

# **PART 1: CURRENT SCENARIO**

## INTRODUCTION

Spring Creek Park is the crown jewel of College Township's parks and recreation system. The conservation and appropriate public use of Spring Creek is a driving force of this park master plan. With its superb public access and legions of dedicated anglers who love this historic stream, Spring Creek is often rated as Pennsylvania's top trout stream. Its beaches are popular destinations for the College Township residents. Protecting the community's water resources is critical for the long-term health of a region that boasts this world-class trout fishing stream and high-quality drinking water. This park master plan will protect the precious heritage of Spring Creek Park, conserve open space, and provide more opportunities for recreation, connecting with nature, and active healthy living practices for those who live, work, and visit here.

In 1967, College Township received both a state grant and a federal grant for park acquisition which resulted in the development of Spring Creek Park. The park is located in the northern end of the Township and aerial mapping from 1971 shows the beginning of the park with one (1) ball field and four (4) tennis courts.



There have been some improvements, expansions and upgrades over the last 50 years. Most recently, a new ADA accessible bridge was added over Spring Creek and a new restroom facility was constructed; however, the general opinion is that the park is due for an 'overhaul'. Additionally, the Township would like to seek out funding opportunities and having a clear vision through a Master Plan will help secure such grants.

College Township became a member municipality in the Centre Region Council of Government on December 2, 1969, and on May 20, 1974, executed the Articles of Agreement that formed the Centre Region Parks & Recreation Board. Centre Region Parks & Recreation (CRPR) has been responsible for managing the use of the regional parks and general maintenance. The Township has been responsible for capital improvements.

As a result, In 2021 College Township Council, commissioned Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson (JMT) to lead a master planning process for Spring Creek Park.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Incorporated in 1875, College Township encompasses 18.55 square miles and is located immediately east of downtown State College and the core campus of Penn State University. Many PSU attractions are located in College Township, such as Beaver Stadium, the Bryce Jordan Centre, Pegula Ice Arena, and Innovation Research Park. College Township is considered a "Gateway from the East" with direct access from Interstate I-99 and State Routes 322

and 26. The population remains fairly consistent but does show a modest increase with a population of 6,237 in the year 1980 compared to 10,762 in 2020 according to the census data. The Township is consistently considered to be one of the best places to live in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with exceptional people, quality parks, excellent education, and top-notch facilities. The 18.55 square mile communities' population is organized onto 3,867 households. According to the Penn State Data Center, College Township is an affluent municipality with a median household income of \$83,701 – about 1.3 times that of the Commonwealth's median household income of \$61,921. However, 8.6% of the population lives below the poverty level. The 60.1% of the population that has a bachelor's degree or higher is double Pennsylvania rate of 30%.

## LIFESTYLE IMPLICATIONS FOR REVITALIZING SPRING CREEK PARK

In addition to traditional demographic numbers, a look into lifestyles is very useful in park planning. According to Esri's lifestyle segmentation, Tapestry, the majority of College Township's population is primarily organized around three distinct lifestyles: "In Style", "College Towns", and "Golden Years". The tapestries are based on the community's data that provide important insights into consumer behavior such as age, education, home ownerships, car types, and consumer purchases. Understanding consumer behavior helps planning to optimize the best products, services, and facilities for the residents. In this case, for park planning, programming, operations, and marketing and promotion. These data underscore the importance of revitalizing

Spring Creek Park as a community facility that people of all ages and interests can use. Entertainment, adventure, socializing, sports, fitness, and education are all crucial aspects of the importance of parks and recreational opportunities to the residents. Equally important is the market segment of "Golden Years" in which people are living alone and active. Loneliness is a major public health issue for which parks and recreational opportunities are a solution in helping people to connect with the community and foster healthy relationships and social connections.

- **In Style (27%)** - In Style denizens embrace an urbane lifestyle that includes support of the arts, travel, and extensive reading. They are connected and make full use of the advantages of mobile devices. Professional couples or single households without children, have the time to focus on their homes and their interests. The population is slightly older and already planning for their retirement.
- **College Towns (18%)** - About half the residents of College Towns are enrolled in college, while the rest work for a college or the services that support it. Students have busy schedules but make time between studying and part-time jobs for socializing and sports. Students that are new to managing their own finances tend to make impulse buys and splurge on the latest fashions. This digitally engaged group uses computers and cell phones for all aspects of life including shopping, schoolwork, news, social media, and entertainment. College Town residents are all about new experiences and seek variety and adventure in their lives.

- **Golden Years (11%)** - Independent, active seniors nearing the end of their careers or already in retirement best describes Golden Years residents. This market is primarily singles living alone or empty nesters. Those still active in the labor force are employed in professional occupations; however, these consumers are actively pursuing a variety of leisure interests—travel, sports, dining out, museums, and concerts. They are involved, focused on physical fitness, and enjoying their lives. This market is smaller, but growing, and financially secure.

### COLLEGE TOWNSHIP DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SUMMARY



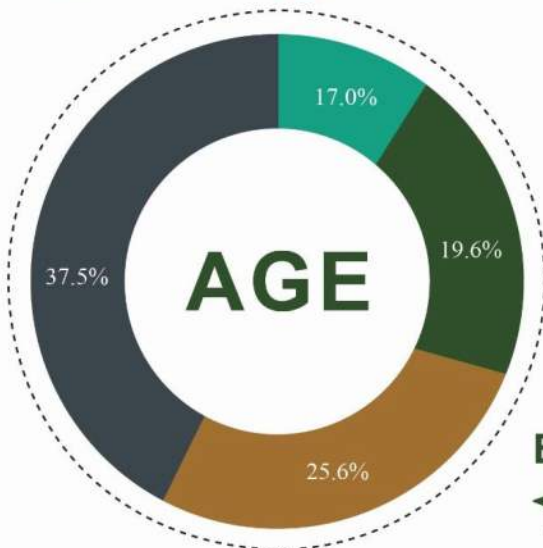
#### LAND AREA

18.56 Sq. Miles  
512.9 Population Per Sq. Mile



**84,500**  
Median  
Household  
Income

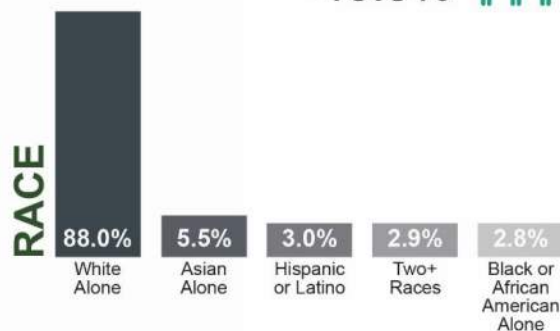
■ Under 19     ■ 35 to 64  
■ 20 to 34     ■ 65 and Over



Source: data.census.gov


#### Total Population:

**10,762**     53.2%   
 46.8% 



#### EDUCATION

 **98.1%**  
High School Grad  
or Higher

 **62.3%**  
Bachelor's Degree  
or Higher

## WHAT IS THE PARK TODAY?

Spring Creek Park is a 36-acre park located at 901 Houserville Road in College Township. The park is bisected with a very distinctive water feature, Spring Creek. The waterway is a high quality, cold-water fishery and Class A wild trout stream. The park not only receives many local visitors, but also is frequented by Penn State University students and other visitors from outside the region. With over 200 pavilion reservations per year, the park is a local favorite and also has proven to be a destination for recreation in College Township. Existing amenities include basketball courts, a baseball field, two softball fields, picnic areas, pavilions, tennis courts, paved and unpaved multi-use paths, connection to a regional bikeway, playground equipment, newly constructed ADA accessible restrooms, and two pedestrian bridges, one of which is a historic covered bridge used for foot traffic.

## WHY PLAN SPRING CREEK PARK?

This Master Plan provides a clear and coherent approach to expanding and enhancing the Park. The Plan outlines development phasing and considers both immediate and long-term cost implications and funding improvements. The Park is challenged by aging infrastructure, inadequate parking, undefined access, and a heavy use of the existing fields and facilities. Surrounded by residential neighborhoods, Spring View to the north and Clover Highlands to the south, the park is utilized as both a neighborhood and a regional park with visitors from the

surrounding area and beyond. While the park area north of the creek is heavily utilized, the area south of the creek is underused and seems disconnected from the main developed park areas.

Eight issues in particular make current planning efforts for Spring Creek Park important:



<https://dftu.org/projects/spring-creek/>

1. Inadequate parking and access.
2. Aging facilities and infrastructure in need of upgrades and repairs to meet current codes.
3. Demand for more athletic fields.
4. Lack of infrastructure to meet current stormwater management regulations and address onsite flooding issues.
5. The need for a phased capital budget that outlines improvements to the park in an orderly, transparent, and responsible manner.
6. Ensure the ecological health of the stream/watershed
7. Accessibility issues throughout the park.
8. Defined pedestrian and bike circulation routes in and beyond the park.

In addressing these eight issues it is imperative that the integrity of the most precious asset to the park, Spring Creek, is preserved.

**Significance of Spring Creek:** Spring Creek is one of the most heavily fished wild trout streams in Pennsylvania. Contributing to its popularity is the fertile limestone geology that supports its exceptional population of wild brown trout, and the ample availability of public access throughout most of its length, including the stretch through Spring Creek Park. Consistently ranked as one of the top wild trout streams in Pennsylvania, angling on Spring Creek contributes millions of dollars in economic revenue to the local economy. As such it is a high priority stream for its landscape and economic value to the local community and partners.

**Playground:** Like many communities across the nation, College Township is wrestling with decisions regarding the future of this beloved playground area. The playground serves as a destination for not only children of College Township, but those from beyond the immediate area as well. The playground has some unique maintenance requirements due to the various types of equipment, surfacing and edging utilized within the area. Over the years the playground has been routinely maintained by the CRPR to keep it safe for children. However, the playground needs substantial re-investment to address potential safety hazards, accessibility, and general routine maintenance and upgrades. The master plan

will address the need to repair, complete a large renovation, or complete replacement of playground.

## VOLUNTEERISM

There is long standing evidence that College Township has always been invested in community events, promoting the longevity of Spring Creek Park and all of its local recreational amenities. The spirit of volunteerism and dedication in the Township is exemplified with the construction of the covered bridge, which was a project of the PSU Civil Engineering students in the mid-70s. A second bridge was erected as an Eagle Scout project but was damaged during a flood and eventually removed. In 2013 another PSU Civil Engineering class designed and constructed a bridge. A few years later, the Township installed ADA accessible ramps.

## PLANNING THE PARK

The intent of this study is to explore options that will provide a solid foundation for existing and future recreational amenities at Spring Creek Park. The process of developing the Master Plan considered the site's valuable existing character and features, location and connections, adjacent land uses, community and neighborhood recreational needs and goals, as well as information on current recreation and leisure trends. A public participation process was undertaken to gain further input from residents regarding future improvements and expansion of the park.

Public participation included working with a Project Study Committee (PSC), completing key person interviews, and holding public meetings. The process emphasized citizen input to develop a relevant Master Plan and strategies that target the existing and future recreation and open space needs of the Township.

The Master Plan will outline site-specific data and design alternatives as “blueprints” that will guide future improvements, development, and activities of the park as a municipal-owned public park. Undertaking the planning process will target the opportunities for future park expansion, and outline recreation and conservation initiatives to meet the needs and desires of the community at large. Recommendations and conclusions of the planning process will

provide insight into strategies and objectives that will meet the community needs and desires for recreation, universal access, and preservation.

### **MASTER PLANNING PROCESS**

The planning process for the Master Plan was designed to create a vision for the park that harnessed the opportunities of the site while respecting the inherent site limitations. This process included six parts:

1. Inventory and Assessment
2. Public Participation
3. Development of Conceptual Alternatives
4. Development of a Draft Design
5. Final Master Plan
6. Operations and Management Plan

It is important to note that this is a planning exercise at a conceptual level and not intended to serve as a final design or engineering documents. The master plan expresses the best way to organize and configure spaces, facilities, and amenities. It is presented graphically with recommendations, strategies, and costs for implementation over the next five to ten years.

