

Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan –

Citizen Survey Results

As part of the development of the County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan, Berks County conducted a countywide survey in late 2004. The survey was designed to measure the preferences of the citizens of Berks County and solicit public opinions regarding recreation, parks, heritage, and ecological issues, and to provide guidance in developing the Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan.

Methodology

Over 5,000 surveys were mailed to a random sample of county households that was

Facility	Sum*
Walking/hiking/biking trails	1659
Natural area	1034
Children's Playgrounds	841
Museum/Heritage Park	643
Outdoor Entertainment (amphitheatre, fairgrounds)	584
Senior Citizen activity area	573
Hunting areas	560
Scenic drives	557
Picnic areas	525
Fishing areas	480
Golf courses	378
Swimming pools	366
Community Recreation Center	344
Boating areas	325
Camping areas	302
Dog Park	298
Community gardens	291
Baseball/softball fields	254
Soccer fields	181
Handicapped activity area	171
Sledding areas	167
Indoor fitness center (i.e. aerobics, racquet sports, weights)	166
Tennis courts	143
Ice Skating/Hockey rink	138
Basketball courts	128
Skate/BMX Bike Park	127
Cross-country ski areas	121
Equestrian trails	114
Bowling Lanes	105
Other group sports fields (football, lacrosse, hockey)	89
Downhill ski areas	81
Volleyball courts	67

derived from the County's Voter Registration List. The surveys were completed between November 29 and December 31, 2004, and those returned represented a 16% response. It is noted that the surveys were sent out the same week the County Commissioners released their 2005 budget announcing a 34% tax increase. This announcement resulted in a public outcry against the tax increase, and most likely influenced the response to this survey, as well as the questions regarding funding and future tax increase. The Berks County Planning Commission conducted the survey.

Questions and results

1. From the following list of recreational facilities, choose five facilities that are most important in satisfying your household's recreational needs. Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the "Most Important" and 5 being the "Least Important" of your top five choices.

* "Sum" was derived by assigning points to the ranking system as follows:

- A rank of 1 received 5 points
- A rank of 2 received 4 points
- A rank of 3 received 3 points
- A rank of 4 received 2 points
- A rank of 5 received 1 point

Total number of points was then compiled for each facility, and appears in the sum column.

2. From the following list of heritage/historical resources, choose five that are most important to you for preservation and/or interpretation. Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the “Most Important” and 5 being the “Least Important” of your top five choices.

Heritage Resource	Sum*
Historic villages	1031
Historic churches/cemeteries	949
Historic farms	897
Historic downtowns	856
Historic railroads/trolleys	834
Historic bridges	811
Historic neighborhoods	669
Canals/locks/dams	667
Historic geologic landmarks	656
Indian Heritage	641
Military heritage	559
Historic architectural style	524
Historic community bldgs	405
Important historic persons	346
Underground railroad	331
Historic grist mills	238
Historic hotels/resorts	220
Historic industry	182
Iron and steel heritage	150
WPA projects	145
Historic theme highways	77

Ecological Resource	Sum*
Water Quality	1929
Streams/other water bodies	1187
Scenic views	1085
Mammal Habitat	830
Bird Habitat	776
Interior forests	702
Rare/endangered animal habitat	693
Wetlands	660
Fish Habitat	564
Groundwater recharge areas	448
Headwaters, springs	438
Native vegetation	426
Unique geological features	384
Rare/endangered plant habitat	354
Contiguous grasslands	225
Floodplains	215
Reptile/amphibian Habitat	166
Riparian (waterway) buffers	138
Ridgelines	96
Steep slopes	65

3. From the following list of ecological/natural resources, choose five that are most important to you for preservation or conservation. Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the “Most Important” and 5 being the “Least Important” of your top five choices.

4. From the following list of recreational programs, choose five programs that are most important in satisfying your household's recreational needs. Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the "Most Important" and 5 being the "Least Important" of your top five choices.

Recreation Programs	Sum*
Cultural Arts (concerts, theatre, dance)	1360
Fairs/festivals	1234
Holiday events	1027
Athletic/sports leagues/clinics	914
Environmental Education	873
Youth Programs	844
Senior Programs	838
Trips/tours	808
Arts and Crafts/Hobbies	741
Fitness programs	728
Playground program	726
Adult Education	633
Interpretive lecture series	287

5. How much does your household rely on school district facilities during non-school hours to fulfill your recreational needs?

	Extensively (weekly)	Somewhat (monthly)	Seldom	Not At All
Outdoor athletic fields/courts/playgrounds	10.9%	16.7%	21.6%	50.8%
Indoor swimming pool	3%	4.3%	11.3%	81.3%
Gymnasium/weight room	4.4%	5.5%	10.4%	79.7%
Auditorium/classroom	4.1%	7.2%	19.1%	69.7%

6. How much does your household rely on private recreation facilities to fulfill your recreational needs?

	Extensively (weekly)	Somewhat (monthly)	Seldom	Not At All
Fitness clubs	20.9%	9.5%	12.9%	56.7%
Swimming pools	13.8%	14.7%	24.7%	46.8%
Bowling lanes	5.1%	11.4%	31.6%	51.9%
Local athletic associations/clubs	8.1%	9.5%	17.8%	64.6%
Golf courses	11.6%	16.1%	14.1%	58.2%
Rod and gun clubs	7%	12%	13.9%	67.1%
Ski area/tubing	2.7%	8.7%	25.5%	63%
Hockey/ skating	2.2%	6.8%	19%	72%

7. Park Satisfaction-How satisfied are you with the park and recreation areas available to you in Berks County? Please rank each on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Very Satisfied” and 5 being “Very Unsatisfied”. If you have never visited the park, please mark with a N.

	Very Satisfied*	Satisfied*	Neutral*	Unsatisfied*	Very Unsatisfied*	Never Visited**
Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park	47.7%	25.1%	14.7%	7.9%	4.6%	36%
Appalachian Trail	44.6%	23.7%	17.4%	9.2%	5%	49.8%
French Creek State Park	43.7%	28%	24.9%	7.9%	4.4%	36.7%
Nolde Forest EE Center	43.1%	27.9%	16.8%	6.9%	5.3%	47.8%
Hopewell Furnace	37.7%	26.9%	21.8%	7.9%	5.7%	39.7%
Daniel Boone Homestead	37%	30.7%	21.3%	6.2%	4.9%	40.3%
Blue Marsh Lake	35.3%	26.6%	23.6%	9.7%	4.8%	20.8%
State Gamelands	31.6%	27%	24.2%	12.2%	5.1%	47.9%
Conrad Weiser Homestead	28.5%	27%	28.5%	12.5%	3.6%	63.7%
Horseshoe Trail	27.3%	27.9%	29.7%	8.7%	6.4%	77.2%
Thun Trail	26.2%	27.2%	27.9%	12.6%	6.1%	60.9%
Kaercher Creek Park	23.6%	24.1%	33.6%	10%	8.6%	70.9%
Lake Ontelaunee	21.4%	26.3%	32.2%	13%	7.1%	40%
Municipal Parks & Playgrounds	21.1%	26.5%	34.7%	11.6%	6.1%	27.9%
Berks Co. Youth Recreation Facility	20%	21.3%	38.7%	8.7%	11.3%	80.1%
Allegheny Aqueduct Park	15.2%	22.2%	41.4%	5.1%	16.2%	86.9%
Hunsicker's Grove	14%	30.6%	42.1%	5%	8.3%	83.8%

* Percent of total respondents that have visited the facility.

** Percent of total respondents.

8. County Action-Please indicate the importance of the following actions, which you feel the County should implement to best satisfy your household's recreation needs in the coming years. Please rank each on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Important" and 5 being "Not Needed".

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Not Needed
Maintain existing park areas	63.5%	19.6%	9.7%	3.1%	4%
Preserve unique natural areas	62.7%	14.8%	11.7%	5.3%	5.6%
Preserve heritage/cultural resources	56.9%	19.8%	13%	5.1%	5.1%
Create regional trail system	44.6%	20.2%	18.2%	7.5%	9.5%
Provide passive park (woodland & trails-Neversink Mt., Antietam Lake)	44.1%	24.7%	16.3%	6.7%	8.1%
Provide active/passive recreation park	30.3%	26.2%	25.3%	6.4%	11.8%
Provide more active recreation facilities	21.9%	13.8%	26.3%	15.4%	22.6%
Provide indoor recreation facility	21.7%	12.5%	20.9%	16.6%	28.1%
Provide recreation program for non-athletic activities	20.5%	27.4%	25.2%	14.3%	12.6%
Support tax increase for additional park/rec opportunities, preserving unique natural areas and heritage resources	13.7%	13.4%	22.7%	12.3%	37.8%
Provide recreation program for organized athletics	10.3%	12.5%	24.7%	21.8%	30.5%

9. Please indicate how you feel about the following statements by circling one response for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. It is important that greenways/trails connect residential neighborhoods and other elements of my community, such as schools and commercial areas	25.1%	23.2%	30.8%	13%	7.9%
b. It is important to develop a county-wide network of interconnected greenways/trails linking municipalities and regional parks	23.6%	23.8%	29.5%	13.5%	9.6%
c. Acquiring land now for the future development of new parks is just as important as maintaining existing public recreation areas and parks	30.6%	25.4%	24.6%	10.6%	8.8%
d. Local government should do more to increase public awareness of the availability of recreation areas, programs and opportunities	39.7%	29.1%	19.2%	6.4%	5.7%
e. Municipalities in my area should join together to form a joint park and recreation department and share park facilities and programs	29.2%	30.3%	24.5%	9%	7%
f. Parks and protected natural areas increase the value of nearby properties	51%	28%	14.8%	3.7%	2.6%
g. Greenways and trails increase the value of nearby properties	41.9%	26.5%	19.3%	7.5%	4.8%

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
h. Recreation facilities should be lighted for night use	28.8%	18.9%	27.9%	12.4%	12%
i. I use private recreation facilities, and don't foresee a need for additional public recreational facilities	7.6%	8.4%	28.3%	24.6%	31.2%
j. Festivals that replicate and recreate historic experiences are as important as active recreational opportunities	24.7%	29.6%	29.9%	10.8%	5%
k. There should be more sports and recreational programs for youth	16.9%	22.8%	36%	13.9%	10.4%
l. Recreation opportunities for senior citizens are adequate	9.6%	14.5%	39%	22.7%	14.2%
m. Private land developers should be required to assist in the development of recreation facilities or protection of unique natural areas as part of new subdivisions	64%	20.2%	9%	2.1%	4.7%
n. Funding for recreation should be expanded to provide for additional land/facilities, programs and personnel	16.5%	29.1%	32.8%	12.7%	8.9%
o. Critical or unique natural areas should be acquired or otherwise protected for passive parkland or open space purposes	43.1%	26.4%	19.8%	6%	4.8%
p. More sports fields are needed in my area	7%	7.3%	25%	26.3%	34.3%
q. There are an adequate number of playgrounds in my area	28.3%	22.7%	29%	12.4%	7.6%
r. Abandoned railroad right-of-ways should be acquired for use as trails	37.5%	29.5%	21.9%	5.8%	5.3%
s. Public recreation areas near where I live are well maintained	23.2%	34.7%	29.6%	7%	5.6%
t. Public recreation areas and trails near where I live are too crowded	2.9%	7.5%	34.4%	34%	21.2%
u. There are a sufficient number of indoor recreational facilities (gyms, indoor pools, meeting rooms, community center) available for public use	19.7%	16.6%	28.4%	18.9%	16.4%
v. In general, there is a lack of access for disabled people to recreation facilities	8.7%	14.2%	45.4%	17.3%	14.45
w. Churches in my community provides youth programs and recreational opportunities	20.2%	28%	37%	10.4%	4.5%
x. Little league organizations provide an important source of recreational opportunities for the youth in my community	38.2%	32.2%	24%	3.6%	2.1%
y. Preserving/interpreting historical sites are important in keeping our heritage alive and should be incorporated into parkland where appropriate	48%	31.3%	16.3%	2.7%	1.8%
z. Interpretive signs and/or pamphlets highlighting natural, cultural, and heritage resources should be available at parks	38.5%	35.5%	18%	5.2%	2.9%
aa. Road-based auto tours and/or bike tour routes of scenic and historic resources should be mapped and made available	35.1%	31.4%	22%	7.7%	3.8%
bb. Trails for walkers/bikers should be paved instead of crushed gravel/cinder paths	19.8%	16.4%	23.9%	19.9%	19.9%
cc. It is important to preserve habitat and create connections that will allow for the movement of wildlife	57.5%	24.9%	13.2%	3%	1.5%

10. Club Interest-Berks County has numerous clubs devoted to various types of outdoor activities. Please rank your level of interest in joining each of the following types of clubs on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Interested" to 5 being "Not Interested".

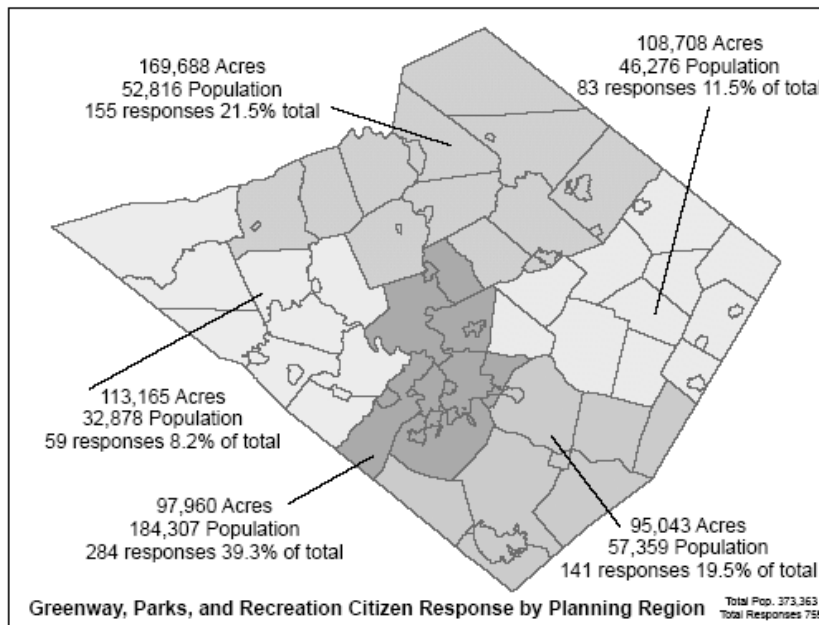
	Very Interested	Interested	Somewhat Interested	Neutral	Not Interested
Hiking Groups	18.9%	18.1%	18.3%	13.3%	31.3%
Environmental/Conservation Groups	18.9%	16.7%	21.6%	15.5%	27.1%
Bird Watching Groups	11.8%	10.4%	17.2%	14.6%	45.9%
Bicycling Groups	9.9%	12.6%	16.8%	13.9%	46.6%
Gardening Groups	12.2%	18.1%	21.2%	12.5%	35.8%
Historical/Cultural Preservation Groups	18%	22.1%	18.8%	14.8%	26.1%
Boating Groups	8.4%	11.2%	14.3%	11.2%	55%
Astronomy Groups	5.5%	9.7%	17.5%	12.6%	54.8%

11. Why are heritage/historic preservation efforts important? Please select no more than three.

	Total number of times selected
Educational Value	507
Provide a Sense of Place	293
Tourism	281
Strengthen communities	276
Improved Quality of Life	272
Aesthetic Value	171
Downtown Revitalization	160
Economic Development	140

Demographic Information

12. Location- What municipality do you live in?



13. Age Groups-Please indicate the number of persons in your household, including yourself, in the following age groups:

Age Group	% of Persons Living in Households that Responded to Survey	% Berks Population
0-19	23.8%	27.6%
20-49	36.3%	42.0%
50-64	23.2%	15.4%
65+	16.7%	15.0%

14. Race-What is your ethnic background? 96% were white

15. Are you Hispanic or Latino? 1.6 % answered yes

16. Educational Attainment-What is the last grade level of schooling that the head of your household has completed?

	Percentage of Respondents	% Berks Population
Non-high school	3.2%	22.0%
High school graduate	24.4%	39.4%
Some college, no degree	15.2%	14.5%
Two-year or tech degree	13.8%	5.7%
Four-year college degree	22%	12.0%
Post-graduate college degree	21.4%	6.4%

17. Income-What is your best estimate of total family income?

	Percentage of Respondents	% Berks Population
Less than \$10,000	1.3%	7.6%
\$10,000-14,999	2.2%	5.6%
\$15,000-24,999	8.7%	12.4%
\$25,000-34,999	11.2%	12.9%
\$35,000-49,999	16.1%	17.1%
\$50,000-74,999	26.4%	22.6%
\$75,000-99,999	16.1%	11.6%
\$100,000+	18.0%	10.2%

Key Results

- The need to maintain the unique natural and heritage resources of Berks County emerged as a key finding. There was strong agreement that critical or unique natural areas should be acquired or otherwise protected for passive parkland or open space purposes, and very strong agreement to preserve wildlife habitat that provides for their movement. Likewise, there was very strong agreement for incorporating historical sites into parkland, as well as providing interpretive signs or pamphlets highlighting heritage resources.
- When asked to prioritize individual types of recreational facilities, multi-purpose trails far out-weighed the other recreational facilities. Other top facilities included: natural areas, playgrounds, museum/heritage parks and outdoor entertainment areas. In general, group/individual sport facilities were least important. Possible new trends include: dog parks, community gardens, and sledding areas.
- The top five heritage resources that respondents indicated were most important to preserve were historic villages, historic churches/cemeteries, historic farms,

- historic downtowns, and historic railroads/trolleys. Historic industry, iron and steel heritage, WPA projects, and theme highways were least important.
- The top five ecological/natural resources that respondents indicated were most important to preserve or conserve were water quality, streams and other water bodies, scenic views, mammal habitat, and bird habitat. Riparian buffers, ridgelines, and steep slopes were least important.
 - When asked to indicate which of the 13 types of recreational programs were most important, Berks Countians indicated cultural arts, festivals and holiday events. Interpretive lectures were least important.
 - One out of two respondents use outdoor school district athletic facilities, however not on a regular basis as one in ten use them weekly. In comparison, over 7 in ten respondents indicated they never use indoor school district facilities.
 - Private recreation facilities are fulfilling an important recreation need. More respondents use swimming pools than any other private facility. One out of every five respondents uses a private fitness club on a weekly basis. Golf courses are also moderately used private facilities.
 - Overall, Berks Countians are satisfied with the public recreation facilities available to them. Respondents indicated they were most satisfied with the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park, French Creek State Park and Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center. Respondents were least satisfied with Allegheny Aqueduct Park. There were several parks that a large majority of the respondents never visited (i.e. 87% never visited Allegheny Aqueduct Park).
 - When asked the importance of several implementing actions that the County could take, maintaining existing park areas was the number one priority. Other priorities, in descending order, were preserving unique natural areas and heritage/cultural resources, providing passive park areas (such as Neversink Mt. and Antietam Lake), and creating a regional trail system. Providing a recreation program for organized athletics, and an indoor recreation facility were the least important.
 - When asked whether funding for recreation should be expanded, 46 % of the respondents agreed, while 22 % disagreed, and 33% were neutral. When specifically asked if they would support a tax increase to provide for additional park/recreation opportunities, 27% of the respondents indicated that it was very important or important, 23 % were neutral, and 50% indicated that it was unimportant or not needed.
 - There was very strong agreement that private land developers should assist in the development of recreation facilities or the protection of natural areas as part of new subdivisions.
 - There was very strong support for little league organizations.
 - There was strong agreement that government should do more to increase awareness of recreation areas, programs and opportunities, and work cooperatively in providing recreation opportunities.
 - There was strong agreement that parks, protected natural areas, greenways and trails increase the value of nearby properties.
 - There was strong agreement that abandoned railroad right-of-ways should be acquired for use as trails.
 - One in ten respondents felt that public recreation areas and trails were too crowded.
 - A representative response was received from all regions of the County, particularly the northern and southeastern communities. No responses were received from households in Bally Borough or New Morgan Borough. In general, the age of persons living in households that responded to the survey were representative of the County's' age groups, except for a greater percentage of persons in the 50-64 age group. Over 43% of the respondents had a four –year or post-graduate college degree, and over 60% had a family income over \$50,000. The response rate from the ethnic minority community was poor.

Note: The following is additional information that was compiled by the Berks County Planning Commission. This information was not part of the citizen survey.

Berks County Open Space/Recreation Facility Inventory

Ownership of Protected Open Space/Recreation

	Number of Sites	Acres
Federal Lands (Army Corps., National Parks)	4	7501.02
State Lands (Parks, Gameland, Forest)	27	29,952.33
Berks County Park Lands	14	615.02
Municipal Recreation (passive)	51	2,386.53
Municipal Recreation (active/passive)	9	851.47
Municipal Recreation (active)	163	1,537.95
Municipal Managed Lands (water authority)	16	11,358.49
Public Sub Total:	284	54,202.81
Non-Profit Owned (Conservancy, Hawk Mountain, etc.)	16	2,900.06
Non-Profit Eased (Conservancy, Wildlands*)	73	2,748.72
Not for Profit (passive - Scout Camps, Rod/Gun Clubs, etc.)	58	4,192.07
Not for Profit (active – swimming pools, Little League, etc.)	111	1,678.97
Non/Not for Profit Sub Total:	258	11,519.82
Total:	542	65,722.63
Percent of County: 12%		

* Eased Parcels are those easements that have not been determined to be Agricultural Easements by the Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

Class of Open Space/Recreation

	Number of Sites	Acres
Mini Parks	43	41.06
Neighborhood Parks	82	520.27
Community Parks	33	1,066.49
Large Urban/Suburban Parks*	9	1,035.53
Special Use Parks	24	1,592.79
Natural Resource Area	68	47,736.21
Greenways	25	2210.46
Public Sub Total:	284	54,202.81
Private Parks		
Non-Profit/Not for Profit*	185	8,771.10
Commercial for Profit**	98	5,641.60
Private Parks Sub Total:	283	14,412.70
Total:	567	68,615.51

* Does not contain easements in calculations

** Does not include smaller ventures (i.e.- arcades, karate clubs, bingo)