

**A MASTER PLAN REPORT
FOR
BRANCBURG TOWNSHIP'S
OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM**

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GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

The following goals and objectives are intended to guide current planning and future management of recreation lands and facilities in Branchburg Township, and act as a point of reference for subsequent actions. The goals below are proposed as a skeleton to be fleshed out by local decisions:

1. To expand system capabilities to provide a variety of recreation facilities that meet diverse needs of the Township's residents with an increased emphasis on passive uses, natural system access and individual pursuits.
2. To develop existing sites to improve service capabilities in the neighborhoods in which they are located and to balance supply of active recreation features across the Township.
3. To provide for adequate access, circulation, and compliance features so that the safety aspect for both residents and recreational participants is considered.
4. To complete the full range of improvements at White Oak Park and reinforce its potential as the centerpiece of Township recreation.
5. To provide for multi-use facilities wherever possible particularly where existing Board of Education site capabilities and Township Recreation needs are coincident.
6. Coordinate the most efficient use and scheduling of facilities between the Board of Education and Recreation Department with expanded emphasis on effective communication and joint planning for facility maintenance and upgrade.
7. Recreation efforts should be coordinated with those of the County and State to the extent that local objectives can be facilitated to the mutual benefit of both particularly on County open spaces occurring along the Raritan River.
8. To persistently upgrade and improve the aesthetic character of existing sites by addition of plantings, site furnishings and feature areas dedicated to decorative character.

ASSESSMENT OF NEED

Recreation needs may be usefully identified by comparison of existing system capabilities to existing demand and by forecasting future demand by anticipated population increase.

As the delivery of recreation facilities and programs is purely optional at the discretion of a given community, no imperatives or deficiencies actually exist. Rather, recreation need is expressed by the focus of public sentiment and subsequent responses by the local administration to meet stipulated demands. This relationship wholly defines the current condition of recreation features within the Township.

For example, there has been a traditional interest in and important programs developed for baseball and softball within the Township. These needs have been met in equal measure by the Township and representatives of the major sports associations to develop a very capable facility at White Oak Park

Beyond these very coincidentally motivated recreation developments, Branchburg Township offers only three other significant recreation sites (Olde Town Park, Teneyek Park and Staats) and two minor facilities (Marshall Street and Brandywine Park) currently exist.

Facilities created within these sites are strongly biased toward supply of organized sports venues and are comparatively lean in individual and spontaneous use features, natural area access features and passive space.

A systematic rather than a reactionary administrative strategy relative to recreation should be adopted. Main tactical elements of that strategy should include:

- Stabilization of existing infrastructure and facilities (update, repair, renovate existing features and maintenance systems and equipment);
- Redevelop appropriate components of existing recreation sites to meet current demand;
- Introduce new or additional features into existing underdeveloped sites to respond to general (not organized) recreation activities; and
- To design and develop existing vacant land parcels as park sites which may be dedicated to local opportunity for active and passive pursuits in a balanced, comprehensive fashion and with a far greater respect of and emphasis upon natural character and aesthetic quality.

Interests among the general public, as for walking, nature study, environmental education, individual training and cultural activities do not frequently coalesce into potent advocacy organizations representing their purposes. Although these recreational day use types potentially surpass the recreation hours spent individually about a given sport they are rarely represented as deficiencies where opportunity is limited. Similarly, playgrounds, quiet places, sunny meadows, sled hills, woodland paths and unnamed other small opportunities that have a chance to please one's senses are rarely directly requested by the general public in an organized and politically influential fashion.

The Township in direction of its recreation system is the only agency capable of creating or preserving individual opportunities but must first recognize them and order their significance among other needs.

SPATIAL NEEDS: SYSTEM WIDE

Statistical spatial needs are variously described according to the relevant agency guide line and are wildly subjective, as land quality relative to a given recreation objective may have no useful reference to size.

According to the New Jersey State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) the following guideline figures are recommended as necessary acreages per 1000 of population, by jurisdiction.

POPULATION/AREA RATIO

- Municipal – 8 acres/thousand
- County – 12 acres/thousand
- State – 24 acres/thousand
- Federal – 16 acres/thousand

These objectives are conditioned as follows:

- 1) School facilities are excluded.
- 2) Large natural areas are excluded. Developed areas are included.

So considered, Branchburg Township rated as follows, based on 14,600 population:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>“Needed” Acres</u>	<u>Acres Furnished</u>
Municipal	8 x 14.6 = 116.8	160

This table indicates a surplus of 43 acres of developed space at the municipal level. Suggesting a comparatively comfortable current status. This coupled with the Township’s fairly useful collection of undeveloped recreation sites indicates that the system has unutilized potential to carry the Township far into the future.

The New Jersey Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan defines a separate standard called Area Percentage which established comparative values for total developable land dedicated to recreation. It assigns values to be met as follows:

Area Percentage

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Standard</u>
Municipality	3%/developable land
County	7%/developable land
State	10%/area of State
Federal	4%//area of State

Branchburg’s status under this method looks like this:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Available</u>
Municipal	3% (312 acres)	464 acres

NEEDS - EXISTING OUTDOOR PROGRAMS

A group of conventional, traditional, and accustomed activities, usually organized by citizens, typifies most suburban communities. In Branchburg Township these are baseball/softball, soccer, and of late lacrosse. As these are represented by organizations and conducted according to regular schedules, they are fairly easily understood in terms of program need contrasted to available facilities.

Those elements of community recreation were explored in part during interview sessions with representatives of the several sports at the Township Association level and through examination of the several sites to evaluate their characteristics.

These are described by activity as follows:

EVALUATION OF SYSTEM BY ACTIVITY TYPE

BASEBALL/SOFTBALL

Baseball/Softball activities for Township residents are the oldest and best supported of municipal programs. They span an enormous age range from kindergarten to adult and involve over 800 of the Township’s youth.

Facilities supporting these sports occur as follows:

	<u>Baseball</u>	<u>Softball</u>
White Oak Park	8	2
Teneyek Park	0	1
Olde Town Park	0	1
Staats Park	1	0
Middle School	0	2
Stony Brook School	1	1
Old York School	2	0
	=====	
	12	7

Additional utility in scheduling opportunity occurs at White Oak Park as three of the ballfields are lighted and may be programmed beyond seasonal daylight limitations.

In interviews with representatives of baseball sports, the most frequent citations of issues were not with field supply generally but with individual substandard conditions (parking, access, support, drainage).

There was a marked preference by all associations to utilized fields at White Oak Park despite their inconvenience for many more remote residential areas.

This preference is attributable to the fact that field quality, support and surrounding activity is far better and more fun than at any other, less developed site.

As the field stocks at White Oak Park will not sustain increased programming indefinitely without excessive damage, it is necessary for the Township to renovate, restructure, and better support secondary fields based upon their spatial capabilities.

The Township should focus on field spaces at Stony Brook School, Old York School and the Middle School as the best, most economical substrates for such improvement in the short term. Though it is minimally supported, the ballfield at Teneyek Park is spatially very capable and can easily be brought to the quality of White Oak Fields.

SOCCKER

Soccer as an organized sport system is represented by recreation teams and by traveling clubs. As elsewhere soccer requires field spaces in fall, spring and to a lesser extent, in summer.

Numerically, this is the largest participation sport with over 800 registrants in divisions from pre-K to adult.

The supply at fields available for programming irrespective of size and condition is as follows:

	<u>Number of Fields</u>
White Oak Park	13
Olde Town Park	1
Staats Park	1
Middle School	2
Stony Brook School	1
Old York School	1
Marshall Street (leased land)	1
	=====
	20

This quantity of fields is approximately balanced with current demand levels in the fall season where no overlap with baseball occurs and remains satisfactory for spring travel soccer as the total service population is less than half of the fall total.

As with baseball, soccer representatives cited physical issues more significantly than spatial issues as needing improvement in the system and preferred fields at White Oak Park to other venues.

Reasons for this preference and the direction for subsequent system additions is also the same to meet short term needs however few.

As very superficial renovation and restoration of athletic field surfaces at Old York School, Stony Brook School, Middle School and Teneyek Park can meaningfully increase their attraction and programmatic utility and as these improvements are exactly coincident with the most sensible improvements to baseball facilities, these are the logical early candidates for system expansion.

LACROSSE

Lacrosse is a 2 year old newcomer to the Township and currently registers 200 participants with the expectation of 250 in 2004. If the pattern of other regional communities is followed, lacrosse may quickly grow to twice this size attracting some of its members from baseball and spring soccer programs.

This program currently occupies fields at Staats, White Oak Park and Raritan Valley Community College. As the program grows it will increasingly conflict with spring soccer and baseball programs on multi-purpose fields.

Numerical problems are cited for practice scheduling as the number of players is greater than can be easily distributed over few fields.

The Township should select and improve multi-purpose fields (at least 3) in anticipation of lacrosse's growing need and to relieve stress on existing field stocks.

This can be most efficiently accomplished at Old York School, Stony Brook School and the Middle School (upper field) where competition by same season sports is least. Teneyek Park is a very close fourth choice due to its remote location.

PLAYING FIELDS (GENERAL)

Increasing space needs for lacrosse as well as baseball and soccer begin to exacerbate an emerging issue particularly for White Oak Park. That issue is over use. These fields are built upon compactable native soils and are incapable of sustaining reliable turf without extensive, continuous maintenance and annual renovation.

In a time not far distant, the ability to maintain these fields in safe attractive condition will fail and greater problems of erosion and injury hazard will emerge. This is simply because grass turf needs months to establish and grow but can be severely damaged in one wet weekend.

This prospect is the most significant liability to Branchburg's current system of sports program delivery, and is the motive for some of the priority short term recommendations.

It is not suggested that field improvements such as those described here be simply adapted piecemeal into existing available space but that the configuration of each subject site be modified by grading, rearrangement of other facilities, access improvements and appropriate support features to produce attractive flexible "park like features" that have a utility and interest beyond the very simple needs of a sports surface.

It is important to focus on the aesthetic character of minor sites used primarily for accommodation of particular programs. Such limited response will invariably result in facilities as bleak as Old York School.

COURT SPORTS

Court sports are standby facilities of recreation systems and are frequently an accurate barometer of the municipalities' recognition and response to smaller, less organized elements of the public.

Tough they may be any of a huge variety of forms, those most important to public recreation are tennis, basketball, handball, squash, racquetball and volleyball.

Popularity for all except basketball is a cyclic proposition that frequently suggests a current surplus or deficiency relative only to local interest and program support by the recreation department.

In Branchburg not many courts exist and are fairly straightforward to consider.

TENNIS

Tennis supplied at White Oak Park alone and while the six courts available there are of good quality and very well sited, their relationship to the northern and southern extremities of the Township is inutilitarian.

The dimensions of unmet demand for tennis are not known as no association has recorded an interest for more service. Nonetheless as a very simple response to the physical location of existing courts, the Township should plan the construction of pairs of courts in the Northern region of the Township (Teneyek) and in the southern region, Marshall Street. Pairs are recommended as the paved space thus produced is adaptable to other purposes as popularity cycles downward.

Additional courts may be constructed if demand warrants in future developments at Case/Whiton, and at Kanach Farm.

BASKETBALL

Basketball occupies a special niche in suburban recreation as familiarity and fondness for the game follows exurbanites as they migrate to suburban communities.

Unlike many other types of court activity, basketball is very effective as a stand-alone facility. It requires only access, parking, a drinking fountain and some sheltered seating.

This is a very important recreation among working males and if well placed can return a great deal of noon day and evening play. Otherwise, it sustains children of all ages coincident with this enormous media attention, associated stars and equipment gimmicks.

Court surfaces can be traditional black asphalt or boldly colored to increase this attraction, where possible they should be lighted. Those existing at Old York, Whiton and Stony Brook schools should be colorcoated and lighted to provide extended evening play.

Basketball courts should be added at Teneyek, Marshall Street and Brandywine and each of the proposed neighborhood park sites previously discussed should ultimately receive at least one court.

HANDBALL, SQUASH, RACQUETBALL

These court games do not exist in the public system excepting a single wall at White Oak Park. The latter two may well never be constructed as these are most successfully placed following the request of an organized group of enthusiasts. Both squash and racquetball have had brief popular periods and both have ultimately been abandoned. Handball contrarily is a sport which can be offered coincident with construction of a tennis practice wall and if interest waxes and wanes, the facility remains functional and available.

Ideally, such a facility would be campused with tennis in a community park setting.

MINOR COURT FACILITIES

These frequently include volleyball, bocce, horseshoes, croquet, shuffleboard, badminton and rarely lawn bowling.

None of these, except volleyball at White Oak Park, now exist in the system. This is not particularly significant as all except horseshoes and badminton require an organized group of followers to make creation of such facilities a viable prospect. Horseshoe pitches and badminton courts can be a useful addendum to a well appointed picnic grove and a horseshoe pitch at least should be included in the program for every recreation site in the Township except facilities such as Olive Street.

Volleyball has exhibited a persistent but limited popularity particularly in association with waterfront activities. It has shown similar popularity in general recreation facilities where a

fairly diverse offering of activities exists. A good, large court is inconveniently sited in White Oak Park and should be relocated coincident with parking lot reorganization.

In the future others should be placed at Case/Whiton, Joe Stala and Staats Park sites.

ROLLER SKATING AND BOARDING

This group of wheeled activities has grown persistently over the past decades to a point where a very significant percentage of both youth and young adults routinely practice one of these forms. The advent of in line skates allowed these urban derived recreations to move to the suburbs. Skateboarders remain the black sheep of the wheeled set but cherish that as a part of the persona.

Roller hockey has become an increasing engaging activity and like basketball has a nearly endless season. A space as large as two tennis courts can occupy dozens of kids simultaneously for long periods of time even outside the context of the game.

Branchburg offers one very well prepared rink facility at Olde Town Park and one far less well prepared at Marshall Street Park for this group and should as the influx of exurbanites continues produce others.

Roller skating and roller blading as exercise remains most easily done on hard surface despite remarkable technological improvements. The very best substrates are paved trails, without conflict with automobiles. Almost no such feature exists within the current recreation system but an opportunity to create them occurs in every site.

The Township should consider paving a loop at White Oak Park, around Marshall Street and Teneyek and should incorporate a paved looped section as an element of each future site development.

Skateboarding can occur on almost any paved or constructed surface and to the annoyance of many, frequently does. As one learns more of several maneuver types, the prospect of accommodating this recreation is comprehensible and a useful, engaging skate park feature can be created in a fairly small space. Comparatively these remain expensive facilities but have come to be considered, conventional public park features.

The Joe Stala site presents an appropriate opportunity for development of this use type as it will contribute to system diversity and be related to existing skating activities established at Marshall Street.

BICYCLING

Bicycling whether on road bikes or dirt bikes is a premium recreation form. Fortuitously, Branchburg Township is as nearly ideal for these activities as can be hoped for in New Jersey providing that riders stay away from the Route 22 and 202 corridors.

Road biking is what existing development offers and here, a bicyclist can travel scores of miles north, south and west on scenic, low volume roads that extend into neighboring Readington, Hillsborough and Bridgewater communities.

Dirt biking too has far more than average opportunity though none occurs on sanctioned public trails. The Township is cut by broad utility transmission swaths each with a service drive capable of long overland rides with few road crossings.

The Township should begin to consolidate recreation parcels between the Board of Education (High School site) and Old York Road to create a neighborhood link and bikeway element connected to White Oak Park, as an initial offering to meet this demand.

In addition, the Township should begin a very active sequence of negotiations and agreements with the County and State governments and private landholders to establish a planning basis and strategy for creation of a bikeway continuously along the Raritan River.

Portions of this concept (between Teneyek Park and the rail crossing at River Road and from Neshanic Station to Black Point Road) can be initiated as stand alone elements as they can reasonably be closed upon themselves as a loop. Presumably, the several tracts currently under construction as a golf course will include sufficient access to accomplish the same closed loop element.

The long term objective of this concept is to create a bikeway system that is continuous along the entire river boundary of the Township and one that is connected off road (transmission line routes) to interior linkage with park sites, school sites and subdivisions.

Opportunity remains within the Township to create a spectacular bikeway system which may eliminate the inclination for road riding almost completely and may produce an alternate transportation system with legitimate service potential.

PLAYGROUNDS

Playgrounds occur in a variety of locations within the Township with particularly well equipped facilities occurring on Board of Education sites and at White Oak Park, Olde Town Park and Brandywine.

Those at school sites seem to have neglected some of the fundamental elements of playground design, perhaps owing to the fact that they are all generally utilized by larger supervised class groups.

Playgrounds for the spontaneous use of the general public benefit greatly by the incorporation of additional features that facilitate access, comfortable seating, shade, shelter and the hope of some social interaction for parents, grandparents or other caretakers that may accompany children to these sites.

If these areas work well for recess, they will not for general recreation. For any other person unfortunate enough to accompany children to these facilities there is hope only to stand in the sun and wind or retiring to some remote place to sit while hoping the kids tire quickly.

It is recommended that the Township restructure these spaces to be as useful for neighborhood play as for school classes and to incorporate accessories and furnishings that are comfortable, inviting and pretty.

As play areas are considered in the future, access paths, perimeter paths, sitting areas, game tables, shelters, landscaping and drinking fountains should be involved. As each new opportunity to place a play area is presented, the ambition to make a beautiful social space simultaneously will be a useful guide.

SWIMMING FACILITIES – MUNICIPAL POOL

Outdoor swimming constitutes one of the very best and, if well presented, most popular of seasonal recreation forms. Currently one private club exists in the northernmost corner of the Township as the sole significant resource outdoors. Two indoor pools also exist.

Branchburg is approaching a population size where development of a Township pool facility begins to make economic sense and can offer family membership in a reasonable price range while generating adequate revenue to construct a broad range of features.

This presumes that a pool facility would be constructed as a public non-profit utility sustained by membership fees, which method is most fair and least impact to taxpaying non-members.

The greatest virtue of a Township Pool is in its social character, not necessarily its swimming utility. People seek such a situation to meet, socialize, rest, play and exercise more importantly than swimming alone.

A pool, in part, closes the gap left by summer school closure by providing a regulated, supervised activity center where parents can reliably deposit their children for fairly long time periods as well as furnishing a legitimate family recreation, should that opportunity present itself.

A pool facility would contribute enormously to an important deficit area in the Township's recreation picture, by creating a conventional large scale social activity area. Accommodation of space for such an amenity should be undertaken as a planning function with a specific purpose of securing 10-12 appropriate acres of prime land where a pool may one day be sited. Two such candidate sites exist. One is the High School reservation parcel, the other the Kanach Farm. Of these, the Farm is by far the best choice as its size, location and accessibility are all ideal.

As Branchburg continues to grow, a grass roots interest will begin to emerge in support of a pool based on prior experiences of new residents and upon finite local swimming resources. When interest and number are sufficiently high, this contingent will approach the Township to fill this need. As membership numbers are the driving force of pool planning and as 600-800 families will be needed to propel this construction, the Township should simply make preparations now by preserving land and awaiting opportunity.

CULTURAL FACILITIES

These are increasing rare but unfailingly useful facilities to forge community links and promote social interaction. Traditionally they might include a band shell, amphitheatre, large pavilion or other structure assembly space where performances, celebrations, demonstrations or ceremonies might occur.

In a practical way, a large pavilion is probably the most convenient of these to consider. A large pavilion with paved base, utility service and a generous lawn surround can be adapted to a variety of occasional purposes as well as used routinely for programmed activities such as day camp, arts and crafts, or simply rain shelter. This obliges appropriate access and parking provisions and is thus best suited to an existing site with such infrastructure. As the Township elaborates its system these features should be placed at White Oak Park, Joe Stala Park, Whiton/Case and Teneyek.

ENTRIES, AMENITIES, GARDENS – AESTHETIC CONDITIONS

Public recreation spaces and parks in particular, have historically been prepared with some deference to a notion that they are special places presented to the citizenry for their refreshment and enjoyment. In past times, parks were frequently planned and developed with a preference for charm, grace, comfort and beauty and intended to be enjoyed for their appearance and accommodation alone.

Some of the characteristics of such potential objectives include: Entry features created to identify the site and welcome visitors within. Walkways - the common connector typically continuing throughout the recreation site, for conduct of visitors to each of the features areas from some place of entry. Furnishings - a coordinated group of benches, tables, trash receptacles, railings, benches and similar accompaniments that enable comfortable occupation of a site. Gardens - extraordinarily various landscape compositions featuring, lawn, flowers, shrubs, trees, edgings, hedges, structures, statuary, landforms, water features, and limitless other elements. Such facilities are intended to present beautiful, historic, educational or symbolic themes and frame spaces to be used for active or passive interaction.

The Township should concentrate as much attention as possible on improving the aesthetic character of its recreation site by inclusion of all of the previous themes into each new proposal. Aesthetic quality is a real limitation to potential experience of recreation in all Township sites.

RESTROOMS

Among real deficiencies in the Township recreation system, restrooms or the lack thereof stands alone as the most pointed and problematic. Only one site (White Oak Park) in the entire system features an adequate, compliant, hygienic, attractive restroom. The ubiquitous Port-A-John has been pressed into service in a variety of other applications but such features are not barrier free, not sanitary, not pleasant and most emphatically not appropriate for young children.

In Branchburg as in all other growing suburban communities this issue constitutes a genuine dilemma. Port-A-John's are awful but cheap and easy. Restrooms are costly, sustain vandalism and require daily maintenance.

A response in part is to assure that one restroom is identified and open on all School Board joint use sites even if maintenance costs must be increased.

Elsewhere, the Township must work towards provision of efficient safe facilities at least to the extent that visitors may visit the restroom and wash afterwards.

A plain philosophical observation applies to the restroom quandary. It is that when a public facility is created with the purposeful intention of inviting citizens to play there, that the duration or quality of that experience should not be limited or degraded by the failure to incorporate the commonest personal conveniences. No such circumstances would be tolerated in a school, office, store, or other public space and should not be in a park site.

SENIOR ACTIVITY FACILITIES

Branchburg's recreation system offers comparatively little in terms of dedicated facilities programmed for the use of the senior population.

This segment of the citizenry frequently orients around social circumstances which may include active outdoor pursuits but is typified by cultural, educational, programmed fitness and excursion types of event opportunities.

These are most efficiently served by provision of a permanent indoor facility structured to accommodate daily social interaction but capable of programming for use as an event, performance or celebration location.

Accessibility and convenience in all weathers are prominent attributes of such a facility and independent programming of open hours and resource availability is preferable for a service group with comparatively great flexibility in their day structure.

As a minimum accommodation, a senior "center" should provide the following features: a meeting space; a social space permanently and comfortably furnished; a kitchen; restrooms; storage; communications and audio/visual equipment. This center should be convenient to attractive outdoor sitting and activity space and should be on normal routes of public transportation.

A senior center may be a separate dedicated structure directed by the recreation department or administrators office, but its day to day functions should be organized by a committee of resident seniors charged with selection and organization of its own activities.

The Township does not currently deliver such an organized function and should consider establishment of a senior center either as an independent facility or as one integrated with a more generally directed recreation center.

RECREATION CENTER (BUILDING)

As the Township determines how recreation delivery within the system will evolve, creation of a recreation center building is one aspect which should be carefully evaluated.

Excepting coincidental occupation of school rooms and the Town Hall for indoor recreation and infrequent meetings, a facility continuously available and intended to support recreation, particularly in the winter months, is not available within the Township.

It is a conventional response in maturing communities to create a dedicated recreation center building which becomes the hub of the entire recreation system.

A recreation center evolves around the administrative core function of the recreation department and may grow or be elaborated to include general purpose meeting and activity rooms, a teen center, exercise fitness and training rooms and potentially independent gymnasium or indoor sports facilities.

The current status of recreation department indoor facilities is extremely constrained.

The modular structure currently adapted to administrative functions is wholly inappropriate to meaningful public service and one poorly situated for any utilitarian expansion.

The Township should prioritize planning for a more capable recreation center type facility among its objectives. It is reasonable and efficient to cast this planning within a broader context including senior activities and community day care and summer camp prospects simultaneously.

It is observed that the Kanach Farm Tract is a clean slate opportunity and one which provides spatial characteristics, structures and location appropriate to receive a Township recreation center.

AESTHETIC CHARACTER

The most important contribution to placing an attractive site, whether for active, passive, or cultural purposes, is creating a series of spaces which are connected such that an experience of movement from one place to another is achieved. Excepting White Oak Park all of Branchburg's sites are wide open to sun and wind, with few occasions of any mystery because everything can be seen from any place.

Trees, shrubs, and plant masses are the three dimensional structures used to create such spaces. They provide shade, cool the summer air, add movement and sound, present flowers and fall color, and provide shelter for birds and animals.

People are and will remain attracted to plantings and the forms and effects they produce. They are so few and so tediously used in the Township's recreation sites, that none of a host of possible benefits is realized.

The very simple fact that plantings have not been appropriately utilized or even planned is a condition that is negative both physiologically and in perception of the quality at these sites. Improvement of the aesthetic condition alone will dramatically improve the public's enjoyment of and regard for the Township's recreation areas regardless of their other virtues.

Plantings frame spaces, walkways, paths and trails, link them within sites to adjacent places and potentially to other places of interest.

Beyond their utilitarian purposes, pathways have been obliged by statute for some time. Technically, each outdoor constructed feature on public land must be accessible or barrier free, permitting access for handicapped visitors. No site (including the newly constructed sections of White Oak Park) is barrier free. In general, all sites are grossly deficient in this respect.

Pathways, like plantings, have an intrinsic functional virtue for more reward than simple access to some ball field. Pathways invite and enable the most important of recreations – walking. Walking, strolling, jogging, running – singly, in pairs or groups, is a universal recreation and circumstance for individual recreation or social interaction. Its importance, in terms of year round utility, cannot be overstated.

Each of the sites within the Township, if surrounded by a continuous loop of firm surfaced pathways, would demonstrate a remarkable phenomenon. Residents would show up to walk there. While a few folk require long strolls in pristine environments or relentlessly pound along for exercise, people in the main appreciate and seek out well developed pathways where they can escape for an hour, exercise moderately, or just converse with a friend.

Necessary conditions of such a feature are few. They include: a loop that begins and ends in the same place, a surface regular in grade, firm and dry under foot, and an occasional place to rest, preferably with an interesting view and some shade. Such a pedestrian accommodation occurs only at White Oak Park where for the bulk of the Township residents a car trip is obliged, changing the quality of a walk from a spontaneous to a planned activity. This goal should be introduced at every recreation site however small.

SYNTHETIC FIELDS

Many suburban communities have begun to consider replacement of conventional sports venues with artificial turf surfaces. Typically this is motivated by chronic field surface problems, drainage and turf issues, lost scheduling and high maintenance expense.

Artificial surfaces can eliminate all of the chronic maintenance issues associated with natural turf and if placed in combination with lighting, can yield significant increase in both season length and daily programming potential.

High initial cost is uniformly identified as the important limiting factor for most communities as artificial surfaces are considered (for example, a full sized multi-purpose soccer field system represents a 1 million dollar budget for a new system on a competent site).

As such systems are absolutely special interest accommodations, they are rarely well received by the general public except where their cost can be significantly subsidized by the beneficiary group.

In Branchburg, sufficient resident participation in sports exists that these interests can be vested in proposals for private/public ventures.

In large systems (population) the cost of synthetic systems can be amortized by fund raising, contribution and annual fees leveraged against sports association numbers and is frequently well received.

Factors that enable this relationship to work will include: The ability to rent the fields for regional league purposes; the possibility for after hours clinics; and the high attraction for tournament hosting. Each of these can generate funds from space rental, food concessions and ancillary services. If prepared in a well supported substrate (parking, food service, spectator accommodations, restrooms), field marketing on a non-profit basis can be lucrative.

It is recommended that the Township consider this potential in collaboration with local sports associations to determine its feasibility.

This technique will be increasing in the region as a response to ever growing demand for high quality, trouble free and “modern” systems for sports. It is timely for exploration of potentials in Branchburg.

ATHLETIC FIELD LIGHTING

Athletic field lighting is an important method of better integrating the adult population into general recreation programming as it enables access to popular activities in a time frame available to working parents and those involved in adult sports. It has the potential to increase scheduling opportunities for older children and adults where play times in the evening are appropriate, thus reducing loads on day time schedules.

Most importantly, it enables both players and spectators from the working adult population to plan for participation in a sport activity in a comparatively comfortable situation, one allowing a unhurried return home, opportunity to dine and reasonable preparation time prior to leaving home for a game. This capability markedly improves the potential for greater adult attendance, more significant social interaction and general positive interaction with Township sports programming.

As a general rule, the lighting of ballfields and other outdoor recreation facilities should be considered and examined with each new facility and/or renovation. Currently, White Oak Park incorporates lighted courts and fields which may be increased. Other potential occur in more isolated park sites and may reasonably be considered for Teneyek Park, Joe Stala Park and likely, the Kanach Farm site.

The Township should consider increase of these systems to help balance adult and event programming but must approach lighting system development in a balanced manner.

As lighting imposes additional utilization on field surfaces (potentially, 12 additional uses per week), the wear and deterioration on field substrates increases similarly.

It is imperative that the surface conditions, soil conditions, drainage systems, and infrastructure support on field lighting candidate sites be upgraded simultaneously with addition of lighting systems.

This has not been accomplished to date on Township's fields and additional utilization stress can be compensated only by increased maintenance.

As the Township considers such future additions, it must plan for incorporation of appropriate field surface improvements which may be as costly as the lighting systems themselves. Consequently, selection of any common field for lighting is rarely a good choice and should be preceded by purposeful search for the most competent available site.

CLASSIFICATION OF SITES AND RECREATION RESOURCES

Recreation sites and facilities can be classified by size and purpose into several categories. Though no specific parameter defines these absolutely, a sites service scope is a conventional determinant of its category.

The following classifications are applied to describe Branchburg's sites.

MINI-PARKS/POCKET PARKS

These typically small sites are ones that furnish a locally useful function or capitalize a unique aesthetic. They may include passive features (path, garden, unique natural or historic feature) a small play area or a quiet sitting area.

The purpose of such sites is to provide adjacent residents with a "safe" playground, a pleasant stroll, a familiar, convenient social space or an accessible place to walk the dog.

Though potentially variable, such a space would incorporate play activity areas for pre-school and grade school children, competent seating, shelter and visibility.

A mini-park may be incorporated as an element of a larger community service site, be it school, athletic field, church, historic site or park, as a wholly integrated element. Its character and function target spontaneous purposes of immediate neighbors.

One such site occurs in Brandywine Park, it being the sole such municipally owned feature within the Branchburg system. This is a nearly perfect little feature needing only additional plantings and a completed pathway system.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

This somewhat inappropriate name describes the keystone element of a well balanced municipal recreation system. Though not usefully quantifiable in size, these sites typically embrace a "few" acres. In function, neighborhood parks represent diverse opportunities and facilities capable of addressing the common place pursuits of area residents. As neighborhood parks are typified in contemporary suburban terms, they contain first, play equipment areas, small or few athletic fields, tennis courts, basketball courts and other of those most recognizable popular games or sports. A more successful assembly incorporates, pedestrian or bike links, unutilized natural space or passive use areas, sitting areas, viewpoints, utility support and some isolation, while minimizing focus upon open, organized sport spaces.

The opportunity to be capitalized for neighborhood parks may be best visualized as a very attractive, aesthetically prominent space where one or one's family can conveniently visit on foot or by a short journey from their home, and where upon arrival, each member can participate in a separate appropriate activity.

An “ideal” neighborhood park functions optimally within fairly densely populated suburban or urban contexts and begins to diminish in practical utility as its distance from a given residence increases. This separation is conventionally expressed as within one half mile. Clearly the concept of neighborhood parks within rural circumstances begins to fail as a practical prospect. Northern and Southern communities in Branchburg are examples of this inefficient characteristic.

Regardless of the type or quality of other features within a neighborhood park, two elements are necessary and should be required. These are a good potable water feature and on site restroom facilities of some description. Failure to provide these relegates any public recreation site to a substandard status.

Two neighborhood parks occur within the Branchburg study area. The best of these is Olde Town Park. This is a classic example of a neighborhood park diminished only by its lack of restrooms which should be added, and insufficient plantings.

The second is the quaint Marshall Street Park which meets all of the criteria for constructed features except for a real restroom and is in need of some refurbishing.

In the optimal circumstance that leased athletic fields across Marshall Street were part of the park this site too would meet the ideal. As future opportunity to link Marshall Street to Stala Park a very diverse and exciting prospect will emerge.

As residential districts of the Township evolve, particularly as large subdivisions are proposed, neighborhood park type opportunities should be explored and exploited as an element of development or minimally as space reservation for that future neighborhood. This opportunity has not been exploited in recent large tract subdivisions where capable target sites of 4-6 acres minimum might have been extracted.

Minimum conditions for such prospects should be based on natural character and aesthetic and on fundamental utility for development. However, healthy and charming wetlands may be, they are not very useful. High, dry land with trees, slopes and good soil is desirable. Access and visibility are useful. Adequate size to enable physical separation from adjacent neighbors is convenient. Every neighborhood park should not be expected to provide every purpose, they should be expected to provide some purposes particularly well.

COMMUNITY PARKS

A Community Park has been described according to a variety of criteria but at its essence is a large space (50 acres or greater) developed in a fashion that seeks to provide a large quantity and diverse selection of active and passive facility types. The operative objective of such parks is to satisfy mainstream demands of the entire community (Township).

In a mature state of development, a community park might offer, athletic fields, grandstands, a swimming pool, group picnic areas, play areas, gardens, bike and hiking trails, courts, and game areas, special event spaces, historic features, day camping facilities, nature/interpretive systems and a host of support features.

In the ideal, such a park occupies capable, beautiful land that facilitates intensive developmental and conserves high quality natural areas. One such site of this description occurs in Branchburg as White Oak Park.

White Oak Park is a prominent social as well as recreational center for the Township because it provides the opportunities that a Community Park should.

Additional opportunity remains for White Oak Park though primarily in the elaboration of passive use and picnicking features.

NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

These are lands preserved from conventional forms of residential and commercial development purposefully to protect fragile, distinctive, historic or scenic landscapes. Unlike preserves, their purpose is to retain purely natural systems for the refreshment or education of area residents.

Currently, Branchburg abounds in such spaces and contains a remarkable quantity of privately owned lands that may be so utilized. A drawback is that Branchburg owns only two such tracts (the High School Site and a vacant land tract near Teneyek).

Among existing public lands with Natural Resource characteristics are North branch Greenway, Reeve Tract, North Branch Reserve, South Branch Reserve, South Branch Greenway and Woodfern Farm. Each of these is land tracts composed primarily of limited access or undeveloped land.

Beyond the unusually numerous and large natural resource lands already secured within the Township and available through other jurisdictions efforts, Branchburg Township presents many undeveloped lands along the rive basin and today has few limitations other than monetary from preserving these resources.

As opportunity is presented, the Township should seek to acquire portions of these natural resource areas particularly those occurring along corridors such as stream courses and flood plain. Objectively, this proposal seeks to acquire and preserve lands impacted for development as by water, steep slopes or flooding and to obtain them inexpensively. There is an important goal in access and through passage for hiking and biking systems. If these can be secured by permanent easement, that would be preferable.

INVENTORY OF RECREATION SITES

TENEYEK PARK

BLOCK 8, LOT 12 – 9.08 ACRES

Teneyek Park is the most northerly of existing developed recreation sites in the Township and the only site of significance north of Route 22. It occurs in the Hamlet of North Branch, occupying a very useful location within that community and adjacent to the Raritan. Less fortunately, it is also immediately adjacent to Route 22 with its high volume of traffic and noise. This site is considered as one with Township owned open space of Block 8, Lot 11.01 as it is adjacent to and contiguous with that lot.

Teneyek Park is simply but effectively developed with a softball/multi-purpose field, a small grouping of play equipment and picnic sites along an entry drive. The space is very pleasant excepting the highway noise, and offers an open airy feeling and good visual separation from adjacent development.

This site is underdeveloped particularly with respect to its utility as a neighborhood park and its extended value as a community wide opportunity to access the river.

The first topic, neighborhood park utility, is generally a weakness of the entire recreation system and though the service population here is comparatively small, other area facilities are non-existent.

Increase of features intended for the daily utility of area residents should be accomplished as a fairly high priority primarily due to the poor local supply of facilities.

Prominent improvements that offer a high level of additional service to local residents include: a basketball court(s), a shelter, expanded parking, a permanent restroom, a walkway system, and minor improvements to existing softball and T-ball fields. It is likely that the southern end of the softball field could be meaningfully expanded to accommodate a large multi-purpose field.

The bulk of Teneyek Park site is undeveloped open floodplain meadows which offer excellent opportunity for walking/jogging paths, an exercise course, or family picnicking within the several small wooded spaces. As a minimum however, the Township should begin planning for a bikeway/multi-purpose trail from the 614 bridge to the Route 22 overpass as an important first step toward linkage of this site to points south along the river.

Although the vast bulk of this site pair lies within the floodplain, opportunity remains to create a loop trail nearly one mile in length around its perimeter. Such a feature coupled with benches, picnic sites and nature interpretive areas would constitute a fine neighborhood park resource.

A second unexploited potential occurs at the river shore where a sound, high, vehicle accessible site exists with no evidence of improvement. As this shore is in the lee of the 614 bridge, flooding here will occur as backwatering primarily out of the force of passing flood waters. Oddly, this site is the only Township owned high quality river access. Notwithstanding that, the Township should focus intently on development of river based recreation as a premium

recreation form both locally and regionally and one where Branchburg is extremely fortunately favored.

It is recommended that the Township take a determined planning stance toward exploration of river access for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, and tubing as well as enhancing fishing opportunities.

Teneyek Park would be the focus of such a facility as a launching point for all such purposes. Here, a launching ramp, dock, boathouse, and equipment shop could be erected for operation locally or by private concession. Within this region, such a recreation would prove remarkably popular.

Whether or not such a course is followed, the river shore here should be developed and expanded to provide picnicking for groups or families, fishing and shore play access. No natural feature is more useful for recreation than water and this is an unusually good presentation.

BLOCK 11, LOT 1 - 28 ACRES

Block 11, Lot 1 is a 28 acres parcel occurring immediately south of Teneyek Park but separated by the Route 22 overpass. It is a broad largely open flood plain meadow site existing in almost perfect isolation excepting Route 22 traffic noise. While its low position in the landform will restrict the site from uses that will not tolerate flooding, it remains important as a vital open space and as an integral link component of a trail system potential along the river here.

This tract fronts along Station Road but is several feet lower than the roadbed continuously, producing a complication to vehicular access except at the Route 22 access ramp.

The probable short and long term future for this site should remain passive in character but presuming that a reliable vehicle entry can be found for emergency response, this tract could handily accommodate outdoor camping as for scouting, education project areas or even group picnic areas.

This is by no means a pristine site with unique or fragile ecological characteristics. It has recently been managed for agriculture and presents a seasonally dry soil which is occupiable.

It is recommended that this site be coupled with Teneyek for planning, to the extent that a pathway/bikeway link is passed around Route 22 and through this tract providing access to southerly lands.

It is further recommended that portions of the former field areas of this site continue to be mowed periodically to prevent a fairly quick return to brushy meadows.

A land tract of 35 acres belonging to the Somerset County Park Commission is the sole parcel existing between Township parkland and access to River Road at the Station Road Bridge. A crossing of Chambers Brook and a crossing of the NJ Transit line are the primary obstacles to a trail linkage to municipal tracts south of the railway.

It is strongly recommended that the Township explore this link with the County and NJ Transit to enable a very unique potential experience.

BRANDYWINE PARK
BLOCK 5.11, LOT 10 - 2 ACRES

Brandywine Park is the single example of pocket park occurring in the Township. It exemplifies an appropriate mechanism for provision of spontaneous recreations targeted directly at local residents, and is among the facility types most needed within developed regions of the Township.

Here, a modest play area, some benches and a pleasant setting provide a safe, attractive space for neighborhood families to walk, play, and socialize.

This site is two acres in size and capable of sustaining a basketball court, restroom and a lot of additional plantings. Completion of barrier free access and provision of a small shelter/sitting area would serve to diversify its utility quite a bit.

It is recommended that this example be utilized as a prototype for subsequent subdivision applications by the Planning Board. Though rarely achieved, this simple facility can provide convenient pedestrian access to residents within a half mile radius of the site. If sufficiently developed and supported, such a pocket park can become an important social hub for a neighborhood. As Brandywine is the only publicly owned recreation in this isolated region of the Township, several such would be appreciated.

The several recreation tracts previously described are disproportionately important to residents north of Route 22, as this unpleasant artery separates them from the main body of developed facilities of the Township. While not insurmountable, this at least implies that this group of residents will be comparatively inconvenienced, particularly near rush hours as they try to get to a game or practice.

As a planning matter, a somewhat higher priority for facilities accessible to this group should be observed.

OLDE TOWN PARK
BLOCK 17.11, LOT 905 – 12 ACRES

Olde Town Park is another prototype example of how a municipal recreation facility can be prepared. It is a very attractive simply designed and well sited neighborhood park, one of only two occurring in the Township.

Olde Town Park includes a ballfield/multi-purpose field, a playground area, a basketball court, a roller skating rink, and a short trail, and provides an additional considerate touch in a small shelter building. The site would benefit in utility by incorporation of a restroom facility to eliminate the porta-john and by some renovation and upgrade of the parking areas.

The basketball court is likewise is in need of renovation and would seem a more exciting venue if color coated and furnished with benches.

The skating facility is a nicely constructed and reportedly well utilized activity area but one with a strangely isolated situation within the site. Its environment and aesthetic could be greatly improved by increased plantings surrounding the feature and by creation of an adjacent sitting area with tables and benches to provide a quiet space for those attending skating games that would prefer to sit and socialize.

The perimeter of the site should be landscaped as well to begin to create a sense of enclosure of the park and to provide shade and wind buffering.

At approximately 12 acres in size, this site could sustain a multi-purpose lane for walking, jogging, and bicycling continuously around the site perimeter. This type of addition provides a valuable opportunity for adjacent residents to take a stroll or a short jog around a short half mile loop. This feature type coupled with an occasional bench and tree could lend significantly to common day use recreations that will be utilized throughout the year.

This site is not a priority for development comparative to other system needs but is one which can be improved over time to supplement aesthetic and facility capabilities.

Like Brandywine Park, Olde Town is a very practical example of the size and scope of neighborhood park which should be placed in similar residential districts of the Township.

STAATS PARK **BLOCK 47, LOT 904 – 5.5. ACRES**

Staats Park is a well constructed, nicely situated small athletic field occurring immediately north of the Middle School site and connected to the school from adjacent neighborhoods along Thoroughbred Drive by a series of walkways.

Apparently this facility was placed as a portion of the residential subdivision but its function seems far more utilitarian for school athletic and recreation sports purposes than for neighborhood recreation.

While little more than increased landscaping should be placed here to modify this site's function, it should be much more intimately integrated into the Middle School site, nearby White Oak Park and the greenway parcels reserved along Bluegrass Boulevard and Champions Circle. This potential will be described in subsequent text sections.

WHITE OAK PARK **BLOCK 59, LOTS 25.01, 29.01, 24 – 127.13 ACRES**

White Oak Park is the most significant active recreation site in Branchburg's system and apparently the perennial target for both sport association and municipal improvement projects. It includes the vast bulk of athletic fields, courts, play equipment, pathway and utility infrastructure

of the Township inventory, is five times large than all other developed sites combined and by all accounts is the preferred venue for any form of organized or large scale event.

Such a centralized community park concept is undoubtedly attractive and uniquely desirable to all of the organized sports programs and to active recreation users in general. It has grown to a condition where the social circumstances and community interaction aspect of the park has evolved to an attractive level equal or greater than the individual facilities. It is always busy, exciting and diverting here. Many peers, whether young or old, arrive at once to pursue common interests, to socialize, to engage rivalries or to stand aside and take in the show. This is exactly what a community park should do and it is a quality that can be enhanced and made more pleasant.

It appears that over recent decades, the Township in concert with local sports associations has facilitated or funded creation of baseball and soccer fields, lighting, fencing, backstops, utility structures, roads, maintenance structures and site amenities in a counterclockwise sweep from north to south following increasing difficult terrain of existing fields.

This sequential expansion has focused on field creation primarily but has fallen short in development of appropriate circulation, parking, restroom and control infrastructure. It has likewise not capitalized valuable opportunities to support and increase passive use, individual activities, picnicking, games and a host of possible related activities that address all remaining interests of the spontaneous day user, the young, old, and neighboring components of the population.

Recent development of the southern field complex here was accomplished to meet current demand for additional baseball and soccer fields. While this purpose has been accomplished to the extent of increasing field stocks, a set of unsatisfactory, unresolved conditions have emerged coincident with the new fields.

In capsule these include:

1. Residual runoff control and drainage problems.
2. Excessive steep and unoccupiable bank slopes.
3. Unreasonable separation of fields from restroom and other group activity areas.
4. Non-compliant pedestrian access to field spaces.
5. Inhospitable environment (few plantings, no furnishings).

While the purposes of athletes in organized pursuits are well or very well met by these facilities, the needs of the young, handicapped, spectators and the general public for any other use are not met at all.

White Oak Park is capable of further expansion considering its unutilized remaining land resources (south side of site, west side of site). This potential should be preserved for some future emergency as the service disparity between the central Township and either end is now very pronounced. Current field shortfalls as for soccer should be addressed elsewhere while further capital projects at White Oak Park focus on issues of greater merit.

These projects include the following in order of priority.

COMPLIANCE ISSUES: BARRIER FREE ACCESS

Simply stated, public recreation facilities must be barrier free. Few of those at White Oak Park are. This condition should be resolved directly. In very practical terms this requires that a durably surface (not necessarily paved) pathway at least 4' wide at slope rates not in excess of 1:20 except with railings up to 1:12 be placed to each facility and spectator area and convenience facility.

Outwardly, this may appear a great inconvenience and cost without much benefit. It is rather, a great opportunity to knit the diverse activities and site types of White Oak Park together into a cohesive whole and to facilitate linkage to exterior sites, neighborhoods and facilities for bikes, hikers, joggers and casual walkers. A plan for initiation of this improvement, focusing first on sub-standard interior linkages and later on perimeter and extended path systems should be begun.

Vehicular circulation and parking is a second critical issue area at White Oak Park. The existing system is haphazard, poorly marked, incomprehensible, inefficient and when peak attendance occurs, unreasonably dangerous. This should be resolved and as few high quality roadways or pavements exist, can be cheaply done without sacrifice of valuable infrastructure.

Four existing parking areas occur in the northern central area of the park between ballfields and the forested area. These should be consolidated into a single lot located in front of the maintenance garage in the area of the current volley court. This lot would be serviced by a single entering and single exiting drive each following a direct course with crosswalks and speed quelling devices from entry at Baird Road to exit at Stony Brook Road. Only a portion of the lot need be sheet paved to provide for winter use and barrier free parking, the remainder can remain aggregate surfaced. The entire lot should be curbed or bollarded to define parking bays and spaces. The whole would be connected to adjacent activities by a perimeter walkway. All previous drives and parking spaces excepting those along the drive to Stony Brook would be restored to turf or recreation space. As a convenience to coaches and arriving ballplayers, drop-off expansion could be prepared near each field on the driveway course.

Two broad linear areas one parallel to Readington Road and one parallel to Dreahock Road, both occurring between residential backyards and the developed athletic fields exist. The area along Readington is wooded in second growth cedar and maple trees and that along Dreahook is two thirds overgrown fields and one third wooded. A number of large specimen trees occur just west of fields 6-10 at the local high point for this area of the park. Many acres of land occur within these two areas and none of it is utilized. A fragile, difficult, wetland woods has been developed by pathways in the eastern quadrant of the park while high, dry competent land is left unexploited.

Presuming no further purpose for athletic field expansion at White Oak Park, these undeveloped areas are ideal for a significant addition of family and group picnic sites, trails and outdoor education, succession garden or other uses benefiting by a shady woodland setting. A large group picnic pavilion with barbeque, horseshoe pitches, play area and utility service overlooking the athletic fields from a viewpoint near field 10 would contribute a dimension for large scale picnics or celebrations beyond the parks current capability. It is strongly recommended that this potential be considered and at the least that a multi-purpose pathway be developed along this

unused perimeter at a respectful distance from adjacent residences. In the same vein, it is recommend that two (2) 50' wide rights-of-way, one to Dreahook and one to Readington be developed into well marked, pedestrian/bicycle access points.

Restroom faculties at White Oak Park are insufficient in number and as a consequence of the size of the facility, inconveniently remote from new fields in the southern site. While portable toilets are technically responsive to this situation, they are unpleasant on the best day and unsatisfactory for small children or anyone intending to eat anytime before encountering a washing facility. Though costly and very consumptive of maintenance, a new, large, clean and attractive restroom should be constructed somewhere near field 17. As sales of snack foods and refreshments are a reliable revenue source for sports associations and a must for tournaments, it is suggested that the two purposes be met in a single new structure.

Field 6, 7, and 8 are small soccer fields each constructed in its own bowl like graded space. This is a very poor design decision as it constrains and impedes far more than it facilitates multiple use. These fields should be regraded and expanded into a single entity which can be subdivided as need by linestriping or temporary fencing. Much better fields and much less maintenance will result.

In a future when alternative fields have been placed and sufficient flexibility exists to enable their shut down, the entire complex of fields 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 should be reconfigured.

This is recommended in response to two motives. First is sun-orientation. Fields 1, 2, and 3 are oriented as poorly as possible and constitute a continuing injury risk for ball players looking into the setting sun. Field 3 is particularly bad as the catcher and batter must look at a pitched ball backdropped by the sun on every play. Secondly, a very large quantity of useless marginal space occurs on this field which could be put into play by rearrangement and expansion to the margins.

Overall, facilities at White Oak Park are thoughtfully and appropriately placed with the exception of parking (already discussed) and basketball which for reasons unknowable is nestled up to tennis in a location far remote from the focus of park activity. Basketball is a noisy, boisterous, sweaty game and one of particular importance to teens and young adult to very adult males. Its conduct is accompanied by a lot of testosterone and impolite language. These characteristics aside, basketball is among the most productive small recreation spaces and is a reliable performer year round regardless of weather. This is a "best buy" facility and one that should be placed right against a parking lot to facilitate quick access for a one on one. Basketball should be relocated, increased several times in scope and lighted to maximize its important utility as an adult component sport.

White Oak Park provides the most significant facility base in the entire Township. In fact it has more active use facilities than the rest of the Township combined. Even a casual examination of the site reveals that it's planning and purposes are all directed at the business of delivering sports and games. Very little has been vested in the creature comforts or truly even the accommodation of visitors not directly involved in some contest. As the practical limit for fields is nearly reached, the Township should turn its attention to the park as a park not as an athletic field. If one visits here other than to play in or watch a game, what diversions are available? Where does one sit quietly, meet with friends, walk the dog, throw a Frisbee, sleep in the sun, roll down the hill, sit in the shade or any of a hundred small pleasures that a park should deliver.

This is White Oak Parks most important deficiency. Fortunately space and place remains to improve this aspect measurably. It requires consideration of forested space in the east and west of the park and meadow areas in the south. These made accessible by paths furnished with benches, decorated with plantings and flowers or provisioned as small sitting areas, overlooks or secluded passages can introduce a quality of peace and refreshment in a sea of activity. Within developed field areas of the park paths, benches, trees, and many, many more trees will begin to transform a very barren, exposed aspect into a series of outdoor rooms or spaces each with a different purpose and occupation.

The bulk of big tasks are complete at White Oak Park and it is a facility with capabilities that most other communities would envy and emulate. It is recommended that the aesthetic of this space now be given a much higher priority than the capacity and that opportunities to refresh and engage the private citizen be addressed before the agenda's of teams.

MARSHALL STREET PARK
BLOCK 91-93, LOTS 8, 21, 1.01 – 4.5 ACRES

This quaint old facility is a group of three small lots joined together and coincident with rear yards of neighboring homes on Chester Avenue and Clinton Street in Neshanic Station. Very few facilities occur within this site and significant portions of the site are not utilized.

Constructed features consist of a tired old basketball court adapted for use as a roller rink, a few pieces of play equipment scattered about and a tiny shelter structure. Open lawn areas west of Marshall Street are reported leased for use as soccer fields and a very rudimentary infield remains but whether or not it is utilized is not known.

This park site is extremely pleasant and integrated with its adjacent neighborhood although very little utilitarian equipment remains within. It is perfectly situated and adaptable to provide a great neighborhood park for the residents of this hamlet.

Two valuable prospects occur relative to Marshall Street Park. Both should be exploited. The first concerns leased field next door which should be purchased. This would facilitate construction of a well graded small multi-purpose field of appropriate size to meet local needs.

The second concerns the currently emerging Joe Stala Park which is a filled land tract expected to be developed by the Township for athletic fields and river access. As this site occurs immediately across Woodfern Road from Marshall Street, integration of the two sites by walkway is possible and useful. These additions will provide a sufficiently large substrate and diverse opportunities to become far more attractive to local residents.

Recommended improvements include these:

Create an entry feature, gate, walkway sign or other welcoming "front door" to the park. Renovate and enlarge the court space to include a modernized rink area. Consolidate play equipment in to a single cohesive space with incorporated small sitting area and shelter and add new, interesting equipment. Construct a perimeter pathway surrounding the site and linked to

Clinton, Chester and Woodfern. Construct a decorative fence along Marshall Street. Construct a unisex restroom.

Marshall Street presents a minor proximity problem and should be improved with crosswalks and speed quelling devices. As in all other municipal park sites, trees, shrubs, garden spaces and decorative additions would contribute enormously to the appearance and experience of this park.

As the Township contemplates Marshall Street's future, it will be useful to consider that Neshanic Station is an extremely attractive, real village center of the type newly reinvented in planning. This tiny park is a keystone opportunity that should be well done to reinforce that theme.

The previous few sites represent the entirety of developed recreation sites within the Township's direct control and management. Of the total of five, three can be considered competent facilities capable of delivering programming or sustaining viable local opportunity. Despite the fact that both are attractive sites with great potential, neither Marshall Street nor Teneyek Park presents sufficient facilities or capacities to constitute a complete facility. Both sites lack either adequate support, or diversity to sustain the purposes they should serve.

BRANCBURG SCHOOL SITES

Three elementary schools, one middle school and one vacant school site exist within the Township. Each is a publicly owned land parcel and each is located in a site selected to distribute service somewhat equitably over the Township.

As the recreation system has important deficiencies in distribution of facilities and as each of these schools sites has constructed facilities and unexhausted potential, it is useful to compare that capability to the service needs of recreation.

As one considers the Branchburg recreation system potential overall, it is evident that a great deal of future opportunity for facility increase is already available in raw land space. It is likewise evident that the single existing recreation site with adequate support infrastructure to enable expansion is White Oak Park.

This yields the disagreeable economic circumstance that to create new features for sports and play, the expense of roads, parking lots, utilities, restrooms, landscaping must be joined to the initial capital needed to construct recreation areas. Tax dollars are and shall always be the primary modifier of scope and timetable for public recreation projects. As the size of budget projections increase the prospect of timely accomplishment of needed facility construction decreases.

School sites in this case present a variety of opportunities which if capitalized can contribute needed recreation features simultaneously with improvement of site conditions, access and the aesthetic character of the several Township schools. As each school site is already provisioned with site infrastructure more than adequate to the purposes of conventional recreation and as school functions must end to release the children for recreation, a seamless merger of use is possible.

It is typical in such joint ventures to agonize over whose budget pays for what service particularly for maintenance, repairs, and capital improvements. Notwithstanding that political certainly, the Township, characterized by the taxpayer, is far better served by cooperation than by duplication.

To this end, the Township and Board of Education can cooperate to a great economy and joint system benefit by finding ways to evolve all of the existing schools into school/parks.

THE SERVICE NEEDS OF RECREATION

This evaluation is predicated on the assumption that Board of Education sites are available to Township recreation programming, should potentials be coincident and implies that a functional relationship between the Township and Board of Education exists and is sufficiently flexible to enable Township agendas to be met on School Board lands.

As both parties and, more significantly, the taxpayers stand to benefit in availability, short term, of useful, needed facilities and in improvements to some unremarkable infrastructure, a positive coordinated effort may be very productive.

The Board of Education sites are considered in order of increasing utility potential in the context of their locality and capability.

WHITON SCHOOL **BLOCK 76, LOT 01 – 16 ACRES**

The Whiton School is the newest of Township school facilities and occurs in the region of the Township least well served by developed recreation.

Unhappily Whiton will do little to ease this situation as its limited space is quite fully occupied by a maze of driveways, parking areas and pavements. Remaining open lawn area in the rear (south side of the site) is complicated by a very ungainly, fenced detention basin and fairly poor soils.

Some opportunity occurs here in a collection of nicely chosen play apparatus which if enclosed in a cohesive space, furnished with benches and game tables and favored with some plantings, could provide a very utilitarian neighborhood play area.

While the enthusiastic application of bituminous concrete pavement has fairly effectively filled the frontal and east side remainder of this site eliminating natural surface utilization, it has certainly created an excellent potential for hard surfaced games. These pavements should be evaluated for very minor modification by curbs and goals to produce needed basketball courts and a high quality roller skating area to replace the feature at Marshall Street.

As the recreation opportunities so created rely on the end of the school day for participants, no conflict exists and the potential for evening and weekend use by adults is one to be exploited.

If a cooperative neighbor can be found this site should be connected to adjacent Hillcrest Drive and/or Covered Bridge Road by a pedestrian trail. Its isolated location within an otherwise densely developed neighborhood was an unfortunate oversight.

Although Whiton School site is the least utilitarian of the several school sites, it offers valuable opportunities responsive to the Township's current needs.

OLD YORK SCHOOL
BLOCK 57, LOT 32 – 9 ACRES

This school site occurs in intimate physical association with the Municipal Complex on Old York Road but is unrelated in any functional sense. This is a somewhat sad looking site, undistinguished by any attempt to make it welcoming or pretty.

An additional to the school itself, surrounded by mandatory fire lanes and a number of haphazard parking spaces, the school site offers a paved play area, a basketball court, a curious scattered array of useful play equipment and a multi-purpose field with two infields. All field space area in shabby condition and a good deal of useful margin is cluttered by fences and the play equipment.

This school site occurs at the very front door of the Township in a prominent visual relationship to the main entrance of the Municipal Complex. It is not a warm welcome visually as no effort to landscape, decorate or otherwise present an attractive space here has been made.

Aside from its unlovely character, the Old York School site presents some good inexpensive opportunities to increase the service potential of its outdoor facilities. To achieve this, the parking swarm surrounding the school can be consolidated in the remaining unused frontal space and the play equipment can be campused into a cohesive space with some sitting opportunities, some shade and shelter, appropriate access pathways and curbed resilient surface play spaces. This would enable restructuring and redevelopment of infields to provide adequate backstops, wing fences and team bench areas as well as recovering wasted marginal space for a larger multi-purpose field.

The objectives in addition to supplying increased quality athletic fields where good infrastructure exists, is to find and capitalize the school sites built-in opportunity to provide services beyond the school day. In this instance, recreation features can be made more accessible to residents on Kenbury Road by development of a pedestrian connection through Municipal land extending to that street. Such a route should be created. More significantly, Old York School should appear more welcoming. Signage and a pleasant entry feature are minimum expectations in a public site with potential to deliver useful recreation.

It may be useful to regard this little site as an opportunity to make a significant but small impact on recreation needs and a large, valuable, needed impact on the appearance of this visually important space.

STONY BROOK SCHOOL
BLOCK 36, LOT 1 – 12 ACRES

The Stony Brook School site is the most useful of all elementary school sites. Though it is all developed, it is extremely inefficiently used particularly where recreation space is concerned. Fortunately the sites “L” shape has been filled with building and pavement on one leg and dedicated to turf fields otherwise. These fields are adequate to provide space for three youth league or softball fields and two multi-purpose fields simultaneously with resolving some unusual slope and drainage conditions behind the school.

The “back fields” at Stony Brook are nicely sited and well removed from adjacent residences and can easily incorporate a multi-purpose path, sitting areas, additional basketball courts and other minor improvements consistent with a neighborhood park. Linkage to adjacent residences is gained by three secondary streets and by Cedar Grove and Stony Brook Roads, enabling very good pedestrian access.

The Township should consider the projected utility of Stony Brook School site as a comparative priority as it can be responsive to three recreation system objectives. These are increased supply of neighborhood parks, increase in multi-purpose athletic field space and extremely low improvement cost.

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL
BLOCK???, LOT???, - ??? ACRES

The Middle School site is a very bleak place in appearance and in the quality and condition of its remaining athletic fields. These consist of a pair of softball infields on a multi-purpose field west of the roadway/parking area complex that dominates the school front. The infield nearest the school has a very poor sun orientation and both infields are in need of comprehensive redevelopment. Their backstops are too small, too close to baselines and dilapidated. Wing fences and team bench enclosures don’t exist and infield margins are in need of renovation. The turf multi-purpose outfield is usefully large but wholly unsupported by any access improvement, seating accommodation, landscaping or identification.

An elevated plateau in the rear of the school is the remnant of a former larger athletic field utilized as space for recent school expansion. Remaining transition areas have left this field poorly connected to the gymnasium and generally impaired in utility. An old bituminous 4 lane track remains in the center of the large rectangular plain and the interior of this track is utilized as a soccer field. Approximately six acres of space occur between the school and the end of this field and that grand total provides two sports venues. If its utility is limited, its appearance is worse. Not a single plant blemishes the entire area, resulting in a weather exposed, windy and inhospitable space.

The track surface is severely deteriorated and of a construction no longer acceptable for training or meets. As its location confounds adaptation of the entire field space it is constructed upon, consideration of a new location for this facility should be undertaken.

The entire upper plateau here should be expanded by grading to the east, south and north to create a new field surface sufficiently large to produce two multi-purpose field spaces with a perimeter lane to replace the existing track feature. This lane should be continued to surround the Staats Field Complex as well as the lower multi-purpose field and subsequently joined to White Park and continued around its perimeter. Within the Middle School site, the lane would be utilized to provide barrier free access between the school and athletic fields as well as providing a “theme line” along which introduction of plantings, furnishings and common site amenities would begin.

The field improvement potential here is more than typically useful as the school and White Oak Park are immediately adjacent. Improvements and expansion here will be less costly than at White Oak Park and will serve both school and recreation programs better.

In an extended planning sense, the Middle School site is a prominent element. The Township has assembled lands along Bluegrass Boulevard and Preakness Circle that extend to Harlan School Road where an exquisite land tract occurs under ownership of the Board of Education.

The Middle School site is the door to creation of a linear parkway over 2 miles in length with pedestrian, bikeway link potentials from every neighborhood north of Holland Brook Road, west of Stony Brook Road, south of Tanglewood Drive and east of Readington Road.

If this type of link can be constructed the Middle School will become a much more valuable resource area and one with a more substantial role as a hub site where organized sports and spontaneous individual recreation merge.

As stated for other School Board properties, capitalizing existing, relatively inexpensive, infrastructure supported potentials here and planning physical links and shared use of the Middle School will depend on a progressive, cooperative attitude between the Township and Board.

VACANT LAND
BLOCK 20.07, LOT 22 – ACRES 76

The Board of Education has preserved a land tract on Harlan School Road as an insurance against the possible future of a High School being placed in the Township. They were not only prudent but very thoughtful in reservation of such a parcel as this choice is an extremely generous 76 acres of prime development land with road frontage on two sides.

It is strongly recommended that the Township discuss the future of this tract as it has potential for immediate supplementation of needed recreation features both community wide and for adjacent neighborhoods.

Factors that prompt this recommendation include the following:

1. The Township will need to increase the quantity of passive and neighborhood park features throughout the Township as comparative priorities.
2. The residents of the Township cite among other needs a desire for access to natural space, walkways, and bikeways.

3. This site occurs as a terminus of a significant greenway/park potential and is itself the most gracious space along that greenway.
4. Significant short term needs for recreation do not include construction of additional space consumptive features such as ballfields (the concentration existing at White Oak Park eliminates priority for more in this vicinity).
- 5) The purpose of preservation against future need can be maintained coincident with a development style useful for present recreation and complimentary to future school development should it occur.
- 6) At seventy six acres, this site contains raw space adequate to construct several High Schools and their parking and athletic fields. As current build-out projections fill the Township at approximately 20,000 residents, a population total in High School would not exceed 2000 in any planning future. Approximately 10 acres of land would be required to site school and parking at this size.

Considering these factors, a space reservation of as much as 30 acres within which no permanent structures would be built would assure the availability of need future space an enable occupation and enjoyment of this beautiful tract immediately.

Proposals for initial utilization of this land tract occur in a very limited spectrum short term. The most appropriate need and opportunity is for creation of paths and bikeways as follows:

1. Bikeway/Multi-Purpose Lane

This proposal is for a natural surface lane 8' wide capable of sustaining use for walkers, joggers, bicyclists and service vehicles. This lane would follow a perimeter course around the entire site with gated accesses at Vollers Drive, West County Drive, Division Boulevard, and Harlan School Road. The Harlan School Road access would also provide a small aggregate surface parking lot, site map and restroom. The lane would continue along Harlan School Road to a meeting with Township land near Chelsey Court where it would continue south to a final destination at the Middle School.

The entire site has been managed for agriculture and today is a series of moderately overgrown farm fields separated by hedgerows and small patches of trees. It is recommended that each field area be studied according to volunteer growth and that some be cleared back to meadows and other managed to maximize the diversity of succession habitats.

Thus discriminated a series of mowed trails would be created throughout the site and these would be perpetuated by mowing to provide a varied walk or jog thought the site diverse characteristics.

Areas of former field should be mowed more frequently to present informal play fields and to maintain open views and vistas which will soon be lost as succession to early forest continues.

Within such a substrate, family picnic sites, benches, a Frisbee golf course, nature interpretive trails could be added to diversify types of activity independent of grading, utilities or structures.

This land is the only large land tract currently owned by the Township or Board of Education that present such a comprehensively natural appearance and stands in such an accessible and well linked relationship to adjacent neighborhoods.

As preparation of this site for low intensity passive use can be so quickly and easily and inexpensively done and as it can produce some of the features that residents would like to use, it should be given a very high priority and soon begun.

UNDEVELOPED LAND PARCELS

It appears that the Township has done a thoughtful job in assembly of some of the more recent subdivision approvals within the Township as a number of very utilitarian small park sites have been preserved, frequently in very adaptable relationship to adjacent residences. Curiously, none have been developed. As these few opportunities can be exploited to provide exactly the pocket or neighborhood park feature that the system is so uniformly deficient in, the Township should turn its attention to exploitation of these.

The intent and objective for these sites is to create a variety of small feature areas targeting the most adjacent neighborhoods. These features will be conventionally accessed on foot or by bicycle and are intended to supply individual or small group play. There is no intent to create programmed activity areas or venues for organized sports.

These little sites should be developed for area kids to play in, for neighbors to stroll through or walk the dog or simply to visit for a quiet nap in the sun. Clearly constructed features such as play equipment, benches, a shelter and drinking fountain and pathways are fundamental elements that each may contain, but beyond those basics, each site will condition which additional facilities are appropriate.

It is important in public features so closely integrated with adjacent homes that the flow of visitors to and through each site is not disruptive or intrusive but equally important that access and the variety of uses is adequate to assure a comfortable, safe feeling situation with the certainty of regular visits by area adults to moderate the occasional wayward tendency of local youths.

Each of the vacant land sites examined during this study is currently being utilized, some more, some less by neighborhood kids and apparently as short cuts from one street to another. Each has a current, perhaps important recreation function which as appropriate should be expanded.

VACANT LAND PARCELS

BLOCK 20.06, LOT 22 – 4.94 ACRES

BLOCK 20.14, LOT 11 – 2.41 ACRES

BLOCK 20.19, LOT 9 – 1.18 ACRES

These lots are adjacent to one another and are surrounded by neighborhoods along West County Drive, Snowbird Way, Shale Hill Road, and Shadyside Court. The tract is very well assembled as useful frontage is included on three of these roads and an access easement connects the land to Snowbird Way. Although the site contains a broad shallow drainage swale and some wetlands, its aggregate acreage provides ample space for a variety of appropriate uses.

This site should be lightly developed to provide at least a small (1 ½ - 2 acres) central clearing, a play equipment area and adjacent sitting area with shelter, family picnic site and a restroom.

Before any of these are designed or constructed the site should be made accessible by pathway entries from the four adjacent roads each of which should be identified with signage. A perimeter loop lane should be constructed around the entire site to enable immediate utilization by bicycles and pedestrians. This will open the site to regular use and through passage and by addition of a few benches provide great neighborhood recreation before facilities can be budgeted and constructed.

This site is noteworthy as it is an excellent assembly of recreation tracts apparently as a deliberate planning process. If all remaining subdivision approvals are as well considered the Township will have done as well as is reasonably possible.

VACANT LAND TRACT
BLOCK 44, LOT 900 – 22.1 ACRES
BLOCK 44, LOT 901 - .2 ACRES

This parcel occurs between Bernard Street and Cedar Grove Road and is entirely surrounded by residential development.

The landform here is unusual and very interesting featuring two broad, deep swales confining a triangular island of lightly wooded, rounded hillside.

The site is very well utilized by area residents and has a path system that extends to each of the adjacent streets, worn by frequent foot traffic and by a few all terrain vehicles.

The site topography is moderately to steeply sloping and an active stream corridor exists in the most easterly end near Longfellow Court.

This site group presents an opportunity to create an unusual and exciting neighborhood park. It's unusual and various landforms provides a superior basis for a formalized pathway/bikeway lane, and creates small flat area sand tiny sheltered areas and view sites perfect for placement of benches, sitting area or play equipment lots.

The site center (between swales) is too steep in all directions for creation of a ballfield but is perfect for an open lawn playfield. Such a clearing, surrounded by a woods edge path, benches and picnic tables would provide an open any viewpoint across the River Valley while remaining visually separate from adjacent homes.

More than adequate space and very cooperative topography here will facilitate siting of courts. A basketball and multi-purpose skating/roller hockey area should be considered.

A neighborhood, group use feature such as a large shelter for picnics is a practical prospect and one which would facilitate adaptation of the site for summer day camp programs.

If developed, this site will generate a fairly substantial amount of visitation and will be a destination site.

It is essential that restroom provisions be made simultaneously with any facility addition proposal.

This is another very clever parkland reservation. It is a fairly big site but one very pleasantly submerged relative to adjacent residences. Active use facilities developed here can easily be placed out of sight and sound from even the nearest neighbors. It can be accessed from all sides which improves the perception of security and dramatically facilitates spontaneous pedestrian use.

VACANT LAND TRACT ARRAY – GREENWAY TRACTS **BLOCK 41.07, LOT 900**

The Township has secured nearly 50 acres of contiguous land in odd shaped strips between residential subdivisions along Thoroughbred Drive, Bluegrass Boulevard, Preakness Circle and Champions Circle. Although each of these sites also performs drainage functions, each element provides space and place for developed recreation facilities and more importantly, is capable of continuing a bikeway or trail system to linkage opportunities at the north and south ends of this area.

This group of land tracts is surrounded by new residences and generally is wide open land flanked by large open rear yards of adjacent homes. Landform is generally steeper than optimal for ballfield spaces but is satisfactory in many locations for court groups and play areas.

These neighborhoods are so near to White Oak Park that local athletic field access is optimal. However, like all other Township neighborhoods, pedestrian access to play grounds, courts, and other day use features is limited. This however can be easily resolved here by creation of a walkway/bikeway spine from Harlan School Road to Readington Road and across Bluegrass Boulevard to a juncture with Dana Terrace and by construction of a play area, tot lot, sitting area and picnic sites in the expanded site space between Paddock Court and Dana Terrace and by creation of a basketball/multi-purpose court near Paddington Road.

Other margins of the bikeway core feature would include extensive planting areas, creation of flower meadows, placement of benches, small sun shelters and small sitting areas at good view sites. The objective here is to create a sequence of experiences and minor attractions along very narrow or exposed portions of the land strips and to locate larger activity spaces and game facilities in larger nodes along the bikeway.

Completion of this linked system will couple neighborhoods north and south to the school, White Oak Park and each other by foot or bicycle and the route between the furthest opposite ends will be a series of natural spaces and recreation activities, views and enclosures. In fact a Branchburg cross section will occur along this potential course.

VACANT LAND TRACTS – GREENWAY TRACTS

BLOCK 61, LOT 902 – ??? ACRES

BLOCK 61, LOT 901 – ??? ACRES

BLOCK 60.02, LOT 4 – 10 ACRES

BLOCK 61.02, LOT 10 – ??? ACRES

BLOCK 61.02, LOT 36 – ??? ACRES

A group of land tracts very similar to those described above has been assembled on lands east of Readington Road, along the course of Holland Brook and between Old York Road and Evergreen Drive along the gas and electric transmission lines.

In general these tracts are not as useful as those near Harlan Drive as the broad expanse of utility easement is and will remain clear of trees. This creates an extremely exposed effect, less pleasant and desirable for facility expansion than optimal.

The tract string is very useful for development of a bikeway/multi-purpose lane continuous from Old York Road east to Old York Road West.

This idea is timidly introduced by an existing bituminous walkway from Oak Tavern Road a few hundred feet to Old York Road. The recommended lane would be 8' wide, gated at roadways to require dismounting and furnished occasionally, in shaded areas with benches, picnic spots and drinking fountains.

This group of land tracts has an east turning and west turning leg that divides at Evergreen Drive. Both legs then enter the stream corridor of Holland Brook and very scenic small portion of some of the Township's older woodlands. Sloping land and sensitive ecological conditions will limit any significant development within these legs of the greenway but will enable small sections of nature trail along the stream sides and flood plains.

The eastward turning land leg of these tracts crosses Holland Brook and ends at the northern side of Route 202 opposite Beechwood Road. This site area should be very carefully examined and considered as it is a reasonable bikeway crossing potential at an existing intersection location. Beyond that intersection, Beechwood Road extends directly into recently acquired farmlands of Kanach Farm Tract.

On the western extremity of this tract group, only narrow upland bands exist to sustain bikeway development. These will be inconvenient, in areas requiring short bridge or boardwalk sections but pass through a very picturesque small floodplain and wetland zone enclosed by wooded slopes.

VACANT LAND TRACT – ACTIVE FARM

BLOCK 70, LOT 17 – 32 ACRES

This parcel is an extremely scenic farmland site occurring along Old York Road and joined by Glen Crest Drive. On its eastern side the land is grazed into very beautiful wooded meadows sloping to open fields along Old York Road. On its western side open field's stretch out along the flat hilltop, flanked by wooded land and subdivided by hedgerows.

This site is exceptionally beautiful and is potentially very useful as it provides a large area of flat, easily developable space. In the short term however there is not a pressing need to develop constructed facilities here. There is however a very substantial utility in creating a pathway system within this tract with entries at both Old York Road and Glen Crest Drive. These should be well marked to discriminate public space from adjacent private space particularly along Old York Road.

This tract area should be preserved as a passive use site as long as possible, to provide for a circumstance where an appropriate special use function or facility need merges in the future. This attractive site and setting that reservation for some cultural, education, or special social purpose should be maintained as long as possible.

VACANT LAND PARCELS – CASE/WHITON SITE – 53.8 ACRES

BLOCK 26, LOT 34.02

BLOCK 26, LOT 31

BLOCK 26, LOT 32

This group of parcels shall be called Case/Whiton for convenience. It consists of three parcels (Block 26, Lot 34.02, 31, and 32) and an aggregate total of 54 acres. It is adjacent to residential subdivisions along Forest Lane, Harvest Drive, Kensington Court and Lexington Avenue.

Case/Whiton is a target site for the next Community Park development in Branchburg and although it is not perfect in physical characteristics, it is the best placed large parcel existing within the southern region of the Township. Beyond that, it occupies a very accessible relationship to large residential districts to the north and east along Whiton Road and Hillcrest Drive.

The site is influenced by passage overhead of two electric transmission lines which diminish appreciation of the space even if they do no actual harm. Respective of these, proposed facilities should be placed to avoid bring directly beneath these lines. It is further influenced by a wetland corridor that follows the site's invert across the most easterly lot. This system hardly detracts from the sites utility and it presents a very diverse and interesting transition of environment types, ideal for walkways and nature study.

It also contains a large tract of overgrown former field which is suitable for construction of a multi-purpose athletic field with two soccer sized fields and two softball sized fields.

The proposal for this site is to create a community park with a part of the compliment of athletic fields needed as the Township grows to deliver team sports for residents living south of Route 202. Remaining future needs will be accommodated at Joe Stala Park. These fields can be created in the single space described previously while the remainder of the site is developed with tennis courts, basketball courts, play equipment areas, a bikeway multi-purpose lane and group picnicking facilities.

Park vehicular access would be located at the existing entry point at the end of Harvest Drive and a second access from Case Road along an existing 50' R.O.W. Primary parking would occur on the transmission R.O.W.

This site development will begin to improve the existing imbalance of sport facilities and provide a park in a location accessible by foot or bicycle from the large subdivisions along Whiton and Hillcrest.

A minor but significant objective has been cited as a need within the Township system. This is a "dog park", a space where residents can bring their pets and allow them to play together in a controlled circumstance.

As a fairly small area (1/4 acre) is adequate for such a feature and as additional, connected walking space is a desirable capability, Case/Whiton is proposed as an opportunity well suited to this use.

This feature should be immediately adjacent to the access drive and parking area and should be linked with the perimeter path loop. Its significant initial elements may include as little as an enclosing fence, double gated entry enclosure, a large aggregate surface, washable space and some shade. Ultimately, potable water, and a sheltered sitting area will be essential.

VACANT LAND TRACT **BLOCK 81, LOT 26 – 7 ACRES**

This is a wide open triangular field in a sparsely populated neighborhood of large tract homes. In its current state it is not attractive for any sustained visit as no shelter shade or other feature or tree shares the space.

The Township should regard this site as a low priority for development. Meaningful additions toward its future utility include planting a large number of shade trees along the roadway frontage and allowing the remainder to grow into succession meadows. A space of 2-3 acres in the most interior corner should be mowed periodically and connected to the roadway by mowed pathways.

Initial constructed features should consist of a basketball court and a drinking fountain leaving definition of a theme to a more advanced development state in the future.

It is strongly recommended that as adjacent lot seven is submitted for subdivision that several additional acres be added to this tract to produce a total capable of providing a future neighborhood park.

VACANT LAND PARCEL – JOE STALA PARK **BLOCK , LOT - 18 ACRES**

Joe Stala Park is a work in progress, currently being filled with excavated earth material from a county project. The remainder, at completion of this process, may provide a well graded plateau suitable for utilization as a recreation site.

Due to its completely open character this site will not be particularly charming initially. Its location however presents some very unique opportunities for river access and provides a suitable site to complete balance of the athletic field supply disparity currently existing in the Township's most southern region.

Joe Stala Park is surrounded by 55 acres of undeveloped Somerset County parkland which parcel includes a very beautiful floodplain and river edge complete with a roadbed following the riverbank from Neshanic Station to the bridge at Black Point Road.

This land does separate Joe Stala from direct access to the river shore which condition should not present a utilization problem presuming County cooperation.

The most appropriate use for this site should capitalize to two distinct land type capabilities as follows:

The most upland, filled section of the park should be finished and developed as turf fields capable of sustaining two multi-purpose fields each approximately 6 acres in area and each capable of producing two full size soccer/multi-purpose fields and two adult softball sized fields. Remaining site space would be constructed to supply vehicle access and parking, a perimeter lane feature, restrooms, play equipment areas and court facilities. This element of the site will not be particularly suitable for picnicking or passive use for a very long time as no trees exist. As these facilities should accompany active recreation areas, it is recommended that the Township in cooperation with the County extend a bikeway/service lane element to the existing roadbed at the river shore and prepare picnic sites at suitable elevated locations there.

It is recommended that the Joe Stala vacant land site be considered as one where a skate park facility is an appropriate future amenity.

Joe Stala offers a location very separate from existing residential development and a site which will evolve in its upland areas into active use facilities.

It is recommended that the Township consider this site opportunity as one little complicated by other dedicated utilization and one where this somewhat "off mainstream" type of activity can evolve in comparative separation from more conventional purposes.

As skate park features may be utilitarian even in a comparatively small format, space here for initial development and space reservation for future additions is available and uncomplicated by other short term agendas.

Joe Stala Park should be well connected back into Neshanic Station at Marshall Street Park and at Main Street with landscaped pathways that invite the village residents to follow a loop walk or bike route through both park sites and the residential streets.

In time, as the filled park area matures and plantings increase sufficiently to provide shade and some enclosure. The upland park site should be further elaborated by installation of a large pavilion feature capable of hosting large groups for picnicking and event programming. The

surrounding river valley is and will remain a dramatic scene and vista which should be exploited for its beauty and rarity.

It is recommended that the Township persistently seek to increase its holdings and add access ways along the river shore adjacent to Neshanic Station particularly along Woodfern Road. The objective of this is to secure sites immediately adjacent to the historic area of Neshanic Station near the station to assure a graceful and exciting transition from the village center to the river.

A portion of the County Tract immediately below the Neshanic Station post office contains the remnant of a former bed location of the river. This site if its utilization can be secured would provide an excellent terminus site for boating and rafting activities along the river. It is recommended that the Township consider this in combination with a launching site at Teneyek Park.

Joe Stala is also an important opportunity to perfect political linkage with the County agency which owns so much of the river shore in Branchburg and to date has done so little with it. It behooves Branchburg's recreation future more than any other adjacent municipality to partner with the County into commitment to development of novel recreations within these sites.

VACANT LAND PARCEL – OLIVE STREET PARK BLOCK , LOT - .57 ACRES

Olive Street Park is a bit of an exaggeration as not much of a park occurs here. It is however a very pleasant little lot on a pleasant street. Development of this space with a garden, gazebo and some attractive site furnishings would provide a classic pocket park in an appropriate location.

Though not an early priority site for construction, it is recommended that the Township partner with local historical society members and local garden club members to begin preparation of a plan for systematic creation of a historically detailed passive park.

No single public site has been developed for beauty and refreshment alone. This is a great place to experiment with a theme that is completely underserved in the Township.

THE KANACH FARM BLOCK 68, LOT 5, 5.01, 5.02, 5.04 – 166 ACRES

This recent acquisition may represent the final major land investment at the Township ever needs to undertake. In size, location, topographic diversity and accessibility, it provides as nearly an ideal circumstance as this Township offers. The site is surrounded by residential subdivisions on the east, commercial lots on the west, and can be accessed from Whiton Road, Holland Brook Road, Beechwood Road and South Branch Road facilitating future connection by bikeways and pedestrian ways from large neighboring residential districts.

The site provides some topographical drama as it changes over 60 vertical feet in its fall to Holland Brook on the western boundary. It offers very large gently sloping farm fields on the

crest of its contained ridgeline and presents a commanding overlook to the river across from lands owned by the NJDEP.

A leg of Lot 5.02 is nearly enclosed by residences on Edgewood, Holland Brook and Whiton Roads providing opportunity to create a complete neighborhood park within the context of a community park.

The site is not perfect however. As it has been actively farmed for a long time, the bulk of land area is open field space, in character, less than ideal for recreation development. Many trees will be needed to soften and shade portions of the site. A second, more curious circumstance exists north of the cluster of farm buildings in the form of a vast pile of soil material. The purpose and ultimate disposition of this is not known.

The Kanach Farm presents a variety of options and potentials for recreation use which shall be suggested but not definitively recommended in this report. Much of the development of this site should occur in the future preserving options for recreation features not yet appropriate within the recreation system. In particular, these features include: a community pool, recreation center, enclosed athletic facilities (dome, air structure), cultural/performing arts center, arboretum, working farm facility or a large passive use park connected by bikeway to the river shore.

Other potentials may include extended planning topics such as relocating the entire Municipal Complex from its uncomfortable crush against Route 202 to a municipal administrative/cultural campus within the farm site in combination with all of the features described above.

The only firm recommendation made for this site is that as soon as ownership issues and access conditions are resolved enabling beneficial use by the Township, a Master Planning sequence should be undertaken to very carefully explore and select from the host of potentials of this valuable tract.

In the event that access is established and the Township is at liberty to begin redevelopment schemes it is suggested that the County and State Forestry Service be called to collaborate on partial reforestation of the site particularly at its residential perimeters.

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SITE

The Raritan Valley Community College has been cited as a resource for recreation programming within Branchburg. In fact, an agreement exists between the College and Township describing opportunities for use of fields and indoor courts.

These are useful potentials and may be influential in the short term, as back-up practice fields are needed while Township fields are renovated. They do provide utilitarian indoor space with limited accessibility, particularly for basketball programming.

The Township should not plan with or rely upon availability of these spaces except as response to interim problems or programs.

Beyond being physically remote from the bulk of the Township populace, they may, at a whim, be needed by the College, modified as the College builds or limited by unforeseeable conditions.

These facilities are not considered as elements of resource potential within this plan as they fail in requisite availability and occur both programmatically and physically beyond the Township's control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following report section describes recommended actions to be undertaken by the Township as an approach to achieving the goals and site specific objectives set forth previously.

As capital projects occur in time secondarily to a Township's primary service and infrastructure demands, the terms that recommendations are grouped under are without precise definition. Those grouped as short term are actions to be undertaken as soon as practically possible. Those grouped as near term include projects that may require several years to complete and generally address stabilization of existing system components and implementation of measures to resolve deficiencies or initiate new system improvements. Those grouped as long term include recommendations that exist as planning objectives alone in current time and that may be realized completely over decades.

Separate recommendations are directed at administrative actions while not necessarily time specific are presumed to be considered and acted upon as preamble to following capital projects.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduce a Framework

Branchburg Township should elect to institute a plan for a series of modifications or improvements of existing facilities as well as creation of new facilities to respond to existing and emerging deficiencies in the recreation system. It is observed that many of the existing system shortcomings are of a subjective nature as contrasted to simple quantitative imbalance. Therefore, a selection of the desired attributes for public recreation lands should be described by the Township as a foundation for subsequent capital improvements. The Township should consider and nominate a generic model or guideline for development of future improvements.

In particular, these guidelines are recommended to reinforce and enable: pedestrian and bicycle access provisions, requirements for permanent restroom facilities, minimum quantification of shade tree, site furnishings and aesthetic objectives, and proportioning of a balance between active use features and spontaneous use opportunities.

Reinforce Relationship to Board of Education

As currently, many active recreation facilities in the Township occur on Board of Education lands, it is imperative that the Township consolidate accustomed practices into long term shared use/ shared cost arrangements that guarantee the Township access to these facilities.

This report anticipates and recommends the use of school sites as an initial response to emerging deficiencies. As jurisdiction of these sites belongs to the School Board and adheres to State mandates, a particular understanding of mutual benefits and obligations will be prerequisite to any joint venture.

Maintenance, repair and reconditioning of fields and the cost associated with those operations will increase over the next several years. Agreements, in anticipation of how those costs will be met, should be entered into now.

Establish Working Links with the County System.

In the future Township outdoor recreation program important passive elements may rely on land and activity features occurring on County parks.

In fact, the County park system balances the recreation system in Branchburg Township by constituting a repository of open space, and water access among a host of important natural area opportunities not delivered or owned locally.

Branchburg Township will seek to expand into County lands in the future and will need a cooperative partner to further Township purposes.

In order to facilitate this important relationship, the Township needs to provide incentive for the County. This incentive occurs in three basic opportunities; access, participation in funding, and connectivity.

As the Township has achieved limited open space preservation and acquisition along the river and stands to the greatest benefit of improvements along its shore, a leadership role in planning and the assurance of regional access will likely compress sequences of agreement, funding and permitting that will take years to complete.

Elements of County owned land, such as the parcel enclosing Joe Stala Park have extraordinary utility to the Township and optimally should be negotiated into an occupiable status. In this particular instance, the Township owns adjacent access which might well be bargained to expand a bikeway and waterfront use. This sort of cooperation is facilitated by a familiar relationship with County representatives and by willingness to come to the trading table with substantial inducements.

Recognize, protect, and preserve existing relationships with citizen associations.

Branchburg Township's organized sports of all descriptions have been and are being delivered by the efforts of private citizens.

The Township should make every effort to sustain this efficient and inexpensive technique of program support and should regard each association formed in support of a particular sport as an effective resource bringing planning, administration, maintenance, and operational services to the delivery of their particular interest. If the Township is able and willing to sustain these organizations by provision of space resources and funding for operations, involved citizens will find manpower to support their own programs.

An official recognition of this sort of private time contribution is always useful but sometimes forgotten. Continuation of a very committed relationship of these groups to the Township and

ideally to each other should be enabled maximally as this group of citizens will be increasingly needed to support new recreation issues and capital requests.

Explore public/private partnerships.

Opportunities may be created to promote future development of recreation features within Branchburg through the expedient of partnerships between the Township and private interests. These opportunities typically evolve as methods of attaining special interest goals and may be appropriate here as vehicles for pursuit of indoor sports facilities, a municipal pool or the provision of concession based river oriented commercial activities.

Local sports organizations have discussed an interest in creation of general purpose indoor athletic venues particularly for soccer and general sports training. This type of facility has increased enormously in interest and utility over the recent decades as sports associations expand into travel formats and full year training and competition. It is however, not a mainstream recreation system need or legitimate priority for the taxpayer to support.

As interest in such opportunity will increase within Branchburg, the Township may reasonably plan to initiate exploration of these forms of future development.

Generally, the Township's partnership share in such ventures includes provision of land or space, utility infrastructure and underwriting financing proposals, while the private share includes operational responsibility, management skill and full capitalization of the specific projects.

The clearest current purpose for such a partnership that is consistent with regional recreation preferences is creation of a municipal pool facility. A resident interest in such public features always exists at some level and is exerted at some point, as citizens coalesce into active interest groups petitioning the Township for such development support.

As organized public interest directed a fund raising and membership status increases and shares responsibility for costly infrastructure construction, such joint projects can evolve much more rapidly than conventional public projects.

In Branchburg, this potential is yet to be explored and specific proposals for partnership have not been reported. Nonetheless, the Township should begin to examine this prospect and should at least adopt a planning strategy and policy determining whether or not such a partnering future is reasonable and to be pursued.

If so, reasonable practical forms should be considered in the context of feasible locations and initial out reach communication should begin.

As an example: river shore opportunity for recreation is various and unexploited, it is useful and desirable for the Township and region but costly to place; the Township owns access at Teneyek and Joe Stala sites which can be capitalized.

The Township may determine that boating, rafting and other river sports are desirable and itemize those that it may be willing to sustain by dedication of land, authorization of utilization

and cooperation in permitting. On such a basis, individuals, Township officials, or the recreation department can begin to contact potential interests, advertise or otherwise solicit external proposals.

It is recommended that such enabling processes be established by the Township.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PLANNING TASKS

Like administrative recommendations, planning tasks are described without specific time frame but are intended to anticipate and facilitate subsequent acquisitions or developments undertaken directly by the Township in furtherance of recreation goals. They are as follows:

New Subdivision Criteria for Recreation

The Township population increased from 10,900 to 14,600 in the decade of the 90's. This dramatic one-third increase in total population was unprecedented and unlikely to be repeated. Nonetheless it has, in its wake, created large and expanding waves of influence in the community profile and municipal resources.

A 20-25% increase in ultimate (18,000) population is forecast as the Township condition at build-out.

This total implies an ultimate need for facilities approximately half again larger than today's inventory.

As some of the sites occupied by such future facilities will occur within new subdivisions, it is strongly recommended that the Planning Board examine its technical conditions defining set aside land for recreation. The following minimums are recommended:

- A. Environmental
 - 1. No wetlands within required acreage
 - 2. No sub-division by roadways
 - 3. High position in the landscape
 - 4. No impacted soils
 - 5. Preserve existing trees

- B. Technical
 - 1. Establish minimum buffers to homes adjacent (25') (no development except paths within these)
 - 2. Require pathway construction to link all adjacent roads
 - 3. Require comprehensive planting of cleared perimeters
 - 4. Require extension of all utility services
 - 5. Require adequate margins on all fields and facilities to accommodate spectator's access and safe play
 - 6. Require barrier-free pathway access to all constructed facilities
 - 7. Require design by qualified experienced professionals.

In more rural subdivisions the following constraints are recommended:

- A. Corridors
 - 1. A 25' wide strip of land along at least one side of each parcel (original) and the entire rear of that parcel be a pathway easement deeded to Township use. Land

area thus taken to be subtracted from total of required subdivision area to preserve total unit count.

2. All natural watercourses and adjacent land area as require by NJDEP Stream Encroachment plus 15' minimum be preserved by easement for Township pathway easements.
3. All wetlands and buffering lands as required by NJDEP Wetlands Section plus 15' minimum be preserved by easement for pathways.
4. Pathways are defined as a maximum of 10' wide to be available for all modes of transportation (pedestrian, bike, horse) except motorized vehicles. Motorized service and emergency vehicles are excluded.
5. Where easements exist subsequent applications shall continue those to subject parcel edge.
6. When no on-site reservations are required or where on-site reservations are not needed in the Planning Board's determination, that developer shall deposit 2% of the retail price/unit into the Township's Recreation escrow fund.

MASTER PLANNING SEQUENCES

This group of recommendations falls somewhere between Planning and Administrative proposals. It is directed toward preparation of master plan proposals for future site development. As these sequences typically take years to design, permit, fund and construct, it is useful to initiate such sequences as far in advance as possible.

As the Township anticipates future capital improvements whether for park sites or trail systems, prior preparation of plans and estimates that define and quantify development proposals enabling sensible budgeting and phasing are indispensable.

It is recommended that the Township begin to assemble such plans and to identify access and environmental issues that require resolution prior to construction sequences.

It is recommended that individual site master planning sequences be initiated for Township sites in this order:

1. Case/Whiton Community Park Site
2. Joe Stala Park Site
3. Timbers Bernard Street Park
4. Staats Farm Champions Circle
5. West County Drive Site
6. Kanach Farm
7. Raritan Bikeway System

RECOMMENDATIONS – CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

These recommendations represent the first priorities for physical work. They are ordered to: correct compliance and liability issues; to stabilize, renovate or otherwise improve existing fields to provide greater utility; and to introduce simple access features to useful vacant land tracts.

COMPLIANCE ISSUES

First among the possible improvements Branchburg Township should undertake at its existing school and recreation sties is resolution of compliance issues and standing liabilities. These are needed to accommodate residents as required by law and to avoid injury.

Compliance issues occur primarily in the form of barrier free access provisions. An accessible route of travel should occur between every public entry location or parking area to every recreation facility or spectator area. Slope rates for such routes must be 5% or less for simple paths, if steeper, constructed with rails, 8.33% slope is the maximum allowable slope excepting special wilderness circumstances.

Each parking area should have reserved paved spaces which connect directly to these pathways. All access doorways to common spaces must be adequately wide, open easily, and be without sills greater than 1/4". All restrooms must contain at least one (1) barrier free water closet and lavatory.

Meeting a complaint condition throughout the recreation system will not be a glorious task, but it is necessary and should be started immediately.

Liability issues occur in a variety of innocuous seeming circumstances. As such, liabilities are coincident with every recreation site in every town, many cannot reasonable be inventoried or eliminated.

This recommendation nominates those that are very dangerous or should have been corrected long ago. The most difficult of these to restore is baseball backstops, wing fences and other structures placed near baselines. In general, none of these features should be closer than 25' from a baseline as the legal system has established a precedent on a liability litigation based on published recommendations. This finding, based upon ASA guidelines is coincident with Little League and NJHSF recommendations. Almost all the existing infields in Branchburg need to be corrected in some respect.

Slope conditions constitute another form of injury risk and liability exposure that the Township should correct. Where fields have been deliberately constructed on plateaus with steep side slopes (as at the Middle School and White Oak Park) the likelihood of someone playing ball there falling to injury in the normal course of play is foreseeable. It is then, an unreasonable risk and irrefutable liability. Wherever steep or sudden grade changes occur at or near athletic fields, a barrier, warning track or fence should be in place. It is recommended that the Township modify at least those cited above.

RENOVATION/RESTRUCTURING PROJECTS

The second group of short term projects is recommended to improve existing facilities currently in the inventory of main stream programming. These include the following (see inventory for elaboration of recommendations):

WHITE OAK PARK – FIELDS #6, 7, AND 8

These small encapsulated fields should be expanded and regraded into a single multi-purpose field plain.

WHITE OAK PARK – NEW FIELD COMPLEX #15, 16, 17, 18 AND 19

Inventory and correct existing drainage problems on field surfaces and incorporate additional interceptor drains below 16, 18 and 19 and along west side of 17.

MIDDLE SCHOOL LOWER FIELD

Renovate turf surface and reconstruct both infield areas.

TENEYEK PARK

Expand right field extremity of existing softball field to create full size soccer multi-purpose capability.

OLDE TOWN PARK

Regrade, expand and reconstruct basketball court. Furnish with benches and color coat court surface.

NEW FACILITY PROJECTS

These recommendations target several of the Township's current demand areas within the context of existing park sites. As possible, these should be undertaken quickly as they are capable of demonstrating the intention to respond to some of the passive use preferences identified in the recreation survey. These projects include:

- A. Continuation of a multi-purpose lane around the perimeter of White Oak Park near its boundaries with existing residences, along Baird and Readington Roads. This lane should be constructed in an 8' wide aggregate paved format prototype typical of subsequent bikeways.

- B. Construction of family picnic sites and foot paths adjacent to fields 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11.
- C. Development of an informal entry, small gravel parking lot and a mowed perimeter trail loop at the Board of Education lot on Harlan School Road.
- D. Development of an identical mowed path course continuous from the Middle School to Harlan Road and Readington Road.
- E. Development of a mowed, cleared path course from an entry at Harvest Drive around the entire perimeter of the Case/Whiton Site.
- F. Development of a mowed, cleared path course around the perimeter of Teneyek Park.

NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

This group of recommendations generally includes large, more capital intensive projects directed at expanding capability of existing sites, particularly school sites to supplement and expand supply of existing primary sports venues and simultaneously increasing the same sites capabilities to provide neighborhood park features.

These presume cooperation of the Board of Education and successful negotiation of development cost and maintenance expense agreements between the Township and Board of Education.

In the event that jurisdictional and funding issues can not be resolved to enable these projects, the Township will be obliged to redirect their efforts at undeveloped land tracts. As this recourse will oblige the prior establishment of access and utility infrastructure, cost will increase and timetable will dilate. It is therefore pointedly suggested that opening dialogue with the Board of Education to clear the way for these projects be initiated quickly.

The first such capital project occurs at Stony Brook School site and involves conversion of the existing field spaces along Harlan Road into a neighborhood park. Specific improvements are included in the site evaluation section.

The second in order of priority occurs at Old York School site. It is comparatively smaller than the Stony Brook proposal and includes comprehensive restructuring of the athletic field portion of the site, landscaping and beautification and creation of a small neighborhood park. Specifics are described in the site evaluation section.

The third priority proposal returns to White Oak Park to restructure the entire roadway and parking area system. This is fairly large project with little facility or recreation opportunity increase but due to the risky character of the vehicle system here it should be resolved directly.

The fourth priority concerns initial planning and development of Joe Stala Park where County lands filling operations near completion. The Township should prepare an initial concept plan enabling placement of an entry way, small parking area and pedestrian link to the Rivershore. Capital budgeting to enable this limited improvement should follow.

The next proposal is intended to establish a second community park on the 50 acre Case/Whiton tract group. This project is the initial large capital proposal to be developed on a vacant land site. It will likely need to be developed in phases over several years but if and when completed will provide additional athletic fields adequate to restore balance of distribution and provide scheduling flexibility to enable restoration of other fields. Proposed specifics of this project are described in the evaluation section.

The final capital project in this group includes the greenbelt tracts between White Oak Park and Harlan Road. It is recommended that the entire bikeway element within this corridor be installed and furnished. See specific details in site evaluation.

At completion of the near term capital projects described above, the Township will have balanced its current sports field needs, improved distribution of neighborhood park features and begun to decentralize use of White Oak Park enabling more reliable maintenance sequences to be achieved there.

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

The next level of recommendations is called Long Term in part because years will pass before these are begun and decades before some are completed.

It is expected that in the several years required to address the variety of projects detailed in short and mid-term sections preceding, specific current needs of the Township will also have changed, perhaps bring a new set of immediate priorities. This group of recommendations is intended to prepare advance planning for response to any such need.

Future emergencies aside, long term recommendations are directed at specific goals. They are:

1. Complete placement of pocket and neighborhood parks throughout the Township to balance access to common day use and passive use opportunities.
2. To begin placement of river based recreation sites and construction of available portions of a river corridor bikeway including in this order:
 - a) Comprehensive development of Teneyek Park including expansion of pathway, court, picnic area, restroom and ballfield improvements (see site evaluations section) couple with development of a water front activity deck, launching area, shelter and picnicking sites. Consideration should be given to creation of a boat livery here, operated as a concession or private enterprise.
 - b) Placement of a bikeway through Township and County lands on the floodplain between Route 202 and the railway at River Road.
 - c) Placement of a bikeway along the floodplain edge of the County golf course site linked back to South Branch Road and Kanach Farm.
 - d) Placement of a bikeway in the floodplain continuously from Elm Street in Neshanic Station to Woodfern Road.

- e) Development of a river access site with deck, launch shelter, and picnic sites near Elm Street.

This recommendation is proposed to significantly improve access to and trails through the flood plain to provide a very substantial opportunity for hiking, biking, nature study, fishing access, camping and boating activities. Though huge, the floodplain of the Raritan System is the significant association of natural areas in the Township and the obvious choice for expansion of outdoor passive uses.

Unfortunately, the Township doesn't own much of it. To produce the desired access and develop even modest passive features will require continuous County and State cooperation. Such cooperation is likely but will require guidance. As Branchburg's interests are vested here, it should seek the guidance role.

- 3. Finalize a Master Plan for Kanach Farm and begin construction of community recreation features there.

Kanach Farm should be pointedly considered as the apparent most logical site for planning of future integrated indoor recreation facilities. Those most prominent by their current deficiency in the Township are dedicated space for senior citizens, for teens and for a community general recreation center building. While these can be planned as a single design concept, the prospect of considering modular components particularly for senior accommodations should be evaluated as well.

As possible make planning assumptions relative to special community features (municipal pool, recreation center, summer camp facility, fairground or other intensive use, structure based activities and campus these within the Kanach Tract reserving space as necessary.

- 4. Finalize a master strategy and master plan for acquisition of needed linkage sites or easements to enable continuation of the river corridor bikeway and begin construction of river access sites for boating activities.
- 5. Complete development of upland areas of Joe Stala Park introducing shelter and cultural activity components.
- 6. Continue expansion of community resource features at Kanach Farm site and begin to explore opportunities for nature trails, boardwalks, and creation of a outdoor education facility on adjacent NJDEP land.
- 7. Distribution of future athletic fields. It is likely that an additional 12-15 athletic fields of various descriptions will be required to sustain organized sports as the Township grows. Stipulating that no additional fields be placed at White Oak Park, space for such future fields will occur within existing adequate space of Joe Stala Park, Case/Whiton Park, Kanach Park and the reserved High School site.

Long term planning will anticipate and reserve appropriate space for these in the priority listed previously to maintain a distribution balance throughout the Township.

CAPITAL PLANNING CHARACTERISTICS

Planning for capital improvements in outdoor recreation may be extremely various but follows a relatively consistent set of identifiable characteristics relative to the type of target facility considered.

Predicting future cost for such improvements as planning guidelines, improves as specific descriptions of proposed features are concisely detailed but can be estimated as generic quantities if such guidelines are not carried beyond planning budgets.

The following examples derived from project potentials within Branchburg illustrate this technique:

Example 1 – Bikeways in floodplain basins

Construction costs for an 8' wide multi-purpose lane per mile of construction in wooded areas.

Soil erosion and sedimentation controls 5,280 lf at \$4.00/lf	\$ 21,120.00
Site clearing 5,280 lf at \$2.00/lf	\$ 10,560.00
Base preparation 5,280 lf at \$3.00/lf	\$ 15,840.00
Pathway surface (aggregate) 5,280 lf at \$15.00/lf	\$ 79,200.00
Marginal finishing 5,280 lf at \$1.50/lf	\$ 7,920.00
Small water course crossing (boardwalk sections) 20 lf at \$400.00/lf	\$ 8,000.00
Entry gate structure Lump sum -	\$ 2,500.00
Signage (directional) Lump sum -	\$ 2,000.00

Furnishing	
Lump sum -	\$ 5,000.00
	=====
	\$152,140.00
Construction Contingency – 20%	\$ 30,428.00
	=====
	\$182,568.00
Project Soft Costs (design) 10% (maximum for projects over \$100,000.00)	\$ 18,257.00
	=====
Budget Total	\$200,825.00

This quick process yields a budget predication of which would be preliminary expressed as a budget anticipation of \$200,000.00 per mile.

Example 2 – Typical Community Park development similar to potential for Case/Whiton Tract

PRELIMINARY COST ESTIMATE PHASED DEVELOPMENT OF FACILITIES AT CASE/WHITON TRACT

These estimates are based on rudimentary planimetric and topographic information which describe site conditions approximately. Cost predictions based upon these documents will vary from estimates derived from actual drawings. When considering these estimates for capital planning, particularly for inclusion into subsequent year/s budgeting, a 20% contingency should be anticipated.

PROJECT AREA #1 - ATHLETIC FIELDS

Site Preparation

Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Controls	
Lump Sum	\$4,500.00
Site Clearing	
12 acres at \$1500.00/ac.	\$18,000.00
Site Security and Staging Area Prep	
Lump Sum -	\$2,500.00
	=====
	\$25,000.00

Earthwork

Topsoil Stripping and Stockpiling	
5000 cu. yd. at \$4.00/c.y.	\$20,000.00
Grading	
18800 cu. yd. at \$5.00/c.y.	\$94,000.00
‘Borrow’ Topsoil	
1000 cu. yd. at \$24.50/c.y.	\$24,500.00

Topsoil replacement 5000 cu yd at \$5.50/cu yd	\$27,500.00
	=====
	\$166,000.00

Utility Systems

Potable Water Features

Meter Pit Lump Sum -	\$4,500.00
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Main Potable Service Supply 345 lf at \$25.00/l.f.	\$8,625.00
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Drinking Fountains 1 at \$2800.00/Each	\$2,800.00
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Sanitary Sewer

Sanitary Sewer Connection 650 lin. ft. at \$25.00/l.f.	\$16,250.00
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	=====
	\$32,175.00

Field Irrigation

Irrigation System Lump sum -	\$46,000.00
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	=====
	\$46,000.00

Athletic Facilities

Infields 1 at \$8,000.00/each	\$8,000.00
----------------------------------	------------

Backstop 1 at \$15,000.00/each	\$15,000.00
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Team bench enclosures 2 at \$2,500.00/each	\$5,000.00
---	------------

Foul poles 2 at \$500.00/each	\$1,000.00
----------------------------------	------------

Soccer goals 4 at \$2,000.00/each	\$8,000.00
--------------------------------------	------------

Soccer field accessories 2 sets at \$1,600.00/each	\$3,200.00
---	------------

	=====
	\$40,200.00

Finishing and Furnishing

Trash Receptacles
4 at \$450.00/Each \$1,800.00

Perimeter Fencing – post and rail
850 lin. ft. at \$18.00/l.f. \$15,300.00

Benches
8 at \$850.00/Each \$6,800.00

Landscape Plantings
Lump Sum - \$15,000.00

Sod Finishing
31,000 sq. yd. at \$3.25/s.y. \$100,750.00

=====
\$139,650.00

SUB-TOTAL \$449,025.00

**GENERAL CONDITIONS and
CONSTRUCTION LAYOUT
5% of total of construction items for bonds,
insurances, and construction engineering**

=====
\$22,451.25

=====
\$471,476.25

10% CONTINGENCY

=====
\$47,147.63

TOTAL \$518,623.88

PROJECT AREA #2 - PLAY AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Site Preparation

Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Controls
Lump Sum \$5,500.00

Site Clearing
4 acres at \$1,500.00/ac. \$6,000.00

Site Security and Staging Area Prep
Lump Sum - \$1,500.00

=====
\$13,000.00

Earthwork

Topsoil Stripping and Stockpiling
3500 cu. yd. at \$4.00/c.y. \$14,000.00

Grading
8500 cu. yd. at \$5.00/c.y. \$42,500.00

Topsoil replacement 3500 cu yd at \$5.50/cu yd	\$19,250.00
	=====
	\$75,750.00

Pavements, Curbs, and Structures

Parking Lot and Roadway Curbing 200 lin. ft. at \$18.00/l.f.	\$3,600.00
Aggregate Roadway Pavements 1450 sy at \$15.00/sy	\$21,750.00
Asphalt Parking Area Pavements 1680 sq. yd. at \$15.00/sy	\$25,200.00
Concrete pavements 2500 sf at \$9.00/sf	\$22,500.00
Seating surfaces 1,200 sf at \$9.00/sf	\$10,800.00
Curbs and edging 460 lf at \$15.00/lf	\$6,900.00
	=====
	\$90,750.00

Facilities and Features

<u>Primary Play Equipment Area</u> Curbing 220 lin. ft. at \$25.00 LF	\$5,500.00
Resilient Surfacing 500 sq. yd. at \$20.00/s.y.	\$10,000.00
Equipment Lump Sum –	\$32,000.00
<u>Tot Lot play area</u> Curbing 160 lin. ft. at \$25.00/l.f.	\$4,000.00
Resilient Surfacing 218 sq. yd. at \$20.00/s.y.	\$4,360.00
Equipment Lump Sum -	\$18,000.00

Family Picnic Sites

Area Preparation
4 at \$300.00/each \$1,200.00

Picnic Tables
4 at \$750.00/Each \$3,000.00

Horseshoe Pitches (Complete With Sitework)
1 at \$ 1200.00/Each \$1,200.00

=====
\$79,260.00

Utility Systems

Potable Water Features

Drinking Fountains
1 at \$2800.00/Each \$2,800.00

Electric Service Extension

Main Service Entry and Metering
Lump Sum - \$2,500.00

Secondary Underground Distribution
600 lin. ft. at \$20.00/l.f. \$12,000.00

Light Poles and Luminaires
10 at \$ 2800.00/Each \$28,000.00

Footings and Conduits
Lump sum - \$5,000.00

Outlet Locations
4 at \$450.00/Each \$1,800.00

Sanitary Sewer

Sanitary Sewer Connection
650 lin. ft. at \$30.00/l.f. \$19,500.00

=====
\$71,600.00

Field Irrigation

Irrigation System - Lower Field
Lump sum - \$22,000.00

=====
\$22,000.00

Buildings

Proposed Restroom Building
1200 sq. ft. at \$150.00/s.f. \$180,000.00

Gazebo Structure Lump sum -	\$18,000.00
Gazebo slab 900 sf at \$10.00/sf	\$9,000.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$207,000.00
<u>Finishing and Furnishing</u>	
Trash Receptacles 4 at \$450.00/Each	\$1,800.00
Perimeter Fencing – (6' Chain Link) 400 lin. ft. at \$18.00/l.f.	\$7,200.00
Benches 8 at \$850.00/Each	\$6,800.00
Vehicle Gate Lump Sum -	\$1,500.00
Park Sign Lump Sum -	\$4,500.00
Interior Signage Lump Sum -	\$1,000.00
Landscape Plantings Lump Sum -	\$50,000.00
Sod Finishing 10,000 sq. yd. at \$3.50/s.y.	\$35,000.00
Marginal finishing 4000 sq yd at \$1.50/sq yd	\$6,000.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$113,800.00
SUB-TOTAL	\$673,160.00
GENERAL CONDITIONS and CONSTRUCTION LAYOUT 5% of total of construction items for bonds, insurances, and construction engineering	\$33,658.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$706,818.00
10% CONTINGENCY	\$70,681.80
	<hr/> <hr/>
TOTAL	\$777,499.80

PROJECT AREA #3 - PERIMETER TRAILS AND PASSIVE FEATURES

Site Preparation

Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Controls Lump Sum	\$4,000.00
Site Clearing 4 acres at \$1500.00/ac.	\$6,000.00
Site Security and Staging Area Prep Lump Sum -	\$1,500.00
	=====
	\$11,500.00

Earthwork

Topsoil Stripping and Stockpiling 300 cu. yd. at \$5.00/c.y.	\$1,500.00
Grading 2000 cu. yd. at \$6.00/c.y.	\$12,000.00
'Borrow' Topsoil 400 cu. yd. at \$24.00/c.y.	\$9,600.00
	=====
	\$23,100.00

Facilities and Features

<u>Family Picnic Sites</u> Area Preparation 10 at \$300.00/each	\$3,000.00
Picnic Tables 10 at \$750.00/Each	\$7,500.00
Horseshoe Pitches (Complete With Sitework) 1 at \$ 1200.00/Each	\$1,200.00
	=====
	\$11,700.00

Buildings

Gazebo Structure Lump sum -	\$18,000.00
Gazebo slab 900 sf at \$10.00/sf	\$9,000.00
	=====
	\$27,000.00

Finishing and Furnishing

Trash Receptacles 6 at \$450.00/Each	\$2,700.00
Perimeter Fencing – Post and Rail 700 lin. ft. at \$18.00/l.f.	\$12,600.00
Benches 8 at \$850.00/Each	\$6,800.00
Vehicle Gate Lump Sum -	\$1,500.00
Landscape Plantings Lump Sum -	\$15,000.00
Sod Finishing 1000 sq. yd. at \$3.50/s.y.	\$3,500.00
Seed Finishing 3000 sq. yd. at \$1.25/s.y	\$3,750.00
	=====
	\$45,850.00
SUB-TOTAL	\$119,150.00
GENERAL CONDITIONS and CONSTRUCTION LAYOUT 5% of total of construction items for bonds, insurances, and construction engineering	\$5,957.50
	=====
	\$125,107.50
10% CONTINGENCY	\$12,510.75
	=====
TOTAL	\$137,618.25

PROJECT AREA #4 - BIKEWAY

Site Preparation

Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Controls Lump Sum	\$4,000.00
Clearing 3600 lf at \$2.00/lf	\$7,200.00
	=====
	\$11,200.00

Earthwork

Stripping

1100 cu. yd. at \$8.00/c.y.	\$8,800.00
Surface grading and compaction 3200 sy at \$1.00/sy	\$3,200.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$12,000.00

Pavement

Stabilized aggregate 5600 sy at \$13.00/sy	\$72,800.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$72,800.00

Structures

10' wide stream crossing Lump sum -	\$12,000.00
Bridge abutments 2 at \$1,500.00/each	\$3,000.00
Elevated walkway (timber) 60 lf at \$200.00/lf	\$12,000.00
Edge grading and finishing 11,200 lf at \$0.50/lf	\$5,600.00
Signage Lump sum -	\$1,200.00
	<hr/> <hr/>
	\$33,800.00

SUB-TOTAL **\$129,800.00**

**GENERAL CONDITIONS and
CONSTRUCTION LAYOUT
5% of total of construction items for bonds,
insurances, and construction engineering**

\$6,490.00

10% CONTINGENCY

\$136,290.00
\$13,629.00

TOTAL **\$149,919.00**

RECAPITULATION

PROJECT AREA #1 - ATHLETIC FIELDS **\$518,623.88**

PROJECT AREA #2 - PLAY AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS **\$777,499.80**

PROJECT AREA #3 - PERIMETER TRAILS

AND PASSIVE FEATURES

\$137,618.25

PROJECT AREA #4 - BIKEWAY

\$149,919.00

Review of the several site specific recommendations incorporated in the report expressed in terms of current cost to develop per site are as follows.

While not specific and not to be utilized as planning references for any project until a concept plan is created to support revised predictions, these projected budget ranges are intended to represent order of magnitude capital expenditures.

WHITE OAK PARK

Parking Area Redevelopment	\$250,000.00-\$300,000.00
New Restroom/Concession Building	\$150,000.00-\$180,000.00
Perimeter Lane System	\$120,000.00-\$150,000.00
General Landscaping and Furnishing	\$100,000.00-\$120,000.00
Water, Sewer, and Utility Infrastructure Extension	\$80,000.00-\$100,000.00
	=====
	\$700,000.00-\$850,000.00

TENEYEK PARK

Roadway Access and Parking	\$60,000.00-\$80,000.00
Waterfront Structures	\$600,000.00-\$650,000.00
Interior Lanes and Connectors	\$200,000.00-\$250,000.00
Landscaping and Furnishing	\$100,000.00-\$120,000.00
Utility Infrastructure	\$200,000.00-\$240,000.00
Environmental Improvements, Controls	\$150,000.00-\$200,000.00
	=====
	\$1,320,000.00-\$1,540,000.00

JOE STALA PARK

Roadway Access and Parking	\$75,000.00-\$90,000.00
Surface Grading and Topsoiling	\$80,000.00-\$100,000.00
Restroom Structure	\$150,000.00-\$180,000.00

Courts and Play Areas	\$180,000.00-\$200,000.00
Lane Systems (Walkways)	\$200,000.00-\$240,000.00
Utility Infrastructure	\$80,000.00-\$100,000.00
Ballfield Facilities	\$60,000.00-\$80,000.00
Lighting Systems	\$160,000.00-\$180,000.00
Landscaping and Finishing	\$150,000.00-\$200,000.00
	<u><u>\$1,135,000.00-\$1,370,000.00</u></u>

Other Township sites have been discussed as potentials for pocket parks or small neighborhood parks. Construction finally planned for these will be widely variable and contingent upon local reaction to individual components.

For conceptual budgeting it is presumed that only walking access, potable water service, small play areas and limited furnishings will be initially installed at any of these.

A reasonable budget range per site to establish these minimum conditions occurs between \$80,000.00-\$100,000.00 but larger sites (Bernard Street and West County Drive) have sufficient space and capability to double these ranges.

Other project potentials should not be forecast until they are defined at least as topics for initial planning. These include features that Branchburg will probably consider within the next decade according to regional patterns of recreation system evolution and are listed as:

- Municipal Pool (1000 family base) 4 - 5 million
- Recreation Center Building 2 – 3 million
- Artificial Turf Stadium – Lighted 2 – 3 million

In consideration of the budget ranges forecast in the preceding section it is observed that the Township will be evaluating capital projects ranging from 5 to 10 million dollars over the next decade. Prudent fiscal advise in this matter directs the Township Administration to initiate a program to keep one capital construction project active at all times and regardless of project budget , to assure that occupiable, high quality features are the product of any sequence.

It is generally more successful to offset a planned construction sequence in time while assembling capital necessary to finish it well, than to scramble to initiation of an interim, useless phase.