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## MEETING NOTES

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Project:	<b>Allentown Comprehensive Recreation, Open Space, &amp; Parks Plan (CROSP)</b>	Project No.:	<b>SC# 22028.00</b>
Location:	<b>East Side Youth Center and Microsoft Teams (Virtual)</b>	Meeting Date/Time:	<b>January 8, 2025 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM</b>
Re:	<b>Public Meeting #2</b>	Issue Date:	<b>January 21, 2025</b>

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### ATTENDEES:

#### **Simone Collins (SC):**

William Collins, *RLA, Principal*

Pankaj Jobanputra, *AICP*

Rob Gladfelter, *RLA, ASLA, Project LA*

Toby Levin, *RLA, ASLA, Project LA*

#### **Certified Parks & Recreation Professionals**

Derek Dureka, *CPRP*

Kathleen Muller, *CPRP*

#### **Attendees:**

#### ***City of Allentown Parks & Recreation Department (PRD)***

Mandy Tolino, *Director of Parks and Recreation*

Bryne Heffner-Bair (BHB), *Program Coordinator (virtual)*

Laura Ballek-Cole, *Manager of Civic Innovation, City of Allentown*

Ella Soto, *Translator, Casa Guadalupe*

## NOTES:

- 1. Simone Collins Landscape Architecture (SC) gave a presentation** that reviewed feedback from previous public engagement efforts, the project schedule, preliminary public survey results, national benchmarking, and park service gaps.
- 2. The meeting then shifted to six breakout groups.** In person breakout groups were organized around four broad neighborhoods (East, West, South, and Center), as well as a breakout group dedicated to recreational programming. In-person meeting participants were invited to start in the breakout group for the neighborhood where they live or recreate in most frequently. Participants were invited to rotate to a different breakout group every 15 minutes but could also remain in the same group. The final breakout group was online.
- 3. Ideas from the East breakout group.**
  - a. Requested improvements include:
    - i. Improved access and maps showing where to park.
    - ii. Improved lighting, not just in parks, but across the city.
    - iii. Restrooms that are open and well-stocked.
    - iv. Improved water access.
    - v. Trails with measured distances.
    - vi. Promote biodiversity along the canal using native trees and grasses to fill holes in the canopy and remove invasive species.
    - vii. Small improvements to enhance the character of parks, ensure parks appear well-maintained and cared for.
    - viii. Increased programming to improve safety within the parks.
    - ix. Better marketing of recreational programs.
    - x. Keck Park could be better connected, but is well-used by the neighborhood.
  - b. Andre Reed Park was specifically identified as needing improvements. Participants noted that Irving Pool has been better cared for than the park. Requested improvements include:
    - i. Picnic areas, both pavilions and less formal areas
    - ii. Sitting areas
    - iii. Need to define as a park/not school district
    - iv. Tennis court/pickleball
    - v. Additional trees to beautify and shade picnic areas

- vi. Improvements that provide multi-generational opportunities that would keep the park busy throughout the day.
- c. Canal Park was also identified as needing improvements. These include:
  - i. Gateway signage and directional signage to existing designated parking.
  - ii. Improved water access, as it is already used to access the Lehigh River.
  - iii. Improvements to make it feel more like a park and less like an open space. Participants recommended that the consultants visit Canal Park.
- d. The D&L Trail would benefit from safety upgrades, increased policing, improved lighting and signage.
- e. Participants identified the following obstacles to reaching parks:
  - i. Streets are high volume and high speed, feel unsafe for pedestrians.
  - ii. Bridges are not good for pedestrians or bicyclists.
  - iii. Parks feel unsafe and unregulated, lacking police presence.
  - iv. Tent cities on the south side of the Lehigh River make parks feel unsafe.
  - v. Access to the D&L Trail was identified as unsafe and too narrow.
  - vi. Other barriers were identified near Andre Reed Park, trail access to Kimmel's Lock, Tilghman St. Bridge, Hamilton St. Bridge, and near Canal Park and the D&L Trail.
- f. Participants recommended talking to the Midway Manor Community Association.
- g. Participants noted that there are opportunities to engage neighborhood associations for volunteer events and funding assistance. The D&L Trail volunteer programs (Trail Patrol and Adopt-a-section of the trail) could be expanded to other parks and greenways.
- h. Participants also noted that the focus of park improvements seems to be Center City.
- i. Participants reported that Boy Scouts use the Lehigh River east of Canal Park for canoeing.
- j. Areas for new crosswalk/pedestrian safety improvements were identified near Andre Reed Park, crossing Hanover Ave. via Irving St., and on Hanover Ave. which was identified as high speed.

- k. Important destinations for the community were identified at Canal Park, the D&L Trail, and Keck Park.

**4. Ideas from the West breakout group.**

- a. Requested improvements include:
  - i. Interpretive information and benches at Trexler Park.
  - ii. Access to Cedar Creek in the Rose Gardens area.
  - iii. Public restrooms.
  - iv. Participants would like to see carbon sinks/nature preservation areas for resiliency, playing fields and facilities for local teams such as youth football, soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey added to parks.
  - v. New trails to connect greenways and other points of interest.
  - vi. Improved pedestrian access to Cedar Beach Park, including additional crossings on Hamilton Ave.
  - vii. Permitting cross country skiing on the golf course in winter.
- b. Participants identified the following obstacles to reaching parks:
  - i. A connection is missing between the Jordan Creek Parkway and downtown.
  - ii. The intersection of Hamilton St. and S 24<sup>th</sup> St. feels unsafe for pedestrians.
  - iii. The intersection of Broadway/Parkway Blvd. and Cedar Crest Blvd. is unsafe for pedestrians and does not have sidewalk connections.
  - iv. In general, heavy traffic makes accessing parks on foot and by bicycle feel unsafe.
- c. Participants recommended talking to active recreation groups from outside the city, such as bike clubs who may visit, running clubs, and recreational/club teams/organizations; Joseph Gackenbach, the former superintendent of parks; and Scott at CAT (NGO).
- d. Participants emphasized the need to extoll the virtues of Allentown's parks and were happy to see some repairs at Union Terrace Park.
- e. Areas for new crosswalk/pedestrian safety improvements were identified along the Little Lehigh Parkway, the connection between the Little Lehigh Parkway and the Cedar Creek Trail, Parkway Blvd., Glenwood St. and Hamilton St., and the intersection of Broadway/Parkway Blvd and Cedar Crest Blvd.

- f. Important destinations for the community were identified at Cedar Beach Pool and Trexler Park.

**5. Ideas from the South breakout group.**

- a. Requested improvements include:
  - i. A walkable map in Roosevelt Park.
  - ii. Improved lighting at Percy Ruhe Park (where visitors use car lights for football practice) and throughout the park system.
  - iii. Improved security at South Mountain Park.
  - iv. Improved maintenance at all pavilions.
  - v. A waterpark on the south side.
  - vi. Old growth trees to provide character.
  - vii. Projects that appeal to older adults and provide opportunities for intergenerational activities so that parks can appeal to the whole community.
  - viii. Additional activities like Monday Funday and the circus at Percy Ruhe Park.
  - ix. AARP walking groups, and other programming for seniors. Participants noted that park improvements should be accessible for seniors.
  - x. Art in the Park.
  - xi. Mack Pool was specifically mentioned as in need of renovations.
  - xii. New trails were requested at South Mountain Reservoir and Mack Pool.
  - xiii. Participants would like to see exercise equipment, playgrounds, benches, chill areas with shade, and natural space protections added to parks.
  - xiv. A recreation center at the former Cleveland Elementary School, now owned by Community Action Lehigh Valley.
  - xv. Additional signage for bike lanes.
  - xvi. Connections from the Lehigh Parkway to St. Luke's Hospital.
- b. Participants identified the following obstacles to reaching parks:
  - i. Lack of transit, particularly buses, to pools.
  - ii. Dangerous intersections need to be addressed and may provide opportunities to build community.

- iii. Additional barriers to pedestrian/bicycle access were identified at the south end of Trout Creek Park and southeast of South Mountain Park.
- c. Participants recommended finding ways to encourage people with disabilities to come to events.
- d. Participants reported that trash dumping and ATVs cause major issues at South Mountain Reservoir.
- e. Participants noted that there are opportunities to connect with the community by forming “Adopt-a-park” or “Friends of” organizations. These groups could be led by residents who already have the respect of neighbors.
- f. Participants recommended formalizing arrangements with the Allentown School District to establish standard expectations for everyone.
- g. Important destinations for the community were identified at South Mountain Park and Percy Ruhe Park, which attracts people from throughout the city.
- h. Trash, ATVs and lighting were identified as major problems, particularly at Percy Ruhe Park where visitors use car lights for football practice.

**6. Ideas from the Center breakout group.**

- a. Requested improvements include:
  - i. A pool at Fountain Park.
  - ii. Swings at Old Fairgrounds Park.
  - iii. Participants identified needs for more farmers markets, vending, public bathrooms, places to dispose of needles, and Narcan.
  - iv. Community Gardens at the Building 21 parking lot, which is located near affordable housing and the MLK Jr. Trail.
  - v. Guides to improve knowledge of park locations.
  - vi. Areas for park and recreation improvements were identified at Old Fairgrounds Playground/5<sup>th</sup> Street Spray Park, Bucky Boyle Farmers Market, Jordan Park, Fountain Park, and the confluence of Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks.
  - vii. Other requested improvements include updated water refill stations/fountains, community gardens with native plants, carbon sinks, and natural areas.
- b. Participants identified the following obstacles to reaching parks:
  - i. Safety at intersections.

- ii. Jordan Creek Greenway ends but doesn't connect to downtown.
  - iii. Barriers to pedestrian/bicycle access were identified near the northwest corner of West Park, near the confluence of Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks, Tilghman Street Bridge and Hamilton Street Bridge, the intersection of Hamilton Street and Riverside Drive, and traffic along MLK Jr. Drive.
  - iv. Participants identified connectivity to urban areas and parking as obstacles to getting to parks and specified that connectivity is an environmental justice issue.
- c. Participants identified parking and access to water vs water quality and damage to the ecosystem as major issues at parks.
  - d. Participants expressed concern about the amount of new development in the area.
  - e. Participants noted that encouraging community ownership of the parks is important. Community involvement in parks could be facilitated with tree planting or clean up events. Participants emphasized the importance of communication with the community.
  - f. Important destinations for the community were identified at Franklin Park, Cedar Beach, Stevens Park, Jackson Street Community Park, and West Park.
  - g. Areas for new crosswalk/pedestrian safety improvements were identified near the confluence of Jordan and Little Lehigh Creeks, at the downtown terminus of the Jordan Creek Greenway, and near West Park.
  - h. Potential for community garden at the building 21 parking lot, future trail connection from Riverside Dr to downtown/Cedar Creek Greenway.
  - i. Participants reported that parks benefit the community by providing places to form relationships and connections, providing structured time for children and families, providing ecosystem services such as air quality, stormwater management, carbon sinks, and providing mental health relief and improving biodiversity.
  - j. Participants suggested speaking to students (elementary, middle, and high school) and senior citizens such as the residents of West Turner Apartments or Center One.

## **7. Ideas from the Programming breakout group.**

- a. Participants reported a desire for more free/low-cost family programs in the parks:
  - i. Farmers market-flea market for 2nd Street (needs to accept WIC checks).

- ii. Fruit & vegetable truck to CASA—N 2nd Street.
  - iii. Resources fair.
  - iv. Add exercise equipment to park renovations so that parents can exercise while watching their kids.
  - v. Zumba in the parks.
  - vi. Salsa in the parks.
  - vii. Special needs: sensory equipment (musical) & sensory trail.
  - viii. “QB” programs.
- b. Possible partnerships:
- i. Giselle at the Casa Guadalupe Center
  - ii. Big Happy Consultants “PAS” (Mountainville Memorial Park/South Side): Empower this organization to partner with the city to provide more youth programming.
  - iii. Blue Zones – Citywide
- c. Participants identified the following needs related to sports programming:
- i. Add new instructional introductions for sports, pickleball for seniors, local sports for teens 15-17 years old, train teens as coaches and trainers for youth sports, basketball for kids with autism (separate, then included).
  - ii. Percy Ruhe fields need to be fixed. No grass is left and mud cakes in spikes.
  - iii. Repaint basketball courts across Allentown.
- d. Participants identified the following needs related to aquatics:
- i. Offer swimming programs for adults.
  - ii. Day camp.
  - iii. Add more bussing and spaces for kids (currently there is a waitlist).
  - iv. Improved awareness of special needs programming.
- e. Participants identified the following needs related to arts & culture:
- i. Spanish classes.
  - ii. Performances on stage (outdoor at Union Terrace).
- f. Participants reported that safety and security are concern throughout the park system.



- g. Participants recommended holding a listening session for seniors in the morning.
- h. Participants also recommended adding a Parks & Recreation Board member.
- i. Participants reported that Second Street is on the back burner for “everything”, including access to fresh food. Access to other areas of the city is problematic.

**8. Ideas from the online breakout group.**

- a. Participants reported that roads do not feel safe for accessing parks.
- b. Access is an issue at many parks. The West End District lacks trail access.
- c. Skate park maintenance is needed. The City could work with Homebase Skateshop for maintenance and programming.
- d. Participants reported valuing the mental health benefits of parks through activities such as yoga, meditation, and walking.
- e. Participants would like to see more swings, basketball courts, soccer fields (Fountain Park fields are always busy; semi-public facilities have been proposed at the Allentown State Hospital site), horseshoes, and places to sit and feed the ducks, cricket fields, and coffee/refreshments in parks.
- f. Participants recommended speaking to Allentown Rescue Mission and more youth and young adults. Organizations that may be able to provide connections to youth and young adults include the Boys and Girls Club, Valley Youth House, Promise Neighborhoods, Casa Guadalupe, and City recreation program participants.

This report represents the Professional’s summation of the proceedings and is not a transcript. Unless written notice of any correction or clarification is received by the Professional within ten days of issue, the report shall be considered factually correct and shall become part of the official project record.

Sincerely,  
SIMONE COLLINS, INC.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



Toby Levin, RLA