



Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition  
c/o Treasurer David Stone  
539 E. Foster Ave.  
State College PA 16801  
nvec2018@gmail.com  
nittanyvalley-eco.org

G. Randolph Hudson Architect, LEED AP  
427 S. Nixon Road  
Ferguson Township  
State College PA 16801  
814-937-4372  
grhudsonjr@gmail.com

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Jim Steff, Executive Director, Centre Region Council of Governments  
Danelle Del Corso, Chair, Centre Region Council of Governments General Forum  
Ferguson Township Board of Supervisors

*Via electronic mail*

Re: Whitehall Road Regional Parklands

Dear Mr. Steff, Ms. Del Corso, Mr. Buckland, Mr. Miller, Ms. Dininni, Ms. Carlson and Mr. Ricciardi:

The Centre Region Council of Governments is about to spend a great deal of taxpayer money for a planned 100-acre park at Whitehall Road, a project that most of our community doesn't want or need.

I respectfully request that all parties pause this project, carry out an updated master plan, and resume with a transparent, fair and cost-effective plan that serves our whole community. Design costs have already been incurred, but rather than proceed, it is better to build the right way on this precious land.

Following is a summary of my open letter to Pam Salokangas, Centre Region Parks and Recreation Director, and Kathleen Matason, Centre Region Parks and Recreation Authority Board Chair, dated July 8, 2018.

### **What does our community really want?**

Ask people in our region what a "park" is, and they imagine something very different from this plan. The only Parks and Rec survey regarding regional park amenities shows ten times the

desire for true "park" amenities (open space, trails, trees, meadows, community gardens, picnic areas, sledding areas) as there is for structured sports. Please see attached graphic.

### **What does the current plan propose?**

The proposed 40-acre Phase One of Whitehall Road Regional Park devotes a great deal of area, and by far the greatest tax dollars, for organized sports and its parking lots, lighting, PA systems, and concessions, rather than for what the community wants. Our desired park would more closely resemble Tudek Park, Penn State Arboretum, or Pittsburgh's Schenley Park.

### **This is a scenic site in the heart of Nittany Valley.**

The Park site is one of the most stunning natural areas in Central Pennsylvania. It offers magnificent vistas of Mount Nittany, Tussey Ridge and thousands of acres of open fields and meadows. If you haven't yet done so, you should visit, walk it, and admire this irreplaceable view. Particularly since the Penn State/Toll Brothers chapter, we must consider not only structured facilities, but also preservation of resources, views, open space and wildlife when planning amenities for our region. This is not the location for so many highly engineered ballfields. Let's find them a better place.

### **Ferguson Township already requested improvements to this plan.**

The Ferguson Township supervisors have already requested significant improvement to the current plan. Its March 21, 2018 letter to the CRPRA Board suggests adherence to the principles of the 2010 Master Site Plan. Key points of the Ferguson Township letter include:

1. Permeable paving for parking and roads. Encourage paved rather than gravel surfaces.
2. Do not "improve" undeveloped portions of park. Since there is no timetable for future phases: No grading; preserve natural habitat. Consider succession planting and reforestation.
3. Update the Parklands Master Plan for subsequent phases as Phase One is developed.
4. Green infrastructure and low impact parkland for this and subsequent phases. Consistent with 2010 planning document, through the Sustainable Sites Initiative.
5. Mitigate light and noise pollution. Prevent spillover light to adjacent properties.

The plan does not address these modest suggestions. In fact, the current version actually *removed* trees from the parking areas. It appears to ignore almost every environmental design principle for which Ferguson Township has stated support.

### **Whitehall Parklands Master Plan principles are not being followed.**

Following are excerpts from the Whitehall Parklands Master Plan:

1. Plan *first* for views and natural areas, *then* for ballfields. Chapter One of Whitehall Parklands: The site is "*exceptional in its scenic position with outstanding valley views*" and has "*spectacular...scenic values.*" Views like these are vital for the community, but not for sports.
2. Create balance. "*...diversity of...activities is important to creation of a great park.*"
3. Use xeriscaping. Employ native grass, shrub and tree species that require no watering, herbicides or pesticides. This provides tremendous yearly savings in maintenance, as well as benefits to wildlife. This should apply to sports turf design and management as well.

### **Next steps towards a great park.**

#### **Carry out new plans by qualified planners, with a transparent public process.**

1. Whitehall Parklands planning was done 10 years ago. The world has changed. There is much more understanding of, and demand for, sustainable recreation opportunities.
2. Hire a firm that is expert in community surveys and participatory design, and which is experienced in planning the full range of contemporary "park" amenities, including all those listed on CRPRA's own past surveys. The firm's team must include LEED-accredited, IDSA and other environmentally expert professionals.
3. Include a capacity survey of existing Centre Region sports fields.
4. Plans must consider views, slopes, sun, trees and other vegetation, wildlife and surface/groundwater.
5. Structured sports fields, lighting and large parking areas must be located in already-developed areas of the Region.

#### **Maintain safe water supplies.**

Whitehall Parklands is within the recharge area of the Harter and Thomas well fields providing drinking water to 75,000 State College area residents, above fragile karst limestone geology prone to sinkholes and fractures.

1. Do not risk the safety of nearby State College Borough Water Authority wells and Slab Cabin Run during construction and operation. Accordingly, re-grade as little as possible. Do not re-grade now for future facilities.
2. Plan now for who is responsible if wells or stream are damaged.
3. Consider having the SCBWA board certify the project as non-risk, absolving the Parks Authority and COG of liability for damages.

#### **Allocate the budget fairly, and show the cost breakdown.**

1. Since most public desire is for "passive" recreation, then most of the budget should be spent on these amenities. As stated, the current plan's budget is almost entirely consumed by ballfields.

2. Early in the planning stages, create an estimate for each type of amenity, including initial and annual upkeep costs. This is critical to understanding the cost-benefit of each amenity, and to fair allocation.
3. COG could reduce the Park's cost by orienting Whitehall Parklands more toward lifetime activities. However, if there is a mandate to spend up to a budget, allocate money in proportion to actual need.
4. Consider more sophisticated construction and amenities: water sources, gravel roads, biofiltration, STEM education, butterfly meadows, nature boardwalks, observation blinds, etc.

**Provide the correct balance of amenities at every phase, including Phase One.**

If Parklands construction is phased, each phase should contain the full blend of active, passive and natural areas, in proportion to those at completion of all phases. The current plan does not do this.

Thank you for your work to date. Let's all realize the fullest potential of this stunning property as true parklands for the entire community.

Sincerely,  
Randy Hudson

cc: State College Borough Council and Mayor  
College Township Council  
Patton Township Board of Supervisors  
Harris Township Board of Supervisors  
Halfmoon Township Board of Supervisors