

## **Ridge Rd. Summary Prepared for 5/21/20 Park and Recreation Board Meeting.**

This summary has been written to resolve confusion, provide missing information, and respond to a number of concerns that have been voiced about the plan to build a new recreation facility for local residents on Township property located at 87 Ridge Rd. The plan includes an ADA accessible walking path; a community garden and orchard; a dog park; and native meadow.

For the past three years the Park and Recreation Board has worked to create a plan to improve and expand East Pikeland's Park and Recreation facilities. They have taken direction from the Township's Comprehensive Plan, the Township Trail Plan, the Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan, and the Northern Federation of Chester County's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. In addition, verbal and written resident feedback, as well as a 2018 community Park and Recreation Survey were also taken into account.

Perhaps the plan that provided the most direction was the 2012 Federation of Northern Chester Counties Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. The plan was compiled through review of existing comprehensive plans, looking at demographic trends, and releasing a direct mail survey to residents in each member township. It looked at northern Chester County as a region, examining recreation and open space opportunities that exist or are needed here. The plan reported that our region needs additional recreation facilities for passive and active recreation, parks that are located in smart locations (i.e. centrally located or near a major roadway), additional athletic field facilities, and expanded trail networks that provide a safe space to walk and bike. There was also an interest in "special use facilities" like dog parks, skate parks, pools etc. Based on our population and parkland planning standards, East Pikeland was 82.56 acres deficient in parkland, and needed more multi-generational parkland. We also were also not meeting demand for baseball, softball, and soccer fields.

In order to dig into the Township's specific needs, we conducted an online survey in 2018 regarding Park and Recreation in East Pikeland. 221 residents responded to the survey. The Township is aware that this number is not representative of the entire township, but the answers similarly reflected past studies like the Northern Federation Plan, supporting those results. When we released the survey we were looking for direction from residents about gaps in parkland opportunities and how people use our current park and trail systems. The survey results supported that residents were interested in more park facility options located within the township. 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, or native meadows.

The survey was meant to paint a broad picture of recreation needs, which it did. To clarify, no specific properties, including the one on Ridge Rd. 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. That being said, when the survey and short answer results were analyzed one of the more common themes observed was that people were choosing to recreate with their dogs. Responses reflected that East Pikeland residents enjoy traveling to area dog parks, and look for areas to safely walk and exercise their dogs, also supporting past plans as well as verbal resident remarks.

In response to these local, regional, and township plans, along with the support of the Township survey, the Park and Recreation Board has been working to identify needed park and trail facilities and match those opportunities up with available land.

Specifically, the Park and Recreation Board saw a local and regional need for ADA accessible walking trails, additional ball fields, a community garden, dog park, and access to native meadowland and woods. Upon further discussion, and examining available locations, the Park and Recreation Board identified the property along Ridge Rd. as an ideal location for ball fields and/or a dog park and community garden. As discussions progressed, it was decided that a dog park and community garden would result in less impact to the surrounding neighbors, while providing a needed public recreation facility in an area of the Township that is currently lacking these options. Additional reasons for selecting the Ridge Rd. property for this use include:

- It was obtainable at no cost to the Township, saving tax payers money;
- The land was relatively flat and would require little to no earth moving, saving thousands;
- The property was more centrally located than other potential properties;
- The property was close to two major transportation routes in the region, 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 these uses.

The Park and Recreation Board understands and hears the concerns of neighboring residents. We apologize if you feel that you were left out of the discussion surrounding this project, this was not our intent. It was our intention to invite all neighbors to a public meeting in April, which we were forced to scrap due to the Coronavirus pandemic. At that point, staff decided to move forward with the grant, with the knowledge that the plan remain flexible, and wait to see if an in-person public meeting would become possible during the summer. We know now that this lack of communication wasn't the right route to take and we will work harder in the future to ensure as much communication and community engagement as possible with all of our park projects.

The Park and Recreation Board and Township staff have spent a number of years researching and discussing ways in which to improve East Pikeland's park and trail system for all residents. The Park and Recreation Board has been tasked with thinking about the health, well-being, and safety of our parkland and the entire East Pikeland community, not just a few residents. We stand by our decision to place a public recreation facility on this property for all of the aforementioned reasons. This project will expand East Pikeland's park system in a positive direction, providing additional recreation facilities to improve people's physical, mental, and emotional health, benefiting all East Pikeland residents.