centrally located specialty recreation area is provided

and;

- require or strongly encourage developers of any development of townhouses or apartments to provide children's play equipment; this is important because each family will not have room for recreation on their own lot.

The largest expense in development athletic fields is often grading the land. The Township should consider allowing developer to accomplish grading on existing Township owned land, in return for reducing the amount of open space or fees that must be dedicated. Any such agreement should require the work to follow a detailed grading plan.

#### PROPOSED RECREATION IMPROVEMENTS

The "Recreation Plan Map" shows major existing and proposed recreation areas. These include approximate example locations of where it may be appropriate for a developer to be required to provide future recreation areas. These locations are meant to be for general planning purposes, and are not intended to define exact boundaries.

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LOCATION

PROPOSED RECREATION IMPROVEMENTS

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TOWNSHIP-WIDE:

Recognize that the Township generally has sufficient recreation areas in the majority of the already developed areas and that most of these existing parks are generally developed to their capacity.

A large recreation area is required to serve the needs of the Township.

Continue to coordinate the Township's future recreation needs with the Township's ability to require developers to dedicate recreation land and/or recreation fees, while coordinating land to be dedicated by different developments (such as requiring land to be dedicated at the adjoining borders of two different developments).

Direct noisier and more intense types of recreation (such as adult softball or lighted fields) to those locations where they are least likely to negatively impact adjacent homes.

Emphasize Riverview Park, the Palmer Athletic Complex, Fairview Park, Tracy School/Keystone Park and Mill Race Park as major "community-wide" parks serving very large areas of the Township with the emphasis on organized recreation programs and a wide variety of active facilities. This will make it easier to efficiently provide recreation programs. Emphasizing the development of active programs at these locations would allow most of the smaller parks that may be developed in the future to emphasize passive recreation and more informal "pick-up" games for neighborhood children.

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LOCATION

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

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NORTHERN PALMER:

Along Schoeneck Creek:

Seek to preserve areas immediately along the Schoeneck Creek as passive conservation areas, preferably in public ownership. Develop a recreation trail along the entire length of the Schoeneck Creek that can tie into a future bike/walking trail along the Bushkill Creek, industrial parks and proposed developments. As an alternative to public ownership in places, preserve lands in a homeowner association, with a public easement for the recreation trail.

Along Bushkill Creek

Preserve the entire Bushkill Creek corridor as a passive natural greenway, preferably in public, homeowner-association or Wildlands Conservancy ownership. If this is not possible, seek conservation easements preventing development, working with the Wildlands Conservancy or the Bushkill Stream Conservancy.

Work with Stockertown & Tatamy to connect the trail to the Plainfield Recreation Trail, a 7 mile paved bikeway that now exists to the north along the Little Bushkill Creek from Belfast to Pen Argyl. Also work to extend this trail to connect with Palmer's existing bike/walking trail near the Wilson border. Seek to link this Bushkill Creek trail with Forks' planned pathways running parallel to Uhler Road and running south from Newlins Road, and with Bushkill Park. Connections are also possible from Belfast to the trails of the Jacobsburg State Park & Environmental Education Center.

Preserve sensitive natural areas of the Schoeneck and Bushkill Creeks in public ownership.

Provide increased public access for fishing along the Bushkill Creek corridor.

Coordinate development of passive recreation areas along the Schoeneck & Bushkill Creek greenways.

LOCATION PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS:

Parkview Estates, continue recreation trail connection from the Palmer Municipal Library to Bushkill Park, through the Parkview Estates

As lands develop, seek a Township or homeowner-association-owned neighborhood park to serve new residents; seek to preserve wooded steep slopes, open space and conservation areas.

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LOCATION

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

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CENTRAL PALMER:

Easton Area High School

Seek to improve pedestrian access in the area of the High School, possibly involving extensions of bike/walking trail across the road at 25<sup>th</sup> Street.

Access Over Rt. 22

Improve the shoulders of Bethman, Green Pond Road and Greenwood Ave for safer pedestrian and bicycle travel to connect southern neighborhoods with the Palmer Athletic Complex, the Chrin Community Center Complex, Palmer School and the Kunkel Athletic Complex.

Weller Tract

Preserve the Weller Tract behind the Palmer Municipal Library for passive recreation, such as walking trails with benches.

Chrin Community Center - Phase I

The township has started plans to build a community center at the corner of Green Pond & Bethman Roads within the next three years to house activities listed on page 13 & 14 of this plan.

Chrin Community Center - Phase II

The portion of the community complex that does not include the community center building is to be graded and seeded in preparation for the fields, pavilions, courts, etc., beginning in 2004. The site is to be completed by 2014.

Bike/Walking Trail

Consider adding additional barriers at major road crossings such as at Mine Lane Road to cause bicyclists and pedestrians to stop or slow down at intersections.

Seek to extend bike/walking trail to the north side of the Lehigh River in Easton in cooperation with adjacent municipalities, using the abandoned railroad bed. Using a former railroad bridge in Easton could create a "looped" bike trail along the river, also using the former Glendon Bridge. Continue to work to extend this bike trail from near Easton Area High School to the Bushkill Creek.

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LOCATION

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

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SOUTHERN PALMER:

As lands develop, seek a neighborhood park to serve new residents.

Woodridge Falls Area

Preserve the steep area alongside Riverview Park to allow a scenic overlook of the Lehigh River and preserve native habitat. The overlook also provides a buffer for the police firing range area.

Riverview Park

Continue to develop trail to link Riverview Park to the former Glendon Bridge across the Lehigh River, with the Hugh Moore Park bikeway, using an abandoned railroad underpass at 25<sup>th</sup> St.

Develop picnic pavilions, children's play equipment, and volleyball courts, at the park.

Along Lehigh River

Preserve land along the Lehigh River as a passive scenic "greenway," as part of the "Lehigh and Delaware River National Heritage Corridor."

Seek Township control of thin areas of land along the River that are now owned by the City of Easton but which are within Palmer Township adjacent to Township-owned open spaces. Encourage preservation of "Island Park" island as a wilderness area.

Continue development of a bike/walking trail along the Lehigh River from the City of Easton to Allentown to connect the existing Bethlehem to East Allentown bike trail with the Palmer and Easton bike trails.

Old Orchard Park

Continue to use the field in Old Orchard Park primarily for practice and youth games that do not attract large crowds and traffic.

Between Rt. 22

As lands develop, seek dedication of a small tot lot to serve residents between Rt. 22 and William Penn Highway.

## OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION PLAN

### THE IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACES

It is important to preserve open spaces in Palmer Township for the following major reasons:

- to maintain the natural environmental processes and balances, ensuring adequate groundwater and high water quality,
- to provide an important psychological relief from developed areas,
- to preserve areas of scenic beauty, and protect the semi-rural character of outlying areas,
- to preserve lands that are not naturally suited for development,
- to provide land for active and passive recreation, both presently and in the distant future, and
- to preserve habitat for birds, fish and other wildlife.

Open space can be preserved in public ownership, private ownership or by a semi-public organization, such as an association of adjacent homeowners. The difference is how much use is allowed by the general public.

### LAND PRESERVATION METHODS

Many creative and practical methods should be used to preserve open space in the Township, especially as a means to avoid the need for extremely expensive purchase of land by the Township. These methods include:

- Purchase- This involves actual purchase of land by a public agency, and is the most expensive method. Purchase permanently preserves the land and provides complete control over it. Condemnation should be avoided whenever possible because of the expense, delay and ill-will that often results. To spread out costs over time, sales agreements could provide for the purchase of land in installments in a form of "owner-financing."
- Leasing- Leasing can make sense to respond to recreation needs in the short-run, especially when the owner is not willing to sell the land. Another option instead of a formal lease is to pay a landowner to allow certain recreational use of the land during certain times of the year.
- Mandatory Dedication- Palmer requires all proposed residential developments to dedicate a certain portion of the tract as permanent open space, and/or to pay recreation fees "in-lieu-of" dedicating land.

New commercial and industrial uses should be required to pay recreation fees to compensate for the recreation demand caused by the additional employees.

- Conservation Easements- This method allows a private property owner to continue to own and use their land, while selling or donating the right to develop it. Restrictions on tree cutting and use of pesticides might also be included. The land is then maintained by its owner, without any public expense. The property can then be sold to others, provided that it continues to be preserved. This method may be significantly less expensive than outright public purchase, but does not allow public access to the land. A conservation easement often appeals to people who wish to preserve the land, but want to retain all fishing and hunting rights for themselves. This method also allows a landowner to protect the privacy of the land around their home. This method would be especially appropriate along the Bushkill and Schoeneck Creeks.
- Scenic Easements- This method is more limited than a "conservation easement" because it allows limited development to occur as long as certain major scenic views are protected. "Facade easements" are a related method that ensure the exterior of a historic building is preserved.
- Agricultural Easements- This method is very similar to a "conservation easement" except that it is intended for prime active farmland. The owner gives up the right to develop the land

permanently or for a set number of years in return for a certain amount of money. Northampton County is currently participating in a statewide program that purchases these agricultural easements. However, this program has very limited funding. Therefore, a property must rank very high on the basis of certain criteria in order to be eligible. This method of preservation is especially appropriate in the north-western areas of Palmer where land is less expensive and where there is the best chance to preserve large areas of open space over the long-run.

- Donations- Certain landowners may be willing to sell land at a price below market value or donate land or donate "conservation easements." The Federal income tax benefits of this method should be well publicized to landowners. This method is often most attractive to persons who own land that has physical limitations on development.
- Tax Abatements- Certain property owners may be forced to sell their land for development because they cannot afford to pay the taxes. In response, the County allows real estate tax reductions under State Acts 319 and 515 for large properties if the owners agree not to develop their land for a seven year period. The owner may break this restriction only after paying significant penalties.

- Zoning - The following section describes ways zoning can be used to help preserve open space.

#### DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The Township's zoning regulations should be used to preserve open space, especially on lands that are clearly physically unsuitable for building. Zoning mainly preserves open space through limitations on how intensely land can be developed and through incentives and disincentives. For example, a higher overall density might be permitted if a developer preserves key areas of a tract in open space. However, every landowner must be permitted some reasonable use of their land.

It is essential to ensure that all development respects the natural features of the land. Also, areas that are clearly unsuitable for development need to be protected. The most important natural features include creek valleys, wetlands, flood-prone areas, riparian buffer zones, wooded areas and steep sloped lands.

The following are certain key requirements and methods that should be used to accomplish these objectives:

- Continue to require large lot areas in areas with slopes of 15 to 25 percent
- Seek to avoid any earth disturbance on slopes over 25 percent
- Strictly enforce the Township's regulations on flood-prone land (especially areas vulnerable to a "100-Year flood")

- Seek to have all paving and buildings setback at least 50 to 75 feet from the banks of each creek
- Carefully review all development plans and activities to help ensure that the Federal and State wetland regulations are enforced
- Carefully control unnecessary tree cutting
- Encourage the development of carefully controlled golf courses, riding academies and similar low intensity uses throughout the Township that would result in open space being preserved.
- Consider using an "Official Map" to reserve land that the Township wishes to acquire in the near future. This is discussed in the "Putting This Plan into Action" section of this report.

#### ACQUISITION OF OPEN SPACE

Recreation and conservation lands are very expensive to purchase (not to mention the high cost to develop facilities and maintain them). The preceding sections described ways that development regulations and other incentives can be used to help preserve and obtain land without expensive purchase.

If the Township considers purchasing land, this Plan recommends that the following criteria be carefully considered:

- Is it physically suited for active recreation (including being relatively flat and well-drained)?
- Would it be well-located to serve current and future neighborhoods?
- Is the land adjacent to a public school, allowing multiple use?

- Is it protected from development by existing regulations (such as floodplains or wetlands)?
- Does it have highly scenic qualities, especially if its in a location that is very visible (such as along a major road or on a ridge)?
- Would it provide an important link between existing recreation areas and neighborhoods and/or connecting to natural features in adjacent municipalities.
- Would it be desirable for passive recreation?
- Could it be purchased for a reasonable price (especially if the seller will "donate" some of the value in return for Federal income tax benefits)?
- Does it involve a willing seller, as opposed to condemnation?
- Would it be developed in the near future if not purchased?
- Does it involve environmentally sensitive areas that could be developed under existing regulations (such as forests or steep slopes)?

Palmer should work with the Wildlands Conservancy, Northampton County, Bushkill Stream Conservancy and possibly local fish and game organizations to acquire key areas of passive open space. This especially includes lands along the Lehigh River and the Bushkill and Schoeneck Creeks. Other important open spaces should be sought through the land dedication requirements in the Subdivision Ordinance.

Lands along creeks are important to preserve because they combine many important and highly sensitive natural features. These include wetlands, steep slopes,

flood prone areas, high water table soils and wooded areas. Also, lands along these waterways have tremendous potential in the long-run for recreation, especially for hiking, bicycling, fishing, walking, cross-country skiing and nature study.

Many environmentally sensitive areas such as lands along the Bushkill and Schoeneck Creeks that are not suitable for active recreation should be preserved. Especially if these lands are in small parcels, it may be difficult for the Township to oversee and provide even minimal maintenance to them.

#### TRAILS

Walking, bicycling and cross-country skiing are becoming increasingly popular. In response, a full set of safer routes for bicycling, jogging and walking are needed throughout the Township, especially for children to reach recreation areas. Although these routes will not be created in a short period of time, attention should be placed on developing key links that eventually will fit into a regional system.

Trails should connect the existing Township bike/walking trails, major parks, major neighborhoods, the public schools and key shopping areas. These trails should include both recreation trails within parks and more transportation oriented trails between key locations to help reduce traffic congestion.

As new developments are proposed, pedestrian and bicycle access should be a consideration. If the local streets would not provide adequate connections from the development towards major attractions in the area (such as a park or school), then the developer should be required to develop a bike/walking trail for these connections. Also, bikeway systems should be considered within new industrial parks, in place of sidewalks along the public streets.

This Plan seeks to avoid the need for bicyclists, walkers and joggers to travel along major roads. The intent is to steer these people onto local streets and separate trails. However in certain areas, pedestrian and bicycle travel will continue to use the shoulders of these major roads because there are no alternatives. Bicycling and walking along roads is especially hazardous when the road is heavily traveled, and does not have much shoulder (such as Greenwood Avenue) or if the road is narrow.

Along selected roads, in cooperation with Penn DOT and adjacent developers, shoulders should be made wide and smooth enough for bicycles and pedestrians. These shoulders should be well-marked and possibly sloped so that they are not used by vehicles.

Consideration should be given to requiring that large industrial parks include bike/walking trails through their development (especially along the Schoeneck Creek) in place of having to construct sidewalks.

Specific trail recommendations are discussed in the "Recreation Facilities Plan" section of this report.

#### IMPORTANT NATURAL FEATURES

Land varies greatly in the amount of development that it can naturally support. Some land, such as flood-prone and very steeply-sloped land, should remain completely in open space. Other lands are suitable for moderate development, while some lands are able to support intense uses.

Development in Palmer Township should only be allowed in a manner which carefully respects the natural features of the land. Environmentally sensitive lands should be preserved in open space to maintain environmental balances. The table on the following pages provides guidelines on how important natural features can be protected.

The "Environmentally Sensitive Areas Map" in the appendix shows the most important natural features in the Township. The tables on the pages 36 & 37 summarize why the Township's natural features are important, and what strategies should be followed to protect them.

PALMER TOWNSHIP  
GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING IMPORTANT NATURAL FEATURES

Type of Natural Feature	Description	Potential Problems If Not Protected	Strategies for Protection
Steep Slopes Wooded areas, Vertical conservation areas	Slopes of 15% have 15 feet of vertical change for every 100 feet of horizontal distance. Steep slopes are often wooded And along creeks.  Areas with numerous mature trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Difficulty of maintaining snowplowing steep road.</li> <li>* Higher costs of buildings.</li> <li>* High rate of septic system failures.</li> <li>* Increased erosion &amp; runoff</li> <li>* Winter driving hazards from steep roads and driveways</li> <li>* Disturbance of scenic areas.</li> <li>* Increased costs to extend public water and sewer lines</li> <li>* Loss of important birds and wildlife habitats.</li> <li>* Loss of hunting areas.</li> <li>* Loss of air purification.</li> <li>* Loss of scenic resources</li> <li>* Noise &amp; incompatible development may become more noticeable</li> <li>* Increase maintenance expenditure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Use special precautions during building.</li> <li>*Cluster houses on the most suitable land, while keeping Steep slopes in open space.</li> <li>* Keep natural vegetation intact.</li> <li>* Preserve areas of 25%+ slopes in open space/conservation districts</li> <li>* require larger lot sizes in steep areas.</li> <li>* Prevent the unnecessary cutting of trees during building.</li> <li>* Seek to preserve in public or private open space</li> <li>* Seek replanting with native vegetation of forested land that may be disturbed</li> </ul>

PALMER TOWNSHIP  
GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING IMPORTANT NATURAL FEATURES

Type of Natural Feature	Description	Potential Problems If Not Protected	Strategies for Protection
Floodplains	Areas that are prone to flooding. These include not only the legally designated Flood plain, but also areas along drainage channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Increased flooding in other areas.</li> <li>* Loss of potential public recreation areas.</li> <li>* Threats to important wild-life and bird habitats.</li> <li>* Erosion &amp; sedimentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Consider prohibiting all structures &amp; paving not only within the "100 year flood way" (which is the actual main flood channel), but also along the adjacent "100 year flood fringe."</li> <li>* Seek to preserve natural vegetation immediately adjacent to creeks.</li> <li>* Seek to preserve land along major creek valley as private, semi-public or public open space</li> </ul>
Waterways	There are three major surface Waters within and adjacent To Palmer: Bushkill Creek, Schoeneck Creek and the Lehigh River.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Loss of potential public recreation areas.</li> <li>* Threats to important bird, fish and wildlife Habitats.</li> <li>* Increased turbidity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Prevent soil erosion avoid sedimentation of creeks.</li> <li>* Consider areas along creeks for public recreation.</li> <li>* Prevent runoff from polluting creeks with pesticides, grease, and farm animal wastes.</li> <li>* Protect &amp; maintain riparian Buffer zones along waterways</li> </ul>

## PUTTING THIS PLAN INTO ACTION

It will be essential to carry out this Plan through action in several major areas: 1) Administration, 2) Security, 3) Park Design and Engineering, 4) Financing, 5) Maintenance, 6) Communications With the Public, 7) Safety/ Liability and 8) Volunteers. This section describes existing conditions and recommendations under each of these major topics.

This Plan should be carried out through a continuous process of planning and action. The awareness and continued participation of Palmer Township residents will be extremely valuable in this process. This section describes ways to move the objectives and recommendations of this Plan towards reality.

### ADMINISTRATION

The Township's seven member Recreation Board is appointed by the five member Township Board of Supervisors to oversee the planning and development of recreation facilities. The day-to-day administration of existing individual recreation programs are handled by the volunteers of each recreation group. The Recreation Commission are assisted by the Township Parks Department Superintendent and the other Township staff.

### SECURITY

Security is especially a concern to prevent vandalism and garbage dumping and to avoid conflicts with adjacent neighborhoods. The township police should regularly patrol township parks.

To help address security, especially as additional recreation facilities are developed, the following should be considered:

- Carefully design all new parks with security concerns in mind, by making all areas visible from adjacent streets and by including security lighting.
- Continue to utilize the township police to lock the gate at Riverview and Penn Pump Parks at night, and any other gates that may be placed at other parks.
- Strongly encourage neighbors who live around parks to report any suspicious activity.
- Work through the schools to inform young people of the costs of vandalism, including potential prosecution.
- Seek to have young people who are caught vandalizing parks to repair and improve the parks if they want to avoid official punishment, or as a condition of such punishment.

- Avoid developing those recreation facilities that are expensive and more vulnerable to vandalism in areas that are more isolated.
- Provide recreation facilities near public schools, Township buildings and other areas where responsible staff can help keep watch over the facilities. This is especially appropriate adjacent to a school because it often has activities and custodians working at night.
- Use fences or barriers to limit access for dumping and to keep vehicles off of athletic fields.

Make sure that all parks are designed to allow access for police patrols, especially at night. Consider using a police bicycle patrol for areas along the Lehigh River, especially during summer months.

Continue to enforce the hour restrictions in parks to prevent late night nuisances to adjacent neighbors.

#### PARK DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

Detailed site planning and engineering is essential to ensure that a park will be constructed properly and efficiently. If athletic fields are not carefully engineered, for example, they often have drainage problems that require large expenses and disruptions in use in the future to correct.

Careful site design is also important to adjust the facilities around each site's natural features; to make sure that there is proper access for emergency vehicles and to coordinate the long-term development of different facilities and areas.

#### FINANCING

State and Federal grants for parks, recreation and open space are extremely limited and increasingly competitive.

- Consider establishing a "Park Endowment Fund" for land acquisition or special projects, supported by

donations and fundraisers.

- Consider creative ways of financing, such as offering to name facilities after persons or groups or businesses that pay for them (such as ball fields or tennis courts, or putting donor plaques on park benches).
- Establish a "memorial arboretum" where people can fund the planting of a tree in memorial to a person. This should involve a small memorial sign and an invitation to the donor to help plant the tree. An overall landscape plan should be completed including many different types of native trees, allowing people to select the one they wish to pay for. Boy Scout troops also are often interested in participating in tree planting programs in parks.
- Establish and periodically update a "capital improvements program".
- Incorporate bird boxes, bat boxes and no mow zones wherever it makes sense.

#### MAJOR TYPES OF FINANCING

A combination of traditional and more creative financing methods will be needed to put this Plan into action. The following major types of financing should be considered:

- Recreation Fees by Developers- This will probably continue to be a major source for financing new recreation facilities and parkland in the Township. These fees are paid by developers of new homes to compensate the Township for the increased demand caused by each new household. The funds cannot be used for maintenance or recreation programs. Consideration should be given to charging reasonable recreation fees on new business developments to offset the demand on public recreation facilities caused by nonresident employees.

- User Fees- These are fees paid directly by the people who use a program or facility. The intent is that certain offerings, such as adult fitness programs, can sometimes be run in a business-like fashion for greater efficiency and a fair distribution of costs. Also, fee systems can help to avoid unnecessary costs. For example, if coin-operated lights are used on a tennis court, the electricity is only being used when the court is actually being used. Care is needed to make sure that lower income families are not excluded because they cannot afford high fees. Also, user fees should not be charged if it would be too costly or administratively burdensome to collect.
- Bond Issue- For very large capital expenses, borrowing often makes sense. This avoids the need for large short-term tax increases and spreads the payments over the many years over which the benefits will be enjoyed. The main disadvantage is the high costs of interest on the debt.
- State and Federal Grants- Significant amounts of State or Federal grants cannot be expected to be available for parks or open space. Even if grants would be available, it must be remembered that grant programs often require significant work to prepare a competitive application and to fulfill all of the administrative requirements. Also, if Federal or State grants are used, all non-Township workers must be paid the "prevailing union wage rates." This substantially increases the costs of most construction projects.

To increase the Township's chances of receiving grants, it should only seek grants for those types of projects that are likely to rank highly according to the program's official selection criteria.

- Environmental Groups- To preserve key lands, the Township should seek assistance from major environmental groups. These groups can often provide technical assistance to the Township, financial advice to the landowner on major tax

advantages and possible assistance in fund-raising. These groups include the Wildlands Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy and the Bushkill Stream Conservancy.

- Annual Appropriations- the Township will need to decide each year whether appropriations from the Township's general fund should be set aside to develop facilities or to sponsor types of programs that cannot be fully funded through user fees.
- Sponsorships- Area businesses or groups may be willing to contribute towards specific programs in return for public recognition.
- Gifts- The tax advantages of donating land and materials should be fully publicized. Also, contributors should receive public recognition to spur contributions. Specific businesses that might have excess of a needed item could be approached for donations. A "Gifts Catalog" would be excellent ways of letting people know what the Township needs, so they could choose exactly what items, materials or services they wish to contribute or pay for.

#### FINANCIAL PLANNING

Three major financial tools will be needed to carry out this plan: an annual recreation operating budget for routine expenses, an annual capital expenses budget for large expenses serving a long-term need and a five or seven year long "capital improvements" program to plan for large expenses proposed for future years, the two later items to be funded by developer recreation fees.

#### PLANNING FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

"Capital" improvements are projects involving a substantial expense for the construction or improvement of major public facilities. These are extraordinary expenses that occur only on occasion,

opposed to "operating" expenses that occur every year.

To carefully prepare for major future expenses and to help decide when they should be accomplished, many communities have found great value in a formal "Capital Improvements Program" (CIP). A CIP is a process of systematically and rationally identifying, planning and budgeting very large capital expenses, such as purchasing parkland and developing facilities.

This allows communities to avoid short-term tax hikes, to set aside funds ahead of time for large projects (which can greatly lower the total cost of a project by reducing borrowing) and to efficiently combine any borrowing needs into one bond issue.

A CIP should list all projects needed, their costs, the year each project will occur and the source of its financing. This also allows many different projects to be compared with each other to effectively prioritize different needs

#### MAINTENANCE

Maintenance includes not only repairing playground equipment and mowing grass, but also includes plant, lawn, and tree care, maintaining the equipment used for maintenance and preparing athletic fields for use.

The following suggestions should be considered in regards to maintenance of parks:

- Prepare a seasonal calendar of maintenance work that needs to be completed at different times of the average year, so the work can be more easily scheduled following a routine year after year.
- Use a checklist to check-off maintenance work that is needed on each parcel of Township parkland.
- Carefully design new recreational facilities to hold maintenance to a reasonable minimum (such as using low-maintenance native plantings, reforestation

certain areas, letting some areas "go natural" [especially immediately along waterways], establishing no mow buffers and laying out grass areas so that they are wide enough for a large tractor-mower).

- Involve experienced maintenance workers in reviewing the design of proposed recreational facilities.
- Request that recreation groups accept primary responsibilities for preparing athletic fields for their use prior to each game (such as lining of fields, putting out bases, raking the infield and occasionally cutting the infield grass). This would free the Township to concentrate on routine grass cutting and major maintenance.

The long-term expenses of maintaining and repairing recreational facilities must be considered in the design of facilities. This includes the time needed for a worker and equipment to move between sites. Therefore, over the long-run, it may be desirable to have limited types of maintenance equipment (such as a riding mower) stored within a small building within a park in the northern end of the Township.

Associations of adjacent homeowners may be willing to assume certain maintenance responsibilities for passive open spaces adjacent to their homes because they would have the most interest in seeing that these lands were well-maintained.

As additional facilities and lands are developed, consideration should be given to writing a maintenance manual that would establish a complete system for all of the maintenance that is needed.

#### COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

Most residents are probably familiar with those parks that are nearest their homes or that are visible from major streets. Many residents are probably not familiar with the opportunities at smaller, less visible and

newer parks. Facilities and programs are of little value if the public is not aware of the offerings. Therefore, a good communications program will be essential.

To increase awareness among the public, an insert should be prepared that could be put into the Township newsletter and on the township Website. This should list the locations of recreation areas and the facilities that are available at each area. This should be intended to be kept by families for reference. Copies of this insert could also be made available at the Township Building, local realtors and other locations. Also, the newsletter and Website should include lists of major recreation programs being offered by local organizations.

In addition, recreation programs should be publicized through radio, newspaper articles, newspaper ads and flyers through the schools. Press releases should routinely be sent to area newspapers to announce new facilities and programs. Small posters can be placed in key locations, such as the library, public schools and local stores.

Palmer could develop a strong public image for its parks, open space and recreation program by using an attractive logo on all recreation notices, letterhead and signs. A contest might be sponsored to spur further interest in the programs. Creating a partnership with school programs would allow for education about these programs, as well as civic responsibility.

Good communication involves not only informing the public, but also listening to their advice, complaints and suggestions.

#### SAFETY AND LIABILITY

Safety has become a major concern in recreation because of the rise in insurance costs. However, it must not be forgotten that safety is an absolutely essential concern purely to avoid unnecessary injuries.

Three methods are recommended to respond to this problem: 1) continue to have adequate Township insurance, 2) require large groups that regularly use Township land to have their adequate insurance of their own that also protects the Township and 3) continually look for ways to make Township lands and facilities safer.

In addition, high risk recreation facilities, such as skateboard areas, should be avoided. All parks should be regularly inspected to note any safety hazards. Any safety hazards should then be quickly resolved. If the Township is aware of a correctable hazard and does not act within a reasonable period of time, it is much more likely to be found liable in the event of an injury.

Nationally, one of the major sources of accidents (and lawsuits) is children's playground equipment. Three quarters of these accidents involve falls in which a child hits a hard surface (such as asphalt). In response, hard surface should never be used under or around play equipment. Instead, the Township should continue to cover these areas with a softer surface, such as sand, wood chip carpet and/or recycled tire chips.

Also, all play equipment must be adequately anchored and should not involve ladders that are too steep. All equipment should have adequate space around it so that children playing around one piece do not run into a second piece of equipment in accordance with the Consumer's Products Safety Commission Publication #325 - Playground Safety Guidelines.

For safety, high and long backstops are needed around all fields used for softball or baseball. Fences should separate play areas from major roads. Sharp edges and protrusions must be avoided.

#### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are an essential part of many recreation programs, including coaches, leaders of activities, nature guides, fundraisers and teachers of skill. Teenagers often are a major untapped source of

volunteers.

The easiest volunteers to work with are often those that participate as part of an already organized group, such as local service groups and boy scouts. Proper supervision, oversight, training, placement and scheduling of volunteers is essential, which often requires substantial effort.

College interns often can provide free labor, especially if they could obtain college credit for the work. However, work intended for an intern must be of a type that will not require so much supervision that it becomes a burden to the staff.

- Provide volunteers with adequate recognition for their work.
- Provide volunteers with adequate training, such as first aid.
- Publicize the types of work that volunteers are needed to accomplish.
- Monitor volunteer coaches to ensure that they do not push young children "too hard."
- Consider establishing a voluntary training program for coaches so that they can be the most effective program leaders, and to help them recognize possible health and safety concerns.

#### CONTINUING PLANNING

Planning must not be a once-and-done process. This Plan will need to be periodically revised to reflect changing circumstances, problems and trends.

As part of this continuing planning program, Palmer Township should expand its relationships with neighboring municipalities and with other groups providing recreation. These strengthened relationships and coordinated efforts will most effectively broaden the recreational opportunities of all present and future residents of Palmer.

The final decision on nearly every matter that affects recreation and open space conservation in Palmer Township rests with the Board of Supervisors. Therefore, it is essential that all boards, commissions and committees maintain the very best of communications with the Supervisors. Many communities work towards this goal by appointing a member of all boards, commissions and committees to attend meetings of the Board of Supervisors and visa versa.

#### TOOLS TO CARRY OUT THIS PLAN

##### ZONING

The zoning ordinance is the main legal tool for regulating uses of land.

##### SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

The Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance guides and controls the layout of streets, lots and utilities. The requirements within this Ordinance for developers to dedicate recreation land or fees and to possibly construct bicycle paths in certain areas are discussed in the "Open Space Plan" section of this report.

##### OFFICIAL MAP

The Municipal Planning Code provides the Township with the authority to adopt an "Official Map." This Official Map can designate approximate proposed locations of streets and new and expanded parks.

The Official Map then provides the opportunity for the Township to work with the owner to reserve those lands for one year after they are officially proposed for development. Within that one year, the Township would then either have to purchase the land for its fair market value or decide not to go forward with the proposal. This method can provide the time needed to raise the needed funds, and to prevent the loss of important opportunities. It also puts the landowners on notice about the Township's future plans.

## A SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND STUDIES

Many key matters were carefully considered as part of background studies and background maps, including the existing recreation programs, existing land uses in the Township, expected development patterns, existing recreation facilities and the natural features of the Township.

Two matters are summarized in this part of the report- 1) Population and Housing and 2) Recreation Expenses.

### THE PEOPLE AND HOUSING OF PALMER

The population characteristics of the Township are important to understand in order to understand the demand for recreation. The demand for different types of recreation varies greatly by gender, income, age, education and physical mobility. For instance, higher income persons are more able to afford commercial recreation, instead of having to depend upon lower cost public recreation.

The following summarizes the most relevant 2000 information that is available from the US Census.

Total Population and Growth - The following table shows the population increases in Palmer Township over the last four decades.

TOTAL POPULATION Palmer Township 1950 to 2000		
YEAR	POPULATION	NUMERIC
	INCREASE	INCREASE
1950	4,086	
1960	8,823	4,737
1970	12,684	3,861
1980	13,926	1,242
1990	14,965	1,039
2000	16,809	1,842

Source - U.S. Census

Households - In 2000, the Township included 6,865 households. Of these households, 4,893 were considered to be "families" - meaning that they included two or more persons who were related. Of these families, 4,262 included a married couple living together. Of the non-family households, 1,583 included one person living by themselves. Of these single-person households, 872 included one person age 65 or older. An additional 213 persons in 1990 lived in some type of institution within the Township, which mainly includes the Manor Care Nursing Home.

Persons Per Household - In 2000, an average of 2.46 persons were in each household. This was a reduction from 1990; and results from young people delaying marriage, mothers having children without being married, increases in divorces and separations, families having fewer

children on the average and more persons living longer.

Ages of Residents - The following table shows the distribution of the residents of Palmer Township by their ages in 2000. Compared to the entire State, Palmer had:

- a) a lower than average percentage of persons age 20 and younger (23.2% vs. 26.6% for the State),
- b) a lower than average percentage of persons age 21 to 54 ( 45.7% vs. 48.5%for the State) and
- c) a higher than average percentage of persons age 55 and over (31.2% vs. 24.8%for the State).

Between 1990 and 2000, Palmer Township experienced a decrease in the number of senior citizens. The number of persons age 65 to 74 decreased from 1,791 to 1,737 a 3 percent decrease. The number of persons age 75 and over increased from 1,108 to 1,721 a 55 percent increase. This increase can likely be attributed to persons who bought houses built during the Township's growth periods in the 1950s and 1960s when the persons were in their 30s and 40s and who have remained in the same home. Also, these senior citizen statistics are affected by the presence of the Manor Care Nursing Home.

AGE GROUP	PALMER TWP.		PENNSYLVANIA % of Total
	Number	Percent	
Under 5	922	5.5%	5.9%
5-15	2,057	12.2%	13.8%
16-20	916	5.5%	6.9%
21-44	5,151	30.6%	34.6%
45-54	2,522	15.0%	13.9%
55-64	1,734	10.3%	9.2%
65-74	1,737	10.3%	7.9%
75 and over	1,721	10.2%	7.7%

Source - U.S. Census

Recreation Planning Areas - The Township was divided into three "Recreation Planning Areas."

These areas are generally based upon the "tracts" used by the U.S. Census, and upon the existence of major roads that provide barriers for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. These Planning Areas are:

- Northern Area - including all lands north of Nazareth Rd./Route 248, including all lands west of Hackett Park and along the Bushkill Creek. In 2000, this area included 3,444 residents.
- Central Area - including all lands south of Nazareth Rd. and north of Route 22, including all lands in the Newburg area and around Palmer Elementary School and the Palmer Library. In 2000, this area included 4,866 residents.
- Southern Area - including all lands south of Route 22, including areas along William Penn Highway, Freemansburg Avenue and the Lehigh River. In 2000, this area included 7,332 residents.

Senior Citizens in the Year 2010 - The following table shows the dramatic increase in senior citizens that is expected in Northampton County in the next 10 years, especially among persons aged 75 and over. Approximately two-thirds of persons over 75 are expected to be women. This is part of a national trend that is expected to continue even more between the year 2010 and 2020.

POPULATION AGED 65 AND OVER IN NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

AGE GROUP	# PERSONS 2000	PROJECTED 2010	% CHANGE
65 to 74	20,825	22,699	9%
75 and Over	21,205	23,113	9%
Total 65 & Over	42,030	45,812	9%

Race - In 2000, Palmer Township included 360 Afro-American persons and 393 persons of Hispanic origin. Please note that a person could be both Black and Hispanic.

Housing - In 2000, Palmer included 6,865 housing units. The Census reported that 76.6 percent of these (5,262) were single family detached houses other than mobile homes. The vacancy rate in 2000 was a very low 2.2 percent. A very high 86.2 percent of all occupied housing units in 2000 were occupied by their owner, and 13.8 percent were occupied by renters.

#### RECREATION EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES

The following tables list expenditures and revenues of the Township concerning parks and recreation.

PALMER TOWNSHIP – PARKS & RECREATION BUDGETED EXPENDITURES  
1999 TO 2004

	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
Parks, Playground and Open Space:						
Salaries & Wages	150,000	165,000	174,000	179,561	195,148	200,000
Conferences & Schools	500	500	350	350	350	400
Small Engine Repairman	0	0	0	1,000	1,000	1,000
Uniforms	1,000	1,000	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700
Materials & Supplies	8,000	19,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	14,500
General Expenses	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	7,200	8,600
Seed/Fert/Golf Mix	15,500	15,500	10,000	14,500	17,800	19,300
Telephone	1,200	1,200	1,400	400	400	400
Vehicle Expenses	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	8,000
Lube/Oil/Filter/Gas	3,000	3,000	4,500	5,680	5,680	5,680
Maintenance & Repairs	10,000	10,000	10,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
Fuel/Light/Water	5,000	5,000	7,500	7,500	9,100	9,100
General Repairs	8,000	8,000	8,000	15,000	15,000	7,800
Capital Improvements	92,500	72,500	85,000	77,401	9,000	0
Capital Purchases	0	7,000	10,000	0	0	0
Capital Equipment	38,500	16,000	29,100	61,100	37,200	73,000
Capital Minor Equip.	5,000	6,500	3,400	9,100	6,700	4,200
Totals	348,200	340,200	374,950	415,292	342,278	365,680
Total Recreation, Parks & Open Space Expenditures	460,418	456,200	496,450	540,192	467,478	488,603

Source: 1999 to 2003 Palmer Township Budget

PALMER TOWNSHIP – PARKS & RECREATION BUDGETED EXPENDITURES  
1999 TO 2004

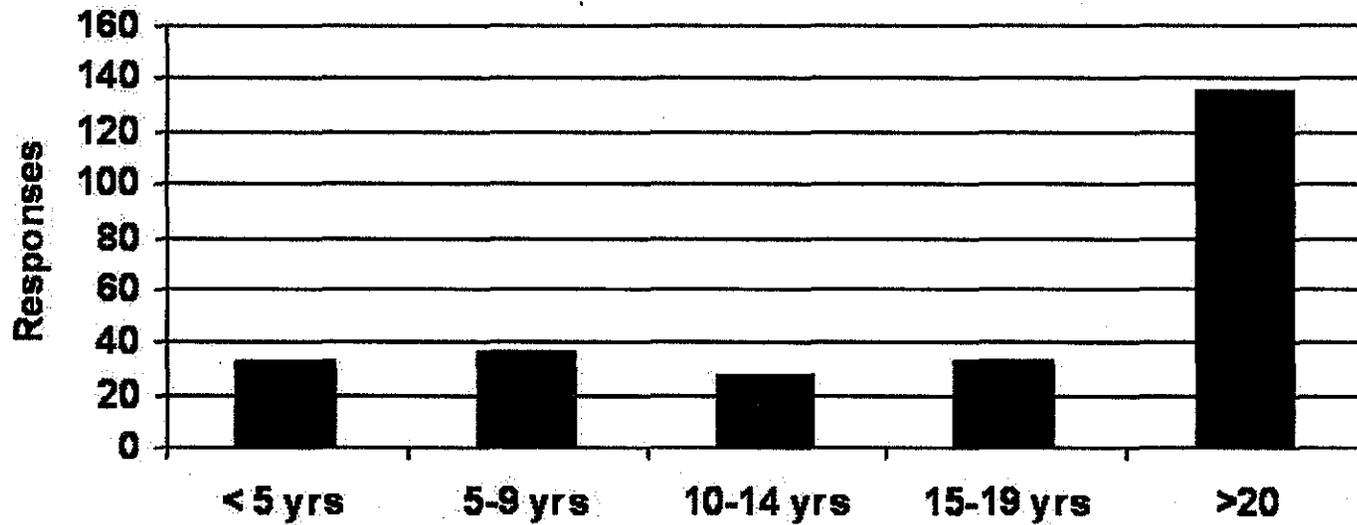
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>Recreation Programs:</b>						
Salaries & Wages	41,000	41,500	40,000	40,000	40,000	30,000
Materials & Supplies		500	500	3,000	3,000	3,000
3,000						
General Expenses	0	0	500	500	500	1,500
Telephone	0	0	1,800	1,200	1,200	800
Maintenance/Repairs		0	0	0	5,000	2,500
2,500						
Fuel, Light, Water	7,000	7,000	8,000	7,000	7,000	8,500
<b>Contributions to Programs:</b>						
Egg Hunt	1,000	1,200	1,200	1,000	1,000	2,000
Basketball	10,000	12,400	13,300	14,000	15,500	15,500
Softball	9,273	9,200	8,300	6,900	6,800	7,140
Baseball	14,745	15,500	15,500	15,500	16,300	17,200
Playground	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,800	3,000
Football	8,300	8,300	8,300	9,000	9,600	9,600
Cheerleading	1,000	1,250	1,600	2,350	3,000	3,380
Wrestling	2,200	2,500	3,500	2,700	2,600	2,703
Maintenance	1,200	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Soccer	8,500	8,000	8,000	8,250	8,900	8,900
Miscellaneous	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,000	1,000	2,000
Capital Equipment	3,000	3,150	3,000	4,000	2,500	2,500
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>112,218</b>	<b>116,000</b>	<b>121,500</b>	<b>124,900</b>	<b>125,200</b>	<b>122,923</b>

# **Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan Survey Results**

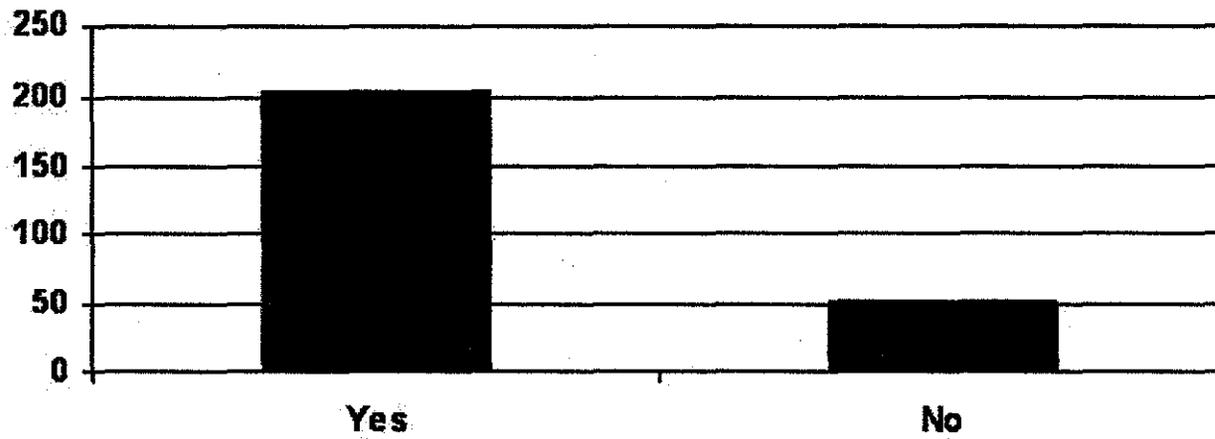
**Attached are the graphical results of the  
subject survey that appeared in the Fall 2003  
issue of the newsletter. The results are  
based on 268 returns.**

**February 21, 2004**

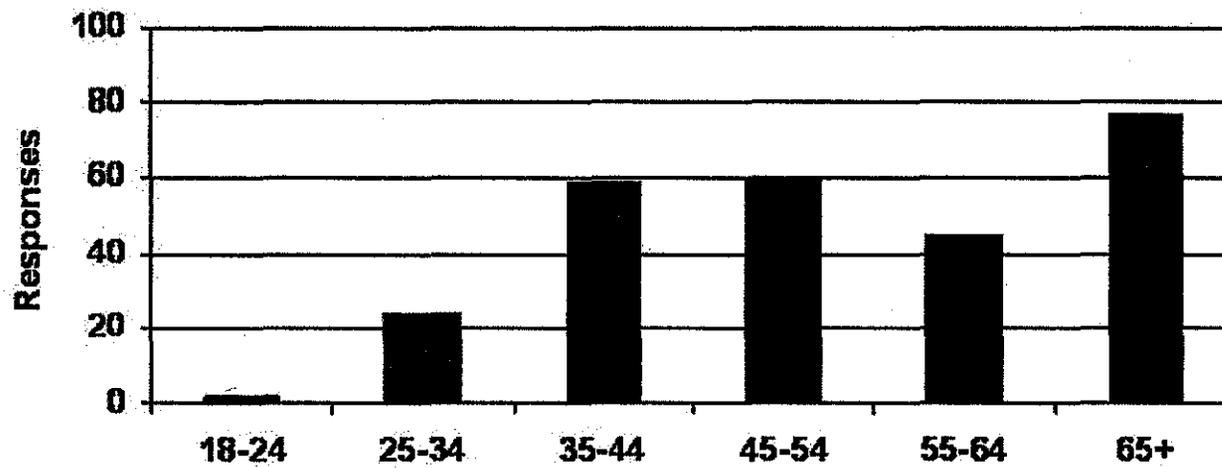
## How long have you lived in Palmer?



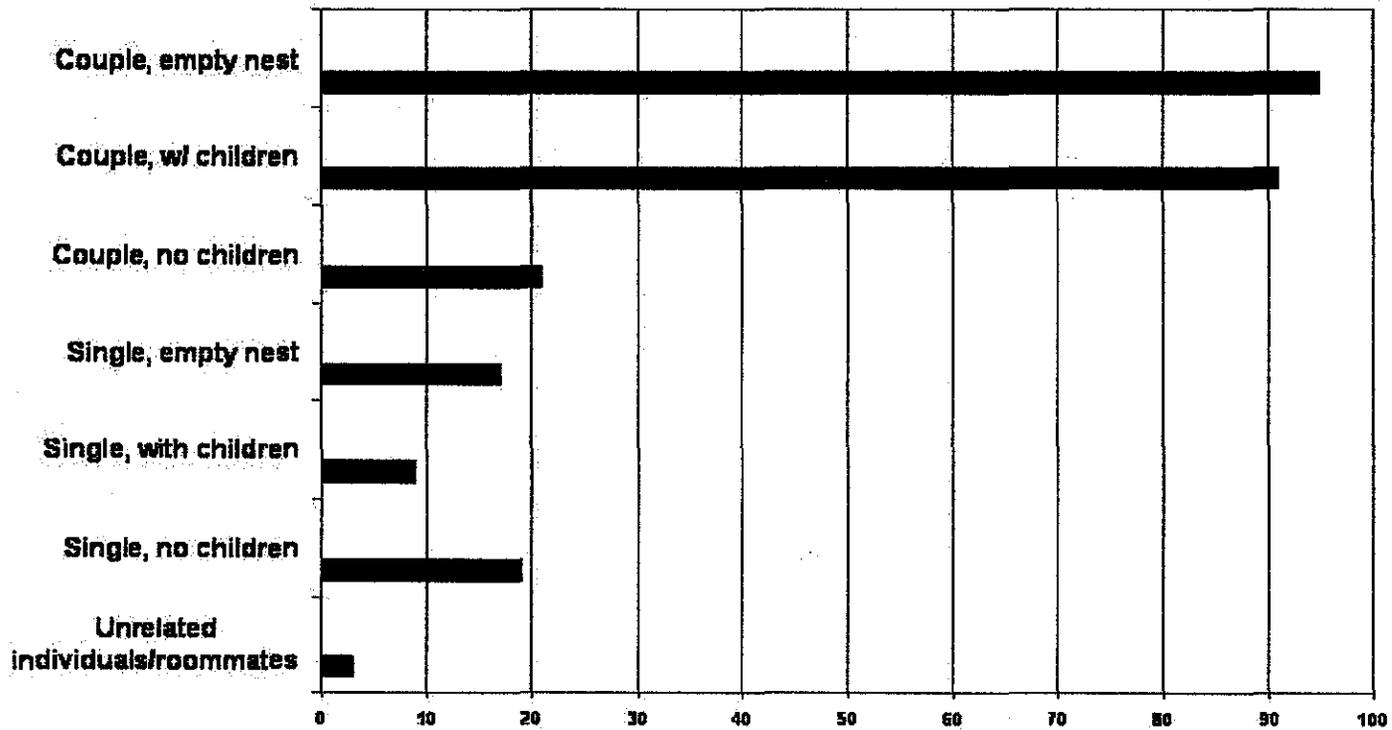
**Do you believe Palmer needs more open space  
and greenway corridors?**



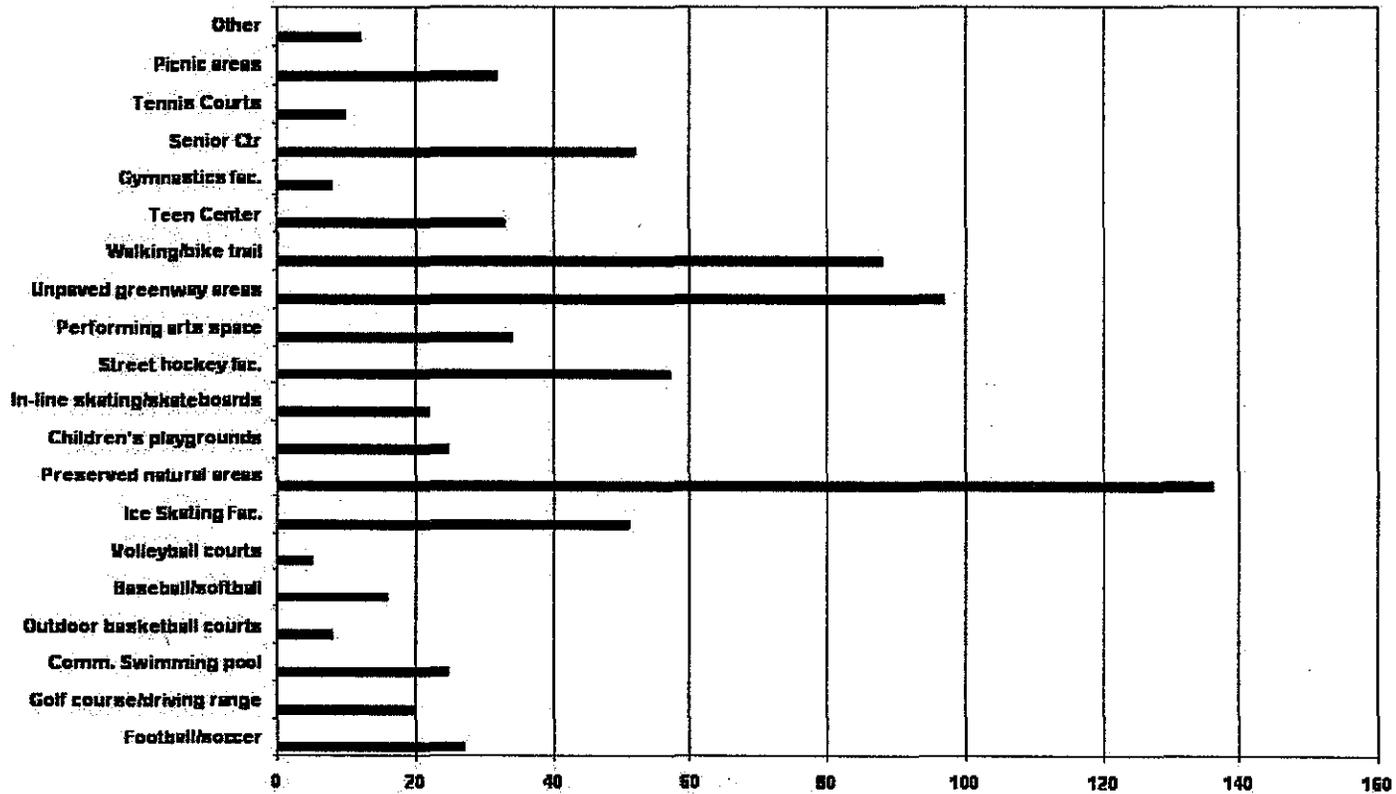
## What is your age?



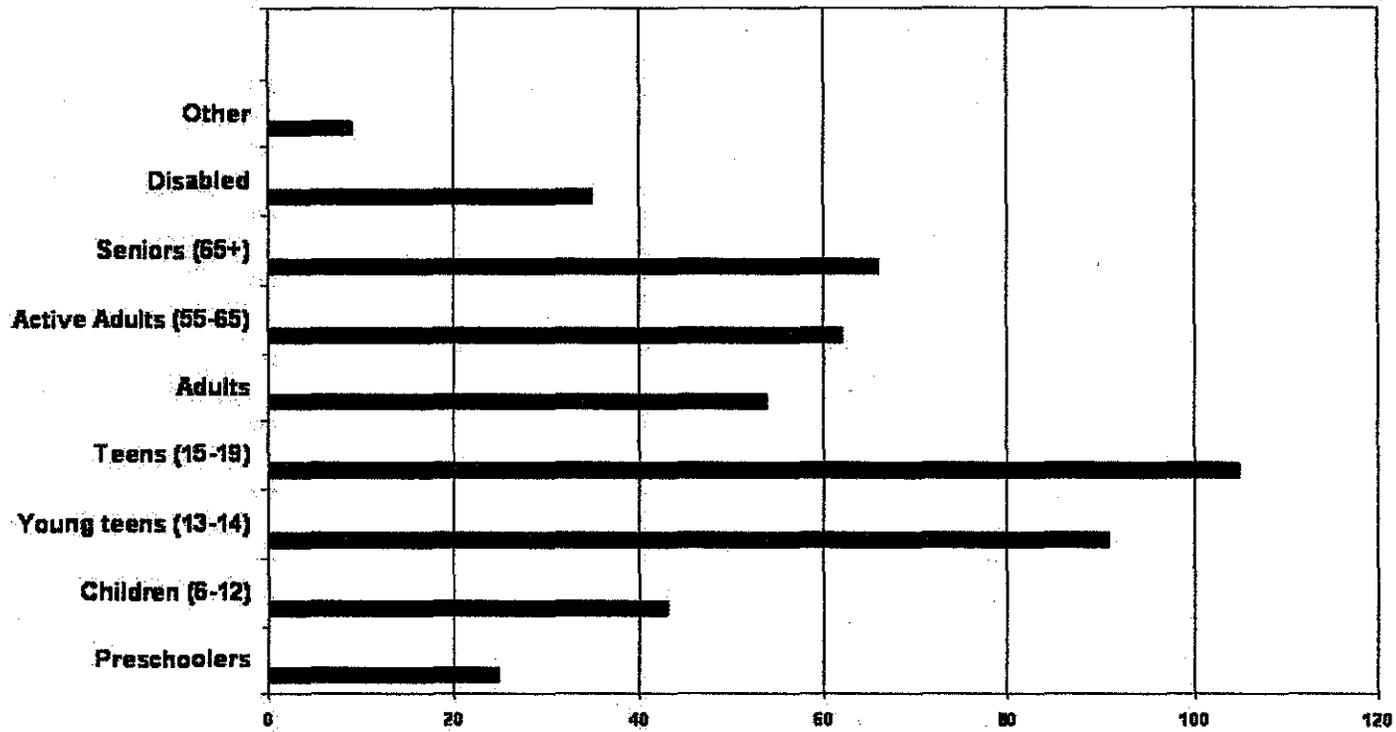
**Which of the following best describes your household?**



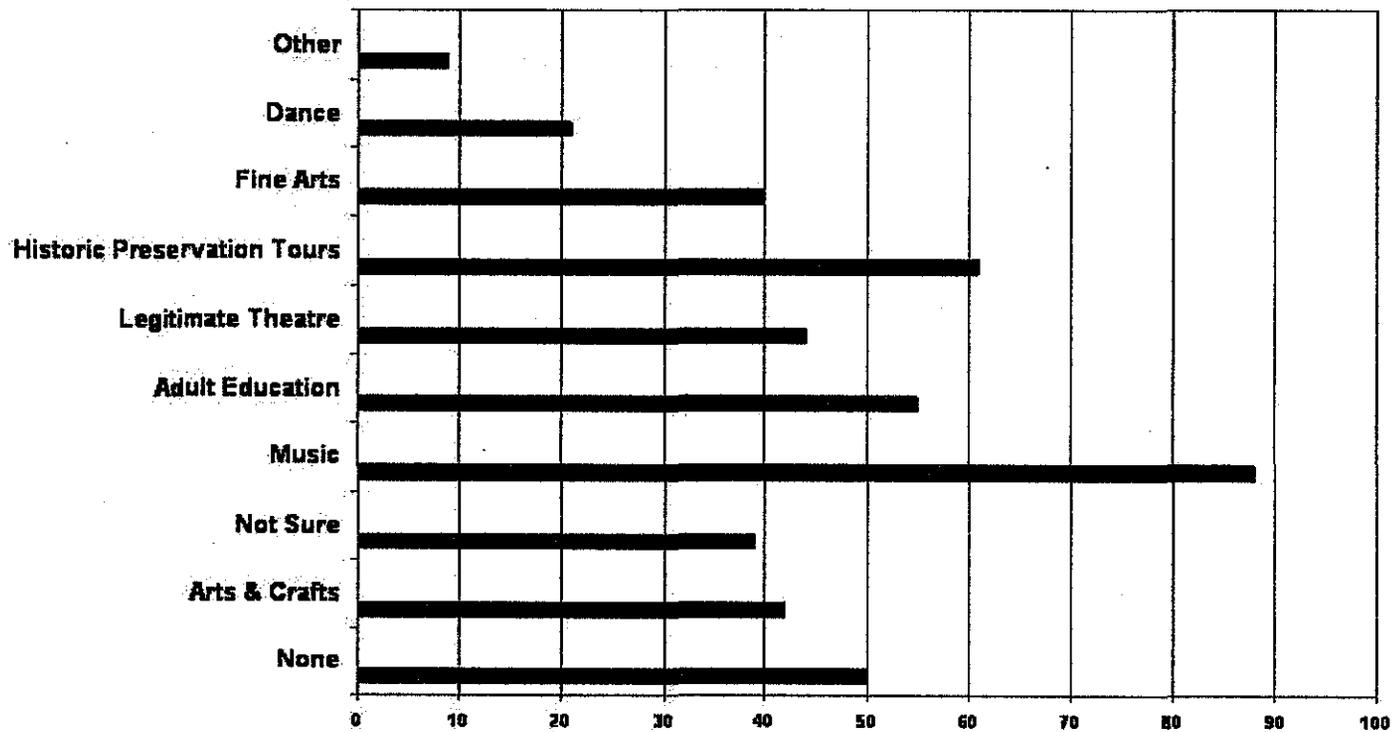
**Check the three most important types of recreation facilities that you feel we need to increase in Palmer Township?**



**What group in Palmer Township do you believe most need more recreation opportunities?**

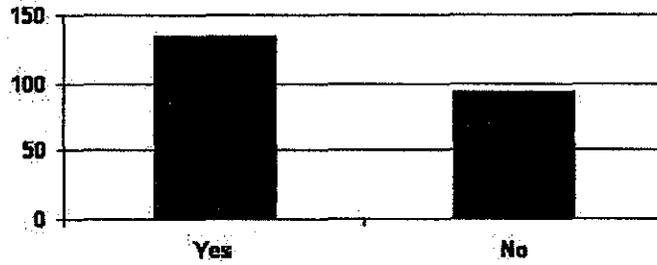


## What cultural activities do we need more of in our community?

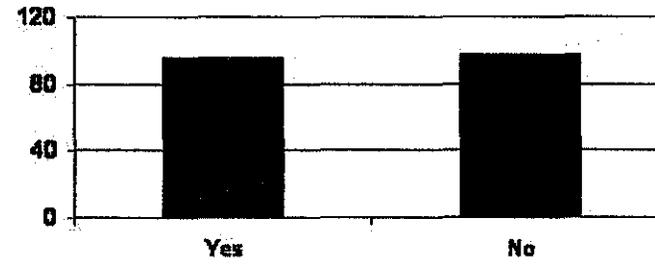


## Do you believe Palmer Township needs more public parkland?

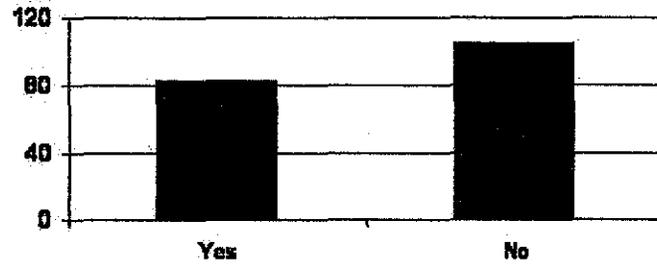
### Smaller, neighborhood - oriented parks



### Expand Existing Parks

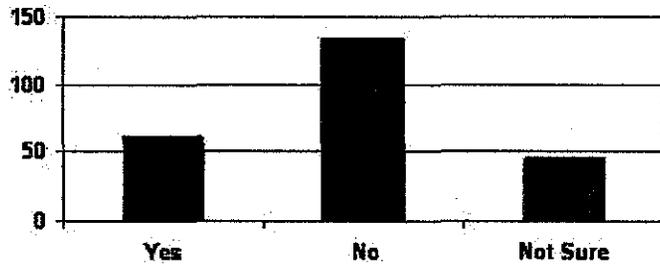


### Larger, Centrally Located Parks

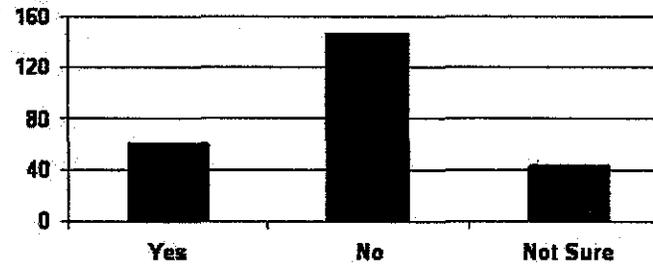


## Would you support Palmer Township Spending Additional Funds for the Following?

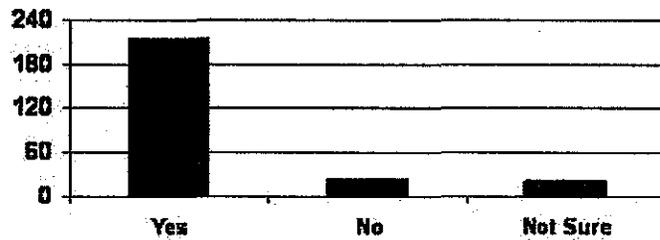
**Sports Programs**



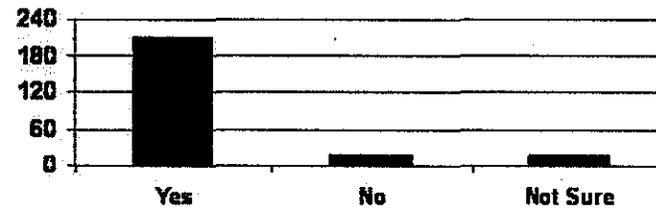
**Parks Primarily Dedicated to Sports Facilities**



**Open Spaces Primarily Intended to Preserve Undeveloped Land and Protect Natural Areas**

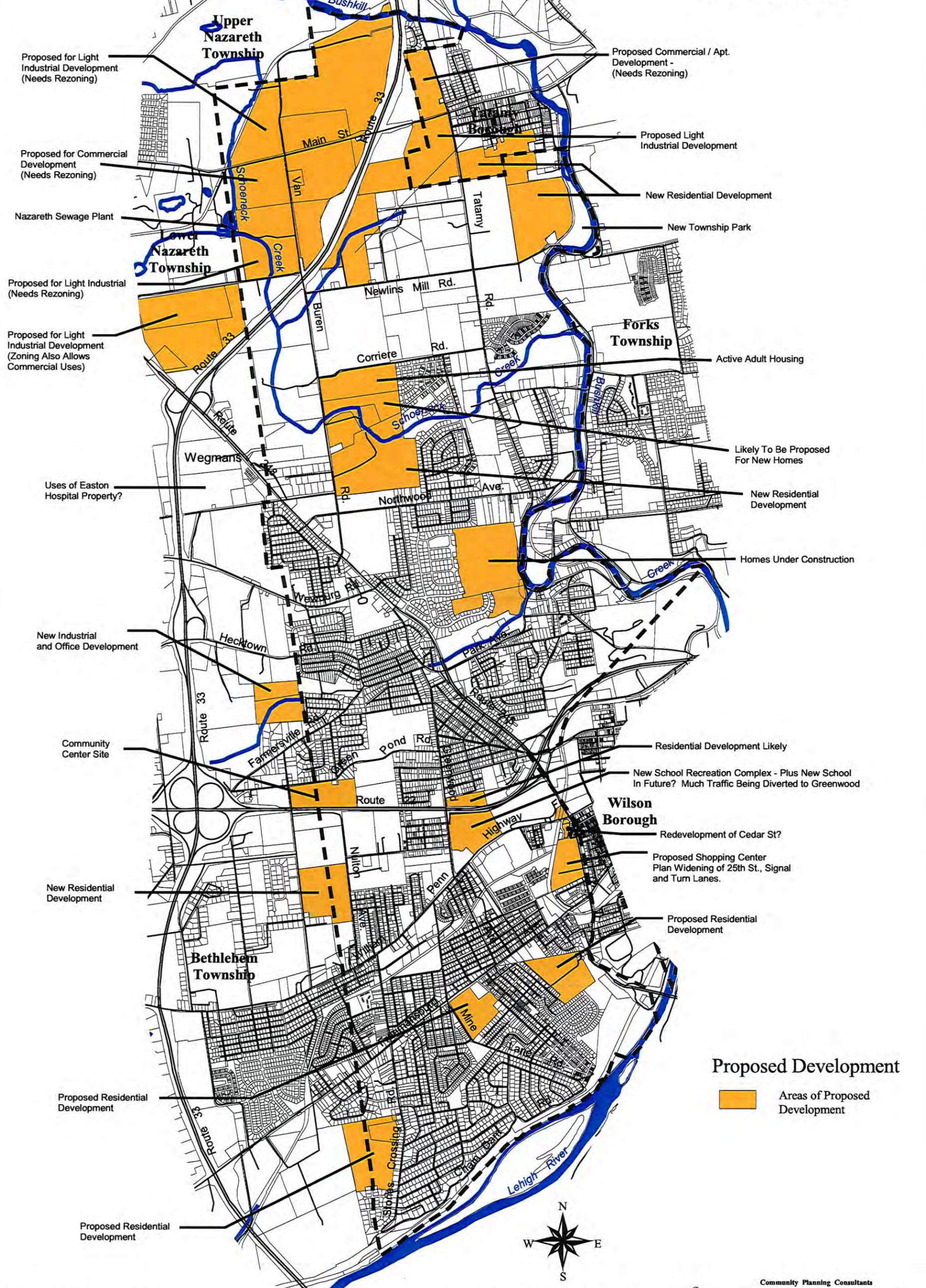


**Greenway Corridors Primarily Intended to Protect Streams or Other Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats**

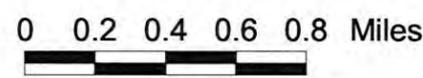


# PALMER TOWNSHIP

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA



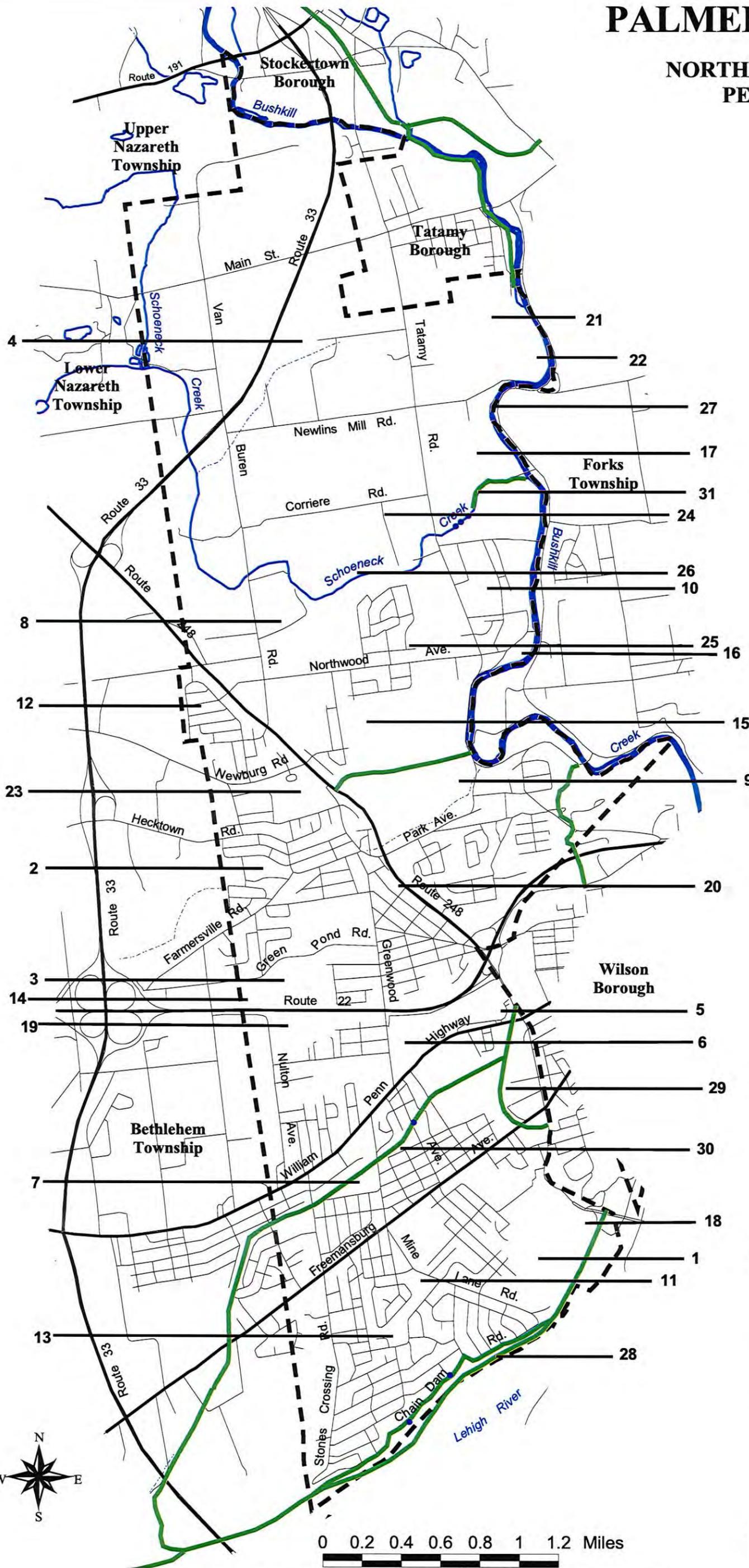
**Proposed Development**  
 Areas of Proposed Development



Source: Northampton County Assessment Data, and Field Work By URDC

# PALMER TOWNSHIP

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA



Existing Parks,  
Recreation &  
Open Spaces Locations  
2004

- Existing Bike Path
- ⋯ Proposed Bike Path
- 29 Location Corresponding To Plan Text

0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1 1.2 Miles

Source of Base Information: Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, 2002.

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