



Trenton Recreation Needs Assessment (draft)

Trenton , New Jersey

September 2018

Contents

Introduction	1
Needs Assessment Process	2
Existing Conditions	5
Findings	10
Usage and Perceptions	10
Maintenance and Security	13
Facilities	15
Facility Features	19
Programs	20
Summary of Needs	22
Appendix	
A: Survey	
B: Additional Survey Data	
C: Park Inventory	



Roberto Clemente Park Children's Garden.

Acknowledgments

This project was a collaborative effort led by the City of Trenton, BRS, Inc., Isles, Inc., the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

The project team extends special thanks to many community members as well as leaders of community-based organizations and leagues who contributed their time and knowledge by participating in the city-wide survey, stakeholder meetings and interviews. The project team would also like to acknowledge the East Trenton Collaborative for supporting outreach and engagement efforts in the East Trenton community.

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Introduction

Background

Trenton, a city of approximately 85,000 people, is situated along the Delaware River. Trenton consists of many neighborhoods and is divided into four wards – North, South, East and West. Because Trenton is the state capital of New Jersey, the city serves both residents and a large number of state workers who commute into the city.

The city's demographic make-up is just over 48 percent African American, 35.5 percent Hispanic, about 14 percent white and nearly 1.5 percent Asian. Trenton's population has remained steady for the last 20 years, but the demographic composition of neighborhoods continues to shift. Most recent estimates indicate a steadily increasing Latino population and a slightly increasing Asian population. Nearly 28 percent of people within Trenton live below the poverty level, as compared to just over 11 percent of individuals within Mercer County.

The decline of the former industrial economy – once a bustling manufacturing town – is evident in dilapidated buildings, vacant properties and land use patterns that present challenges for creating a healthy urban environment and quality of life. The City of Trenton is approaching these challenges as opportunities for revitalization, investing in extensive brownfields planning and development efforts.

While this needs assessment takes a city-wide look at recreation needs in Trenton, it comes at a favorable moment, as the City of Trenton is currently planning for the redevelopment of a large span of open space along the Assunpink Creek. An area-wide brownfields planning project is underway for the Assunpink Greenway, a 99-acre linear park in a floodplain along the Assunpink Creek, which flows through East Trenton into the Delaware River. This corridor presents many possibilities for recreational enhancement to spur and support neighborhood revitalization.

Recreation Needs Assessment Purpose

As demographics across the city change and new sports and recreation options continue to gain popularity, the City of Trenton recognizes the need for community input to guide investments in existing and new recreation facilities, such the planning area along the Assunpink Greenway, likely to be the first large scale area to be able to incorporate this information into a redevelopment project.

The City of Trenton, BRS, Inc. and the nonprofit Isles, Inc., have partnered with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the United States Environmental Protection Agency to conduct a needs assessment to identify needs for parks and recreation facilities and programming across Trenton. The findings will help inform the City's decisions about improving and enhancing existing facilities. The results will also inform planning and development of the Assunpink Greenway into a regional asset that offers a wide range of recreation opportunities and revitalizes Trenton neighborhoods.



Figure 1. Early plan for Assunpink Greenway. Source: City of Trenton

Needs Assessment Process

1. Research

The project team reviewed the following documents for context and background information:

- City of Trenton Park Inventory (working version)
- City of Trenton Park Map
- *ReCreate in THDC* Neighborhood Recreation Plan
- SCOOP (Social Celebrations, Organizations, Opportunities and People program summary)
- Assunpink Creek Park Plans (initial schematic design)
- *Trenton250* Comprehensive Master Plan



Examples of publications and documents reviewed.

2. Survey

The City conducted a city-wide recreation needs survey in English and Spanish from April 27, 2018, to July 31, 2018. The survey included 12 questions to collect input on the kinds of parks and amenities currently being used, the types of facilities needed and the types of programming that interest participants. See Appendix for survey questions.

Over 260 participants completed the survey. Participants represent most city neighborhoods somewhat evenly across the four wards as seen in Figure 2. The highest number of participants were from the North Ward, followed by the West Ward, East Ward and South Ward respectively. Twenty participants did not provide location information. It is important to note that as the survey was conducted in the summer months, this could have influenced perceptions of recreation needs (i.e., the need for swimming pools). Only nine participants responded to the Spanish-only version of the survey.

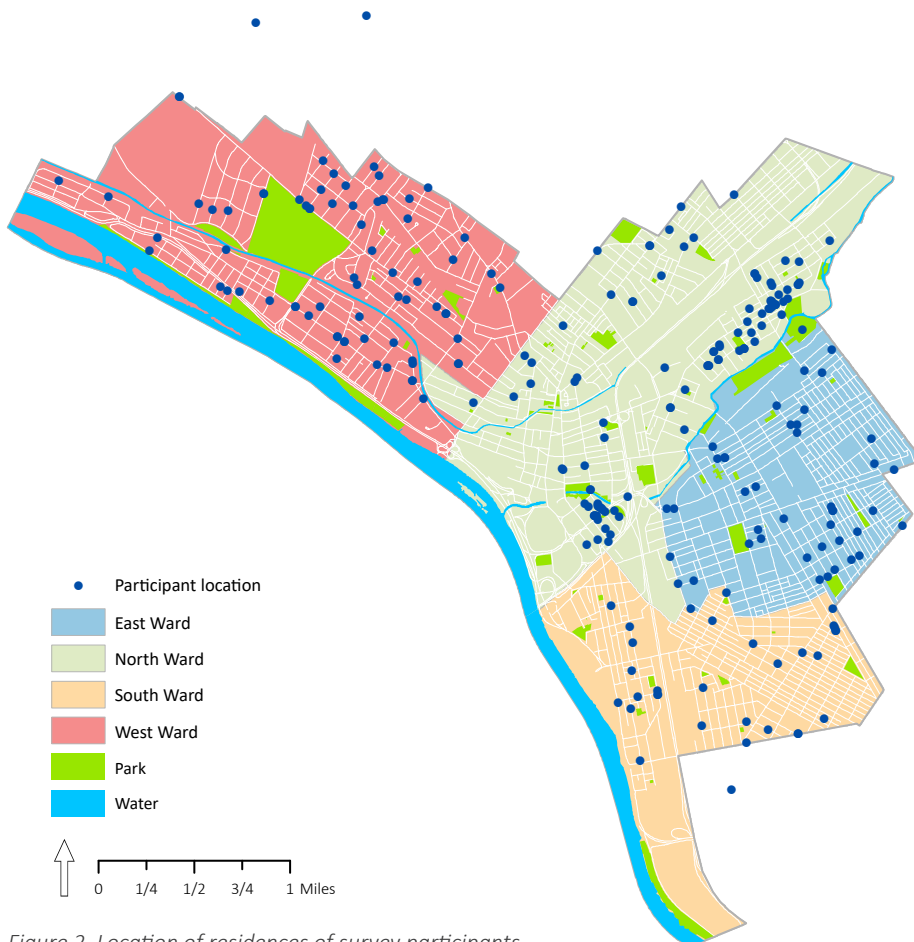


Figure 2. Location of residences of survey participants.

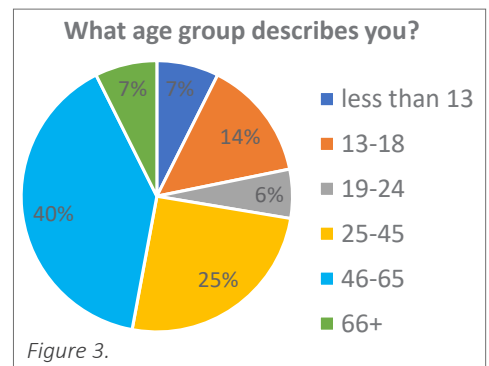


Figure 3.

Approximately 20 percent of the survey respondents are under 18 years of age, and 65 percent are between 25 and 65 years of age.

Compared with Trenton's population, survey participants under 13 and ages 25-45 are under-represented, survey participants ages 13-18 and ages 46-65 are over-represented, and survey participants ages 19-24 and 66 or older are nearly the same.[1]

[1] Comparisons were made using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Comparisons are approximate because U.S. Census Bureau and survey age categories do not match exactly.

Needs Assessment Process

3. Outreach

The City of Trenton distributed the survey link on the City's website and made paper copies available. The project team also shared the survey link widely with recreation leagues and community organizations. Several stakeholder distributed survey links using personal media.

During April and May 2018, project partners distributed English and Spanish versions of a flyer that provided information about the survey and instructions for completing the online survey. The City distributed paper copies of the survey during summer program training, and Isles provided paper copies of the survey to residents through the East Trenton Collaborative.

The City distributed a press release that described the background and purpose for the recreation needs assessment as well as instructions for completing the survey.

4. Site Visit

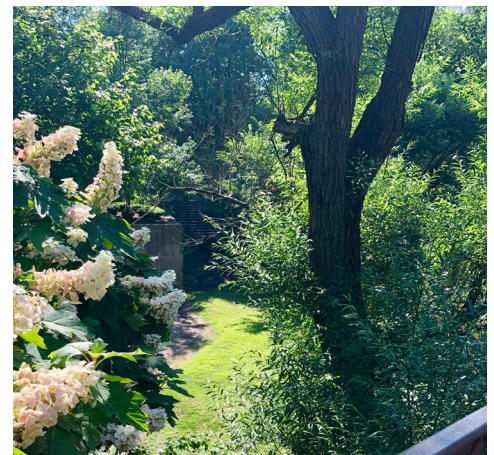
In June 2018, several members of the project team convened in Trenton for a tour of parks and recreation facilities led by Randy Baum, former Landscape Architect for Trenton's Division of Recreation, currently Landscape Architect with BRS, Inc.

The group visited several parks with recent or ongoing renovations including Cadwalader Park, in which recent renovations include a playground, pavilions and new plantings, as well as Hetzel Park, where a significant pool renovation is underway. The tour highlighted other planned and recent improvements at parks including Calhoun Park, Martin Luther King Park and Battle Monument Park.

The tour also included brief visits to smaller parks across the city to see the variety of sizes, amenities and conditions of facilities. Parks that are maintained with resources that supplement the city maintenance, such as Mill Hill Park and Roberto Clemente Children's Garden, appeared well-maintained. City-maintained parks appeared to need more frequent mowing, general upkeep and equipment repairs. City maintenance workers were present in two of the parks during the site tour. Conversations with the maintenance workers suggested additional park maintenance guidance for workers could be beneficial.



Spanish version of flyer.



Trenton's Downtown Association supplements maintenance funds for Mill Hill Park.



Renovations are underway at the historic Hetzel pool facility.



Playground and pavilion renovations were recently completed at Cadwalader Park.

Needs Assessment Process

5. Stakeholder Meetings and Interviews

The project team identified key stakeholders to weigh in on the needs assessment, and scheduled in-person meetings and phone interviews to gather input. The project team met with four stakeholder groups in Trenton in June 2018. The meeting with East Trenton residents took place at the offices of the East Trenton Collaborative. Meetings with other groups took place in the recreation conference room at City Hall. Because the timing of the meetings coincided with the start of summer programs, many of the community organizations were unable to participate. The meetings included:

- Stakeholder Meeting One: East Trenton Residents
- Stakeholder Meeting Two: City Staff (representing recreation, brownfields and skate park interests)
- Stakeholder Meeting Three: Current and Former City Safety and Maintenance Staff
- Stakeholder Meeting Four: Recreation League Administrators

Phone interviews were conducted with seven city staff, league and community organization representatives who could not attend the stakeholder meetings in Trenton in June. Additionally, two leagues submitted input regarding recreation programs and facility needs by email.



Stakeholder meeting at the East Trenton Collaborative office.

6. Analysis

The needs assessment analysis centered on reviewing summarized survey data and reviewing findings from stakeholder meetings and interviews. Survey analysis consisted of evaluating data summarized for all participants as well as analyzing data based upon participants' age and ward location. Several questions included the opportunity for survey participants to select multiple options, however, participants were not required to prioritize their responses if multiple options were selected. Efforts were made to identify overlapping needs expressed by both survey participants and participants in stakeholder meetings and interviews.

Stakeholders invited to participate:

- City of Trenton Staff (Planning, Brownfields, Security and Recreation Divisions)*
- 6/11 Little League*
- American Legion Posts 93/182*
- Boys and Girls Club
- Catholic Youth Organization (CYO)*
- Chambersburg Athletic Association
- New Jersey Tennis League
- North Trenton Youth Baseball
- Pop Warner Football
- Play Soccer*
- TCHS All Years Scholar and Athletic Development Program*
- The First Tee of Greater Trenton*
- Trenton Cycling Revolution
- Trenton Babe Ruth Baseball
- Trenton YMCA*
- Urban Promise
- West End Little League*

*Organization representatives participated in meetings or interviews.

Existing Conditions

Trenton's Parks and Recreation Facilities Today

Trenton's parks and recreation facilities provide settings for many pursuits across the city, from waterfront access to competitive athletics to outdoor cookouts. Trenton's largest park, Cadwalader Park, is a notable 100-acre park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed New York City's Central Park. Several medium-size parks provide basketball, baseball, football and other league facilities, picnicking areas, swimming pools, and playgrounds. Smaller pocket parks offer different settings for passive recreation. The Delaware & Raritan (D & R) Canal State Park, a 70-mile trail for bicyclists and pedestrians developed alongside a historic canal, connects Trenton to other communities in the region. The Assunpink Greenway corridor, for which planning is underway, is illustrated in light purple.



The Green Acres program helps secure funding for parks.

Trenton's Public Works Department maintains Trenton's parks and recreation facilities. Other organizations, including Isles and the Trenton Downtown Association, supplement maintenance funding in specific parks. While most parks provide features for leisure, several are used by area leagues for active recreation programming, such as little league baseball, or by community organizations for scheduled events. Coordination between leagues, community organizations and the City is handled by the Division of Recreation.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres program, which supports acquisition and redevelopment of land to preserve open spaces for recreation and conservation, has provided funding for Trenton's parks. The funding restricts future development and provides guidelines to ensure that the amount of open space and recreation facilities in certain areas remains the same or increases over time. Green Acres funding has also been used to acquire several large properties along the Assunpink Greenway that are available for redevelopment for recreation purposes.

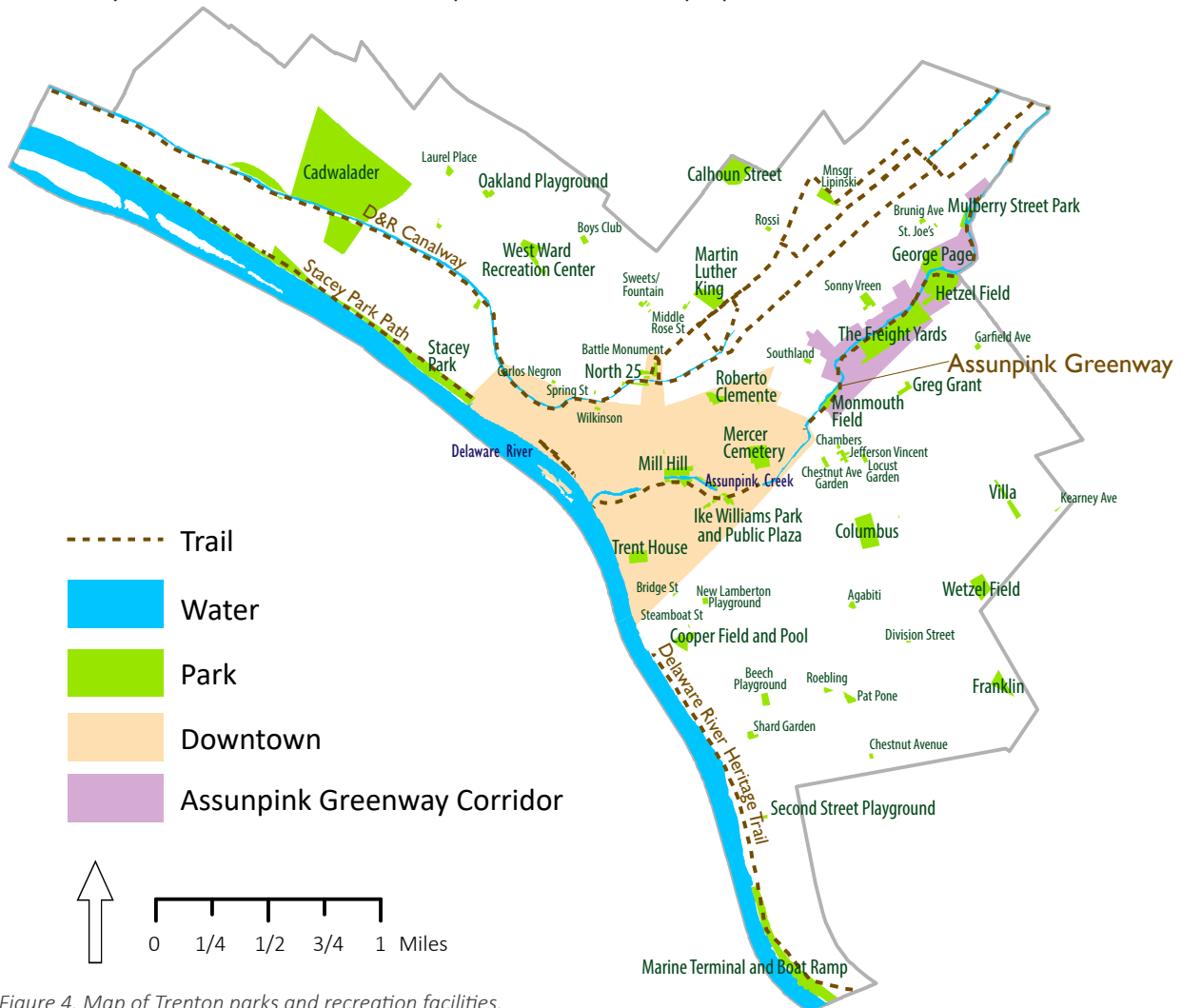


Figure 4. Map of Trenton parks and recreation facilities.

Existing Conditions

Park and Recreation Facility Inventory (Placeholder)

Include table listing parks. For each park, include ward, acreage, facilities and features.

Figure 5. Excerpt of Park Inventory. Source: City of Trenton.

Existing Conditions

How Trenton Parks and Recreation Facilities Compare Nationally

Trenton's park and recreation facility acreage per person falls below the lower quartile of park space per resident based on the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) facility metrics.¹ According to the NRPA, typically there is one park for every 2,114 residents and there are 10.1 acres of park land for every 1,000 residents when looking at the United States as a whole. According to The Trust for Public Land's *2017 City Parks Facts*, 69 percent of people living in the largest U.S. cities live within a 10-minute walk to a park. Almost 100 percent of Trenton's residents can walk to a park within 10 minutes.²

While the accessibility of Trenton's parks trends positively compared to others across the U.S., Trenton's resources to support parks and recreation facilities reveal a significant gap. NRPA metrics show an average operating expenditure per capita of \$78.26 per year, and full-time staff of 7.9 full-time employees per 10,000 residents. If Trenton's resources were aligned with those metrics, the City's recreation operating expenditure would be approximately \$6.6 million (currently Trenton budgets _____) and the recreation staff would include 66 full-time employees (currently there are _____ full-time recreation staff members).

Park Initiatives and Activity

Renovations and Improvements

Several parks and recreation facilities have undergone renovations and improvements in recent years. Examples include the following:

- Battle Monument Park – expansion underway across the D & R Canalway
- Cadwalader Park – new playground, pavilions and canal front improvements
- Calhoun Park – new soccer field and updated pool; new field house is under contract
- Hetzel Park – renovation of the pool and pool house is underway
- Locust Hill – gate planned for installation at the African American cemetery Martin Luther King Park - new pool facility
- Mill Hill Park – park recently restored with funds from a Historic Trust. The Downtown Association provides funds for maintenance of the downtown park.

1. 2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review – Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks.

2. Walk time based on distance and estimated walking pace. These measures are based on buffers which do not account for routes needed to walk to park.

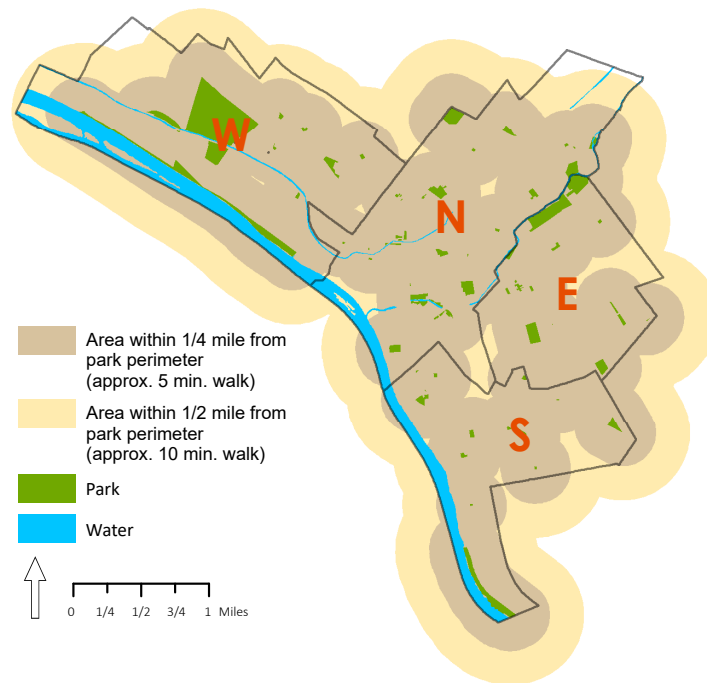


Figure 6. Walk radius of park and recreation facilities. Almost all areas of Trenton are within a quarter mile (approximately a 5 minute walk) of a park, although some parks offer more features and amenities than others. All areas in Trenton are within one-half mile (approximately a 10 minute walk) of a park.



Improvements along the D & R Canal at Cadwalader Park.

Existing Conditions

Bike and Trail Network

“Many of Trenton’s streetscapes, trails, and open spaces are disconnected and underutilized. This deters residents from accessing the recreational, cultural, and historic resources that the City has to offer and prevents the City from capitalizing on its locational advantage, hampering economic development efforts.” (Trenton250)

The D & R Canal State Park, one of the most extensive trails in the city, is widely-used but more heavily by visitors from outside of Trenton. The trail runs continuously for nearly 70 miles and is shaped like a “V,” with Trenton at its center. It connects many other towns along the way, including Frenchtown, Lambertville, Ewing Township, Princeton, Franklin Township, and New Brunswick. The trail comprises part of the developing East Coast Greenway trail network that runs from Maine to Florida.

Several smaller recreation and bike paths extend for short lengths in the city. *Trenton250* indicates the City’s plans to connect disparate paths and trails, linking them to key destinations across the city. The Assunpink Greenway will provide new links for many neighborhoods in areas east and north of downtown. Other trails, illustrated in the *Trenton250* Open Space map, create additional regional connections. The comprehensive master plan states the City will coordinate open space access initiatives with the Comprehensive Capital City Regional Trail Network Initiative.

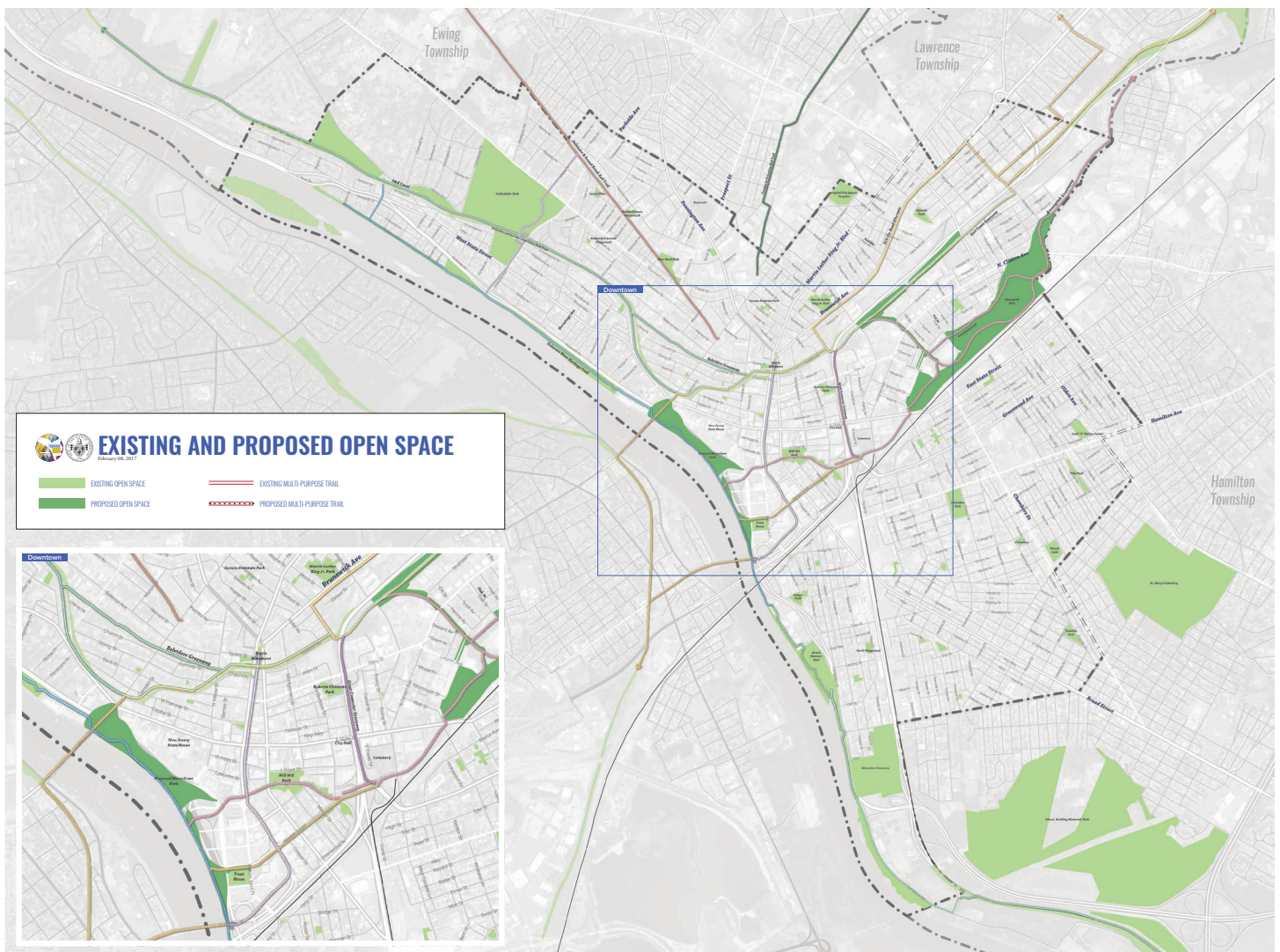


Figure 7. Trenton250 Open Space Map proposed trails and open spaces.

Existing Conditions

New Open Space and Redevelopment Planning

*“Open Space initiatives such as community gardens and a combination of city, county and state parks and trails allow some residents and visitors to the City to experience the health benefits of recreational spaces.”
(Trenton250)*

The City is currently engaged in new open space and redevelopment planning. Along Assunpink Creek, efforts are underway to daylight a portion of the Assunpink Creek in downtown. Broader redevelopment planning is also underway to develop the 99-acre linear park along Assunpink Creek, which has potential to enhance local and regional recreation opportunities.

Other efforts include the City’s waterfront reclamation and redevelopment project. (City to add more information about this project.)



Amtico Square, a potential recreation site along the Assunpink Greenway.



Daylighting of the Assunpink Creek in downtown Trenton.

Community Gardens

(If desired, City to provide brief overview of gardens, #, city and non-city support for gardens).

Findings

Usage and Perception

Conditions

According to input from stakeholders, the condition of Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities has steadily declined over the last 10 years. Resource shortages prevent the City from being able to maintain and update facilities and meet the recreation needs of residents.

The Department of Public Works took over maintenance of the park facilities around 2008. Today, stakeholders note that well-trained workers are no longer available to oversee tasks such as pruning, safety inspections, and playground equipment repair. Many parks are in disrepair, and others are often unusable because they are poorly maintained. Often, the litter in parks, such as used needles, presents such imminent safety risks that community organizations and families do not visit parks at all.

Despite the significant concerns and setbacks attributed to lack of maintenance and upkeep, over 20 percent of survey participants view the condition of Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities as good or very good. Over 40 percent view the condition as average, and 35 percent of the participants rate the condition as poor or very poor.

Access

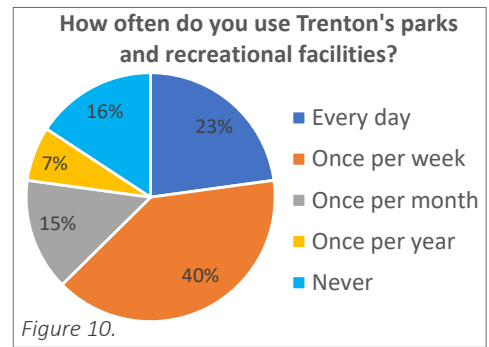
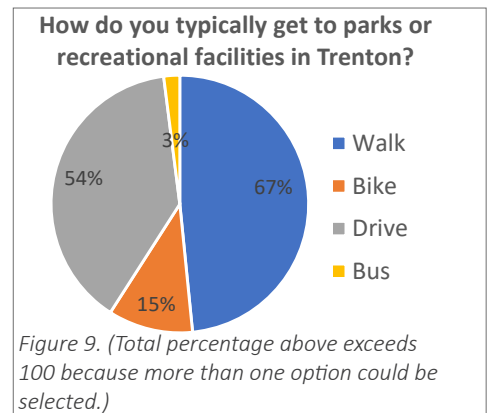
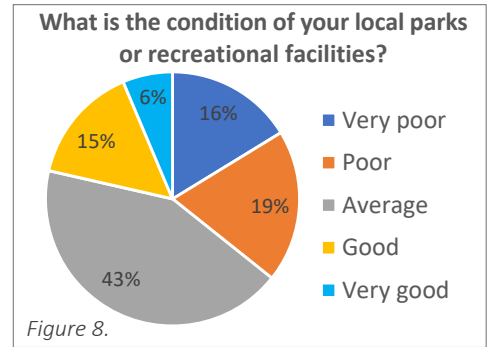
Most community stakeholders and survey participants walk or drive to parks and recreation facilities. Creating safe pedestrian paths to parks and recreation facilities is a high priority for visitors according to stakeholders, as well as for the City as outlined in *Trenton250*.

Stakeholders from the East Trenton Neighborhood specifically described the difficulties walking to George Page Park due to narrow streets, industrial vehicles, high speed traffic and lack of sidewalks.

About 15 percent of respondents also bike to Trenton’s parks or recreation facilities. Only a small number (less than 5 percent) of respondents use the bus.

Use

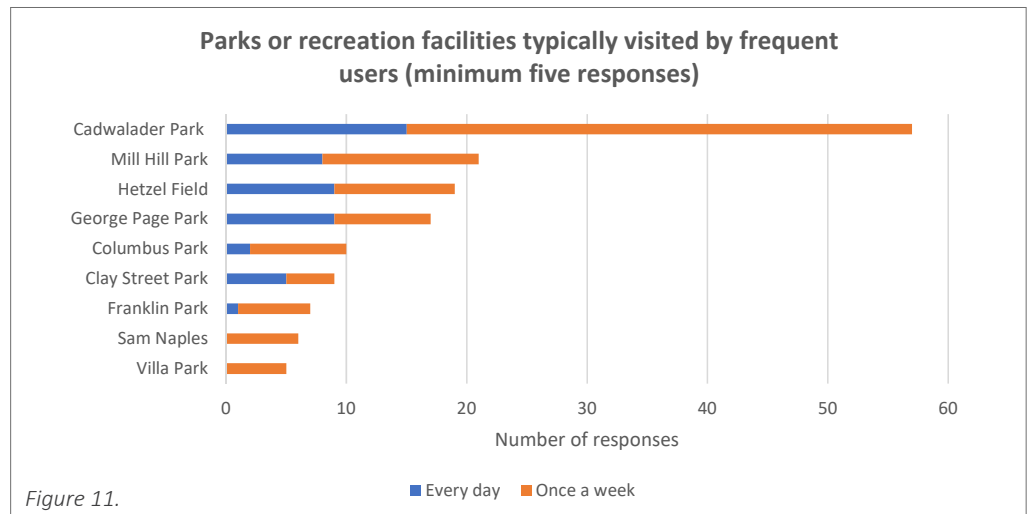
Survey participants frequently use Trenton’s parks, and the results indicate that the city’s larger parks are the most heavily used on a frequent basis. Almost 65 percent of survey respondents indicate they use Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities daily or weekly.



“Parks need regular grass cutting and tree trimming. Trash pickup should be done regularly.”

“I would like to see the implementation of lights, speed bumps and safe equipment for our children to play on.”

Survey Participants



Findings

Frequently Visited Parks and Recreation Facilities

Survey participants typically visit five of the largest parks in Trenton: Cadwalader Park, Mill Hill Park, Hetzel Field, George Page Park and Columbus Park. These four parks range in size from 105 acres (Cadwalader Park) to 4 acres (Mill Hill Park). The amenities at these parks vary.

Cadwalader Park offers a wide-range of amenities for both active and passive recreation including tennis, basketball and baseball, as well as walking paths, pavilions and grills to accommodate gathering and walking. Mill Hill Park supports passive recreation uses primarily; features include a creek-side amphitheater, walking paths, a large open lawn area and a plaza.

Although George Page Park and Hetzel Field are adjacent to one another, the type of use varies. George Page Park's visitors likely use the park's passive amenities for relaxing or gathering, while visitors to Hetzel Field are more likely to use active recreation facilities such as softball fields. Shared restrooms for the two parks are located at Hetzel Field, so visitors are likely to use both parks.



Figure 12.

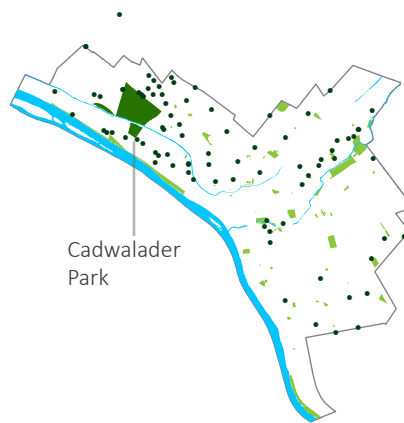


Figure 13a. Visitors to Cadwalader Park.



Figure 13b. Visitors to Hetzel Park.

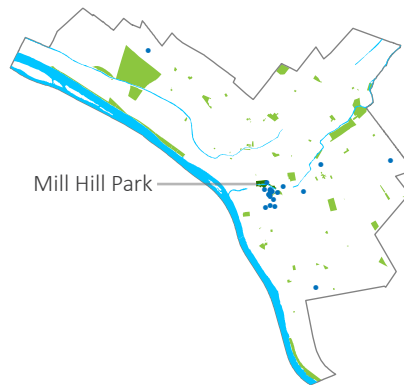


Figure 13c. Visitors to Mill Hill Park.



Figure 13d. Visitors to George Page Park.

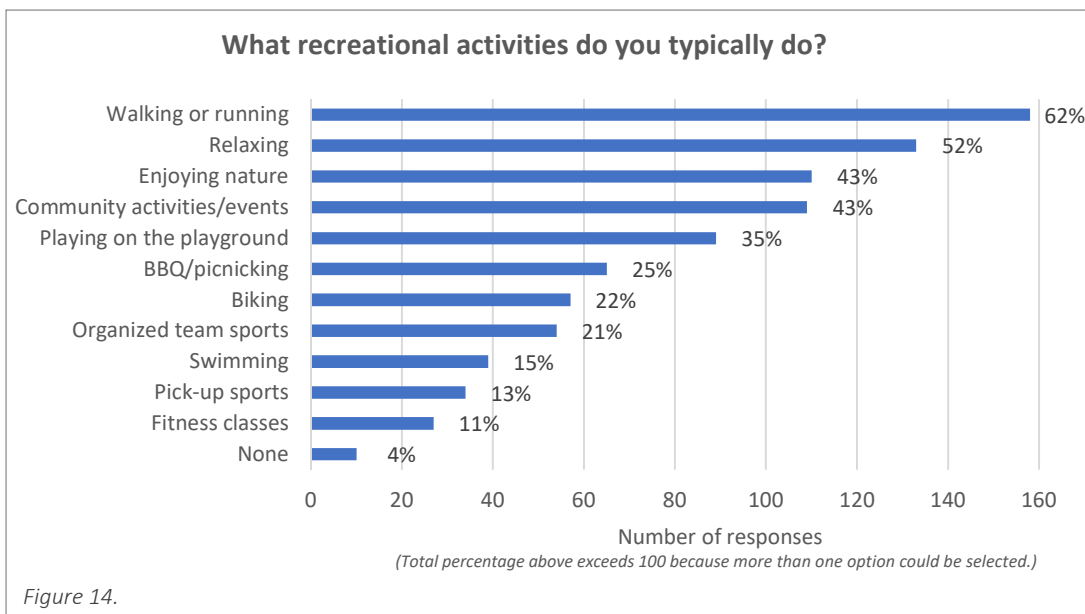
Figures 13a-13d. Maps above are based upon survey data indicating which parks or recreation facilities survey participants are most likely to visit and survey participant location information. Visitors to Cadwalader Park are likely to come from across Trenton. Visitors to Mill Hill Park, Hetzel Park and George Page Park are more likely to come from nearby neighborhoods.

Findings

Common Recreation Activities at Trenton’s Parks and Recreation Facilities

Stakeholders and survey participants use Trenton’s park and recreation facilities for a variety of passive and active recreation activities.

- Over half of survey participants selected walking or running and relaxing as the most common recreation activities at Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities.
- Enjoying nature, community activities/events and playing on the playground or taking children to the playground are also identified as common activities.
- Other popular activities include BBQ/picnicking, biking, organized team sports and swimming. Swimming and pick-up sports were also mentioned by several survey participants.
- These survey results are similar by ward and by age. Survey responses by age and ward location are presented in the Appendix.



- 62% of respondents selected walking or running
- 52% of respondents selected relaxing
- 43% of respondents selected enjoying nature or community activities/events
- 35% of respondents selected playing on the playground
- 25% of respondents selected BBQ/picnicking

Findings

Maintenance and Security Needs

The top issue raised by stakeholders is the need for routine maintenance of park and recreation facilities. Stakeholders cite infrequent cleanup and garbage removal, inconsistent mowing, and the lack of experienced staff to address facility repairs as key issues in parks.

Discussions and survey results reveal that Trenton residents and stakeholders prioritize basic needs for safety, security and maintenance across all recreation facilities. The condition of existing facilities makes it difficult for many stakeholders to consider new recreation facilities. Many community members, leaders and volunteers work tirelessly to provide safe and positive recreation opportunities for children and youth across the city. League directors often mow their teams' ball fields for games and community organizations using parks during programs often send staff to clean play areas before participants arrive.

Stakeholders and survey participants also cite increased security as a significant need in Trenton's parks and recreation facilities. Facility damage, illicit activity and concern about using the parks and facilities are attributed to the lack of a park ranger staff and inconsistent police presence.

Additionally, communication and basic information about parks and recreation facilities and programs is needed by residents. While many repairs and renovations are planned or underway in Trenton parks, many residents are unaware of efforts to improve existing facilities. Information about Trenton's parks and community centers including location, size, photos, amenities and features — previously provided on the City's website — is no longer available.

East Trenton Collaborative Community Parks and Recreation Goals

During a stakeholder meeting convened at the East Trenton Collaborative offices, participants identified the following goals for Trenton's parks and recreation facilities.

- Parks are safe and secure for everyone.
- Parks and open spaces have gathering places for family and community events.
- The City and local non-profits have activities for youth.
- The roads around parks are safe for pedestrians.
- Parks and open space have clear rules and include cultural, historic and interpretive signs.
- Parks are clean and beautiful spaces.

Maintenance, Safety and Security Needs

- Repair and upgrade existing parks and recreation facilities.
- Address litter, trash and debris at parks and recreation facilities. Increase the availability of trash and recycling bins and increase service to remove refuse.
- Improve security to address and deter criminal activity at parks and recreation facilities. Safety features suggested include police or park patrols, security cameras, lighting, and signs about permitted activities.
- Improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow in industrial areas to make it safer for residents to walk to parks.
- Install or improve bathroom facilities at parks and recreation facilities where feasible.
- Enhance communication about parks and recreation facilities using the City's website and/or other channels.

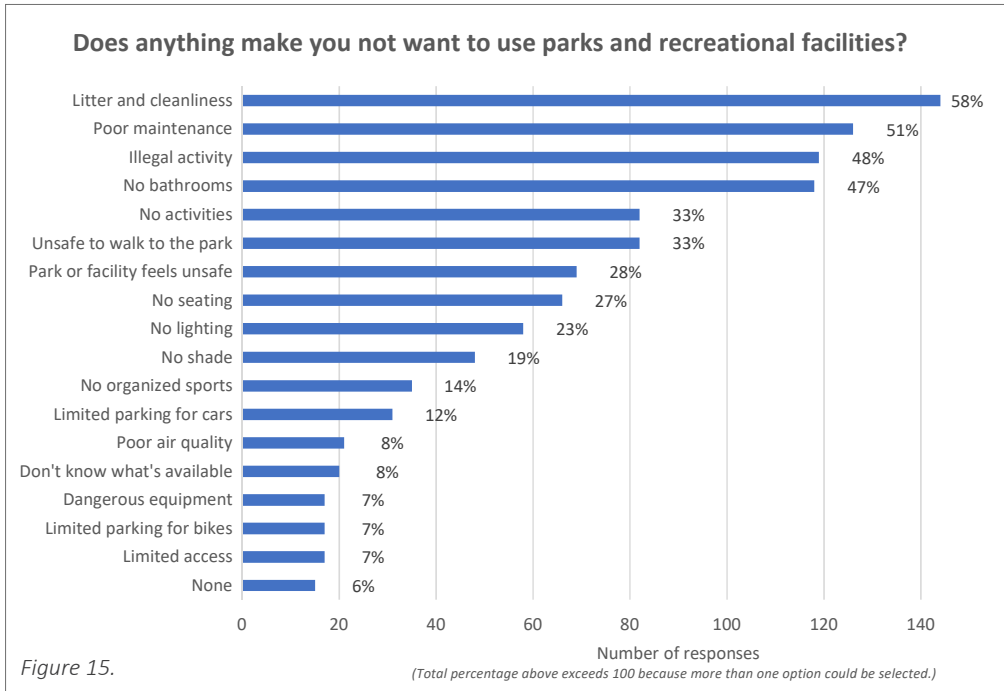


Broken playground equipment at Edgewood Avenue Playground.

Findings

Reasons Not To Use Parks and Recreation Facilities

Survey participants were asked to identify features that made them not want to use Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities. Participants could select all options that apply. The most frequently selected options included litter and cleanliness, poor maintenance, illegal activity and lack of bathrooms. Other frequently selected options include no activities, unsafe to walk to the park, concern about park safety, lack of seating, lack of lighting and lack of shade. Survey results are generally consistent by survey participant location and age. Survey responses by ward location and age are presented in the Appendix.



“Have police at all parks. Empty garbage cans daily.”

“Plan festivals that can bring the community together. If you have activities for families they will stay in the city.”

“The next generation has to be nourished with activities, especially teenagers.”

Survey Participant

- 58% of respondents selected litter and cleanliness
- 51% of respondents selected poor maintenance
- 47% of respondents selected no bathrooms
- 33% of respondents selected no activities and unsafe to walk to the park

Findings

Facility Needs

Traditional Sports and Existing Facilities

The City's swimming pools are heavily used during the summer. According to stakeholders, pool operations have improved significantly since the Trenton YMCA started overseeing operations in recent years. Survey participants indicate a high demand for pool facilities. The existing city pools are located in the central and north portions of the city. Locating a new pool in the southeast part of Trenton would significantly increase pool access for residents who live in those neighborhoods. Additionally, existing pools require upgrades, including wrought iron fencing and dual motor pumps, to improve safety and operations.

Basketball has long been the most popular sport in Trenton, according to long-time residents and community organizations. While there are many basketball courts in small and large parks in the city, court and equipment conditions vary. Few parks have multiple courts or supporting features, such as lights and restrooms, to sustain organized basketball programs. The year-round and summer basketball program coordinated by TCHS All Years Scholar and Athletic Development Program requires two additional courts at the Cadwalader location to meet needs for appropriate basketball instruction, practice and play space.

Several established league sports, such as baseball, have experienced slowly declining numbers of participants. The decrease might reflect changing interests. However, league officials suggest the decline is due to poor conditions, which keeps parents from investing in local league programs. Some families who have the resources to travel for competitive sports prefer updated facilities and join Mercer County leagues.

Survey data suggests that many visitors are currently using existing trail facilities for walking and running. Survey results also indicate additional trails are one of the most needed recreation facilities. Participants in stakeholder meetings suggested that mile-markers along trails would be a helpful wellness reminder for walkers.

Emerging Sports and New Facilities

Lack of field space for emerging sports is a critical need. Artificial turf and/or indoor field space would also help existing sports programs in Trenton.

Soccer is growing rapidly in Trenton, particularly in south Trenton. Several community organizations offer soccer programs, and PLAY SOCCER is emerging as a leading soccer program in the city. The lack of field space causes many adult and youth players to join Mercer County leagues. PLAY SOCCER sets up small spaces to teach skills, but needs a soccer facility to provide higher-level programming and feeder support in the city for middle-school children.

Recreation Facilities Needed

- Upgrade pool facilities, particularly fencing and motors to improve safety and operations. Consider constructing a pool facility in the southeast part of Trenton.
- Establish multi-purpose fields, preferably turf, primarily for soccer as well as other field sports. Soccer fields are particularly needed in the East and South Wards. Consider constructing soccer fields in the East and South Wards and one at Cadwalader Park on available land.
- Improve existing basketball courts and equipment at all parks in the city. Establish a lighted multi-court basketball facility for league and tournament use (this might be accomplished by improving and expanding existing courts and support facilities such as restrooms at Cadwalader Park).
- Expand the multi-purpose trail network to better accommodate walking and biking with fitness stations. Include mile markers.
- Conduct regular playground safety inspections and repair equipment in a timely manner.
- Build a skate park that incorporates community-focused features such as rain gardens and street art installations.
- Construct a putting green and small golf practice area (with two or three holes) to build on growing golf programs in and around Trenton.
- Develop an indoor sports facility (or seasonal bubble over artificial turf) to accommodate field sports and athletic training for soccer, baseball, football and other sports during winter and preseason months.
- Make facility improvements and necessary repairs at the three active baseball facilities.
- Renovate city-owned community centers to meet state regulations for childcare facilities and to provide welcoming, safe environments for children, youth and adults.
- Upgrade waterfront facilities (marina and boat ramp) to build demand and improve user experience, and restructure fees to develop a feasible revenue stream around this unique regional recreation asset.

Findings

Several community organizations work with other community groups to expose youth to new and emerging sports, such as field hockey, lacrosse and golf. For example, the First Tee of Greater Trenton has partnered with schools to teach basic golf skills in on-site clinics to 4,500 students in Trenton and Mercer County. Unfortunately, students who are exposed to new sports often do not have an opportunity to try the sport again because of the lack of facilities for non-traditional sports or sports that have not been widely introduced in Trenton.

League and community organization representatives expressed strong interest in an outdoor multi-purpose field facility, particularly one with a turf field that can withstand high use from many field sports. For other sports, such as golf and skateboarding, that require more specialized facilities, organizers are hopeful that opportunities might exist along the Assunpink Greenway.

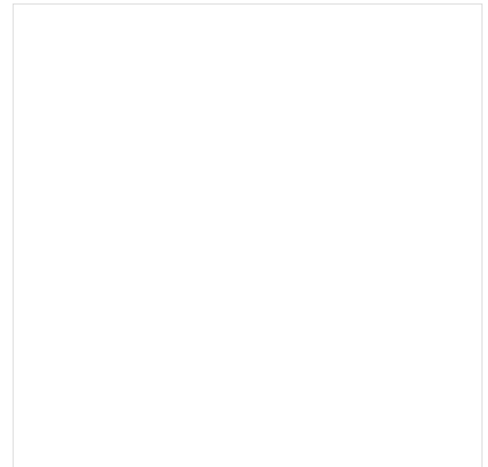
Stakeholders, particularly league representatives, expressed strong support for a city-wide, modern multi-purpose indoor training and recreation facility. Stakeholders envision a facility that can be shared by residents from all wards. Transportation to the facility would be important, since many people walk to recreation facilities. Access to an indoor training facility would allow Trenton's baseball leagues to begin training in the early season when other baseball leagues start. Access to outdoor turf fields would enable football and soccer leagues to begin training one to two months earlier.

Community Centers

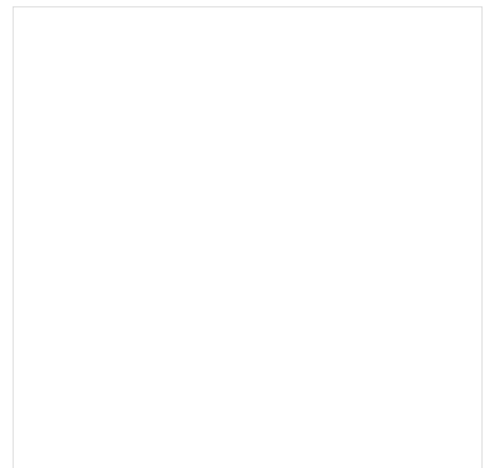
The City located a community center in each ward to make access viable for residents. Lack of staffing, maintenance and programs, as well as rivalries within the wards, have made the community centers inhospitable for many residents. Three of the four city-run community centers are currently operating; one has been closed indefinitely for repairs. The centers are not maintained to state standards for childcare and offer minimal programs and recreation opportunities for youth, according to stakeholders. Popular supervised events for youth have diminished due to funding cuts and facility condition. Many residents rely on community organizations for childcare and safe facilities for youth programs.

According to stakeholders, committing to meeting state guidelines (NJ School Age Child Standards) at all City of Trenton community centers would require significant investment in repairs and ongoing maintenance. However, adherence to the standards would ensure consistent, quality programs and environments for children, youth and families. Acquiring licensing for camps and childcare centers would also be more efficient. The state standards apply for youth up to age 13.

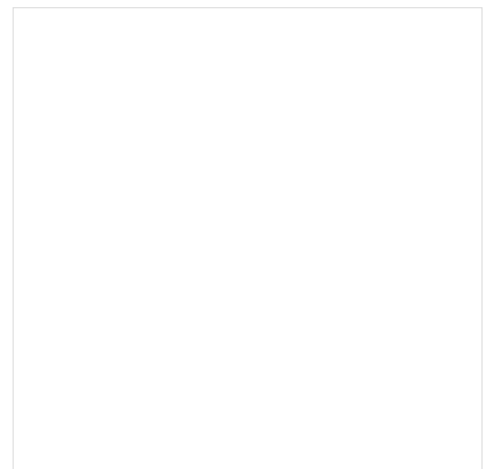
Additional facility updates are needed to cater to youth up to age 18. Suggestions to improve facilities and programs to meet the needs for 13-18 year olds include updated physical spaces (more welcoming buildings, lounges to "hang out" and computer labs) to accommodate teen-focused programs (tutoring, computer skills, resume writing and entrepreneurship). Building new community centers or substantially renovating existing community centers is a high priority for stakeholders.



(Placeholder image, change photo to soccer play)



(Placeholder image, change photo to basketball play)



(Placeholder image, change photo to swimming pool or golf)

Findings

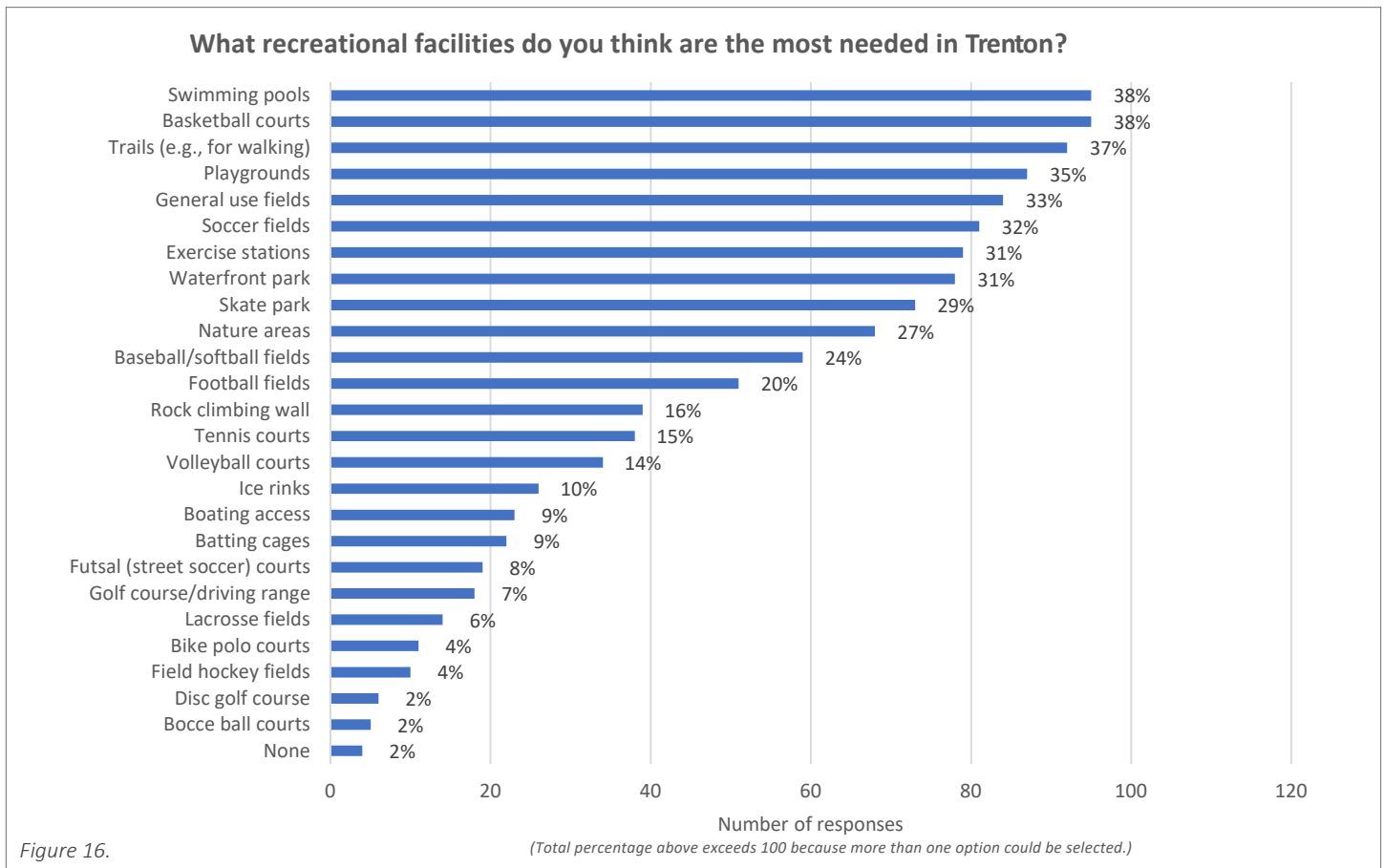
Most Needed Recreation Facilities

Survey participants chose from 25 recreation facility options most needed in Trenton. Choices ranged from various types of sports fields and facilities to swimming pools, exercise stations and natural areas. Respondents could select up to five.

Most frequently selected options included: swimming pools, basketball courts, trails, playgrounds, general use fields, soccer fields, exercise stations, waterfront park and skate park. Other options were selected by between 10 and 60 participants.

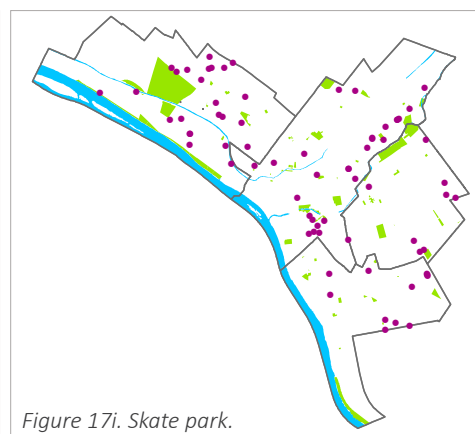
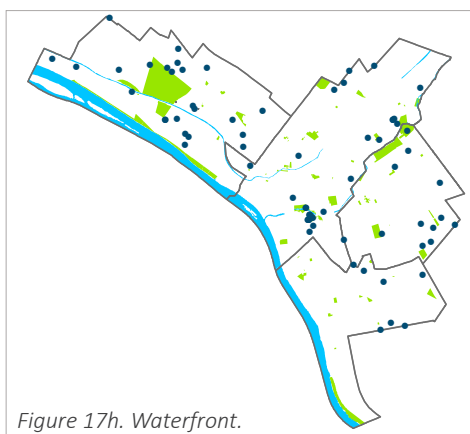
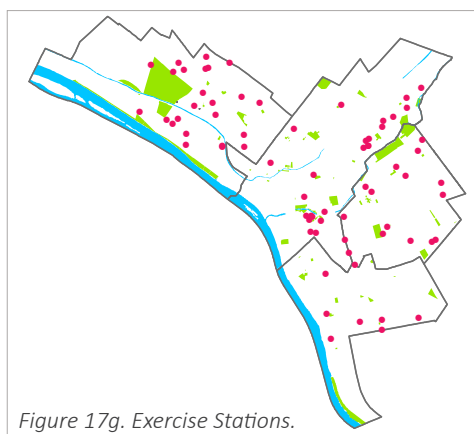
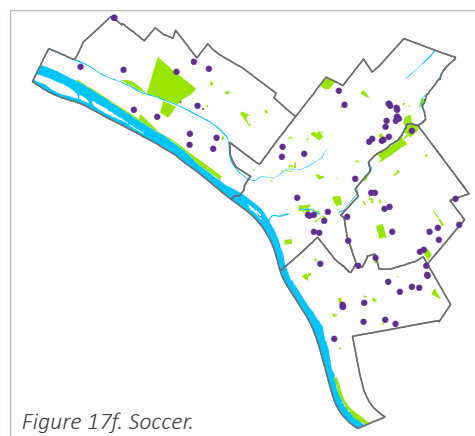
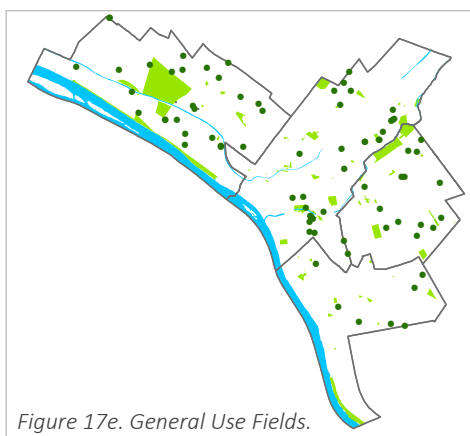
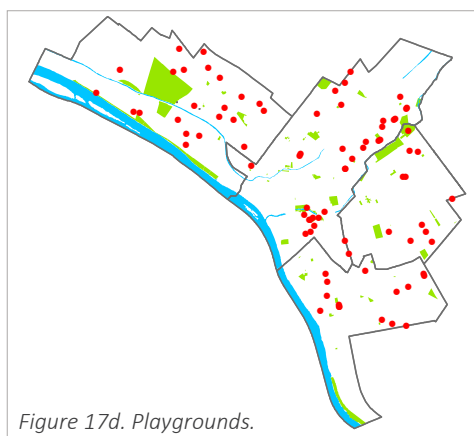
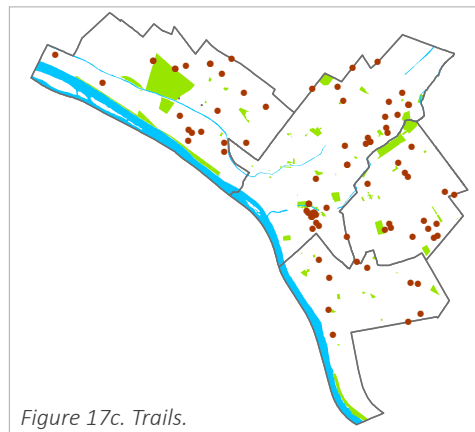
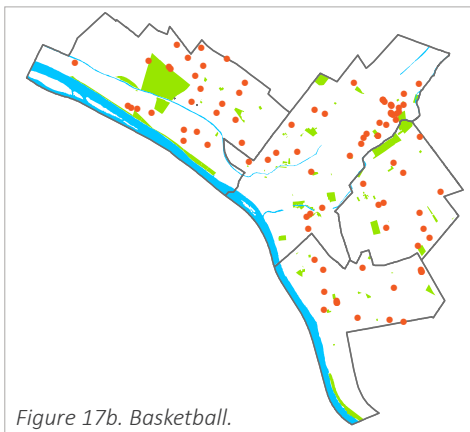
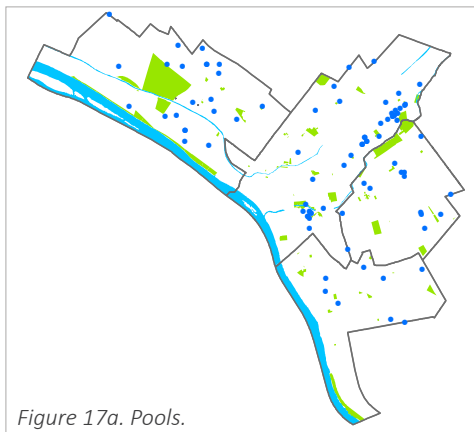
Survey responses by age group suggest results overall are similar, however swimming pools were not selected as frequently by 19-24 and 25-45 age groups as other age groups. Basketball courts were mentioned less frequently for participants ages less than 13 or 66 or older compared with other age groups.

- 38% of respondents selected swimming pools and basketball courts
- 37% of respondents selected trails
- 35% of respondents selected playgrounds
- 33% of respondents selected general use fields
- 32% of respondents selected soccer fields
- 31% of respondents selected exercise stations and waterfront park



Findings

Facilities Needed by Survey Respondent Location



The facilities selected most frequently were indicated by participants spread somewhat evenly across Trenton (approximately proportionate to location of survey respondents). Slightly higher demand for a pool from respondents in East Trenton Neighborhood (located within the North Ward) may result from closure of the pool at Hetzel Field for renovations during the time of the survey.

The strong response for soccer facilities from respondents in the East Trenton Neighborhood (in the north ward) as well as East and South Wards, is especially noteworthy considering the fact that the majority of survey respondents are from the North and West Wards.

Findings

Facility Features

Lack of restrooms or poorly maintained restroom facilities is a critical need for Trenton’s parks and recreation facilities, especially for larger parks and heavily used outdoor recreation facilities.

Trenton’s parks serve as gathering places for significant community events, attracting residents to festivals, tournaments, games and neighborhood cookouts. Discussions and survey results among leisure users identified the need for additional restrooms, seating and features for gatherings (grills, picnic areas, pavilions). For sports recreation users, features that support staff, volunteers, participants and families during games and practices are high priorities. These include nearby restrooms, functional concession stands, field houses, equipment storage and bleachers in good condition.

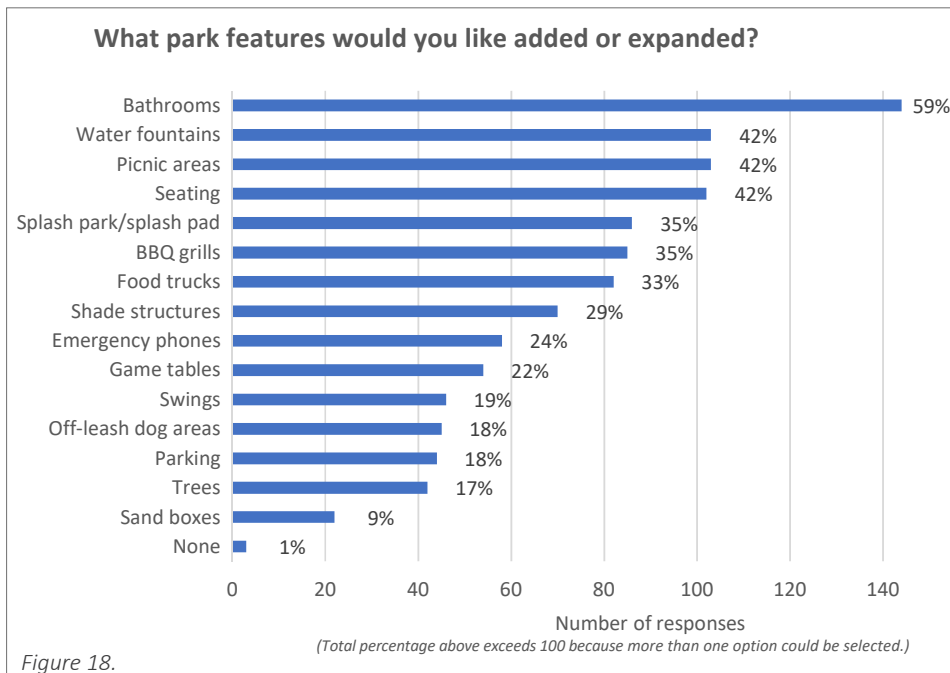
Proximity to working restrooms has been consistently raised as an issue for both general users of recreation facilities and organized sports participants, particularly at larger parks such as Cadwalader and George Page. During instructional programs such as summer basketball clinics at Cadwalader Park, staff members must escort children to distant restrooms to ensure the children’s safety, detracting from hands-on program quality and attentiveness. The distance between picnicking facilities at George Page Park and the restrooms at Hetzel Field creates challenges for visitors, who want to use the space for relaxing and gathering. Stakeholders indicate restrooms are needed in close proximity to where activities such as league play, community events, and instructional programs attract many visitors for extended periods of time.

Most Needed Features

Across all survey responses, the park feature most frequently selected by survey participant to be added was bathrooms. Over half of all survey participants selected this option. Other frequently selected park features participants selected include water fountains, picnic areas, seating, splash park/splash pad, barbecue grills, food trucks and shade structures. Survey responses by ward indicate again that bathrooms was the most common feature selected within each ward. Similarly, survey results by age indicate that across every age group, bathrooms were the most consistently selected park feature that should be added. Survey responses by ward location and age are presented in the Appendix.

Facility Features Needed

- Install more restrooms in parks across the city, particularly in close proximity to gathering areas and sports facilities.
- Install more infrastructure to support gathering and event spaces (shaded tables, pavilions, seating) that are easy to walk to from park entrance areas.
- Renovate field houses, concession stands and bleachers in facilities where leagues are active to provide safe places for players, coaches and volunteers participating in leagues.
- Include equipment storage, concession stands, seating and restrooms for new active recreation facilities that cater to leagues and competitive events.



- 59% of respondents selected bathrooms
- 42% of respondents selected water fountains, picnic areas and seating
- 35% of respondents selected splash pad/splash park and BBQ grills
- 33% of respondents selected food trucks

“Our volunteers, parents and players have pitched in and contributed blood, sweat, tears, and even dollars to make upgrades to facilities that the City owns.”

A Little League President

Findings

Programs

Community members and leaders express significant concern about the availability of safe, positive places and programs to engage Trenton's children and youth. With only three operating community centers and a lack of funding for resources, few programs are offered for Trenton residents.

Community Program Providers

Following the decline of city-funded programs starting in 2008, community organizations across Trenton have grown and strengthened programs through grants and fundraising. These organizations offer many opportunities for engaging children and youth year-round, after school and during the summer. Many offer programs for older adults too.

Participation in programs offered by community organizations can be limited by location. When Trenton's Division of Recreation was operating recreation programs at full capacity, the frequent duplication of offerings across wards, partnerships with non-profit program providers, and an active transportation service for youth made programs available to residents across the city. While several organizations currently partner to transport students or deliver programs at locations in other areas of Trenton, many programs are limited to each organization's facility.

Fees

Program fees present another factor delineating the programs that can be delivered by the City and those delivered by community organizations, a difference which, according to stakeholders, has far-reaching consequences. Since the growth of the City's recreation programs started with a large grant in the early 1990s, the City has not charged program fees for Trenton residents. As costs increased and funding decreased, the no-fee model remained unchanged. The facilities and programs have declined substantially. Stakeholders note the following effects:

- Expectations among residents for free program services remain, although this model is atypical in most cities and towns.
- No revenue is generated to help sustain costs.
- Without investing money when registering for programs such as summer day camps, participants are less committed and their attendance waivers, causing staffing and resource disruptions for organizers.
- Many middle class families opt to pay for higher quality recreation programs from local organizations, and more impoverished families use the free city programs and city recreation facilities.

Communication and Collaboration

Stakeholder conversations also highlighted the need for improved communication and collaboration between community organizations, leagues and city staff to improve programming opportunities and support. Stakeholders repeatedly referenced the former Social Celebrations, Organizations, Opportunities and People (SCOOP) program, which helped the City and disparate program providers coordinate efforts through comprehensive planning for youth programming. The SCOOP Initiative, which was created and implemented in the early 2000s during Mayor Palmer's Administration, provided a collaborative framework and support for youth programs across Trenton. The initiative's key components included a set of program providers, locations and transportation for 5,000 students to participate in 100 programs across the city; youth summits, which brought program providers together to set goals, identify challenges and share information about programs; and youth forums, annual meetings of 75-100 Trenton youth to provide information about key issues affecting the youth population.

Program Needs

- Develop safe, welcoming recreation program facilities (community centers) and expand programs for children and teens.
- Increase city support and funding for organizations currently providing recreation, sports or related community programming to increase these organizations' capacity and reach.
- Establish partnership models to set up partnerships between the City and program providers to help the City and organizations improve programming, revenue, and operational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Create framework (similar to SCOOP) to improve communication, collaboration and coordination among city and community program providers.
- Consider integrating nature-focused programs or experiences into existing parks and facilities and new facilities along the Assunpink Creek (such as environmental education and stewardship opportunities, rain gardens, and street art exhibits).

Findings

Within this framework, representatives from community recreation organizations met to compile and share information about recreation and education opportunities available across the city. The group also coordinated events such as tournaments that brought together youth from different parts of Trenton. Participating organizations found the coalition valuable for planning, cross-marketing and engagement, and have suggested a similar model would help create a comprehensive, up-to-date picture of recreation offerings to expand opportunities and transportation for youth to participate in a wider variety of programs.

Partner Models

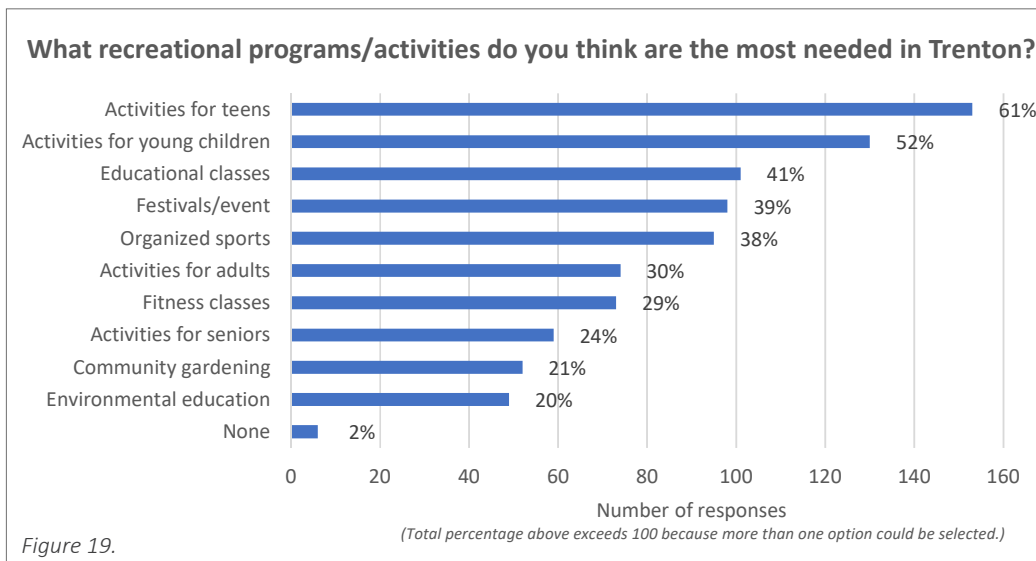
Many models exist for establishing productive profitable relationships between municipalities and community organizations that enable these organizations to deliver high quality programs as part of a city's parks and recreation offerings. Models can help set standards of excellence, facilitate revenue sharing and efficiently align resources with needs and timing. Stakeholders agree the City should explore new partner models for program providers so the City can better support organizations that have expertise and a record of successfully delivering programs. The City should also consider upgrading community center facilities to provide spaces to support the programs and providers.

Most Needed Programs

Survey participants chose from 10 recreation programs or activities most needed in Trenton. Choices ranged from organized sports and education opportunities such as art classes to general activities for young children, teens, adults and seniors. Participants could select up to three options. The most frequently selected program or activity was activities for teens followed by activities for youth, educational classes, festivals/events, organized sports, activities for adults, and fitness classes (e.g., Zumba, yoga, boot camps, swimming, etc.). Activities for seniors, community gardening and environmental education also received several mentions.

Across all four wards, activities for teens was the most frequently selected option. Activities for young children was the second most frequently selected option across all wards, with the exception of South Ward participants which had equal numbers of responses for both activities for young children and festivals/event as the second most frequently selected option.

The most frequently selected options by age group were slightly more varied, however, activities for young children and activities for teens were still among the top five most frequently selected options across all age groups. Given the extensive interest in activities for young children and teens, it useful to note which programs/activities survey participants in these age groups most frequently selected. For survey participants less than 13, these include: activities for young children; educational classes which could include art, dance, martial arts, etc.; activities for teens; fitness classes which could include Zumba, yoga, boot camps, swimming, etc.; and organized sports. For survey participants ages 13-18, these include: activities for teens, organized sports, festivals/event, activities for young children, and education classes.



- 61% of respondents selected activities for teens
- 52% of respondents selected activities for young children
- 41% of respondents selected educational classes
- 39% of respondents selected festivals/events
- 38% of respondents selected organized sports
- 30% of respondents selected activities for adults

Summary of Needs

Summing Up Trenton's Park and Recreation Facilities Needs

Trenton residents, city staff, sports league representatives and community groups shared many ideas for improving and expanding Trenton's parks and recreation facilities. There is also a unique opportunity to expand Trenton's facilities inventory through recreation-related development along the Assunpink Greenway. The section below summarizes top needs as expressed by survey participants and stakeholders.

Maintenance, Safety and Security Needs

- Repair and upgrade existing parks and recreation facilities.
- Address litter, trash and debris at parks and recreation facilities. Increase the availability of trash and recycling bins and increase service to remove refuse.
- Improve security to address and deter criminal activity at parks and recreation facilities. Safety features suggested include police or park patrols, security cameras, lighting, and signs about permitted activities.
- Improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow in industrial areas to make it safer for residents to walk to parks.
- Install or improve bathroom facilities at parks and recreation facilities where feasible.

Recreation Facilities Needed

- Upgrade pool facilities, particularly fencing and motors to improve safety and operations. Consider constructing a new pool facility in the southeast part of Trenton.
- Establish multi-purpose fields, preferably turf, primarily for soccer as well as other field sports. Soccer fields are particularly needed in the East and South Wards. Consider constructing soccer fields in the East and South Wards and one at Cadwalader Park on available land.
- Improve existing basketball courts and equipment at all parks in the city. Establish a lighted multi-court basketball facility for league and tournament use (this might be accomplished by improving and expanding existing courts and support facilities such as restrooms at Cadwalader Park).
- Expand the multi-purpose trail network to better accommodate walking and biking with fitness stations. Include mile markers.
- Conduct regular playground safety inspections and repair equipment in a timely manner.
- Build a skate park that incorporates community-focused features such as rain gardens and street art installations.
- Construct a putting green and small golf practice area (with two or three holes) to build on growing golf programs in and around Trenton.

- Develop an indoor sports facility (or seasonal bubble over artificial turf) to accommodate an indoor field sports and athletic training for soccer, baseball, football and other growing sports during winter and preseason months.
- Make facility improvements and necessary repairs at the three active baseball facilities.
- Renovate city-owned community centers to meet state regulations for childcare facilities and to provide welcoming, safe environments for children, youth and adults.
- Upgrade waterfront facilities (marina and boat ramp) to build demand and improve user experience, and restructure fees to develop a feasible revenue stream around this unique regional recreation asset.

Facility Features Needed

- Install more restrooms in parks across the city, particularly in close proximity to gathering areas and sports facilities.
- Install more infrastructure to support gathering and event spaces (shaded tables, pavilions, seating) that are easy to walk to from park entrance areas.
- Renovate field houses, concession stands and bleachers in facilities where leagues are active to provide safe places for players, coaches and volunteers participating in leagues.
- Include equipment storage, concession stands, seating and restrooms for new active recreation facilities that cater to leagues and competitive events.

Program Needs

- Develop safe, welcoming recreation program facilities (community centers) and expand programs for children and teens.
- Increase city support and funding for organizations currently providing recreation, sports or related community programming to increase these organizations' capacity and reach.
- Establish partnership models to set up partnerships between the City and program providers to help the City and organizations improve programming, revenue, and operational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Create framework (similar to SCOOP) to improve communication, collaboration and coordination among city and community program providers.
- Consider integrating nature-focused programs or experiences into existing parks and facilities and new facilities along the Assunpink Creek (such as environmental education and stewardship opportunities, rain gardens, and street art exhibits).