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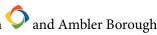
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Table of Contents

Background | chapter one 1 General Recommendations | chapter two 3 Large Parks | chapter three 7 Small Parks | chapter four 13 Open Spaces | chapter five 16



introduction

This planning effort 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 report 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 the Open Space Plan implementation items by soliciting park-specific stakeholder participation and feedback, and prioritizing improvements for each park.

Ambler Borough's Planning Commission, with support from Borough Staff and the Montgomery County Planning Commission, examined three things:

- 1) What's in the parks? We conducted a detailed inventory of existing amenities, uses, and challenges in the parks.
- 2) What do people want? We conducted public outreach to find out what residents want to stay the same, and what residents want to change or add.
- 3) What's next for parks in Ambler? We analyzed the existing conditions and public feedback and created a set of recommendations for the future of Ambler's parks and open space.

This report summarizes what we learned from this process and can be used as a resource for budgeting and improving parks in the future.

Broadly speaking, we found that 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.

Background

chapter one

Park Inventory

The map shows a general inventory of all parks and open spaces owned by Ambler borough, as well as nearby parks that are outside of the borough.

Ambler Borough has a remarkable number of parks and open spaces for its size. There are 11 parks or open spaces that total approximately 25.4 acres of borough-owned land. These are categorized as large parks (4), small parks (4), and open spaces (3).

Public Outreach

Community engagement was the foundation of this planning effort. The project issued an online survey and held a series of public workshops to gather public input into desired improvements. In addition, online presentations were developed for specific parks and allowed respondents to indicate on a map where they wanted specific improvements. This effort was designed to meet the needs of the busy lifestyles of the community and to maximize the breadth and depth of the input gathered.

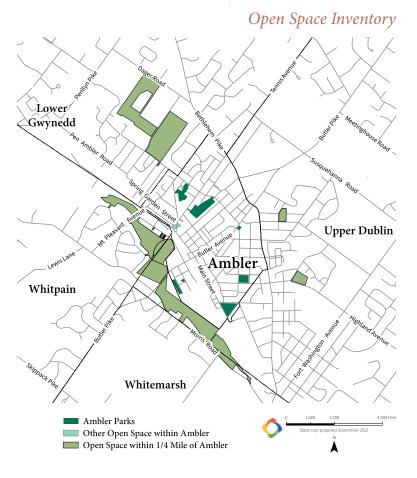
Survey

In September of 2021, the Borough opened a digital and paper survey to allow the community to provide detailed input on the parks system and all individual parks. The survey was sent out via email, linked on the Ambler Borough website Parks and Recreation page, and printed copies were provided at Borough Hall. Additionally, promotional material with QR codes linking to the digital version of the survey were posted in the parks. The survey remained open through May 2022 and received 129 responses.

Online Workshops

Beginning in November 2020, the Ambler Planning Commission hosted a series of virtual workshops to obtain resident feedback on each park. Focusing on a different park each month, residents shared what they liked most and where they felt improvements were needed.

Continuing through March of 2021, the workshops included brief presentations on each park including the location, existing recreation amenities, as well as park access and wayfinding. Residents provided feedback on the current active and passive recreation amenities to the Planning Commissioners, including their vision for specific



improvements at each individual park. Additionally, if residents were unable to attend the workshop, a copy of the presentation for each park workshop and a link to an online digital message board was provided online via a link on the Borough Website for residents to provide any additional feedback. The schedule of workshops was as follows:

- November 24, 2020: Knight Park (12 residents made comments, many more in attendance, 2 online comments)
- December 22, 2020: Pickering Field (15 residents made comments, many more in attendance, 1 online comment)
- January 26, 2021: Ricciardi Park (10 residents made comments, many more in attendance, 1 online comment
- February 23, 2021: Ambler Borough Park, Edgewood Preserve, Tennis Avenue Open Space, Tennis/Spring Garden Triangle (unknown number of resident comments, no online comments)
- March 23, 2021: Wahl Park, Ambler Square, Locust Street Park, Jean Thompson Park (unknown number of resident comments, no online comments)

Public Outreach Findings

Here are some highlights from the public outreach. Additional responses not shown here were considered prior to making recommendations for Ambler's park system.

Survey respondents were asked why they go to borough parks (Figure 1). Participants could select as many responses as they liked. The most common response was "walking," followed by "enjoy nature" and "exercise."

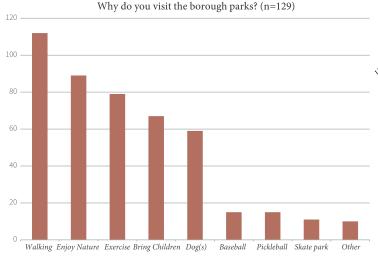


Figure 1

Would you support a small tax increase to improve parks and recreation in Ambler? (n=129)

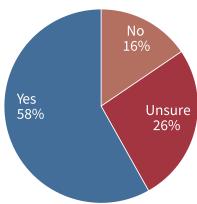
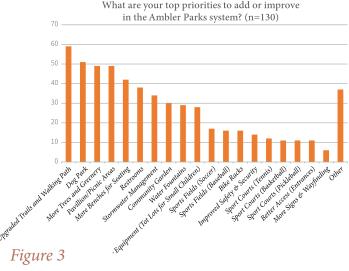


Figure 2

Survey respondents were asked for their top priorities to add to or improve within the Ambler parks system. Respondents could choose up to 6 items. The most popular choices were upgraded trails and walking paths, a dog park, more trees and greenery, a pavilion or picnic areas, and more benches (Figure 3). A large number of respondents put ideas into the "other" comment box, with a wide range of items that were considered during this planning process.



How do you get to parks in Ambler? (n=128)

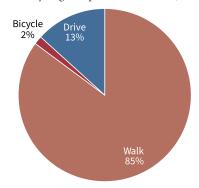


Figure 4

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 (Figure 5).

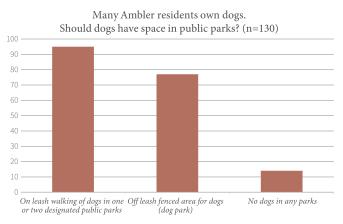


Figure 5

General Recommendations

chapter two

Below are several categories of recommendations. First, non-capital recommendations such as policies or programs, are summarized. Following that are two sections of capital items that are not specific to any one park.

Non-capital Considerations



Borough Staff as of December 2022.

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

- Priority Recommendation: 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.
- Recommendation: 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.



Ambler Borough Police Department staff.

- Recommendation: Recruit volunteers to "friends of" groups for more parks.
- Recommendation: 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:

- Recommendation: Continue to remove invasive and noxious plant species.
- *Recommendation:* Formalize a maintenance program for parks.
- Recommendation: 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.

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

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

- Recommendation: Improve information on the borough's website about park locations and amenities.
- *Recommendation*: Formalize and promote the bench dedication program.
- Recommendation: Improve information on the borough's website about how to report a problem or submit a request related to the parks and open spaces.
- Recommendation: 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.
- Recommendation: Provide information on the borough's website about what capital improvements are planned for the parks.

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

- Recommendation: Add recreation programming for children to the parks such as soccer or basketball programs, environmental education, etc.
- Recommendation: Add recreation programming and events for adults and teens to the parks such as community sports, concerts, yoga and fitness classes, etc.



The picnic area at Knight Park is available to be reserved.



Heyday Athletics offers sports leagues for adults around the Greater Philadelphia region (from heydayathletic.com)

Capital Improvements

The next set of recommendations are financial investments in physical improvements that may be located in any or all of the parks.

This first set of items are those that would be added to one or two parks if desired. These are larger items that would be more significant investments. 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.

Recommendation: Borough Council should consider some of the following additions to the park system:



Picnic Pavilion



Playground equipment for older children (8-12+)



Workout equipment for teens and adults



Fenced, off-leash dog-park



Splash pad



Swings that meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requirements



Additional dog-bag stations



A new tree at Borough Park



Bike rack at Locust Street Park

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



This second set of items are those that 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.

These are general recommendations that apply to many of the parks in Ambler:

- *Recommendation:* Continue to add trees and native vegetation.
- Recommendation: Upgrade trails and paths.
- Recommendation: Add seating and benches where needed.
 - Recommendation: Add bicycle parking.
 - Recommendation: Improve physical accessibility to parks.
 - *Recommendation*: Add drinking fountains.
 - Recommendation: 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.
 - Recommendation: Implement a cohesive signage program for all parks.
 - *Recommendation*: Upgrade safety surfacing at existing playgrounds.
- *Recommendation:* Work with regional partners to connect parks to the regional trail system.
- Recommendation: Add educational signage about environmental practices such as green stormwater management infrastructure and native plants in parks.
- Recommendation: Add trash and recycling receptacles.
- *Recommendation:* Improve park lighting for safety while adhering to Dark Sky lighting best practices.



An educational sign about a rain garden at Ricciardi Park

Ambler's four largest parks make up 89% of the park and open space acreage in the borough. Borough Park is a passive, naturalized open space, while the other three large parks provide primarily active recreation. Pickering Field is the only one of these parks that does not have some type of walking trail or pathway.

Figure 6 | Large Parks and Their Amenities

Park / Open Space	Access Locations	AREA (ACRES)	PLAYING FIELDS/ COURTS	PLAYGROUND	PATHS/ TRAILS	RESTROOMS	PICNIC TABLES
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
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	yes
Ricciardi Park	Hendricks St., Reiffs Mill Rd., Grist Mill Ct., Fulling Mill Ln.	5	Pickleball Court Soccer Field	yes	yes	no	yes
TOTAL ACREAGE		22.50					

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.





Rose Valley Creek emerges from under Hendricks Street into Borough Park. Erosion is visible along the streambank. Mature trees and newly planted trees create a lush area next to Rose Valley Creek. This area floods during heavy rain events.



Recommendations

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 recommendation: Improve stairs and fencing at Hendricks Street. This highest priority item was identified due to safety concerns with the existing Hendricks Street entrance.
- *Priority recommendation:* Perform streambank restoration and improve riparian buffers.
- *Priority recommendation*: Continue to improve trails and paths.



Some ad hoc seating has been created by park visitors.

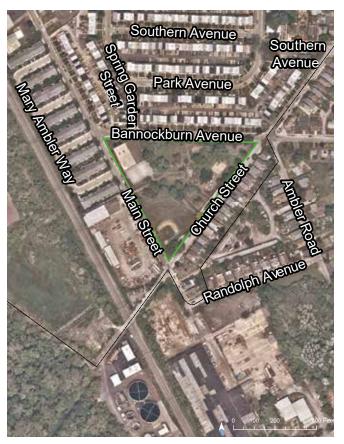
- Priority recommendation: Add seating where appropriate.
- Priority recommendation: Improve Tennis Avenue entrance to park (signage, path condition, landscaping).
- Recommendation: Mark trails. Pathways through the woods are unlabeled; it's not always clear what is intended to be a trail.

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

- Recommendation: Add environmental education signage about riparian corridors, native plants, and wildlife such as common bird species.
- *Recommendation:* Consider adding bat boxes, bird feeders, a bird blind, and/or bird nesting boxes.
- Recommendation: Replace/improve swings.

Knight Park

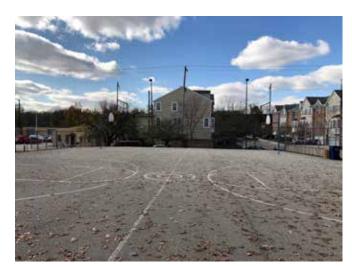
As Ambler's second-largest park, Knight Park has many different activities and uses, and may have room for additions to the park or changes to some of the existing uses.







Entrance Sign Skate Park





Basketball Courts Ball Field





Community Garden Playground

Recommendations

There are no high priority recommendations for Knight Park, 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 (see General Recommendations, Capital Improvements).

- *Recommendation*: Evaluate how this park fits programmatically into the park system.
- Recommendation: Consider other uses for the ball field noting the recent addition of the community gardens.
- *Recommendation:* Add benches throughout park.
- Recommendation: Improve maintenance of picnic area – foundations for picnic tables, condition of tables and benches.



Monument stone – Pickering Field is named in memory of Charles W. Pickering, Jr.

Pickering Field

Pickering Field is a very actively used park rimmed with beautiful mature trees. The park has four ball fields which are used for baseball, softball, basketball, and soccer. Restrooms, a concession stand, and a playground are packed into the southeast corner of the park. On game days there's quite a lot going on here!



Northeast Field – the grass outfield area in the northeast corner of the park is sometimes used for soccer.





A basketball court is between the northeast ball field and the street. No fencing surrounds the court.



A small playground area and picnic table are located near the concession stand on the eastern side of the park



A curb ramp and poor-condition sidewalks at Highland Avenue and North Street.



A sidewalk along Highland Avenue terminates not far from the corner with North Street. An extension is planned.



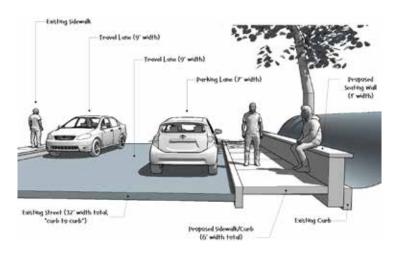
Mature trees line the Park Avenue side of the park. A future sidewalk is planned for this are (see recommendations below).

Recommendations

Some high priority items as well as other recommendations were developed for Pickering Field. Many of them recommendations for this park focus on safety for park users.

Top Priority Recommendation: Complete sidewalks on all sides of park. Plans are complete to add sidewalk along Highland Avenue.

To address this top priority recommendation, 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 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.





Swings in Ricciardi Park

A fine gravel loop trail circles the park.

and a seating wall. The existing curb will not be disturbed.

- *Priority Recommendation:* Continue to work to control erosion and protect existing shade trees.
- Recommendation: Add fencing between basketball court and street.
- Recommendation: Improve crosswalks and safety signage on streets bordering park.
- Recommendation: Add traffic calming measures to surrounding streets.
- Recommendation: Add benches and picnic tables.
 Consider tables with inlaid chess/checkers boards.
- Recommendation: Enhance playground equipment.
- Recommendation: Consider other border fencing near the playground and where needed to contain runaway balls.
- Recommendation: Improve the waiting area at the school bus stop at Park and Highland Avenues.

Pictured: children currently wait on the wooden steps for the school bus. 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.



Ricciardi Park

A well-utilized park, Ricciardi Park draws users for a variety of purposes. Ricciardi Park has entrances on four sides and is well-connected to surrounding neighborhoods. The courts are used by pickleball players, hockey players, and kids on wheeled toys such as tricycles

Recommendations



- Top Priority Recommendation: Add picnic tables.
 With only one picnic table in this large park, this item was specifically called out as a top priority improvement.
- Priority Recommendation: Continue to work on traffic calming on Hendricks Street. Although efforts have been made to calm traffic on Hendricks Street, additional measures may be needed.
- Recommendation: Improve park access from Reiff's Mill Road – create a hard surface pathway and improve signage.
- Recommendation: 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 it works in this location.
- Recommendation: Consider additional movable pickleball nets.
- Recommendation: Consider additional lighting.
- Recommendation: 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

chapter four

Totaling only 1.5 acres in size, Ambler's small parks play a significant role in recreation access for the community. Even the smallest of these, Wahl Playground, is heavily utilized by the neighborhood.

PARK / OPEN SPACE	Access Locations	AREA (ACRES)	PLAYING FIELDS/ COURTS	PLAYGROUND	RESTROOMS	PICNIC TABLES	Benches
Ambler Square	E Butler Ave., E Park Ave.	0.24	no	no	no	no	yes
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
TOTAL ACREAGE		1.46					

Ambler Square





Native plant landscaping shields the park from the CVS parking lot.



High-quality bicycle parking for two bicycles is available in Ambler Square.



Plaza and Seating – as seen from the CVS driveway entrance from Butler Avenue.

Wahl Playground



AMPLET ADROUGH HALL AMPLET AD

A sign for borough hall is located outside of the Wahl Playground fence.

Small Park Recommendations

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 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to monitor to control erosion/muddy areas.
- Add shade trees on Poplar Street.
- Enhance playground equipment if needed.
- Add seating/benches.



Jean Thompson and Locust Street Parks





A large play structure is the main amenity available at Jean Thompson Park.



JEAN THOMPSON PARK RECOMMENDATION: Enhance playground equipment.



Locust Street Park Basketball Court



Small play structure, bench, and portion of split-rail fence at Locust Street Park.



LOCUST STREET PARK RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Repair sidewalk.
- Improve basketball court.
- Create a native butterfly garden or meadow.
- Add playground equipment.
- Improve oversight of third-party maintenance.

chapter five

Figure 8 | Open Spaces

PARK / OPEN SPACE	Access Locations	AREA (ACRES)	PUBLIC ACCESS
TENNIS AVENUE	Tennis Ave.	0.14	no
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
TOTAL ACREAGE		1.44	

Tennis Avenue

A home was removed from this site, creating the newest borough-owned open space.





Rose Valley Creek is at the rear of this property. The creek is channelized by a concrete wall.

Edgewood Preserve

This undeveloped area contains Rose Valley Creek between Edgewood Avenue and Valley Brook Road. Many mature trees are located on this site.



Pictured from Edgewood Drive

Reiff's Mill Open Space

This open space area is located on both sides of Reiff's Mill Road.



Erosion is visible on the stream banks of Rose Valley Creek.



West of Reiff's Mill Road, Rose Valley Creek is channelized into a concrete flood control structure.



Flood control and drainage are the main features of this part of the open space. Limited grassy areas are available.

OPEN SPACE RECOMMENDATIONS



TENNIS AVENUE

The only top priority recommendation is for Tennis Avenue.

- Top priority recommendation: Work with federal and state agencies to create a landscaping plan for Tennis Avenue.
- Recommendation: Rename Tennis Avenue Open Space.
- Recommendation: Implement appropriate riparian landscaping at Tennis Avenue, once a landscaping plan is developed and approved.



EDGEWOOD PRESERVE

Recommendation: 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.

REIFF'S MILL OPEN SPACE

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



Summary

Ambler's parks are a wonderful asset to the borough, well-loved and utilized by the community. In general, the parks are already functioning well for the Ambler Community. Borough Council and staff should continue the conversation about parks and work gradually on improvements for safety, comfort, greening, and recreation opportunities as requested by the community. The priority recommendations are summarized in the table on the right.

Figure 9: Top Priority Recommendations

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION	Area
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.	General; Non-capital
Complete sidewalks on all sides of Pickering Field.	Large Park: Pickering Field
Continue to work to control erosion and protect existing shade trees at Pickering Field.	Large Park: Pickering Field
Improve stairs and fencing at Hendricks Street entrance to Borough Park.	Large Park: Borough Park
Perform stream bank restoration and improve riparian buffers at Borough Park.	Large Park: Borough Park
Continue to improve trails and paths at Borough Park.	Large Park: Borough Park
Add seating where appropriate at Borough Park.	Large Park: Borough Park
Improve Tennis Avenue entrance to Borough Park (signage, path condition, landscaping).	Large Park: Borough Park
Add picnic tables at Ricciardi Park.	Large Park: Ricciardi Park
Continue to work on traffic calming on Hendricks Street near Ricciardi Park.	Large Park: Ricciardi Park
Work with federal and state agencies to create a landscaping plan for Tennis Avenue.	Open Space: Tennis Avenue

Contact

To review Ambler's 2019 Open Space Plan, visit: https://boroughofambler.com/open-space-plan-update/

To find out more about Parks and Recreation in Ambler, see: https://boroughofambler.com/departments/parks-recreation/

If you have questions, comments, or other inquiries for the borough, please visit the Borough of Ambler's website or email manager@borough.ambler.pa.us.

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