

IV. Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan

Introduction

The Township of Bloomfield has a large and diverse system of parks, recreation facilities and open space areas to meet the active and passive recreational needs of residents. Bloomfield's parks and recreation facilities make a substantial contribution to the quality of life experienced by residents and enhance its desirability as a community in which to live, work and visit. In addition to providing a source of recreation, the Township's system of parks and recreation facilities provides significant open space, a gathering place for social and community events and an oasis from the densely developed suburban character of central Essex County. Bloomfield has made it a priority to preserve existing parks and recreation facilities and improve those facilities to meet the changing needs of Township residents. The Township has also identified through the Master Plan process areas that are appropriate for future recreation facilities and open space preservation.

Availability of Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Township of Bloomfield has a multi-level system of parks, recreation areas and open space consisting of municipal, school district and County facilities with a total area of almost 200 acres. This amount is considered a sufficient quantity of parks and open space for a community such as Bloomfield, depending upon the standard used. In addition, the Township benefits from the relatively even geographic distribution of parks, recreation facilities and open space throughout the community. There are large County parks in the northern and southern sections of the Township and most neighborhoods are served by at least one smaller municipal park. There are, however, a limited amount of parks and open space in the northernmost, east-central and southeastern sections of the Township.

As shown in Table IV-1, Bloomfield has an adequate amount of parks and open space according to the New Jersey Balanced Land Use and New York City standards. According to the New Jersey Balanced Land Use standard, the Township should have 102.33 acres of parks and open space based upon a total developable area of 3,411 acres. Under the New York City standard, the Township should have 119.21 acres of parks and open space based upon a 2000 population of 47,683. Bloomfield exceeds both of these standards, although it should be noted that Brookdale County Park and Watsessing County Park account for more than two-thirds of all parks, recreation facilities and open space acreage in the Township. This reinforces the fact that the Township controls less than one-third of all parks, recreation and open space and is reliant on the County to preserve and maintain most parks and open space.

Table IV-1 Park and Open Space Standards, 2001 Township of Bloomfield, NJ				
Category	Park Area Standard	Recommended Park Area	Existing Park Area	Park & Open Space Surplus/Deficit
New York City*	2.5 acres/1,000 population	119.21 acres	199.82	+80.61 acres
NJ Balanced Land Use	3% of developed/developable area	102.33 acres	199.82	+91.49 acres
NJ Green Acres	8 acres/1,000 population	381.46 acres	199.82	-181.64 acres
* The New York City standards consist of active recreation space per 1,000 population and -0.5 acres of passive recreation space per 1,000 population.				
<i>Source: Open Space Guidelines, New York City Department of Planning; New Jersey Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan Summary - 1994 to 1999; Green Acres Program, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection</i>				

Bloomfield, in contrast, has a parks and open space deficit according to the New Jersey Green Acres standard. Under this standard, the Township should have 381.46 acres of parks and open space based upon a 2000 population of 47,683. The Green Acres standard does not fully reflect conditions in mature, fully developed and densely populated municipalities such as Bloomfield. It is better suited to less densely developed suburban and rural communities with moderate to low population densities and available land for park development. The Green Acres standard should therefore be used with caution when evaluating the adequacy of the Township’s parks and open space inventory. It does, however, indicate a potential need for additional parks, recreation facilities and open space in a community such as Bloomfield that has an increasing population and limited available land for new facilities because of its fully developed and landlocked character.

The primary issue regarding parks and open space in Bloomfield are the need for additional facilities in certain neighborhoods and preserving remaining open space rather than the overall amount of parks and open space in the community. Most residents have access to a park, recreation facility or open space within a half-mile radius of their residence. The Township and its residents further benefit from the presence of the two (2) large County parks that are easily accessible and strategically located in the northern and southern sections of the community. Overall, there are a variety of parks, recreation facilities and open space to provide residents with numerous active and passive recreational opportunities.

Table IV-2 Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities, 2001 Township of Bloomfield, NJ			
Facility	Location	Size	Amenities
<i>County</i>			
Brookdale County Park	Bellevue Avenue and Watchung Avenue west of Broad Street	77.41*	Ball fields, tennis courts, football field, track/exercise course, playground, archery area, bathrooms, field house, running track, garden
Watsessing County Park	Bloomfield Avenue and Glenwood Avenue	60*	Ball fields, paths, playgrounds, basketball courts, bandstand, lawn bowling green, senior citizen recreation building, oval running track
<i>Municipal</i>			
Berkeley Heights Park	Berkeley Heights Park north of Bloomfield Avenue	0.75	Passive recreation area
Brookside Park	Broad Street and Bay Avenue	5.68	Softball field, football field, tot lots, game area, gazebo
Civic Center	84 Broad Street	0.33	Recreation department offices, recreation program space, community meeting rooms
Clark's Pond	Dewey Street off Broughton Avenue	12.34	Basketball court, tennis court, tot lot, softball field, game area, passive recreation area
Felton Field	Floyd Avenue between LaFrance Avenue and Watsessing Avenue	3.71	Tennis courts, tot lot, field house, little league field, game area, bocce court
The Green	Broad Street between Liberty Street and Church Street	4.6	Passive recreation area, walking paths
Halcyon Park	Parkway East and West between Farrandale Avenue and Lexington Avenue	1.5	Passive recreation area, walking path, fountain
Memorial Park	John F. Kennedy Drive between Belleville Avenue and Spring Street	12.50	Tennis courts, basketball court, ball fields, tot lot, field house, parking lot, recreation maintenance garage
Millbank Playground	17th Street south of Bloomfield Avenue	0.50	Passive recreation area, tot lot
Pulaski Park	Mt. Vernon Avenue between Chapel Street and Howard Street	6.50	Softball field, parking lot, basketball court, tennis courts, sledding area, tot lot, game areas
Vassar Field	Day Street	6.20	Basketball court, ball fields, field house, tot lot, game areas
Wright Field	Baldwin Place	7.80	Ball fields, field house, tot lot, game area, parking lot
Total Area		199.82	
* Brookdale Park is located in Bloomfield and Montclair, total area within Bloomfield is 77.41 acres. Watsessing Park is located in Bloomfield and East Orange, total area within Bloomfield is 60 acres.			
Source: Bloomfield Township Recreation Commission, 1989 Bloomfield Township Master Plan, Essex County			

Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Township of Bloomfield has a well-developed system of park facilities that provide recreational opportunities, open space and a gathering place for social as well as civic events. There are currently 14 parks and recreation facilities with a total area of 199.82 acres in the Township, as shown in Table IV-2. The facilities vary in size from large County parks that are regional in nature to intermediate-sized parks that serve the entire Township and small parks that are neighborhood-oriented. They provide a broad range of active and passive recreational amenities including ball fields, playgrounds, walking paths and seating areas. The Township’s parks and recreation facilities are intensively utilized for organized and informal recreation on a year-round basis. This reflects Bloomfield’s dense suburban character, limited open space, extensive recreational programs and the relatively good condition of existing facilities.

Township Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Bloomfield has 12 municipal parks and recreation facilities located in neighborhoods throughout the Township as shown in Table IV-2. The parks and recreation facilities range in size from Memorial Park, which is 12.5 acres in size, to the Civic Center, which is .33 acres in size. They contain extensive amenities such as ball fields, playgrounds, tot lots, sitting areas, field houses and gazebos. The size and mix of amenities determines how each park and recreation facility is used as well as the service area it covers. The larger parks such as Memorial Park have significant amenities and serve the entire Township. The smaller parks such as Millbank Playground are dispersed throughout the Township and have limited amenities. They primarily serve the neighborhoods in which they are located. Overall, the municipal park and recreation system functions well and meets the current needs of residents. The larger parks are the foundation of the system, providing diverse recreational opportunities, while the smaller parks complement them, providing specialized recreational opportunities.

The majority of Bloomfield’s parks and recreation facilities are concentrated in the central area of the Township between Watchung Avenue and Bloomfield Avenue. This area contains 75 percent, or 9 out of 12, of the Township’s facilities. This includes the largest municipal parks in Bloomfield, which are Clark’s Pond, Memorial Park and Wright Field. They contain numerous amenities such as ball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, field houses, playgrounds, tot lots, sitting areas and passive recreation areas. They are a significant community asset that provides a unique combination of active and passive recreation as well as open space. The remainder of Bloomfield’s parks and recreational facilities are relatively small, less than 7 acres, and are located in neighborhoods throughout the Township. This includes Brookside Park in the Brookside section, Felton Field in Watsessing and Vassar Field in the North End. The parks provide an active and passive

recreational outlet for the neighborhoods that they are located in and contain amenities such as ball fields, playgrounds, tot lots and passive sitting areas. They are an important local source of recreation and open space for residents, especially those with limited mobility such as senior citizens and children.

The Bloomfield Recreation Department has identified several parks and recreation issues, the most prominent of which is the need for a full-scale recreation center. Such a facility would serve the Township and potentially include a gymnasium, stage, kitchen, indoor pool and teen center. Other issues that have been identified include the need for additional parks in underserved neighborhoods such as Watsessing, a greenway in the Clark's Pond/Third River, Second River and Toney's Brook corridors, preservation of remaining vacant land as open space and maintenance of County park facilities. The preservation of Clark's Pond as an open space and recreational resource is an issue that requires further attention. In particular impacts from development, flooding and pollution that originate upstream should be addressed in a coordinated manner with property owners, adjacent communities and relevant County and State agencies. The future development of any new parks and recreation facilities should be coordinated with the Township Land Use Plan and future redevelopment efforts.

County Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Bloomfield has two (2) Essex County park facilities located in the northern and southern sections of the Township that supplement the municipal park system. As shown in Table IV-2, the County parks are Brookdale County Park and Watsessing County Park. They are large regional facilities that provide a broad range of active and passive recreational opportunities for residents of the Township as well as the County.

Brookdale and Watsessing County Parks contain numerous amenities such as ball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, sitting areas and walking paths. They are a major source of recreation and open space by virtue of their large size, extensive amenities and relative accessibility. Both, however, suffer from deferred maintenance by the County and are in need of improvement and renovation. The recently enacted Essex County Open Space Trust Fund may provide funding for necessary improvements in the future. The primary issues concerning the Essex County parks are coordinating with the County to maintain existing parks, improving neglected and deteriorated facilities, providing additional amenities to meet the recreational needs of Township and County residents and enhancing links to the municipal park system as well as adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Brookdale County Park is located in Bloomfield and Montclair and has a total area of 121.41 acres. The majority of the park, or 77.41 acres, is located in the Township. It is located between Bellevue Avenue and Watchung Avenue to the

west of Broad Street. Brookdale County Park contains the full spectrum of active and passive recreational amenities including ball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, a track, playground, tot lot, walking/running trails, archery area, picnic area, sitting area and bathrooms. As a consequence, it functions as a regional park that is used by County residents, a community park that is used by Township residents and as a venue for organized athletic activities and special events.

Watsessing County Park is located in Bloomfield and East Orange and has a total area of 69.67 acres. The majority of the park, or 60 acres, is located in the Township. It is located in an area bounded by Bloomfield Avenue, Glenwood Avenue, the Garden State Parkway and the municipal border with East Orange. Watsessing County Park contains the full spectrum of active and passive recreational amenities including ball fields, a playground, walking paths, sitting areas and a maintenance building. It functions as a regional park that is used by County residents, a community park that is used by Township residents and as a venue for organized athletic activities.

Planned/Proposed Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Township of Bloomfield has established the goal of increasing the quality and quantity of the parks, recreation and open space network. The Township has sought to maximize the use of its current network, however, there is a need for additional facilities because of the heavy usage of existing facilities, limited remaining open space and presence of environmentally sensi-

Table IV-3 Improvements to Existing Parks, Recreation & Open Space, 2001 Township of Bloomfield, NJ		
Facility	Location	Type of Improvements
Brookside Park	Broad Street and Bay Avenue	Improved seating area (amphitheater)
Clark's Pond	Dewey Street off Broughton Avenue	Wetlands restoration
Felton Field	Floyd Avenue between LaFrance Avenue and Watsessing Avenue	New little league complex, expanded children's playground, new entrance plaza, new landscaping, demolition of tennis courts/bocce court
Pulaski Park	Mt. Vernon Avenue between Chapel Street and Howard Street	Improved seating area (amphitheater)
Source: Bloomfield Township Recreation Department, Township of Bloomfield		

tive river/stream corridors. The need for such facilities and open space is expected to continue increasing because of renewed population growth. The Township’s population increased by 2,622 or 5.8 percent from 45,061 in 1990 to 47,683 in 2000. The potential expansion of the existing parks, recreation and open space network will help to preserve the suburban character of the Township as it experiences future population growth and additional redevelopment. Further improvements may be categorized as follows: improvements to existing facilities and potential new facilities.

Improvements to Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Bloomfield is continuously maintaining and improving existing parks, recreation facilities and open space areas. As shown in Table IV-3, the Township has plans to improve several existing parks and recreation facilities to repair deteriorated infrastructure and provide additional amenities. For example, the seating in Brookside Park and Pulaski Park is scheduled to be upgraded and a wetlands restoration project is planned for Clark’s Pond. In addition, the Township plans a new little league complex at Felton Field. Essex County also plans long-term improvements to Brookdale and Watsessing County Parks to be funded, in part, from the County Open Space Trust Fund. The types of improvements planned have not been determined subject to completion of County Parks Master Plan.

Potential Future Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Township of Bloomfield proposes to explore a long-term expansion of the existing network of parks, recreation and open space. The purpose of the potential expansion is to provide increased recreational opportunities, capitalize on existing natural corridors and preserve remaining open space. Potential future projects include a new Township Recreation Center, Greenway Corridor, community Park and open space area along the Third River as shown in Table IV-4. They are intended to be implemented in a flexible manner as funding, location and environmental issues are addressed and resolved.

Township Recreation Center

The Bloomfield Recreation Department has identified the need for an indoor recreation center that will serve the entire Township. This need was confirmed by members of the public at the initial kick-off meeting for the new Master Plan. A new recreation center would provide much needed indoor recreation space including courts, a pool, activity rooms, meeting space, lockers and other amenities typical of such a facility. Planning for this facility may proceed in the short-term, however, implementation will depend upon obtaining funding, finding an adequate site, acquiring property and resolution of any site issues. Planning factors that should be considered when selecting a site include finding a central location, providing adequate access, ensuring connections to existing recreation facilities and adequate developable area in case of future expansion. A site in the vicinity of Memorial Park such as the former National Starch property is recommended for consideration.

Township Greenway Corridor

Bloomfield is traversed by several river and stream corridors that extend nearly the full length and breadth of the Township. These corridors include the Third River, Second River, Toney’s Brook and Wigwam Brook as well as Clark’s Pond. They contain environmentally sensitive features including floodplain and wetlands and are prone to flooding during periods of heavy rain (100-year storm). Development has encroached on many sections of the aforementioned corridors, however, there are still areas where adjacent land is vacant or public open space. The creation of a Greenway offers the opportunity to create a new recreational amenity alongside these water bodies and link existing residential neighborhoods with parks and activity centers. It also provides an opportunity to preserve additional open space, reduce flood hazards and improve water quality.

The potential Township Greenway consists of several elements and would be implemented in phases as funding, property, access easements and NJDEP approvals/permits become available. The Greenway is envisioned as a linear park with a semi-pervious pedestrian/bicycle path, sitting areas and educational trail markers. It is anticipated that portions of the Greenway would be constructed in conjunction with flood control projects such as stream bank stabilization, stream desnagging/desilting, water quality basins and wet-

Table IV-4 Potential Future Parks, Recreation & Open Space, 2001 Township of Bloomfield, NJ		
Facility	Location	Amenities
Township Recreation Center	Memorial Park at Belleville Avenue/ Memorial Parkway	Indoor courts, pool activity space, meeting rooms, locker room, etc.
Township Greenway	Clark's Pond/Third River, Second River, Toney's Brook/Wigwam Brook Corridors	Walking paths, pedestrian/bicycle route, sitting area, educational markers, open space
Township Park	Watsessing/Westing-house Site	Active and passive recreation
Township Open Space	Third River at Liongate Drive	Open space, walking paths, educational markers
<i>Source: Bloomfield Township Recreation Department, Township of Bloomfield</i>		

lands restoration. Other sections would be created where easements and property alongside stream corridors are obtained. Most importantly, a significant portion of the Greenway would be routed through existing Township and County parks where property acquisition is unnecessary and minimal

improvements are required. The presence of extensive public land along the planned Greenway improves the possibility of implementation and creates the opportunity for several kick-off projects.

Township Park

Bloomfield contains parks, recreation facilities and open space that are located in every neighborhood within the Township. Our analysis of the existing network, however, indicates that the southeastern section of the Township is underserved by such facilities. This problem is most acute in the Ampere and Watsessing neighborhoods where there are only two (2) relatively small parks, Felton Field and Millbank Playground. The development of a new park in this section of the Township is recommended to meet the need for additional recreation facilities and open space. Consideration should be given to providing a neighborhood park in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Westinghouse site. It is recommended that any redevelopment plan for this site include a park as part of the overall site plan, to be constructed by the redeveloper in consultation with the Township.

Township Open Space

Bloomfield is an almost fully developed community with little remaining vacant land for the development of new parks, recreation facilities and open space. The preservation of the few remaining large vacant parcels of land is encouraged in order to preserve the Township's suburban character, increase active and passive recreation, protect environmentally sensitive areas and maximize publicly accessible open space. Potential vacant parcels to be preserved should be evaluated based upon their recreational potential, proximity to existing parks and open space, unique or environmentally sensitive natural features, susceptibility to development pressure and eligibility for funding under County and State programs. Specific attention should be given to private vacant parcels of land along the route of the planned Township Greenway that are "missing links" which obstruct the long-term completion of this linear recreation and open space facility. The vacant lands along the Third River at the end of Liongate Drive should be considered for preservation given their large size and location in the path of the planned Greenway. Where vacant parcels cannot be acquired, alternative means of access to river and stream corridors such as easements should be considered.

Recommendations

1. Complete planned and proposed improvements to existing Township parks and recreation facilities as outlined in Table IV-3.
2. Plan for a new Township-wide Recreation Center to provide indoor recreation and organized athletic programs at a centrally located site with adequate access, sufficient land area and proximity to existing recreation facilities. Consider the National Starch site off of Belleville Avenue as a potential location for the Recreation Center.

3. Explore the possibility of creating a linear Greenway along the Clark's Pond/Third River, Second River, Toney's Brook and Wigwam Brook corridors for active and passive recreation, increased open space and improved flood control. Pursue development of the Greenway in conjunction with flood control improvements and open space preservation.
4. Evaluate the feasibility of a new community park in the underserved southeast section of the Township. Consider incorporating a new park into future redevelopment plans for the Westinghouse site, which is currently being remediated for environmental contamination.
5. Identify and evaluate large vacant parcels of land for potential open space preservation. Particular attention should be given to those parcels of vacant land that are located adjacent to, or along the route of any potential Township Greenway or contiguous to existing park and recreation facilities.
6. Advocate for increased maintenance and improvements to Brookdale and Watsessing County Parks by Essex County. Coordinate with Essex County on obtaining County Open Space Trust Fund and State Green Acres program assistance for necessary improvements. Facilitate alternative methods of County Park maintenance and oversight including establishment of a parks conservancy such as at Weequahic County Park.
7. Encourage the establishment of a Township Open Space Trust Fund to support park, recreation and open space facilities including improvements to existing parks, development of the Township Greenway and preservation of open space.
8. Consider applying for all available funding for park development and open space preservation.