

A Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites

With Connecting Street Designs for Downtown Muncy



SEDA-Council of Governments
Community Resource Center
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania 17837

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For: Borough of Muncy
Lycoming County
Pennsylvania

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INTRODUCTION

A Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites



INTRODUCTION

Study Purpose

The Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites proposes enhancements to the Borough's principle downtown streets—Market and Main Streets—and short connecting segments of Water and Washington streets which constitute another heavily used pedestrian connection between Muncy neighborhoods, schools and parks. These streetscape designs illustrate design concepts for a Main Street parklet and other walkway, lighting, landscaping and intersection improvements to enhance downtown walkability and public safety. It proposes designs to implement concepts first proposed as part of a regional multi-municipal greenway plan for the Muncy-Hughesville area.

Equally important, this plan includes proposals for enhancing the use of Green Street Park—a well-used municipal park which could be enhanced through an improved design and rehabilitation. Also included in this plan are proposals for enhancing the use of 7 additional flood-prone lots located along Market and Main streets. The plan proposes repurposing a cluster of contiguous lots to increase public recreational value and benefits for the community while maintaining the existing use and character of the remaining 3 scattered small lot sites.

The proposed plans and designs illustrated in Muncy's plan for recreation sites and connecting streetscapes were developed with input from the community using a facilitated design process to determine the best and most appropriate uses for the involved recreation sites. Special consideration was given to enhancing the

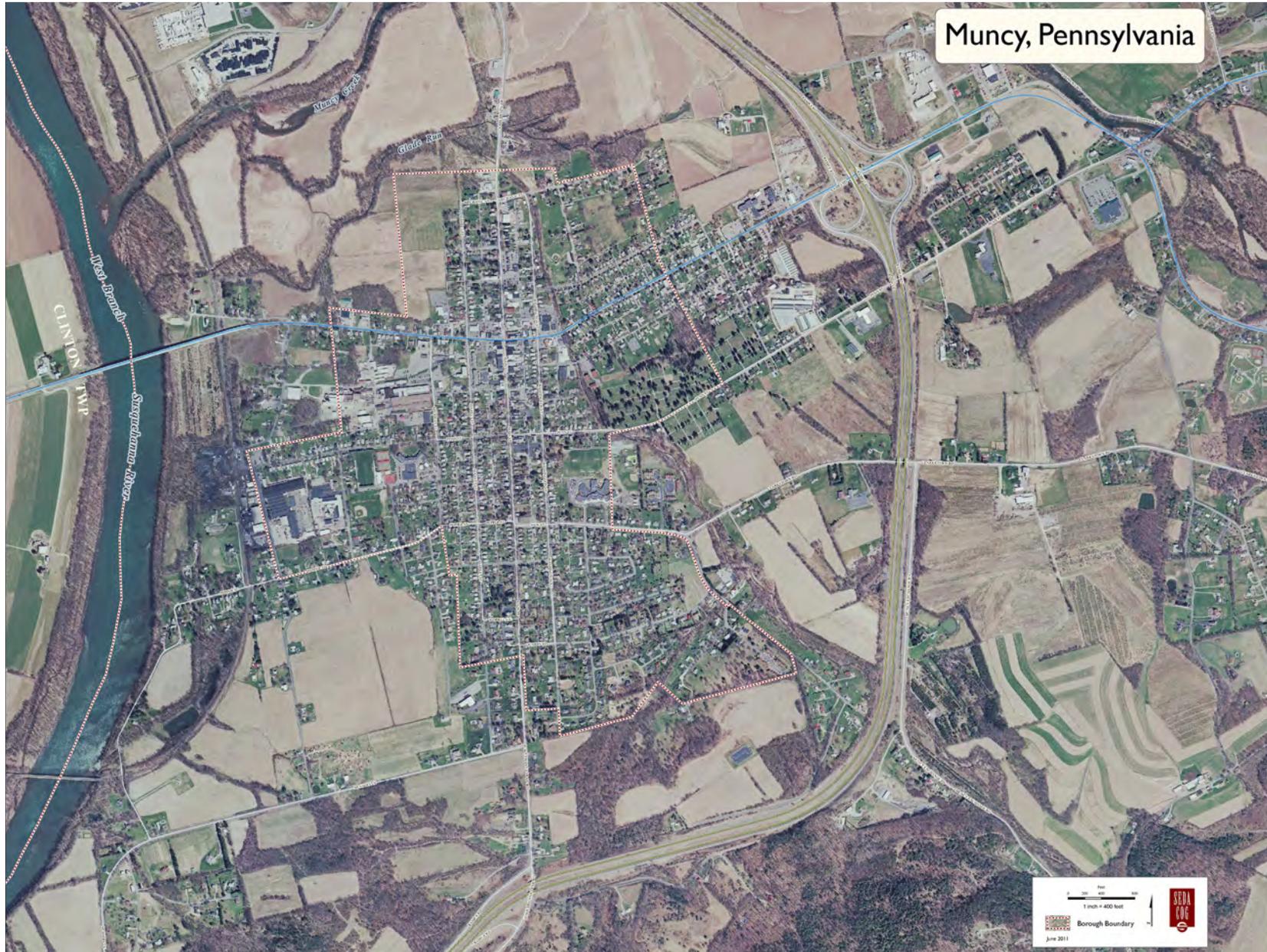
pedestrian connections between Muncy neighborhoods and schools, the downtown district, and identified park and recreation sites. Muncy is an important destination along the emerging Susquehanna Greenway and a key link between outlying communities and other Susquehanna riverfront recreation sites.

The Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites is a master plan built on the underlying concept of creating a safe, walkable and healthy community. It puts forth a vision for connecting downtown with nearby park and recreation sites. The plan moves Muncy one step closer to implementing previously developed regional goals and strategies for project implementation to create a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly downtown, improve recreational resources within the borough, and enhance access to parks and open spaces for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

Community Context

Muncy is located on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. With its potential for cross-bound connections linking the Montgomery-Hughesville and Montoursville-Warrior Run corridors it occupies a strategic location important to building the Susquehanna Greenway. Muncy is identified as a community hub in the Susquehanna Greenway Concept Plan and figures prominently in the Lycoming County Greenway and the Muncy-Hughesville Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. Muncy is the connecting link between the Susquehanna Greenway and the proposed Muncy Creek Greenway which extends east to Hughesville.

Muncy, Pennsylvania



CLINTON TWP

Susquehanna River

Muncy Creek

Glade Run

0 200 400 600 Feet
1 inch = 400 feet

Borough Boundary



June 2011

Community Profile

Muncy Borough is a small Central Pennsylvania town located near the junction of Interstate Highway 180 and US Highway 220 along the West Branch of the Susquehanna River at the confluence with Muncy Creek in Lycoming County. Muncy is situated within the Williamsport Metropolitan Statistical Area approximately 15 miles south and east of the City of Williamsport.

The site of present day Muncy occupied a prominent place in Native American history. The area was settled in 1787 by Quakers emanating from Bucks County in southeastern Pennsylvania. The town was first named Pennsboro in honor of Pennsylvania's founder, William Penn. The first town lots were laid out in 1797 along today's Main Street. After over 2 centuries of growth and change, Muncy remains a compact and vital town with a strong sense of history and an equally strong sense of place. The Muncy Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

Muncy grew slowly in the shadow of Bald Eagle Mountain and remained a village for many years. The original land tract consisted of 300 acres—the present day land area of Muncy is .84 square miles. It was incorporated as a Borough in 1826. In 1827, with a population of less than 600 persons, the town was renamed Muncy to preserve historical associations and to perpetuate the name of the Indian tribe indigenous to the area



Muncy's present population (2010) is 2,477. Like many of Pennsylvania's older boroughs, Muncy's population is declining—the Borough experienced a 7% drop in population since the year 2000. But Muncy remains densely populated with 2,935 persons per square mile. There are 1,049 households in Muncy. The average household size is 2.4 persons and the median household income is slightly under \$42,000.

The Borough population is somewhat evenly spread out by age group. The median age of Borough residents is just under 40 years of age which is somewhat younger than the median age for all Pennsylvanian residents. Just over half of Muncy's total population is married. 97% of Muncy's residents are white.

Approximately 21.5% of Muncy's population is age 60 and over. About 27.5 % of the Borough population falls between ages 40-59. The 20-39 age group comprises another 25% of the Borough population. Children under the age of 10 account for 13% of the Borough population as do children and adolescents in the 10-19 age group.

Healthy Living

These data suggest no specific direction or priorities related to recreational development within the Borough. Rather, they suggest that new facilities and programming investments should be made with the broadest cross section of community needs and resident's abilities in mind and with a fundamental view toward enhancing everyday opportunities for active and healthy living.

Restraint in new municipal investment in single purpose youth-centered play areas and athletic fields may be warranted. These needs might be better served by school district and private facilities with scarce municipal funds better used for establishing safer bicycle and pedestrian access to existing recreation destinations.

The past decade has seen substantive changes in public attitudes toward outdoor recreation and these attitudes are reflected in the use of established facilities. These are likely to have continued bearing on the need for new or enhanced recreation sites and this would appear to be an opportune moment for examining the

rationale underlying Borough park investment. New priorities may be called-for and should be weighed in formulating Borough spending decisions relating to present and future facilities.

Creating the opportunity for healthy living in Muncy requires a shift of focus in recreation thinking—with less spending directed to automobile-dependent destinations and more dedicated to integrating recreation destinations with normal everyday life and activity patterns. Enriching the public realm through enhanced streetscape design for safer walking and bicycling will generate more social connection and interaction among all age groups.

The Muncy townscape is rich with such opportunities. Linking neighborhoods to public recreations sites via attractive, safe and walkable streets will create new opportunities for social connection, for individual and group exercise, physical fitness and mental health. Understanding downtown Muncy in a crossroads context for connecting neighborhood uses and activities is an essential ingredient in the investment mix. Doing so will also build opportunities for business development and jobs within the Borough.

Realizing the opportunity for healthy living requires that obstacles—perception, experience, attitudes, and environment—be identified and addressed and this plan does that with its additional focus on downtown streetscape design and intersection enhancements. It also requires the making of better destinations for active and passive recreation and social activity in the context of a stronger public realm. This is possible through integrated community planning and design. With new perspectives, the Borough can satisfy multiple objectives important to present day and future living in Muncy.

SITE INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

A Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites



SITE INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

Recreation Sites Context

Muncy is a compact community with clearly defined beginnings and endings. It remains largely surrounded by undeveloped open spaces which separate the Borough from nearby and neighboring communities like Hughesville and Pennsdale. With its easy connections to the West Branch Susquehanna River and Muncy Creek, Muncy has tangible assets of place with the potential for even greater recreation use and development.

Muncy's principal public recreation sites are located adjacent to its public schools. These include the normal complement of athletic facilities for team and field sports. Private pleasure grounds and other nearby municipal parks are well used by Muncy residents. But other Borough-owned existing and potential recreation sites would benefit from new thinking relevant to public use and design to serve a broader demographic range of community residents.

Muncy occupies a mix of low-lying flood-prone lands and uplands. Borough-owned open spaces and recreation sites are shoe-horned into low-lying flood-prone residential neighborhoods divided by Main Street (PA Route 405) at the northern extremities of the town. While the use of these lands is most appropriate, public use would be improved by the establishment of stronger, safer, and more welcoming pedestrian connections between neighborhoods, schools and the downtown.

Improving Muncy's recreation sites and pedestrian access to these sites is an overarching aim of the Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites. By improving pedestrian access to these existing public open spaces and recreation sites, the Borough can reduce the need for recreation-linked automobile usage and even more importantly, the

need for new public expenditures for park and recreation site parking facilities. Reinvestment in these established but scattered recreation sites is an economical approach to meet community needs for active outdoor recreation, including the need for passive recreational use and wholesome social activity for people of all ages and abilities. Where appropriate, clustering uses will create new resident interest in these sites and new opportunities for enhanced use in keeping with today's requirements.

Site Conditions

Green Street Park

Green Street Park is primarily used by Little League Baseball teams. While its ball field is reasonably well-care for, other site features, including basketball, playground and pavilion fixtures, are outdated and not well-sited with respect to family access and use.

Green Street Park consists of several closely spaced land parcels separated by private residential lots. The southernmost parcel is most developed. The northernmost parcel is undifferentiated in design and lacks any layout plan to define its highest and best recreational use. The park setting is enhanced by the wooded and leafy backdrop of the Glade Run corridor. And the Park's location, tucked into a neighborhood at the north end of Muncy Borough, makes it a walkable destination for people of all ages and abilities living in town.

On the whole, Green Street Park does not live up to its potential as a recreational amenity for the Borough—something that this plan seeks to address. In developing the new park master plan consideration was given to youth and adult field sport fields, nature trails, picnic and event accommodations and regional trail connections.



Scattered Sites

As part of a federally funded flood property buy-out program, the Borough acquired title to 6 formerly residential lots located west of N. Main Street and 1 lot located on N. Main Street. Over the years these have been largely neglected with the result that these lots have not achieved their full public-use potential. Some of these lot parcels are maintained by mowing. Others are maintained in a natural condition with no specific uses accommodated.

These lots present a challenge with regard to development for recreational use owing to their limited size and situation among other house lots with homes still extant. The Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites proposes active uses for 4 relatively contiguous lots. No active public recreation use is feasible or presently advisable on the remaining lots owing to their general location, areal limitations and other site-related factors.

Downtown Muncy

Downtown Muncy is the focus of economic and social activity in the community and a crossroad destination in the wider Muncy area. Muncy's key downtown streets—Main and Water streets—are heavily traveled vehicular corridors made even more dangerous by increasing volumes of through truck traffic serving the natural gas industry in Lycoming County and elsewhere. The focus of this effort is on a four-square block area of downtown Muncy centered at Main and Water streets.

Downtown Muncy retains a mix of features that make it a vibrant place. But the appearance, functionality and safety of historic downtown streets is also compromised by modern motor vehicle use. These concerns are addressed by proposals for parklet development and important corrections to streetscape design—

better sidewalks and curbs, street trees and street lighting, and enhanced intersection designs—to more safely accommodate the primary needs of bicyclists and pedestrians navigating the town and accessing the Borough's public open spaces and recreation sites.

Community Connections

Public open space, parks and recreation sites do not exist in a vacuum. In addition to the standard issues relating to site and facility design, it is also important to consider site connections within the community and its wider area. The full use and realization of facility investments is also tied to facility accessibility.

One of the intrinsic benefits of Muncy's traditional town design relates to its grid iron street layout and sidewalk plan and the near unencumbered connectivity it provides motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians in town navigation. Recent regional studies have articulated a concept and priorities for linking walk-bike destinations through connected greenways, street and sidewalk systems. The Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites proposes design solutions for core areas of this emerging transportation framework.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

A Plan for Muncy Recreation Sites



COMMUNITY NEEDS

Community recreation needs were determined through the planning process— with input from the project task force, public meetings, meetings with Borough officials and committee members, from key person interviews, informal on-site user surveys, county and PennDOT staff, and from review of currently available Lycoming County survey and planning data.

Available Recreation Areas and Facilities

While the Borough has an important stake and vested interest in outdoor recreation facility development, operations and maintenance, the Muncy School District is the major provider of outdoor facilities and programming for school-aged children and youth, including playgrounds and athletic fields.

School playgrounds have newer equipment and are well maintained. School recreation facilities and equipment comply with current standards with no deficiencies noted. Playground equipment and surfacing safety are typical concerns. School playgrounds have ADA-compliant parking facilities. Two playgrounds have ADA-compliant equipment.

Neighborhood schools function also as neighborhood and community centers. As such they play and will continue to play an important role in meeting community recreation needs. This is especially true in built-up towns like Muncy where schools are generally within acceptable walking and bicycling distance of residential neighborhoods.

In planning the type, location, and design of outdoor recreation areas within the Borough it is important to recognize the role school facilities play in meeting community needs in order to eliminate duplication of facilities and economize on public spending.

Municipal investments should be directed increasingly toward the conservation and preservation of open spaces and natural areas, especially those that address floodplain conservation and provide opportunities for connected trails and town pathways.

Limited municipal funds should be allocated to resources that serve the majority of the town population. Municipal playgrounds should be a top priority for replacement or enhancement to meet present day safety and accessibility standards. The borough should open communications with the school district and volunteer organizations to reduce duplication of services and promote a wiser use of limited resources

Recreation Programs

Recreation programs, while not the focus of this current study, are fundamentally important to insure the highest and best use of available recreation facilities whether owned and operated by the school district or the Borough. Quality programs go hand in hand with quality facilities and are an essential part of the Borough's underlying appeal and vitality.

The findings of county surveys speak to this point:

- ▶ Programs and special events are top reasons for visiting a public recreation area.
- ▶ Learning and social activities should be increased or improved.
- ▶ Fitness, concerts, and cultural arts top the list of desired park activities.
- ▶ More emphasis should be directed to individual orientation, group activities and environmental orientation which serve a wider spectrum of the population.

Green Street Park

Municipal facilities at Green Street Park require upgrading to meet current design and accessibility standards and to restore their value to community residents. Playground layout, equipment and surfacing are substandard and not maintained at the required level. With regard to playgrounds in general the county recommends annual playground inspections by qualified recreation specialists. Recreation program providers should be schooled in basic playground safety practices.

Because this playground is used most heavily in connection with family outings centered on Little League baseball games, the play area should be repositioned to establish clear sight lines between spectator stands and the play area and apparatus.

Green Street Park lacks basic amenities like public rest rooms and trash receptacles. The existing pavilion is too small to meet family picnicking needs or use for special group outings. The pavilion is too far removed from the parking area which lessens the potential for its use and makes it more difficult to police. There are no designed ADA-compliant parking spaces or pathways connecting parking areas with facilities such as the pavilion, playground and ball field seating areas.

Although public rest rooms would enhance the utility of Green Street Park, it is not feasible for the Borough to construct or maintain rest rooms on this flood-prone site. Site use is and will remain limited by location and parking availability.

The Borough may wish to consider new recreational programming to increase public use of Green Street Park:

- ▶ Coordinate with community organizations and private businesses to offer recreation programs designed to increase knowledge and skills in a wide variety of interest areas for a mix of age groups and to promote family-centered recreation.
- ▶ Coordinate with community organizations to organize special tournaments and festivals in the park. Promote collaboration between organizations and downtown businesses to capitalize on the economic advantages of special park activities.
- ▶ Coordinate with Muncy Valley Hospital/ Susquehanna health to promote active healthy living and park use for related youth and adult programming.

FEMA Lots

These scattered Borough-owned flood-prone lots are located among other residential lots on N. Market and N. Main streets. They were acquired through the federal disaster assistance program which was used to demolish irreparably flood-damaged homes. Under deed restriction, permanent building construction is forbidden on these so-called “FEMA Lots”.

These lots have been kept as unimproved open spaces and include a combination of mowed grass and naturalized lots which are gradually reverting to a fully natural state. They are valuable as bird and wildlife habitat but several in combination have potential for more active public use which is consistent with public needs identified through the planning process.

Although no scientific polling was completed, Borough residents involved in the planning process support open space protection, particularly as it relates to the preservation of natural areas, wildlife habitat, and historic site context. Interest was also expressed in dog exercise parks and community gardens, active uses which were deemed to be appropriate for these sites and compatible with adjoining residential uses.

Downtown Streetscapes and Intersections

Preserving Muncy's historic charm is not without its difficulties. Muncy faces real and serious threats to its historic buildings, its image, and its property values as a result of increasing motor vehicle traffic, especially truck traffic connecting to industrial sites west of the Susquehanna River which use Water Street as a primary route for accessing the larger regional highway network.

The solution to this problem is not quick or simple. Nor is there any agreement on what that solution might be in the long term. In the short term, however, it is imperative that basic issues relating to bicycle and pedestrian safety be addressed in the core blocks of downtown Muncy radiating out from the signalized intersection of Water and Main streets.

Walking for pleasure and exercise walking for fitness are among the top activities that neighborhood residents engage in. And downtown Muncy is among the most highly frequented destinations for walking as well as a pass-through place for destinations such as the Borough Building, schools, eateries, parks and playgrounds.

Improvements to enhance pedestrian safety at Water Street and Main Street intersections are imperative to address dangerous conditions affecting residents and visitors, especially children, youth and the elderly. While truck traffic reduction is the ultimate aim, traffic calming through streetscape and intersection design is the immediate aim as it is also essential to maintaining Muncy's central business district, its visual character and historic "feel", and its attraction as a Susquehanna Greenway river town.

The intersection of E. Water and Washington streets is especially challenging and requires urgent design remediation. These conditions result from a perfect storm of traffic congestion on Water Street, active motor vehicle use on Washington Street, and the convergence of commercial land uses at this intersection—uses geared to traffic-generating convenience shopping and dining.

When combined with other confounding factors—truck trailer combinations and buses—utility pole locations, commercial signage, sidewalk and curbing deficiencies—it is uniformly agreed that this intersection is high on the list of those requiring remediation. These challenges are further compounded by the fact that the intersection is in the path used by school-aged children in their daily travel from home to school to downtown and to destinations like Green Street Park.

Beyond the need for intersection improvements, it would also be desirable to establish more passive parklets along Main Street for the use and enjoyment of older residents and visitors and to create still more public spaces for impromptu social interaction among town residents.

