

Ambler Parks Plan – 2023

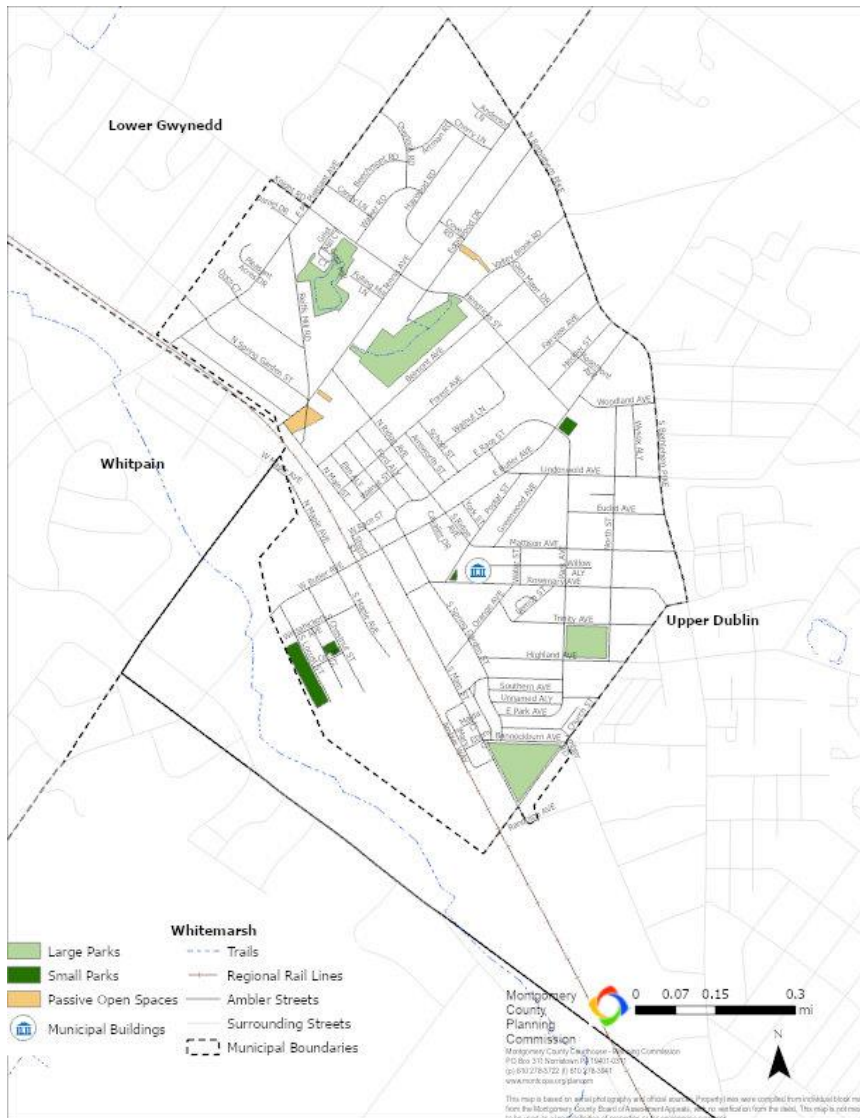
Summary of goals and recommendations

As of September 2, 2022

Introduction

This plan celebrates Ambler’s existing parks & recreation facilities and looks to set the Park System up for future success. Building on the adoption of the Borough’s Open Space Plan Update in November 2019, this document seeks to make specific recommendations for improvements to amenities and programming at individual parks to better serve the needs of borough residents. This plan furthers these implementation items by soliciting park-specific stakeholder participation and feedback, and prioritizing improvements for each park.

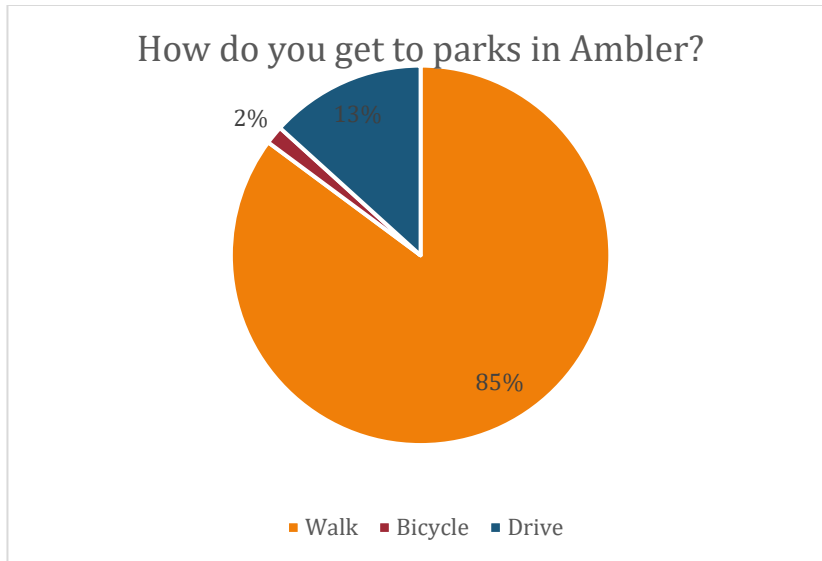
Ambler Borough has a remarkable number of parks and open spaces for its size. Ambler’s parks and open spaces can be divided into three categories. The Large Parks group consists of four parks that are around 3 acres in size or greater. The Small Parks group consists of four smaller park areas that serve a more limited, but still important, function in the park system. Finally, Ambler Borough owns three small parcels that are reserved as open space, without significant public access. Between them, the parks and open spaces total 25.4 acres.



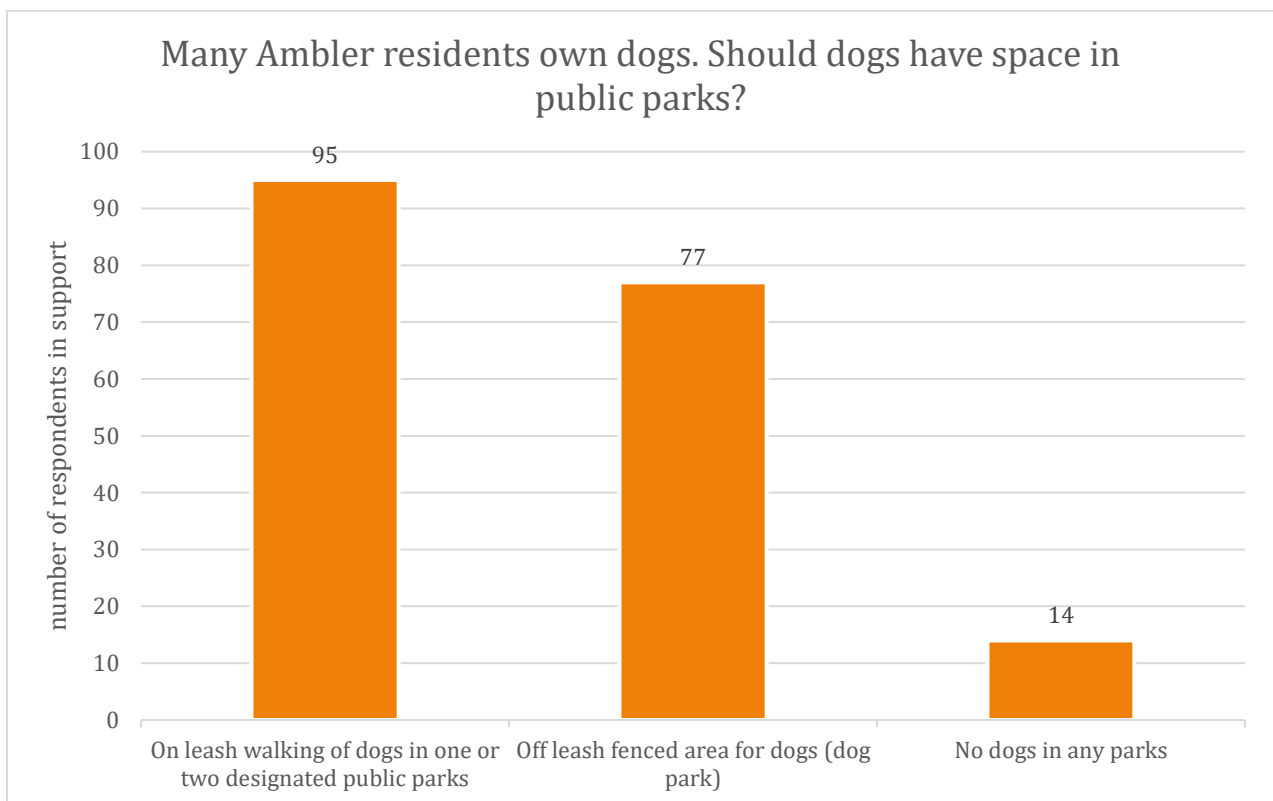
Broadly speaking, the borough is not in need of major changes in how the park areas are used or what is in them. The changes recommended are primarily improvements that enhance the existing spaces; many of them can be made gradually over time. Recommendations for the plan are for both capital improvements – physical objects with a fixed cost, and non-capital items. The non-capital items include policy changes, programming, management, and maintenance. Capital improvements may apply to many parks or just to a few specific parks.

Highlights from Public Outreach

Some key general findings from the public survey include that 85% of survey respondents walk to parks in Ambler (n=128).

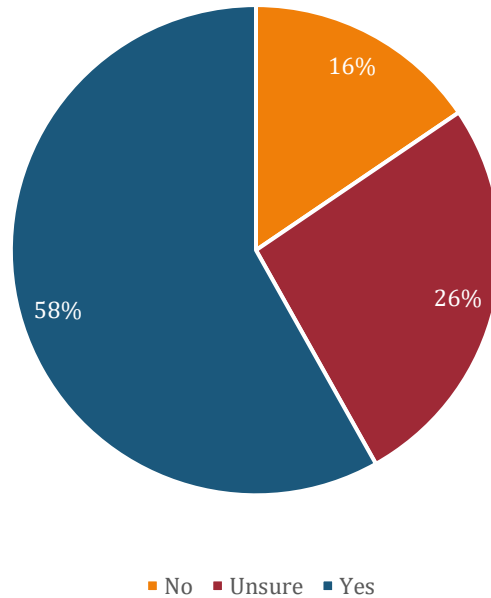


There is broad support for dogs in some parks on leashes and/or an off-leash dog park. Only 11% of respondents do not support allowing dogs in parks at all. Note that respondents could choose more than one option for this question (n=130).



Many survey respondents would consider a tax increase to go specifically towards the park system. Supporters of a tax increase and those who were unsure add up to 84% of survey respondents (n=129).

Would you support a small tax increase to improve parks and recreation in Ambler?



General Recommendations

The survey and public meetings focused primarily on potential capital improvements to parks. However, a number of non-capital items came up in the process these are summarized first, followed by two sections of capital items that are not specific to any one park.

Non-capital Considerations

A few of the policies set by council may need reevaluation, including about staffing and volunteers for parks and recreation leadership and organizing.

Reevaluate rules surrounding dogs in parks in light of survey responses that indicate support for leashed dog walking in parks and a strong interest in the creation of a fenced (off-leash) dog park.

Evaluate the need for an appointed Parks and Recreation Board or Commission that will work with Borough Council on programming, capital decisions, management, and volunteer management.

Recruit volunteers to "friends of" groups for more parks.

Evaluate the need for a part-time Parks and Recreation Director position to manage recreation programming and events.

Maintenance and policing recommendations include the following:

Continue to remove invasive and noxious plant species.

Formalize a maintenance program for parks.

Increase frequency of police foot and bicycle patrols of parks.

Additional funding is likely needed to implement the recommendations of this plan. Pennsylvania allows municipalities to request that new development that adds residential units to the borough contribute financially or with land on their site to the borough's park system. Implementing this would require a change to the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. Alternatively or in addition, the existing tax for parks and recreation could be increased.

Consider implementing a recreation land dedication or fee in lieu of dedication for new development.

Evaluate the need for a modest tax increase to provide additional funding for parks and recreation.

Ongoing planning and updates will be needed, including further physical evaluation of and more detailed planning for each individual park.

Evaluate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance at all parks and consider ways to expand physical accessibility.

Work with Montgomery County Planning Commission to create detailed master plans for each park, perhaps at a rate of one park every two to three years. Work with funders to implement plans.

Create periodic opportunities for residents to provide input into programming and capital improvements (e.g. online survey every five years).

Clarifying and improving public information about existing park facilities and policies will help promote Ambler's excellent park system. The public would also like to stay informed about what is planned for the future.

Improve information on the borough's website about park locations and amenities.

Formalize and promote the bench dedication program.

Improve information on the borough's website about how to report a problem or request related to the parks and open spaces.

Formalize a policy for rental or reservation of park facilities. Clarify prioritization and fees for residents, non-residents, groups, individuals, non-profits, etc. Promote facility rental opportunities.

Provide information on borough website about what capital improvements are planned for the parks.

Finally, a variety of types of programming were requested for both children and adults.

Add recreation programming for children to the parks such as soccer or basketball programs, environmental education, etc.

Add recreation programming and events for adults and teens to the parks such as community sports, concerts, yoga and fitness classes, etc.

Capital Improvements

The next set of recommendations are financial investments in physical improvements that may be located in any or all of the parks. For some of these items there is a two-stage decision to be made. Do we want this in our park system? If yes, where should it go?

Add to multiple parks

These items are likely needed at many if not all parks. Note that the items here are not generally repeated under individual parks in the sections below.

Continue to add trees and native vegetation.

Upgrade trails and paths.

Add seating and benches where needed.

Add bicycle parking.

Improve physical accessibility to parks.

Add drinking fountains.

Continue to add stormwater management facilities such as rain gardens to parks in a way that is compatible with the recreational use of the spaces and enhances the natural beauty and usability of the park.

Implement a cohesive signage program for all parks.

Upgrade safety surfacing at existing playgrounds.

Work with regional partners to connect parks to the regional trail system.

Add educational signage about environmental practices such as green stormwater management infrastructure and native plants in parks.

Add trash and recycling receptacles.

Improve park lighting for safety while adhering to Dark Sky lighting best practices.



Bike rack at Locust Street Park



Bicycle parking is not available at most parks (pictured: Borough Park)

Add to a specific park if desired

These are larger items that would generally be applicable at only one or two parks. Once the overall decision is made to invest in the item, a second stage of the decision about where to locate it will need to be made. The decision of where to locate these items will depend on how many of them are planned.

Add a covered picnic pavilion – could be available for reservation or rental.

Add workout equipment for teens and adults.

Consider the addition of a fenced dog park. (See also non-capital considerations.)

Add a splash pad.

Add dog bag stations to any parks where leashed dog walking is permitted.

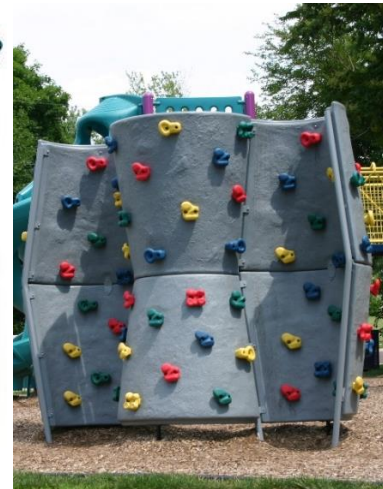
Add playground equipment for older children (8-12+).



Splash Pad, Roe Park, KS



Teen/adult workout equipment



Swings can be popular with kids, teens, and adults. Older children are often drawn to more complex climbing structures.

Large Parks

Park / Open Space	Access Locations	Area (Acre s)	Playing fields/courts	Playgrou nd	paths / trails	restroo ms	picni c table s
Pickering Field	Trinity Ave., North St., Highland Ave., E. Park Ave.	2.9	Basketball Courts (1) Baseball Fields (4) Soccer Field (1)	yes	no	yes	1
Borough Park	Tennis Ave., Edgewood Dr., Hendricks St.	8.9	no	swings only	yes	no	yes
Knight Park	Main St., Church St., Bannockburn Ave.	5.7	Basketball Courts (2) Baseball Field (1) Skate Park	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ricciardi Park	Hendricks St., Reiffs Mill Rd., Grist Mill Ct., Fulling Mill Ln.,	5	Pickleball Court Soccer Field	yes	yes	no	yes
22.5							

Pickering Field

Some high priority items as well as other recommendations were developed for Pickering Field. Many of the recommendations for this park focus on safety for park users. The photo at right shows the corner of Park and Highland. There are no sidewalks on either street and children wait for the school bus at this corner. The photo below shows the basketball court very close to the street with nothing to prevent balls (or children chasing them) from running right into the street.



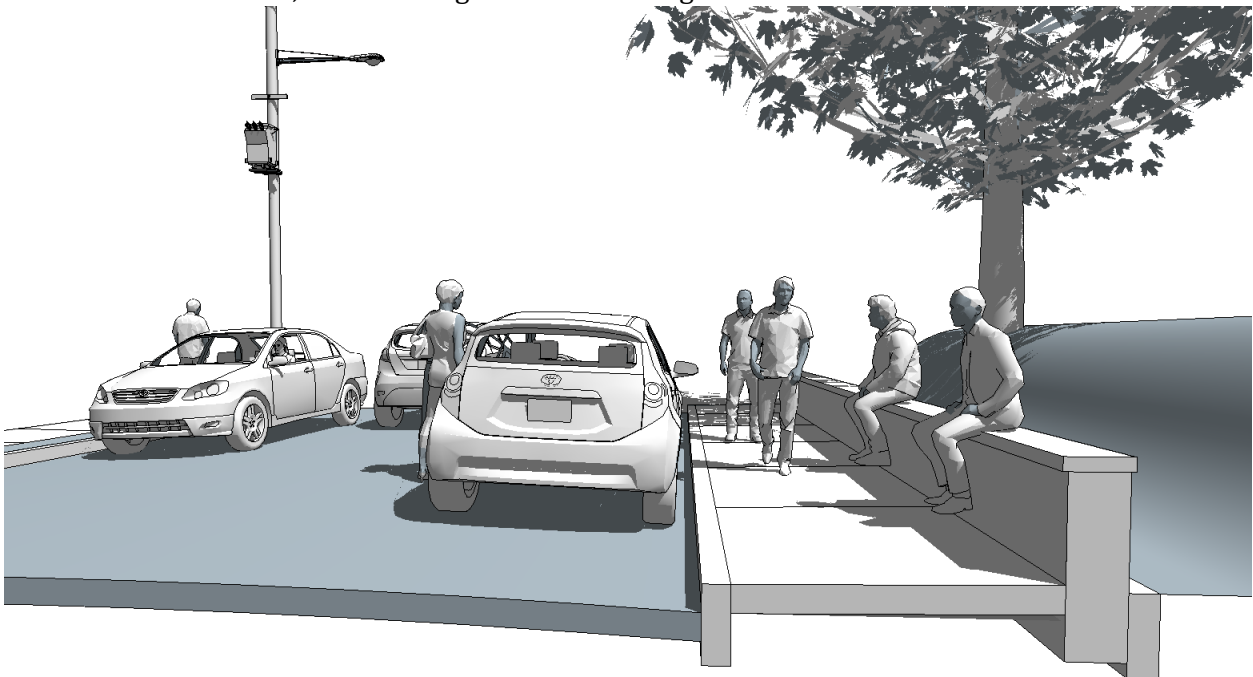


Top Priority:

Complete sidewalks on all sides of park.

Continue to work to control erosion and protect existing shade trees.

To address these top priority recommendations, Montgomery County Planning Commission has redesigned East Park Avenue to add a sidewalk with a seating wall. The design will reduce the width of the cartway of the road, removing parking on the west side of the street. The resulting cross section will have two-way travel, one parking lane (on the Pickering Field side of the street), a new curb and sidewalk, and a seating wall. The existing curb will not be disturbed.



Other:

Add fencing between basketball court and street.

Improve crosswalks and safety signage on streets bordering park.

Add traffic calming measures to surrounding streets.

Add benches and picnic tables.

Enhance playground equipment.

Consider other border fencing near the playground and where needed to contain runaway balls.

Improve the waiting area at the school bus stop at Park and Highland Avenues.

Completing the sidewalk on all sides of the park will improve the waiting area at the school bus stop, as will the addition of the seating wall. Newly painted crosswalks will also help with student safety. Once those improvements are complete, an informal assessment should be done to observe whether additional improvements are needed for schoolchildren boarding the bus at this location.

Borough Park

The largest park in Ambler, Borough Park is also the most passive park of the public access parks. Borough Park is a great place for bird watching and escaping into nature.

Several high priority items were identified for Borough Park, primarily focused on access. Other recommendations cover environmental issues and amenities. While the public outreach did not indicate a desire for additional active recreation amenities in Borough Park, the existing swings are popular and an upgrade to those swings as well as a few benches, especially near the swings, were requested by the community.



Top Priority:

Improve stairs and fencing at Hendricks Street.

This highest priority item was identified due to safety concerns with the existing Hendricks Street entrance.

Perform streambank restoration and improve riparian buffers.

Continue to improve trails and paths.

Add seating where appropriate.

Improve Tennis Avenue entrance to park (signage, path condition, landscaping).

Other:

Mark trails.

Trails could be marked using signage or blazes so that park users know where the designated paths are when park vegetation is fully leafed out.

Add environmental education signage about riparian corridors, native plants, and wildlife such as common bird species.

Consider adding bat boxes, bird feeders, a bird blind, and/or bird nesting boxes.

Environmental education and additional wildlife amenities could enhance the natural experience for users of Borough Park.

Replace/improve swings.

Knight Park

Knight Park has many different activities and uses, with the possibility of additions to the park or changes to some of the existing uses. There are no high priority recommendation, but general recommendations focus on an overall assessment of how the park is used and how that could change in the future. Knight Park is a likely location for new amenities to the park system, if those are added at some point.

Evaluate how this park fits programmatically into the park system.

Consider other uses for the ball field noting the recent addition of the community gardens.

Add benches throughout park.

Improve maintenance of picnic area – foundations for picnic tables, condition of tables and benches.



There may be opportunities for additional amenities at Knight Park.

Ricciardi Park

A well-utilized park, Ricciardi Park draws users for a variety of purposes. The courts are used by pickleball players, hockey players, and kids on wheeled toys such as tricycles and scooters. Ongoing monitoring of the way the space is used may be helpful to ensure different constituencies are all able to get their recreation needs met.



Some of the many uses at Ricciardi Park include a playground and a crushed stone walking trail.

Top Priority:

With only one picnic table in this large park, this item was specifically called out as a top priority improvement. Although efforts have been made to calm traffic on Hendricks Street, additional measures may be needed.

Add picnic tables.

Continue to work on traffic calming on Hendricks Street.

Other:

Improve park access from Reiff's Mill Road – create a hard surface pathway and improve signage.

Consider the addition of restrooms or temporary restroom facilities.

The addition of restrooms at this park has both strong supporters and strong detractors. Perhaps a trial of a temporary restroom unit is a reasonable next step to see if

Consider additional movable pickleball nets.

Consider additional lighting.

Consider adding a flagpole.

Pickering and Knight Parks both have flagpoles, so it may be nice to have one at Ricciardi Park also.

Small Parks

Park / Open Space	Access Locations	Area (Acres)	Playing fields/courts	Playground	restrooms	picnic tables	benches	
Wahl Playground	Poplar St., Rosemary Ave.	0.1	no	yes	available in Borough Hall	yes	yes	
Jean Thompson Park	Chestnut St., Center St.	0.3	no	yes	no	no	yes	
Locust Street Park	Locust St., Center St.	0.82	Basketball Court	yes	no	no	yes	
Ambler Square	E Butler Ave., E Park Ave.	0.24	no	no	no	no	yes	
		1.46						

Recommendations for small parks were primarily for Wahl Playground and Locust Street Park. There were no recommendations for Ambler Square and no top priority recommendations for these parks. Some opportunities exist at Locust Street Park for new amenities or enhancement of the environmental and natural features of the park.

Wahl Playground

Continue to monitor to control erosion/muddy areas.

Add shade trees on Poplar Street.

Enhance playground equipment if needed.

Add seating/benches.

Jean Thompson Park

Enhance playground equipment.

Locust Street Park

Repair sidewalk.

Basketball court improvements.

Create a native butterfly garden or meadow.

Add playground equipment.

Improve oversight of third party maintenance.



There may be the opportunity for more naturalized area at Locust Street Park.

Open Spaces

Park / Open Space	Access Locations	Area (Acres)	public access
Edgewood Preserve	Edgewood Dr., Valleybrook Rd.	0.36	no
Reiff's Mill Open Space	Reiffs Mill Rd. Tennis Ave., N Main St.	0.94	yes
44 Tennis Avenue	Tennis Ave.	0.14	no
		1.44	

A few recommendations were developed for the open spaces, and the general recommendation for all parks

Top Priority:

Work with federal and state agencies to create a landscaping plan for 44 Tennis Avenue.

Other:

Remove park signage at Reiff's Mill Open Space that encourages public access.

Rename 44 Tennis Avenue open space.

Implement appropriate riparian landscaping at 44 Tennis Avenue, once landscaping plan is developed and approved.

Install signage on Edgewood Drive at the border of Edgewood Preserve indicating that the preserve is a protected environmental area that was preserved with funds raised by the community.



44 Tennis Avenue

Summary

The top priority recommendations are summarized below with preliminary cost estimates as relevant and available.

Recommendation	Cost
Reevaluate rules surrounding dogs in parks in light of survey responses that indicate support for leashed dog walking in most parks and a strong interest in the creation of a fenced (off-leash) dog park.	
Complete sidewalks on all sides of Pickering Field.	\$276,534.75
Continue to work to control erosion and protect existing shade trees at Pickering Field.	
Improve stairs and fencing at Hendricks Street entrance to Borough Park.	
Perform streambank restoration and improve riparian buffers at Borough Park.	
Continue to improve trails and paths at Borough Park.	
Add seating where appropriate at Borough Park.	\$500 - \$1,000 per bench
Improve Tennis Avenue entrance to Borough Park (signage, path condition, landscaping).	
Add picnic tables at Ricciardi Park.	\$1,500 - \$2,000 each
Continue to work on traffic calming on Hendricks Street near Ricciardi Park.	
Work with federal and state agencies to create a landscaping plan for 44 Tennis Avenue.	Covered by MCPC contract.

Other available preliminary cost estimates are listed below:

Item	Cost per item
Bench	\$500-\$1,000
Picnic table	\$1,500 - \$2,000
Bicycle parking	\$200 - \$800
Drinking fountain	\$800 - \$4,000 per fountain depending on location and water source
Trash or recycling receptacles	\$500 - \$1,000
Covered picnic pavilion	\$3,000 - \$30,000
Workout equipment for teens/adults	\$2,000 - \$30,000
Fenced, off-leash dog park	\$10,000 – \$30,000
Dog bag station	\$150 - \$500
Signage	\$300 - \$1,000