



Executive Summary

Building Community Through Parks

A Master Plan for Parks and Recreation

Randolph Township, New Jersey

July, 2016



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BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PARKS RANDOLPH, NEW JERSEY

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Mark Forstenhausler
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Roman Hirniak (Mayor in 2016)
Christine Carey (Deputy Mayor 2016)
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Ethan Blynn

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BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PARKS RANDOLPH TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

THE NEED FOR A PLAN

Randolph Township, founded in 1805, is located in northern New Jersey, approximately 40 miles northwest of New York City, in central Morris County. At the beginning of the 20th century, Randolph became a popular vacation destination and resort community for people from nearby urban areas. As a result, a series of hotels and bungalow colonies were developed along Sussex, Brookside, and Calais Roads.

The Township began to experience rapid growth starting in 1960, after the end of the resort era, when the population, according to the U.S. Census, was 7,295. The population increased to 13,296 by 1970 and continued to grow steadily, reaching 24,847 in 2000. The level of growth in Randolph has since leveled off, reaching 25,877 in 2014. The composition of these residents has also changed, however, as the Township has seen growth in populations over age 65 and a decrease in residents under age 18. Additionally, the Township has seen substantial growth in minority populations which is projected to continue into the future.

Changes to the makeup of the population have implications to both the current and future needs for parks and recreation in Randolph Township. Recognizing that the needs of the population should be reassessed, the Township Council and staff of the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department determined that a comprehensive process should be completed to determine the needs of the community over the next 10 years, leading to the authorization of this Master Plan. The theme, *Building Community Through Parks*, was integral to the planning process and is the title of this Master Plan.

EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN RANDOLPH

For many residents, parks provide their primary access to the natural environment, and for all residents, parks provide a variety of natural and active outdoor recreational opportunities. Access to these facilities helps to promote the health and wellness of the community.

The quality of a community's parks and recreation system is viewed as one of the indicators of the overall quality of life. A recent study titled, *The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation* by John L. Crompton for the Trust for Public Land, included a section on the impact of parks and open space on property taxes. This study indicated that property values were higher for properties near quality parks and open spaces than for similar properties located elsewhere.

In addition, recent surveys of home buyers by the National Association of Home Builders indicated that trails, parks, and playgrounds were three of the top five amenities that homebuyers desire when considering a new home purchase. Finally, the preliminary findings of a recent study, *The Economic Significance of Local and Regional Park Systems' Spending on the United States Economy*, conducted by the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University (GMU) for the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) found that local and regional parks created \$140 billion in economic activity per year and supported nearly one million jobs in the United States.

Parks and recreation services are currently provided primarily by the Randolph Township Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department which provides maintenance and programming for Township parks and open space properties. Randolph has both a Parks Advisory Committee and a Recreation Advisory Committee which together provide advice on parks, recreation, and open space policies. Randolph has four large Community Parks, three Neighborhood Parks, and three Mini Parks.

In addition to the Community, Neighborhood, and Mini Parks, Randolph has a substantial amount of open space. In total these open space properties cover over 1,400 acres of land that, combined with the Township park properties, yield over 2,000 acres of open space. Many of these properties were acquired through the Township's Open Space Trust Fund, intended to preserve the rural character of the Township.

In addition to the facilities offered by Randolph Township, the school district (Randolph Township Schools) provides playgrounds, athletic fields, and courts at four locations that can be used by the public when schools are not in session. Additionally, several county parks (Morris County Park Commission) are located near or adjacent to Randolph Township. Private organizations also provide recreational facilities for use by the public.

A CITIZEN DRIVEN PLAN

As the purpose of this plan is to address the needs of the community, a primary focus of the master planning process was to identify those needs. A number of methods were utilized to determine the needs and desires of Randolph residents for parks and recreation facilities and programs. The public was involved in the process through the following methods:

1. A public workshop that functioned as a kick-off for the process (over 25 attendees)

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2. A statistically valid Community Interest and Opinion Survey conducted by ETC/Leisure Vision that was completed by 520 households
3. A web-based and handout survey that was completed by 606 residents
4. An active Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee
5. Meetings with nearly 40 stakeholder groups representing:
 - Township Council and Mayor
 - Parks/Recreation Advisory Boards
 - Other Township boards and committees
 - Athletic groups (baseball, softball, lacrosse, track, cross country, football, soccer, cheerleading, wrestling, basketball)
 - Randolph High School students
 - Township staff (Parks and Recreation, Planning, Police, Public Works)
 - Cultural organizations (Brundage Park Theater and Artworks program staff)
 - Community service organizations (Kiwanis, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Venturers)
 - Businesses/sponsors (The Goddard School, John Herold Jewelers, Randolph Pain Relief and Wellness Center)
 - Other recreation providers (Randolph YMCA, Indoor Sports Pavilion)
6. Preliminary presentations of the public input findings

WHAT RANDOLPH RESIDENTS SAID

The information gathered from the various public input methods was used to identify the needs of Randolph residents. A brief summary of the findings and needs as communicated in the various public input methods is described below.

Statistically Valid Mail Survey

1. Eighty-seven (87%) of residents visited a park in Randolph over the past year (98% for the Web Survey), and 49% of these residents visited parks more than 20 times.
2. Freedom Park was the most visited park (71% reporting visiting), followed by Brundage Park – Carrel Road (63%). Forty-five percent (45%) of households reported using trails.
3. The top reasons for not using parks more often included:
 - Do not know what is offered (25%)
 - Use private clubs/gyms (23%)
 - Program or facility not offered (21%)
4. The improvements households would most like

to see to existing parks included:

- Improve/add restrooms (35%)
- Drinking fountains (31%)
- Bike trails & bike lanes (28%)
- Expand trails (26%)

5. Seventy-one percent (71%) of households are either “very supportive” or “somewhat supportive” of Township actions to upgrade older parks and recreation facilities. Other actions with very high levels of support included:
 - Purchase land to preserve open space, natural, and historic areas (66%)
 - Develop new recreational trails and connect existing trails (60%)

Web Survey respondents were generally more supportive of all improvement actions.

6. The most needed parks and recreation facilities for households were:
 - Walking and hiking trails (71%)
 - Large Community Parks (54%)
 - Natural areas/nature parks (54%)
 - Paved bike trails (49%)
 - Indoor exercise and fitness facilities (44%)

The largest number of households had unmet needs for the following facilities: indoor exercise and fitness facilities, paved bike trails, outdoor swimming pools, and an outdoor fitness circuit.

The most needed parks and recreation programs for households were:

- Adult fitness and wellness (42%)
- Concerts (38%)
- 50+ programs (35%)
- Adult learning (30%)
- Youth sports programs (28%)

The largest number of households had unmet needs for the following programs: adult fitness and wellness, concerts, 50+ programs, adult learning, and nature programs.

7. Respondents were asked how they would allocate \$100 among different types of parks and recreation facility improvements in Randolph. The top responses ranked as follows:
 - Improve/maintain existing parks
 - Develop new walking and biking trails
 - Develop new indoor recreation facility

Building Community Through Parks Website (powered by MindMixer)

1. Walking, running, or hiking was by far the highest ranked option for how respondents utilize the parks (65% selected this response).
2. The top features users included in a vision of the future were:

- Trail system connections
- A town pool
- Artificial turf fields

Public Workshop and Stakeholder Groups

Reoccurring themes included:

- More artificial turf fields
- Park developed at the 90 Acres site (variety of facilities) as a community gathering area
- Recreation center
- Interconnected trails with parking and signage
- ADA improvements
- Improvements to Brundage Playhouse, Artworks Studio, and VFW Hall
- Improvements to fields (including drainage)
- Improved Randolph Lake
- More events

The input gathered from all of the methods yielded similar results. Several common themes appeared in all methods of public input. Residents would like to see upgrades to existing facilities (including athletic fields), more trails, and more opportunities for community interaction (including program offerings).

VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF PARKS AND RECREATION IN RANDOLPH

Vision for the Future

The vision for Randolph Township is to provide a wide range of park and recreational services that are fun, connected, and accessible for all residents and visitors. These services will promote community enrichment through the provision of excellent facilities and programs that are equitable and accessible to all residents. Services and facilities will be further enhanced through a focus on sustainability (environmental and financial) and cooperation.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide and direct priorities, actions, and investments. These principles will help the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department work in concert with other Township departments and other potential partners to ensure that Randolph accomplishes its vision and maintains the qualities that make it such a desirable place to live and visit.

1. Fun: Excitement and Community Enrichment through Parks and Programs

Randolph Township will explore a wide variety of opportunities for fun and excitement at parks. To facilitate these opportunities, Randolph parks will provide an inclusive environment for social activities, relaxation, and entertainment for families and individuals of all ages. These trendsetting parks and recreational facilities will be utilized to enrich the community

through a variety of athletic, educational, and cultural arts programs. Criteria for determining improvements will focus on the value added to the community as a result of the development.

2. Compatibility: Flexibility, Adaptability, and Sustainability of the Park System

Parks and Recreation in Randolph Township will be adaptable to trends through an emphasis on durable multi-purpose facilities. Facilities will be compatible with a wide variety of programs with design that is well planned and engineered. These quality facilities will promote sustainability, both economically through cost-effective development decisions that consider revenue opportunities, and environmentally through protracted use.

This flexibility will extend to nature as efforts will be made to ensure development is non-disruptive to the environment through the preservation of open space and the use of green (or eco-friendly) materials and practices. Efforts will be made to ensure that adjacent uses are complementary. Facilities and programs will be encouraged to utilize the character of the natural environment for educational and passive uses as well as wildlife management.

3. Connectivity: Building Community Connections

Randolph Township will facilitate connectivity of the community through parks and programs, helping to inspire pride and community identity through shared experiences. Parks will provide venues for members of the community to gather and connect with nature and each other socially through events as well as daily usage. These connections will help to further enrich the community by encouraging interaction between users of all ages and providing motivation for healthy activities. Trails will be utilized to provide opportunities for health and fitness and to connect parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other gathering places. The Township will connect residents through the programming of events which will be publicized electronically and accessible online.

4. Accessibility: Equitable Access to a Wide Variety of Park Services

Accessibility in Randolph will encompass considerations of geographic location (both of parks and of facilities within parks), the availability of (and access to) facilities and programs for those with disabilities, and the provision of facilities that meet the needs of a diverse population, including users of all ages. As part of this effort, Randolph Township will provide an array of affordable programs and facilities to enrich the lives of community members with consideration to the

opportunities provided by (and the sensitivity of) the local climate, ensuring continued access for future users.

5. Cooperation: Expansion of Facility and Program Offerings through Partnerships

Randolph Township will pursue partnerships with other public agencies and private organizations to maximize parks and recreation services and facility offerings to residents and visitors to the community. Potential partners for both capital improvements and operations will include: schools, business groups, non-profits, land trusts, the Morris County Park Commission, the State of New Jersey, community service groups, clubs, the YMCA, private recreation providers, and more. These efforts will extend to improving awareness of all activities in Randolph, including those offered by these other agencies or organizations, through strategies such as cross promotion of events and programs.

6. Excellence: Exemplary Facilities, Programs, and Services that Ensure Safety of Users

Randolph Township will strive for excellence in all aspects of parks and recreation. High standards will be expected for facilities, programs, and services. These expectations will extend to staff, coaches, and volunteers and will require ongoing training. This excellence will allow Randolph to serve as a model for parks and recreation delivery.

Furthermore, Randolph parks will ensure a safe environment through proactive maintenance of its high quality facilities and regulatory compliance. Parks will have adequate lighting and will be equipped with necessary emergency equipment in order to maintain adequate security. Parks and facilities will have sufficient supervision to assure safety of users and security of facilities.

Proposed Mission Statement for Parks and Recreation

The mission of Randolph Parks and Recreation is to build community and enrich lives through the provision of recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities that encourage residents to enjoy life and have fun.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Building Community Through Parks plan includes six Goals that were each derived from one of the Guiding Principles of the Vision. Objectives describe how to meet those Goals, and Strategies further describe how to meet each Objective. Timeframes for the completion of each strategy (0-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-10 years, or over 10 years) are also suggested to help set priorities for improvements. Twenty-six (26) Objectives and 149

Strategies describe in detail how to meet each of the six goals (see Section IX Action Plan for details on each of the Objectives and Strategies). The following list broadly represents a summary of the primary recommendations for parks and recreation in Randolph Township which represent a balance of active and passive recreational opportunities.

1. Develop the 90 Acres site as a Community Park with a focus on facilities that encourage residents to gather and interact.



2. Ensure that the development of the 90 Acres site includes the following amenities: trails, outdoor fitness equipment, an outdoor stage (or bandshell), a community garden, an all-access playground, game courts (pickleball and bocce), and picnic shelters.



3. Develop all-purpose perimeter trails at Freedom, Heistein, Brundage Sussex, and all future parks.



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4. Develop nature trails to take advantage of existing natural resources at the 90 Acres site and other open space properties where conditions allow.
5. Develop a Trail System Master Plan that includes sidewalk improvements, new trail segments, and the prioritization of existing segment connections.
6. Replace field lighting at Heistein, Brundage Carrell, and Brundage Sussex Parks, and add lighting to additional fields at Heistein, Freedom, and Randolph Parks.
7. Replace the existing artificial turf at Freedom Park and add turf to the second lower field at Freedom Park and the field at Brundage Sussex to increase the availability of fields and reduce the frequency of rainouts.



8. Ensure the availability of program offerings for all residents regardless of age or disability.
9. Seek partnerships to mitigate both capital and operating costs for new facilities, particularly for high cost project.
10. Provide paved walkways to all facilities and spectator areas to improve access and meet ADA guidelines.
11. Ensure the availability of support facilities, including restrooms, signage, and drinking fountains at parks in Randolph.
12. Provide Wi-Fi hotspots in Community and Neighborhood Parks and install additional lighting at all parks as needed to improve safety and security.
13. Encourage the creation of a Friends of Randolph Parks foundation to recruit and organize volunteers, raise funds, and work toward the implementation of this plan.
14. Pursue CAPRA Accreditation within the next five years.

INDIVIDUAL PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are provided for each park (and other sites) in Randolph. A concept plan was

developed for the new 90 Acres site which can be seen at the end of this Executive Summary. Section VIII of this Master Plan includes cost estimates for the outlined improvements. A summary of the key recommendations for each park is provided in the following text. Support facilities, signage, and walkway enhancements are needed at all parks and, therefore, not included in these lists.

1. 90 Acres

- All-access playground (nature themed)
- Bandshell with event lawn
- Picnic shelters (one with restrooms)
- Walking track with lighting
- Nature trails (2 loops) - 0.5 miles each
- Walking trails with connection to Heistein Park and adjacent neighborhoods
- Mountain bike trails
- Community garden
- Outdoor fitness equipment
- Pickleball courts (2)
- Bocce courts
- Shuffleboard courts
- Chess tables/multi-use tables (2)

2. Brundage Park (Carrell)

- Field lighting replacement
- Sprayground
- Brundage Park Playhouse improvements
- Playground replacement (large all-access)
- Bungalow improvements (ADA to one, façade to all)
- Trail around diamond fields (complete loop)

3. Freedom Park

- Artificial turf (lower field #2)
- Replacement artificial turf (lower field #1)
- Softball field lighting
- Perimeter trail (around turf fields) - 0.6 miles with lighting
- Playground improvements (edging, accessible features)

4. Heistein Park

- New lighting (fields #3 and #4)
- Replacement lighting (fields #1 and #2)
- Field improvements (irrigation, drainage, fencing)
- Playground replacement (expanded size)
- Medium picnic shelter (at pond)
- Perimeter trail (around central rectangular fields) - 0.4 miles

5. Randolph Park

- Field lighting
- Medium picnic shelter
- Spray park improvements

6. Brundage Park (Sussex)

- Artificial turf field
- Field lighting replacement
- Parking lot paving
- Restroom building

- Medium picnic shelter
- Trail around field with connection to trail system - 0.25 acres

7. Brundage Preserve

- Picnic shelter
- Trail around pond (complete loop)

8. Rosenfarb Park

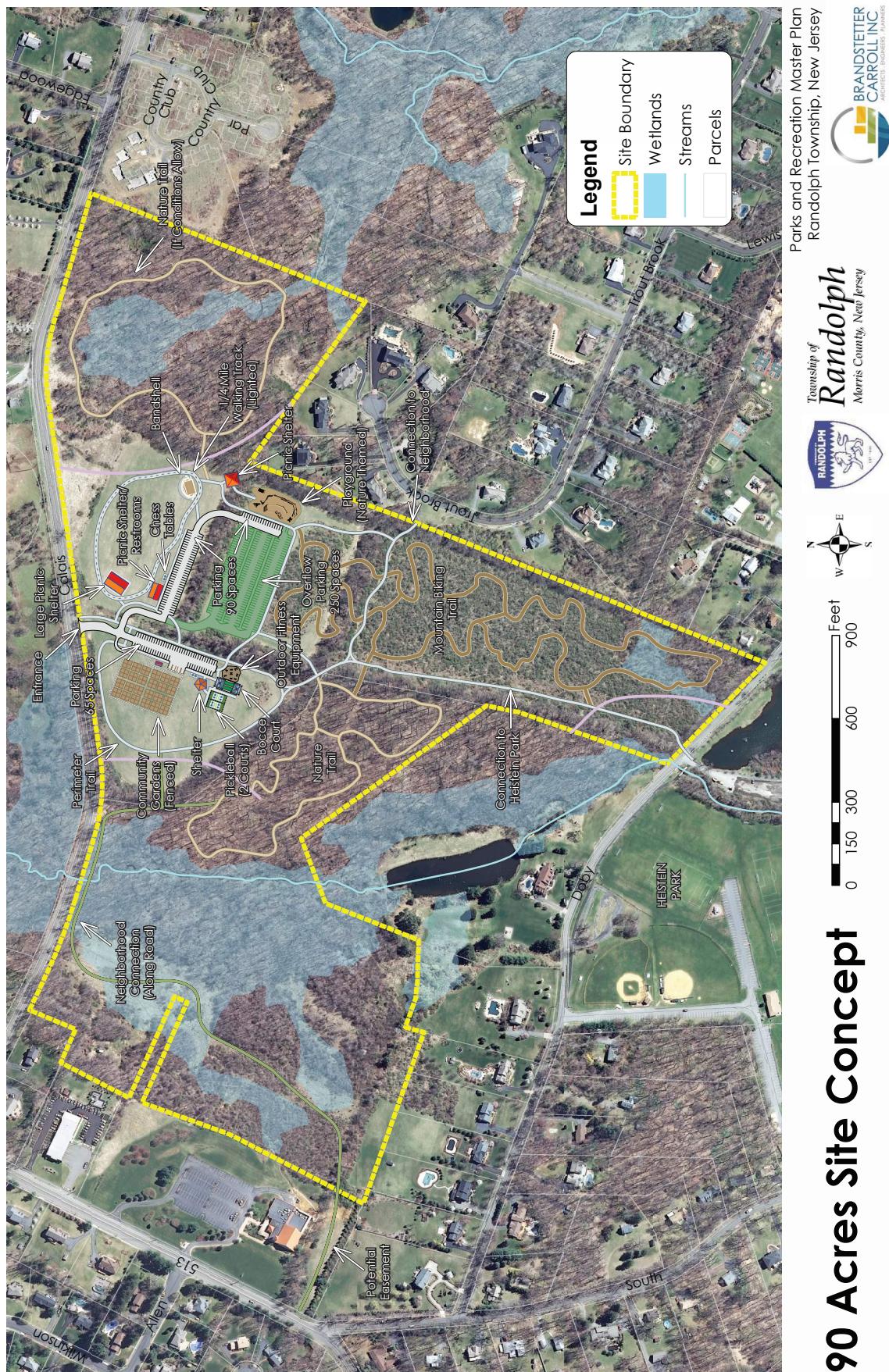
- Playground
- Gazebo
- Basketball court improvement (replace/reduce slab)

PROJECT FUNDING

Randolph Township has an existing funding source that can be utilized for the funding of the capital project recommendations proposed in this plan. The Open Space Trust Fund balance will allow the implementation of the improvements in this plan over the next ten years utilizing tax revenue from this existing source.

The Township has prepared an estimated capital improvement budget to fund projects in this plan over the next 10 years (see Section VIII). The projections are based on several assumptions, including the estimated project costs. Additionally, as part of the budgeting process, conservative interest rates were assumed for borrowing, but those numbers are also estimates, although the Township has an excellent bond rating that will provide favorable rates. Finally, *Building Community Through Parks* represents a plan for the future with recommendations to realize the vision for parks and recreation in Randolph; however, the decision to appropriate funds will ultimately be made by the Township Council, the Mayor, and other Township representatives, thereby determining the scope and timeline for these projects.

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