



Delaware County Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan

RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Prepared by:

**DELAWARE COUNTY
OPEN SPACE TASK FORCE**

Presented to Delaware County Council January 2018

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Delaware County Open Space Task Force
January 22, 2018

Delaware County Council
Courthouse and Government Center
201 W. Front Street
Media, Pennsylvania 19063

County Council:

Delaware County Council convened the Open Space Task Force in October 2016 “to study and make recommendations to Council about open space preservation opportunities; recommended investment strategies and funding for open space; as well as recommended parameters for the County’s participation in open space preservation projects.”

In the months since, the Task Force has researched important opportunities and obstacles to implementing the County’s *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan*. It also reviewed similar programs from other counties in the region and discussed the benefits to different approaches. With an understanding of the impacts of these programs, the Task Force was able to identify an appropriate and effective implementation strategy for Delaware County.

The Task Force believes that the enclosed recommendation strikes the appropriate balance between County and local municipal participation and will incentivize proactive behavior at all levels. Further, it will direct funding toward impactful and meaningful projects that build toward the goals of the Open Space Plan.

We request that Council give due consideration to the enclosed recommendations and offer our assistance in its implementation.

Respectfully,

Delaware County Open Space Task Force

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DELAWARE COUNTY OPEN SPACE TASK FORCE

Government

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Executive Summary

Delaware County Council convened the Open Space Task Force in October 2016 to recommend a strategy to implement the County's *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan* in an effective and responsible manner. The Task Force is comprised of leaders from local municipalities, nonprofit organizations, the business community, and several County staff members. The diverse background of the Task Force members was crucial to developing a recommendation that is inclusive of all Delaware County communities.

The Task Force reviewed several important opportunities and obstacles to achieving the County's open space goals. It also reviewed similar programs from other counties in the region and discussed the benefits of different approaches. It is important to understand the impacts of these in order to identify an appropriate and effective strategy for the County's involvement.

In order to effectively address the opportunities identified, the Task Force recommends a three-pronged approach to implementation of the Open Space Plan: 1) providing grants to local municipalities; 2) an infusion of capital investment in County parks; and 3) funding for professional services support for open space and recreation projects. This approach will show leadership by the County and incentivize proactive investment by local municipalities.

The Task Force recommends the County invest in the following categories:

Category 1: Grants to local municipalities for open space and recreation projects

Category 2: Capital improvements to County Parks

Category 3: Professional services support for open space and recreation projects

The Task Force recommends that the County provide grants to assist local municipalities in implementing the Open Space Plan. This is the most significant part of this strategy because of the important role that local municipalities play in identifying and completing projects that impact the community. In order to maximize the effect of this funding, the Task Force recommends making funding available as soon as possible and developing multi-municipal action plans to identify and prioritize additional projects. The County can fund a select number of projects from these action plans. Further, the Task Force recommends additional competitive funding rounds in subsequent years.

The Task Force recognizes the tremendous significance of County park facilities, including multi-municipal trails, in providing valuable open space and recreational opportunities. The County will strive to become a leader in providing high-quality county-level open space and recreation facilities. As such, the Task Force recommends that County Council commits additional funding for capital improvements to County park and trail facilities.

The Task Force also recommends that the County provide professional services support for open space and recreation projects. This will help support community efforts to identify projects that are appropriate and feasible, while also building community support. It is an investment in sound planning that will open opportunities for funding and better prepare local municipalities in an increasingly more competitive environment for grant funding.

Finally, the Task Force recommends several parameters, including eligible projects and municipal match requirements, for participation in this program.

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Section I: Introduction

In April 2015, Delaware County Council adopted the *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan*, the first comprehensive plan for open space since the 1970s. In response to public interest in open space, the County took an aggressive approach in planning to identify needs and opportunities, as well as to address the challenges facing the County in the future. In the years leading up to and following the adoption of the Plan, the County has successfully implemented several major projects.

In 2010, the County acquired approximately 41 acres in Middletown Township and preserved an additional six acres via a conservation easement. The acquisition of the site, referred to as Mineral Hill, was coordinated by the County in cooperation with, and with monies from, Natural Lands Trust, Middletown Township, and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The acquisition is adjacent to two municipal parks, Memorial Park in Middletown Township and Louis Scott Park in Upper Providence Township. The combined area of these three parks is approximately 123 acres.

In June 2016, Delaware County announced the acquisition of 33.5 acres of open space adjacent to Little Flower Manor in Darby Borough and Upper Darby Township. Again working with Natural Lands Trust, the County secured grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Delaware County contributed funding from its Act 13 Marcellus Shale Impact Fees fund to complete the purchase and has committed additional funds to improve the County's newest park.

At 80.5 acres, the acquisitions of the Mineral Hill and Little Flower properties represent the largest addition to the County's park system since the acquisition of Rose Tree Park a half century ago.

Additionally, Delaware County is currently in various phases of several large trail projects. Construction was completed in December 2016 on almost three miles of trail along the former Chester Creek Branch Railroad in Middletown Township. Engineering is underway for Phase 2 of this trail, which will extend it an additional 1.5 miles into Aston Township. Construction is underway on one mile of the Darby Creek Greenway Trail from the Swedish Cabin to Delaware County's Kent Park, along Darby Creek in Upper Darby Township.

As County Council recognizes, not every open space project can be funded solely with outside funding and have no impact on the County budget. This recommended strategy was developed to identify opportunities and guide Council's investment in the implementation of the Open Space Plan. It is not intended to study the potential of expanding of the county park system; rather, it is to recommend a strategy that will benefit communities across Delaware County.

Section 2: Background

Open Space in Delaware County

The open space network in Delaware County consists of resources protected at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels, as well as protected privately owned land. These open spaces contribute to the character of the community, conserve significant environmental features, and offer diverse recreational opportunities for Delaware County communities.

Protected Open Space in Delaware County

System	Acres
County Parks System	1,116
Municipal Parks	4,652
State and Federal Open Space	3,359
School District Open Space and Recreation	1,791
Homeowner’s Association Open Space (HOA)	4,661
Conservation Organization Protected Lands*	2,902
Total Protected Open Space	18,481

* Including privately owned land with conservation easements

Delaware County Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan (2015)

The Delaware County *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan*, adopted in April 2015, is the County’s first open space and recreation plan since 1978. It serves as a guide and resource for countywide, multi-municipal, and municipal open space planning efforts. The plan is the result of widespread public participation, which included nearly 1,300 participants in an online survey and hundreds of residents at several public meetings, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups. The plan was developed with guidance and input from a task force comprised of municipal officials, local leaders in parks and recreation, and experts in conservation of natural features.

Community input led to the identification of three goals for open space in the County: **Conserve** open space and natural features; **Enhance** their environmental and recreational uses; and **Connect** communities, cultural/historical resources, and natural features.

The plan envisions an ambitious multi-use trail network to connect both regional and municipal trail systems and destinations, such as parks and commercial centers. The Primary Trail Network helps to direct the energies of the County and local municipalities into developing a cohesive trail network that provides access across the County. This network is supported by over 148 miles of existing local trails. While several Primary Trails have already been constructed, many segments are still conceptual. As more detailed studies are completed on these trails, alternate routes may need to be considered.

Primary Trail Network

System	Miles
Existing	35
Construction	1
Planned	94
Primary Trail Network	130

The *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan* also provides guidance regarding how to maximize and enhance the use and function of County-owned parks, open space, and recreational programs. It identifies unexplored opportunities and makes recommendations for improvements that will result in a parks system that best serves the needs of County residents long into the future.

The plan recognizes that it will take the combined efforts of many government agencies, organizations, officials, stakeholders, and motivated citizens to implement all of the ideas and actions presented.

Section 3: Open Space Task Force

Delaware County Council convened the Open Space Task Force in October 2016 to recommend a strategy to implement the County's *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan* in an effective and responsible manner.

The Task Force is comprised of leaders from local municipalities, nonprofit organizations, the business community, and several County staff members. The diverse background of the Task Force members was crucial to developing a recommendation that is inclusive of all Delaware County communities.

Task Force Strategic Planning Process

The Task Force met three times between November 2016 and May 2017. At the first meeting, the Task Force reviewed the County's *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan* with particular emphasis on implementation methods and progress. The Task Force discussed many opportunities and challenges in implementing the plan. At the second meeting, the Task Force reviewed similar programs from other counties in the region and discussed the benefits to different approaches. County staff developed a draft recommendation based on the general strategy discussed at these meetings. The draft report was sent to the Task Force for review in advance of its third meeting. The Task Force provided input on the draft and discussed potential clarifications; several revisions were made as a result of this discussion.

Items of Consideration

Over the course of the Task Force meetings, several important opportunities and obstacles to achieving the County's open space goals were identified. It is important to understand the impacts of these in order to craft an appropriate and effective strategy for the County's involvement.

Existing Funding Programs

There are several existing grant programs offered at the state and federal level that provide funds for local communities to complete open space and recreation projects. All of these programs require local match in the amount of anywhere from 15% to 50% of total project costs. While appropriate and necessary to ensure that funding is directed toward suitable projects, this can also act as an unintentional barrier. Compiling the money to meet match requirements, along with time spent applying and administering the money, often makes grant funding too "expensive" to obtain for some communities. Instead, they often choose to complete smaller or less expensive projects using only local funding.

Further, in order for a project to be considered eligible for funding under many grant programs, communities must have identified it in a municipal open space and recreation plan. As of March 2017, only 13 of 49 municipalities have adopted open space and recreation plans, while another five municipalities have a plan in progress. For many municipalities, these plans are often too costly to complete. While there are some programs available to fund planning efforts, communities often choose to direct limited funding to more immediate and pressing projects.

Additionally, costs for feasibility studies, engineering, legal, and permitting can quickly escalate and create an impediment to getting a project started in the first place. Funders are often not willing to be the first organization to commit financial support to a project. Finally, several funding programs heavily favor projects with a physical end result. While this is beneficial in showing the importance of these programs to the community, it often leaves municipalities on their own to cover the costs for other phases of the project.

Assuming a community is able to meet all of these requirements, projects must still be submitted through a competitive application process that requires relatively significant preparation time without any guarantee of funding.

Diverse Municipalities

The diverse character of its communities is one of Delaware County's strongest assets. The historic architecture of mature neighborhoods and the rolling hills of growing suburbs play an important role in its quality of life. This diversity also means that the types of open space and recreational opportunities are different across the County. Additionally, the capacity of local communities to finance and manage projects varies. Some municipalities have full-time staff and are capable of managing grant funds, while other municipalities have few or part-time staff. An overly complex or onerous county program may simply be another impediment to funding for some communities.

Planning and Zoning

The Task Force acknowledged the limited use of existing planning tools, such as comprehensive plans, open space plans, and Official Maps to designate areas for future open space acquisition. Throughout its discussions, the Task Force also noted that many potentially developable parcels in the County are not appropriately zoned. This is particularly true for parcels that have for years been considered "developed" or "safe" from further development due to their ownership. Should ownership or other factors change, the current zoning could severely influence what happens with the land.

Section 4: Recommendations

The goal of the Task Force was to recommend a strategy to implement the County's Open Space Plan. In order to effectively address the issues and opportunities noted above, the Task Force recommends a three-pronged approach that funds projects in three main categories: 1) providing grants to local municipalities; 2) an infusion of capital investment in County parks; and 3) professional services support for open space and recreation projects. This approach will show leadership by the County and incentivize proactive investment by local municipalities.

The Task Force recommends the County invest in the following categories:

Category 1: Grants to local municipalities for open space and recreational projects

Category 2: Capital improvements to County Parks

Category 3: Professional services support for open space and recreation projects

Category 1: Grants to Local Municipalities

The Task Force recommends that the County provide grants to assist local municipalities in implementing the Open Space Plan. This is the most significant part of this strategy because of the important role that local municipalities play in identifying and completing projects that impact the community. In order to maximize the effect of this funding, the Task Force recommends making funding available as soon as possible and developing multi-municipal action plans to identify and prioritize additional projects. The County can fund a select number of projects from these action plans. Further, the Task Force recommends additional competitive funding rounds in subsequent years.

Category 1.A: Municipal Grants – Round 1

The Task Force recommends that the County make available grant funding to local municipalities as soon as possible. This funding should be restricted to projects that meet the eligibility requirements below and be awarded through a competitive application process. The Task Force may review the applications and provide comments to County Council; Council will make the ultimate decision regarding project funding. Making a portion of funds available as soon as possible provides the opportunity to implement current projects and will entice communities to participate wholly in this implementation strategy.

Category 1.B: Multi-municipal Open Space Action Plans (OSAP) Projects and Round 2 Grants

The Task Force recommends creating multi-municipal Open Space Action Plans (OSAPs) to identify priority projects across the County. A similar effort was used for the County's Revitalization Program (2004-2008). The County created "Revitalization Planning Areas" and coordinated the development of a Revitalization Action Plan for each area. These plans identified priority projects, including potential funding sources. Subsequently, the County provided funding assistance for some priority projects. Based on the success of the Revitalization Program, the Task Force feels that it will be an effective approach for identifying priority open space projects and ensuring local municipal participation. Open Space Action Plans for each planning area will encourage multi-municipal efforts and emphasize projects that can address common opportunities. It also provides the flexibility for each planning area to develop priorities and an approach that is appropriate for them.

The OSAPs will be created based on the data and concepts identified in the County *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan*. This will include reviewing existing planning efforts; environmental features and development constraints (e.g., wetlands, steep slopes, etc.); potentially vulnerable or "at-risk" sites (i.e., large, privately-owned lands); and trail opportunities. Each OSAP will result in a list of projects for the study area, including priorities. The inventory and analysis phase of this effort is intended to provide data to inform and support local discussion; it is not intended to supplant it. While not all information will be relevant to the same degree in all planning areas, it is important that OSAPs are consistent across the County.

OSAP Planning Process

The multi-municipal Open Space Action Plan (OSAP) effort will be led by the County Planning Department beginning at the direction Council. The Planning Department is in a position to use existing data sources and its institutional knowledge of open space opportunities in the County to streamline this process. The Planning Department will facilitate three meetings for each planning area. The first meeting will include an overview of the planning process and review of the inventory and analysis. At the second and third meetings, the planning team will work with municipalities to identify priority projects and necessary information. Cost estimates, potential funding sources, and timing will be detailed for each priority project.

Municipal Grants – Round 2

Upon completion of the OSAPs, the Task Force will compile the highest priority projects for funding assistance and report to Council. Council may fund a select number of these projects through grants to local municipalities.

Open Space Planning Areas

Open Space Planning Areas were established based on the Revitalization Program planning areas with minor modifications and additional areas added. Each area consists of contiguous groups of municipalities that may have similar open space opportunities and/or commonly work together. See proposed planning areas map on the following page.

Category 1.C: Municipal Grants – Round 3 and Round 4

The Task Force recommends additional competitive funding rounds in the years following the completion of the Open Space Action Plans (OSAPs) setup in the same manner as Category 1.A: Municipal Grants – Round 1. This funding can be used to implement municipal projects, including those funded through Category 3: Professional Services Support, which is available on a rolling, as-needed basis.

It is important to note that many potential projects, particularly acquisition projects, are time sensitive and cannot wait for open grant rounds. As such, Council may consider periodic requests for funding to support time-sensitive projects outside of the above mentioned grant rounds.

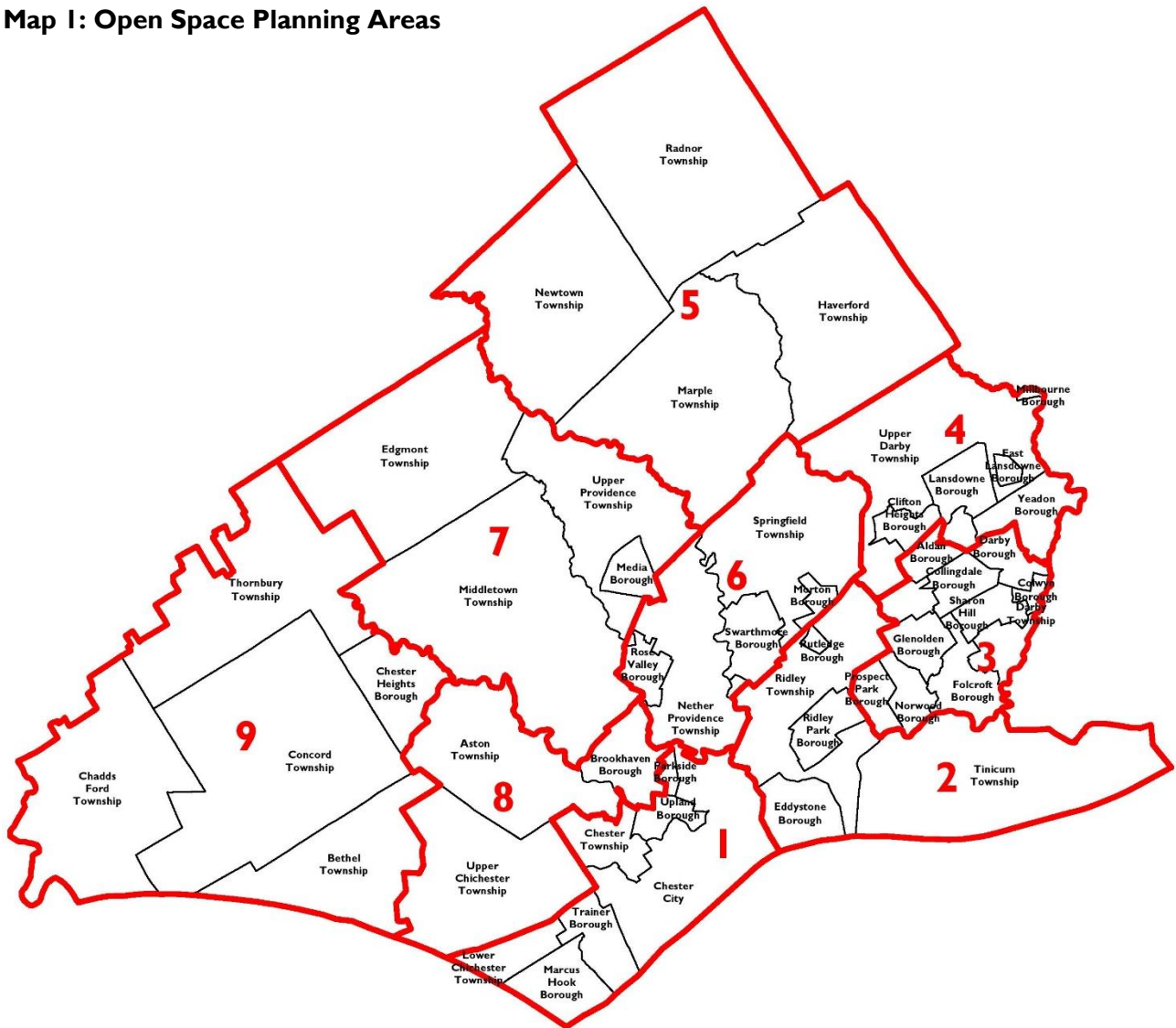
Category 2: Capital Investment in County Parks

The Task Force recognizes the tremendous significance of County park facilities, including multi-municipal trails, in providing valuable open space and recreational opportunities. The County will strive to become a leader in providing high-quality county-level open space and recreation facilities. As such, the Task Force recommends that County Council commit additional funding for capital improvements to County park and trail facilities.

The Task Force recommends that these funds be used to help facilitate implementation of the park master plans included in the open space plan. Additionally, the Task Force recommends that this funding be used to leverage outside grant funding. Where appropriate, funding should be directed toward projects that reduce maintenance requirements, such as creating meadows or other “no-mow” zones and green stormwater infrastructure. This targeted investment in County facilities will be a clear example of the impact sound planning and fiscal responsibility can have on community facilities.

Expenditure of the funds should be programmed through the capital improvement planning efforts of the County Parks and Recreation Department.

Map I: Open Space Planning Areas



<p>Area 1 Chester City Chester Township Lower Chichester Twp. Marcus Hook Borough Parkside Borough Trainer Borough Upland Borough</p> <p>Area 2 Eddystone Borough Ridley Township Ridley Park Borough Rutledge Borough Tinicum Township</p>	<p>Area 3 Aldan Borough Collingdale Borough Colwyn Borough Darby Borough Darby Township Folcroft Borough Glenolden Borough Norwood Borough Prospect Park Borough Sharon Hill Borough</p> <p>Area 4 Clifton Heights Borough East Lansdowne Borough Lansdowne Borough Millbourne Borough Upper Darby Township Yeadon Borough</p>	<p>Area 5 Haverford Township Marple Township Newtown Township Radnor Township</p> <p>Area 6 Morton Borough Nether Providence Twp. Rose Valley Borough Springfield Township Swarthmore Borough</p> <p>Area 7 Edgmont Township Media Borough Middletown Township Upper Providence Twp.</p>	<p>Area 8 Aston Township Brookhaven Borough Upper Chichester Twp.</p> <p>Area 9 Bethel Township Chadds Ford Township Chester Heights Borough Concord Township Thornbury Township</p>
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Category 3: Professional Services Support

The Task Force also recommends that the County provide professional services support for open space and recreation projects. This funding can be used to help communities create open space and greenway plans, an Official Map, park master plans, feasibility studies, or engineering. It can also be used for costs that are not typically eligible for grant funding, such as appraisals, title searches, etc. This funding will help communities to identify projects that are appropriate and feasible, while also building community support. It is an investment in sound planning efforts that will reduce barriers to existing funding sources and better prepare local municipalities in an increasingly more competitive environment for grant funding. This funding will be made available to communities on a rolling, as-needed basis.

FUNDING GUIDELINES

The Task Force recommends that the following guidelines be used to establish formal parameters for funding.

Eligible Projects and County Contribution Limits

While it is important for this program to remain flexible, the Task Force recommends that the County set guidelines for its contribution based on the type of project.

Category 1: Grants to Local Municipalities

Conserve

The County may contribute up to \$500,000, but not more than 25% of the total project costs, for the protection of undeveloped land in perpetuity.

Eligible projects include: fee simple acquisition; conservation or trail easements on private land; and other similar conservation methods.

Enhance

The County may contribute up to \$100,000, but not more than 25% of the total project costs, for capital improvements to park and/or recreational facilities.

Eligible projects include: capital improvements to existing park facilities; and regreening efforts (e.g., street tree plantings, green stormwater infrastructure, etc.).

Connect

The County may contribute up to \$500,000, but not more than 25% of the total project costs, for the development of trails included on the countywide Primary Trail Network. Additionally, the County may contribute up to \$100,000, but not more than 10% of total project costs, for the development of local trails.

Eligible projects include: construction of multi-use segments of the countywide Primary Trail Network; and construction of local multi-use trails.

Category 3: Professional Services Support

The County may contribute up to \$100,000, but not more than 25% of the total project costs, for the planning, study, and design of park and/or recreational facilities.

Eligible projects include: comprehensive open space and greenway plans; park master plans; feasibility studies; title searches; appraisals; and design/engineering and permitting.

Municipal Match (Categories 1 and 3)

Additionally, local municipalities must contribute a minimum of 10% of the total project costs. Local match can be provided through cash or in-kind services.

The Task Force believes that the maximum contributions identified above will provide an appropriate balance between the County's contribution and a required local match while also providing incentive to obtain other grant funding. The County's contribution will significantly reduce the barrier that local match requirements in state and federal programs create for some municipalities. This is a vital step in achieving the County's open space goals. Further, it is anticipated that the majority of projects will fall below the maximum dollar amount stated above. For example, the average amount awarded to Delaware County communities was less than \$150,000 in the 2015 and 2016 DCNR C2P2 grant rounds.

General Requirements

The Task Force recommends the following general requirements apply to all relevant projects:

- Funds must be expended within five (5) years of date awarded;
- Conservation projects must include a deed restriction to guarantee the property remains undeveloped in perpetuity;
- Projects must be open to the public, except when conservation easements are acquired on private lands;
- Capital projects include new facilities or a major improvement to (or rehabilitation of) an existing facility and must have a useful life expectancy of at least seven (7) years;
- Multi-use trail projects must be ADA-accessible;
- Projects must be identified in a comprehensive, open space, or other plan; and
- Planning projects must be adopted by the local municipality.

Branding Strategy for Implementation Program

For this strategy to be broadly successful, the Task Force recommends that Council develop a branding campaign for this implementation program in line with similar programs across the region. This will help to highlight the efforts the County is taking to implement its open space plan and build community support for the program. As with similar programs, the County should require recognition. Signs stating that funding assistance was provided by the County should be installed on projects with a physical end product and formal recognition should be included in planning documents.

Section 5: Implementation

The Task Force recommends that the County begin applying this implementation strategy as soon as possible.

A draft application form for Municipal Grant Rounds is attached; this form will help to simplify the application process for communities while still providing adequate information for the County to review the project.

CONCLUSION

The Open Space Task Force commends County Council for proactively addressing the opportunity to implement the *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan*. The Task Force believes that the recommended strategy outlined in this report will direct the County's involvement into projects that will have positive and long-lasting impacts across the County while leveraging as much outside funding as reasonably possible.

Sample Application

Submission Checklist

- Letter of Transmittal
- Section 1: Application Form
- Section 2: Project Description
- Section 3: Project Map
- Section 4: Scope of Work
- Section 5: Project Schedule
- Section 6: Cost Estimate
- Section 7: Municipal Resolution(s)
- Section 8: Letters of Funding Commitment
- Section 9: Attachments

Section I: Application Form

Single Municipality Multi-Municipal

Lead Municipality: _____

Participating Municipalities: _____

Municipal Contact*

Name	Email:
Title:	Phone:
Address:	Fax:

*For lead municipality

Project Information

Project Title:	
Project Type:	<i>(Conserve, Enhance, Connect, or Professional Services)</i>
Project Location:	
Project Summary (150 words maximum):	
Previous Planning Efforts	
Please identify any previous planning efforts that identify and support this project.	

Project Funding

Source	Dollar Amount	Percent of Total Cost	Status
Local Funding	\$		Committed
<i>(Additional Source 1)</i>			<i>(Committed/Pending)</i>
<i>(Additional Source 2)</i>			<i>(Committed/Pending)</i>
<i>(Additional Source 3)</i>			<i>(Committed/Pending)</i>
County			Requesting
TOTAL		N/A	N/A

Section 2: Project Description

Please provide a summary of the project and a brief description of how the project will support the County *Open Space, Recreation, and Greenway Plan* and other local planning efforts. (400 words max.)

Attach the following materials:

Section 3: Project map

Section 4: Scope of Work

Section 5: Project Schedule

Section 6: Cost Estimate

Section 7: Municipal Resolution

Section 8: Letters of Funding Commitment

Section 9: Attachments (As Necessary)

(e.g., Photographs, Letters of Support)