

## Rec center

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will be a real asset to this community," he said.

In order to get the grant and the support of DCNR, Schneider said, Lehman Township needs to contract a peer counselor and form a study committee, which will be a group of representatives from the various organizations that are committed to the project. The purpose of a peer counselor is to help with getting the group together and then doing research and collecting information for the study committee to work with, such as composing and distributing municipal questionnaires; making site visits to determine what parks and recreation areas already exist and what facilities they have and don't have; and analyzing parks in comparable settings to see whether they're failing or succeeding and determining how and why.

Schneider recommended Julie McMonagle for the role of peer counselor; she is a trained geologist and environmentalist who has had previous experience as a peer counselor working with a park commission in Columbia County. McMonagle, a native of Trucksville, has recently begun working with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council on trails, greenways, and rivers. DeMara, who has had many years of park

experience, would work with McMonagle as a technical consultant.

By the next meeting, the township must submit to DCNR a list of acceptable study committee members and a fully-executed contract with McMonagle as the peer counselor; then, when they receive a copy of the Commonwealth contract, they will obtain approval to proceed.

When the study committee is formed and the peer counselor contracted, research and planning work will begin. It is necessary to look at long-term management and maintenance, because a recreational park can be very expensive in the long run. There

are many factors to consider: security, facilities, garbage, care-taking of the grounds — to name just a few. "The first 10 years are easy," Schneider said. "As time goes on, maintenance costs and maintenance become more difficult." He said that is why a thorough and long-term plan for operation and revenue must be developed before any sort of work is begun on the recreational center.

In the meantime, the Back Mountain Recreation Board is working on a master site plan. Eight municipalities have expressed definite interest in the project, as well as two school districts and two athletic clubs; these need to send in letters of interest to solidify their commitment.

"We are committed as a board to plan and come up with the money," Sutton said. State agencies will match funds, but there will be a need for funds for long-term maintenance; Sutton said they are not looking for financial backing from the municipalities.

Phase one will be to use the initial grant to purchase the land, which consists of two contiguous properties totalling 130 acres, one of which the township has a solid option on. "It happens to be an absolutely perfect piece of property," Sutton said. "And even if the park isn't built, it will never be developed. The land will be used for recreation or for nothing."

"I know we can get it funded, I know we can get it built," Sutton said. "Someone's going to give us a 50,000-foot house, and all we've got to do is figure out how to pay the heating bill."

Schneider sounded a theme that was heard several times. "Why are we doing this? We're doing this for the kids, right? The kids don't give a damn about what township they live in — they want to play soccer, they want to play baseball!"

Back Mountain Baseball Inc. has over 1,100 children involved, ranging in age from six to 16, both boys and girls, and consists of 80 teams. "It would give us some assurance that we'd be there forever. The land would be ours," said Jack Snyder, president of the league of the proposed baseball complex at the recreational center. However, Snyder said, "we'd like to stay where we are." He said that the Back Mountain Recreation

Board has asked for a letter of interest, which Back Mountain Baseball intends to send. Snyder said there were certain factors to be taken into consideration before the league could give its full approval, but thus far, Snyder admitted, the positive aspects of having fields at the park seemed to outweigh the negative ones.

"We're backing them in theory. If it turns out to be our best option, then we're in favor of it," he said.

Adrian Merolli, who has been involved with the Back Mountain Youth Soccer Association (BMYSA) for many years and is currently on its board of directors, says that BMYSA is in favor of the project. "Very much so," he said. "We are

going to cooperate fully." Merolli said that the BMYSA is in the process of writing its letter of interest. "Currently we use at least nine fields," Merolli said. There are over 1,000 children involved in the various soccer programs, and Merolli estimates the BMYSA's growth rate is between 4 and 5 percent annually. When combined with the existing facilities, the new fields would provide sufficient space to accommodate all the players.

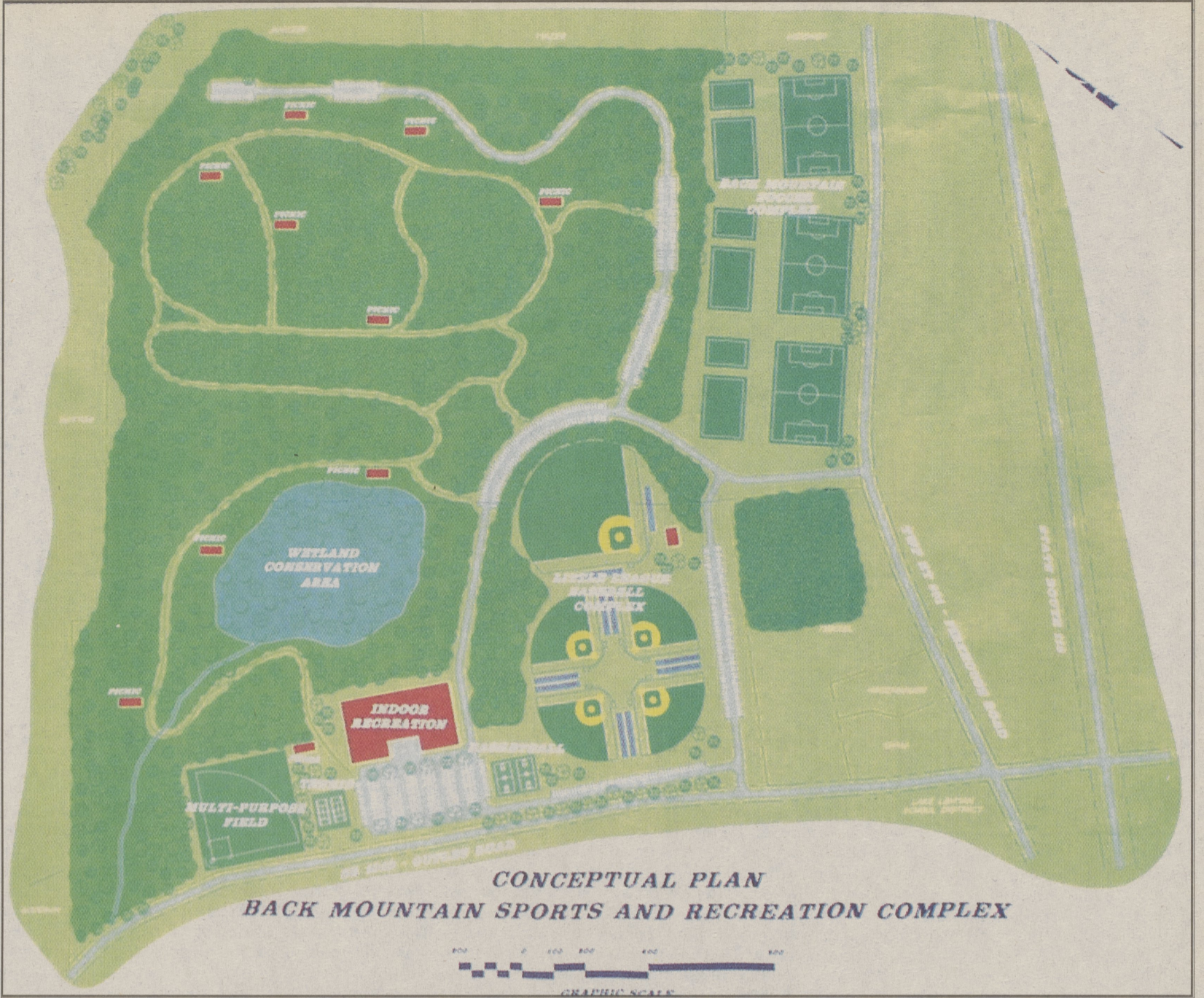
The current situation whereby BMYSA shares athletic fields with other sports teams has drawbacks that would be solved by the creation of a soccer complex: "The fields get so overused — it would

keep the existing fields in better condition," Merolli said, and added that having new fields would prevent scheduling conflicts.

There has been talk of an outdoor ice rink as one of the final projects for the recreational center. "There's no outdoor hockey rink in the area — the only place is in Montage, and that goes over very well out there," said Rich Coslett, a member of the Back Mountain Recreation Board. Coslett believes an outdoor hockey and skating rink would do well in the Back Mountain, and that even the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins were enthusiastic about the idea of one being built. "I don't think many people in the NHL

grew up playing organized hockey in an indoor facility," Coslett said.

Sutton said that in addition to an outdoor ice rink, some of the other possibilities for the recreational center include an indoor pool and a skateboarding ramp. "There will be facilities for unorganized sports, too," Sutton said, meaning by "unorganized sports" such activities as hiking, skateboarding, mountain-biking, swimming and jogging. Coslett agreed: "There are so many places for organized sports, and not many for unorganized," he said. "We're doing this so families can go and play." There will also be picnic grounds, nature trails, and a wetlands conservation area.



A drawing shows the conceptual plan for a proposed Back Mountain Sports and Recreation Complex.

"We're doing this so families can go and play."

Rich Coslett

Back Mountain Recreation Board

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