



Rural Pennsylvania

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Recreational Issues in Pennsylvania's Small Municipalities

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania surveyed municipal officials in boroughs and townships of the second class with populations of less than 2,500 to learn more about their park and recreation issues. The survey found that while some of Pennsylvania's small municipalities operate facilities and offer programs, a small percentage does not have recreational facilities and a larger percentage does not offer recreational programs.

The survey also found that in addition to municipal governments, school districts, community groups, and other organizations actively provide recreational activities. And, while municipal governments consider recreation to be an important issue, they lack the resources to develop or expand recreational facilities and activities.

Methods

To learn more about the parks and recreation issues in Pennsylvania's small communities, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania mailed a survey to municipal officials in communities with less than 2,500 residents. To develop the survey and compile the results, the Center identified the sample population and size; constructed and sent the questionnaire; implemented significance testing; and analyzed the data.

Sample Population and Size

Since the 2000 U.S. Census data was unavailable at the time of the survey, the Center used the 1990 U.S. Census to identify the survey population, which included 644 boroughs and 908 townships of the second class. The Governor's Center for Local Government Services provided the names and mailing addresses of these municipalities. The questionnaire was then sent to the borough council president or township supervisor chair. Each survey was given a unique number for coding.

The Center chose boroughs and townships of the second class with populations under 2,500 for the following reasons. First, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 89 percent of these small municipalities in Pennsylvania are rural. Second, municipalities of this size have smaller budgets and fewer resources for recreational services. For example, the Center for Local Government Services' data shows that in 1999, the average revenues for municipalities under 2,500 were less than \$400,000, and the average parks and recreation expenditures were only \$10,100. Third, municipalities of this size make up 61 percent of the municipal governments in Pennsylvania.

Please note that while 10 first-class townships and one third-class city met the population criteria, they were excluded from the survey since they have significantly different administrative functions and responsibilities than boroughs and townships of the second class.

Questionnaire Construction

The three-page questionnaire had 11 questions divided into three sections: background questions about recreation within the municipality; questions about recreational facilities and programs; and attitudinal questions about recreation. The questionnaire was developed with assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Bureau of Conservation and Recreation staff and the U.S. Park Service staff. The questionnaire was also field tested with selected officials from a small municipality.

Significance Testing

In mid-March 2001, 1,552 questionnaires were mailed and by the end of April 2001, 729 usable questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 47 percent. At the 95 percent confidence level, the confidence interval is plus or minus 2.6.

Because of the large sample size, the responses of boroughs and townships were also examined separately. The response rate was 48 percent for boroughs and 46 percent for townships.

Data Analysis

After the survey responses were recorded, the Center linked the responses with demographic and financial data specific to each municipality by matching each questionnaire's unique number with a pre-developed data file. Among the data used were:

- Population, Age Cohorts and Household Characteristic, 1990, 2000: Using Census data, the population, population change, and number of households with children were recorded. In addition, the percentage of people under 18 years and over 65 years of age were recorded for both 1990 and 2000.
- Municipal Finance: Using 1999 municipal financial data from the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, the following variables were recorded for each respondent: total municipal revenues, total tax revenues, total expenditures, and parks and recreational expenditures.

The data was recoded and analyzed using frequency tables and cross tabulations.

Data Limitations

Although a scientific method was used to gather the data presented here, the validity of the results may have shortcomings.

- Information Bias: The survey was sent to borough council presidents and township supervisor chairs. It may be possible that these officials are not as knowledgeable about parks and recreation issues as other officials in their municipalities. As a result, some responses may contain errors or omissions. This is especially a concern among officials in municipalities without recreational facilities or programs. There may have been a tendency among these officials to overlook non-municipal recreational facilities or programs. This potential bias is partially offset, however, by the large response rate.
- Population Classification Errors: When the survey was conducted, the most current population data was from the 1990 Census. Some municipalities may have been incorrectly excluded or included in the sample because of population changes from 1990 to 2000. However, a more recent analysis of Census population data shows that only 53 of the 1,550 eligible municipalities in 1990, or 3 percent, were no longer eligible in 2000.

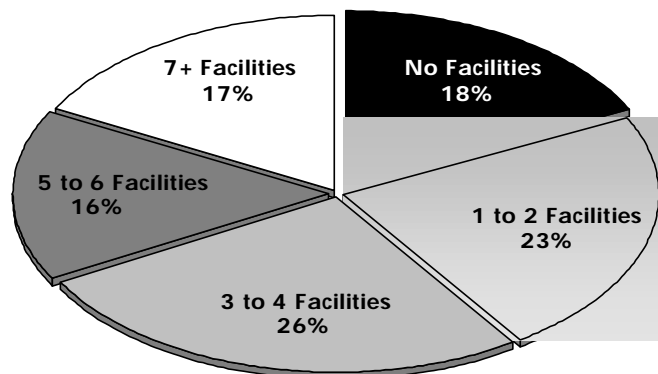
Throughout this report, boroughs and townships with less than 2,500 residents are called "small municipalities."

FINDINGS

Number and Types of Facilities

- More than 80 percent of Pennsylvania's small municipalities have at least one recreational facility within the municipality. About 18 percent of the small municipalities surveyed reported having no facilities. (See Figure 1.)
- Townships are less likely to have recreational facilities than boroughs. Nearly 28 percent of townships reported having no recreational facilities, while 6 percent of boroughs reported the same.
- Small municipalities with recreational facilities have an average of 4.6 facilities. Boroughs have an average of 5.3 facilities, while townships have an average of 4.0 facilities. Regionally, municipalities in southeastern Pennsylvania have an average of 6.3 facilities, while those in central and western Pennsylvania have an average of 4.6.

Figure 1
Distribution of the Number of Small Town Recreational Facilities (n=729)



- Municipalities with seven or more facilities had a population increase of nearly 8 percent between 1990 and 2000, while those without any recreational facilities had an increase of more than 9 percent.
- As the number of facilities increase, so do parks and recreation expenditures. In 1999, for example, municipalities with seven or more facilities spent an average of about \$18,500 on parks and recreation, or about 4 percent of their total expenditures. Municipalities with one to four facilities spent about \$4,500, or less than 2 percent of total expenditures. (See Table 1.)
- About 70 percent of boroughs have ball game courts and nearly 80 percent have playgrounds. About 51 percent of townships have sports fields, 46 percent have playgrounds, and 30 percent have ball game courts. (See Table 2.)

**TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL MUNICIPALITIES BY THE NUMBER OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

	No Facilities (n=131)	1-2 Facilities (n=166)	3-4 Facilities (n=193)	5-6 Facilities (n=114)	7 or More Facilities (n=125)	Total (n=729)
% Chg in Population, 1990-2000(1)	9.5%	4.8%	2.0%	2.5%	8.2%	5.2%
% Population Under 18 Years Old, 2000(1)	25.0%	24.2%	24.6%	23.4%	24.8%	24.4%
% With Zoning Ordinances, 1995(2)	21.4%	42.8%	49.7%	50.0%	60.8%	45.0%
Avg. Total Revenues, (in \$1,000) 1999(2)	\$214	\$282	\$304	\$337	\$684	\$359
Total Taxes Per Capita, 1999(2)	\$94	\$109	\$121	\$116	\$158	\$122
Avg. Parks & Recreation Expenditures, 1999 (3)	\$879	\$4,535	\$4,516	\$9,469	\$18,451	\$7,031
Park & Rec. Expenditures Per Capita, 1999(3)	\$0.86	\$4.23	\$4.33	\$8.27	\$12.39	\$6.18
Park & Rec. Expend. As % Total Expenditures, 1999(3)	0.5%	1.9%	1.9%	2.9%	3.8%	2.5%

(1) Source: U.S. Census Bureau

(2) Source: Center for Local Government Services, PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development

(3) Municipalities without recreational facilities can still have parks and recreation expenditures through donations and other contributions.

Data source: Center for Local Government Services, PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development.

**TABLE 2
TYPES OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES BY MUNICIPALITY**

	Boroughs (n=311)	Townships (n=415)	Total (n=726)
% With Sports Fields	72.0%	50.8%	59.9%
% With Playgrounds	78.1%	45.8%	59.6%
% With Ball Game Courts	69.8%	29.9%	46.7%
% With Picnic Areas/Pavilion	64.0%	42.9%	51.9%
% With Walking Trails	20.3%	17.6%	18.7%
% With Other Types of Facilities	9.3%	8.2%	8.7%

Note: Column totals do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

Facility Owners and Operators

Respondents were asked to identify the owner(s) and operator(s) of recreational facilities within their municipality. The responses were coded into four categories: municipal, school district, community groups, and others.

- More than 70 percent of the respondents indicated that their municipality owned at least one facility.

- Boroughs were more likely to report municipal ownership (88 percent) than townships (52 percent).

- Approximately 25 percent of respondents indicated that school districts and other groups owned facilities in their municipality (state parks and forests, game lands, rails-to-trails, etc.) These same respondents reported that community

groups owned about 20 percent of the facilities in their municipality. (See Table 3 on next page.)

- While municipal governments own the majority of recreational facilities, school districts and community groups also own facilities. As Table 4 illustrates, school districts owned nearly 20 percent of playgrounds, ball game courts, and sports fields in small municipalities. Community and other groups own about 30 percent of the sports fields, picnic areas/pavilions, and other types of facilities and more than 40 percent of the walking trails.

- Municipalities also operate the majority, or about 57 percent, of the recreational facilities. Other operators of municipal-owned facilities included community groups (39 percent), school districts (22 percent), and other organizations (25 percent). (See Table 5.)

TABLE 3
OWNERSHIP OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES BY MUNICIPAL TYPE
(Includes only those municipalities with facilities)

	Boroughs (n=289)	Townships (n=294)	Total (n=583)
<u>Percent with:</u>			
Municipal Owned Facilities	88.2%	52.4%	70.2%
School District Owned Facilities	22.5%	26.2%	24.4%
Community Group Owned Facilities	14.5%	26.2%	20.4%
Other Group Owned Facilities	18.0%	33.7%	25.9%

Note: Columns do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

TABLE 4
TYPES OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES BY OWNERSHIP

# Responses	Municipal Govt.	School Districts	Community Groups	Other Groups	Total
Sports Fields (n=535)	50.3%	19.1%	16.1%	14.6%	100.0%
Playground (n=512)	65.8%	19.9%	8.0%	6.3%	100.0%
Ball Game Courts (n=382)	66.6%	19.4%	8.6%	5.2%	100.0%
Picnic Area/Pavilion (n=400)	69.0%	1.5%	13.3%	16.3%	100.0%
Walking Trails (n=142)	51.4%	5.6%	9.2%	33.8%	100.0%
Other Types of Facilities (n=60)	65.0%	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Note: The number of responses does not add up to 729 because of multiple responses.

- Boroughs operate more facilities than townships.
- Municipalities operate about 82 percent of the recreational facilities they own. (See Table 6.)
- Municipalities that own and operate their own facilities spend on average \$6.54 more per resident on parks and recreation than municipalities that owned facilities but did not operate them.
- Community groups operate about 40 percent of all facilities. Among the facilities they operate, they own 44 percent.

Municipal-Sponsored Recreational Programs

- More than 59 percent of boroughs sponsor one program or more, and 26 percent of townships do so. There is no significant difference between municipalities that gained or lost population and the number of programs or activities they sponsor.
- Among small municipalities that sponsor recreation programs, 21 percent sponsor youth sports leagues (soccer, baseball, basketball, etc.). Seventeen percent sponsor family/community events and 13 percent sponsor summer playground programs. (See Table 7.)
- Small municipalities are least likely to sponsor adult/community education, arts and crafts programs, and fitness or wellness programs.

TABLE 5
OPERATOR OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES BY MUNICIPAL TYPE
(Includes only those municipalities with facilities)

	Boroughs (n=294)	Townships (n=303)	Total (n=597)
<u>Percent with:</u>			
Municipal Operated Facilities	77.6%	37.6%	57.3%
School District Operated Facilities	21.4%	21.8%	21.6%
Community Group Operated Facilities	37.1%	41.6%	39.4%
Other Group Operated Facilities	17.7%	32.2%	25.1%

Note: The total percentages do not add up to 100 because of multiple responses.

**TABLE 6
TYPES OF MUNICIPAL OWNED FACILITIES & OPERATOR**

	% Operated by Municipal Government	% Operated by Non- Municipal Organization	Total
<u>Municipal Owned Facilities</u>			
Sports Fields (n=269)	55.7%	44.3%	100.0%
Playgrounds (n=337)	79.8%	20.2%	100.0%
Ball Game Court (n=255)	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%
Picnic Areas/Pavilion (n=276)	80.7%	19.3%	100.0%
Walking Trails (n=73)	80.8%	19.2%	100.0%
Other Facility (n=39)	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%
Total (n=412)	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%

Note: The number of responses does not add up to 729 because of multiple responses.

**TABLE 7
MUNICIPAL SPONSORED RECREATION PROGRAMS BY MUNICIPAL TYPE**

	Boroughs (n=311)	Townships (n=415)	Total (n=726)
<u>% that Sponsor:</u>			
Summer Playground Program	23.2%	5.8%	13.2%
Family/Community Events	28.3%	7.7%	16.5%
Youth Sports Leagues	31.2%	12.8%	20.7%
Adult/Community Education, Arts & Crafts	5.5%	0.7%	2.8%
Fitness or Wellness Programs	2.3%	0.5%	1.2%
Other	11.3%	6.3%	8.4%

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because of multiple responses.

- Except for community education and wellness programs, sponsorship of municipal recreation programs is strongly correlated with the number of recreational facilities. The more facilities, the greater the likelihood that the municipality will sponsor recreational programs.

- Spending on parks and recreation is also correlated with the number of municipal sponsored programs. The majority, or 69 percent, of small municipalities that spend more than \$5,000 on parks and recreation have one or more programs.

- Forty-four percent of the municipalities with expenditures of less than \$5,000 sponsored one or more programs. Among municipalities with no reported expenditures, 16 percent sponsored recreational programs.

Recreation Oversight

Most municipalities with recreational facilities provide only limited oversight. Oversight is defined as having a citizen parks and recreation board or commission, or having an elected official(s) in charge of recreation.

- Throughout the state, about 20 percent of small municipalities have a citizen park and recreation board, and 20 percent have elected officials in charge of recreation. These percentages are generally higher in boroughs than in townships. (See Table 8 on next page.)

- Municipalities with some form of recreation oversight are generally wealthier than those without oversight. The per capita income in municipalities with a citizen park and recreation board is \$1,500 higher, and per capita market values are nearly \$7,000 higher than those municipalities without oversight functions. The same pattern is true for those municipalities with elected officials in charge of recreation.

- Regionally, there was little difference among municipalities that provided recreational oversight. Within each region — east, central, and west — about 25 percent of municipalities had a citizen park and recreation board or an elected official in charge of recreation issues.

**TABLE 8
MUNICIPAL RECREATION OVERSIGHT BY MUNICIPAL TYPE**

% With	Boroughs (n=311)	Townships (n=415)	Total (n=726)
Citizen park & recreation board	28.3%	15.7%	21.1%
Elected official(s) in charge of recreation issues	39.9%	6.5%	20.8%

Note: Columns do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

Recreation Expenditures

- According to 1999 data collected by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, the average small municipality with recreational facilities spent about \$10,100 on parks and recreation. Excluding Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the statewide average for all municipalities was nearly \$120,400.

- About 27 percent of the small municipalities in 1999 reported no park and recreation expenditures.

- Among Pennsylvania's small municipalities, the average borough with recreation facilities spent slightly more than \$11,800 on parks and recreation, or \$12.22 per capita. The average township with facilities spent \$5,600, or \$3.92 per capita. For both boroughs and townships, more facilities meant greater expenditures. (See Table 9.)

- The majority of respondents, or 64 percent, said spending had remained the same for recreation over the past five years. On average, these respondents reported spending about \$8,900 for parks and recreation in 1999.

- Nearly 33 percent of respondents said spending had increased. On average, these municipalities spent more than \$14,200 for parks and recreation.

- About 4 percent of respondents said spending had declined. On average, this group spent less than \$5,400.

- Population change and change in recreation spending are closely linked. Among the small municipalities that reported an increase in expenditures, population increased 8 percent between 1990 and 2000. Those that reported a decline in expenditures saw a 4 percent population decline during the 1990s. Finally, those that said expenditures remained about the same, had less than a 3 percent population increase during the 1990s.

Cooperating with Others to Provide Recreation

- Among Pennsylvania's small municipalities, about 5 percent have an agreement with a local school district or neighboring municipality(s) to provide recreational services. This pattern remains constant regardless of municipality type or region of the state (See Table 10). About 5 percent of small municipalities without recreation facilities also had an agreement with another jurisdiction to provide recreation services.

- Few respondents indicated that recreational cooperation is an important issue. When asked to rate the importance of cooperating with a neighboring municipality(s) on a cost-share basis to provide recreational facilities, 25 percent of respondents said it was important or very important. Similarly, 24 percent of respondents said the same about cooperat-

**TABLE 9
SMALL MUNICIPALITIES PARKS AND RECREATION SPENDING, 1999**

Range of Parks & Rec. Spending	BOROUGHES			TOWNSHIPS		
	% Boroughs (n=626)	Parks & Rec. Spending Per Capita,	Parks & Rec. Spending as % Total Expenditures,	% Townships (n=910)	Parks & Rec. Spending Per Capita,	Parks & Rec. Spending as % Total Expenditures,
No Reported Expenditures	18.4%	\$0.00	0.0%	53.3%	\$0.00	0.0%
\$1 to \$2,000	30.2%	\$1.17	0.4%	28.9%	\$0.55	<0.1%
\$2,001 to \$5,000	14.9%	\$3.32	0.8%	6.6%	\$2.10	0.9%
\$5,001 to \$10,000	12.1%	\$6.52	1.6%	4.3%	\$4.35	1.5%
>\$10,000	24.4%	\$23.66	4.3%	6.9%	\$24.47	5.7%
Total	100.0%	\$10.70	2.4%	100.0%	\$3.08	0.2%

Source: Municipal Financial Statistics, 1999, PA Center for Local Government Services.

ing with the local school district.

- Among the respondents who indicated that their small municipality had an agreement with another municipality, more than 73 percent view these agreements as important-to-very important.

- Among the respondents with agreements with a local school district, about 72 percent said the agreements were important-to-very important.

- In 1999, small municipalities with intergovernmental agreements (agreements with a school district and/or municipality) spent an average of \$8.75 per person on parks and recreation. Those without agreements spent an average of \$9.30 on parks and recreation.

Park and Recreation Staffing

- Less than 10 percent of respondents employ seasonal or full-/part-time staff dedicated to parks and recreation services. The percentage breakout was 16 percent for boroughs and 4 percent for townships.

- Small municipalities with recreation staff generally have bigger budgets. In 1999, these municipalities spent an average of \$24,200 for parks and recreation, or roughly \$16.50 per person. In municipalities without staff, the average expenditures for parks and recreation were \$5,600, or \$4.91 per person.

- Small municipalities with staff had an average of seven facilities, and those without had an average of four facilities.

Change in Programs/Facilities

- When asked if residents' demands for recreational facilities and programs has increased, decreased, or remained about the same over the past five years, 50 percent of

**TABLE 10
AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE RECREATION SERVICES AND ATTITUDES
TOWARD COOPERATION BY MUNICIPAL TYPE**

	Boroughs (n=311)	Townships (n=415)	Total (n=726)
MUNICIPAL			
% that have agreement with a neighboring municipality(s) to provide recreational services	4.8%	5.8%	5.4%
% that indicated it is important-to-very important to cooperate with neighboring municipalities on a cost share basis to provide recreational programs & facilities	31.9%	18.7%	24.5%
SCHOOL DISTRICT			
% that have agreement with local school district to provide recreational services	7.4%	4.1%	5.5%
% that indicated it is important-to-very important to cooperate with local school district on a cost share basis to provide recreational programs & facilities	33.6%	15.5%	23.6%

Note: Columns do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

**TABLE 11
PERCEIVED CHANGE IN RESIDENTS' DEMAND FOR
RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS**

	Boroughs (n=298)	Townships (n=311)	Total (n=729)
Demand has Increased	57.0%	43.5%	49.9%
Demand has Decreased	2.7%	1.8%	2.2%
Demand Remained the About the Same	40.3%	54.7%	47.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**TABLE 12
RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED AN INCREASED DEMAND FOR
RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS BY TYPE OF FACILITIES/PROGRAMS
(n=316)**

More Activities for Young People	65.8%
Safer/Modern Playground Equipment.....	43.0%
More Athletic Fields.....	41.1%
More Activities for Older Adults	33.9%
Indoor Facilities (Rec. center or gym)	19.9%
Other.....	14.6%

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because of multiple responses.

respondents said that demand had increased. About 2 percent said that demand had declined and 48 percent indicated that demand had remained the same. (See Table 11)

- In small municipalities where residents' demands had increased, the item demanded most was more activities for young people, followed by safer/modern playground equipment and more athletic fields. (See Table 12.)

Park and Recreation Issues

- The most important park and recreation issues were to have facilities that were accessible to persons with disabilities, and to have modern or up-to-date equipment at recre-

	Boroughs (n=301)	Townships (n=377)	Total (n=678)
<u>% Indicating it was Important or Very Important</u>			
To own and operate own park & rec. facilities	63.1%	29.7%	44.2%
To have modern or up-to-date equipment	79.6%	43.0%	59.1%
To provide year-round recreational programs	31.1%	10.9%	19.9%
To have park & rec. facilities accessible to persons with disabilities	79.4%	47.2%	61.5%
To contribute financially to development or maintenance of a regional trails/greenway project	20.3%	11.2%	15.2%

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

ational facilities. As Table 13 shows, about 60 percent of the respondents indicated that these were important or very important issues.

- About 60 percent of respondents indicated that providing year-round recreation programs and contributing financially to the development or maintenance of a regional trails/greenway project were not very important.

- Opinions among borough and township respondents varied on the importance of certain recreation issues. Eighty percent of borough respondents said it was important to have modern or up-to-date equipment; 79 percent said it was important to have facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities; and 63 percent said it was important to own and operate their own park and recreation facilities. Forty-seven

percent of township respondents said it was important to have park and recreation facilities accessible to persons with disabilities; 43 percent said it was important to have modern or up-to-date equipment; and less than 30 percent said it was important to own their own park and recreation facility.

- One issue that all respondents largely agreed on was financially supporting the development or maintenance of a regional trail or greenway project. Less than 21 percent of borough respondents and 11 percent of township respondents said this was important.

- Small municipalities that spent more than \$2,000 on parks and recreation in 1999 generally believed it was more important to own and operate park and recreational facilities, provide access to persons with disabilities and have

Boroughs (n=311)	Townships (n=415)
<u>Most Needed</u>	<u>Most Needed</u>
1. Funding for development of new or existing parks (47.9%)	1. Funding for development of new or existing parks (33.5%)
2. Safe/modern playground equipment (33.4%)	2. Walking/biking trails (20.7%)
3. Programs for local youth (28.3%)	3. Programs for local youth (17.6%)
4. New playground facilities (23.8%)	4. Safe/modern playground equipment (15.4%)
5. Walking/biking trails (23.8%)	5. New playground facilities (14.2%)
<u>Least Needed</u>	<u>Least Needed</u>
1. Community festivals/fairs (5.8%)	1. Community festivals/fairs (3.6%)
2. Swimming pool (5.1%)	2. Summer playground program (3.1%)
3. ATV Trails (3.2%)	3. Tennis Courts (2.2%)
4. Recreational coordinator (3.2%)	4. Recreational coordinator (1.4%)
5. More recreational programs from the school district (2.6%)	5. Swimming Pool (0.7%)

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because of multiple responses, and the "other" category was excluded.

modern or up-to-date equipment than those small municipalities that spent less than \$2,000 or had no expenditures.

Park and Recreation Needs

- According to the survey results, the top needs of small municipalities are nearly identical. (See Table 14.) For example, the top five items for both borough and township respondents are funding for the development of parks; safe/modern playground equipment; walking/biking trails; programs for local youth; and new playground equipment. The difference between borough and township responses was in ranking.

- There were common themes among the items that are least needed by boroughs and townships. Both did not indicate a need to sponsor community festivals or fairs, hire a recreational coordinator, or have swimming pools.

- Borough respondents did not perceive a need for ATV trails or recreational programs from school districts and township respondents did not perceive a need for tennis courts or summer playground programs.

- For those small municipalities that reported no recreational expenditures in 1999, the top needed items were funding for the development of new parks, programs for youth, walking/biking trails, and new playground equipment. This list was similar for small municipalities that reported expenditures over \$5,000. The only difference was that the latter also wanted more volunteers to run youth programs.

Summary

Residents of Pennsylvania's small municipalities, for the most part, are provided with an array of recreational programs and facilities. These are owned or operated by a number of interests, including local government, school districts and community-based organizations. This survey helps demonstrate that many small communities lack the resources to develop or expand recreational activities and helps illustrate a number of issues, described below.

Although 82 percent of the respondents have recreation facilities, the number and types are limited. Almost 60 percent have five or less facilities and most of these are sports fields or playgrounds. Formal recreation programs are offered by 40 percent of survey respondents, with the most frequently cited being youth sports league and family/community events.

The lack of diversity in the types of facilities and programs was apparent. Only a few municipalities provide any type of recreational opportunities for senior citizens or persons with disabilities. When asked to prioritize their three biggest recreational needs, the majority of small municipalities identified traditional recreational activities – namely, new playground equipment, youth activities, and funding for park development/expansion.

This focus on youth comes at a time when many of Pennsylvania's small communities are experiencing a decline in both youth population and married couples with children. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 1990 and 2000, small municipalities overall had a 9 percent decline in the number of persons under 18 years old and nearly a 12 percent decline in married couples with children.

Just over 60 percent of the recreational facilities in small communities are owned or operated by a municipality. The remainder is under the control of another governing entity. This shows that recreational needs are being met by multiple providers, and that costs associated with operations are not the sole responsibility of local government.

About 25 percent of the respondents believe it is important to cooperate with a neighboring municipality or school district on a cost-share basis to provide recreation programs and facilities. However, less than 6 percent actually have such an agreement. This is not unique to recreation. Traditionally, outside of services shared through membership in a council of governments, many municipalities "go it alone" when it comes to providing services to its residents.

In general, recreation facilities and programs are concentrated in boroughs. Nearly 50 percent of the boroughs responding have five or more facilities and less than 6 percent have none. About 30 percent of townships have no recreational facilities within their jurisdiction, and of those that do, 70 percent have fewer than four. About 58 percent of boroughs sponsor some type of recreation programs, compared to 24 percent of townships.

Regionally, there is little variation among small municipalities in the number and type of recreational programs and facilities. The only noted exception was in southeastern Pennsylvania where there are few small municipalities. This lack of regional variation may help support the development of a statewide strategy for improving recreational options for smaller communities.

The survey results suggest that, with respect to recreation, three distinct groups of small municipalities emerge.

The first group owns or operates few, if any, facilities or programs. It allocates little funding for recreation, or an average of less than \$2,400 in 1999, and has no staff or agreements with other municipalities to provide programs or facilities. The average annual budget of this group is about \$215,000. Sixty-nine percent of the municipalities in this group indicated that residents' demands for recreation had remained the same over the past five years.

The second group has some recreational facilities and programs, providing mostly basic recreational facilities and programs. This group does not employ staff to oversee its programs and, on average, spent less than \$5,960 on parks and recreation in 1999 or 2 percent of total expenditures. This group's average annual budget is about \$313,000. Over the past five years, 47 percent of the municipalities in this

group indicated that residents' demands for recreation had remained the same.

The third and smallest group provides the most recreational facilities and programs. This group spent an average of about \$18,400 on parks and recreation in 1999 or 3 percent of total expenditures. The average annual budget of this group is more than \$645,000, and over the past five years, 72 percent of the municipalities in this group indicated that residents' demands for recreation had increased.

Each of these groups listed funding to develop new or existing parks as their top recreational need.

For more information on funding as well as technical assistance, small municipalities may turn to the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). DCNR provides information on the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, which has been restructured to combine several funding sources that were previously administered by the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation as separate grant programs. The program includes the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund (Keystone), Environmental Stewardship and Watershed Protection Act (Growing Greener), and Pennsylvania Recreational Trails Program. In addition to funding, DCNR also offers technical assistance to municipalities on parks and recreation issues.

For more information on funding, and technical and other assistance, visit DCNR's website at www.dcnr.state.pa.us or call (717) 787-2869.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities. The Center seeks to preserve and enhance the rural environment, which makes the Commonwealth a unique place to live, work, or visit; awards grants for applied research and model projects; maintains and disseminates information on rural trends and conditions; develops publications to share research and project results; and sponsors local, state and national forums on rural issues.

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