

Ridge Road Park Q&A East Pikeland Township

Why a Dog Park and Community Garden?

The Northern Federation of Chester Counties Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, along with the East Pikeland Comprehensive Plan, and Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan all concur that our region needs additional recreation facilities for passive and active recreation. The Northern Federation Plan specifically indicated that East Pikeland was deficient in parkland. In response to these local, regional, and township plans, along with the support of a Township survey, the Park and Recreation Board has been working to identify needed park and trail facilities and match those opportunities with available land.

When taking all of this information into consideration, the Park and Recreation Board determined that a dog park and community garden, coupled with ADA accessible walking paths and native meadowland would be a welcome park facility in the Township.

In addition, as our community and region continues to grow; apartments, townhomes, and subdivisions with smaller lots are becoming the norm. These residents don't always have the space to grow their own food or walk their dogs in a safe area. The proposed park property is less than a mile away from a new apartment complex and the Kimberton Glen subdivision—where residents have small and/or no yards and will benefit from being so close to a facility with these amenities.

While Kimberton Park and the French Creek Trail currently allow dogs, all dogs must remain on their leashes, preventing dogs from truly being able to exercise. A dog park provides a safe space for dogs and their owners to recreate and socialize together. Research has found that people enjoy traveling to dog parks in the region, providing a positive economic impact to local businesses.

East Pikeland Township is also lacking in ADA accessible walking paths. This property is relatively flat, making it a great location to provide this amenity for all residents.

Design of Dog Park

- The dog park has been closely modeled after the Doylestown Dog Park, which has been recognized for its design and safety.
- There will be three enclosed pens—one for large dogs, one for small dogs, and one that is used as a rotation pen to be used when necessary to preserve the grass. Each entrance will have small holding pens for owners to release or connect their dog's leashes when entering and exiting, cutting down on the possibility of dogs getting loose. There will be benches, a water fountain, dog waste bag facilities, and a pavilion for shade in each pen. We will also plant trees in each pen that will provide natural shade in the future.
 - The Park and Recreation Board is still discussing rules and regulations for the dog park. There are various models used in our area, and they will be researching them to determine the best model for our Township.

Design of Community Garden and Orchard

- The community garden and orchard have been designed with all residents in mind. The garden features both raised and table-top garden beds to be accessible to people of all abilities. Area residents can reserve plots for a small fee and will sign a user contract which includes maintenance expectations and other rules. The garden will be surrounded by a 6ft. fence in order to prevent access by deer and other creatures that would eat the produce. This fence can also be used to prevent theft and vandalism when secured at night. The garden and orchard will both have strict organic policies in order to reduce harmful runoff into area wetlands and streams.
 - People gardening can choose to keep all the food they produce or donate all or a portion to a local food pantry. We are also considering having a few communal plots which everyone tends, from which all of the food would be donated to a local pantry.
 - People can take freely from the Community Orchard, all excess will be donated.
- Garden plots will be allotted on a first come, first served basis for a small fee, which will be waived if financial aid is requested. Plots would be reserved for one growing season with the whole process starting over the next year. As we are still in the planning phase, the exact number of plots and rules have not yet been determined.

What will happen to the rest of the property not being used for a dog park and community garden?

- The remaining acres will be transitioned into native meadowland which will provide habitat for pollinators, birds, and other mammals. We will plant native trees and shrubs and install a rain garden and bioswale to manage stormwater. The meadowland will be mowed twice a year. An ADA walking path with benches and interpretive educational signs will also be a highlight of the park.

Why this location?

This location was selected for a number of reasons:

- It was obtainable at no cost to the Township, saving taxpayers money;
- It is located in an area of the Township that was lacking public recreation facilities;
- Relatively flat parcels (reducing earth moving);
- The property is more centrally located than other potential properties;
- The property is close to two major transportation routes in the region (Routes 724 and 23) and is easily accessible from other areas of the Township, and
- It is less than a mile away from a new apartment complex and subdivision with single family homes.
- With the addition of a new elementary school being built across the street, and the revitalization efforts planned for the 724 Corridor, this property is even more attractive for a proposed park.

Why not develop these facilities on the “Crouse” property?

- The newly acquired Crouse property is 115 acres located off Spring City Road.
- The Park and Recreation Board determined that the Crouse property was too rural to host a dog park and community garden in East Pikeland. One of the goals for this project was to provide a facility that was centrally located, and near major transportation routes in order to make the park more accessible to as many people as possible. Also, the Reservoir Dog Park in Phoenixville Borough is only a mile and a half away from the Crouse Property.
 - In addition, we have discovered that the Crouse property has archaeological significance and will have to feature less impactful facilities.

What are other options for this property?

- When the Kimberton Meadows subdivision was approved in 2005 the developer was required to provide land as open space and it was agreed that this part of the property would be dedicated to the Township for “future public park use”. It was never intended to remain as vacant land. The Township took dedication of the land in 2019 with the intention of following through with that plan. This property will become a public park facility of some kind. The Park and Recreation Board discussed placing soccer and recreational baseball and softball fields on this property but figured that a more passive recreation facility would be more welcomed by neighbors.

How will this be paid for?

- Development of the new park will be paid for largely with grant funds. Taxes will not be increased to pay for the development of this project. The Township will also be seeking in-kind donations from contractors and businesses, as well as sponsorships from local pet-related businesses.
- Once the project is complete, maintenance and upkeep will fall under the Township’s General Fund and managed through the township’s Public Works department as well as volunteers. There are currently no grants that pay for maintenance and upkeep of park and trail facilities.

Who will maintain this facility?

- Like our other Park and Trail facilities, this property will be maintained by the East Pikeland Public Works Department, as overseen by Township Staff and the Parks and Recreation Board. We pride ourselves on providing clean and safe outdoor recreation opportunities for area residents, and this property will be no different.
 - The dog park and community garden have also been designed with features that will reduce the time and cost of maintenance time.
 - In addition, many dog parks and community gardens are also maintained by the users of the facility. Users will be expected to pick up their dog waste and keep their garden plots and surrounding areas tidy. This is enforceable using a variety of tactics and is often policed by other people using the facility. When we spoke with the managers in

townships with dog parks, they reported that cleanliness of their dog parks is not an issue.

Is there a plan to control pests and vermin in the community garden?

- As many people who garden know, there is no perfect plan to deal with pests and vermin! The garden will be surrounded by a 6ft fence to deter deer, rabbits, groundhogs, etc. but we will address each situation as it comes. It is expected that the presence of the dog park will help to deter pests in the garden area as well.

What about Security?

- Like all of our Township properties, this park would be closed from dusk to dawn and monitored by the East Pikeland Police Department. We will look into security lighting and other features that will increase the security on this property. In addition, the Township will pursue security options for the gates to the dog park and garden which would allow us to ensure that they are closed and opened at certain times - as we do for other township facilities.
- The trail on the property has been designed for distance from nearby homes. We can also ensure that it doesn't connect to the existing Kimberton Meadows trail; a decision that we will work with the Kimberton Meadows HOA on as we finalize the park design. We will include signage directing walkers to stay on the trail. Signage has worked well on the French Creek Trail so that users do not trespass on private property.
 - We did receive a number of comments concerning people accessing the Kimberton Meadows trail by parking on roads within the development. Since there will be no link between the proposed uses and the Kimberton Meadows development it would not be convenient for people to park there and walk to the dog park/community garden. However, the roads in Kimberton Meadows are public roads and we cannot regulate who parks on them. If the HOA wants to regulate who uses the trail through their subdivision, that is a private property issue that they will have to enforce.

Will there be noise issues? What are we doing to combat noise and smell?

- Township staff has researched this topic and have also reached out to the managers of townships with existing dog parks, all of whom have reported ZERO noise complaints in connection with their dog parks. Research completed online indicated a similar finding. Dogs often bark when they are contained to a yard or crate, but when they are allowed to run freely and socialize with other dogs, barking is minimal.
- We are also working with neighboring residents to create an effective buffer that will reduce noise from the facility.
- Similarly, in researching other dog parks, smell has not been an issue. Dog park users generally clean up after their pets with enforcement by other users.

Will there be buffering considered for neighboring residents?

- The draft plan does include buffering considerations, but we will continue to add buffering where appropriate based on feedback from residents directly neighboring the active zones of the proposed park.

Traffic Concerns:

- We have spoken to our traffic engineer about the permit we will need for the parking lot for this facility and were informed that the project will require a general access permit from PennDOT for a low impact driveway.
 - The plan for the parking lot currently has 28 spaces, including 4 ADA spaces. There would be space to expand the parking lot an additional 20 spaces if needed.
- With approval of a new school on Hares Hill Road, the four-way stop intersection at Ridge Road/Hares Hill Road will be upgraded with a traffic signal and crosswalks. This will improve safety and serve to slow down traffic.

What will happen to property values?

- Chester County's 2019 *Return on Environment* Report explained that park properties and open space have been proven to increase property values of nearby homes. Other research on this topic has found similar findings.

What is the benefit for the neighboring residents?

- Before the Township took ownership of the land, the neighbors of the property, and residents of East Pikeland did not have access to this property. As Township parkland, it is open to all residents to access and enjoy. Neighbors and residents can have a community garden plot, attend workshops, walk on the path, enjoy the native meadow, take your dog for a run, meet a friend to chat under the garden pavilion. We hope this is an area that becomes a small community gathering space and that neighbors find a way to utilize the property and all of the benefits that it brings.

Will the Kimberton Meadows HOA residents will be able to utilize the existing walking trail as they currently can without interruption of the current asphalt trail?

- We will be leaving this decision up to the Kimberton Meadows HOA and will work with their representatives to decide if and/or how they want to connect to the trail.

What about the new school?

- Phoenixville Area School District is proposing to build a new school on a property 1,000 ft. away from the proposed park providing a great opportunity for collaboration. Teachers can use the native meadowland and garden for lessons in writing, art, science, math, and history. Parents

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can utilize the walking path, dog park, and garden before or after school. The increased traffic to the school will require installation of a traffic sign and crosswalks at the Ridge/Hares Hill Roads intersection.

How does the 2018 Community Park and Recreation Survey impact this project?

- The Community Park and Recreation Survey was released in 2018 and available for East Pikeland residents to take online. The survey was advertised at public meetings, on the Township Website, on our Facebook page, at all community events, in the Township Newsletter, and on posters around our community. With 221 residents participating, the survey is not statistically significant and the Township recognizes that responses are not a complete representation of the entire Township. However, the survey was able to show areas of growth and weakness that were similarly reflected in past studies and plans like the East Pikeland Comprehensive Plan, the East Pikeland Trail Plan, the Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan, and the Northern Federation of Chester County's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. The survey results supported that residents were interested in more park facility options in East Pikeland (88%), as was reflected in past studies. In response to one question about availability of park opportunities, survey responders indicated that there were not enough paved walking paths, multipurpose trails, access to woods and natural areas, community gardens, dog parks, and native meadows.
 - The survey was meant to paint a broad picture of recreational needs. To clarify, no specific properties, including the one on Ridge Road were mentioned in the survey. Also, dog parks were mentioned in a question on the survey, but were not the focus of the survey itself.
 - We do not have any plans at this time to conduct another survey about Park and Recreation in East Pikeland.

Will there be a public meeting about the plan for this property?

- Initially, our goal was to create a plan for this property and share that plan at a public meeting in April. This meeting would have been advertised widely and all neighbors and stakeholders would have been invited. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic these plans were cancelled. At that point, staff decided to move forward with grant applications, with the knowledge that the plan remain flexible. We conducted a virtual public presentation via a webinar format on October 1, 2020 and responded to questions at that time. Additionally, residents were able to submit their questions and concerns via email following the meeting.

When will the final plan for the project be available to view?

- The current plan available on the website is a first draft. As we continue to talk with neighboring residents, we will fine tune the plan andit will be available sometime in 2021.

What are the next steps?

Updated 12/2020

- Township staff is currently working to compile comments made at the Public Comment Meeting, at committee meetings, and via email to amend the draft plan relative to buffering, stormwater, etc. In 2021 a final version of the plan will be adopted by the Board of Supervisors.