



## **PENNSYLVANIA URBAN RECREATION INITIATIVE 2013 SUMMARY REPORT**

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**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
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## PURPOSE

More than 100 parks and recreation professionals participated in the Parks and Recreation Leadership Summit sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS) in 2010 at Temple University. They established priorities for parks and recreation in Pennsylvania. One of the top five priorities was the establishment of an urban program to help the cities provide parks and recreation facilities and services. As a result, DCNR and PRPS moved ahead with developing an action plan to establish the Urban Recreation Initiative.

## GOAL

The goal of the Urban Recreation Initiative is to help make urban areas in Pennsylvania healthier, more livable, and economically competitive through the revitalization and development of parks, green space, and recreation opportunities.

## PROCESS

DCNR and PRPS developed an outreach program to seek the input of key stakeholders in urban recreation across the Commonwealth. Outreach included the establishment of an Advisory Committee and focus groups and interviews held across the state. The key stakeholders represented parks, recreation, health care, landscape architecture, universities, nutrition, elected and appointed officials, private non-profit organizations, land conservancies, trail groups, park friends groups, commercial business, national and state organizations, and cities of all sizes. The DCNR Bureau of Recreation & Conservation staff and the PRPS Board of Directors provided input to the findings and action planning. The input of all those involved served as the foundation for the development of an Action Plan.

## FINDINGS

The main findings included the following

- Participants voiced strong support for a statewide city parks and recreation program. The program must include cities of **all** sizes and facilitate access for urbanized communities such as large boroughs.
- Parks and recreation organizations need “Talking Points” to make the case for public parks and recreation. It is absolutely necessary to position parks and recreation as an essential service consistently over time, not just when there is a funding or budget crisis.
- Public parks and recreation needs a strong public identity rooted in a common brand statewide. This applies to public parks and recreation in all types of municipalities including the urban ones.
- Maintenance is by far the chief problem in urban parks and recreation systems.
- Focusing on programs and services is essential as they hold the key to increasing park use, active healthy living, connecting people to nature and social equity.
- While Pennsylvania’s grant programs serve jurisdictions of all sizes equitably, the urban stakeholders are looking for some tweaks in the grant programs that would allow for innovation and pilot projects to try out new ways of programming, managing and maintaining facilities and

services. Communities are looking for more assistance in learning in a timely manner about grant opportunities. Small communities need more help in applying for grants and in generating matches.

- Partnerships for parks and recreation are key at all levels of government. There was some concern that private support has in some cases decreased public support. This is another reason why it is important to have a parks and recreation brand and talking points about the importance of parks and recreation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are fully described in the Urban Recreation Initiative Report.

1. Finalize the name with three possible choices: 1) the Urban Recreation Initiative, 2) the Pennsylvania City Parks & Recreation Partnership, or 3) the Pennsylvania Metro Parks & Recreation Partnership.
2. Establish a committee within PRPS to focus on implementing the Urban Recreation Initiative.
3. Develop talking points and a publicly recognizable identity for parks and recreation to help get us a “seat at the table”.
4. Build capacity for park maintenance through the DCNR Peer Program and further explore establishing the Pennsylvania Maintenance Institute in partnership with the private sector, foundations and other partners.
5. Use programs to foster active healthy living, connections with nature, and social equity through parks and recreation in cities.
6. Develop partnerships with other organizations to advance the Urban Recreation Initiative including the Pennsylvania Municipal League, Pennsylvania Statewide After School Youth Development Network, and American Academy of Pediatricians, the City Parks Alliance, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Philadelphia Parks Alliance and others.
7. PRPS to continue pursuing funding for the Urban Recreation Initiative via DCNR grants, foundations, and other sources. PRPS and DCNR will also develop an annual urban recreation initiative work plan together with committee input. This will foster continued collaboration on the initiative.
8. Include city parks and recreation as a specific area in Pennsylvania’s Outdoor Recreation Plan (2014-2018) that is now underway.
9. Develop the Pennsylvania Parks and Recreation Clearinghouse for case studies, benefits of parks and recreation in Pennsylvania, and other knowledge that would help to make the case for parks and recreation as an essential public service.

## NEXT STEPS

- DCNR and PRPS (with assistance from the committee) develop a work program to advance the Urban Parks and Recreation Initiative with assigned roles, responsibilities and level of effort.
- Continue the Advisory Committee's participation in the implementation of the recommendations to advance the Urban Recreation Initiative. Coordinate this effort with DCNR and the PRPS Board of Directors.
- Conduct a survey of the participants in the outreach effort to determine their preferences for the name of the program. Incorporate this information into the decision-making on the name. Weigh the merits of targeting cities specifically vs. the need to get legislative and state support. Consider ways to bridge the two interests.
- Consider the California Parks & Recreation Society "Parks Make Life Better" logo/campaign and develop a Pennsylvania based campaign.
- Retain a marketing specialist as a trainer to develop tailored advertising programs with municipalities incorporating the development of talking points as part of the training. While the training programs would be available to all municipalities, it would be important to advertise the training programs specifically to cities. Give consideration to the marketing consultant who developed California's program and has provided training to Pennsylvania parks and recreation professionals over the years.
- Work with DCNR staff in tweaking the grant programs to include an innovation category to demonstrate creative and sustainable approaches to urban programming, maintenance and management.
- Work with PRPS to develop steps to increase the visibility of the Urban Recreation Initiative through training programs, a website link to urban parks and recreation, articles for posting and the magazine, and the annual conference. Develop a roll out plan for all of this and include as part of the marketing consultant's contract to be consistent with agreed upon brand.