park yourself here

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this page: Barclay Park



If you've ever been to the charming city of Savannah, Georgia, you already know that one of the biggest draws of the place are the series of parks—or squares—scattered around the sprawling city. They serve as pockets of peace and serenity, respites of greenery and birdsong amidst the lively urban backdrop of a busy, vibrant city. Here you can sit with a book or magazine on a break from work. Bring a friend and a blanket and some lunch at the weekend. Or simply pop in your earbuds, plant yourself on a bench, and tune the world out for a while.

Although West Chester isn't technically a city and is about 100 times smaller, there are similarities: both county seats, both have a university, and West Chester is also certainly vibrant and bustling. And, given its comparatively diminutive size, the number of dedicated parks around the WC borough is impressive.

According to Keith Kurowski, Executive Director of WC's Parks and Recreation Department, West Chester has 13 parks within the boundaries of the borough for a total of 46 acres. And that number may be growing. Kurowski notes that the borough is in the process of updating their PROS (Parks, Recreation, and Open Space) Plan to see what they can do to make park experiences better for everyone.

"One big thing we're looking at is how to better connect our parks in a non-vehicular way, and to see if there are any parcels of land in the borough we could use to expand our park system," he says. Parks and Rec is presently eyeing a hook of land on Bradford Avenue for this purpose, and, if it's approved, would eventually make the 14th park in the borough.

The concept here is to create a "10-minute city," whereby every home in the borough would be within a 10-minute walking distance of a park, even if it's a "pocket" or neighborhood park. Or, in government-speak, "implementing non-vehicular interconnectivity."

According to Keith, this process started eight or nine months ago, when the department began soliciting volunteers for the program's steering committee. Local landscape planner Tom

***Everhart Park** has the premier playground in the borough, but it also hosts weddings, festivals and those incredible cherry trees that steal the show in the spring.*

Comitta of Thomas Comitta Associates has done the survey, the project is approved by Borough Council, approval is pending from the county, and there will be an online survey questionnaire and three public meetings for residents to offer feedback. "I don't want anyone to say that they had no input," Keith told us.

The goal is to have upgrades and expansions implemented by spring of 2025. "I've been pushing this project for a decade," Keith said. "The last time an open space project was done here was in the late 90s, and it should be addressed every decade."

West Chester's parks are not only places for the community to take solace in nature, but places for the community to come together. "COVID showed us how important our parks are to not only

***Marshall Square Park** was named after a botanist, so it should be no surprise that nature is clearly in focus. It's probably our favorite park for a picnic.*

physical but the mental health of our residents," Keith told us. Check in regularly at the Parks and Recreation website often for what's happening in our parks, especially since space precludes us from going in-depth here on all of them. Activities and events held in the borough's parks are numerous and varied, with programs from art camps to family yoga to fitness classes and special festival events including movie nights, live concerts, and sporting events.

In the meantime, we picked Keith's brain about some of our parks; the things they have in common and what sets them apart from one another. Keith only asked that we not request him to pick a favorite—"It would be like picking a favorite kid."

Barclay Park

535 N. HIGH STREET

Among the questions we posed to Keith was "most peaceful," and he went with the lush haven that is Barclay Park (followed closely by Hoopes). "It's a great spot to throw down a blanket and read a book."

The park is particularly notable for its variety of trees, according to the Friends of Barclay Park website. They include several varieties of oak, river birch, poplars, maples, pines, elms, and more.

Bayard Rustin Park

740 S. WALNUT STREET

Bayard Rustin Park is approximately 1.4 acres, according to the Parks and Rec website. Originally known as Walnut Street Park when it opened in 1939, it was re-dedicated, and the name was changed to Bayard Rustin Park on June 4, 1998.

Bayard Rustin, an African American Civil Rights leader, was born in West Chester on March 17, 1912. See our History Happened Here column in this issue for more on him. Activities at Rustin Park include art camps and a basketball tournament.



Everhart Park

100 S. BRANDYWINE STREET

Looking for a spot to let the kiddos roam around? While all of West Chester's parks are family friendly, "Has to be Everhart Park with the addition of the new(ish) playground in 2022," Keith said. "If it's a nice day, that playground is full of kids and adults."

It also won the following nods from our erstwhile parks judge: most active (with events) – Everhart Park as this park is home to the annual Turks Head Music Festival—now headed into year 41 on June 2, 2024, from 12pm-7pm, turksheadfestival.com

Keith also thinks it's one of the two most Instagram-friendly (see Marshall Square Park for the other). "Probably Everhart Park around Mother's Day, when the Cherry Blossoms are in full bloom.

If you're looking for a romantic spot around town that doesn't involve sitting in a restaurant with a bunch of other people, Everhart Park's gazebo is your best bet, says Keith. "That gazebo has held numerous weddings (and proposals) over the years."



Marshall Square Park

200 E. MARSHALL STREET

Following up on that Inst-friendly question, Kurowski points out the fountain at Marshall Square Park as particularly picturesque. Designed by Joshua Hoopes, Marshall Square Park was named for botanist Humphry Marshall, according to the Friends of Marshall Square Park website. "Marshall was born in 1722 and never went to school after the age of twelve; yet (appropriately for a cousin of William Bartram, America's most celebrated explorer/botanist) he published in 1785 'Arbustum Americanum, the American Grove,' the first botanical essay in the Western hemisphere," states the website's "About the Park" page.

The park has had memorable installations over the years, including a zoo, according to the article "More Than A Public Park" on the Chester County Day website. "In 1889, a small zoo was installed that included white rats, two monkeys named Sullivan and Kilrain which the zookeeper could not tell apart, alligators, rabbits, raccoons, guinea pigs, opossums and red and gray squirrels," writes Gail Guterl. A fountain housed carp, turtles, and other fish. One year a mink found its way to the fountain pool surrounding the park's signature five-tier fountain and feasted on fish.

***Hoopes Park** is so big you can get lost in its 16.2 acres or forget entirely that you're still within the bounds of the borough.*

Hoopes Park

700 HOOPES PARK LANE

Located on 16.2 acres of land, Hoopes Park was named after Josiah Hoopes, who was one of the borough's three original park supervisors. It was opened in the summer of 1957 so that the children of the community could have a place to gather. The first piece of land was purchased from Edward Jackson for $1 on December 20, 1928, and the second piece of land on June 1, 1939, also for $1.

Presumably given the sheer size of it, Keith suggested Hoopes as best for four-legged friends. "It has the most room and is our biggest park," he told us. "Remember, though—dogs need to be on leash and please clean up after them."

It offers, among other things, an adult baseball field, an activity building, a parking lot, grills, tennis courts, water fountain, playground and picnic tables.

Keith cited both Hoopes and Barclay as best for nature lovers. "Both are excellent for watching birds and the occasional deer that come romping through them," Keith said. "For its size, you can still find a cozy little spot to just relax."

John O. Green Park

S. MATLACK AND E. MINER STREETS

Kurowski cited John O. Green as a close second to Everhart for most kid friendly and is a big fan of it particularly in the summertime. "Nothing beats this park on a hot summer day when you want to cool down in the water play area," he says. Coming in at around 24,000 square feet, this park offers a covered picnic spot, those various summer water features, a basketball court, and several separate play areas. The park is named after former West Chester Police Chief John Green.



Other Places to Park:

Fugett Park
401 E. GAY STREET

Located behind the Borough building, this park was built in 1990 on the land once occupied by the Fugett School, so named after a teacher, principal, and active NAACP member Joseph R. Fugett. It's small but mighty, centrally located, and containing some playground equipment and picnic tables.

Green Field Park
S. FRANKLIN STREET

This park is aptly named as it's essentially just under two acres of green field. It's used by local sports organizations, mostly youth football and soccer. It also offers a parking lot, bleachers, picnic tables, and a snack bar.

Horace Pippin Park
520 W. MARKET STREET

Originally called Market Street Park when it opened in 1911, but known as the "Children's Playground," this park was unsegregated. Later named after renowned local African American artist Horace Pippin, this acre or so of space offers an open play area, basketball court, picnic tables

***John O. Green Park** is a favorite in the summer, when they turn on the water features so kids can stay cool. (It has other great equipment the rest of the year, too.)*

Kathy McBratnie Park
300 W. NIELDS STREET

On the corner of Nields and New Streets across from West Chester University sits this neighborhood park. It offers a basketball hoop, swings, and a climbing wall, and one very cool and colorful mural.

Mosteller Park
601 E. ROSEDALE AVENUE

Purchased by the borough from a builder in 1963 and named after the prominent former local retailer, James Mosteller. It features swings, a grille and picnic tables, and a basketball court. It's just under an acre in size.

Veterans Memorial Park
315 VEIT ALLEY

Opened in 1948 through the combined efforts of returning service personnel and the VFW, this park offers a playground area and covered picnic area. It's small and a bit hard to find (one-way street alert, but you're better off walking), but if you've got little ones, it's worth the effort.

Random Facts:

The Everhart Park playground (which was implemented, in large part, during the pandemic) cost nearly $700k and was completed using grant funding and ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) dollars.

Farley Field at Hoopes Park has run a men's baseball league consecutively for 68 years.

Kathy McBratnie Park is the namesake of the first director of the Borough of West Chester's Parks and Recreation. She's responsible for many of the events we still attend today—Turks Head Music Festival and the Chester County Restaurant Festival to name two.