

High School Park: Creating a Neighborhood Gem

At this June's Arts in the Park, the Friends of High School Park (FHSP) officially unveiled the beautiful new park entrance. The stone wall, garden and benches were designed and installed thanks to a continuing collaboration between the Township and the FHSP to create a neighborhood gem in Elkins Park.

The FHSP, incorporated in 1995, were instrumental in the Township's acquisition of this 11-acre site, which once featured the burned remains of the former Cheltenham High School building. Abandoned as a school facility in the mid-1980s, the site was purchased by a developer that intended to convert the building into an age-restricted facility. After the fire, the Township secured a grant under the Montgomery County Open Space Program to purchase the site.

Next, the Township and FHSP partnered on developing an Ecological Master Plan with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). That plan established the blueprint for restoring an environmentally-sound native landscape around the Tookany Creek in both High School Park and Ogontz Park. It also guides the installation of amenities, such as the front entrance, to make the park inviting and informative to visitors.

More recently, the Township secured about \$300,000 in additional DCNR grant funding for three more development projects: (1) to restore the meadow and woodland edge of the park; (2) to enhance stormwater management and create a transition to the lower woodlands; and (3) to repair, replace and enhance the riparian buffer along the Tookany Creek in both High School Park and Ogontz Park. The first project is already complete, and the second will be finished by the end of 2017. The third will begin after the Township's replacement of sanitary sewer Interceptor A is completed.

While the Township has contributed to High School Park's stunning transformation, the real heroes are the dedicated volunteers and several part-time employees of the FHSP. Since 2007, the volunteers and staff of FHSP have dedicated thousands of hours to removing invasive plant species and planting and tending native ones that provide natural habitats for many animals and help protect our waterways from stormwater runoff. Additionally, the FHSP raised over \$63,000 to install the Joshua G. Schwartz Meadow Walkway, a water fountain and the new entrance. The annual Arts in the Park fundraiser, which has become a fabulous community event, also helps maintain this park.

Anyone interested in contributing to the FHSP can contact them at info@fhsp.org or 215-782-8082. More information about their vision for High School Park can be found at www.highschoolpark.org.



The Friends of High School Park (FHSP) unveiled a beautiful new entrance at this year's Arts in the Park. Working with the Township, the FHSP has helped transform the park into an environmentally sound community treasure.