



SUMMARY OF AGE-FRIENDLY PARK GOALS

Age-Friendly Teaneck would like to share its suggestions for how to increase the ability of residents of all ages to actively and passively enjoy the Township's parks. We recently toured Teaneck's 23 parklands, including the 9 sites designated as "natural areas," to evaluate how well they meet "age-friendly" design principles we learned about in a recent conference. In that conference, NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver outlined a park redevelopment strategy that focuses on four factors: **access, comfort, activity** and **nature**. That design approach combined with a new philosophy of **equity** and a strategy of **opening the perimeters** has led to some innovative park redevelopments in NYC, some of which we think would also work in Teaneck.

ACCESS

Teaneck is fortunate in that parkland comprises 13 percent of total Township acreage, which means that 94 percent of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park (well above the national average of 55 percent), according to a study by [The Trust for Public Land](#). But not all sidewalks or pathways leading to parks are smooth and barrier-free. Paving upgrades are needed in many parks as well as pathway redesigns to ensure safer entrances, better access to seating areas, and improved connectivity for walking, jogging or other exercise. These are the access issues we think need to be addressed:

- **Condition of Pathways** Many of Teaneck's parks have pathways in disrepair, often in areas with amenities that older adults are likely to use, such as ones leading to a fenced dog walk area, adult fitness equipment, and seating areas in Phelps Park. **(see photos below)**. Similar pathway condition issues were spotted at larger neighborhood parks such as Herrick, Terhune, Brooks, Amman and Argonne.



- Length/Location of Pathways** - Some parks could benefit from extended perimeter pathways as well as criss-crossing paths to access seating areas or amenities. Brooks Park offers a good example of how a medium-sized park can maximize walkway length through a number of connecting loops. In contrast, parks, such as Coolidge and Herrick (**shown below**) have pathways that dead-end or drop-off even though there is room to extend.



- Park Entrances**. Many parks have multiple entrance points but the entrances have gravel pathways or uneven surfaces that present challenges to people with mobility issues. Some park entrances may not “feel safe” to users because they are poorly fenced, have uneven surfaces, or are obscured by overgrown shrubs.



- **Park Perimeters** Locating seating and other amenities near park entrances and borders - and removing imposing barriers such stairs, steep ramps, and unnecessary fences and obstructions - could make parks better blend into neighborhoods and create more ways for people to gather in open spaces. One example would be Amman Park - the addition of a seating area near the Fort Lee Road entrance could make a nice place for people to sit and enjoy an ice cream cone at the nearby Dairy Queen. Other parks surrounded by homes, such as Brooks, Coolidge, Argonne, and Harte Park could also be “opened up” with seating areas on the perimeter. Other possibilities for perimeter improvements are the parks along the Hackensack River Greenway: Terhune Park and Andreas Park, **(pictured below)** which offer great views of the river. Adding shaded, platformed seating areas (with accompanying pathways) near the banks would allow residents to relax while looking at the waterfowl.



- **Pedestrian Crossings to Parks** As parks and recreation officials work to improve the interior of parks, we recommend public works officials review pedestrian crossings leading to parks. A number of the parks along River Road, for example, can be hard to reach at times when traffic along that busy road is heavy. Both Terhune, Andreas and Brett parks do have marked pedestrian crossings but those crossings would be much easier to navigate if those locations were also marked with flashing lights that would signal cars to stop.

COMFORT

Many of Teaneck’s parks offer ample seating, including benches with backs, which are more comfortable. But the seating is often near playgrounds and wading pools, which is convenient for parents of young children, but not the type of “social” or “companion” seating that older adults or others without children might prefer. In addition, some seating areas are marooned in the middle of parks and lack connecting walkways.

Seating areas would better serve all areas if they were designed to promote social conversation and passive park use, especially at times like this, when access to outdoors is a crucial component to residents' physical and mental health. Residents whose nearest park is one of Teaneck' nine nature areas would benefit from the addition of pavilion-type or gazebo-type seating, which could turn these undeveloped parklands into community gathering places. Good locations for this include Brookstaver Park and Windsor Park, across from the new Avalon apartment building. "Comfort" also equals accessible bathrooms, and parks that offer athletic facilities and picnic amenities would serve the public better if they had actual bathrooms rather than portable ones.

ACTIVITY

Teaneck's parks offer a diversity of activity and several like Votee, Phelps and Brooks are home to adult fitness equipment, which is commendable. We suggest complementing the many baseball fields, soccer fields, tennis courts and basketball courts with opportunities for lower-intensity exercise or activity, such as pickleball courts, bocce ball courts, or ping-pong tables, as well as opportunities for passive recreation, such as community gardens or outdoor chess tables.

NATURE

Teaneck's parks are lush with trees and shrubbery but it's important these natural areas be better maintained. Many larger parks like Phelps and Argonne have forested areas with downed branches or trees and shrubs that need to be pruned. In addition, while some of the nine "nature areas" are small or located near highways, others could be improved with hiking paths and seating pavilions.

Equity is lacking in the use or upkeep of some of these nature areas.

For example, the 15-acre Feldman Nature Preserve in Northwest Teaneck is well-maintained with a wooden walking bridge traversing its length.



In contrast, the undeveloped wooded areas of the 23-acre Argonne Park in Northeast Teaneck are very inaccessible because of poor overall maintenance and rutted and rocky pathways inside. Pathways leading into the forested areas of Argonne dead-end near their entrance points. Since this is a large area surrounded by densely developed residential areas, the lack of walking/hikes paths and the poor overall upkeep represents a huge missed opportunity to connect residents of the Northeast with a natural area that could be a source of both passive and active enjoyment of nature.



END NOTES

Please note our review did not include Votee Park, as we are focused on neighborhood parks, nor did it include Overpeck County Park or the natural lands maintained by the Teaneck Creek Conservancy or Hackensack Greenway organizations.

If you are interested in learning more about the NYC parks redevelopment campaign, please feel free to view [this recording](#) of this presentation or this [condensed power-point presentation](#) we recently shared with our task force members.

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