

MAKING THE CASE FOR PARKS & RECREATION IN MORGANTOWN



MORGANTOWN

Your Great Neighborhood Outdoors



“What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives?”

E.M. Forster

A photograph of a person in a white and black pinstriped baseball uniform sitting on a grassy field. The person is wearing orange socks and black shoes, and is holding a brown leather baseball glove. The background is a bright green field under a blue sky with white clouds.

We're going to level with you.

Our ice arena, ballfields, swimming pools, and playgrounds are nearing the end of their viable lifespans. Morgantown is blessed with community parks and recreational programming unparalleled in the Mountain State, but most of our facilities, built over a quarter century ago, are in a state of disrepair. If parks and recreation matter here in Morgantown, now is the time to reinvest before it is too late. We need your help.

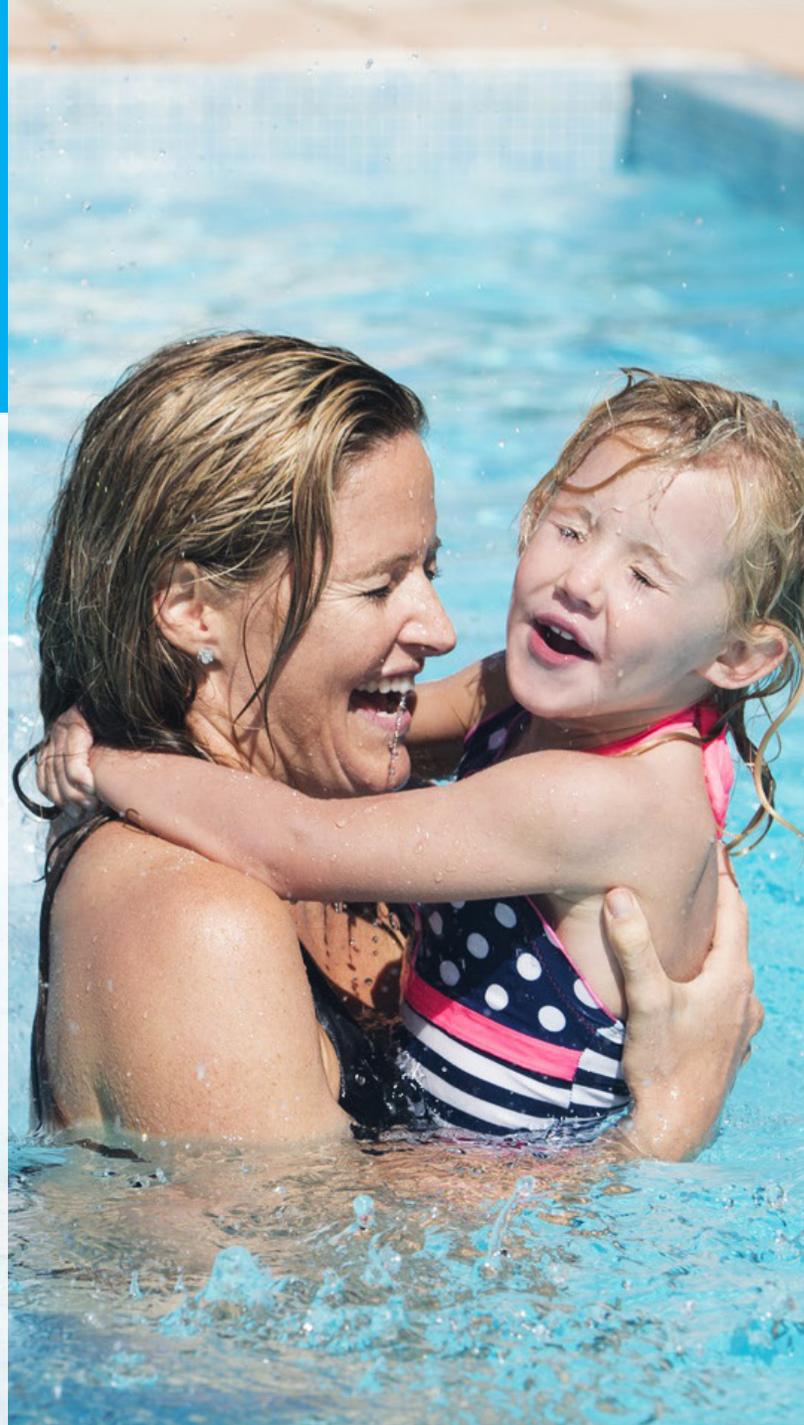
THE CRISIS WE FACE

The outlook for parks and recreation in Morgantown is bleak. While we hope this outlook will change, these are the challenges we face today:

Parks and recreation are treated as non-essential services. This is an issue faced by parks and recreation providers across the country. All too often, parks and rec are viewed as “extras,” and budgetary support reflects this. This status quo is not enough to maintain a thriving system here in Morgantown. Author Jane Jacobs once wrote that parks “give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity.” Parks and rec “give back” this and so much more: increased property values, improved health, character development, and lifelong learning opportunities. They are indeed essential services.

Decreased funding. BOPARC raises 42 percent of its funds through rentals and fees. When you buy a swim pass or register your kids for camp, this helps to sustain park space and recreational programming, including camps, lessons, adult and senior activities, leagues, and community partnerships. The remainder of our funds come from city and county sources, and those are at risk. Just this year, the West Virginia Coal Severance Tax Fund was drastically reduced. That’s \$100,000 of funding that BOPARC is unlikely to receive this year. (Ours is not the only public service affected.) Funding has decreased steadily over the years, while expenses continue to rise.

Deferred maintenance of facilities. BOPARC is charged with maintaining 13 parks, 40 miles of rail trail, and a number of recreation facilities. Historically, tight budgets have prevented us from setting money aside for deferred maintenance. The funds in the 2016 budget allow just enough to keep the lights on, really. Repairs and new projects will be held at a minimum due to reductions in funding and seasonal maintenance staff. This mirrors a trend described in the latest West Virginia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: “...deferred maintenance is an all-too-common observation” in a climate in which park facilities have “all but reached the end of their life cycle.” Our facilities have reached this point.



OUR AGING FACILITIES

Marilla Pool: **58 years old**

Krepps Pool: **38 years old**

Morgantown Ice Arena: **36 years old**

Marilla Water Slides: **26 years old**



“I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.”

John Burroughs

THE PROMISE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation add to the quality of our lives. There are too many benefits to list in this space, but they contribute to health and wellness, confidence and character development, safety, property values, and economic development. The programs offered and the community parks used keep us active and connected. And they protect the green spaces that we so treasure.

HOW PARKS AND RECREATION IMPROVE OUR LIVES

Environmental justice advocate Robert Bullard has said, “Tell me your zip code and I can tell you how healthy you are. That should not be [the case].” In neighborhoods without a usable park or playground, the incidence of childhood obesity increases by 29 percent.¹ While 31.6 percent of state residents are considered obese, Monongalia County has fared better [25.2 percent]. But there is still room for improvement. The county’s leading diseases are obesity, diabetes, lung cancer, and heart disease.² Healthy lifestyles come into play with each.

Swimming pools offer a safe, supervised environment for swimming. Our pools were used 37,024 times in 2015. In a city with 30,000 residents, that’s a lot of pool use. Not only this, but 626 children learned to swim through BOPARC swim classes.

More than 1,600 adults kept active with trips, dances, and fitness classes through our 2015 recreation programs. Older adults who participate in recreation programs report higher rates of life satisfaction and are more likely to delay the onset of chronic disease.³

BOPARC day camps provide safe and enriching summers for school-aged children in our community. In our camps, children learn new skills, build confidence, and make friends in a safe environment.

A whopping 120 softball teams played games on our fields in 2015. That’s 120 teams, not players. BOPARC fields hosted over a dozen softball tournaments (an economic generator, to be sure) and served as home field for local little league teams. In a country in which fewer than half of children ages 6 to 11 meet the U.S. Surgeon General’s recommendation for engaging in physical activity, having places to play and organized leagues makes a real difference.

Local trails maintained by BOPARC hosted 39 organized walks and runs in 2015. Nearly every mild weather weekend, a trail event contributed to the vibrancy of our riverfront.

Parks and rec can also impact a community’s bottom line. National data shows that communities with parks and robust recreation programs experience reduced crime and vacancy rates and increased property values and tax revenues.

¹ Darell Hammond, KaBOOM!

² WVU Medicine Community Health Needs Assessment and Report, January 2013

³ National Council on Aging



MORGANTOWN PARKS & RECREATION BY THE NUMBERS



Photo credit: Steve Shaluta



40

miles of rail-trail maintained



10

ballfields



9

neighborhood parks



5

picnic shelters



4

parks of 30 acres or more



4

nature trails



2

dog parks



2

swimming pools



1

community & senior center



1

skate park



1

ice arena



1

amphitheater

SPOTLIGHT'S ON: DORSEY'S KNOB PARK



“The mountains
are calling and
I must go.”

John Muir

West Virginians appreciate a good view. Among 2014 survey respondents for the statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, views ranked as a top priority in urban areas. Dorsey's Knob Park offers one of the most iconic views in Morgantown and is one of the shining stars of the park system. The park boasts a shelter with a view, Dorsey's Knob Lodge, disc golf, and nature trails. The lodge is rented year-round by private groups and gets rave reviews from those who stay.

Consider these comments from Dorsey's Knob Park visitors:

“This place is freaking awesome!”
(stated in the words of a 12-year-old)

“It felt like home. Thank you, BOPARC.
See you next year!”

“We wish to thank you for the wonderful facility.
Our family reunion has found its home.”

From business retreats and university events to family gatherings and dream weddings, the lodge has been an asset to the community and one that we want to ensure remains so.

A Great Egret with a long, sharp beak and a dark cap stands on a weathered log in a river. The water is calm and reflects the light. In the foreground, there are out-of-focus autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and red. The bird's feathers are a mix of grey, white, and black, with a prominent white plume on its neck.

“Nature is always nearby
in West Virginia.”

West Virginia Division of Tourism Website

SPOTLIGHT'S ON: TRAILS

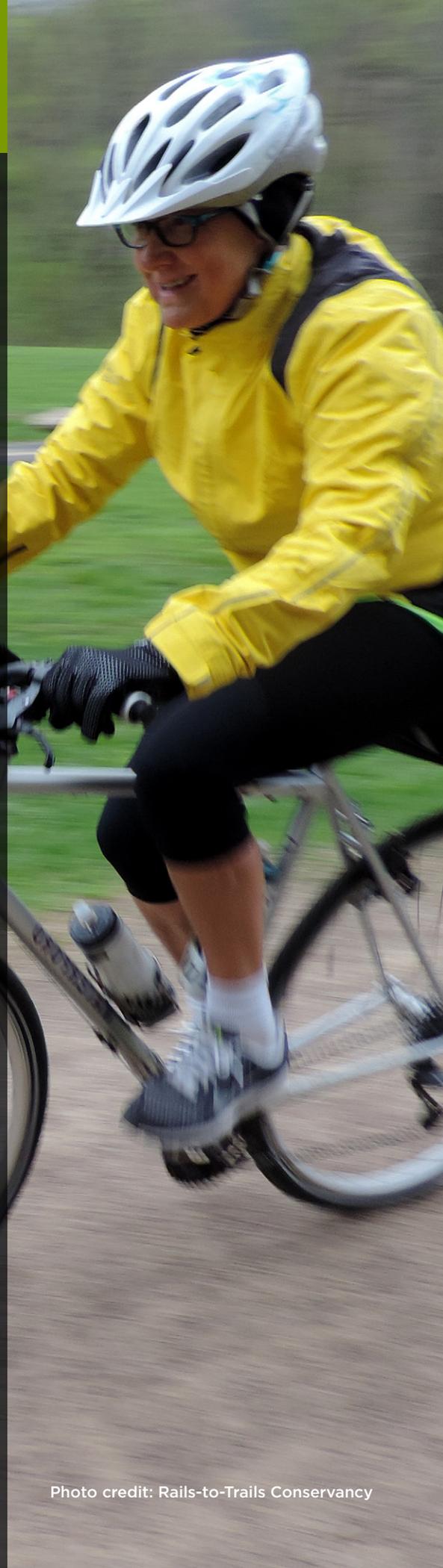
We recently overheard a lifelong resident state that Morgantown doesn't need any more parks. In the same breath, he pointed to Deckers Creek Trail and said, "But that trail, that's a good thing." We believe that both parks and trails are essential. They're intertwined—six of our parks are connected by trails. But what value did that gentleman see in trails?

BOPARC maintains 40 miles of trail through and near Morgantown on behalf of the Mon River Trails Conservancy. This results in first-class trails open to area residents. On our trails, you can get to the river, the dog park, al fresco dining, and to class.

And our trails are part of something bigger. They are part of a massive network of bikeways envisioned by the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition to connect cities and small towns throughout northern West Virginia and neighboring states. When complete, this network will provide residents a path to Fairmont, Parkersburg, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C. Trails also provide a path to improved health, better business, and a more vibrant Morgantown.

Our partners are busy counting trail use here in Morgantown. When 168 walkers and cyclists are counted on the trail near the Seneca Center on a typical Saturday in January, what does that mean for use the rest of the year, and in the future when the trails connect to others? Our trails will eventually link up with the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP), one of the best known trails in the U.S. The GAP hosts over 700,000 trips a year, with \$50 million in annual spending attributed to trail use.⁴ What if Morgantown can peel off some of this activity?

⁴ Great Allegheny Passage Economic Impact Study, 2012



SPOTLIGHT'S ON: **PLAY**



“Play is really the
work of childhood.”

Fred Rogers

If play is the work of childhood, then it surely is the most beneficial hobby of our adult lives. In Morgantown, many of us have played through BOPARC summer camps and in local parks and playgrounds. We learned to swim at our community pools and to skate at the ice arena. We grow into young adults, have our own families, and enroll our children in the same programs and activities. We walk on trails, picnic in parks, and are comforted by green space as we move through our lives. Recreation is the activity that allows us to continue to play well beyond childhood, and our parks, trails, and facilities are the threads that bind these experiences into the material of lifelong wellness.

“If bread is the first necessity of life, recreation is a close second.”

Edward Bellamy



Photo credit: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

A CALL TO ACTION

We hope you'll agree that parks and recreation are an investment worth protecting. Our park system is at risk. You may be shocked to know the age of our ice arena and our pools. You may be disappointed with the condition of our playgrounds, facilities, and parks. It disappoints us as well.

Communities of all sizes face similar challenges. In 2004, an SOS (Save Our Summer) was sent to Pittsburghers when their system was in a state of distress. Pools and rec centers were to be kept closed that summer. Instead, the community stepped in to open 14 pools in record time. That's how their community responded to what was a critical need there. How will we address the crisis we face here at home? Now is the time for action if we want parks and recreation to continue to play a positive role in Morgantown.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Talk to your local leaders and express how important parks, trails and recreation are to the community and to you as an individual
- Frequent our parks and facilities
- Participate in BOPARC programs
- Vote “yes” on the May 2016 Monongalia County Park and Trail Levy, which would benefit local parks and trails
- Volunteer to adopt a section of rail-trail
- Get involved with park and trail groups and further the mission of parks in the community
- Make a donation



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Content Contributors

Morgantown Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners
Cycle Forward
MSM Digital
McCullom Development Strategies, LLC

BOPARC MORGANTOWN BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION

www.boparc.org

304.296.8356