

Chapter 7 - Park Maintenance

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The Spring Garden Township Recreation Department is responsible for operating and supervising the public parks, play fields, and all outdoor and indoor recreation areas and facilities owned and controlled by the Township, as well as sponsoring recreation programs for all ages. Park maintenance is performed by the Township Public Works staff.

Good maintenance practices are important for Spring Garden Township public park areas and recreation facilities for five reasons:

1. **Increased Safety for Visitors** – Public safety is an essential concern; proper maintenance of park areas and recreation facilities helps the municipality manage risk by avoiding unnecessary injuries. The Township is less likely to be sued for negligence if staff routinely checks for unsafe conditions and then promptly corrects hazardous situations.
2. **More Facility Use By the Public** – Well-maintained facilities are frequented more often. Residents are only able to enjoy their park visits if facilities and equipment are maintained in useful condition.
3. **Less Vandalism** – Well-maintained facilities are usually less vandalized. Vandalism should be corrected as soon as possible, and proper maintenance procedures allow that to happen.
4. **Citizen Support for Additional Recreation and Park Facilities** – As citizens see the Township properly maintain park areas and recreation facilities, they are more inclined to support expansion of these areas and facilities.
5. **A More Attractive Municipality** – Well-maintained public park areas and recreation facilities help to develop a positive image for the Township, making it a place people want to live and work.

The Public Works Department provides the maintenance needed to provide safe, clean, useable and attractive park and recreation facilities to the public in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Maintenance is typically the single largest recurring expenditure in parks and recreation operations. Over the lifetime of a park, about 75% of its cost can be attributed to maintenance while the remaining 25% is the cost of acquisition, development, design, and construction.

Spring Garden Township owns and maintains six park sites totaling 7.5 acres that are designed to meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhood residents. Because the Township currently lacks any large community parks, the neighborhood parks are utilized in part to serve the community with ball diamonds. The park sites are developed in a similar manner containing a pavilion with restrooms, basketball court, and play equipment.

The Township General Fund is the source of all monies needed to maintain the park areas and recreation facilities. The Recreation Director and the Public Works staff work cooperatively to prepare the annual parks operating and capital improvement requests for the budget process.

Park Maintenance Staffing

Routine park maintenance and minor construction projects are performed by two full-time employees in the Public Works Department who are permanently assigned to this responsibility, a Building and Grounds Maintenance Crew Leader (Parks Foreman) and a Building and Grounds Maintenance Crewperson (Laborer). The Parks Foreman reports directly to the Public Works Supervisor.

While the Public Works Department is directly responsible for park operations and maintenance, the Recreation Director works closely with the Public Works Supervisor and the Parks Foreman on park maintenance issues that arise from recreation programs and park visitor use. From discussions with the Parks Foreman and the Public Works Supervisor, it is evident that they are very experienced individuals who take great pride in their work.

Due to the regular communication and shared concern for the community, schedules are adjusted as needed to provide an excellent experience for park users or program participants. An example of this collaboration is that the Recreation Department doesn't schedule baseball practice on a Friday evening when fields will be used for weekend games. With this minor change the parks maintenance staff can prepare the fields for weekend games without the need for costly overtime on Saturday morning, because of Friday evening practice.

The 12 Public Works Department employees are represented by Teamsters Local No.776. The current contract, which expires at the end of 2017, establishes the terms and conditions of work without adversely affecting the Township's right to manage the work in an effective manner.

In addition to park maintenance, the two full-time parks staff maintain other municipal properties and buildings and prepare School District ball fields for youth ball games. The parks staff receives assistance from other Public Works staff on an as-needed basis. The parks staff routinely provides help for the Township's leaf collection and snow and ice removal. Little routine work is contracted out. Exceptions include the need for specialty trades such as HVAC and electrical or vehicle repairs that cannot be completed by the in-house mechanic. Occasionally work is contracted out if the staff cannot complete tasks on a strict timeline.

There have been no seasonal part-time employees hired in recent years since the Township dedicated a second full-time employee to perform parks maintenance.

Occasionally minor maintenance assistance is provided by Boy Scouts working on Eagle Scout projects, individuals performing community service, and youth volunteers from an area church. The York Little League baseball program lines the ball fields for its use.

The Township has no on-site park staff available to provide customer assistance, minor maintenance or security during late afternoons, evenings, or on weekends.

Staff Certifications and Licenses

The Parks Foreman maintains a Class A Commercial Driver's License. The Parks Foreman is also a Certified Public Pesticide Applicator, which provides the Township with the ability to utilize a variety of chemicals to maintain ball diamonds and general park turf areas, general Township property, and roadsides. Certification as a Public Pesticide Applicator is very important for park maintenance because it is required if pesticides are being applied to the parks, playgrounds, and athletic fields. This certification must be updated every three years.

Park Maintenance Scheduling

The amount and frequency of maintenance needed at each park location is largely dependent on the age of facilities, type of construction, intensity of use, the kind of activities, vandalism, and community expectations.

The Parks Foreman is responsible for a wide variety of maintenance, service, repair, and minor construction functions. Park maintenance tasks are focused on the duties needed to proactively and reactively care for the parks including a variety of recreation facilities and amenities. The Parks Foreman determines how and what tasks need to be performed on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis using his experience, input from his supervisor, and requests for service from park users and residents. Meetings are held by the Public Works Supervisor for all maintenance staff each morning to review the work assignments for the day. Due to the varied skills and resources in Public Works, the park maintenance program is performed by Department employees with only large capital projects being contracted out.

The Parks Foreman, using his extensive knowledge with the help of his years' worth of maintenance records, prepares weekly work schedules year round. These schedules are modified as needed to accommodate requests for service received by the administration office and the needs of the recreation programs.

The Public Works Department daily work sheets provide basic information about where each employee has worked that day, the tasks performed, and amount of time worked.

The Mt. Rose Avenue Property is used as a yard waste recycling area. Yard waste that is dumped by residents or collected by the Public Works Department is periodically chipped up with the Township's tub grinder and then made available to residents who load and haul the material themselves.

Maintenance Equipment and Vehicles

All equipment and vehicles needed to maintain the park areas and recreation facilities belong to and are maintained by the Public Works Department. A five-year capital equipment replacement plan is in place that is adjusted as the need arises. This plan is reviewed annually when it is time to formally request vehicle and equipment replacement purchases for the new budget year. The Township has demonstrated the commitment to maintain its vehicles and equipment to provide the level of service needed.

The responsibility and expense to purchase and maintain equipment rests solely with the Public Works Department. There is no expenditure charged to the Recreation Department budget for this purpose.

Safety and Security Efforts

Park areas and recreation facilities need a variety of safety and security measures to protect park visitors and the resources themselves.

The park playground equipment is not annually inspected by a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI). No Recreation Department or Public Works Department staff hold CPSI certification.

Currently the Parks Foreman and Laborer perform informal inspections of park areas when they visit a site to perform maintenance. The Township's Safety Committee annually performs park site inspections and provides its comments and recommendations to the Public Works Department. The Recreation Director is a member of the Safety Committee.

The Spring Garden Township Police Department provides patrol service for the community, responds to calls and follows up on reported incidents of vandalism at park sites. Vandalism in the parks is characterized by the parks staff as being cyclical and minor in nature, including such issues as damage to equipment and graffiti. The incidents are reported to the Township Police Department who investigates. An estimated or actual cost of repairs is supplied to the Police by the Parks Foreman for their records.

Dusk-to-dawn lighting is typically provided under pavilions and on the outside wall of ball field sheds. None of the parks are gated and there are no security cameras or alarm systems permanently in place at any park location. The Police Department have placed temporary cameras in locations that were experiencing vandalism; these temporary installations have not resulted in any apprehensions.

Rules and regulations for park areas have been adopted by Township ordinance and are posted at all sites.

Park Maintenance Analysis

Strengths

Park maintenance is performed by two full-time employees in the Public Works Department who are permanently assigned to this responsibility. With only six park sites, totaling 7.5 acres, the workload is not overwhelming.

The Public Works Supervisor, Parks Foreman and Recreation Director enjoy an excellent working relationship.

Challenges

The percentage of time spent for scheduled park maintenance tasks versus reacting to unforeseen needs cannot be easily determined because there is no maintenance tracking system. Because the

daily work sheet information is not computerized, easily manually compiled, or specific enough, it currently provides little help with future maintenance planning or decision-making.

The Public Works staff provide a limited amount of maintenance at the 60-acre Mt. Rose Avenue Property which now consists of mowing near adjacent properties and keeping access areas through the site passible. The future projected development of this site will have large maintenance and budget implications driven by the types and size of facilities developed on the site.

Currently there is no written maintenance plan that describes the Township's expectations and timing for maintenance.

There is no a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) on the staff, which means that the playground equipment is not inspected on a regular basis to ensure it meets Consumer Product Safety Commission safety standards for public playgrounds.

The grass is cut and trash is picked up, but overall, the condition of the parks is below average. Items such as basketball court striping, landscaping around park signs, even the park signs themselves, give the appearance of below average maintenance and lack of care for the park system.

Opportunities

While the current park maintenance scheduling system is working, a formal maintenance plan would provide a variety of additional benefits and information about the park system that become more important as resources are stretched, facilities increase, or staff transitions occur.

A written maintenance plan will benefit the Township with work scheduling; making sure that everyone's expectations for maintenance are on the same page; and assisting with planning and future staff changes that will occur.

For the most cost-effective and efficient way to inspect Township play areas, a Township staff person should obtain CPSI certification. The National Recreation and Park Association offers this nationally-recognized certification program in playground safety, that provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date training on playground safety issues including hazard identification, equipment specifications, surfacing requirements, and risk management methods. The CPSI certification must be updated every three years.

