IN THE BIG LEAGUES: SPORTS AND RECREATION FACILITIES IN HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP

By: Steven S. Goodman



INTRODUCTION

Sports and athletic activities play a significant role in the health and well-being of both individuals and communities. Annual healthcare costs are significantly lower for adults who maintain moderate or high physical activity levels. Children with access to sports and recreational facilities have shown decreased prevalence of obesity compared to children without access, as well as reduced screentime, better sleep and lower incidence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Physical activity also positively impacts mental health by increasing cognitive performance and well-being and alleviating illnesses such as depression and Alzheimer's.

These benefits highlight the importance of sports and recreation facilities to the broader community. Such facilities not only promote public health but can also drive local economic growth and foster social cohesion. Recreational facilities may involve individuals, small groups, teams or entire communities and are important to people of all ages, abilities and skill levels.

In keeping with these important benefits, Haverford Township offers a wide variety of public and private sports facilities, ranging from multipurpose athletic fields and indoor recreation centers to golf courses and an ice skating rink. Ten percent of the Township's land consists of public parks and open spaces, and approximately 8 percent consists of privately owned golf courses.[1] Many of the township's sports and recreational facilities have a rich history befitting the historic location in which they are located, although their prevalence belies the challenges that have occasionally accompanied their development and improvement.

[1] "*Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan*," Haverford Township, Feb. 2024 (the "PROS"), p. 43.

GOLF COURSES

The land devoted to golf courses within Haverford Township, past and present, and their significance to the sport's national tapestry, make them an apt place to begin. At one time the township had more golf clubs than any other municipality in Delaware County.[2]

Merion Golf Club

Any discussion of the history and significance of golf courses not only in Haverford Township, but nationally, must feature the Merion Golf Club.

The golf club originated as part of the Merion Cricket Club, established in the Lower Merion Township portion of Haverford in 1865. Merion built a golf course just northeast of its existing property in 1896, when golf was still in its infancy in the United States but gaining popularity. The course was quite short by present standards and within 15 years it was outdated. Technological evolution of the golf ball, rather than increased player skill, brought about the need for a new, longer course.

Golf originated in 15th century Scotland, and the standard 18-hole round was created at the Old Course at St. Andrews, widely regarded as the birthplace of the modern game.[3] In its earliest days, balls were probably made of boxwood, followed by goose or chicken feathers stuffed into stitched pieces of leather, and eventually coagulated milk of the Malayan gum tree called gutta percha.[4] Although the ball had come to be hammered with dimples to improve its flight, it was difficult to achieve much distance, and a short course remained suitable for play.

Dramatic change occurred in the late 19th century with the advent of a rubber-cored ball, developed by a Cleveland businessman, Coburn Haskell, and his golfing partner Bertram Work of the B.F. Goodrich Rubber Company. The new "Haskell ball" featured thin strands of rubber wound around a small rubber ball which, with deeper dimples, increased the carry distance of the ball an average of 20 to 30 yards over previous balls. The ball's superior performance made many older, shorter golf courses obsolete.[5]

Over the next several years golfers using the new Haskell ball won major tournaments, including the U.S. and British Amateurs and the Open, now referred to as the British Open, routinely defeating players who continued to use the gutta percha ball. In 1909, the golfers at the Merion Cricket Club formed a committee to study the impact of the Haskell

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[2] Kathy Case, Richard Kerr, "*Haverford Township: A (sorta) Brief History*," History of Haverford | The Township of Haverford, PA, accessed May 11, 2026.
[3] "*The History of Golf From Ancient Origins to Modern Day*," Under Armour Inc., The History of Golf: From Ancient Origins to Modern Fairways | Under Armour, accessed May 11, 2026.
[4] John R. Jenchura, "*U.S. Open at Merion: A history of Merion Golf Club,"* Mainline Media News, June 4, 2013, U.S. Open at Merion: A history of Merion Golf Club – Mainline Media News, accessed May 11, 2026.
[5] Jenchura, "*U.S. Open at Merion*."

ball and determined that their Haverford course was now too short to be challenging to golfers using the Haskell ball.[6]

The Club realized that it would be impossible to acquire land adjacent to its existing Haverford course sufficient to lengthen its holes and so, in 1910, decided to build a new course. It purchased a 120-acre tract of land, originally a farm, south of the Philadelphia & Western Railroad tracks on both sides of Ardmore Avenue in Ardmore. The seller, the Haverford Development Co., hoped the course would lure homebuyers to this then-rural area of Haverford Township.[7] The purchase of adjacent property brought the total footprint to 126 acres.[8]

The Club selected Hugh Wilson, a gifted amateur player but novice golf course architect, to design the new course. In the eyes of some, the property did not seem suitable for a golf course, with one local writer deeming it "worn-out farmland, none too well-adapted in dimension or topography for golf course purposes."[9] The absence of large earthmoving equipment forced the incorporation rather than removal of many of the property's existing features, including an old limestone quarry.[10]



Hugh Wilson, Merion Golf Club photo

[6] Jenchura, "*U.S. Open at Merion*."
[7] Frank Fitzpatrick, "*Merion's layout has evolved from its 19th-century origins*," Philadelphia Inquirer, June 7, 2013.
[8] Jenchura, "*U.S. Open at Merion*."
[9] Fitzpatrick, "*Merion's layout*."
[10] Fitzpatrick, "*Merion's layout*."

Wilson overcame these issues and succeeded admirably in the design of the course. Opened in September 1912 and now referred to as Merion East, the course was soon regarded as one of the finest in the country.[11] A report on its opening opined that "among experts, [it is] considered the finest inland links in the country."[12] In 1941, United States Golf Association (USGA) president Richard S. Tufts described it as a "model test of golfing skill and judgment for future architects to copy."[13] Golf Digest has consistently rated Merion East among America's top 10 golf courses, and no less a golf luminary than Jack Nicklaus has said that, "acre for acre, [it] may be the best test of golf in the world."[14]



Merion Golf Club photo



Merion East's unique wicker baskets, used on the greens instead of flags; Philadelphia Inquirer photo

[11] The Cricket Club's original Haverford course officially closed upon opening of the Ardmore course, but it was still used for another year. "*Merion History,*" Merion Golf Club, Merion History - Merion Golf Club, accessed May 11, 2026.
[12] "*Club Information*," Merion Golf Club, Club Information - Merion Golf Club, accessed July 15, 2026.
[13] "*Merion History*." The USGA is the national governing body for golf in the United States and Mexico. Founded in 1894, it provides a unified handicap system, sets rules of golf and equipment standards alongside the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, and conducts 15 national championships, including the U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open.
[14] "*Club Information*." Notably, especially from a physical fitness perspective, Merion East is a walking course. Only those with a medical necessity are allowed to use golf carts. "*Merion History*."

A substantial increase in membership caused the Merion Cricket Club to acquire an additional 122 acres of land for a second course, about a half-mile from the East course. Hugh Wilson again served as the architect. On May 30, 1914, what came to be referred to as the Merion West course opened. Upon completion of the West course, Merion became the first club in the nation to have two 18-hole championship layouts.[15]

Financial difficulties during the Great Depression led the Cricket Club to form a committee to consider separating the golf club from the Cricket Club, a move the committee eventually recommended. The recommendation was adopted and on March 1, 1942, the Merion Golf Club was formed, independent of the Cricket Club.[16]

Merion Golf Club has held more USGA championships than any other course in the country (20 as of August 2026), and it is the future site of the 2030 U.S. Open, 2034 U.S. Women's Open, 2040 U.S. Open, 2046 U.S. Women's Open and 2050 U.S. Open. The 1930 U.S. Amateur held at Merion East holds an esteemed place in golf history, as golf legend Bobby Jones became the first and only player to win the "grand slam" of golf in the same year, sweeping all four major championships (the British Open, the British Amateur, the U.S. Open and the U.S. Amateur). Both the East Course and West Course are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the club was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1992.[17]



[15] "*Club Information*."
[16] Jenchura, "*U.S. Open at Merion*."
[17] "*Haverford Heritage Trail, Site 13, Merion Golf Club*," Haverford Her. Trail-Site 13, accessed July 16, 2026. In the off-season Merion serves as a recreational facility in another manner – sledding at the club is a cherished local tradition, with nearby residents often taking advantage of the course's slopes after a heavy snowfall.

Bobby Jones receiving USGA Amateur Championship trophy in 1930 outside the Merion East clubhouse; Haverford Township Historical Society photo

Merion Golf Club holds a storied place in the history of golf in the United States. Its reputation is not completely unblemished, however. In 1990, the Shoal Creek club in Alabama, host of that year's PGA tournament, acknowledged excluding Blacks as members. As a result, the USGA adopted a rule requiring host clubs to demonstrate that their membership policies do not discriminate against women and minorities. Merion had been selected to host the 1994 U.S. Women's Open but withdrew because it could not promise to have minority members by that time.[18] Although club records are private, Merion must have come into compliance with the USGA rule because it has since hosted, and as noted is slated to host, a number of championship tournaments since 1994.

Llanerch Country Club

Although not as prominent in golf annals, Llanerch Country Club dates back nearly as far as Merion Golf Club and has also hosted a major USGA tournament.

Golf was played on the present site of Llanerch Country Club under various names from 1895 to 1916. The first attempt to formally organize a club took the form of a notice in the American Cricketer Magazine dated January 15, 1902:

> A proposed corporation, to be called the Delaware County Country Club, has sent [a] description and invitation to a number of golfers in the city to enlist their support in the maintenance of a semi-public course on the West Chester Pike, within easy access of the city by rail and trolley. Low dues, a good course [and a] large clubhouse … are promised.[19]

On May 19, 1902 the Delaware County Country Club was admitted to membership in the USGA, and in June 1903 the club opened an 18-hole golf course.[20] The club then changed its name in April 1904 to the Delaware County Field Club (DCFC), rosily described as:

> A country club with grounds covering ninety-three acres, which are doubly attractive from the fact of their being charmingly natural – being dotted with clusters of grand old shade trees, and springs of crystal water that feed the small brooklets running here and there across the great stretches of green rolling turf on which are the 18-hole golf course, its old mansion of a Club House [and] comfortable locker

[18] Mike Jensen, "*Merion club withdraws as host of golf tourney*," Philadelphia Inquirer, March 20, 1991, p. 1-A.
[19] Wilbur B. Germain, Club Historian, "*History of Llanerch Country Club*," unpublished, June 25, 1987; Robert F. O'Neill, "*Golf club survives the rough*," Philadelphia Inquirer, March 6, 1994, pp. MD1- 2.
[20] O'Neill, "*Golf club survives the rough*," p. MD1.

> rooms with hot and cold showers. All in all it's a delightful Field Club where one can indulge in Tennis, Cricket or Golf.[21]

Seven years later the DCFC combined with the Athletic Club of Philadelphia, with both clubs operating under the name "Athletic Club of Philadelphia." This arrangement ended in 1914 and the DCFC changed its name to Bon Air Country Club.[22]

In September 1918, a fire destroyed the Bon Air clubhouse. The club was reorganized and in May 1919 newly chartered as the Llanerch Country Club. The golf course was progressively lengthened over the next several years and eventually expanded to 27 holes.[23]

In 1933 the club hired prominent professional golfer (and eventual World Golf Hall of Fame member) Denny Shute as its golf pro. Shute had won several tournaments and was a member of the U.S. Ryder Cup team in 1932 and 1933.[24] In his first year as Llanerch club pro, Shute won the British Open and as a result spent most of the next few seasons away from Llanerch.[25]

Shute was replaced in 1935 by Marty Lyons, a former caddy (beginning at the age of 9) and assistant pro at the course. Lyons was prominent in local and national golf circles and, through his influence, at least one professional golf tournament was held at the club each year between 1935 and 1946, including the Philadelphia Inquirer Invitation Tournament in 1945, the seventh of eleven consecutive tournaments won that year by legendary player Byron Nelson.[26]

After World War II, the club sold nine holes of its property for development of new homes, and the course was re-designed from 27 back to 18 holes. In what is likely the club's proudest moment, it hosted the 1958 PGA Championship, a tournament that marked a turning point in golf history as the first to transition from match play to stroke (or medal) play to allow for television broadcasting.[27]

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[21] Germain, "*History of Llanerch Country Club*."
[22] Germain, "*History of Llanerch Country Club*."
[23] "*Llanerch Country Club*," top100golfcourses.com, Llanerch Country Club | United States | Top 100 Golf Courses, accessed May 11, 2026; O'Neill, "*Golf club survives the rough*," p. MD2.
[24] The Ryder Cup a biennial men's golf competition between teams from Europe and the United States.
[25] Germain, "*History of Llanerch Country Club*." Shute also won the 1936 and 1937 PGA Championships, becoming the last player to win this prestigious tournament consecutively until Tiger Woods in 1999 and 2000.
[26] Germain, "*History of Llanerch Country Club;*" O'Neill, "*Golf club survives the rough*," p. MD2; "*Llanerch Country Club*," St. Joseph's University, Llanerch Country Club - Facilities - Saint Joseph's University, accessed May 11, 2026.
[27] Match play is a head-to-head golf format where a player or team competes against an opponent to win individual holes rather than counting total strokes over 18 holes. The goal is to win more holes than the opponent, and a match ends when one player leads by more holes than remain. Medal play, or stroke play, is a format in which the winner is determined by the lowest total number of strokes taken over one or more rounds, with every shot counting toward the final score.

Today, Llanerch Country Club is the home course of the Saint Joseph University golf team. It is also Haverford Township's only remaining country club.



Llanerch Country Club, Haverford Township Historical Society photo

Pennsylvania Railroad Golf Club

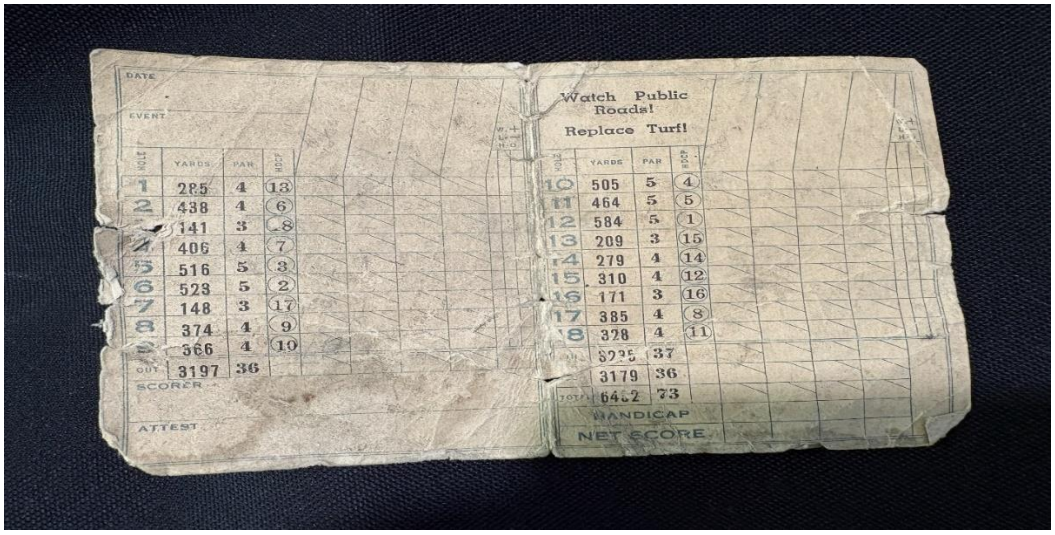
In the early 1900s the Pennsylvania Railroad created a plan to relieve growing congestion on its main line between Philadelphia and Harrisburg. Called the Darby Creek Low Grade Line, the railroad sought to divert freight trains onto an alternate route that would also provide a more efficient, less steep gradient up from Philadelphia. The line was never built, but the railroad had acquired 70 percent of the necessary land, including a large triangular tract bounded by Manoa Road, Earlington Road (then called Lewis Road) and Valley Road (later Juniper Road).[28]

The railroad developed this parcel into a golf course, the Pennsylvania Railroad Golf Club, in 1923 as an amenity for its workers. In 1928, however, the railroad purchased 135 acres in Malvern to build a larger and grander course. The original course continued to operate while the new course was being built. On May 30, 1929, the Malvern course

[28] "*Haverford Heritage Trail Site 32: The Glen*," Haverford Her. Trail-Site 32, accessed May 11, 2026.

opened, with the original Manoa Road course continuing as a public course into the 1940s.[29]





Original Pennsylvania Golf Club layout and scorecard; from the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society

[29] "*History*," Chester Valley Country Club, Private Golf Clubs Malvern, PA - Chester Valley Golf Club, accessed June 9, 2026; Jeff Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow – The Philadelphia Area's Lost Golf Courses*," Lost Courses.pub, accessed June 9, 2026, p. 3. The Malvern course was originally known as the Pennsylvania Railroad Country Club but changed its name to the Chester Valley Golf Club in the late 1940s.

The Pennsylvania Railroad eventually sold the original Pennsylvania Golf Club property on Manoa Road to Warner West Corporation, which subdivided it into the new neighborhoods of Chatham Park and Chatham Glen.[30]

Brookline Square Club

Not long after the inauguration of the Pennsylvania Golf Club, a crowd estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000 people participated in events celebrating the establishment of the Brookline Square Club, a magnificent new country club developed by members of the Freemasons on a 118-acre plot along Mill Road adjacent to the new Haverford High School on Darby Road (now Haverford Middle School). Public officials, including Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick of Philadelphia, former Pennsylvania Governor William Sproul (an avid golfer), William I. Schaffer, Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and William Taylor, District Attorney of Delaware County, spoke at the event, as did Ruth Malcomson, the reigning Miss America.[31]

The Brookline course measured more than 6,100 yards in length and offered, in the words of club pro Frank Coltart, "all the mental and physical hazards the most exacting golfer would demand."[32] In addition to the golf course, Brookline Square Club featured tennis courts, a swimming pool, baseball diamonds and a huge clubhouse with a bowling alley, dining and ballrooms and an auditorium that could seat well over 1,000 people.[33]

Unfortunately, the club was short-lived. Deeply in debt, the club's members sold the property to the Thomas Conway Corporation in 1926, prompting a relocation to a 118-acre plot in Marple Township. There they established a new club, the Paxon Hollow Country Club, and constructed a new golf course. The club briefly changed its name to White Manor Country Club between 1948 and 1962 but reverted to the Paxon Hollow name and is now owned and operated as a public facility by Marple Township.[34]

The Brookline Square clubhouse survived the 1926 transfer and was eventually acquired and used by the Haverford Township school district until being demolished in the 1950s.[35] During World War II it may have housed members of the U.S. Signal Corps, responsible for establishing and managing communication and information systems for use by the

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[30] "*Haverford 2025*," Haverford Township, June 9, 2025, p. 121; *Haverford Heritage Trail Site 32: The Glen*; Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 3; Kathy Case, Richard Kerr, "*Haverford Township: A (sorta) Brief History*."
[31] Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 1; Staff, "*Palatial Club House and Links Will Boost Game in Delaware Co.*," Philadelphia Inquirer, Nov. 25, 1923.
[32] Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 1.
[33] Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 1.
[34] Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 1; "*Club History*," Paxon Hollow Country Club, Paxon Hollow Country Club | Public Golf Course | Broomall Pennsylvania, accessed June 4, 2026.
[35] Silverman, "*Here today, gone tomorrow,*" p. 1.

armed forces.[36] The present Haverford High School occupies a portion of the former Brookline Square property.



Brookline Square Club, (J. Victor Dallin Aerial Survey collection (Accession 1970.200)). 1926-10-04. 1970200_01985. Audiovisual Collections, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807

TOWNSHIP RECREATION CENTERS AND ICE ARENA

Although not involving the purchase of an existing facility similar to Marple Township's acquisition of Paxon Hollow golf course, the model of public ownership of often privately held sports and recreation facilities (or the land on which they have been built) has been followed in Haverford Township as well.

The Skatium

The idea of a public ice rink germinated in Haverford Township after the Philadelphia Flyers joined the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1967 and the Haverford High School hockey team was formed in 1969, initially playing at other local rinks. The high school's

[36] Reports of local women's clubs during the war referred to invitations to members of the Signal Corps, stationed at the former Brookline Square Club, to attend performances and other social events. "*War Service Report, Annual, 1943-1944*," Brookline Women's Club, in the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society.

first hockey coach, Ed Galli, was instrumental in the initial efforts to convince township officials to build a facility in the township.[37]

Eventually, as the idea gained momentum, the matter was taken up by the Haverford Township Board of Commissioners. Interest was strong but numerous issues required resolution. At a public meeting on May 14, 1973, for example, while no one spoke out in opposition to the rink, some residents objected to its proposed location at Veteran's Field on Darby Road.[38]

A few months later, having decided to proceed with the project (on the Veteran's Park site), the Board of Commissioners appointed the first members of a new Ice Skating Rink Citizens Advisory Board. The advisory board's initial priorities included supervision of the construction of the rink in a manner conforming to ecological standards, recommending policies and practices in the administration and operation of the rink and advising on the hiring of a rink manager.[39]

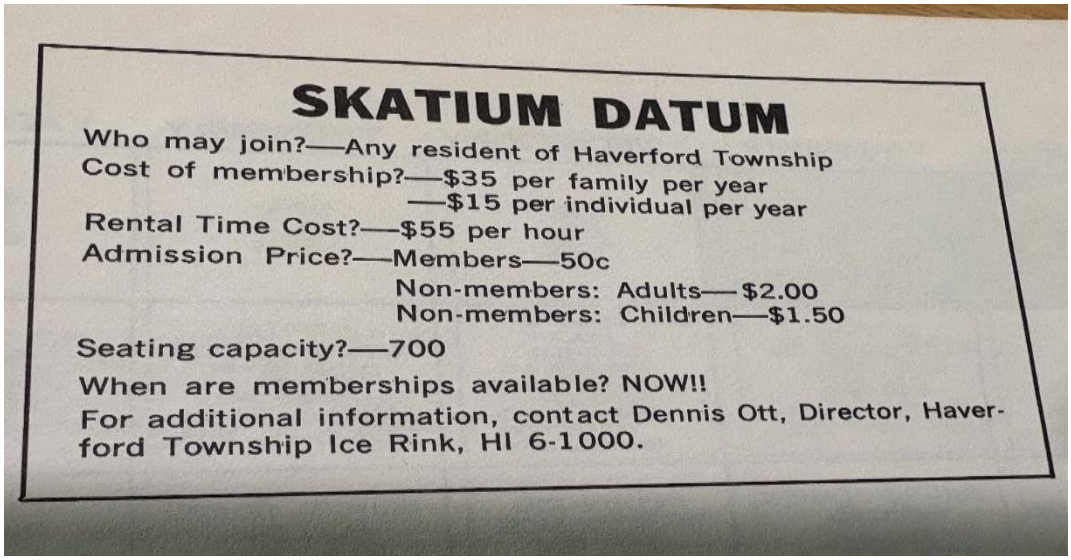
Construction of the facility, eventually named the Skatium, began in January 1974 and was completed later that year. The building cost $1.5 million, and it features an NHL-sized rink, quite fitting as the township, in a contemporaneous communication to residents, described ice hockey as "America's fastest growing sport."[40] The name "Skatium" was selected through a township-wide contest, won by Michael Steinberg, a 12-year-old Havertown resident. Other suggested names included Hav-a-Skate; Ice-Ford; Haverink; Snoopy's Rink; The Ice Darby; ManDarb Rink; and Veteran's Rink.

The Skatium opened on September 20, 1974 to large crowds, and township residents were offered favorable rates for membership:

[37] Doug Humes, "*HHS ice hockey legends inducted into sports hall of fame*," Facebook post, Nov. 21, 2023. Humes is a local historian.
[38] Helen Gallagher, "*Residents Protest Rink*," The Havertown Leader, May 16, 1973.
[39] Annette Steigelfest, "*Citizens Named to Ice Rink Committee*," The Havertown Leader, Aug. 15, 1973. The original Advisory Board still exists, now simply called the Ice Rink Advisory Board.
[40] Haverford Township Skatium Official Website, Official Skatium Website | The Township of Haverford, PA, accessed May 11, 2026; "*Skatium – Cool Summer for All*," Haverford Township Newsletter, Summer 1974, No. 3.



From the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society



From the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society

In addition to open skating, the Skatium was initially home to the Haverford High School Hockey Club, the Intercounty Scholastic High School League (ICSHL) and a figure skating club. It now hosts numerous high school hockey teams, including Haverford, Archbishop Carroll, Cardinal O'Hara, St. Joe's Prep and others in the ICSHL, and teams from the Haverford School and Episcopal Academy, as well as the Haverford Ice Hockey Club, the Haverford Hawks youth hockey club and the Crossroads Figure Skating Club.

It also offers summer skating camps and instructional clinics for both figure skating and hockey.[41]

The Skatium has had a number of directors, notably including Dave "The Hammer" Schultz in the early-to-mid 1990s. Schultz was a legendary “enforcer” for the Philadelphia Flyers, who had come to be known as the "Broad Street Bullies," and is often remembered for his record-setting 472 penalty minutes in the 1974-75 NHL season. During his tenure at the Skatium, he led hockey camps and mentored young players.[42]



Dave Schultz. Wikipedia photo

The Skatium was meant to be self-sustaining but it has both lost and made money from time to time, and it relies upon funding from the township’s general budget to support major renovations, repairs and operations. The original construction mortgage was paid off, however, in 1994.[43]

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[41] “*Skatium Celebrates its 25th anniversary*,” News of Delaware County, Haverford Edition, Oct. 20, 1999; Haverford Township Skatium Official Website, Official Skatium Website | The Township of Haverford, PA. Whereas the Skatium has provided excellent opportunities for ice hockey, the same cannot be said for efforts to promote field hockey in the township. In 1975 the Haverford Township Board of Commissioners unanimously voted against a proposed field hockey court to be constructed on Karakung Drive following area residents’ concerns about traffic problems and other issues. Suzanne Fatow, “*Residents Cross-Check Rink as Commissioners Change Mind; Karakung Hockey Site Rejected*,” The Havertown Leader, Nov. 19, 1975, p. 3.

[42] Jackie Spiegel, “*The Original Bullies: Where are they now*”, Philadelphia Inquirer, May 22, 2024.

[43] “*Skatium Celebrates its 25th anniversary*;” Joan Toenniessen, “*Can the Skatium’s Financial Woes be Checked*,” News of Delaware County, Nov. 27, 1975, p. 3.

The Community Recreation and Environmental Center

As discussed later in this article, in the early 1940s Haverford Township sought to fund the acquisition, through a bond issuance, of various parcels of privately owned land for conversion to public parks. Supporters of the bond proposal believed that, in view of the township's rapid development, the opportunity should be seized in part because sufficiently large parcels would likely never be available again.[44] Little could they have known that 60 years later the township would be presented with an opportunity to acquire, in one fell swoop, over *200* contiguous acres of land, now known as the Haverford Reserve, upon which the Community Recreation and Education Center (CREC) came to be built.

The history of the overall Haverford Reserve site is addressed more fully here.[45] For purposes of this article, the events relevant to development of the CREC began with the closing of the Haverford State Hospital, a psychiatric facility that occupied the site for over 30 years, in June 1998.

Closure of the facility gave rise to a long and sometimes contentious process to determine a new use for the property. The hospital's 209 acres represented the largest and last parcel of open space in Haverford Township,[46] presenting a rare opportunity to both preserve and re-purpose the tract. The hospital buildings and site languished for several years while a planning and community survey process played out.

Eventually, when the most appropriate uses for the property were determined, the township acquired it from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. After soliciting bids to develop the site, the Township selected a joint venture formed by Blue Bell-based Goldenberg Group and Malvern-based Pohlig Builders. Following sometimes contentious negotiation with the joint venture, an agreement was reached that, of the site's 209 acres, 123.7 acres would be preserved in perpetuity as open space and 45.5 acres would be available for active recreation.[47]

Active recreation refers to a structured individual or team activity that requires the use of special facilities, courses, fields or equipment.[48] In addition to preservation of the

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[44] The bond proposal was not the first attempt to find ways to acquire land for public parks. In the mid-1930s, the township's Park Board sought information on tax delinquent properties in Haverford Township that might be sold to satisfy the tax obligations and thus be available for purchase for use as parks.

[45] Steven S. Goodman, "*Haverford Township – A History*," Haverford Township Historical Society, March 23, 2025.

[46] Christian Davenport, "*Haverford Twp. Brimming with ideas for hospital land,*" Philadelphia Inquirer, September 28, 1997, p. B1; "*Vitali urges preservation of open space at Haverford State Hospital*," Legislative Report, Greg Vitali, State Representative, 166th District, April 1999.

[47] Letter to Haverford Township Residents from Stephen D'Emilio, President, and Andy Lewis, Vice President, Board of Commissioners, Haverford Township, Dec. 18, 2006. The remaining 40 acres were be developed with carriage homes and age-restricted condominiums.

[48] "*Meeting Community Needs, Protecting Human Health and the Environment*," United States Environmental Protection Agency, REPORT: MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS, PROTECTING HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT, accessed May 6, 2026. Active recreation contrasts with passive

dedicated open space, several playing fields and an accessible playground, along with other amenities – collectively the "Community Park at Haverford Reserve," subsequently renamed "Andy Lewis Community Park" following Commissioner Lewis's passing in 2021 – were built or improved.

The CREC was also constructed on the Haverford Reserve property and opened its doors in June 2012, offering additional opportunities for active recreation. The CREC is a 35,000 square-foot facility that encompasses an indoor track, double gym with basketball and pickleball courts, fitness center and walking track (along with an environmental nature area, multi-purpose rooms and kitchen facilities).



Haverford Township Community Recreation & Environmental Center – Haverford Township photo

The CREC's broad mission includes provision of township-owned indoor space to serve a wide range of ages and recreational interests, while also taking advantage of Haverford Reserve's natural beauty, providing opportunities to improve residents' health, and serving as a learning center for environmental stewardship.[49]

The YMCA

Like the CREC, the Haverford Area YMCA, located on Eagle Road in Havertown, was also constructed on a site that had an entirely different, and in this case tortured, history.

recreation, which refers to low-impact or low-energy activities that focus on relaxation or enjoyment of nature and do not require prepared facilities like sports fields or pavilions.

[49] "*CREC and Fitness Information*," Haverford Township, CREC & Fitness Information | The Township of Haverford, PA |, accessed June 23, 2026.

Because of that difficult history, although the YMCA is not owned by Haverford Township, the township does own the land upon which it sits.

The YMCA site was previously owned by the Philadelphia Chewing Gum Company, upon which was situated a 200,000 square foot factory. The factory was located across the street from a wood preservation business known as National Wood Preservers (NWP), established in 1947, which used a variety of chemicals in its operations. Primary among them was pentachlorophenol, referred to as PCP (not to be confused with the illicit drug with the same acronym), a synthetic compound characterized by high toxicity and slow biodegradation. For many years NWP dumped oils containing PCP into a well near Eagle and Lawrence Roads, contaminating the groundwater under NWP's site and nearby properties, including the chewing gum factory.[50]

After almost two decades of containment and remediation activity overseen by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources and, eventually, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the EPA added the site to its National Priorities List in 1983, making it eligible for investigation and cleanup under the federal Superfund program.[51] Although cleanup efforts continue to this day, years ago they had progressed sufficiently that the site became eligible for a program called Superfund Redevelopment, pursuant to which the EPA works with communities to help return Superfund sites to productive use.[52]

The YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity, working with Haverford Township, proposed to redevelop a portion of the site pursuant to this program. To facilitate this project, in 2008 the township acquired the 6.5-acre site of the chewing gum factory, which had closed in 2003, by eminent domain and in 2010 entered into a 25-year ground lease for the property with the YMCA, upon which the latter would build a community recreation center.[53]

The new YMCA building, called the Haverford Area YMCA, opened in 2013. The 75,000 square foot facility, constructed at a cost of $22.5 million, includes a multi-lane lap pool, a warm water recreational/therapy pool and a shallow children's pool, a gymnasium, wellness center, locker rooms and an indoor track, among other amenities. In 2015, the

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[50] Steven S. Goodman, "*History – and Future – of the Havertown Superfund Site*," Haverford Township Historical Society, Superfund-Site.pdf, accessed June 22, 2026, p. 2.
[51] "*Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis*," presentation by the United States Environmental Protection Agency at a Haverford Township public meeting, February 23, 2023. The entire Superfund site encompasses approximately 12 to 15 acres, including the former chewing gum factory and current YMCA site.
[52] "*Superfund Redevelopment Basics*," United States Environmental Protection Agency, https://www.epa.gov/superfund-redevelopment/superfund-redevelopment-basics, accessed Nov. 19, 2024.
[53] Goodman, "*History – and Future – of the Havertown Superfund Site*," p. 6; Lois Puglionesi, "*Haverford approves YMCA lease*," Daily Times, March 20, 2010.

EPA conferred its Excellence in Site Reuse award, recognizing extraordinary results in revitalizing and reusing formerly contaminated sites, on the Haverford Area YMCA.[54]



Haverford Area YMCA - United States Environmental Protection Agency photo

SWIMMING POOLS

Construction of the YMCA and its three pools actually featured in the most recent episode of a long-running drama regarding the desirability of a public swimming pool in Haverford Township. Notwithstanding frequent requests, there are no public pools in the township, although not for lack of effort by interested residents. The township does, however, have several private swimming options.

A Municipal Pool

Although expressions of interest in a public swimming pool likely date back further, numerous efforts have been made since the 1960s to persuade township officials to construct at least one municipal pool. An open letter from a Havertown resident to "All Taxpayers of Haverford Township" in September 1969 requested a set-aside of funds received from a sale of land by the township to the Karakung Swim Club (discussed further below) for the construction of two public pools in the township. In early 1970, an "ad hoc committee for Public Pools for Haverford Township" formed to advocate for the

[54] Goodman, "*History – and Future – of the Havertown Superfund Site*," p. 6. Although deemed safe to build and occupy the structure, the YMCA took further precautionary measures by installing a state-of-the-art vapor intrusion protection system to prevent any potentially harmful vapors from contaminated groundwater from entering the building. The YMCA also incorporated sustainability features, including LED exterior lighting, a rain recovery system for lawn and plant irrigation, and "green" recycled floor material in the lobby and hallways.

construction of one or more public pools.[55] In 1974, a group of Haverford Township residents, armed with petitions from approximately 900 township residents, also requested construction of a public swimming pool.[56] In each instance, no action was taken.

More recently, the issue arose in connection with development of the Haverford Reserve. When the township surveyed residents about potential uses of the former Haverford State Hospital property, respondents ranked a swimming pool highly, immediately after walking trails and bike paths and ahead of several other alternatives.[57] Some residents advocated for construction of one, or possibly two, public pools – one for recreational and the other for competitive swimming.[58] In keeping with this resident interest, the Haverford Township school board, which had set aside $2.6 million in 1994 for eventual construction of a pool, also expressed interest in building one on the hospital site.[59] The ultimate master plan for the Haverford Reserve, however, did not include a pool.

At approximately, the same time, a grass-roots organization called SPLASH (Support a Pool Lobby for All Swimmers in Haverford Township), with over 2,400 members, also advocated for construction of both recreational and competitive pools. The group's fallback option was one six-lane multi-use pool for both competition and recreation. SPLASH's efforts lost momentum, however, when the township and the YMCA began discussions, addressed above, regarding the new YMCA facility which, as noted, eventually resulted in the construction of three pools.

In February 2024, Haverford Township adopted its updated Parks, Recreation and Open Space plan. Although the PROS outlines future water and adventure play amenities, it focuses on updating existing park spaces rather than proposing a new, full-scale municipal swimming pool.

Private Membership Pools

The absence of a public pool in the township does not mean that township residents lack local swimming options. In addition to the YMCA pools, accessible through membership

[55] Barbara Short, "*To All Taxpayers of Haverford Township*," Sept. 27, 1969; Agenda, Ad hoc Committee for Public Pools for Haverford Township, Jan. 5, 1970. Both are in the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society.
[56] News Staff, "*A Public Pool for Haverford*?", News of Delaware County, Nov. 21, 1974, p. 6.
[57] "*Survey Report for Haverford State Hospital Property*," compiled by The Haverford Township Authority, September 15, 1998, p. 27.
[58] Rosalie Pressman, "*Pool issue remains divided in Havertown*," Main Line Times and Suburban, Feb. 5, 2008.
[59] Andrew Rice, "*Survey: Use vacant hospital for recreation; Haverford must have a plan before the state will consider turning over the campus to the township,*" Philadelphia Inquirer, September 16, 1998, p. B1; Davenport, "*Haverford Twp. Brimming with ideas for hospital land,"* pp. B1, MD10.

or day passes, three private, membership-based pools are located in Haverford Township.

Hilltop Swim Club

Founded in 1955, the Hilltop Swim Club is a private, seasonal outdoor club operating a swimming pool and related facilities on Hilltop Road in Havertown. The club features an L-shaped main pool spanning six lanes, as well as a 1-meter diving board and 12-foot diving well, a separately fenced baby pool ranging from 6 to 18 inches in depth and a water slide.



Hilltop Swim Club photo

Karakung Swim Club

Perceiving a need for children to have an additional place for summer activity, in 1964 several families in the Oakmont area of Havertown formed the Karakung Swim Club and acquired, from the township, land across from the Little League ball field on Karakung Drive on which to construct it. Supervised by club board members who worked in the trades, construction was completed and the 25-meter, 6-lane main pool opened in 1965. The club also features a diving board and diving well, a water slide and a separate pool for young children. Unlike the Hilltop Swim Club, Karakung Swim Club has always been designated for use only by Haverford Township residents.[60]

[60] Jamie Hawthorn, Vince DiFabio, "*History of Karakung Swim Club*," Karakung Swim Club History - Google Docs, accessed June 4. 2026.



Karakung Swim Club pool; Facebook photo

Llanerch Country Club

The amenities of Llanerch Country Club, discussed earlier, also include a 25-yard pool and a dedicated splash park. These facilities, available to club members, underwent a major overhaul and modernization in 2026.

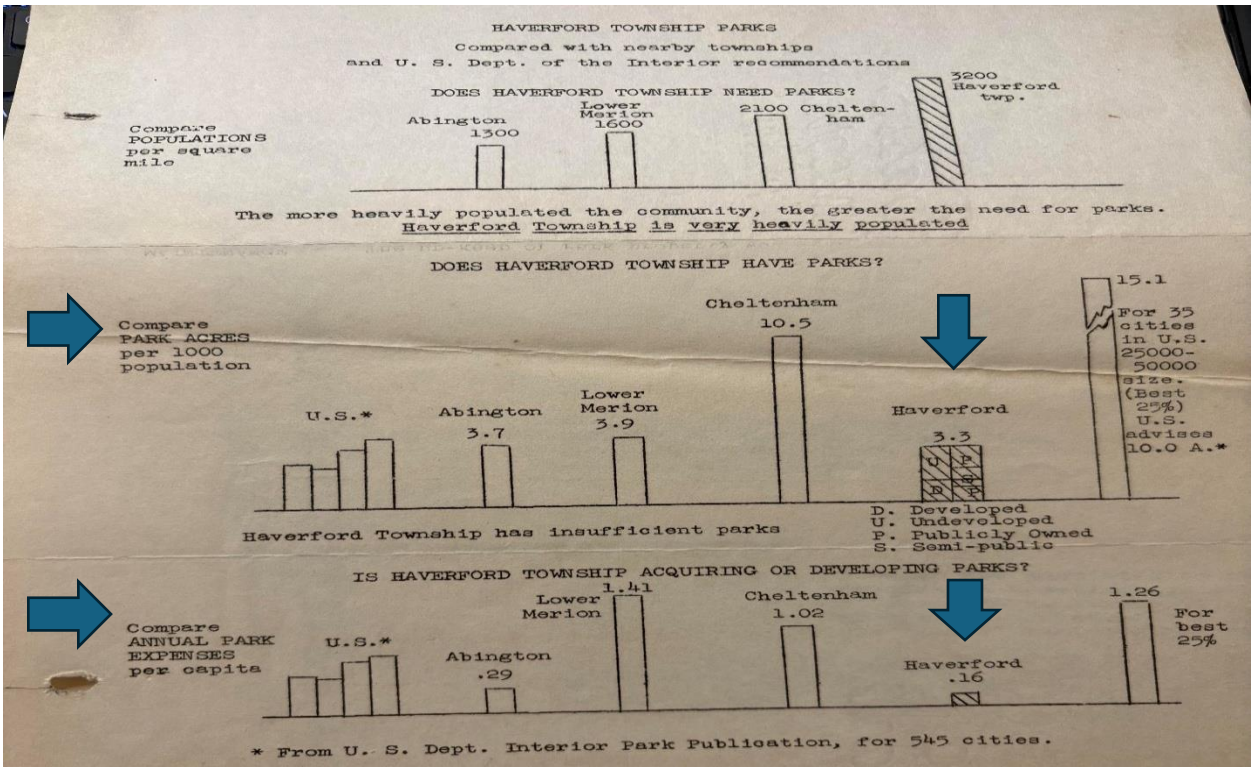
PARKS, BALL FIELDS, TENNIS COURTS AND PLAY STRUCTURES

Ninety percent of U.S. adults say that parks and recreation are an important local government service.[61] Considering the health and other benefits, this is hardly surprising – people who have more access to green environments, such as parks and trails, tend to be more physically active than those with limited access.[62] As discussed further below, Haverford Township has an abundance of parks, many of them featuring ball fields, basketball and tennis courts, play structures, walking trails and open green space, along with other amenities.

Establishment of parks was not, however, always performed by the township. Parks began appearing in Haverford Township by 1920, but typically at the instigation and through the direct efforts of local civic associations representing various neighborhoods. The township did not open its first park until 1933 and did not formally take responsibility for local public parks and playgrounds until November 1944, when the Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance establishing the legal foundation for governing, maintaining and supervising a park and recreation system.[63]

[61] "*Parks and Recreation is Essential*," National Recreation and Parks Association, Parks and Recreation Is Essential | National Recreation and Park Association, accessed July 3, 2026.
[62] "*Parks and Recreation is Essential*."
[63] Kathy Case, Richard Kerr, "*Haverford Township: A (sorta) Brief History.*"

Parks and community recreation were topics of national interest during and immediately after World War II and simultaneously the subject of considerable discussion in Haverford Township. Many residents strongly believed that the township lacked sufficient parkland and attendant sports and recreational facilities and lagged behind neighboring communities in this regard:



From the files of the Haverford Township Historical Society

In an open letter to township residents in 1943, the Haverford Township Civic Council said:

> The inadequacy of present park and recreation facilities in Haverford Township has long been apparent to our Park Board. To get unbiased advice, they [the Park Board] obtained a full and comprehensive report from the National Recreation Association of New York … This report emphasizes the definite need of additional areas for such purposes for each community of our Township.[64]

These sentiments were echoed by the Park Board itself:

[64] Open letter from the Haverford Township Civic Council "to every resident of Haverford Township," October 1942.

> The Haverford Township Park Board throughout its nearly 15 years' existence has been aware of the inadequacies of the township's present park system for such a rapidly expanding community as Haverford…
>
> The Park Board study and the National Recreation Association survey emphasize that our Township is 'rapidly becoming urbanized,' that 'parks, playfields and playgrounds are lacking to an unusual degree, their acreage and number falling far below recognized standards,' standards that in the words of the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs 'reflect to an unusual degree the cultural character of a community' … Great emphasis is laid on the fact that 'in the absence of early action these natural advantages may be lost permanently to the community.'[65]

No less a Haverford Township luminary than H. Gates Lloyd, Jr., part of a prominent family of township benefactors, weighed in on the matter:

> Our township is already far behind her neighbouring townships who have already established park and recreational programs, and it is high time we took definite steps to correct this situation. A first-class township, located in the suburbs of a large city, must in future years have adequate parks and playgrounds if the community is to remain suburban … A start must be made at some time, as our future citizens will certainly expect to have properly maintained parks and playfields, just as they now have ash collection, police protection, street lighting, etc.[66]

A proposed $200,000 bond issuance to fund the acquisition of private land for public parks appeared on the local ballot in November 1942. Although, as noted, the need for parks was widely recognized, the bond matter was hotly debated, with opponents arguing that the timing of the proposed bond issuance, and the incremental tax increase it would engender (between $1.82 and $2.10 per year for a house assessed at $2,800), was inopportune or even unpatriotic when the country was in the midst of a war. Proponents countered with a letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the National Recreation Association, on whose survey the Haverford Township plan was based:

> Now that we are at war, we are fortunate in having this rich resource of recreation to give us physical, mental and spiritual power for the titanic task at hand … I am greatly encouraged by the reports received of what communities are doing through their local governments and voluntary community committees.[67]

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[65] "*Report of Haverford Township Park Board, Studies and Recommendations of Existing and Proposed Park and Recreation Facilities*," Haverford Township Park Board, October 1942, p. 1.
[66] Letter from H. Gates Lloyd, Jr. to Robert H. Harold, Publicity Director, Haverford Township Civic Council, Feb. 1, 1943, p. 1.
[67] "*Opposition to Haverford Recreation Bond Issue Looms: Township Civic Council Plans Door-to-Door Drive*," Darby News, Oct. 22, 1942, p. 2.

The bond proposal was defeated, however, leading supporters to doubt that a similar opportunity to promote park development would present itself again:

> ,,, the past demonstrates clearly that there has never been a better time; and experience fairly shouts that there may never be another such opportunity to invest in real, lasting values when pocketbooks can support such values – as they can now. Financial conditions actually point to today as THE ONLY POSSIBLE TIME for such an investment.[68]

These fears, although understandable at a time Haverford Township was experiencing rapid growth and significantly increased use of land for residential and commercial purposes, ultimately proved unfounded. In 1957 the Township's Parks and Recreation Department reported:

> The acreage of recreational areas increased greatly from 1940 to the present time … Township-directed recreation and park areas increased from 69 acres [in 1940] to 257.9 acres in 1957, or an increase of 273%.[69]

As a result of continued development efforts, including the creation of the Haverford Reserve discussed above, Haverford Township now has 33 parks spread over 400 acres within its 10 square-mile area:

Andy Lewis Community Park (Haverford Reserve); Bailey Park; Beechwood Park; Brookline Park; Cadwalader Tract; Carroll Park; Chatham Glen Park; Darby Creek Valley Park; Elwell Field; Foster Tract; Genthert Field; Gest Tract; Grange Field; Grasslyn Park; Highland Farms Park; Hilltop Park (includes Hillside Park); Jack McDonald Memorial Field; Karakung Field; Lawrence Road Park; Llanerch Crossing; Lynnewood Park; Merion Gold Manor Park; Merry Place; Merwood Park; Normandy Park; Paddock Farms Park; Polo Field; Powder Mill Valley Park; Preston Field; Richland Farms Park; Thompson Tract; Veterans Park; Westgate Hills Park.[70]

Most of these parks feature active and passive sports and recreation amenities or facilities, including baseball, soccer, pickleball, tennis and basketball courts or fields and trails and other areas for walking, hiking, running and biking.

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[68] Editorial, Darby News, Oct. 22, 1942.
[69] "*Fun Time in Haverford Township, 1957*," Haverford Township Parks and Recreation Department.
[70] *PROS*, p. 25.



Haverford Township Parks Map, PROS, p. 26

Although all of the township's parkland formerly served a different purpose, some of the parks have particularly interesting historical antecedents. Grange Park, for example, takes its name from the adjacent 300-year old Grange Estate. Originally a 548-acre tract deeded to Welsh Quaker Henry Lewis in 1682, the property hosted George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette in the years shortly after the Revolutionary War. The tract was eventually divided and Haverford Township purchased its remaining 10 acres in 1974 to preserve the Grange mansion while turning the surrounding grounds into today's public park. Grange Park features tennis courts, pickleball courts, two dedicated baseball/softball fields, a basketball court, playground areas, slides, climbing zones and swing sets.

Polo Field Park's name is similarly tied to the prior use of the property. George W. Childs Drexel, horse owner and breeder, publisher of the Philadelphia Public Ledger and son of the renowned banker A.J. Drexel, acquired much of the Haverford Township land along County Line Road up to Old Lancaster Road by 1892. In 1898 Drexel and others

chartered the Bryn Mawr Polo Club and constructed a polo field on a portion of the tract, with the first match played in 1900. Both the club and many of its members were prominent – the Strawbridge family of department store fame were club champions, as was Charles Randolph Snowden, a broker and son of the head of the Baldwin Locomotive Company, who owned an estate called "The Pines" across Railroad Avenue near the field. H. Gates Lloyd, mentioned earlier, eventually worked with Haverford Township to make the privately-owned Polo Field available perpetually for recreation.[71]

Karakung Field, with its upper and lower ball fields, is notable not necessarily for its own history but for its association with a beloved and historic organization, Little League Baseball, founded in 1939. Little League is the world's largest organized youth sports program, with approximately 2 million players in over 80 countries.[72] Karakung Field serves as a central hub for the Haverford Township Little League, founded in 1959 as the only official Little League-affiliated youth baseball program in Haverford Township.[73]

SCHOOL DISTRICT AND COMMERCIAL SPORTS AND ATHLETIC FACILITIES

By no means does the township have a monopoly over local athletic facilities. The School District of Haverford Township also administers sports facilities, fields and courts spanning 82 acres of public recreation and school land for use by the community, various youth sports organizations and, significantly, portions of the Township's recreation program. This joint township-school district approach stems from the early 1940s National Recreation Association survey of the township's park and recreation facilities mentioned earlier, which highlighted the desirability of coordinated development of school- and township-owned property for athletic and recreational purposes.[74] To this day the township's Parks and Recreation Board facilitates cooperation and joint use of the recreational services and facilities maintained and operated by both the township and the school district and makes recommendations and provides advice to the Township Manager, the Board of Commissioners, the School Board and the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation concerning the use and development of park and recreational facilities operated by the township and the school district.[75]

In addition to the publicly owned sports and recreation facilities in Haverford Township (and the YMCA located on publicly owned land), the township has a number of commercial facilities that contribute to its athletic tapestry. They include a bowling alley,

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[71] Kathy Case, "*Bryn Mawr Polo Field: A Green Space at the Center of our History*," Haverford Township Historical Society, Oct. 28, 2022, Bryn Mawr Polo Field- A Space at the Center of Our History, accessed June 4, 2026, pp. 5-6.
[72] "*Who We Are*," Little League Baseball, Who We Are - Little League, accessed July 3, 2026.
[73] "*About Haverford Township Little League*," Haverford Township Little League, About HTLL and Little League, accessed July 3, 2026.
[74] "*Fun Time in Haverford Township, 1957*."
[75] Haverford Township Code, Article XVII, §§ 4-510, 4-512 (2026).

which has been home to various leagues for bowlers throughout the township community, including the Brookline Bowling league from 1947 to approximately 1962 and the Coopertown Women's Bowling League from 1957 through at least 1982, and sports academies and training facilities hosting training programs, camps and clinics.

CONCLUSION

Sports facilities have played an important role in Haverford Township history, and sports history has been made at some of those facilities. Famous names and everyday township residents have competed, exercised, used and been employed by the township's athletic sites. The value of such facilities has long been recognized, and their number and variety have grown significantly, sometimes in unexpected ways or from quite different prior uses. Together they offer great opportunities for active and passive athletic activities and high-level competition throughout Haverford Township.