

Merion Botanical Park

Master Plan



September 2014



TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania



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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Lower Merion Township completed an update to the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. The purpose was to:

- Complement the 2006 Lower Merion Open Space and Environmental Resources Protection Plan;
- Serve as the Parks & Recreation element of the Township's Comprehensive Plan; and
- Comply with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code Act 170, Section 503 (11).

The goal of updating the plan was to increase its effectiveness as a guide for the Township's actions and decision-making in achieving its mission for parks and recreation:

"To help our citizens engage in active healthy lifestyles and to conserve our natural resources. We do this by collaborating with public and private sector partners and providing public service that is friendly, convenient and exceeds expectations."

One recommendation contained in the plan is for the Township to complete master plans for all of its parks. A master plan is an evolving long-term document that defines the future of a park and its place in the park system. Master plans recommend additions and renovations that will provide recreational opportunities, protect significant environmental resources and preserve key cultural resources using an open and public process.

Merion Botanical Park, an 11.6 acre passive park that is located in the middle of a developed residential neighborhood, has an interesting history. Converted from a large public dump site in 1944, the Merion Botanical Park is maintained by the Township of Lower Merion, in partnership with the Botanical Society of Lower Merion, the park's founding organization. The Botanical Society conceived of the idea for a botanical garden and park in 1943 and began negotiations with the Township. The Society solicited residents to make substantial subscriptions in amounts up to 5% of resident's property values. The Society purchased the majority of the land in 1944. By agreement with the Township, the Society donated the park land in exchange for Township agreement on how the park would be maintained. The Botanical Society subscription funds paid for:

- Development of the original Wheelwright and Stevenson plan entitled "A Botanical Park for Lower Merion, dated May 5, 1944, for conversion of the dump site into a park with meadows, paths, a pond, gazebo, and plantings (plan on page 10).
- Purchase and donation of the majority of the park land.
- Purchase and planting of the entire valuable botanical collection.
- Design and construction of the stream crossings and pathways.

While the Township is responsible for general maintenance of the park, the Botanical Society has, since 1944, provided care and replacement of the entire botanical collection and shrub beds through member dues, donations and volunteer hours. The Society also funded the design and construction of the Clarence Hall Bridge.

Deed restrictions limit the type of development that is possible in the park. Currently, the park does not have a master plan. The Merion Botanical Park master planning process focused on:

- Providing facilities that respond to the leisure needs and interests of residents;
- Accessibility;
- Safety standards;
- Improving park circulation;
- Environmental sustainability;

- The park's use / relationship with the surrounding neighborhood

An extensive public participation process was conducted, including a neighborhood survey and meetings with a Steering Committee, the Botanical Society and the community. The resulting plan reflects the input received from this process.



Aerial photo of Merion Botanical Park

The *Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan* establishes five very important goals:

1. Enrich parks and recreation facilities as community destinations where residents can have fun, experience nature, socialize and exercise.
2. Conserve our natural resources by using best management practices in the parks for conservation, public education and partnerships.
3. Collaborate with Township planners on the redevelopment of the villages and on land development applications throughout the Township to ensure that public recreation facilities, opportunities and partnerships in recreation facilities, programs and management are incorporated into the improvements.
4. Engage the citizens in recreation to enrich their lives.
5. Provide operational excellence and financial stability that will garner widespread public support for parks and recreation.

The *Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan* identifies a series of specific actions that the Township can take to improve its parks and recreation services, and recommends a plan for their implementation. Many of the recommendations are general to various parks and not repeated here.

Specific to Merion Botanical Park, the *Comprehensive Plan* recommends updating the Master Plan in 2013. The Master Plan updates are called on to “focus on accessibility, safety standards, improving park circulation, gathering spaces, and environmental sustainability.”

Merion Botanical Park is cited several times for improvements related to *Goal 1: Enrich Parks and Recreation Facilities*. Specific objectives are noted as important to achieve this goal, including five that are relevant to the issues present in Merion Botanical Park:

- Objective 6, Ensure that all parks include an environmental component as part of the park, design, operation and programming.
- Objective 7, Evaluate, design, and upgrade parks with consideration of safety and security of users. The recommendation proposes following the principles of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), maintaining clear sight lines in the parks from public streets and sidewalks, locating recreation facilities for safety, limiting vehicle penetration into the

park as much as possible to avoid pedestrian/vehicle conflicts, and providing trails of adequate width for the intended users.

- Objective 8, Provide accessible trails, viewing areas, and other accommodations to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Recommendations include developing trails within all parks to provide accessible routes from parking areas and sidewalks to recreation and support facilities, and providing site amenities that accommodate persons with disabilities.
- Objective 9, Design, plan, and implement a Township-wide signage system for parks and recreation facilities. The goal is to build upon the Township's signage system to establish a readily identifiable signage system for wayfinding, park and facility name, directions, rules and regulations, interpretation, and information.
- Objective 11, Create destinations in parks where people can gather and socialize. Ideas include adding pavilions and creating a scenic area for photo backdrops.

Related to *Goal 2: Conserve our natural* resources, four recommendations are relevant to the issues present in Merion Botanical Park:

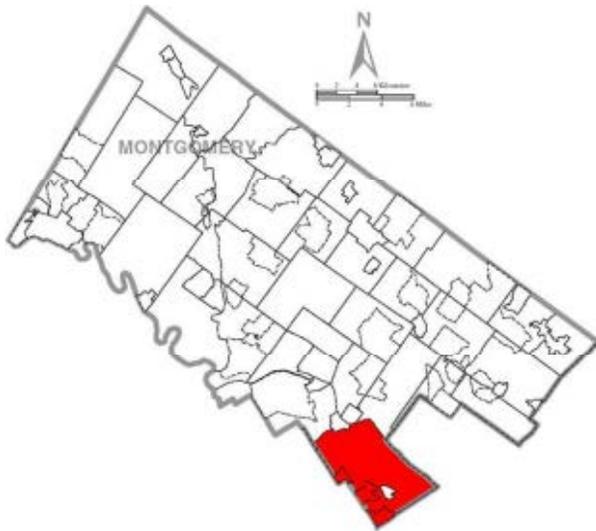
- Objective 3, Establish a philosophy of environmental sustainability in the parks. The recommendation is to address environmental issues by managing storm water and enhancing the water quality through infiltration of runoff, stabilizing the stream banks, and removing the invasive plant species.
- Objective 4, Improve Lower Merion Township's Parks for environmental sustainability.
- Objective 5, Address environmental issues in Lower Merion Township's parks. The recommendation, similar to Objective 4 above, is to manage stormwater and enhance water quality through infiltration of runoff, continue to plant trees in the park, stabilize the stream bank of the creek that runs through the park, and to develop and implement a plan to remove invasive species in the park.
- Objective 6, Develop strategies for solving environmental problems through solutions in the parks. The recommendation involves developing a strategic plan for stormwater management and stream bank stabilization in the parks with collaboration with the Public Works Department.

The Master Plan for Merion Botanical Park seeks to fulfill the goals and objectives of the overriding Parks and Recreation Plan, while responding to expressed needs and desires of the local community.

SECTION A BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DATA

Introduction to the Community

Lower Merion Township is located in Montgomery County, in southeastern Pennsylvania. Located in the heart of the "Main Line," the Township is a first ring suburban community bordering the City of Philadelphia. The community is served by commuter rail and bus transit services provided by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) as well as Amtrak rail passenger service. The nearest major airport, Philadelphia International, is about 30 minutes by car, and can be accessed by SEPTA.



Covering an area of 23.64 square miles, the Township is bounded by the City of Philadelphia, the Boroughs of Conshohocken and West Conshohocken, and the Townships of Upper Merion and Whitemarsh in Montgomery County and by the Townships of Haverford and Radnor in Delaware County.

Forming the eastern boundary is City Avenue (U.S. 1) separating Lower Merion from the City of Philadelphia. Running along the Township's northern border is the Schuylkill River paralleled by the Schuylkill Expressway (Interstate Route 76), a limited access express highway expediting travel to and from Philadelphia and Philadelphia International Airport and connecting with the Valley Forge interchange of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Upper Merion Township.

Lower Merion is the largest of the 62 municipalities located within Montgomery County. According to the 2010 Lower Merion Township Community Profile, based upon the 2010 United States Census, the Township population is 57,825, with 24,095 households located within its 23.64 square miles. According to the US Census Bureau, the township has a total area of 23.9 square miles.

The village of Merion is a residential suburban community located in the southern end of Lower Merion Township, on the border of Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties. It is bordered by Wynnewood, Narberth, Bala Cynwyd and the City of Philadelphia. As of the 2010 census, it has a population 4,752. The approximate area of Merion is 676 acres, or 1.1 square miles.

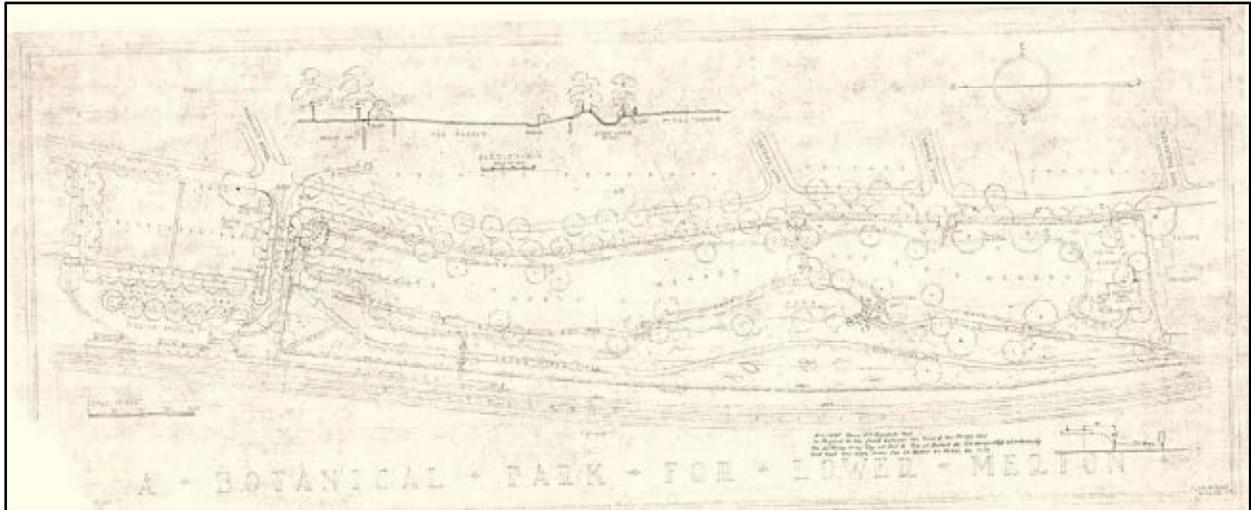
Lower Merion Township Park System

Lower Merion Township has 44 parks comprising 725 acres of parkland. The parks offer a wide range of recreation opportunities, from active parks that host competitive play and traditional playgrounds to passive parks for enjoying nature and the Township's scenic beauty. Facilities include ball fields, tennis and basketball courts, playgrounds, pavilions, sitting areas, trails, community meeting rooms, a community center, areas for dogs, an indoor gym, a gazebo for performing arts, two swimming pool facilities, a banquet facility, an arboretum, historic sites, community gardens, a wildlife preserve, nature areas, horticultural plantings, and bird sanctuaries.

Original Park Plan

In 1944, the firm Wheelwright and Stevenson prepared the original plan for development of the park. The Township has one copy of the plan, which is unfortunately very light and difficult to read.

The plan depicts a natural park setting with meadows, paths, a pond, gazebo, and plantings.



Original Park Plan: *A Botanical Park for Lower Merion*, Wheelwright and Stevenson, 1944



Detail of the south meadow, pond, and gazebo

SECTION B PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The public process regarding the Merion Botanical Park Master Plan was comprehensive and involved a multi-faceted approach.

1. Study Committee: A Study Committee comprised of Township staff and key community and neighborhood stakeholders met at regular intervals during the design process, at the Lower Merion Township Building.

Study Committee Meetings: February 6, 2013
March 6, 2013
April 24, 2013
November 8, 2013
July 1, 2014

Study Committee Site Walk: March 11, 2013

2. Public Meetings: Two public meetings were held at the Merion Tribute House, located on Hazelhurst Avenue in Merion Station, close to the park. Township staff advertised the public meetings by posting signs in the park, emailing residents and posting the information on the Township's website. The Botanical Society of Lower Merion and the Merion Civic Association also helped to promote the public meetings via their email lists.

First Public Meeting: April 30, 2013

Second Public Meeting: November 18, 2013

Third Public Meeting and Presentation to Parks & Recreation Committee: October 2014

3. Neighborhood Survey: Park surveys were mailed to 1,573 residents of Lower Merion within a quarter mile of Merion Botanical Park. The survey was also emailed to members of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion, and posted on the Township's website, where residents could print the survey and send it to the Township. Approximately 149 surveys were returned, for a response rate of nine percent. A copy of the survey, including a complete compilation of the responses, is included in the appendix of this report. A summary of the responses is below.
4. Web Site: Information concerning the planning process, including meeting dates, the neighborhood survey, sketches and various segments of the master plan were posted on the website for the public to view.

SECTION C SITE INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

This section outlines the information gathered and evaluated in order to establish a basis for planning and the proposed use of the site.

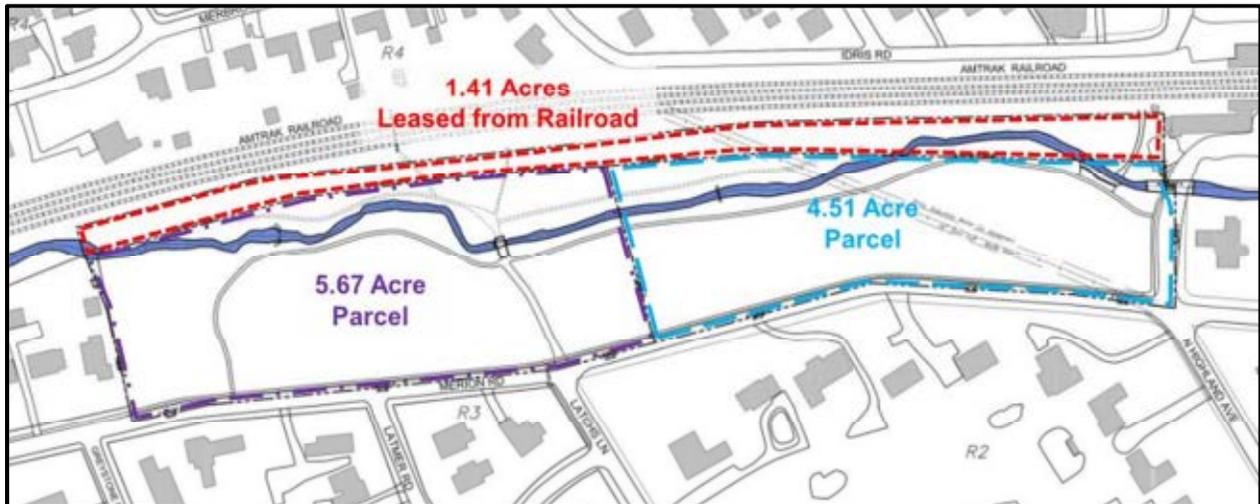
General Description of the Site

Merion Botanical Park is located at 100 Merion Road in Merion, PA. The plan, converting a large public dump site into a park, was developed and given to the Township in 1944 by the Botanical Society of Lower Merion. Care and replacement of the entire botanical collection and shrub beds has been provided by the Botanical Society since 1944, through member dues, donations, and volunteer hours.

The park is located near the Merion Station train station, bounded by the railroad tracks on the west, Merion Road on the east, N. Highland Avenue (and the train station) on the north, and residential properties on the south. The park is zoned RAA (Residence District). The surrounding parcels are all single family homes in the R1, R2 and R3 Residence Districts.

Area and Restrictions:

Area: The park is comprised of two parcels, totaling 10.18 acres. The Township leases an additional 1.41 acres from Amtrak, for a total of 11.591 acres.



Deed: The original deed, dated 1944, included four very important restrictions that have since guided the use of the park:

1. "That either the Township or The Botanical Society of Lower Merion will improve, develop, grade and landscape the said premises . . . to make the same suitable for use as botanical garden and public park."
2. "That the said premises shall be forever kept, maintained, and used solely as and for a botanical garden and public park and for no other purposes."
3. "That no building or other structure shall be erected, kept, or maintained thereon, other than tool houses or similar small structures for use in maintaining the said premises as and fro a botanical garden and public park, and shelters for the protection of persons using the park."

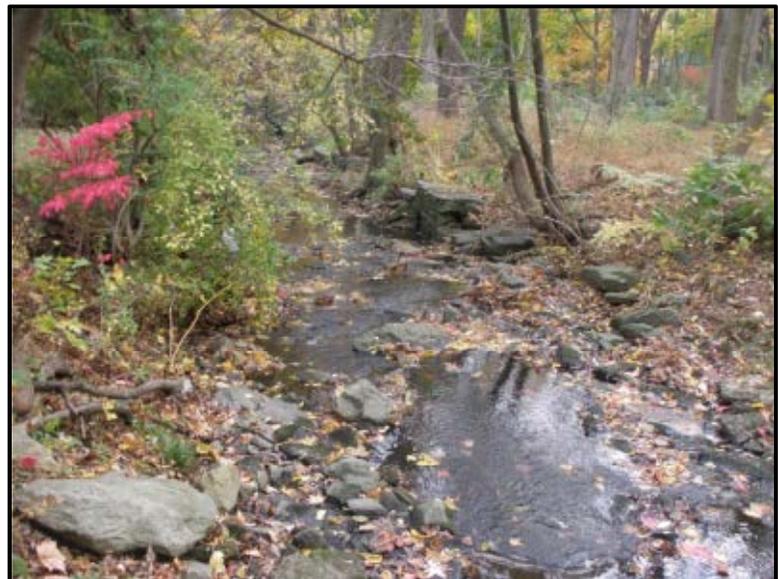
4. *“That the said premises shall not at any time hereafter be used for a playground, playfield, swimming pool, place of commercial entertainment, or for the playing of any competitive games, or in such manner as to attract large crowds of people; it being the intent and purpose of these restrictions that the land so conveyed shall be made into a botanical garden and public park for the beautification of the Township of Lower Merion and the education and quiet enjoyment of its residents.”*

Water Easement: There is a water main easement of undefined width for a 16” cast iron water main that crosses the park.

Telephone Easement: There is an undefined easement for the purpose of installing and maintaining communication lines to and through the park.

Stream:

A major feature of the park is the stream that traverses the length of the park. This stream has never been named, and therefore is referred to as an “unnamed tributary to the Schuylkill River” The stream flows south through the park, where it enters a culvert and eventually drains into the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia.



The stream divides the park into two separate areas—the larger area to the east of the stream, bordering Merion Road, has a manicured lawn with specimen trees, gravel trails, and benches. Thanks to the Botanical Society, many of the trees are rare or unusual species. The narrow area between the stream and the railroad tracks has been left as a more natural area, allowing native (and unfortunately some non-native) species to establish.

Throughout the years, the stream banks have suffered from various levels of erosion. Repairs are visible along the stream bank, including boulder placement, stone walls, and gabion baskets. Recently, a more environmentally sensitive stabilization was performed on a small section of the stream bank in conjunction with a drainage project being done on the adjacent Amtrak railroad.

The Lower Merion Conservancy has included the stream in their StreamWatch and BirdWatch programs. StreamWatch is a comprehensive monitoring program designed to assess the health of Lower Merion’s waterways. The water in the stream is routinely tested, and aquatic insects are collected in order to assess the biodiversity of the waterways. BirdWatch is a program where community members monitor and record the number and species of birds in Lower Merion.

Topography and Vegetation:

The park, as a botanical garden, contains a variety of native and specimen plantings. The park has three distinct areas:

- **Lawn Area:** The eastern side of the site, between the stream and Merion Road, is the manicured side of the park, with mowed lawn and aggregate trails. This side of the park is treasured for its beautiful, passive, quiet setting. The lawn has a visible slope toward the stream, but is usable for picnics, informal play, and sunbathing. Trees and shrubs are planted individually or in informal groupings.



Many of the specimen trees have tags on them with identification numbers, while some have the species identified on them. The Botanical Society of Lower Merion has a fully developed plan for re-labelling the botanical collection and has obtained private funding to complete the re-labelling of the specimen plants and other trees and shrubs.

In the southern area of the site, a group of dawn redwoods has been planted as a memorial.

- **Stream and Stream Banks:** The stream and stream banks have their own plant habitat and unique features. The stream is fairly shallow, and varies in width from about 8' to 15'. In many areas, where the banks are not steep, the stream banks have been left in their natural state with small stones and plantings lining the banks. In the steeper areas, where erosion has occurred, various types of stabilization measures have been implemented. Along the banks of the stream there are both naturalized and installed plantings. The Lower Merion



Conservancy has noted that the northern part of the stream, just below the train station culvert, is a perfect example of what a healthy stream should look like.

- **Natural Area:** West of the stream, between the stream and the railroad right-of-way, the park has been left in its wooded natural state. The intent is to leave this area unmanicured, to highlight beautiful native plantings in a natural setting. Occasionally, the Botanical Society does maintenance in this area, mostly to remove invasive plant species.



Because the park surrounds a stream, the obvious problems of occasional flooding, puddling, and wet soils occur in some areas near the stream. The soils in the area, as mapped by the Soil Survey of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania by the USDA Soil Conservation Service, are typical of urban soils near a stream: Made Land, Schist and Gneiss Materials (MdB) is sloping, has a seasonal high water table, and easily eroded & Made Land, Schist and Gneiss Materials (MdD) is strongly sloping and easily eroded.

Most of the park is located within the 100-year flood plain, both as mapped by the Township and FEMA. Only the highest areas in the park, along Merion Road, are not in the floodplain.

Site Access and Circulation:

The park is not fenced, so one can enter the park on the grass anywhere along Merion Road and the Train Station exit drive. The main entrance to the park is off of Merion Road close to the center of the park, across from N. Latches Lane. A wide paved trail leads from the entrance to the bridge and to the aggregate trail along the stream. There are two minor entrances to the park, one at the southern edge of the park off of Merion Road, the other at the north side of the park, where the aggregate trail meets the train station exit drive sidewalk.



All of the paths in the Lawn Area are aggregate (crushed stone). The central path, from the main entrance to the bridge, is slightly wider, from 8' to 10' wide, because it is used for maintenance vehicle access. The trails along the eastern side of the stream, and leading to the southern minor entrance, range from 4' to 6' wide. The aggregate trails offer a softer, less formal paving option, and are popular for walking, jogging, and dog walking. The paths in the natural area are both aggregate and bare soil, and generally used for walking.

Curb ramps for ADA access are located at the main entrance and at the corner of Merion Road and N. Highland Avenue. Generally, aggregate paths are not firm enough to be considered ADA compliant.

Lower Merion Township has recently completed their Township-Wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Feasibility Study (2004) which maps a comprehensive path, bicycle, and trail system that will link parks, natural areas, and the Schuylkill River with neighborhoods, business districts, schools, and adjacent municipalities. The plan indicates that both Merion Road and N. Latches lane are slated to be an on-road bicycle route, which means that bicycles are meant to “share the road” with automobiles, and no bicycle lanes or markings will be painted on the road. Merion Road is also a pedestrian route, on the existing paved sidewalk.

Historic and Significant Features:

- Stone Arch Bridge. Located in the center of the park, the 20' wide stone arch bridge has stone side walls and an aggregate and grass surface. There is a plaque on the bridge dedicating the reconstruction of the bridge to Clarence E. Hall, Esq., a founder and president of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion.



- Curved Stone Headwall.



- Stepping Stones. There are two sets of stepping stones in the park. The set of stones north of the bridge have been repaired several times. Although there is much erosion around the stones, they are still usable as a unique way to cross the stream. The other set, south of the bridge, have fallen into disrepair. The center stones have been removed so no one will be tempted to use them as a crossing. Although fun and unique, jumping across stepping stones is not considered a safe way to cross a stream. From an environmental aspect, the stepping stones are not good for fish habitats, because they dam the water. Still, the stepping stones are an important, identifiable, asset to the users of the park.



Site Furniture:

- Benches. There are currently 11 park benches located throughout the park, of wood and metal construction.
- Trash Receptacles. There are 4 rubber or plastic receptacles. Recently, all of the trash receptacles were relocated to the entrances of the park, to provide for easy pick-up by Township forces.



- Drinking Fountain. A new drinking fountain was installed near the center entrance walk in the Spring of 2014.
- Hose Bibs. Along with the drinking fountain, a two new hose bibs were installed for use by the Botanical Society for watering plants and other maintenance tasks.
- Dog Waste Bag Dispensers: There are 3 dispensers, one at each entrance to the park.



Signage:

- Park Entrance Signs. There are three historic wooden Merion Botanical Parks signs, one at each entrance to the park.
- Regulatory Signs: At each entrance, informational signs are posted with the park rules, dog waste disposal directions, and leash laws.



Memorials:

Various plaques are located throughout the park, most mounted on stones in the lawn, some mounted on trees.



Analysis of the Site

Merion Botanical Park is popular and successful as an open green oasis in an established residential neighborhood. The Botanical Society, neighbors, and Township residents feel very strongly about not changing the character of the park. While the park is highly valued in its present state, there are a number of issues that have been identified to protect and enhance the park's existing character. The following is a summary of some of the park's challenges that were noted in the public meetings and surveys:

- *Drainage Issues:* After heavy rains, the lower areas of the park have standing water and saturated soils. The aggregate trail is located along the top of the stream bank for almost the entire length of the park. Throughout the years, re-stoning of the aggregate trail has built up the elevation of the trail, which impedes overland flow from the lawn to the stream. As a result, water often puddles in the grass on the high side of the path and in the path itself. After heavy storms, water washing across the path causes the aggregate trail to wash out.



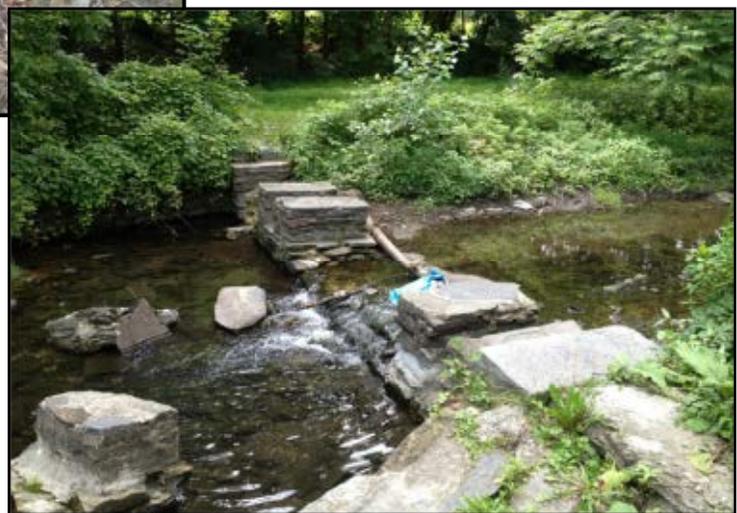
Several yard drains are located along the trail.

The condition of the drains and pipes leading to the stream must be evaluated.

- *Stream Bank Erosion:* In the areas along the stream where the grades gently slope toward the stream, flood waters can rise and wash over the banks with minimal problems. In those areas where the banks are steep and defined, flood waters have eroded the banks.



- *Stepping Stones:* The missing stones, loose stones, and erosion on the banks of the stream create an unsafe situation.



- *Rock Outcropping:* In the Natural Area along the Amtrak right-of-way, a high rock outcropping has become an attractive nuisance. The close proximity to overhead wires and the steep drop-off makes standing of the outcropping potentially dangerous.



- *Aging Plant Material:* Some of the shrub beds contain plant material in various stages of decline. Weeds have begun to take over the beds, mulch is minimal or missing, and the edges of the beds are not well defined.
- *Invasive Plant Species:* Weeds, usually non-native species, make the “invasive species” list because they spread easily by seed or roots, then grow fast often choking out the native species in the process.



The Site Inventory & Analysis Plan (see Section E) documents the items noted above. All of these challenges are addressed in the Final Master Plan.

Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI)

The Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory Environmental Review Tool (PNDI) is used to perform searches for potential impacts to threatened, endangered, special concern species, and special concern resources. Four agencies have jurisdiction over these resources:

- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

A PNDI search request was submitted in 2013, for the stream bank stabilization work that was recently done. Results returned indicated that there no known impacts to threatened or endangered species and /or species of special concern, and resources within the project area. Therefore, no further coordination is required with the jurisdictional agencies.

When future projects are in the design phase, a PNDI search will be repeated.

SECTION D ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES ANALYSIS

This section describes the proposed uses of the site based upon the public participation process, community needs, and the site analysis.

Public Participation – Survey Summary

Purpose:

The purpose of the survey was to determine the opinions, ideas and concerns of residents that live in the service area of Merion Botanical Park to serve as a foundation for decision-making regarding the park. By understanding resident's needs and interests, the Township will be better able to direct resources for the benefit of the community.

Process:

Township staff and members of the Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Study Committee prepared a survey to be mailed to residents that live within a ¼ mile radius of the park. The survey was open-ended in order to secure as much information from residents as possible. Surveys were distributed to residents using the U.S. Postal Service's "Every Door" direct mail program in manila colored envelopes lacking the Township's return address. This could have impacted the responses received. Should this service be used again in the future, greater emphasis will be placed on designing an envelope that will identify the mailing as coming from the Township. Surveys were mailed to 1,573 residences in a ¼ mile radius. 149 responses were received for a return rate of nine percent. Typically, direct mail surveys generate a return rate of two to four percent.

Return:

Survey respondents lived on all streets within the park's service area, which essentially is bordered by Bowman Ave. to the west, Montgomery Ave. to the north, City Ave. to the east and E. Wynnewood Rd. to the south. The Amtrak/ Septa track that immediately border the park cut the park off physically, but residents from south of the tracks appear to regularly use the park.

1. Children

Forty-one percent (41%) of the homes responding have children between the ages of less than one year old up to twenty. Ages were spread out among respondents.

2. Park Visitation

Of the 149 responses, eighty (54%) said that they visited the park daily or weekly. Fifty-four respondents (36%) visited the park monthly or sporadically, while fifteen (10%) said they rarely or never visit the park.

3. Other Parks

Fifty-two respondents (35%) visit other parks, including Township, non-Township, County, State and Federal parks, colleges and arboretums. The majority of other parks visited were Township parks, however, the most frequently listed park was Fairmount Park in the City of Philadelphia. Other frequently identified parks included Narberth Park, the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, Shortridge Memorial Park and General Wayne Park. The parks included a variety of active parks with playgrounds and athletic facilities and passive, natural areas with trails, but the more frequently visited parks were in generally two categories:

- Close to Merion Botanical Park
- Offered walking trails and open space

Merion Botanical Park does not have active recreational facilities and while it is a natural open space with a perimeter trail, it is not very long.

Summary of Findings:

The survey confirms that Merion Botanical Park is an important part of the surrounding neighborhood and it provides clear direction on how to manage and enhance the park to meet the recreational needs and interests of residents. The major survey findings follow:

1. Recreational Pursuits

The two most popular recreational activities cited by respondents were:

- Walking / walking with their dog
- Enjoying the park's open space, beauty and serenity

2. Park Positives

When asked what they liked about Merion, the five most popular answers were:

- Open space, peacefulness and natural beauty
- Plantings, trees
- Creek, stepping stones
- Trail
- Well-maintained

3. Improvements

When asked what they would like to see improved in the park, the five most popular answers were:

- More trees and shrubs
- Better upkeep of plants
- Better care of the other side of the creek, including screening the tracks and adding paths
- Care of the stream, including repairing the stepping stones
- Address muddy conditions

4. Amenities at other parks

When asked what attracts respondents to other parks in the area, the five most popular answers were:

- Playgrounds
- Walking / hiking paths
- Athletic fields
- Natural surroundings, beauty
- Plants, trees

5. Suggested Improvements

When asked about what they would like to see improved in the park, the five most popular answers were:

- Better care of trees
- More plants shrubs and trees
- Nothing
- Provide more benches, picnic tables
- Improve the other side of the creek, including screening the tracks and adding trails

6. Themes

When asked what improvements should focus on, respondents provided the following direction:

- Seventy-two respondents (48%) disagreed that the parks should be maintained in lawn with planted specimens, but forty-four (30%) agreed.
- One hundred twenty-three respondents (83%) agreed that the park should be a combination of lawn and natural area.
- One hundred five respondents (70%) agreed that native plant species should be used as much as possible.
- Fifty-seven respondents (38%) agree that the priority should be on plant specimens, regardless of whether or not they are native, but thirty-two (21%) disagreed and forty-nine (33%) were unsure.
- One hundred fourteen respondents (77%) agreed that labeling plant species names is important.
- One hundred twenty-nine respondents (87%) agreed that it is important to preserve the creek's stepping stones.

Description and Prioritization of the Community Needs and Uses for the Site Opportunities and Recommendations

The Public Participation process was outlined earlier in this report. Based on a thorough review and evaluation of the mailed surveys, comments from the two public meetings, input from the Study Committee, and discussions with Township Staff, the following list of recommendations has been developed for improvements to Merion Botanical Park. Because Merion Botanical Park has distinct areas with different characters and needs, we have broken up the recommendations into groupings: General Recommendations that apply to the whole park, then recommendations that apply to the three areas described—the Lawn Area, the Stream and Stream Bank, and the Natural Area.

A. General Recommendations:

1. *Continue the Vision of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion*
2. *Manage Trees and Vegetation – General*
3. *Install Interpretive Signage and Replace/Improve the Entrance Signage*

B. Lawn Area Recommendations:

4. *Preserve the Open Green Space*
5. *Manage Trees and Vegetation – Lawn Area*
6. *Manage Stormwater Runoff*
7. *Improve Paths and Provide Accessibility*
8. *Install Gazebo*
9. *Develop Natural Play Areas*
10. *Install Tool and Equipment Shed*

C. Stream and Stream Bank Area Recommendations:

11. *Stabilize the Stream Banks and Improve the Stream Quality*
12. *Establish Areas for Stream Access*
13. *Repair / Redesign the Stepping Stones*

D. Natural Area Recommendations:

14. *Creation of a Natural Forest*
15. *Improve the Walking Path*
16. *Create an Outdoor Learning Area*
17. *Install Bat Houses*
18. *Eliminate Access to Hazards*

A. General Recommendations:

1. Continue the Vision of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion:

The Botanical Society of Lower Merion, whose members help beautify and maintain Merion Botanical Park, has a stated vision for the park:

“Merion Botanical Park will become a highly regarded and well-managed public botanical garden and park. The park will offer a catalogued collection of mostly native specimen plantings, a model restored native forest fragment, and a restored stream. The welcoming natural setting, interpretive information, and study opportunities will attract visitors and gain active support from the Merion community and beyond.”

Their items of highest priority include:

- Create a maintenance plan for sustaining healthy specimen plantings.
- Remove invasive plant species throughout the Park, replant native plants along the stream, and reforest the area between the stream and the railroad tracks.
- Improve the park’s educational programming and increase its interest to children.
- Redesign the stream stepping stones.

The goals of the BSLM have been incorporated into the recommendations brought forth in the Master Plan. Township will work closely with the BSLM to implement the recommendations and to avoid duplication of effort.

2. Manage Trees and Vegetation:

Along with the preservation of the open green space, the care of the existing trees is a high priority for the residents. Merion Botanical Park is unique in that upkeep of the park is shared between the Botanical Society of Lower Merion and the Township. The Township takes care of general maintenance, such as lawn cutting, leaf removal, trash pickup, and tree removal. The Botanical Society focuses on the plantings, such as specimen tree planting, shrub and perennial plantings, and removal of invasive tree species.

The Township will work with the Botanical Society to develop a long-term Maintenance Plan for sustaining healthy specimen plantings. In any established park with mature trees, the basic management items include:

- Remove dead and dying trees. This is mostly a general maintenance item. Removing the trees that have died or are in very poor health is not only a safety issue, but can help to prevent the spread of detrimental disease and insects. In the Natural Area, fallen trees do provide homes for wildlife, so removal of those trees would be done only if necessary.
- Selective pruning to prolong the life of the trees. This is one step beyond the general maintenance of removing branches after they die. Selective pruning and shaping of older, mature trees can help to extend their life.
- Remove invasive and unwanted species. Invasive species can have a negative effect on the trees and native shrubs that are desired in the park. Removal of invasive species can be a labor intensive and a time consuming effort.
- Develop an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to protect against future outbreaks. Although many think of pests as insects, IPM covers a wide range of organisms (animals, plants, and micro-organisms) that negatively affect the landscape. Generally, IPM uses a variety of control strategies, usually ecologically based, to maintain pests at acceptable levels.

The Township will also work with the Botanical Society to develop a long-term Landscape Master Plan for all future plantings. Although the Botanical Society will take the lead on the specific plants to include in the Landscape Master Plan, our general recommendation here is to encourage the use of native plant material. Carefully selecting plant material that is adapted to the conditions in southeastern Pennsylvania will create a plant habitat that is adapted to the climatic conditions and will require little long-term maintenance when established.

3. *Install Interpretive Signage and Replace/Improve the Entrance Signage*

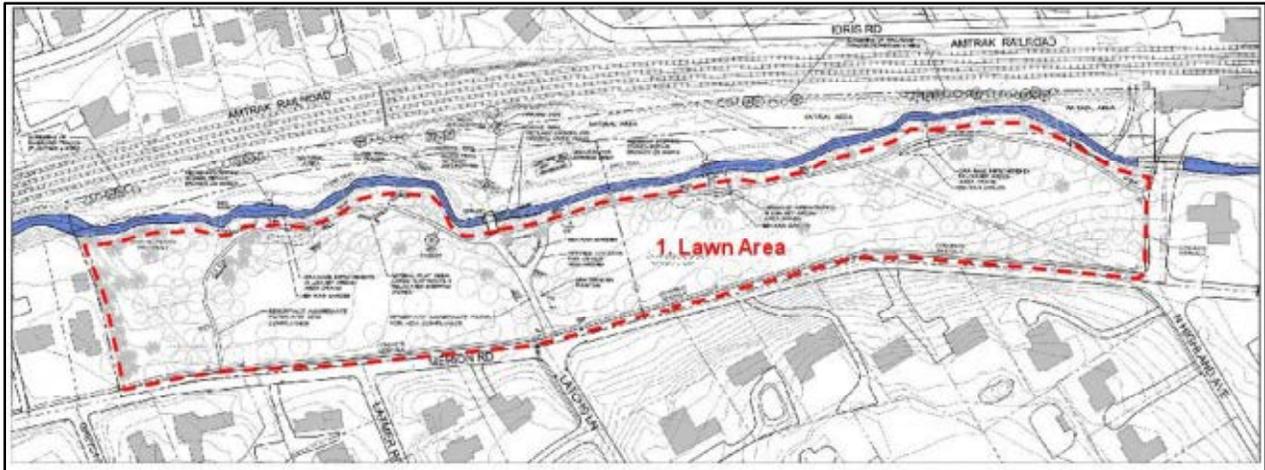
Interpretive Signage: This recommendation was brought forward by the Lower Merion Conservancy, as a means to inform and educate the public about the park environment. The Township has had success with similar signs installed along the Cynwyd Trail. In addition to the standard park rules and regulation signs, the uniqueness of Merion Botanical Park can benefit from the addition of educational, informative interpretive signage. The unique areas include:

- The Natural Area—intent and the creation of the Natural Forest.
- Riparian buffers and the benefits of stream bank stabilization.
- Rain gardens and butterfly gardens.
- Information on how to use the tree tags and links to the informational website.



Entrance Signage: The current park signage consists of the standard brown wood signs with routed lettering. The Botanical Society of Lower Merion would like the opportunity to redesign the entrance areas, and perhaps consider a new signage style. The redesigned entrance areas could incorporate the main park sign, and the various park rules and regulation signs required, into a cohesive, inviting design with complimentary landscaping.

B. Lawn Area: Between Merion Road and the Stream.



Recommendations for the Lawn Area focus on the lawn, trails, and plantings:

4. *Preserve the Open Green Space:*

The large open lawn area is one of the most valued assets in the park. Through the expert guidance of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion, future plantings will be thoughtfully designed and implemented to enhance the current character of the park.



5. **Manage Trees and Vegetation in the Lawn Area:**

In addition to the management items listed above, the plantings in the lawn area have a few additional requirements.

- Specimen tree planting. The Botanical Society of Lower Merion may, it its mission to present an unique and comprehensive botanical garden, plant trees that are not native to the area. The experts at MBS will ensure that the plantings are appropriate and not negatively impact the other plant material or the environment.

The Botanical Society has been identifying and tagging trees in the park with aluminum tags with identification numbers. Most of the trees in the park have been identified and mapped. Physical labelling of the specimen trees and other trees and shrubs will follow.



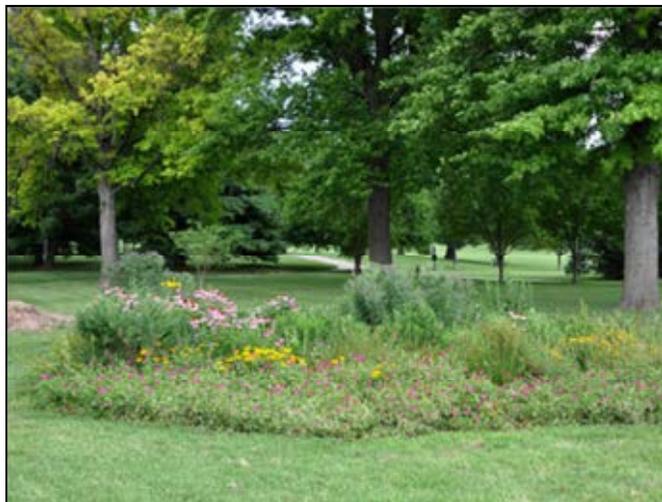
The Botanical Society is also considering a system to tag the trees and other significant plant material in the park with a QR code link, so park users can scan the tree tag on inventoried trees and be connected to a website that provides additional information.

- Maintain the lawn.
- Create easily maintainable shrub beds. For existing and proposed shrub beds, shrubs should be planted in groupings according to their mature size. It is important that plants are spaced so they don't crowd each other, and conversely so that there are no large spaces between the plants that allow weeds to establish. The beds should have adequate mulch to prevent weed growth and to keep the soil cool and moist for the plants. The edges must be well defined and have smooth curves, so a mower can easily mow around.
- Install butterfly gardens. For multi-season visual appeal, as well as educational uses.

6. **Manage Stormwater Runoff:**

Areas adjacent to a stream will obviously have the potential of being wet. The sloping topography of the park directs all of the rain water runoff toward the stream. The trail, at the top of the stream bank, acts as a barrier to this flow and causes puddling on the lawn areas adjacent to the path. Recommendations for managing the stormwater include:

- Install rain gardens and inlets upslope of paths. Rain gardens are defined areas with special soils, plantings, and drainage systems that help to manage storm water. Usually, the rain garden is graded so there is a slight depression that collects the storm water. The special soils help infiltrate the collected water to the subsoils below. The plantings, specially selected for wet soils, also help to absorb the water. Excess water, which has been filtered and cooled through the plantings and soils, is drained into the stream.



Several of the low, wet areas in the lawn, adjacent to the trail, are ideal spots for a rain garden. Because rain gardens do require a little more maintenance than typical landscape beds, the Township will work with the Botanical Society and the Lower Merion Conservancy before installing the rain gardens, in order to have in place a group of friends who will volunteer to weed and mulch the beds when required.

- Inspect and repair the existing drainage system. Several yard drains have been installed in the low areas next to the path. This system should be inspected and documented, and broken grates, inlets, or pipes repaired.

7. Improve Paths and Provide Accessibility:

Aggregate paths are made by installing a fine crushed stone over a layer of larger stone. Aggregate paths are best suited for flat and well drained areas. The fine stone is very susceptible to washing away if storm water flows over the path. In Merion Botanical Park, most of the aggregate trail is located along the top of the stream bank, subjecting it to erosion.

- Repair damaged and washed out sections of the path. This work should be done after the drainage improvements, outlined above, are installed.
- Treat surface of aggregate paths to make ADA compliant. For a surface to be ADA compliant, it must offer a certain amount of friction so wheelchairs can operate on it. In most cases, loose crushed stone is not considered an ADA compliant path. At the public meetings, there was a general agreement from the residents that the paths in the park remain aggregate. There are products that can be applied to the surface of aggregate trails that binds the aggregate, making them firmer and ADA compliant. Again, this treatment should be done after the drainage improvements are installed, as the binder will not prevent aggregate from eroding.

On occasion, maintenance vehicles are required to enter the park. Vehicle traffic on the lawn causes compaction to the soil and can break the tender tree roots around the trees. Recently, the trash receptacles were relocated to the entrances to the park, allowing the Township to collect trash without entering the park. For the other vehicles that must enter the park, mostly park maintenance trucks, Amtrak service vehicles, and occasional police cars, the main entrance can be improved to accommodate the weight of the vehicles and provide a place for the vehicles to turn around without driving on the grass. Below is a sketch of how a simple turn-around can be incorporated into the park entrance path and proposed rain gardens.



8. *Install Gazebo:*

Although the deed restrictions prohibit structures in the park, it does allow for structures that support the use of the site as a park and shelters for the protection of persons using the park. The recommendation is to install a new, small, appropriately designed gazebo in the park.



- A gazebo will provide shade and additional seating options and gathering space.
- Along with nice landscaping, it can offer a nice area for wedding photos and other small events.
- A gazebo was an element in the original 1945 plan for the park.

9. *Develop Natural Play Areas:*

In some of the Township's natural parks, they would like to consider an alternative to playground structures for children's play—natural play areas. The general concept is to re-introduce our children to nature by providing outdoor spaces designated for play that focus on natural components and unstructured play. The extent of the components used can vary widely. For Merion Botanical Park, the existing character of the park would direct the type of elements suggested:

- In the low, flat area next to the stream, installing large rounded boulders, to match the existing boulders, that children can play on and jump from one to the other.
- In select areas of the park, install sculptures that children can play on and around, that are also aesthetically pleasing enough to be an artistic compliment to the park.
- If the above elements are successful, consider more interactive installations such as grass mazes or human sundials.

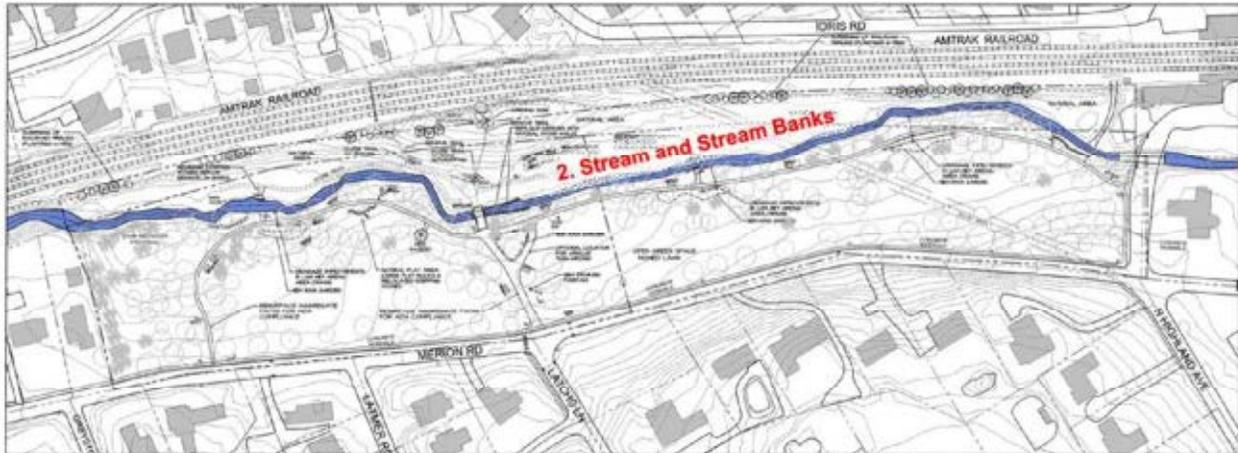


Currently, the Botanical Society has hidden fairy houses throughout the park with clues for children find them. Before any new installations are introduced, the Township would establish the same public process as is done for other playground areas.

10. Install a Tool and Equipment Shed:

The Botanical Society has been very successful in gathering volunteers to help with the park. Currently, the space they have available in the post office is too small to house the tools necessary for group work days. A small tool shed in the park would allow for proper, safe storage of the tools and materials required to continue to properly maintain the park.

C. Stream and Stream Bank



Recommendations for the Stream and Stream Bank focus on bank stabilization and plantings:

11. Stabilize the Stream Banks and Improve the Stream Quality:

- Stabilize the eroded stream banks with riparian buffer plantings, coir mats, and boulders.
- Identify areas for natural floodplains.
- Replace the gabion walls with natural stones or plantings and boulders.
- Plant sustainable and easily maintained stream bank plantings. Riparian buffer plantings can vary in design and plant type, depending upon the desired final product. Generally, a mix of perennial plantings and woody trees and shrubs are used in order to promote a healthy plant cover above grade and a strong, fibrous root zone below grade, which work together to stabilize the soils next to the stream.



Stream quality can be evaluated in many ways. Generally, a stream is a combination of its physical characteristics, chemical makeup, and biological diversity. The stream in Merion Botanical Park is greatly affected by the human activities which occur in its watershed. Specific positive effects that are a result of stream bank stabilization and riparian buffer planting include:

- The general increase in the volume of water flowing to our streams, due to continued development, causes a rush of water at high volume flow for a short period of time. The stabilization efforts help to reduce erosion along the banks and slow the water flow, which in turn prevents silting of the stream.

- Winter road salt, fertilizers and insecticides, dog waste, and contaminants from the roadways wash into the stream through the stormwater system or by overland flow. The chemicals and introduction of warm water runoff inevitably causes a change in the ecology of the stream. The riparian buffer plantings help to intercept the stormwater runoff, capturing, cooling, and filtering the runoff before it goes into the stream.
- The riparian buffer plantings and trees shade the banks, further keeping the water temperature down. High water temperatures reduce the amount of oxygen in the water available fish and other aquatic organisms.
- The plantings, boulders, and especially the root wads create a habitat for plants and wildlife.

The Lower Merion Conservancy (LMC) has educational and improvement programs that focus on several aspects the environment. This is important because even subtle changes in the stream or wildlife can be an indicator of a larger problem.

- StreamWatch water quality monitoring. This is a comprehensive monitoring program designed to assess the health of Lower Merion's waterways. Individuals and groups known as StreamKeepers adopt certain sites along streams and routinely test the water and the water flow.
- BirdWatch species monitoring. Like StreamWatch, community members adopt natural areas in which they monitor and record the number and species of birds in Lower Merion.
- Educational programs for students and families.

The Lower Merion Township Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) was created to promote and conserve the Township's Natural Resources. They have a detailed Environmental Action Plan which encourages action at the local level that can have an impact on the local, regional, and global environment. Specific to streams, they have created an informative brochure entitled S.O.S. Safeguarding our Streams, which outlines the ways that residents can help to improve local creeks.

Educating the public about water quality, pollution, use of fertilizers and pesticides, and dog waste, can highlight how seemingly minor everyday activities can and do affect the environment.

More information about the programs is available at lmconservancy.org and lowermerion.org.

12. Establish Areas for Stream Access:

Plantings along the stream bank do help control erosion, but during the peak growing season they can create a barrier at the stream edge. As part of the stream bank stabilization projects, low, flat, grassed areas adjacent to the stream will be identified, or installed in appropriate places, to offer people a safe way to access the water's edge.

13. Repair / Improve both sets of Stepping Stones:

The fate of the stepping stone stream crossings was a recurring discussion topic at the public meetings. The park users love the stepping stones for their uniqueness and historic value. Although historic, stepping stones are not considered a safe way to cross a stream (no handrails, tops of stones may be slippery when wet, etc). From an ecological standpoint, the stepping stones create a dam in the stream, which prevents fish from swimming upstream. The damming effect also causes erosion on the stream banks where the water washes around the stones.

As a compromise, the stepping stones should be repaired with a slight redesign that does not change the character of the crossing:

- Investigate lowering the stones so more of the stream flow will wash over the stones, and stay in the stream channel, during storm events.

- Use appropriate plant material to manage views. Many of the neighbors and park users are used to the regular trains that pass by. In the past few years, Amtrak has implemented an aggressive program to clear trees, shrubs, and brush within their right-of-ways. The clearing of vegetation in the right-of-way has opened up some views to the railroad tracks. Some consider the field of stone and overhead wires unattractive.

Several years ago, The Township prepared a *Natural Land and Stewardship Plan* for all of the parks in the Township. This plan did not specifically include Merion Botanical Park, but does have general guidelines on how to restore natural areas. *The Restoration and Stewardship Plan* commissioned by the Botanical Society will be a more detailed, site specific plan for the natural area, addressing the park's unique features and characteristics.

15. Improve the Walking Path and Provide Accessibility:

The walking path is very informal in the Natural Area. After crossing the bridge, it appears that the trail has been overlaid with stone and mulch in the past. The trails further away from the bridge are mostly bare, compacted soil. Many of these trails do have puddles after storm events.

- Investigate methods and materials to improve the walking paths without impacting the above stated goals of the Natural Area.
- Coordinate the improvements to the walking path with the elements of the previous recommendation for the Creation of the Natural Forest. The walking path may need to be relocated or redesigned to allow access to or around new features.



16. Create an Outdoor Learning Area:

Close to the bridge is concrete slab that was once the foundation to a building. The Botanical Society would like to use this area as an informal gathering area, for classes and educational activities.

- Assess the concrete slab for structural stability. The slab should be removed if it is determined to be unsafe and not able to be repaired.
- If the slab is structurally sound, clear and repair concrete slab, and provide safe access.
- Add benches.

If the slab is not suitable for use, a simple alternative for an outdoor learning area can be installed, such as a small clearing with wood mulch.

17. Install Bat Houses:

Eighteen Bird Houses have already been installed by the Botanical Society, to great success. The addition of a few bat houses is a simple way to help maintain a healthy ecosystem. Bats not only eat thousands of insects, but providing a home for them in a natural habitat helps keep them from roosting in people's houses.



18. Eliminate Access to Hazards:

This recommendation focuses on removing the paths to both the rock outcropping and to the catenary poles.

- Remove path by removing any mulch or aggregate on surface. Install plantings to discourage use. Install signage warning of hazards.



SECTION E

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

There are many aspects to a successful master plan. This section reviews some of the design considerations that were applicable to forming the recommendations for Merion Botanical Park.

Site Limitations

Although the recommendations for Merion Botanical Park focus generally on improvements to the existing uses, there are minor site limitations which were considered:

- **Site Topography:** The park is in the floodplain of the stream, and consequently the lawn areas in the park often remain soggy after storm events. But the lawn in the park is a popular place to walk and play. Although some would like to make the lawn areas drier, the natural function of the floodplain must be considered.

Applicable Standards and Guidelines

The proposed improvements to the Park will reference:

- “2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design”, published by the Department of Justice, for access into and around the park, including sidewalks and curb ramps.
- “Pennsylvania Stormwater Best Management Practices Manual”, published by the PA Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Watershed Management, for sediment and erosion control, stream bank stabilization, and other stormwater management items.
- Applicable Codes and Ordinances of Lower Merion Township.

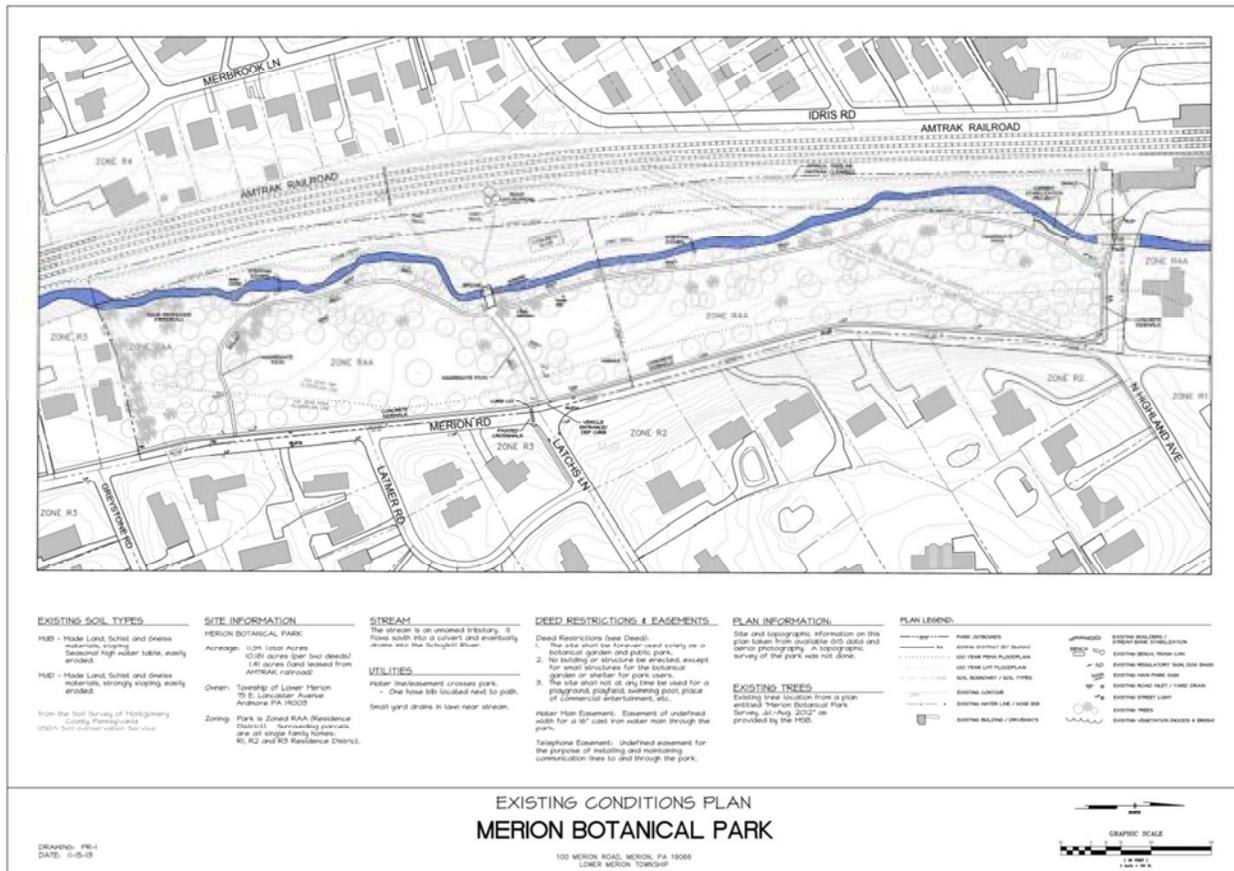
Riparian Buffers and Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas

The Master Plan will encourage the continuation of the stream bank stabilization efforts. The short area of stabilization that was done in 2013 includes the placement of boulders and the planting of native grasses, perennials, and woody plants suitable for a successful riparian buffer planting. The stabilization efforts and plantings will improve the stream quality by reducing erosion, intercepting polluted storm water flowing to the stream, shade the banks and cool the water temperature, and provide habitats for wildlife. Established trees will be saved and protected.

SECTION F DESIGN PROCESS

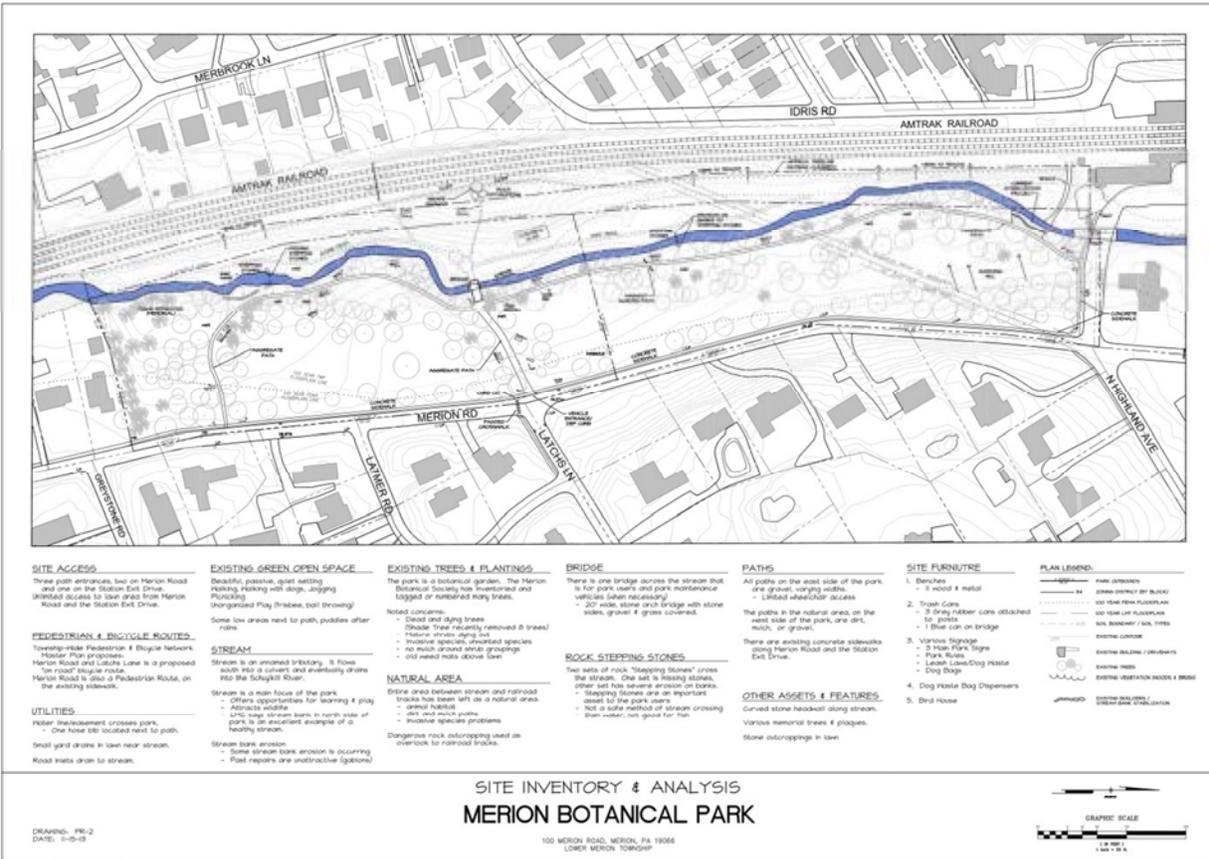
The creation of the Final Master Plan involved several steps:

- The Study Committee first met on February 6, 2013 to review the overall master planning process, the schedule, and the best way to include the residents in the design process.
- Township Staff, with input from the Study Committee, developed the questionnaire that was mailed to the residents.
- An Existing Conditions Plan was made for the park, including property lines, topography, flood plains, vegetation, the stream and bridge, and other existing site features.



- The Study Committee met on March 6, 2013, to prepare for the first Public Meeting. Preliminary survey results were discussed, as well as the agenda for the meeting.
- The Study Committee also met at Merion Botanical Park on March 11 to walk the site and discuss the positive/negative aspects of the park
- The first Public Meeting was held on April 24. Billed as a Public Workshop, the purpose of this meeting was to gather as much information as possible about the current uses of the park, the challenges and needs, desired improvements, and other observations. The attendees were broken into three groups and asked to review and discuss three key questions: What do you like about Merion Botanical Park? How do you use the park? and What would you like to see improved in the park? A multitude of responses were provided in writing by each group, and

also discussed by everyone table by table. These responses were the basis of the Site Inventory and Analysis Plan as well as the Preliminary Master Plan.



- The third Study Committee Meeting was held on April 24. The purpose of this meeting was to review the Preliminary Master Plan in advance of the second Public Meeting.
- The second Public Meeting was held on November 18. At this meeting, a power point presentation was given summarizing the design process up to date and outlining each of the recommendations.
- The fourth and final Study Committee was held on July 1. The group reviewed a draft of the Final Master Plan report.
- The final Public Meeting, and presentation to the Lower Merion Township Parks and Recreation Board and the Board of Commissioners, will be held in October of 2014. If the Commissioners approve and adopt the Final Master Plan, the report will be finalized and distributed.



CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF LOWER MERION

- The Botanical Society Vision for the Park.
 - a highly regarded and well-managed park.
 - a natural garden and park-like setting with native botanical plantings, a model restored native forest program and a restored stream.
 - an educational and research center.
 - an active support from the Merion Community as a priority.

SIGNAGE

- IMPROVE SIGNAGE AT ENTRANCES**
 - Install new park signs with landscaping at all three entrances.
- PROVIDE SIGNAGE FOR**
 - Park Area 4 (Entrance of a Natural Forest).
 - Stream and Stream Bank.
 - Non-wooded / Blisterly Gardens.
 - Tree log site to relocate information.

MANAGE TREES & VEGETATION

- MAINTENANCE**
 - Work with the Botanical Society to create a long-term maintenance plan for sustaining healthy trees and vegetation.
 - Remove dead & dying trees.
 - Selective pruning to prolong life of existing trees.
 - Schedule appropriate integrated pest management to protect against future infestations or diseases.
- REPLANTING**
 - Work with the Botanical Society to develop a replanting plan for future plantings.
 - Monitor the lawn.
 - Plant areas in easily maintainable much beds.
 - Install and maintain a large stormwater inlet and overflow plantings.
 - Inventory and tag trees, set code for tree relocation.
- Area 1 - Street Side of Stream**
 - Stabilize stream bank with native plantings.
 - Plantings to create a tree native forest.
 - Screen railroad and rocky overlook with native plantings.
- Area 2 - Stream Banks**
 - Stabilize stream bank with native plantings.
- Area 3 - Railroad side of Stream**
 - Plantings to create a tree native forest.
 - Screen railroad and rocky overlook with native plantings.

LAWN AREA (West side of stream)

- PRESERVE THE OPEN GREEN SPACE**
 - Manage trees & vegetation.
- IMPROVE PATIO AND PROVIDE ACCESSIBILITY**
 - Create a paved area for ADA compliance.
 - Place surface of aggregate pavers to make ADA compliant.
 - Reconfigure existing ADA path to improve wheelchair access for avoid driving on the lawn.
- MANAGE STORMWATER RUNOFF**
 - Install rain garden and water storage of paths.
 - Repair and repair existing drainage system.
 - To reduce stormwater runoff.
 - Use area for wedding photos and other events.
 - Elements of original trail plan for the park.
- CREATE NATURAL PLAY AREAS**
 - Create an area in the streambed play area.
 - Investigate native plantings like grass meadows, ferns, and other-friendly specimens.
- RETHINK A SMALL TOOLS SHED**

STREAM AND STREAM BANKS

- CONTINUE STREAM STABILIZATION PROJECTS**
 - Stabilize eroded stream banks with vegetation.
 - Replace gabion walls with natural stones.
- REMOVE INVASIVE AND NON-NATIVE PLANT SPECIES**
 - Replace with native plant species.
- REPAIR/REDO BOTH SETS OF STEPPING STONES**
 - Investigate lowering the stones to allow flow over stones during storm event.
 - Replace broken on bank leading to stones.
 - Replace and level for access.
 - Provide signage warning of potential risk.
- ESTABLISH AREAS FOR STREAM ACCESS**
 - Create an area in the streambed play area of a stream.
- MAKE THE STREAM CENTER**

NATURAL AREA (RS side of stream)

- CREATION OF A NATURAL FOREST**
 - Planings to establish natural forest habitat.
 - Remove invasive and non-native plants.
 - Restore native plants and pollinators.
 - Screen areas of natural forest.
- IMPROVE INCLUSIVE PATH**
- CREATE OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA**
 - Create and repair increase step that have a learning area and benches for natural leading area.
- INSTALL BAT HOUSES**
- IMPROVE ACCESS TO WOODS**
 - Create a path to Amtrak, customary paths.

PLAN LEGEND



**FINAL MASTER PLAN
MERION BOTANICAL PARK**

100 MERION ROAD, MERION PA, 19066
LEON BROWN, DESIGNER



DRAWING: PR-3
DATE: AUGUST 2011

Design Alternatives

At the second public meeting, several design options / alternatives were presented for discussion:

1. Alternative Trail Layout, to address the concerns about vehicles driving in the park.

There are occasions where vehicles must drive into the park: for policing, tree pruning and removal, etc. The most frequent reason for vehicles driving in the park is to empty the trash receptacles.

An alternative trail layout option was presented, which would provide a paved area for vehicles to enter the park, turn around, and exit without having to drive across the lawn.



2. Install Children's Natural Play Area

The deed restrictions specifically prohibit the installation of a playground. To make the park a more enjoyable place for children, the idea was brought forth to install more “natural” items, that would blend into the park environment but allow children a climbing, jumping, balancing, or educational experience. Some ideas presented included placing boulders or tree stumps in the lawn area, or a sundial made of stepping stones.



3. Alternative Stepping Stone Design

As stated in the Recommendations section, neighbors feel that the two sets of stepping stones are an important and identifiable feature in Merion Botanical Park. A few alternative designs for stream crossings were presented, that still allowed people to cross the stream on rocks, but may be a safer option. The idea was to remove the existing stepping stones, and install either a low, shallow crossing, or installing a crossing with large, flat topped boulders that would allow the stream to flow through, while providing a larger area for traversing the stream.

After much discussion, the neighbors felt very strongly about keeping the style of the existing stepping stones.



**SECTION G
DESIGN COST ESTIMATES**

This section provides very general Overall Magnitude of Probable Construction Costs for each of the recommendations. These estimated costs are based on Conceptual Plans and will be used for budgeting purposes. Construction costs can vary widely based upon the economy, the construction climate, and the type of work. As each item gets implemented and detailed plans are developed, the construction costs can be refined.

A Master Plan is a guide for long range improvements to the Park. Improvements will be done in phases as funds become available. For each of the items, we have included a priority rating based upon many factors, including:

- Improve the health, safety, and welfare of the public.
- Deter/Correct negative impacts to the environment.
- Provide needed amenities.
- Eliminate maintenance problems / Simplify maintenance.

The priority levels may be adjusted over time as the needs of the community change and due to other unforeseen conditions that may affect the park. The Township also actively seeks grant money from various organizations, which may modify the schedule of improvements.

The Township of Lower Merion has a Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which is a written document that provides direction and guidance to carefully plan and manage its budget and assets. It is a five-year plan, updated annually, that identifies capital projects, budgets and funding sources, and scheduling of major public physical improvements. Based upon the priority rating, the Merion Botanical Park improvements will be entered into the CIP.

Merion Botanical Park Opinion of Probable Construction Costs

A. General Recommendations

1. CONTINUE THE VISION OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF LOWER MERION

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION	Priority Level: A
TOTAL:	\$0.00

2. MANAGE TREES AND VEGETATION - GENERAL

OVERALL TREE AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN (can be phased)	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$12,000.00
Remove dead and dying trees	\$10,000.00
Selective pruning of existing trees	\$10,000.00
Removal of invasive species	\$40,000.00
Selective clearing for landscape screening	\$5,000.00
Evergreen tree and shrub plantings for landscape screening	\$35,000.00
Develop and implement and IPM program	\$20,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$12,000.00
Design and Engineering: Site Inventory & Landscape Master Plan	\$24,000.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$18,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$186,000.00

3. INSTALL INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE and REPLACE/IMPROVE ENTRANCE SIGNAGE

THREE NEW PARK ENTRANCE SIGNS with LANDSCAPING	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$1,400.00
Fabrication of signs (design tbd)	\$6,000.00
Concrete foundation / sign installation	\$3,000.00
Landscape plantings	\$5,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$1,400.00
Engineering: Design study, Construction Documents	\$2,800.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$1,400.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$21,000.00

FIVE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS - COLOR FIBERGLASS PANELS in ALUMINUM FRAME	Priority Level: C
Contractor Mobilization	\$1,200.00
Fabrication of aluminum/fiberglass signs	\$8,000.00
Concrete foundation / sign installation	\$4,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$1,200.00
Engineering: Design study, Construction Documents	\$2,400.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$1,200.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$18,000.00

B. Lawn Area Recommendations

4. PRESERVE THE OPEN GREEN SPACE

TO BE CONSIDERED IN ALL FUTURE PLANNING & DESIGN	Priority Level: A
TOTAL:	\$0.00

5. MANAGE TREES AND VEGETATION for LAWN AREA

FOCUSES ON THE SPECIMEN PLANTINGS of TREES and SHRUBS	Priority Level: B
Contractor Mobilization	\$7,500.00
Specimen tree planting	\$24,000.00
Lawn maintenance: fertilization, overseeding, aeration, etc.	\$20,000.00
Clean up shrub beds: prune, replant, mulch	\$22,500.00
Install butterfly gardens	\$6,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$7,500.00
Design and Engineering: Site Inventory & Landscape Plan	\$15,000.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$10,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$112,500.00

6. MANAGE STORMWATER RUNOFF

INSTALL RAIN GARDENS & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$9,000.00
Install rain gardens: four at 500 sf each	\$40,000.00
Stormwater management: inlets, sewer pipe, endwalls, rip rap	\$50,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$9,000.00
Survey, Design and Engineering	\$18,000.00

Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$14,000.00</u>	
		TOTAL: \$140,000.00
7. IMPROVE PATHS and PROVIDE ACCESSIBILITY		
REPAIR OF DAMAGED PATHS/LOW AREAS & ADA COMPLIANCE		Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$2,000.00	
Improve Paths: repairing, restoning, path hardener	\$20,000.00	
Construction Contingency	\$2,000.00	
Design and Engineering	\$4,000.00	
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$3,000.00</u>	
		TOTAL: \$31,000.00
8. INSTALL GAZEBO		
PAINTED WOOD GAZEBO		Priority Level: C
Contractor Mobilization	\$5,000.00	
Install gazebo	\$40,000.00	
Construction Contingency	\$4,500.00	
Design and Engineering	\$8,000.00	
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$5,000.00</u>	
		TOTAL: \$62,500.00
9. DEVELOP NATURAL PLAY AREAS		
TWO AREAS – DESIGN TBD		Priority Level: B
Contractor Mobilization	\$1,400.00	
Install boulders to play on	\$10,000.00	
Install child friendly sculptures or sundial	\$4,000.00	
Construction Contingency	\$1,400.00	
Design and Engineering	\$3,000.00	
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$2,000.00</u>	
		TOTAL: \$21,800.00
10. INSTALL TOOL & EQUIPMENT SHED		
SMALL WOOD BUILDING		Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$900.00	
Install concrete foundation	\$3,000.00	
Install prefabricated building	\$6,000.00	
Construction Contingency	\$900.00	
Design and Engineering	\$1,800.00	
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$900.00</u>	
		TOTAL: \$13,500.00

C. Stream and Stream Bank Recommendations

11. STABILIZE THE STREAM BANK AND IMPROVE STREAM QUALITY

ASSUMES 900 lf OF STREAM BANK, about half of the banks in the park.	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$24,000.00
Stabilize slopes with coir mats and boulders	\$170,000.00
Replace gabion walls with natural stone walls	\$45,000.00
Plant riparian buffer plantings: seed, plugs, shrubs, trees	\$25,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$24,000.00
Survey, Design, Engineering, Permitting	\$80,000.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$36,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$404,000.00

12. ESTABLISH AREAS FOR STREAM ACCESS

THIS WORK WOULD BE DONE DURING THE STABILIZATION PROJECT (ABOVE)

13. REPAIR / REDESIGN THE STEPPING STONE CROSSINGS

FOR BOTH SETS OF STEPPING STONES	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$4,500.00
Repair / Rebuild stepping stones	\$40,000.00
Site Restoration: grading, seeding, path to crossing	\$5,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$4,500.00
Survey, Design, Engineering, Permitting	\$25,000.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$6,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$85,000.00

D. Natural Area Recommendations

14. CREATION OF A NATURAL FOREST

THIS WORK WILL BE HEADED BY THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY	Priority Level: A
Contractor Mobilization	\$3,000.00
Install native plant material	\$20,000.00
Remove non-native species	\$10,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$3,000.00
Design and Engineering	\$6,000.00
Construction Administration, Construction Observation	<u>\$3,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$45,000.00

15. IMPROVE WALKING PATHS

PATHS IN THE NATURAL AREA TO BE MULCH OR STONE	Priority Level: C
Contractor Mobilization	\$1,500.00
Repair low spots / Install stone or mulch on paths	\$15,000.00
Construction Contingency	\$1,500.00
Design and Engineering	\$3,000.00

Construction Administration, Construction Observation \$2,000.00

TOTAL: \$23,000.00

16. CREATE OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA

CLEANUP OF THE EXISTING CONCRETE PAD

Priority Level: C

Contractor Mobilization \$900.00

Clear area and Repair pad \$7,000.00

Install benches \$2,000.00

Construction Contingency \$900.00

Design and Engineering \$1,800.00

Construction Administration, Construction Observation \$1,400.00

TOTAL: \$14,000.00

17. INSTALL BAT HOUSES

TO BE DONE BY THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

Priority Level: C

Purchase and Install 3 bat houses \$600.00

TOTAL: \$600.00

18. ELIMINATE ACCESS TO HAZARDS

REMOVAL OF TWO PATHS LEADING TO RAILROAD TRACKS

Priority Level: A

Contractor Mobilization \$800.00

Remove existing path material \$2,000.00

Install topsoil, seeding, and shrubs \$5,000.00

Warning signage \$1,000.00

Construction Contingency \$800.00

Design and Engineering \$1,600.00

Construction Administration, Construction Observation \$1,200.00

TOTAL: \$12,400.00

TOTAL PRIORITY A IMPROVEMENTS: \$937,900.00

TOTAL PRIORITY B IMPROVEMENTS: \$134,300.00

TOTAL PRIORITY C IMPROVEMENTS: \$118,100.00

GRAND TOTAL: ALL IMPROVEMENTS: \$1,190,300.00

SECTION H
APPENDIX

1. Mailed Survey – Questionnaire
2. Mailed Survey – Survey Report
3. Meeting Memoranda – Study Committee Meetings, Site Walk, Public Meetings

Merion Botanical Park Survey

In 2013, the Lower Merion Township Department of Parks & Recreation and the Botanical Society of Lower Merion will complete a master plan for Merion Botanical Park. The goal of the master plan is to provide a guide for appropriate park uses and a long-range vision for future development and/or programming. The park was formed from land purchased in 1944 by the Township and from an adjacent parcel purchased at the same time by the Botanical Society of Lower Merion then donated to the Township. While the 1944 deeds make clear that the land was to become a public park, they also restrict its use—no playground equipment, playfield, swimming pools, competitive games, or structures except as needed for plant care or visitor shelter. Under a 1944 agreement, the Township maintains the park, and the Botanical Society, with the Township's permission, may plant botanical specimens. Obtaining input from those who live near the park or care about it is an integral part of the planning process. We hope you will take a few minutes to answer the questions below.

1. **On which street do you live?** _____

2. **Does your household include children?** Yes _____ No _____

2a. If Yes, what ages? _____

3. **How often does your household visit Merion Botanical Park?**

Daily _____ Weekly _____ Monthly _____ Sporadically _____ Rarely _____ Never _____

3a. **If Daily or Weekly**, please indicate why: _____

3b. **If Rarely or Never**, please indicate why: _____

4. **What do you like about Merion Botanical Park, in order of priority?** _____

5. **What would you like to see improved in Merion Botanical Park, in order of priority?** _____

6. **Does your household visit other parks?** Yes _____ No _____

6a. If Yes, please indicate which parks: _____

6b. What attracts you to parks in other areas? _____

7. What types of improvements would you like to see made in the park, in order of priority (please note deed restrictions)? _____

8. Currently, most of the park is lawn with well-spaced specimen trees & shrubs, some planted as memorials, while across the creek is less maintained. One option would be a natural area where invasive species are kept in check, and vegetation is otherwise lightly managed. Please indicate your feelings about the following by circling a single response for each.

All of the park should be maintained in lawn with planted specimens.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
--	-------	----------	--------

The park should be a combination of lawn and natural area.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
--	-------	----------	--------

Native plant species should be used as much as possible.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
--	-------	----------	--------

The priority should be interesting plant specimens, regardless of whether native.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
---	-------	----------	--------

Labeling plant species' names is important.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
---	-------	----------	--------

Footbridges should be built across the creek in addition to the stepping stones & stone bridge.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
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It is important to preserve the creek stepping stones.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
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9. Additional comments: _____

If you would like to be kept up to date on the master planning process via email, please print your name and email address clearly: _____

Once completed, please fax to (610) 645-4777 or return to Township of Lower Merion Department of Parks & Recreation, 75 E. Lancaster Ave., Ardmore, PA 19003-2323; Attn: Merion Botanical Park Survey by March __, 2013. As always, should you have any questions or wish to discuss Merion Botanical Park in further detail, please call the Department of Parks and Recreation at (610) 645-6220.

Thank you for your time!

MERION BOTANICAL PARK MASTER PLAN
SURVEY REPORT

Purpose:

The purpose of the survey was to determine the opinions, ideas and concerns of residents that live in the service area of Merion Botanical Park to serve as a foundation for decision-making regarding the park. By understanding resident's needs and interests, the Township will be better able to direct resources for the benefit of the community.

Process:

Township staff and members of the Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Study Committee prepared a survey to be mailed to residents that live within a ¼ mile radius of the park. The survey was open-ended in order to secure as much information from residents as possible. Surveys were distributed to residents using the U.S. Postal Service's "Every Door" direct mail program in manila colored envelopes lacking the Township's return address. This could have impacted the responses received. Should this service be used again in the future, greater emphasis will be placed on designing an envelope that will identify the mailing as coming from the Township. Surveys were mailed to 1,573 residences in a ¼ mile radius. 149 responses were received for a return rate of nine percent. Typically, direct mail surveys generate a return rate of two to four percent.

Return:

Survey respondents lived on all streets within the park's service area, which essentially is bordered by Bowman Ave. to the west, Montgomery Ave. to the north, City Ave. to the east and E. Wynnewood Rd. to the south. The Amtrak/ Septa track that immediately border the park cut the park off physically, but residents from south of the tracks appear to regularly use the park.

4. Children

Forty-one percent (41%) of the homes responding have children between the ages of less than one year old up to twenty. Ages were spread out among respondents.

5. Park Visitation

Of the 149 responses, eighty (54%) said that they visited the park daily or weekly. Fifty-four respondents (36%) visited the park monthly or sporadically, while fifteen (10%) said they rarely or never visit the park.

6. Other Parks

Fifty-two respondents (35%) visit other parks, including Township, non-Township, County, State and Federal parks, colleges and arboretums. The majority of other parks visited were Township parks, however, the most frequently listed park was Fairmount Park in the City of Philadelphia. Other frequently identified parks included Narberth Park, the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, Shortridge Memorial Park and General Wayne Park. The parks included a variety of active parks with playgrounds and athletic facilities and passive, natural areas with trails, but the more frequently visited parks were in generally two categories:

- Close to Merion Botanical Park
- Offered walking trails and open space

Merion Botanical Park does not have active recreational facilities and while it is a natural open space with a perimeter trail, it is not very long.

Summary of Findings:

The survey confirms that Merion Botanical Park is an important part of the surrounding neighborhood and it provides clear direction on how to manage and enhance the park to meet the recreational needs and interests of residents. The major survey findings follow:

1. Recreational Pursuits

The two most popular recreational activities cited by respondents were:

- Walking / walking with their dog
- Enjoying the park's open space, beauty and serenity

2. Park Positives

When asked what they liked about Merion, the five most popular answers were:

- Open space, peacefulness and natural beauty
- Plantings, trees
- Creek, stepping stones
- Trail
- Well-maintained

3. Improvements

When asked what they would like to see improved in the park, the five most popular answers were:

- More trees and shrubs
- Better upkeep of plants

- Better care of the other side of the creek, including screening the tracks and adding paths
- Care of the stream, including repairing the stepping stones
- Address muddy conditions

4. *Amenities at other parks*

When asked what attracts respondents to other parks in the area, the five most popular answers were:

- Playgrounds
- Walking / hiking paths
- Athletic fields
- Natural surroundings, beauty
- Plants, trees

5. *Suggested Improvements*

When asked about what they would like to see improved in the park, the five most popular answers were:

- Better care of trees
- More plants shrubs and trees
- Nothing
- Provide more benches, picnic tables
- Improve the other side of the creek, including screening the tracks and adding trails

6. *Themes*

When asked what improvements should focus on, respondents provided the following direction:

- Seventy-two respondents (48%) disagreed that the parks should be maintained in lawn with planted specimens, but forty-four (30%) agreed.
- One hundred twenty-three respondents (83%) agreed that the park should be a combination of lawn and natural area.
- One hundred five respondents (70%) agreed that native plant species should be used as much as possible.
- Fifty-seven respondents (38%) agree that the priority should be on plant specimens, regardless of whether or not they are native, but thirty-two (21%) disagreed and forty-nine (33%) were unsure.
- One hundred fourteen respondents (77%) agreed that labeling plant species names is important.
- One hundred twenty-nine respondents (87%) agreed that it is important to preserve the creek's stepping stones.

Agenda

**Merion Botanical Park Master Plan
Study Committee Meeting #1
February 6, 2013
8:30 – 10:00 a.m.
Board Room**

Please Bring:

- Community wants, needs & wishes for Merion Botanical Park
- Availability for future meetings

Agenda Topics		
1.	Welcome and Introductions	
2.	Master plan overview	
3.	Discussion of project scope, timeline and budget	
4.	Determine project vision, goals and purpose	
5.	Determine applicable studies, maps, plans, By-Laws, etc.	
6.	Review survey	
7.	Future meeting dates and times, including Public meeting #1	

#	Action Items	Responsible Party	Due Date	Status
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Study Committee Meeting #1

DATE: February 6, 2013

LOCATION: Board Room

ATTENDEES: Scott Zelov, Board of Commissioners, P&R Committee Chair
Brian Gordon, Board of Commissioners, Ward 12 Commissioner
Lindsay Taylor, Director, Parks & Recreation
Dave DeAngelis, Parks Supervisor
Donna Heller, Recreation Supervisor
Patty Thompson, Executive Director, Lower Merion Conservancy
Patrick Gardner, Lower Merion Conservancy
Kate Galer, President, LMT Environmental Advisory Council
Scott Feuer, Merion Civic Association
Jeff Cepull, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Brenda Casper, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Orsolya Lazar, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
David Richards, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Diana Mancini, Office of the Township Engineer

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the first Study Committee Meeting held at 8:30 am in the Lower Merion Township Board Room.

An agenda, list of study committee invitees, Master Plan project scope outline, project calendar, and draft of the survey was distributed to all attendees.

1. Lindsay Taylor, Commissioner Scott Zelov, and Commissioner Brian Gordon each gave a brief welcome and introduction.
2. Lindsay gave an overview of the master planning process. Per the attached Master Plan Project Scope outline, the process includes:
 - A. Collection of background information and data
 - B. Review of current plans and reports related to the park (and deed restrictions)
 - C. Summary of the public participation process
 - D. Collection of site information and site analysis
 - E. Activities and facilities analysis
 - F. Design considerations
 - G. Design process
 - H. Design cost estimate

I. Maintenance and operating costs.

3. Lindsay noted that Merion Botanical Park is currently a passive park with a great history. The Township wants to work closely with the Botanical Society of Lower Merion to make sure the mission of the Society is represented in the Master Plan.
4. Discussion of Project Scope, Timeline, and Budget
The Project Calendar, attached, includes the following milestones:
 - Second Study Committee Meeting and First Public Meeting in April
 - Site Analysis and Public Participation Input Evaluation from April to July
 - Third Study Committee Meeting in July
 - Development of Alternative Designs from July to August
 - Fourth Study Committee Meeting in August
 - Development of Draft Master Plan in September
 - Second Public Meeting in September
 - Development of Final Master Plan in October
 - Fifth Study Committee Meeting, Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, and Public Meeting #3 in November.
5. A survey is being developed to be mailed to residents within a ¼ mile radius of the Park, plus members of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion. Lindsay asked that all Study Committee members review the survey and provide comments. The survey will be mailed shortly, and also posted on the Township's website.
6. Study Committee members shared some thoughts on the Park:
 - a. The MBS is currently tagging the trees with aluminum tags with identification numbers. Most of the trees in the park have been identified and mapped. Name plates may follow later.
 - b. Perhaps signage can be installed in the Park notifying residents and users about the Master Plan and public meetings, directing them to the website for more information.
 - c. The Lower Merion Conservancy has stream data and bird data.
 - d. There is an existing cliff near the railroad tracks that is very dangerous. Someone created a gravel path to the cliff that should be removed or blocked in some way.
7. A site visit will be scheduled to tour the Park as a group.
8. Lindsay will send out an email with the date of the next Study Committee Meeting.

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan
SUBJECT: Study Committee Site Walk
DATE: March 11, 2013
LOCATION: Merion Botanical Park

Some members of the Study Committee met at the Merion Botanical Park for a group tour. The following items were noted while walking through the Park:

1. There are several wet spots in the lawn areas that do not drain well after a rain.
2. The west side of the stream has typically been left in a more natural state than the rest of the park. It serves as an animal habitat.
3. The Park has always been a passive botanical garden. Most would like to see the use of the park remain passive.
4. There are two rock stepping stone crossings across the stream. One is in disrepair, the other is usable but has erosion problems on the banks leading up to the crossing. There was a long discussion about the whether to keep the crossings as they are, improve them, or remove them. Advocates of keeping and repairing the crossing cited the history and uniqueness of the structures. Advocates of removing the crossings cited the safety concerns as well as the negative effects to fish from damming the stream.
5. The stream at the north end of the site is a good example of what a good stream bank should look like.
6. Some noted that often there is sewer smell coming from the area under the train station driveway bridge. It was not smelly during the site walk. The Township was aware of the issue.
Post meeting note: Lower Merion Township Public Works investigated the sewer odor and found no evidence of a sewer line break or overflow.
7. At the confluence of the small tributary coming from under the railroad tracks and the main stream, there is a significant amount of bank erosion. This sooner this is stabilized the better.
8. There is an unofficial trail to the rock cliff over the railroad tracks. Many agreed that the access to the dangerous cliff should be eliminated.
9. There was discussion on whether the railroad tracks should be screened from view with evergreen trees.
10. The major focus of the Park is the stream and the plantings.
11. Further discussion about the rock stepping stone crossings followed. There was an idea to remove the stepping stones from the stream and place them in the grass (as a faux crossing). Some liked the idea of natural, passive play like this.

Agenda		Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Study Committee Meeting #2 April 24, 2013 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Board Room	
Please Bring:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community wants, needs & wishes for Merion Botanical Park 	
	Agenda Topics		
1.	Welcome		
2.	Progress Report		
3.	Preliminary Survey Responses		
4.	April 30, 2013 Public Workshop		
5.	Next steps		
6.			
7.			

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Study Committee Meeting #2

DATE: April 24, 2013

LOCATION: Board Room

ATTENDEES: Patricia Ryan, Assistant Township Manager
Lindsay Taylor, Director, Parks & Recreation
Dave DeAngelis, Parks Supervisor
Donna Heller, Recreation Supervisor
Patrick Gardner, Lower Merion Conservancy
Kate Galer, President, LMT Environmental Advisory Council
Jeff Cepull, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Brenda Casper, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Orsolya Lazar, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Edward P. Pluciennik, PE, Township Engineer
Diana Mancini, Office of the Township Engineer

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the second Study Committee Meeting held at 8:30 am in the Lower Merion Township Board Room.

1. Lindsay Taylor said there has been a great return rate on the surveys that were mailed. They are in the process of compiling and sorting the information received.
2. Public Meeting #1 will be held at the Merion Tribute House on Tuesday, April 30. Diana Mancini will prepare a plan from GIS data that can be used in the group input portion of the Public Meeting.
3. Edward Pluciennik gave an update on the Highland and Idris Roads Drainage Project. This project is directly across the railroad tracks from the Merion Botanical Park. Ed explained that the project was being done to alleviate drainage and flooding issues on Highland and Idris Roads. As a result, additional storm water will be collected by the existing storm sewer pipe that goes under the tracks, which outfalls into a swale then into the stream in the Park. Either as part of this project or as a separate project, some improvements will be done at the stream at the point where the swale enters the stream. Improvements proposed include a short area of bank stabilization where the bank is currently severely eroded and rock vanes and cross vanes in the stream to direct stream flow away from the banks.

The Study Committee had the following questions and comments:

Q: Will the erosion continue to happen? A: No, not where the bank is stabilized.

Q: What will the rocks look like? (Some members of the BSLM commented that they did not like the look of the rocks used in Shortridge Park. The rocks were too square and light in color.) A:

The squarish rocks are used because they fit together better, creating a more solid bank and preventing loss of material from between the rocks. The BSLM can be included in the selection of the rock size and color when the time comes.

Q: Would it help to add wetlands on the west side (the natural side) of the stream? A: No, as the bank erosion occurs during the high flows of heavy storms.

Q: Can the BSLM be involved in the plant selection? A: Yes, Diana will meet with the BSLM to discuss the new plantings.

Q: Must the work be done now, or can it wait until after the Master Plan work is complete? A: The proposed improvements at the outfall should be done when the Highland & Idris Road Project is done. The remaining stream bank restoration can be done later.

Q: Can some of the rocks remain in the stream bed? A: The rocks that are there naturally (the roundish rocks) can remain if they do not affect the desired stream flow. The brown, angular rocks were part of an older stream bank stabilization project, and will be reused if possible in the new stream bank rock wall.

Q: Can we have any extra rocks for use elsewhere in the park? A: Yes.

4. Lindsay gave a summary of the recurring themes noted in the survey so far:

- More specimen plants.
- Keep up with maintenance of the trees. Remove dead trees, prune, and replace dead trees.
- Stabilize the stream bank.
- Keep the stepping stones.
- Keep/enhance the natural area on the west side of the stream.
- School in the area want to use the Park for gym class at recess.
- Park is used for wedding photos.

5. The Public Meeting will follow the prepared agenda.

6. Brenda Casper recently visited the Morris Arboretum and wanted to share some thoughts that may be helpful for the Merion Botanical Park:

- how to build a volunteer base
- long term planning
- developments of small natural areas (like what they want on the west side of the stream) where they let go native, leave fallen trees, etc, but removed invasive plants
- educational opportunities

7. The future of the ash trees in the Park was discussed. The Emerald Ash Borer is slowly making its way across the county and will inevitably affect all ashes in our area. One school of thought is to treat the trees now for the best defense. This should be discussed with Cliff Van Yahres.

8. The BSLM applied for a grant from Toyota for training park volunteers.

Agenda		Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Public Workshop #1 Tuesday, April 30, 2013 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. <i>Merion Tribute House</i>	
Please Bring:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community wants, needs & wishes for Merion Botanical Park 	
Agenda Topics			
1.	Welcome – 5 minutes	Commissioners Brian Gordon & Scott Zelov	
2.	Introductions – 5 minutes	Lindsay Taylor	
3.	Background- The master planning process / Status report 20 minutes	Lindsay Taylor, LMT; with representatives from: Lower Merion Conservancy, Pennoni Associates, Botanical Society of Lower Merion	
4.	Workshop/ Group input – 25 minutes	Small groups	
5.	Group summaries / Sharing ideas / Open discussion – 20 minutes	Group	
6.	What's next and questions? – 10 minutes	Lindsay Taylor	
7.			

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Public Workshop #1

DATE: April 30, 2013

LOCATION: Merion Tribute House, Merion, PA

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the first Public Workshop Meeting held at 7:00 pm at the Merion Tribute House.

1. Commissioner Scott Zelov gave a brief welcome.
2. Lindsay Taylor introduced the attending members of the Study Committee.
3. Brenda Casper (Botanical Society of Lower Merion) shared her ideas about botany education in the park—putting signs on trees with a link to a website that would give more information. Lindsay emphasized that the goal of a “botanical garden” was the focus on education. Patrick Gardener (Lower Merion Conservancy) noted that the Conservancy already has educational programs in the parks, and can work with the BSLM to coordinate the efforts in the Park.
4. Lindsay explained the Master Planning process and the purpose and importance of the Public Workshop. Diana Mancini (Office of the Township Engineer) briefly outlined how the Master Plan document would be developed.
5. The attendees were asked to work as a group at each table where they were seated. They were provided a plan of the Merion Botanical Park for reference, and given a list of questions to discuss and respond to. The groups’ written responses are attached.
6. Lindsay asked a representative from each table to give a brief summary of what they felt were the most important issues. The following is a summary of the comments:
Table 1: More plantings are desired. It is very bare. Keep the back of the park in its natural state.
Keep the rock stepping stones stream crossings. Repair and maintain them.
Like the quiet aspect of the park.
Can there be seating areas in the park? Maybe in a quiet corner of the park.

Table 2: The stream and the stepping stones are the most important elements in the park.
 Like the unstructured play—kids playing on the grass, using imagination.
 Like the quiet, the color, the plant selection, and the animal habitat.
 Important to tag and label trees.
 Need more plants, and a way (signs) to know what is planted in the park.

Table 3: Love the stepping stones, the open areas, and kids climbing on trees.
 Love the stone walls along the stream. Hate the gabion walls (along the stream bank)
 Like the gravel path, do not want a paved asphalt path.
 Like walking in the park. Add a path on the west side of the park (natural area)
 Undecided on lighting in the park, after much discussion.
 Add interpretive signage, note the historical background of the park.
 Screen the railroad tracks, especially in the winter.
 Consider a dog park on the west side of the park.

7. The next Public meeting will be in the fall, where the Conceptual Master Plan Alternatives will be presented.

Attendees (from sign-in sheets):

1	Norah Goldfine
2	SCOTT KALWER
3	Brenda Casper
4	Barbara Schick
5	Katy Ruckdeschel
6	SCOTT FEUER
7	Cheryl Allison
8	Gail Granoff
9	Bill Hanafee
10	CORINNE CACAS
11	Lyndee Russell Mischel
12	Carl M. Watson
13	Orsolya Lerner

14	JEFF CEMILL
15	Karen Nakahara
16	Karen Dunleavy
17	Larry Jonas 41
18	BERRY BEEMAN
19	George Penn
20	Mark Shaw, 152
21	DORIS BROWN
22	Muffy Givens

Agenda	Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Study Committee Meeting November 8, 2013 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Lower Merion Township Building, Caucus Room	
Please Bring:		
	Agenda Topics	
1.	Review process to date	Taylor
2.	Review Existing Conditions, Site Inventory and Analysis	Mancini
3.	Review public participation process, community input and suggestions	Group
4.	Discussion of options and potential design alternatives	Group
5.	Process going forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of alternative designs • Draft master plan • Cost estimates • Maintenance and operating costs 	Group
6.	Confirm public workshop #2 agenda	Group

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Study Committee Meeting #3

DATE: November 8, 2013

LOCATION: Board Room

ATTENDEES: Scott Zelov, Board of Commissioners, P&R Committee Chair
Lindsay Taylor, Director, Parks & Recreation
Dave DeAngelis, Parks Supervisor
Donna Heller, Recreation Supervisor
Patty Thompson, Executive Director, Lower Merion Conservancy
Kate Galer, President, LMT Environmental Advisory Council
Jeff Cepull, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Brenda Casper, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Orsolya Lazar, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Diana Mancini, Office of the Township Engineer

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the third Study Committee Meeting held at 8:30 am in the Lower Merion Township Caucus Room.

(pre meeting: Lindsay gave Diana a copy of the original 1944 plans for the design of the park. Diana will make copies and include the plan in the Master Plan Report.)

1. Lindsay gave an overview of the information gathered to date:
 - Review of all LMT documents and plan: A summary report (attached) of Merion Botanical Park fits into the 2012 Lower Merion Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Plan, the 2012 ADA Title II Compliance Audit, the 1996 Natural Areas Stewardship Study, the 2004 Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan Update, and the 2003 Bicycle & Pedestrian Network Plan.
 - The survey results have been logged. Lindsay prepared a Survey Report summarizing the results of the survey. The Survey Report and the raw data of the survey responses are attached also.
2. Diana reviewed the status of the Existing Conditions Plan. The plan includes all of the information that the DCNR requires for future grant application submissions.

Diana pointed out that the western property line of the park bisects the natural area. The land west of the property line is owned by Amtrak. Lindsay said that the land used by the park is under a lease agreement. Lindsay will find that lease agreement so we can verify that proposed improvements are within the terms of the lease, and that they would not be vulnerable in the future.

3. Diana reviewed the Site Inventory and Analysis Plan.
 - Regarding the proposed “bicycle lane” on Merion Road, Brenda asked if a painted bicycle lane would mean that the parking lane would be eliminated. Some said that removing of the parking on Merion may be a good thing since the road is too narrow for cars to pass where cars are parked. Diana will review the Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan to see if it had any additional details about the bike lane.
 - All other items listed on the Plan were consistent with the views of the Study Committee.

4. Lindsay summarized the findings from the mailed survey. The return rates on the survey was 9%, which is considered very good (2% to 4% is average). There was a slight difference in the responses from the different neighborhoods, but generally the themes were the same, and reflective of what we have already discussed.

5. Lindsay asked if anybody knows of any other documents that would benefit the Master Plan. Patty noted that the LMC has Stream and Bird data. She will send the data to Lindsay. Dave said that the stream data would be good to share, as some people believe the stream is ‘polluted’.

6. Diana reviewed the outline of items that will be included on the Preliminary Master Plan. Lindsay noted that the purpose of this exercise is for the Study Committee to agree on what items are to be in the Master Plan. The following items were reviewed:
 - Preservation of Open Green Space. Emphasis on park as a Botanical Garden.
 - Stream. Improvements will include stream bank stabilization, replacing the gabions with natural stone walls, removing the invasive species in the riparian buffers, and working with the LMC and EAC for educational and improvement programs.

Brenda noted that during the Labor Day storm, stream flow backed up at the bridge and the paths flooded. The water was about an inch away from overtopping the bridge. Diana said that in the design for the stream stabilization project, areas for floodwater to pool and slow can be included.
 - Stepping Stones. Keep both sets of stepping stones. Fix the erosion on both sides of the stones, and redesign the stones so they are lower and wider—to allow water to flow over when necessary (no damming). Morris Arboretum has an example of stepping stones across their stream.

The liability issues of the stepping stones must be reviewed by the Township Solicitor. The stepping stones may be okay in a natural setting.

The current stones do dam a little bit of water, which the ducks seem to enjoy. Perhaps the new design could include a little pool of water, but not impede the stream flow.
 - Drainage Improvements. To address the low, wet spots in the lawn and to prevent future washouts of the aggregate trail. Four new rain gardens are proposed adjacent to the trail, in existing wet areas. New inlets will be installed in the rain garden areas that do not have them.
 - Tree and Vegetation Management.

Maintenance. A long term Maintenance Plan will be developed together by the Township and the BSLM to map out procedures.

 - Removal of dead and dying trees, and removal of trees where required to prevent future problems (crowding),

- Selective pruning to prolong life of existing trees
- Removal of invasive and unwanted plant species
- Preventative maintenance (treating to reduce future infestations)
- Shrub bed maintenance.
- Leaf pick up and composting

Future Plantings.

- Work with the BSLM to develop a phased long-term Master Planting Plan for all future plantings.
 - Select plants indigenous to Pennsylvania or to use for educational purposes.
 - Plant shrubs in easily maintainable beds.
 - Screen railroad tracks. This should be done not with rows of conifers, but with a mix of native broad leaf evergreens in select locations.
 - Inventory, tag and label trees. Brenda spoke about a contact at the US Forest Service, Lara Roman, who uses a system called I-Tree that links a QR code on the tree to tree information on the USFS website. More information to follow.
- Natural Area. Keep the natural area as a “lightly managed” area—leave fallen trees and leaves, remove invasive species, keep paths natural. Brenda mentioned another contact, Sara Low, at the USFS who may want to use the park’s natural area as a model for restoration and stewardship. She noted that there is a process for successfully removing invasive plants. A meeting has been scheduled with Sara on Friday, November 22 at 9:30 am at the park—all are welcome.

The natural area seems to have little deer traffic, which may make it a good place to establish an understory/wildflower area. Bowman’s Hill Wildflower Preserve is a good example. Lindsay will be updating the Natural Areas Plan in 2014, and will include the new information.

The trail to the rock outcropping (and dangerous cliff) should be removed. The trail to the caternary pole should also be removed.

- Paths and ADA Compliance. The paths in the park will remain aggregate trails. Several options/products were discussed that may help to make the paths firmer (for wheelchair accessibility) and to help deter washouts. Dave noted a product called GravelPave that, like grass pavers, holds the gravel in place. Brenda mentioned a similar product that looked more like waffles. Dave said the material used in Linwood Park is a good material that has held up well—it is a finer stone dust that was compacted with a vibratory roller. For the Master Plan, we will propose repair and leveling of the paths, making the paths ADA compliant, and removing the grass growing in the paths.

Jeff asked about the maintenance vehicles that must enter the park. A defined place should be provided that they can use to park and turn around. Driving on the grass and/or over tree roots should be avoided.

There should be easy ways to access the stream—a low flat area.

- Bridge. The existing bridge is in good shape. Since both sets of stepping stones will remain, a second footbridge will not be proposed.
- Site Furniture.
 - Benches. The park has 11 benches now.
 - Gazebo. A gazebo was proposed on the 1944 plan, and also recommended in the Comprehensive Plan for most parks. A gazebo will be proposed on the Master Plan that will offer additional seating, shade, and a place for wedding photos, etc.
 - Trash Cans. Move trash cans to the perimeter of the park, so maintenance vehicles will not have to enter the park to empty.

- Recycling containers. Currently, the Township does not have the vehicles or staff to collect recycling. Lindsay is looking into the feasibility of instituting recycling in the parks in the future.
- A drinking fountain is scheduled to be installed in the park in the near future, on the right side of the main trail.
- A 'natural play' area should be included. Like the idea of low, flat rocks. Also consider grass mazes or human sundials as seen in other parks. Kids play area should include an easy place to access the stream.
- There is a concrete pad in the natural area (near the bridge) that maybe was once a barn. This would be a good spot for informal gathering/educational space. This area can be cleaned up and a few benches added.

Agenda		Merion Botanical Park Master Plan Public Workshop #2 Monday, November 18, 2013 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. <i>Merion Tribute House</i>	
Please Bring:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas for Merion Botanical Park! 	
		Agenda Topics	
1.	Welcome	Commissioners Brian Gordon & Scott Zelov	
2.	Review planning process to date	Lindsay Taylor	
3.	Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of park • Existing conditions • Emerging themes • Design options 	Diana Mancini (Pennoni Associates)	
4.	Group input / Open discussion	Group	
5.	Next steps?	Lindsay Taylor	
6.			

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Public Workshop #2

DATE: November 18, 2013

LOCATION: Merion Tribute House, Merion, PA

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the second Public Workshop Meeting held at 7:00 pm at Merion Tribute House. Attendance sheet is attached.

1. Commissioners Brian Gordon and Scott Zelov welcomed the attendees.
2. Lindsay reviewed the planning process to date and the general results of the mailed surveys.
3. Diana gave a powerpoint presentation for the Preliminary Master Plan, which included:
 - a. Overview of the Park
 - b. Summary of background information and data pertaining to Merion Botanical Park:
 - Township Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan Update (2012)
 - Township Open Space Plan
 - Township Wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Feasibility Study (2004)
 - ADA Title II Compliance Audit
 - Lower Merion Environmental Action Plan
 - c. Existing Conditions / Park Assets:
 - Existing open green space & beautiful passive quiet setting
 - Botanical plant collection
 - The stream
 - The natural area
 - Unique features: the stone arch bridge, curved stone culvert, stepping stones.
 - Walking paths
 - Site furniture & Signage
 - Memorials and dedication plaques
 - Seasonal color
 - d. Site Inventory and Analysis / Park Challenges:
 - Poor drainage
 - Stream bank erosion
 - Stepping stones in disrepair
 - Dangerous rock outcropping
 - Aging shrub beds
 - Invasive plant species

e. Opportunities and Recommendations:

General:

- Continue the Vision of the Botanical Society of Lower Merion for a Botanical Park
- Tree and Vegetation Management
 - Develop a long term maintenance plan
 - Remove dead and dying trees
 - Selective pruning to prolong life of existing trees
 - Remove invasive and unwanted plant species
 - IPM program to protect against future outbreaks.
 - Develop a long term master planting plan to direct future plantings.
 - Inventory trees and use QR codes to link to website

Lawn Area:

- Preservation of Open Green Space.
- Tree and Vegetation Management
 - Specimen tree planting
 - Maintain the lawn
 - Plant shrubs in easily maintainable beds
 - Install rain gardens and butterfly gardens
- Eliminate Wet areas and Improve Storm Drainage
 - Install rain gardens
 - Inspect and repair existing drainage system
- Improve Paths
 - Repair damaged and washed out sections.
 - Treat surface of path to make ADA compliant
 - Redesign the access road to allow for maintenance vehicles to turn around without driving on the lawn.
- Install Gazebo
 - For shade and additional seating
 - Good for photo ops and other events.
 - In original 1945 plan for the park.
- Move Trash Cans to Park Entrances
- Install Drinking Fountain
- Install Natural Play Areas
 - For unstructured play
 - Grass mazes, human sundials, child friendly sculptures

Stream and Stream Bank:

- Continue Stream Stabilization Projects
 - Stabilize eroded banks
 - Identify areas for natural flood plains
 - Replace gabions with natural stone
- Remove Invasive and Unwanted Plant Species
- Establish Areas for Stream Access

- Repair / Redesign both sets of Stepping Stones
 - Investigate lower, safer design
 - Design should not affect stream flow or animal habitat
 - Repair erosion on banks for safe access to stones

Natural Area:

- Creation of a Natural Forest
 - Native plantings, leave fallen trees, etc
 - MBS to work with US Forest Service
 - Remove invasive and non native species
- Improve the Walking Path
- Create an Outdoor Learning Area
 - Using old house foundation/pad
- Install Bird and Bat Houses
- Manage Views
 - Screen unwanted views with plant material
- Eliminate Access to Hazards
 - To rock outcropping (cliff and wires) and to Amtrack catenary poles.

General:

- Improve Entrance Signs
- Provide New Interpretive Signs
 - Stabilize eroded banks
 - Identify areas for natural flood plains
 - Replace gabions with natural stone

The Existing Conditions Plan, Site Inventory and Analysis, and the Preliminary Master Plans were also displayed on easels for viewing.

4. After the presentation, the floor was opened for comments:

- Are the trees going to be maintained?

The need for a long-term maintenance plan is a recommendation in the Master Plan.

- Is the stream healthy?

The signs saying that the stream is polluted (from the 1970s) have been taken down. Patrick said the stream is healthy enough that it is safe for children. It is checked once a week.

The stream has a wide range of wildlife, including ducks, salamanders, and fish. The LMC will be doing a 'macro collection' in the future.

- Can maintenance vehicles park in the street?

Lindsay said in some cases it is not safe to unload mowers from trailers in the street.

The suggestion of putting a vehicle turn around in the park was not well received. Would prefer a lay by on Merion Road. Keep maintenance vehicles out of park and away from large trees.

Brenda noted that Amtrak does drive into the park and crosses the bridge to get to the railroad. She expressed doubt that maintenance vehicles can be kept out of the park.

- The Post Office property is not being maintained. Is there something we can do?

Lindsay noted that it is not park property, so there is nothing the maintenance crews can do.

- Can the stepping stones stay?

Generally, the consensus was to keep the stepping stones the way they are. Alternative designs presented did not look the same. Lindsay noted the issues with the existing stepping stones: liability, safety, damming of the stream, etc. Brenda said that the last repair to the stones was done in the 1970s.

- Organized sports are starting to use the park. For example, the Mount Airy Church brings people in vans to play football on the lawn.

Lindsay noted that there was a fine line between what is considered an ‘organized sport’ and a ‘pick-up game’. Lindsay will check the code for the exact number of people playing before needing a permit. The Township will not issue permits for that type of use in this park.

A resident said that the park used to have more signs saying what is okay to do in the park and what is prohibited. Maybe this would help.

- For interpretive signage, can we include something about what a “botanical park” is? Or what the MSB wants the park to be?

Dave noted that the standards for maintaining a ‘botanical park’ is very difficult and may be very different than what is being provided.

- Can there be more seating areas?

Orsi said that with plantings they can easily make quiet seating areas.

- Where will the rain gardens be located?

Diana explained that the rain gardens would work in conjunction with the storm drainage system, and would generally be located in the low, wet areas around yard drains.

- Does the park have to have only native plant species? What about more color?

Brenda said that only the natural area will be restored as a natural forest, using all native trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers. The lawn area has many non-native specimen plantings. Currently, there is no plan to make the whole park native.

5. Based upon the comments above, the Master Plan will be revised and a Final Master Plan Report will be prepared. The Final Master Plan will be presented at the final public meeting (date to be determined).

6. Lindsay concluded by saying that anyone with additional comments can email them directly to her.

Attendees (from sign-in sheet):

1	PATRICK GARDNER
2	David DeAngelis
3	ALEXIA SOTIRCHOS
4	Ann LaBorie
5	Tim LaBorie
6	Orsolya Lazar
7	NORAH GOLDFINE
8	Janet Meyer
9	Rich Widmann
10	MICHAEL & ROSALIND SEIDEN
11	Scott Kolner
12	Leslie Greenbox
13	William Gross
14	GEORGE BUKHANN
15	HEP CEPULL

16	Brenda (Apple)
17	Scott Zelov
18	BRIAN Gordon
19	RICHARDS DAVID
20	GEORGE ROSS
21	LIME MAYMOND

MEETING MEMORANDUM

PROJECT: Merion Botanical Park Master Plan

SUBJECT: Study Committee Meeting #4

DATE: July 1, 2014

LOCATION: Lower Merion Township Building, room 216

ATTENDEES: Scott Zelow, Board of Commissioners, P&R Committee Chair
Brian Gordon, Board of Commissioners, Ward 12 Commissioner
Lindsay Taylor, Director, Parks & Recreation
Dave DeAngelis, Parks Supervisor
Patrick Gardner, Lower Merion Conservancy
Scott Feuer, Merion Civic Association
Jeff Cepull, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Brenda Casper, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Orsolya Lazar, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
David Richards, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Lawrence Fine, Botanical Society of Lower Merion
Diana Mancini, Office of the Township Engineer

The following is a summary of the items discussed at the fourth Study Committee Meeting held at 8:30 am at the Township Building.

The purpose of this meeting is to review the draft of the Final Master Plan Report, before presentation to the Board of Commissioners at the final public meeting. The members of the Steering Committee were emailed the draft of the Final Master Plan Report prior to the meeting.

1. The Botanical Society of Lower Merion (BSLM) requested additional time to review the Draft and discuss with their members.
2. Diana reviewed the recommendation outlined in the report. The following comments and suggestions were provided:
 - a. The general recommendations and the recommendations listed for the lawn area were reviewed.
 - b. Diana noted that the vehicle turnaround was removed from the plan based on input at the last public meeting. After discussion, members of the study committee agreed that it is not realistic to expect that no vehicles enter the park. Although the trash receptacles have been moved to the park entrances, allowing the Township to pick up trash without driving through the park, other maintenance vehicles and Amtrak vehicles still must enter the park. Diana will add the recommendation to consider installing some type of vehicle turnaround to accommodate those vehicles, with more discussion on the specifics to follow.
 - c. Diana also noted that the recommendation for the natural play area was removed based upon comments from the last public meeting. The study committee felt that this recommendation did not need to be removed. Commissioner Gordon noted that there are many neighbors with young families that would benefit from some type of unstructured, natural play area. Many people with

young children are not able to attend the evening meetings to provide their input. Brenda Casper said that the Botanical Society is interested in interviewing users of the park, to find out who uses the park, where they are from, etc. They could include questions about a play area to gauge the interest. Diana will add the recommendation to the report.

- d. The gazebo was added as a response to add more seating areas both by the public and in the Comprehensive Parks Plan. There is also a gazebo indicated on the original 1944 plan of the park (although this plan was not followed exactly). The cost of a gazebo depends on several factors, like the size, if it has lighting and electrical service, and how ornate it is.
 - e. The BSLM would like to include the recommendation for new signage at the park entrances, along with landscaping. They asked about other options for sign styles and materials. Several years ago, the Township investigated replacing all of the signs in all 47 parks, but due to the cost it was not a priority. The plan now is to include new signage when a park is getting a capital improvement. The signs will be the wood sign with routed text.
3. The BSLM had a few comments on the prioritization of the recommendations:
- Improving the park entrances (discussed above) should be Priority A.
 - Elevate the educational signage and other signage to Priority A.
 - The natural path improvement should be priority C, to be done after the Natural Forest is complete.
 - Combine the creation of the Natural Forest with the recommendation to manage views, as the plantings should all be done in together as one plan. This new recommendation should be Priority A.

4. The BSLM is in the process of preparing a Restoration and Stewardship Plan. This summer, they would like to begin with the survey of the plant species in the natural area.

Lindsay noted that the Township many years ago did a Natural Land and Stewardship Plan. This plan is not currently available on the Townships website. It did not specifically include Merion Botanical Park, but does have general recommendations for restoring natural areas. Lindsay will provide a copy of the plan.

Brenda said that the natural area has unique features that should be taken into account, such as the linear character, the different edges, and the wet areas that will require specific types of plantings.

5. The BSLM is currently marking their 70th year. They are planning a celebration for their 75th anniversary, details to be announced.
6. The BSLM would like to consider installing a shed for tools. They currently have no location selected. They have a lot of volunteers, and the existing space they are using in the Post Office is very small. Sheds in the past have been vandalized, so a new shed would have to be sturdy.
7. The drinking fountain is going to be installed this week. There is no dog bowl incorporated into the fountain, but it does have a low tap to fill bowls. Along with the fountain, two hose bibs are being installed. One is a replacement of the existing spigot along the trail. The new hose bib is located near the entrance in the shrubs.
8. Along with the prioritization suggestions, the BSLM also included some additional written comments on the report, including more information on the history of the park, fine tuning the details of the recommendations, and comments on the proposed costs of some items. Diana will incorporate those comments into the report.

9. Next Steps:

- Any additional comments that members of the Study Committee have can be emailed to Lindsay.

- After all comments are received and evaluated, Diana will revise the Master Plan Report and plan drawing. A final draft of the Master Plan Report will be distributed to the Study Committee for a final review.
- The final draft will be posted on the website and distributed to the Board of Commissioners in advance of the next meeting.
- The final draft will be presented to the Parks and Recreation Committee. Upon approval of the Final Master Plan Report will be reviewed and adopted by the Board.