



CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT

Parks Inventory & Recommendations

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OCTOBER 15, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Investments in parks have been found to significantly increase property values, improve overall economic conditions, reduce crime and improve physical and mental health. Cities in particular are judged by the condition of their parks. If a city's parks are in poor condition, potential home and business investors will view the city in an overall negative manner. Conversely, a city with a vibrant park system will be perceived as a strong investment opportunity for potential homeowners and businesses.

The City of Williamsport has a large inventory of parks. Many significant investments have been made in the system, but much work still remains. In December of 2006, SEDA Council of Governments Community Resource Center prepared The Williamsport City Parks Master Plan. Their work was focused on making improvements to five neighborhood parks: Phillip E. Preziosi Park (formerly Newberry Park), Lose School Park, Flanigan Park, Young's Woods, and Shaw Place.

In the many cases in which the City of Williamsport followed the recommendations of its Master Park Plan, positive impacts have resulted.

The purpose of this project is to update and add to that inventory so that city officials have the information that they need for long-term planning.

With the right planning, support and investments, cities throughout the United States are able to use parks to achieve the following goals: Revitalization of Neighborhoods, Economic Development, Improving Public Health, and Creating Safer Neighborhoods.

REVITALIZATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

- ✓ Strong parks can stop downturns in neighborhoods by providing a landmark element and a point of pride for residents and business owners.
- ✓ Well maintained parks add visual appeal and create the impression of care and community concern.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ Effectively managed parks increase property values, bring in home-buyers and workers, and attract retirees.
- ✓ There is over 160 years of research that demonstrates the positive impact of parks on property values.
 - Frederick Law Olmsted conducted a study of how investments in New York's Central Park impacted property values from 1856 to 1873. While \$13 million was spent (an astonishing investment at that time), there was a \$209 million increase in the value of property around the park over a 17 year period.
 - Improvements in the park system of Chattanooga, Tennessee were demonstrated to have increased property values by 127.5% and increased property tax revenues by 99% from 1988 to 1996. Prior to these investments, Chattanooga was experiencing significant unemployment, increased crime, declining tax revenues and decreased property values.

- Housing with dedicated “open space” in Amherst, Massachusetts was found to appreciate at an annual rate of 2.5 percent higher than housing without it.
- In Atlanta, Georgia the building of Centennial Olympic Park has been widely credited with the economic revitalization of the city. After the park was built, condominium prices increased from \$115 per square foot to \$250 per square foot.
- According to a 2012 analysis by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Philadelphia’s park system increases the market value of nearby residential properties by \$689 million.
- In 2011 the Greenspace Alliance and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission found that protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania adds \$16.3 billion to the regions home values and is responsible for \$240 million in annual property and transfer taxes.



Wealthy retired people are attracted to parks.

- Studies have shown that wealthy retired individuals prefer communities that focus on arts, culture, recreation, and scenic beauty.
- Retired people are “net positive” taxpayers for cities in that they generally use fewer services than they pay for in taxes. Generally, retired people do not add children to the school system or participate in criminal activity which requires the use of police resources.
- If 200 retired individuals bring an expendable annual income of \$40,000 to a city, that impact is similar to a new business spending \$8 million annually.

- ✓ Well educated workers are attracted to areas with parks. “New Economy” workers are selling their knowledge rather than their labor. These workers are looking for places that offer recreational opportunities.
- ✓ People want to buy homes in areas that have quality parks.
 - A National Association of Realtors survey shows that 57% of individuals would buy a house close to a park or open space over one that was not. The same survey indicated that 77% of potential homebuyers wanted “places to walk” near their home.
 - According to the National Association of Home Builders, 65% of home buyers felt that the availability of parks would seriously influences them to move to a community.

IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH

- ✓ Studies have shown that contact with nature offers a wide range of medical benefits. Recent research also suggests that exercise is more beneficial when it occurs in natural settings.
- ✓ Active park users are less likely to suffer from obesity and visit doctors less than non-park users.
- ✓ A study conducted by the publication The Physician and Sports medicine found that active adults had much lower annual direct medical costs than those who are inactive. If inactive adults became active the potential savings in healthcare costs is estimated to exceed \$76.6 billion.
- ✓ Individuals that are healthier cost less to insure, thereby saving employers on health insurance costs. Companies want to locate in areas where health insurance rates are lower.

CREATING SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS

- ✓ Scientists have concluded that park like settings reduce mental fatigue and feelings of violence, particularly among teenagers and young adults.
- ✓ Parks are “gathering places” where social ties are formed that produce a feeling of community and produce safer neighborhoods.
- ✓ The presence of people outdoors participating in activities creates a built-in sense of surveillance which leads to less crime.
- ✓ A clean, well-maintained park sends a message that people in a neighborhood care about their community and it’s safety.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

In the 2006 City Parks Master Plan Executive Summary, SEDA Council of Governments pointed to the significant investments that had been made to that point in the two largest City parks, Brandon and Memorial, while pointing out the relatively limited investment in smaller neighborhood parks. Since that time the City of Williamsport has demonstrated a change in their parks investment strategy including significant investments in Shaw Place in 2006, and approval in 2008 to fully fund Phase #1 improvements to Lose Park, Young's Woods, and Phillip E. Preziosi Park.

By completing Phase #1 improvements to Lose Park, this popular neighborhood park continues to provide quality recreational opportunities for visitors. According to the most recent U.S. Census figures, the neighborhood around this park is mainly residential and 57% are renters. 54% of the total households in this area are inhabited by a family, and of those 54% have children under 18. Roughly 25% of these households are inhabited by senior citizens (65+). These demographics make for a high demand for a quality neighborhood park. While there are still some improvements which could be made, Lose Park is a far better community resource today than it was 10 years ago.

While the Phase #1 improvements to Young's Wood in 2008 were positive, this park is arguably one of the most dilapidated and challenged in the city. A review of newspaper police logs and conversations with neighbors revealed a great deal of criminal activity occurring in this small "pocket park." Increased use of and police presence in the city's larger, higher profile parks may have forced "bad actors" to use this smaller, lower profile location for their criminal activities.

If people do not feel safe, any efforts to improve a park are unlikely to result in increased use. Additionally, if there is a negative perception about the safety of a community park, property values will go down as the overall perception of the neighborhood will decrease. If parks are effectively managed and secured, their very presence in a neighborhood will increase property values. The addition of security cameras and additional police patrols would go a long way towards improving the perception of this park and should be considered a fairly high priority.

Phillip E. Preziosi Park is perhaps the best example of the City following the Master Plan and achieving the desired results. Prior to the completion of Phase #1 in 2008, this park was most noted for noise, vandalism, and complaints about drug activities. It had dated high fencing which served as a barrier to entry and made the site look very unappealing. Rather than being an asset to the neighborhood, it was viewed as a nuisance.

Today, Phillip E. Preziosi Park is a clean, well maintained, and heavily used space. Phase #1 improvements have increased accessibility, improved safety, and enhanced family-oriented activity in the park. There is still room for improvement. Due to the departure of the Newberry Lion's Fair, the need to maintain a large "open space" no longer exists. This area would be better served with additional trees and an expanded walking trail. With continued attention and investment, this park will continue to enhance property values and provide recreational opportunities for this family oriented neighborhood.

Investments into Memorial Park have been significant and the results of this investment have a very positive impact on the city overall and the surrounding neighborhood in particular. Today, Bowman Field, the oldest minor-league ballpark in the Commonwealth and second oldest in the nation, is home to the Williamsport Crosscutters and a popular destination for city residents and tourists of all ages. The City of Williamsport Community Pool, Splash Cove at Memorial Park, is an affordable and heavily used community asset. Ample picnic and pavilion space, as well as a playground, further enhance this green space and provide multi-generational recreational opportunities.

Brandon Park, often referred to as Williamsport's Central Park, is fortunate to have a dedicated group of community volunteers focused on its preservation and enhanced use. This picturesque 127-year old park features over 400 trees, a bandshell, tennis courts, a playground, open space, two baseball fields and one softball field. The city, under the leadership of John Grado and the economic development team, has secured \$500,000 in grant funding for repairs to the tennis courts, the addition of a nature play component, improved lighting, expanding parking, storm water improvements and expanded walkways. These improvements, slated to occur in 2018 are significant and will improve this historic landmark.

CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT PARKS INVENTORY

Below is an inventory of the Williamsport Park System. While the city does not own all of these locations, the conditions of these parks impact residents and investors.

BRANDON PARK

Brandon Park is truly the “gem” of the Williamsport Park system with its rich history and wide variety of over 500 trees. This 42 acre park has grass areas, walking paths, ample parking, children’s play equipment, a band shell, baseball field, and six lighted tennis courts.

The City has secured \$500,000 in grant funding to make significant improvements to Brandon Park. The funding breakdown for this project is \$250,000 from DCNR Land and Water Conservation Fund, matched by \$250,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money. These improvements will include repairs to the tennis courts, the addition of a nature play component, improved lighting, expanding parking, storm water improvements and expanded walkways.

Key Note: The neighborhood surrounding the park is primarily residential and it is closely located to Lycoming College.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- 42 acres of multi-generational, well maintained, recreation space.
- Park is viewed as being safe.
- Central location.
- The band shell provides numerous opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to enjoy musical and cultural entertainment.
- This park offers visitors an opportunity to enjoy natural beauty in an urban setting.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Due to the diversity of activities available, the park could be said to lack a specific identity.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The park is well maintained and has a dedicated group of volunteers that work hard to maintain and improve the property.

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Improvements to the Dr. Kenneth Cooper Bandshell
2. Renovation of the Roundhouse Building.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Additional lighting.
- Additional signage which focuses on the rich history of the park.



ELM PARK

Owned by the City of Williamsport, **Elm Park** is a fully-lit, three-field complex located on West Fourth Street across from historical Bowman Field. Most of the fields at Elm Park are equipped with press boxes and scoreboards. Elm Park is currently managed by the Williamsport Softball Association and is the home of the Williamsport Area High School softball team. Elm Park also has public tennis courts and borders The Original Little League Field. There have been discussions about using this facility to create a sports complex which would include baseball, softball, and soccer fields.



Key Note: The park's proximity to Bowman Field, Route 15 and The Original Little League Field make it a highly visible and easily accessible facility.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Central location.
- Well maintained softball fields.
- Well maintained tennis courts.
- Well maintained pavilion.
- Possibility for expansion at the southern end of the facility.
- The park is located within a site which has been identified by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a “pilot program” to expand economic development while protecting natural resources. The following Commonwealth agencies involved in this program include: Department of Community and Economic Development, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Protection.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Limited parking.

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. New directional signage listing all of the current assets in Elm and Memorial Park, for example, the current sign lists “basketball courts” and the courts have been removed.
2. Facility expansion to include baseball fields and soccer for larger tournament play.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Expanded Parking

FLANIGAN PARK

Flanigan Park is situated in the 'Park Avenue' neighborhood of the City of Williamsport and is in close proximity to the City's historic downtown. Findings from the 2005 Lycoming County Recreation Survey reveal that City residents like the park's central location, but feel it is in need of clean up, renovations and upgrading.

Important facts about Flanigan Park include:

- The neighborhood is comprised of 80% renters, with many school-aged children
- The park is maintained by Firetree Place and is not owned by the City.
- The neighborhood also has a strong senior population, about 1 in 4, further demonstrating the need for both the younger and elder populations.
- The need for accessible recreation is high.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Central location.
- The park is en route to the UPMC medical center and has the opportunity to project a positive image of the neighborhood to visitors and residents.
- Homes along Memorial Avenue on the park's north side add a safety element.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Negative reputation for violence.
- Fencing sections off parts of the park while impeding movement to the park from the surrounding area.
- Limited recreational opportunities for younger children.
- Tennis courts are highly visible but rarely used.
- Baseball field impedes pedestrian circulation across the park.
- Courts need more bleachers.
- Mulching should be replaced by rubberized turf.
- Broken swings.
- Exposed but sealed wiring near court looks unsafe.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

There is a need for more social spaces, including areas for picnics, grilling, shelters and/or multi-use tables (chess and other games). Flanigan Park would greatly benefit from increased public use by providing a variety of recreational options for different ages and interests. The “appeal of use” can be improved by fencing removal, creating pedestrian crossings and park gateways. This would improve overall park accessibility.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Removal of fences.
2. Lighting and electrical upgrades.
3. Basketball and tennis court reconstruction/improvements.
4. Additional basketball bleachers.
5. New sidewalks and benches.
6. Landscaping and reseeding.
7. Playground equipment.
8. Bike rack.
9. More trash receptacles.
10. Park signage.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Seating plaza.
- Pavilion.
- Restrooms.
- Tables.
- Parking.

LOSE SCHOOL PARK

The Lose School Park is a 3-acre neighborhood park located in the City's Memorial Avenue neighborhood. The facilities where Lose Elementary School once stood, such as picnic pavilions, playground and basketball courts are still intact and are a part of the park facility. The building footprint is now a grass open space.

Key Note: The neighborhood surrounding the park is primarily residential with a high renter population; many of these households are families. Grier Street Manor is home to senior citizens; therefore, multi-generational offerings in this park are important.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Existing housing along Memorial Avenue also offers excellent park frontage and clear views for enhanced park security.
- New playground equipment.
- Great lighting.
- Community garden.



SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Park is near a high-crime area in the City.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The park is in need of more trees and landscaping throughout to make it attractive and seasonably comfortable. The location of a successful “community garden” offers multi-generational recreational opportunities.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Trash receptacles.
2. Picnic pavilions.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Fitness Stations.
- Community garden.

MEMORIAL PARK

Memorial Park on West Fourth Street is the Home of Bowman Field and the minor league Crosscutters baseball team. It is also home to the city's only swimming pool and "splash park." It is the most heavily visited park in the City of Williamsport. Major recent investments in the swimming pool and Bowman Field have been heavily recognized in the local media and have greatly enhanced the appeal of this popular recreational area.

Key Notes: The park has received a lot of recent attention for the improvement of its swimming area. BB&T Park at Historic Bowman Field is a popular destination for people from all over central Pennsylvania. The park has ample pavilion and picnic space.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Memorial Park is centrally located and is visible from Route 15.
- The location of BB&T Park at Historic Bowman Field in Memorial is a huge advantage. It is the second oldest ballpark in minor league baseball and brings numerous visitors to the park.
- A state of the art pool and "splash park" complex.
- A well maintained playground area.
- Frequent activities in the park, associated with Bowman Field and the swimming complex make crime less likely to occur.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Rubber safety surfacing in the playground is old and somewhat unsafe.
- Past negative publicity related to criminal activities in the park.
- Controversy related to a decision to remove basketball courts from the park.
- Parking challenges on Crosscutters game days.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The park is in need of more trees and landscaping to provide shade and aesthetic appeal. A walking trail could be added.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Replacement of existing rubber safety surfacing in the 7,990 square feet play area.
2. More trees.
3. A walking trail with connections into the Brodart neighborhood.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- More parking.



NEWBERRY LITTLE LEAGUE COMPLEX

Schultz Field is a baseball facility primarily used by the Newberry Little League. It is not city owned. It is situated along Arch Street and Mosser Avenue in the Newberry neighborhood of Williamsport. The park, owned and maintained by Newberry Little League, is very active among Little League teams, junior softball teams, and t-ball. The neighborhood surrounding the park is primarily residential with an YBC store bordering the south-east.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- 3 baseball fields and 3 “practice fields” provide plenty of baseball space for practicing and play.
- Park is viewed as being generally safe.
- Location is ideal as it is close to Susquehanna State Park with easy access off the Lt. Col. Abram Howard Bridge.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- The park has no perimeter boundary on its southern end and borders a residential street.
- No separation between t-ball fields. It is hard to differentiate between fields during game play.
- No walking paths in practice fields.
- Generally there is a lack of seating and benches throughout the facility.
- Parking is lacking particularly along Emery Street.
- The Tyler Belton memorial rock needs signage and lighting.
- No bathroom facilities.
- General signage is lacking.
- General lack of trash cans.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The park is well maintained and has a dedicated group of volunteers that work hard to maintain a safe and fun environment for the children and their families. Newberry Little League has a number of sponsors that help with costs and have engaged Williamsport colleges and non-profits to help with painting and other repairs at the facility. This park is one of the most used parks in the City for Little League and the biggest baseball facility in the Newberry neighborhood.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Benches.
2. Trash receptacles.
3. Parking.
4. Walking paths in the practice fields.
5. Restrooms.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Lights and signage along the Tyler Benton memorial rock.
- Picnic benches.
- Refurbished storage shed.

PHILLIP E. PREZIOSI PARK

Phillip E. Preziosi Park is a 1.9 acre neighborhood park situated in the Newberry neighborhood in the City's West End. The site was formerly home to the Jackson Elementary School and was converted to a park after the school burned down in the 1950's. The park was once very vibrant, with winter ice skating, summer activities like storytelling and even a pet parade. Newberry is very family-oriented with almost 3 in 5 houses containing school-aged children.

While significant improvements have been made, a great deal of potential exists in finding expanded uses for the open space that once served as the fairgrounds for the Newberry Lions. The addition of a walking trail and picnic pavilions would greatly enhance the value of the park by providing additional multi-generational recreational activities which would mesh well with the family oriented elements focused on the Linn and Pearl Street sides of the property.

Key Note: The park is surrounded by low and medium density housing.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Phillip E. Preziosi Park is centrally located and is easily accessible from a neighborhood commercial district.
- Easily walkable from many homes in Newberry.
- Multi-generational use potential.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Limited exposure given its difficult access from more heavily traveled streets in Newberry.
- The park's open field gets little use throughout the year.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The park is in need of more trees and landscaping to provide shade and aesthetic appeal. A "pedestrian mall" could be built in an east-to-west direction to create a safe and accessible passage. The addition of picnic pavilions would mesh well with current family activities associated with the site.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Pedestrian walkway.
2. Picnic pavilions.
3. Small performance stage.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Additional signage.
- Off-street parking.

SHAW PLACE PARK

Shaw Place Park is an 8.1-acre park located in the East End neighborhood in the City. Due to its size, and large facilities, this park draws users from throughout the City. The residential neighborhood around the park is mostly owner-occupied with 1 in 3 households containing seniors. The park used to have a pool, but currently has a walking path, large soccer field, softball field, tennis courts, volleyball, handball and basketball court. Currently, there are discussions underway to revitalize the baseball and soccer fields to allow for more parking, and more use. Shaw Place Park used to be one of the city's most used parks; however, today with the loss of the its swimming pool and aging infrastructure, Shaw Place Park is in need of care.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- The park's large size offers great views of the hillside.
- Playground equipment is in good condition.
- Ample parking.
- Good neighborhood access.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- No restrooms.
- Walking path is narrow.
- The open space formerly occupied by the pool (i.e. maintenance structure, concession stand and changing room structures).
- Volleyball court is underutilized.
- Lack of trees and vegetation.

- Aging tennis courts.
- Basketball court in poor condition and in a bad location.
- Pavilions are underutilized.
- Lack of trash receptacles.
- Benches are old and need replaced/fixed.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

Shaw Place Park is enjoyed by neighborhood residents and residents throughout the city. With ongoing discussions relative to the use of the baseball field, in the context of Elm Park funding and Williamsport's history as a baseball town, particular redevelopment focus should be centered on the baseball field and soccer field, and how to best accommodate both activities.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Improved and expanded pathways.
2. Renovation of tennis courts.
3. Addition of a dog park.
4. Park signage.
5. Improve basketball court.
6. Demolish or repurpose concession stand, maintenance building and changing room.
7. Improve soccer field.
8. Improve softball field.
9. Removal of volleyball court.
10. Removal of handball court.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Other amenities such as benches, horseshoe pits and game tables.

SUSQUEHANNA STATE PARK

This 20-acre scenic riverfront and recreational area is home to the Hiawatha Paddle-wheel Riverboat, which operates in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks. **Susquehanna State Park** also features the City of Williamsport's only public boat launch.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- Riverfront location.
- The proposed Susquehanna Riverwalk extension project is likely to increase usage of the park.
- Site is heavily promoted as a result of the presence of the Hiawatha.
- Well maintained pavilion and picnic tables.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Prone to flooding.
- Limited activities for children.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

Susquehanna State Park is likely the second most heavily used park in the City of Williamsport due to the popularity of the Hiawatha. With the current focus on recreational opportunities associated with rivers, this location will continue to grow in popularity.



PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Additional playground equipment.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Addition of interactive kiosks related to the history of the Susquehanna River.



WAY'S GARDEN

Many visitors and city residents identify **Way's Garden** as one of the most naturally beautiful places in Northcentral Pennsylvania. More than 100 years ago, city philanthropist J. Roman Way gave the city the beautiful gift of the garden; it is located in the heart of the city's Historical District and is a frequent site for weddings and other events. This park has received significant community support and has received grant funding from DCNR and Lycoming County. Ongoing additions to the park include the addition of a Pergola, oval walking path, and a foundation terrace.



SITE ADVANTAGES

- Easily accessible location in a heavily traveled portion of the City.
- The site is the recipient of numerous "earned media" opportunities due to the strength of the Way's Garden Commission and the involvement of the Lycoming County Master Gardeners.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Limited activities for children.
- Limited parking.

PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The natural beauty, historical significance, and visibility of this park make it a treasure of the Williamsport Parks System. The parks uniqueness and the 'love and care' that it receives from community volunteers is very evident.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Replacement of fence.
2. Addition of signage explaining the history of the park and identifying native plants and trees.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Addition of a pavilion.



YOUNG'S WOODS PARK

Young's Woods Park is a small 3-acre neighborhood park in the City's East End neighborhood. It is a secluded park, with a mix of owner-occupied and rental homes surrounding the park. The park has a playground area, a picnic/pavilion area, a basketball court, volleyball court and an open space. Despite its small area, there is a collection of trees scattered throughout the park which adds to its secluded feel. This park is mostly used for passive recreation.

SITE ADVANTAGES

- A great park for families with small children.
- Lots of shade and benches.
- Good neighborhood access.

SITE DISADVANTAGES

- Poorly placed seating and lighting.
- Basketball court should be reconfigured.



PARK USE AND AREA SUSTAINABILITY

The quiet neighborhood park is often at odds with the noise from the basketball courts. A fence was also constructed to contain loose balls but this inhibits access. The baseball field does get used by children, but this activity doesn't last long, as criminal activity pushes families and children away from the park. This park has become a hub for out of the area drug use and activity. There have been numerous complaints from neighbors about criminal activity ranging from graffiti to drug dealing.

PRIMARY IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

1. Added lighting.
2. Addition of security cameras.
3. Removal of Volleyball Court
4. Pavilion repairs.
5. Park signage.
6. Trash Receptacles.
7. Benches.
8. Removal of mulch and replace with rubberized turf.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

- Demolition of fencing.
- Reconfiguration of basketball court.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

With ever increasing strain on the City's budget, it is important to balance the need for additional investments in our parks system with other priorities. Public safety, infrastructure, and long-term pension obligations are important, and, as demonstrated by the information provided in the introductory, so are spending on parks and recreation.

All of the improvements listed above are needed and would greatly enhance recreation in Williamsport; however it is important to prioritize investments based upon the following considerations:

- ✓ Is the park frequently used? Will an investment encourage more use?
- ✓ Is the investment associated with regular maintenance of existing infrastructure? Will "putting off" this investment lead to higher costs in the future?
- ✓ Is the investment consistent with other planned community investments?
- ✓ Will investment in this park create economic benefit?
- ✓ Based upon these considerations the top four parks in need of immediate attention are as follows:

#1 MEMORIAL PARK

Previous investments in this park have made it a popular attraction for residents and visitors. Due to its heavy use, the city should continue to invest in regular maintenance and expansion associated with the operation of this location.

The City has a cost estimate for playground improvements for this park related to replacement of the rubber safety surface in the playground. The City has estimates for these improvements and they are noted in the city's Capital Budget and slated for action in FY 2018-2019. This important work should be completed.

#2 SHAW PLACE

Due to the loss of the swimming pool and aging existing infrastructure, investment is needed in this park. In addition to funding Phase #2 improvements, which are referenced in the Capital Budget and slated for FY 2019-2020, consideration should be given to demolition or repurposing of the locker room facility that it is no longer needed for the pool.

For budget planning purposes, it is important to note that Shaw Place does not qualify for CDBG funds. As a result, any spending on this park would have to come from other grant sources or general fund.

#3 BRANDON PARK

Improvements slated for 2018 will add to the attractiveness and sustainability of this popular open space. Additional improvements, including repairing the bandshell, slated for FY 2018-2019 are needed.

#4 YOUNG'S WOODS PARK

Community parks are crucial investments which help to increase property values, reduce crime, and increase neighborhood pride. Young's Woods Park is on a downward spiral and will soon become a drain on real estate values in the area surrounding its East End location. The fastest, most inexpensive way to curb this decline would be the addition of security cameras and lighting. This addition should be made now.

Phase #2 upgrades for this park are scheduled for FY 2020-2021, it is important to consider if these scheduled investments may be too late. It is much more difficult and costly to "bring a park back" than it is to prevent its decline by investing now. The old phrase "spend a nickel today rather than a dollar tomorrow" may well apply here.

COST ESTIMATES

Cost estimates for Memorial Park, Shaw Place Park, Brandon Park and Young's Woods Park are provided by **Reynolds Solutions**.

Please refer to the attached addendum for the complete categorized cost estimates.



OBSERVATIONS

The only way that cities like Williamsport can fix their economic and budget problems is to grow their way out of them.

Williamsport, simply put, needs to increase its population. The City has made significant improvements in its downtown district through careful planning and skillful use of state and federal grant dollars. It now needs to focus on its neighborhoods.

According to U.S. Census Bureau calculations, the City of Williamsport has lost 547 residents, a decrease of 1.9% since the 2010 count. While this figure is not positive, it is consistent with the population loss trend throughout central and northeastern Pennsylvania. Two bordering communities experienced growth: Old Lycoming Township (+1.3%) and Loyalsock Township (+1.1%), while South Williamsport experienced a 2.3% estimated population loss. The U.S. Census Bureau only estimates changes in populations to communities with 5,000 or more people, therefore estimates for Woodward Township are not available at this time. Lycoming County as a whole experienced an estimated population decline of 0.7%.

Considering that significant parts of the city are already fully developed and host several non-taxable properties, the only way to increase tax revenues without increasing property tax rates is to increase investment in the city and grow its population. A particular focus should be to attract more professionals with families and high income retirees, who are more likely to invest money into improving single-family homes and starting small businesses.

Substantial research over the past 30 + years has clearly demonstrated a correlation between spending on green spaces and economic growth and private investment in communities. Spending money on public safety and streets is very important, but equal focus should be placed on investing in recreation and parks. A well balanced approach to city spending will encourage responsible growth.

In addition to the economic benefits associated with park spending, the City of Williamsport should consider the limited accessibility offered to its citizens and visitors with disabilities. Based upon our understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act, only one playground in the City is fully handicap accessible (Memorial Park). Public parks and playgrounds in particular should be accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities.

The City of Williamsport spent \$301, 925 (1.17%) of its most recent budget on recreation -- this number is on the low end for cities of its size in Pennsylvania. Because of the very effective use of grant dollars by former Economic Development Director John Grado and his team, Williamsport has been able to make significant capital improvements to its park system. However, as the inventory above demonstrates, much remains to be done. The City of Williamsport needs to find ways to spend more on its park system.

In Pennsylvania, we've researched cities of comparable size and classification as Williamsport in regards to the relationship between their spending on recreation and their overall economic health. Our observations include the following examples of cities and their recreational spending, from lower investment to higher investment:

LOWER INVESTMENT

Johnstown, PA invests just .65% of their budget to recreation. This city has the distinction of being "one of America's fastest shrinking cities."

The City of Scranton (.35%), which is on the verge of bankruptcy, is losing its population, and recently forced to sell its water system to generate enough cash to run annual operations.

HIGHER INVESTMENT

Cities with larger investments include Lancaster (4.65%) and Allentown (4.26%), both cities that are recognized as "comeback cities" after years of decline. Allentown is the second fastest growing Pennsylvania City; Lancaster is the fifth.

REGIONAL EXAMPLES

Compared to Williamsport's investment (\$301, 925), much smaller communities have made more significant investments in recreation:

City of Sunbury - \$592, 071

Borough of Montoursville - \$334,169

Borough of Lewisburg - \$185,030

If the City Council and Mayor agree to place a higher priority on parks and recreation spending, the Recreation Department could begin to “shop” for estimates for the work suggested above and expand the priority list beyond what is listed above.

While there are grant programs available through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Community Conservation Partnerships Program) and the Commonwealth Finance Authority (Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program) all require a local match. If the City of Williamsport decides to place a priority on parks, they will have to spend money out of their General Fund or lead a capital campaign seeking private donors.

In addition to spending on capital improvements, the City should consider the following:

- ✓ Additional spending on the promotion of city recreational assets.
- ✓ Additional consideration towards making playgrounds more handicap accessible.

Decision makers in most cities throughout the United States are faced with dwindling budgets and increased costs associated with public safety, streets, and long term debt obligations, Williamsport is no different. While not optimal, the first place most cities cut is recreation. Smart communities resist the urge to reduce parks and recreation spending to solve short term budget problems; they focus on the big picture of long-term growth and opportunity.

You can't simply build great parks and expect to turn around decades of economic stagnation. Some regions are simply not "primed" for economic growth. Fortunately Williamsport has numerous potential economic drivers; unfortunately they have yet to be tapped to their full potential. These drivers include two major academic institutions, proximity to markets, two major hospital systems serving the area, and Marcellus Shale development. Investments in parks and recreation will enhance these other drivers and allow Williamsport the opportunity to experience significant economic growth in the next few decades.

For the first time in history many companies are moving to where the talent is as opposed to making the talent move to them. Modern technology has enabled firms to open satellite locations to better access a balanced talent pool. The presence of two major academic institutions in Williamsport, one with a focus on liberal arts (Lycoming College) and the other with a technical focus (Pennsylvania College of Technology), place Williamsport in a unique position to market itself to large firms wishing to add an east coast location.

A regional example of a high tech company "moving to where the talent is" is the expansion of Pepperjam, the internet marketing business formerly known as eBay Enterprise Marketing Solutions which located to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Pepperjam has locations throughout the United States and recently added nearly 150 new jobs in downtown Wilkes-Barre which pay an average of \$60,000 and employs people in diverse roles such as engineering, coding, account management, and sales. Pepperjam was drawn to the City of Wilkes-Barre because of the talent pool offered by numerous local colleges.

Williamsport is ideally situated for growth from a geographic standpoint, with 40% of the population of the United States within 8 hours of the city. This proximity to markets offers great potential for economic growth. With the highly reported death of American retail, which could be more

accurately described as the death of mega malls, the ability to get products to consumers quickly will be more important than ever.

In addition to changes in the way Americans shop, the change in national attitudes related to trade policy could bode well for Williamsport. A possible resurgence in domestic manufacturing could mean that firms wishing to have easy access to domestic and foreign markets, such as from The Port of Philadelphia, may bode well for this area as well. Williamsport has a rich manufacturing history and potential employers would find a well-trained and eager workforce an attractive motivator when deciding where to locate operations.

The recent merger of Susquehanna Health and UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center) is a very positive development from a public health and economic development perspective. The competition with Geisinger Health System, demonstrated by their recent purchase of the Jersey Shore Hospital, should prove to be positive for the area as well. Competition between these two well-funded health care giants will lead to better care for patients and increased compensation for medical professionals. The City of Williamsport must be sure to market itself as a livable community for medical professionals moving to the area to take jobs at these facilities.

Lastly, the resurgence of the Natural Gas industry provides opportunities for growth. So long as the development of this natural resource is done in an environmentally responsible manner, there will be enormous potential for economic development and growth. The next wave of activity, while not predicted to be as large, is likely to last longer and allow for long-term planning opportunities for public officials. The important caveat with natural gas related economic growth is that it is “an industry on wheels” and is very prone to cyclical adjustments based on demand and public policy decisions by the state and federal governments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, strategic planning and investments in recreational assets greatly enhance opportunities for solid economic growth but these investments alone are not enough to jump start a regional economy. These investments must occur in conjunction with other carefully planned efforts. Good parks and recreation can “seal the deal” when a family or company is considering a relocation to a particular area, however, special attention must also be paid to maintaining good streets and bridges and creating a sense of safety in a community.

If public officials at the city and county level take full advantage of the opportunities listed above, Williamsport can experience significant economic growth. The old model of offering huge incentives in the form of grants and tax abatements to selected private companies has proven to be a largely unsuccessful economic development tool. Often companies who respond to these incentives will jump at opportunities to take advantage of a better deal offered by another region or state and leave an area as quickly as they came into it.

Making public policy decisions based upon achieving the greatest good for the largest number of businesses has proven to be more successful than efforts targeted towards specific companies or industries. Creating a diversified economy protects a region from huge swings associated with a downturn in a particular industry cluster. Investments in infrastructure, such as parks, benefit all businesses and individually in a fairly equal manner. These investments are viewed positively by individuals looking to relocate their businesses or homes.

City of Williamsport officials should consider ways to increase investments in their parks and promote the city as an ideal location for home and business ownership. Through skillful use of grant funding, increased focus on raising private funds, and prioritization of General Fund dollars, the City could make significant improvements which will increase the quality of life for current residents and encourage new and exciting development opportunities.



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ADDENDUM



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Helping Pennsylvania's Municipalities