

# **Friends of Little Crum Creek Park**

## **Three-Year Strategic Plan**

### **MISSION**

Little Crum Creek Park is a valuable community resource and deserves a formal commitment to the preservation and management of its assets. Friends of Little Crum Creek Park was formed in the spring of 2020 to support this mission. The goal of this nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization is to preserve, restore, maintain, and protect the diverse native and natural habitats, water quality, beauty, and sustainable legacy of the park and to educate the community about its environmental value. It is the intention of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park to serve as stewards of the park and carry out educational, environmental, and charitable activities and objectives in collaboration with the borough of Swarthmore and surrounding communities.

### **HISTORY**

Previously, a committed group of residents of Swarthmore and nearby communities held periodic workdays to plant and maintain trees and shrubs, remove invasive species, and stabilize stream banks in Little Crum Creek Park. The work has been funded primarily by obtaining grants from various sources and by working with the Chester Ridley Crum (CRC) Watersheds Association.

Now, with the creation of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park, it is time to commit to carrying out the mission of the organization, beginning by developing a more formal agreement with the Borough of Swarthmore and by having a dialogue with the nearby neighbors of the park concerning the goals of the Board of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park.

Much of the groundwork for this strategic plan has been laid by previous park plans. In 2000, members of the Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council conducted a survey of the parks in Swarthmore with on-site visits. The purpose of the survey was to assess the current state of the natural environment of each park and to make recommendations for maintenance and improvements. Little Crum Creek Park encompasses 5.29 acres. It is the borough's largest park and has the most diverse plantings and habitat of all of the parks. The park currently is used for passive recreation, picnicking, birdwatching, and borough events. Recommendations in the survey are similar to those included in subsequent plans and will be incorporated in the recommendations listed later in this document.

In 2006, the Little Crum Creek Park Conceptual Master Plan Study was funded by a grant from the Community Design Collaborative of Philadelphia and designed by Jonathan Alderson Landscape Architects, Inc. Many of the recommendations in the plan were beyond what was feasible for financial and aesthetic reasons, however basic recommendations for stream-bank stabilization and removal of invasive species were valuable suggestions. Additionally, a Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Plan was completed and adopted by the Borough of Swarthmore in 2018, with similar recommendations for park improvements

that were included in previous studies but had not been implemented. To date, recommendations in the plan for the parks in Swarthmore have yet to be completed.

In 2019, a survey completed by four Swarthmore College students found that of 94 respondents, 58% were regular users of the park, 33% used the park daily or weekly, and 25% used the park biweekly or monthly. This suggests that Little Crum Creek Park is a valued and consistently used resource in the community.

In the summer of 2020, a volunteer intern created a document cataloging plants found throughout the park, including native, non-native, and invasive species. This document will be used to provide information to further the educational and environmental goals of the Board of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park, to educate volunteers and park visitors, and will be used as a guide for planting more sustainable species in the park.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARK IMPROVEMENTS**

### **1. Stream-bank Restoration**

- Remove invasive plants and replant with native species to improve ecological value and enhance habitat for wildlife. Strengthen the riparian buffer along all stream banks in the park and improve the water quality.
- Removal can be completed by employing contracted labor or with engineered solutions.
- Replanting can be completed using native plants, donated and/or purchased through awarded grants and donations of funds or plants. This work could be accomplished by volunteer groups with demonstrated interest, including Park Pals, the volunteer arm of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park, and by groups such as the Chester Ridley Crum Watersheds Association, Americorps, the local 4-H Club, high school and college environmental organizations, and community volunteers.

### **2. Improve Signage at All Park Entrances**

- Improve and install signage that will enhance the visual appeal of the park, identify the park, and invite more park usage.
- Signage at the corner of Swarthmore and Yale Avenues should identify this northeast entrance to the park as the gateway to the Borough of Swarthmore. Non-native plantings in this area should be removed, and the area should be reforested with native trees and shrubs to eliminate ongoing mowing and improve habitat. Plantings should provide separation and privacy from the adjoining property. Signage could be similar to that of other key entrance points to the borough (i.e., Gateway Park and Keystone Park). Collaboration for funding could include the borough, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore Centennial Foundation, and grants.
- Entrance on Yale Avenue near the bridge: invasive species should be removed and replanted with more resilient plantings. The macadam path should be replaced.

- Entrance along Cresson Avenue: augment plantings by adding flowering trees and shrubs to complement the mature trees, and reduce the need for mowing and buffer the park from the street.

### **3. Create Planting Buffers Along All Property Lines**

- Provide additional plantings, particularly flowering trees and shrubs, to provide separation of the park from neighboring properties without creating an impenetrable wall of separation.
- Eliminate mowing as much as possible and provide plantings to improve habitat.
- Improve the existing fence and remove all invasive plants growing into and on it. Plant a hedgerow of native evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs.

### **4. Improve Park Amenities to Encourage Park Usage**

- Standardize all materials for park furniture throughout the park. Use a consistent style and material to improve visual compatibility and usefulness of benches, tables, grills, and trash and recycling receptacles.
- Evaluate the two stone fireplaces for safety, visual appeal, and possible removal. Remove all granite benches and replace with sturdy wood/metal benches.
- Collaborate with the Swarthmore Street Tree Committee to assess the health of all trees and identify those that should be removed or pruned. Replace with sustainable, resilient species.
- Improve lighting throughout the park.

## **GROWTH AND SUPPORT OF FRIENDS OF LITTLE CRUM CREEK PARK**

### **1. Build Public Awareness of Little Crum Creek Park**

- Conduct education and outreach activities aimed at increasing the knowledge of the history of the park and why it is a valuable community asset. Target the surrounding community, including local residents, park visitors, school groups, and senior citizens.
- Plan regular tours for all age groups to learn more about the environmental benefits of the park.
- Hold regular events at the park, including plant exchanges with local garden clubs, ; coordinate with the Swarthmore Recreation Association and the Swarthmore Public Library to create activities for young people.
- Maintain an active website; employ social media and local print publications for publicity.

### **2. Identify and Expand Network of Stakeholders and Partnerships**

- Identify partnerships: for example, Swarthmore Borough, Swarthmore Street Tree Committee, Swarthmore Centennial Foundation, Swarthmore Horticultural Society, Scott Arboretum, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore Public Library, Swarthmore Recreation

Association (SRA), Chester Ridley Crum Watersheds Association, local garden and birding clubs.

- Create a listserv to communicate with stakeholder groups and to recruit volunteers; set up a tool for RSVPs (e.g., Signup Genius).
- Establish and implement a method for communicating with the borough government and its employees and with the nearby neighbors of the park.

**3. Park Pals:** This group of volunteers has been created as auxiliary to the Board of Friends of Little Crum Creek Park to participate in regular workdays in the park. Expanding this group beyond the Swarthmore community is important because of the numerous visitors to the park from the surrounding communities.

#### **4. Grow Financial Support**

- Identify grant resources: for example, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, TreeVitalize from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Delaware County Conservation District, Hardy Plant Society, Audubon Society, Rotary Club of Swarthmore, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary.
- Annual Appeal: identify and solicit donors through an Annual Appeal.
- Create fundraisers to be held at the park.