



Chapter 6: Recommendations



6.0 Recommendations and Action Items

As Washtenaw County continues to grow and evolve from what was historically a rural region defined by agriculture to a suburban community, the Parks and Recreation Commission seeks to address the changing needs of area residents. This includes the increased demand for new recreation facilities and programming and the need to maintain and improve existing facilities.

6.1 Basis for Action

Planning Process Summary

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Master Plan Update was developed by combining input generated during public forums and visioning workshops, during WCPRC work sessions and meetings and meetings with County Parks and Recreation staff. The consultant team used this information, along with the inventories and analyses of existing recreational facilities, demographic trends and natural resources to craft a Plan Update that establishes priority actions for the County Park system.

The recommendations and action items contained in this chapter are based on the input of the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, staff, park superintendents, County and municipal employees, officials and recreation providers, and park users. Input generation meetings were held at various times during 2003 (see Appendix B for meeting summaries). They are detailed below:

- Washtenaw County Parks Staff Visioning Meeting - May 2003
- Core Advisory Group Visioning Session - June 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Work Session - June 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Work Session - July 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Draft Plan Presentation - September 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks Superintendents Input Session - September 2003.

- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Master Plan Subcommittee Meeting - October 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Master Plan Subcommittee Meeting - November 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission Final Plan Presentation - December 2003
- Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission - Public Hearing - January 2004

Additional monthly meetings with Parks and Recreation department staff, including Parks Director Robert Tetens, Superintendent of Park Planning Tom Freeman and Park Planners Ray Essell and Richard Kent helped formulate and refine many of the observations and recommendations contained in the plan. Parks Commissioner Nelson Meade and Ray Essell contributed the Chapter 1: History.

To assist in the plan update, WCPRC commissioned a random telephone survey (see executive summary in Appendix A) in May 2003. Results of this survey, as well as a survey commissioned by the HCMA and the Detroit Area Study - an overall quality of life study done by researchers at the University of Michigan sponsored by 20 federal, state and local agencies - were used to aid in the development of action items contained in this report.

This update includes administrative, programming and facility recommendations. These recommendations establish a set of goals for the Parks and Recreation Commission over the next five years. Additionally, the recommendations will shape the vision for Washtenaw County and provide the focus for capital improvements, programming implementation and property acquisition over the next five years.

The recommendations and supporting action items are divided into two principal categories - program-wide recommendations and existing facility improvements. At current funding levels, the recommendations contained in this Plan Update cannot all be implemented in the 2004-2008 time frame of the Plan. Each set of recommendations is prioritized, as well as identified in the Five-year Capital Improvements schedule which follows Chapter 6.

6.2 Greenways and Trails

County residents have indicated that a county-wide system of non-motorized trails for bikes and pedestrians should be a high priority for WCPRC.

There is a need for a county-wide effort to develop a comprehensive non-motorized greenway and trail network in Washtenaw County that ultimately connects all County Parks to the major centers of population. There is a need to bring all governmental bodies including the State of Michigan, County Road Commission, local governments, HCMA and WCPRC together to better coordinate the creation of a county-wide trail network.

Greenways and Trails Action Items:

1. Work with municipalities, independent recreation providers, trail interest groups and public agencies to facilitate the development of a county-wide greenway network.
2. Continue to acquire land and/or trail easements to facilitate the completion of the Huron River Border-to-Border Trail.
3. Develop a County-wide Greenway and Trail plan.

6.3 Natural Areas and Environmental Quality

The population of Washtenaw County is projected to grow 39% between 2000 and 2030, while the number of households is projected to increase 49% during the same period. Undeveloped land and sensitive environmental areas will become increasingly scarce as the area develops. As a consequence, there will be greater demand for additional recreation space as the population expands. Growth rates in excess of 35% place a huge strain on the natural environment, particularly sensitive water resources and habitat.

The County has a rich and diverse collection of landscape ecosystems, flora and fauna. All of the parks, particularly the larger and more significant natural parks such as Park Lyndon,

Independence Lake, County Farm, Pierce Lake, Rolling Hills and Parker Mill, need full ecological inventories and Natural Resource Management Plans.

Natural Areas and Environmental Quality Action Items:

1. Acquire additional land for resource conservation and general recreational needs.
2. Develop an evaluation matrix to assess land that becomes available for acquisition.
3. Develop a water quality monitoring program in each park facility.
4. Explore the possibility of relying exclusively on Integrated Pest Management techniques for all county-owned parkland.
5. Develop Natural Resource Management Plans for all county-owned park land and existing facilities.
6. Prioritize full ecological (MNFI) audits for Park Lyndon, Sharon Mills, Osborne Mills, County Farm and Parker Mill parks.
7. Create or assign a staff position that is responsible for the development, implementation and coordination of park natural resource plans.
8. Create or train a maintenance crew devoted to combating invasive species and implementing resource management plans at all County parks.

6.4 Environmental and Cultural Education

Washtenaw County has rich and sensitive natural and historic resources. As mentioned in the previous section, the County's high growth rate has placed these areas at risk of development or loss. Education is a key component in

protecting these sensitive resources. Furthermore, as the County continues to develop, opportunities to observe and experience natural landscapes and historic sites are diminished.

Environmental and Cultural Education Action Items:

1. Explore opportunities to construct additional interpretive and educational facilities.
2. Improve interpretive facilities at existing parks.

6.5 Additional Facilities

The diverse population of Washtenaw County is reflected in the diversity of recreational activities that can be found in the County. However, many popular activities that are important recreational activities for large segments of the population have been, and continue to be, overlooked. Activities such as skateboarding and in-line skating have gained in popularity but have very limited opportunities within the County.

County Park facilities that have traditionally been primarily summer destinations may be able to be developed, managed and promoted for outdoor and extended season winter sports.

The majority of existing WCPARC facilities are located in the northern half of Washtenaw County. The Commission recognizes that, in response to the changing demographic make-up of Washtenaw County, there is a need to provide additional recreation programs and facilities in closer proximity to the growing population centers in the southern portion of the county.

In order to best serve the recreational needs of all County residents, it is of increasing importance to develop inter-jurisdictional partnerships to help reduce costs and maximize the recreational benefits for all County residents.

Additional Facilities Action Items :

1. Explore the possibility of developing an off-leash dog park facility in close proximity to the major population centers of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.
2. Upgrade all playgrounds to ensure barrier-free access.
3. Conduct a workshop with disabled users to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the park system and facilities and how the Parks and Recreation Commission can work to make the parks more user-friendly for disabled users.
4. Explore the possibility of purchasing additional land in “under-served” portions of the County for active recreation development.
5. Create an annual “recreation summit” that brings recreation providers, elected and appointed officials, interest groups, and other relevant individuals together to share ideas, develop partnerships and foster cooperation between municipalities and agencies.
6. Explore the possibility of purchasing additional parkland adjacent to existing WCPRC facilities.

6.6 Recreation Programming

There are many different recreation providers in Washtenaw County that offer similar or identical services and programs. Traditionally, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission has offered limited programming, largely due to limited demand and staffing. The lack of staffing and perceived interest in outdoor winter activities has led to limited outdoor recreational activities in WCPRC facilities during the winter months.

Recreation Programming Action Items:

1. Explore the possibility of adding winter activities and facilities such as ice fishing, skating, winter nature programs and/or outdoor clinics.
2. Hire additional staff to enhance programming capabilities.
3. Explore additional programs and activities that target the recreation needs and interests of youth, especially teens.”

6.7 Parks and Recreation Administration

Over the years, WCPRC has lacked a coordinated or sustained marketing effort and is often confused with other park agencies operating park facilities within the County. Recent efforts by WCPRC have increased awareness of Washtenaw County Parks and programs. Establishing a strong brand identity, by continuing to develop special events, marketing campaigns and materials, will help inform County residents about WCPRC facilities and recreational opportunities. Furthermore, survey respondents indicated there is a continuing

Administration Action Items:

1. Develop a marketing plan.
2. Assign a staff person with the responsibility for developing and implementing the marketing plan. This effort would also spearhead public-private partnerships and assist in the coordination of inter-agency partnerships.
3. Work with the HCMA and State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources to sell dual-use permits that allow users to have a single permit that allows access to multiple facilities.
4. Develop an environmental and cultural programming brochure for all public, private and independent schools in Washtenaw County.

need to market and advertise special events, facilities and programming.

Administration Action Items (continued):

5. Partner with local municipalities to plan and coordinate shared programming and facilities.
6. Develop marketing materials designed to promote the rental of WCPRC facilities for special events.
7. Develop a calendar of special events at each of the WCPRC facilities and post on the WCPRC website.
8. Update WCPRC website on a regular basis.

6.8 Maintenance

Maintenance of the park system and existing parks facilities stretches the current staff responsibility of the maintenance division, making it challenging to adequately maintain existing facilities. As WCPRC develops new facilities and acquires additional land, it will become increasingly important to maintain the existing facilities to a standard acceptable to both the Commission and its park users.

Maintenance Action Items:

1. Repair, restore and renovate older park facilities to continue to provide the highest level of recreational opportunities to County residents.
2. Create a maintenance crew devoted to implementing natural resource management plans and invasive species control.
3. Explore the possibility of partnering with a non-profit group, Northfield Township and/or Superior Township to provide maintenance at Park Northfield and Superior Center Park.

Maintenance Action Items (continued):

4. Explore the possibility of working with interest groups (mountain bikers, trail runners, dog park supporters, and scout troops for example) to develop volunteer stewardship groups in conjunction with activity specific development.
5. Explore the possibility of developing public-private partnerships to provide maintenance services or enhance the overall budget for park maintenance.

One of the major maintenance concerns for WCPRC staff is that because of the dispersed location of many facilities, there is a need to develop a larger and more centrally located maintenance depot.

Existing Facility Improvements

The following Chapter includes detailed recommendation for improvements, planning and maintenance at each of the existing Washtenaw County Park and Recreation Commission facilities.

