Burnham Park
REVITALIZATION PLAN
BURNHAM PARK REVITALIZATION PLAN

Town of Morristown, Morris County, New Jersey

February 2023

Prepared For
Town of Morristown
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MC Project No. 19004639A
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The Revitalization Plan for Burnham Park in Morristown is one that enhances and improves the legacy of this beautiful and historic landmark.

**Mission Statement**

Burnham Park has a 110-year history in Morristown, providing the township with the gift of natural beauty, respite, and civic pride. While improvements have been made over the generations, the park itself has remained largely as it was originally conceived. Now, in 2022, Morristown seeks to reaffirm its commitment to preserving the Burnham family’s gift of open space, to providing a park for all to enjoy, and to ensuring that the park reflects the ever-changing needs and interests of a 21st Century community. This Revitalization Plan will serve as a guide to that effort.
Introduction

This document articulates that commitment, putting the planning objectives established by the community, township personnel, and local stakeholders at the forefront while satisfying the needs of the Burnham Park Association. As will be discussed in detail, these objectives range from ADA accessibility to wayfinding to invasive species management. Seven geographic focus areas have been identified, with the current condition of each considered and opportunities for improvement to increase accessibility, utility, and use of the park as a whole prioritized. Finally, within each focus area, recommendations are made that will specifically advance one or more of the planning objectives. One to two priority recommendations are identified per focus area, with additional long-term projects listed that may be used to guide ongoing park improvements in the coming years as urgency and funds permit.
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Burnham Park Association website[1] provides the following summary of the history of the park:

Burnham Park Gift

In 1911 the Burnham Family provided the generous gift of Burnham Park to the Town of Morristown and carefully articulated their vision for this land. Their intentions and eloquence resonate in the following excerpts from the original deed, the amended deed, published comments by the original donors and letters from their descendants.
Statement of Intent

The Burnhams further elaborated on their intent with this statement, addressed to then Mayor of Morristown, Hon. Arthur S. Pierson and published in the Daily Record on April 21, 1911:

Dear Sir:

For some three or four years, Mrs. Burnham and myself have been discussing the plan of giving a piece of ground, fitted for the purpose, to the Town of Morristown, for a Public Park. In our judgment this should be situated so near the green as to be within easy walking distance of the residences of our town, especially of those which have not much land surrounding them.

Our idea has been that this ground should be used not as a playground for the benefit of noisy ball games or such other games as are attended by noise and uproar, but rather as a place where tired families can, during the spring, summer and autumn days, obtain that refreshment which is only obtainable apart from the noise and confusion of a crowd.

We have thought that such a piece of ground should contain twenty-five or thirty acres available for walks, resting places, with cool spring water, ponds and streams, where the pleasures of fishing, and boating could be had, and fine trees under whose wide spreading branches mothers could take their children and find the rest and enjoyment which such a park would afford....
Reaffirmation

In 1976 the Town of Morristown approached the Burnham heirs seeking to further amend the deed to permit the addition of more sports facilities in the park. The grandson of Frederick Burnham refused to amend the deed and wrote back to Ms. Eileen M. Cornell, then attorney for the Town of Morristown. This excerpt from his letter explains the Burnham Family’s love of history, of nature and their special feeling for this park.

“My grandfather loved the land, the trees, and the ponds, and he thought it was important for the town, which he also loved, to have these thirty green acres preserved for people of all ages whose recreation was not restricted to organized sport. The deed giving the park to the town stated that the park management should be concerned “preserving as much as possible its natural state as woodland.” If this was important then, it is doubly so now.
Since 1948, the Burnham Park Association has provided stewardship for the park and has played an active role in the upkeep, maintenance, and improvements to the park.

For the 31st Arbor Day event in the park, trees were planted in partnered with Clean Communities efforts to clean the park. As noted on the website: For the past 15 years, BPA volunteers, trained and registered with the Town, worked on goose addling each spring...dramatically reducing the goose population in the park.

The Association has also undertaken many initiatives in the park, working with many different parties over the years, as mentioned in this brief sampling:

- Working with the Town to replant the vegetation on the island in the lower pond, 1990.
- Working with the Town Recreation Department to host an outdoor movie night in 2019.
- Working with the Whippany River Watershed Action Committee, the Town, The Morris Land Conservancy and Omni Environmental on the installation of the Riparian Buffer Zone on the lower pond (near Rt. 124) over 2000-2002 to address water quality and goose management.
- Working with Robert Tracey and the local Veterans group to design/install the Baldinger bench and river birch grove, around 2000.
OBJECTIVES

In October and November of 2020, public meetings were held at Burnham Park, and virtual meetings were held with various Stakeholder groups, to discuss the preparation of a Revitalization Plan for Burnham Park including the ponds and surrounding area, the athletic fields, the pool and all other areas and amenities within the park proper. Throughout the meeting, eight (8) general improvements were identified:

• Pond Improvements
• Stormwater Quality
• ADA Access and Park Connectivity
• Existing Park Amenities
• Natural and Undisturbed Areas
• Wayfinding
• Potential New Amenities
• Gateway/Fringe Improvements

The meeting allowed the general public, as well as various committees and/or organizations in Morristown, to provide feedback on improvements to the park on all eight above-referenced items.

As a result of this meeting and further discussion with representatives from the town and various committees and boards in Morristown, the following seven (7) primary planning objectives were identified:

1. Improve connectivity & ADA accessibility
2. Renovate existing structures to maintain the historic nature of the park
3. Develop a sense of entry at various park locations
4. Consider ways to remain relevant to present and future community needs and interests, while respecting the history of the park
5. Evaluate drainage and storm water management needs
6. Evaluate and improve existing natural features (i.e. Ponds, Trees, Open Spaces)
7. Develop recommendations for phased improvements
PLANNING AREAS

Throughout the planning process, Burnham Park was divided into seven (7) discrete areas that serve unique functions and purposes within the park. Thus, each of these areas were investigated locally when identifying specific items in need and proposing improvements. These park planning areas are as follows:

- Entrance and Monuments
- Park Circulation and Connectivity
- Playgrounds and Pavilions
- The Meadow
- The Pool
- Ballfields and Parking
- The Ponds
The Entrance and Monuments area generally located on the Eastern portion of the park where Washington Street meets Burnham Parkway. Presently, this area has two (2) monuments, an overlook, a promenade, and a pond spillway. In addition to the existing pedestrian bridge, park identification sign, and pathways, the area could benefit from a more official yet humble entryway that excites the community, draws people to enjoy the park, and provides connectivity and way finding to and from the downtown area. Recommendations made during the public meeting referenced in Section 3.0 specify improvements and to the entrance using multi-seasonal landscaping and gateway signage.

A number of proposed improvements to the area can be considered. These improvements are as follows:
Restore overlook areas, utilizing hardscaping and decorative landscaping, as necessary. (Objective 2)

a. Replace existing tables with ADA-accessible tables.

Provide a new streetscape for Washington Street along the entire Park frontage and part of Burnham Parkway. (Objective 3)

***PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:***

Develop a main entrance from downtown area with connected ADA-accessible walkways and signage. (Objective 3)

a. Evaluate sluiceway and outfall with goal of developing more naturalistic treatment in the area.

Provide ADA-accessible walkway at nearby crosswalks. (Objective 1)

a. Develop ADA-accessible walking paths.

b. Provide connections to existing monuments.

Create ceremonial grove to host weddings or other ceremonial events with a backdrop of the pond.
CIRCULATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Circulation and Connectivity relates to how people use the site, ADA-accessibility, and the possible development of additional trails and paths to provide safe and easy to follow pedestrian connectivity between the various use areas. Currently, there are sections of trails and walkways without a defined internal circulation system. The following potential improvements have been identified during the investigation process and Community input:

• Improve park paths to allow for ADA-accessibility around the entire complex.
• Install sidewalks along surrounding roads with ADA-access down to interior park pathways.
• Install additional ADA parking around the park.
• Install ADA-accessible walkways and ramps for all park amenities such as: playgrounds, monuments, fishing areas, ballfields and pool.
• Install ADA-accessible playground equipment.
• Install ADA-accessible bathrooms.
• Install ADA-accessible benches and picnic tables.
To remedy these issues, Colliers Engineering & Design makes the following recommendations:

1. Investigate and install a safe, accessible crossing to connect Burnham Park to the Foster fields property. (Objective 1)

2. Provide ADA-accessible walkway from parking areas to the ballfields. (Objective 1)

3. Provide Naturalistic trail through meadow area to connect to Morris township Greenway. (Objective 1)

4. Provide safe pedestrian-striped crossing on Burnham Parkway. (Objective 1)

5. Provide safe, accessible striped crossing and walkway from the intersection of Springview Drive and Burnham Parkway. (Objective 1)

6. Investigate the ability to provide a walkway along the edges of Burnham Parkway. (Objective 1)

7. **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Provide continuous ADA-accessible loop trail around the perimeter of the pond areas with a connection to the parking areas. (Objective 1)

8. **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Provide improved sense of entry and pedestrian connection to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. (Objective 1 & 2)
PLAYGROUNDS AND PAVILIONS

The playgrounds and pavilions areas are located along the southern side of the park, between Burnham parkway and the ponds. Currently, there is a play area, two (2) pavilions, and a historic fireplace. A portion of the walking trail from Washington Street extends to the playgrounds, but does not continue to the parking lot, the pavilions, or Springview Drive. Furthermore, residents, community leaders, and representatives from various organizations suggested numerous new amenities that could be constructed in the park including:

- Improve the existing public bathrooms.
- Statue Diversity.
- Increased public safety, such as improved lighting, improved parking and better access for Police.
- Charging stations.
- Drinking water bottle fillers.
- Implementation of solar lighting to access various areas of the park.
- Open air exhibits to display the art of local artists.
- Bocce Ball Courts.
- Sledding Hill.
- Additional playground to accommodate ages 6-12 (existing playground is only up to age six).
- Outdoor area for public music and performances.
To remedy these issues, Colliers Engineering & Design makes the following recommendations:

1. Evaluate and renovate existing trail. (Objectives 1, 5)
2. Develop terraced walks to create an informal amphitheater space with performance area at the bottom. (Objective 4)
3. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:
   Renovate playground area with new play pieces to accommodate young children age 6-12 and ADA safety surfing. (Objective 4)
4. Install a pedestrian walkway along Burnham Parkway. (Objective 1)
5. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:
   Renovate pavilions and grading of the areas around pavilions to allow access and to expand usable areas. (Objective 2)
THE MEADOW

The Meadow is a large section of the park in the southwestern portion. The meadow is adjacent to the ballfields and parking and the playground and pavilions areas, with frontage on Burnham Parkway on two sides. The area slopes towards the pond area and has a wide variety of native vegetative species. Furthermore, a number of suggestions were made regarding this area during the public meeting requesting:

- Installation of nature conservation information and education boards.
- Installation of tree marking signs, including species and type.
- Restore natural areas, including removal of invasive species and dead trees/or dead vegetation.
- Installation of educational walkways with signage and historical facts.
- Installation of bird/bat houses.
To improve upon this area, the following considerations are proposed:

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:**
Investigate the creation of a naturalistic trail to provide ADA-access and linkage to adjacent parking lots and ball fields. (Objective 1)

Install conservation and educational boards along trail(s). (Objective 4)

Install tree species signs on vegetation. (Objective 4)

Evaluate existing vegetation in the meadow area and recreate a natural resource inventory to guide future management. (Objective 6)
THE POOL

The Pool area is a community facility which includes swimming and diving pools, areas for smaller children, a playground, and related buildings. The area is bordered by Mendham Ave, Burnham Parkway, and Scherzer Way. The main point of entry is on Scherzer Way and there is informal parking along Burnham Parkway. Community comments have identified a number of possible improvements for the site:

• Improved Parking and vehicular/pedestrian traffic delineation.
• New perimeter fencing/improvement of fencing around the pool.
To improve upon this facility, the following proposed changes are to be considered:

Evaluate existing perimeter fencing for condition and compliance. (Objective 4)

**Priority Recommendation:** Evaluate existing seasonal parking area and provide recommendations for possible improvements. (Objective 1)

Look to extend pedestrian walkway outside of pool area. (Objective 1)
BALLFIELDS AND PARKING

The Ballfields and Parking areas encompass the section of the park providing access to many of the active facilities, such as the pool and baseball fields, while also serving as a central parking area for the park as a whole. The ballfields include two regulation little league fields, one with a skinned infield, batting cages, basketball courts, and facilities buildings. The parking area is graded stone with timber edging. There is also some open space adjacent to the pond. Many comments were made during the public meeting regarding possible improvements to the site including:

- More/improved garbage and recycling containers.
- Improved bathroom buildings or facilities, including siding, ADA-accessible bathrooms and improved storage.
- New fencing and backstops for both baseball fields.
- Exercise course/stations throughout the park.
- Additional benches and picnic tables.
- Benches with backs.
- Repair or resurfacing of the existing basketball court including security lighting.
- Area for assembly, such as lawn seating area.
- Improve/add park signage.
- Installation of signs including park history and park maps.
- Improved pedestrian connection to Mendham Parkway and to cross Scherzer Way.
Regarding the Ballfields and Parking area, the following items are possible improvements:

1. **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Renovate existing basketball courts. (Objective 4)
2. **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Renovate existing facilities building. (Objective 2)
3. Replace existing backstops and perimeter fencing on both fields. (Objective 4)
4. Consider programming for open spaces. (Objective 4)
5. Provide handicapped-accessible parking spaces. (Objective 1)
6. Recondition parking area to improve drainage. (Objectives 1, 5)
   a. Provide corrected alignment and handicapped-accessible parking.
7. Provide ADA-accessible walkway to connect parking area to ballfields and pond loop trail. (Objective 1)
The Ponds at Burnham Park are one of the area's most popular destination spots. Besides their natural beauty, they have been used by the community for birdwatching and fishing. The pond features various seating areas and overlook areas. It also has seasonal aerators. The water flows towards Washington Street on the eastern side of the park, where a spillway and sluice are located. The edges of the ponds contain wooded areas and, in some locations, invasive wetland species. There is a land-link between the two pond areas. Regarding the ponds at the public meeting, the following suggestions were made:

- Dredging.
- Hydro Raking.
- Geese Control.
- Enhancement to riparian buffer/ removal of invasive species not native to the park.
- Install esthetic lighting.
- Create additional pond access such as a dock, walkways to the water, or additional scenic overlooks.
- Improve water quality.
- Additional fountains in the pond.
- Removal of dead trees or invasive vegetation surrounding the pond.
- Increased pond activities, such as skating or boating.
- Install drainage around the ponds to eliminate soft/wet areas.
- Utilize pervious materials for existing or new walkways.
- Installation of trash-capturing devices on stormwater inlets and areas where stormwater runoff enters the pond.
- Improved soil erosion and sediment control around the pond.
- Improve/upgrade both pond's dams.
To improve upon this facility, the following proposed changes are to be considered:

In conjunction with the proposed loop trail around the ponds, develop naturalistic edge treatments for access to pond edges. (Objective 1, 6)

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Provide hydro raking of ponds to reduce seasonal growth of algae and the buildup of vegetative material. (Objective 6)

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Evaluate edges of pond areas and identify invasive species. Develop a management plan to control and remove these invasive species. (Objective 6)

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Improve pond edges (near the entrance of Burnham Pkway & Washington St.) To remove invasive species, and install new plantings to improve interaction between park visitors and the pond. (Objective 6)

Update formal overlooks along Washington Street and Burnham Parkway. (Objective 2)
ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to recommendations made in each of these areas, there have been many general and recurring recommendations made regarding improvements to the park, especially stemming from the public meetings. Although some of these recommendations may not be specifically mentioned previously in this report, various specific improvements can be accommodated in nearly all areas, and seamlessly fit into the overall park culture and purpose. Specific consideration for each of these items can be addressed during discreet design of the various park areas. Below are some of these recommendations:

Potential New Amenities

- Additional public bathrooms.
- Statue Diversity.
- Increased public safety, such as improved lighting, improved parking and better access for Police.
- Charging stations.
- Drinking water bottle fillers.
- Implementation of solar lighting to access various areas of the park.
- Introduction of local artist display areas.
- Bocce Ball Courts.
- Sledding Hill.
- Six-year-old to twelve-year old playground (existing playground is only up to age six).
- Outdoor area for public music.
- Community Garden.
- Butterfly Garden.
- Installation of a labyrinth (a garden-type maze).
- Exercise course/stations throughout the park.
- Additional benches and picnic tables.
Overall, the Burnham Park Revitalization Plan presented effectively creates a more inclusive, functional, and updated park, while maintaining its historic and natural character.

The Plan also takes special care to encourage pedestrian and vehicular connection to the Morristown Green, Fosterfields, Jones Woods, Fort Nonsense and the Greenway.

The proposed park improvements present a more updated experience, providing improved accessibility to all park-goers, by restoring the natural and historic features of the park, and by enhancing the park’s main entrance.

More specifically, select Priority Recommendations were as follows:

**Entrance & Monuments**

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Evaluate pond edges, remove invasive species, and develop naturalized stabilization to improve interaction between park visitors and the pond. (Objective 5)

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** Develop a main entrance from downtown area with connected ADA-accessible walkways and signage. (Objective 3)
Circulation and Connectivity

**Priority Recommendation:** Provide continuous ADA-accessible loop trail around the perimeter of the pond areas with a connection to the parking areas. (Objective 1)

**Priority Recommendation:** Provide improved sense of entry and pedestrian connection to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. (Objectives 1, 3)

Playgrounds and Pavilions

**Priority Recommendation:** Renovate playground area with new play pieces to accommodate young children age 6-12 and ADA safety surfacing. (Objective 4)

**Priority Recommendation:** Renovate pavilions and grading of the areas around pavilions to allow access and to expand usable areas. (Objective 2)

The Meadow

**Priority Recommendation:** Investigate the creation of a naturalistic trail to provide ADA-access and linkage to adjacent parking. (Objective 1)

The Pool

**Priority Recommendation:** Evaluate existing seasonal parking area and provide recommendations for possible improvements. (Objective 1)

Ballfields and Parking

**Priority Recommendation:** Renovate existing basketball courts. (Objective 4)

**Priority Recommendation:** Renovate existing facilities building. (Objective 2)

Ponds

**Priority Recommendation:** Provide hydro raking of ponds to reduce seasonal growth of algae and buildup of vegetative material. (Objective 6)

**Priority Recommendation:** Evaluate edges of pond areas and identify invasive species. Develop a management plan. (Objective 6)

**Priority Recommendation:** Improve pond edges (near the entrance at Burnham Parkway and Washington Street) to remove invasive species, and install new plantings to improve interaction between park visitors and the pond. (Objective 6)

It is the intent that these priority recommendations were made in order to ensure that each of the geographic focus areas and each planning objective was addressed for more immediate action. Additionally, by identifying those improvements which may be delayed until a later phase of parks improvement, funding for such improvements may be gradually managed as economically feasible.

*These priority recommendations represent five overarching themes:*

- Improved accessibility and circulation
- Stormwater management
- Enhanced park entry
- Restoration of historic park elements
- Return to original natural park features

Improved accessibility, particularly ADA accessibility, will demonstrate the township’s commitment to serving all of its residents. Various drainage and stormwater improvements will put the Park in a position to maintain its long-term functionality and sustainability.

A greater sense of entrance and delineation of the park areas is accommodated by creating unique and tasteful entrances along entry and exit points around the park, consistent with the park’s historic and natural feel. Likewise, restoring the historic park elements, and original natural landscape will not only enhance the beauty of the park, but will honor its legacy and original intent.

Collectively, these improvements will ensure that the park remains a tranquil, beautiful place for the community, proudly serving future generations of park-goers.
Community Input

Multiple community input meetings were held. The following are areas for future improvements as deemed necessary by the Mayor & Council. As follows, the pavilions can be a home for a public-art project or display.

- Sell fundraising tiles like they have at Foote’s Pond, but painted by local students, maybe the kids on baseball or swim teams, or “adopted” by local scout troops. People could sponsor the tiles, which would be incorporated into the concrete on the ground or on the outer walls of the structure.

- Create a collaborative art project that could become an ongoing, interactive feature, as the park could have fundraisers where people (not just kids) attend an event where they paint river rocks that are then used as ground cover or decorative features.

- A lot of people randomly painted rocks as a hobby during the Covid lockdown and scattered them around the park. There are a few spots - around the Burnham family's plaque, around Thomas Paine, on one random hillock across from the bottom of Egbert.

- Permanent painted or inlaid “frames” and coloring-book style drawings as permanent features in the concrete surface to encourage chalk art. On the more protected walls of the structure, one can use chalkboard paint and invoke an ongoing, constantly changing children’s art feature.
Social Media / Public Art Installation

- Create a program for local artists to bid for the opportunity to decorate them; they are placed around the park (maybe around all Morristown/ship) and eventually auctioned.

Statues / Landscaping

- Perhaps of less traditional icons.
- Black History in Morristown.
- Who are the accountable, responsible and consulted stakeholders for each zone and what are their respective roles and responsibilities for that zone? (e.g. across candidates like DPW, Engineering, Recreation, Shade Tree Commission, Environmental Commission, BPA, others)
- What are the macro-objectives for each park landscape zone? (Driven by the stakeholders, with zone-appropriate process and input).
- What does DPW need to operationally maintain with regular frequency and as-needed frequency? (e.g. lawn care, tree maintenance in specific zones)
- What areas don’t yet have a proactive management approach? (e.g. do the riparian buffers, the meadow, and the wild woodland have appropriate management plans?)
• What are the strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities of each landscape zone towards fulfilling its intended purpose? (e.g. in wild areas plant diversity and health may be a strength, deer browse and invasives may be a weakness, and emerald ash borer may be a vulnerability; in the ponds water flow may be a strength, shallowness may be a weakness, phosphorous loading from stormwater and geese may be a vulnerability; etc.)

• What can be done over time to ensure that each zone provides the richest set of intended services to park users?

• What are appropriate new plantings and removals for each zone?

• What will be the impact of Ash tree loss in each of the different wooded areas and what should be the multiyear removal and replacement plan?

• What invasive management is warranted in each zone, and how can we find ways for better management?
## APPENDIX B

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION COST ESTIMATE**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Planning Areas</th>
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<td><strong>4.1 Entrance &amp; Monuments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Develop a main entrance from downtown area with connected ADA-accessible walkways and signage.</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.2 Circulation &amp; Connectivity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide continuous ADA-Accessible loop trail around the perimeter of the pond with a connection to the parking areas</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Provide improved sense of entry and pedestrian connection to downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.</td>
<td>$250,000.00</td>
<td>$750,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.3 Playgrounds &amp; Pavilions</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Renovate playground area with new play pieces to accommodate young children age 6-12 and ADA safety surfacing.</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Renovate pavilions and grading of the areas around pavilions to allow access and to expand usable areas.</td>
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## 4.4 The Meadow

1. Investigate the creation of a naturalistic trail to provide ADA-access and linkage to adjacent parking.

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## 4.5 The Pool

1. Evaluate existing seasonal parking area and provide recommendations for possible improvements.

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## 4.6 Ballfields & Parking

1. Renovate existing basketball courts.

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2. Renovate existing facilities building.

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## 4.7 Ponds

1. Provide hydro raking of ponds to reduce seasonal growth of algae and buildup of vegetative material.

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2. Evaluate edges of pond areas and identify invasive species. Develop a management plan.

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3. Improve pond edges (near the entrance at Burnham Parkway and Washington Street) to remove invasive species, and install new plantings to improve interaction between park visitors and the pond.

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