



INTRODUCTION

The Parks and Recreation Space Open Plan and the City of Ann Arbor Master Plan

A master plan is an official document adopted by a local government to establish long range, general policies for the physical development of the community. The City of Ann Arbor Master Plan is composed of six documents, or “elements,” that cover the City’s major geographical areas and its essential City-wide facilities. These supporting documents provide a framework for preserving the City’s unique character, ensuring its diversity, supporting investment, and promoting desired change. The Master Plan elements and a description of each are provided below:

- ◆ **MASTER PLAN: LAND USE ELEMENT (2009)** – Provides information and guidance to residents, decision-makers, developers, and property owners about land use issues facing the City, including goals, objectives, action statements, and site-specific land use recommendations.
- ◆ **DOWNTOWN PLAN (2009)** – Sets goals, objectives, and land use recommendations for Ann Arbor’s downtown area, including the boundaries of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). Updated as part of the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) effort; a subarea of the master plan.
- ◆ **TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE (2009)** – Analyzes the opportunities and constraints for improving Ann Arbor’s major transportation corridors, such as Plymouth Road and Washtenaw Avenue, and provides design guidelines for aesthetic and transportation improvements.
- ◆ **NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION PLAN (2007)** – Outlines recommendations for improving non-motorized modes of travel in Ann Arbor.
- ◆ **PARKS & RECREATION OPEN SPACE PLAN (2006)** – Provides a comprehensive inventory of Ann Arbor’s park and recreation facilities and presents issues, needs, and opportunities for the City’s park and recreation system.
- ◆ **NATURAL FEATURES MASTER PLAN (2004)** – Provides a framework to guide the City and its citizens in their policy making and stewardship of natural features protection activities.

Each of the City’s master plan elements has a significant relationship with the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan. Existing and future land use, transportation, and natural feature systems are essential components in assessing the parks and recreation needs and desires for any community.

Goals of the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan

The Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS) is the City's vision for parks and recreation in Ann Arbor. The PROS Plan provides an inventory of existing parks and facilities, describes the relationship between the parks and recreation system and surrounding municipalities and recreation providers, identifies parks and recreation needs and deficiencies, and proposes major capital park projects for existing and new parks.

The 2011-2015 PROS Plan is intended to facilitate discussion and evaluation of major issues, problems and potentials, the setting of priorities for the next five years, and the identification of goals and objectives that reach further into the future. The scope of the plan is to reflect tradition; to provide balance of parks, facilities and programs; to respond to the needs of today; and to set a direction for the future. It also establishes background information while delineating system needs that may qualify for state and federal grant funding. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE) requires all municipalities applying for recreation grants to have a current plan on file with the MDNRE and to update that plan every five years. This planning effort is directed towards the formal adoption of an updated PROS Plan by the Park Advisory Commission, the City Planning Commission, and the Ann Arbor City Council.

Ann Arbor has a long history of planning for parks, recreation, and open space, with plans in 1920, 1939, 1952, 1962, 1978, 1981, 1988, 1994, 2000 and 2006. Many factors necessitate the updating of the old plan, including the City's desire to retain the parks, open space, and recreational amenities that continue to attract people to Ann Arbor.

Focus of the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan

The PROS Plan provides an overview of the Ann Arbor park system, including the physical description of the City, administrative structure and budget information, and an inventory of parks and programs provided both by Parks and Recreation and by the Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Education and Recreation program. It also describes goals and objectives for future planning guided by input gathered through an extensive public process.

The plan, by identifying valuable natural and cultural resources, is a tool for the preservation and improvement of amenities. Natural and cultural amenities are a necessary aspect of a balanced community and are considered a legitimate land use along with housing, business, and industry. An evaluation of open space and natural features is essential in the planning process for optimum land use and potential parkland acquisition. The plan is also an opportunity to update relevant recreational services and facilities so they better meet the community's needs.

Other local, state, and regional agencies provide additional park and recreational planning and opportunities for the broader community. Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation is a provider of parkland in various locations throughout the County, including County Farm Park in the City of Ann Arbor and Parker Mill just east of the City. The Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Parks Authority provides parkland near Ann Arbor along the Huron River, including Delhi, Dexter-Huron, and Hudson Mills Metroparks. The State of Michigan owns and operates the Pinckney and Waterloo Recreation Areas and the Chelsea State Game Area in the western half of the County. While the PROS Plan does not address the recreational needs for other entities, it recognizes common goals and linkages, including shared open space, trails, and natural features, such as the Huron River.

Projects Completed During PROS Plan Cycle 2006-2010

Many projects were completed during the five-year period starting in 2006. Those that were actually listed in the PROS Plan as a priority have an asterix (*) next to them. Other projects were completed because of maintenance issues or changes in identified needs.

Parks and Recreation Facility Improvements

- Argo Park – woodchip trail from canoe livery north to Longshore Drive*, boardwalk and wetland planting, restroom renovations*, new sheds for camps and storage, kayak racks
- Bandemer Park – new disc golf course*, new dirt bike jump course*, renovations to parking and green space*, and a new windmill to power light at north restroom
- Buhr Park – solar/windmill lighted sign at entrance, signage improvements through park
- Buhr Ice Arena – floor and refrigeration system replacement, sun shield installation to protect ice surface*, constructed skate sharpening room, ADA access to facility*
- Buhr Pool – pool resurfaced
- Burns Park – new Petanque Court
- Cobblestone Farm Barn – kitchen renovations*, wood floor replacement including insulation*, dumb waiter*, interior and exterior lighting*, customer service renovations, restroom renovations, landscape renovations, service drive replacement, porch repairs
- Farmers Market – painted sheds, replaced lighting*, installed sound system, upgraded electrical*, repaired gutters
- Fuller Pool – shade structure addition*
- Gallup Canoe Livery – café renovated, constructed storage room*, renovated restrooms, added drinking fountains
- Huron Hills Golf Course – pump station replacement*
- Kempf House – restored windows*, interior plaster repair*, ADA walk, exterior painting, foundation replacement*, porch restoration*
- Leslie Science Center – raptor enclosures constructed*, expanded critter room for three-season classroom space*, landscaping, seat walls
- Leslie Park Golf Course – renovated shelters and club house, new furniture, replaced maintenance equipment
- Mack Pool – roof renovations*, LED pool deck lights
- Mary Beth Doyle – disc golf course reconstruction*
- Olson Park – continued development, including soccer fields*, parking lot completion, off-leash dog park*, new restroom building*
- Sculpture Plaza Renovations – replaced brick and furniture, reconfigured planting beds, renovated sculpture, landscaping
- Southeast Area Park – demolished house on property and restored area*
- Swift Run – developed off-leash dog park*
- Veterans Memorial Park Ice Arena – locker room renovations*, dehumidification system*, fire suppression system*, new zamboni, new compressors
- West Park – design and implementation of storm water and recreation master plan*, including storm water improvements*, new pathways, entrance improvements, seatwalls at band shell, parking improvements, landscaping, boardwalk, relocated basketball court

Park Acquisitions

- Bluffs Park – two additions to allow access at Riverview and at Daniel*
- Camp Hilltop – park along Huron River Drive adjacent to Kuebler Langford Park*
- Narrow Gauge Property – high quality natural area in northeast part of City*
- Scheffler to Redbud access along Malletts Creek*
- South Pond – land along Huron River Drive at South Pond (life estate)*
- West Park – property on Chapin

Neighborhood Park and Playground Renovations

- Riverside*- replaced play area
- Gallup* - replaced play area by Canoe Livery
- Marybeth Doyle* - relocated and replaced play area
- Wheeler* - replaced part of play area,
- Leslie* - replaced south play area, and renovated north play area
- Sylvan – replaced play area
- South Maple* - replaced play area
- Garden Homes* - replaced play area
- Wellington* - replaced play area
- Frisinger* - replaced play area
- Lansdowne* - replaced play area
- Evergreen* - new play area
- Brookside* - new play area
- Redwood - constructed walk through park with landscaping and park furniture

Storm Water Improvements and Rain Gardens

- Argo Nature Area – rain garden
- Belize Park – rain garden
- Bird Hills – rain garden
- Buhr Park – three storm water basins/naturalized vegetation as part of storm water master plan*
- Burns Park – rain garden at Petanque Court
- Cobblestone Farm – rain garden at barn
- Hunt – rain garden
- Huron Hills – rain garden near Huron Parkway
- Fuller Park – storm water feature adjacent to river
- Lansdowne Park – rain garden at play area
- Mary Beth Doyle – rain garden (in addition to Water Resources Commission work)
- Olson – storm water vegetation management*
- Veterans Park – rain garden at parking lot on Jackson Ave
- West Park – extensive wetland creation and storm water improvements*

Tree and Shrub Plantings

Major plantings completed in conjunction with volunteer groups at:

- Buhr
- Mary Beth Doyle
- Olson
- Sylvan

Pathways, Parking Areas and Bridge Renovations

- Allmendinger - replaced pathway through park*
- Argo – constructed boardwalk from parking area to picnic area
- Bandemer - implemented vehicle bridge and parking lot renovations*
- Bromley - constructed barrier free access walk from neighborhood to play area
- Buhr - completed pathway connection from Packard Road to play area, and replaced pathways from Essex to Allen School and from Easy Street to entry drive, replaced service drive/walkway to Cobblestone Farm Barn
- Buhr Ice Arena and Pool – rebuilt entry stairs and ADA compliant walkway
- Huron River Trail – installed Border to Border trail signs throughout City
- Gallup – renovated vehicle bridge*
- Leslie Park Golf Course - replaced pedestrian bridges and renovated pathways, tunnel repair
- Mary Beth Doyle - replaced pathways throughout*
- Olson - completed parking lot paving*
- Pilgrim - replaced entry walk
- Scheffler - replaced pathway along Platt Road*
- South Maple - replaced pathway around play area and connection to residential units*
- Sugarbush - replaced portions of pathway in park*
- Veterans - replaced pathway along South Maple and parking lot at Jackson Ave and along parking lot on Jackson adjacent to tennis courts*
- West - replaced pathways throughout and constructed new stair entry on Huron*

Restroom Renovations

Renovated restrooms

- Southeast Area Park
- Argo Park
- Northside
- Island, Gallup
- Hunt

New restrooms

- Olson Park*
- Bandemer Park*
- Leslie Park Golf Course

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Game Courts Renovations

Tennis court renovations

- Burns*
- Sugarbush
- Northside

Basketball court renovations

- Ellsworth*
- Leslie
- Mary Beth Doyle
- Southeast Area
- Northside
- West
- Wheeler
- Veterans Memorial

Athletic Field Renovations

- Reconstructed soccer fields at Fuller Park*, map of fields installed at Fuller*
- Reconstructed soccer fields at Olson Park
- Reconstructed open field at West Park

Park Amenities

- Replaced drinking fountains with barrier-free accessible fountains, including dog drinking bowls at ten parks
- Renovated benches and picnic tables throughout system where needed
- Replaced trash cans and bleachers

Adopt-a-Park and Stewardship Activities

- Stewardship activities, including plant and animal inventories, native plant revegetation, ecological restoration, invasive species removals, flower planting, trash pickup, and other active volunteer coordination in over 98 park areas.

Studies, Task Forces and Reports

- Allen Creek Greenway Task Force Report*
- Ann Arbor Senior Center Survey and Task Force Report and Recommendations
- Golf Task Force
- Golf Convergence Report
- Huron River Impoundment Management Plan*
- Mack Pool Survey and Task Force Report and Recommendations
- Athletic Field Task Force

Summary of changes from 2006 PROS Plan to 2011 Plan

This update to the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan has changed in format to align more closely with the City's Master Plan Documents. One of the goals for this plan includes elimination of subjective statements when explaining City functions, such as administrative structure and budget. The later planning chapters fully describe the public input, needs and future facilities that will be explored. Two chapters from the previous plan were eliminated and incorporated into other chapters that conveyed similar information and concepts. This list below summarizes the changes that were made to the plan.

Introduction

This section includes a description of the relationship of the PROS Plan to the City Master Plan, and a new section details projects completed during current PROS Plan cycle (2006-2010).

Section I: Community Description (Formerly Section A)

This section includes most of the same information as the previous plan. Several maps were eliminated that were either duplicated in other sections of the City Master Plan (such as the Land Use and Zoning maps), were very difficult to read (topography and hydrology) or were no longer required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment and considered less pertinent to the park planning document (monthly temperatures and precipitation). Still included is a short history of the City and park system, social and economic characteristics, transportation planning, and descriptions of the built and natural environment. Demographic information and development characteristics by planning area were added in text and chart form.

Section II: Administrative Structure (Formerly Section B)

This section was reorganized to explain the administrative structure of the City in a more logical sequence. Rather than starting with an explanation of Community Education and Recreation (a division of the public schools), it begins with City administration, and how the Parks and Recreation system fits within the overall structure of the City. The section on funding was eliminated as this is covered in Section III, Budget and Funding.

Section III: Budget and Funding (formerly Section C)

This section explains the budget process and funding sources, revenues and expenditures in more detail, as well as the relationship between the millages and the General Fund. It explains, through charts and text, the percentages of funding that are utilized by each unit of the park system. Some of the more speculative alternatives for future funding were eliminated.

Section IV: Inventory of the Park, Recreation and Open Space System (Formerly Section I or 9)

This section was moved towards the beginning of the document to group the factual/background section of the plan together. Some of the charts have been eliminated as they no longer are pertinent. For example, almost every park in the system has some involvement from Natural Area Preservation (NAP), especially with the growth of the Adopt-a-Park program; therefore, the chart detailing NAP activities by park was eliminated. Additionally, the chart providing acreage by planning area was eliminated to follow more closely with the City Master Plan, which no longer divides plans by planning area. The recreation program inventory was converted to a chart rather than lists to help understand the relationship between the school recreation programs and the City. The list of private recreation providers was eliminated as this information was already readily available to the public, and did not help with planning initiatives.

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Section V: Land Use Planning and Acquisition (Formerly Section F)

This section was moved earlier in the document to provide information on existing programs and structure prior to discussing future planning. The text was reorganized to be clearer and flow more logically. The section also eliminates some of the more speculative ways in which land might be acquired that has never been implemented or are not viable options. The text describes the funding, summarizes land purchased, and details the criteria used to evaluate land.

Section G was eliminated as a separate chapter

This information was incorporated into the plan both in Section I - Community Description, and in Section VIII - Major Park and Recreation System Infrastructure Needs Assessment. For example, all of the census data that was formerly explained in text is now summarized in a chart in the Community Description Section, enabling comparisons between each planning area. Issues and evaluations for the City as a whole are incorporated into Section VIII of the current PROS Plan. These changes align the plan more closely with the City Master Plan format. The planning area maps were moved to the inventory section as they show the distribution of parks throughout the City.

Section VI: Planning Process for the PROS Plan (Formerly Section E)

This section provides in depth details of the input received. Rather than summary paragraphs, the survey is included in this section, as well as a summary of the comments received. Public input for this plan relied much more heavily on electronic media, and all of the ways in which outreach was accomplished are detailed. The major issues that were heard in the input phase were summarized, and the focus groups, public meetings and email responses are included and paraphrased. Additionally, summaries of the task forces and study groups that met during the past few years were included as they provide significant input for future planning and were important sources of public input.

Section H: Trails and Greenways, was eliminated as a separate chapter

This information was incorporated in to Section VIII - Major Park and Recreation Infrastructure Needs Assessment. The maps formerly found in this chapter were relocated to Section VIII, Major Parks and Recreation Infrastructure Needs Assessment.

Section VII: Goals and Objectives

This section did not change substantially from the previous plan. This was because the overriding goals and objectives are still relevant and respond to the concerns of residents today.

VIII: Major Park and Recreation System Infrastructure Needs Assessment

The format of this section was changed slightly to reflect the manner in which the park system is evaluated for future planning. It is organized to better help prioritize needs. This chapter incorporates most of the Greenway section text as well as the maps from the current 2006 PROS Plan.

IX: Action Plan

This section was changed to reflect the manner in which capital projects are planned and prioritized. It details the criteria used to prioritize projects, and is much more closely tied to the City's Capital Improvement (CIP) Planning process, which being updated. The draft CIP is included, however, the CIP is updated on a yearly basis depending on current needs and priorities.

SECTION I: Community Description



SECTION I: COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Community Description section of the PROS Plan describes the geographic boundaries, demographic composition, and physical characteristics, including the built and natural environments to provide background and an overview for planning efforts.

A. Geographic Planning Boundaries

The City of Ann Arbor is located in southeast Michigan, approximately 30 miles west of the Detroit metropolitan area and 50 miles north of Toledo, Ohio. Ann Arbor is bounded primarily by roads and freeways, including M-14 on the north, US-23 on the east, Interstate-94 and Ellsworth Road on the south, and Interstate-94, M-14, and Wagner Road on the West. Ann Arbor is centrally located in Washtenaw County and is the county seat.

Both the City's *Master Plan: Land Use Element* and the *Parks and Recreation Open Space (PROS) Plan* examine geographic sub-areas of the City, referred to as the Central, South, Northeast, and West planning areas.

1. The Central Area is made up of the Central Business District of Ann Arbor, the South State Street and South University areas, and surrounding neighborhoods. This area contains the highest density of population. Its parks are characterized as urban plazas, catering to visitors and businesses. Several parks are within walking distance to the downtown core, such as West and Wheeler Parks, and green space is also provided by the University of Michigan Diag and the Community High School yard. Other types of recreational open space in the downtown include the Dean Promenade on Main Street and the Farmers Market. The Downtown Development Authority uses tax increment financing for public projects, including park projects and pedestrian improvements.

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2. The Northeast Area consists of a wide variety of neighborhoods, including both the oldest and newest in the City. Commercial centers are primarily located along Plymouth Road, Washtenaw Avenue, and Broadway Street. This area contains the highest amount of park acreage, partially due to the location of both municipal golf courses and significant natural areas in this sector of the City. Gallup Park, the City's most popular park, is located along the Huron River. North Campus, Nichols Arboretum, and Mitchell Field, owned by the University of Michigan, also greatly contribute to the open space.
3. The West Area developed primarily from the 1920's to the 1960's, with historic homes typical of the 'Old West Side' historic district, to multi-family dwellings including larger apartment and condominium complexes. Commercial centers are located primarily along Stadium Boulevard, Maple Road, and Jackson Avenue. Parkland dedication with residential development provided many of the neighborhood parks resulting in most neighborhoods having some nearby parkland or school playground. The West Area includes a significant length of the Huron River as well as two of the three Sister Lakes.
4. The South Area developed primarily between the 1940's and mid 1970's, with at least 600 housing units added in the 1980's. This planning area contains the largest concentration of senior care and senior housing facilities in the City. The main commercial areas are along Packard and Eisenhower, and include Briarwood Mall. The larger parks include Mary Beth Doyle and Buhr, as well as the County Farm Park, managed by the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission.

B. Economy of the City of Ann Arbor

Ann Arbor's economy is dominated by the presence of the University of Michigan. The University is the City's largest employer, and its presence within the City has caused several other educational institutions and research and light manufacturing firms to locate in Ann Arbor. Because the City's economy is largely dependent on government employment and rooted in University and related enterprises, the cyclical variations of the regional manufacturing-based economy are felt less strongly in Ann Arbor than elsewhere.

In 2000, the City of Ann Arbor had 63,995 persons in the labor force. Of these, 61,291 were employed and 2,684 (2.8 percent) were unemployed. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Ann Arbor was characterized by an extremely tight employment market. Ann Arbor's unemployment rate rose from 1.3 percent in 1997 to 2.8 percent in 2000 and to 4.4 percent in June 2005 - still well below the State of Michigan's overall unemployment rate (6.9 percent in June 2005). The economic downturn in 2009 has had an impact on the local economy. In 2010, the unemployment rate in Michigan rose to 15%. While Ann Arbor's unemployment rate (approximately 10%) was still the lowest in Michigan, there was a substantial increase from 2005.

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C. Social Characteristics of Planning Areas

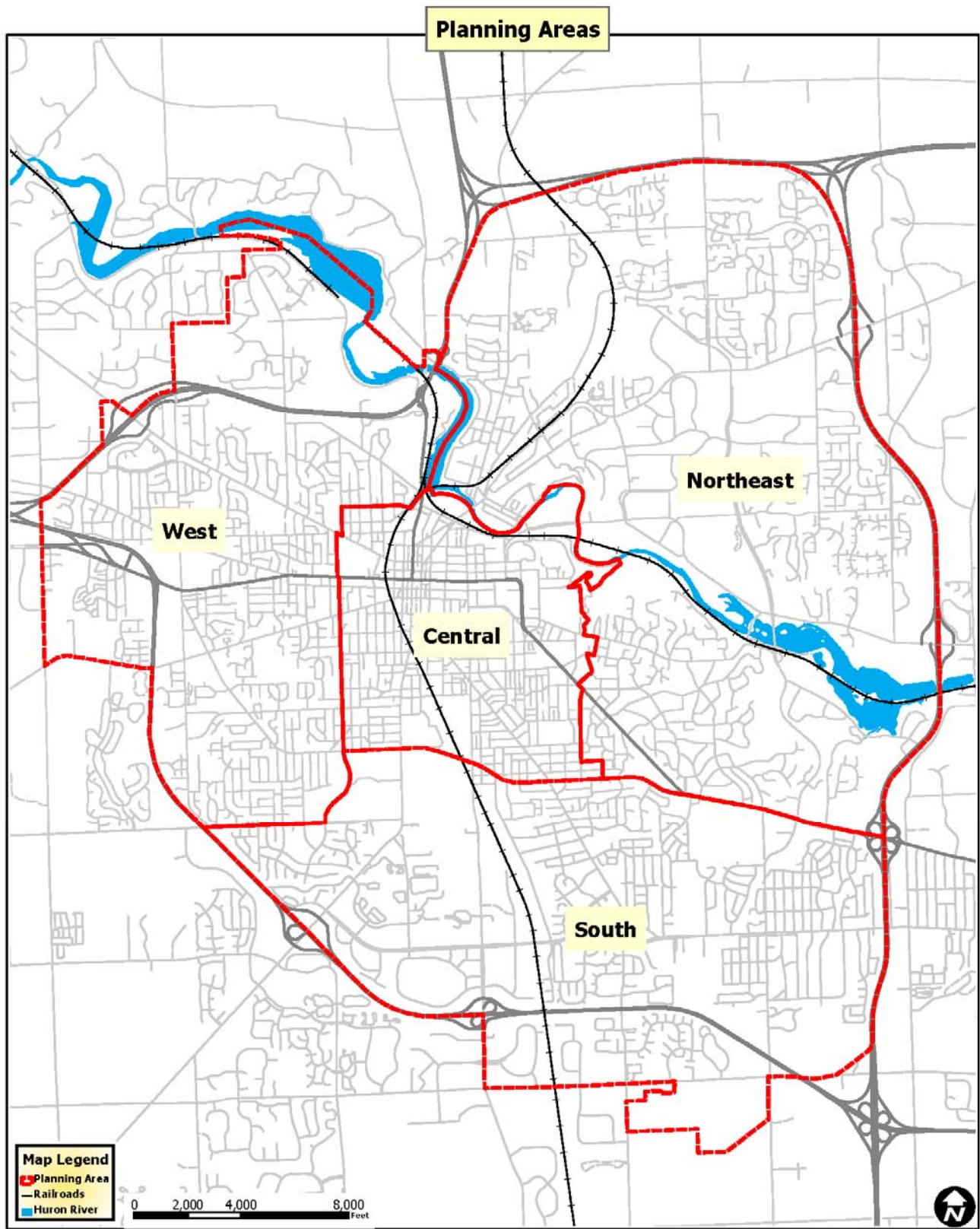
Understanding the demographic and socio-economic composition within each planning area contributes to assessing park and recreational needs within each subsection of the City. The total population of Washtenaw County in 2000 was 322,895. The City of Ann Arbor population (about 35 percent of the county population) was 114,024 in 2000.

STATISTICS FROM 2000 CENSUS

Planning Area	Central	Northeast	West	South	Outside City*	Citywide
Population	33,550	31,121	22,254	27,099		114,024
Number of dwelling units	11,237	12,971	10,050	12,446		46,704
Owner occupied	2,588	5,807	6,682	5,608		20,685
Renter	8,402	6,692	3,076	6,838		17,008
Average household size	2.21	2.27	2.26	2.15		2.22
Median income	30,627	57,898	59,939	51,447		46,299
Person density per acre	22	5	6	6		9.75
% of households with children	9%	30%	30%	27%		24%
Disability status - ages 5-64	8%	8%	10%	13%		9%
Disability status - ages 65 & up	37%	30%	32%	39%		34%
Minority comp. African American	6%	9%	6%	13%		9%
Minority composition - Asian	11%	21%	3.5%	9%		12%
Number of parks	23	54	36	38	6	157
Acreage of parks	125.67	885.40	605.63	341.43	130.41	2088.54
Acreage parkland/1000 residents	3.7	28.45	27.21	12.6		18.32
Percent student population						33%

*Outside City refers to parks such as Marshall and Dolph which are outside of the official City limits of Ann Arbor, but are still part of the park system.

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D. Physical Characteristics

This section describes the physical characteristics, including both the built and natural environment, found throughout the City of Ann Arbor and discusses their relevance to parks and recreation programming.



1. The Built Environment

- a. **LAND USE.** The built environment includes constructed systems or structures such as homes and businesses, factories and public buildings, and roads and utilities. Ann Arbor serves as the business/economic, cultural, entertainment, and recreation center for the greater Washtenaw County area. Approximately 50% of the land within the City is used for residential purposes. The center of the City contains a mixture of commercial, office, residential, and public land uses, including the University of Michigan Central Campus. The Briarwood Shopping Center and surrounding area south of the central business district also accounts for a large share of commercial and office uses. The combined office, commercial, and industrial land accounts for 8.5% of the land in Ann Arbor. The remainder of similar land uses are scattered throughout the City but are generally concentrated along major thoroughfares and freeway interchanges. There is no heavy manufacturing in the City and most light industry is located along the railroad tracks that bisect the City north to south. Research uses, important to Ann Arbor, are divided between the south area, just south of the I-94 freeway, and the northeast area, south of Plymouth Road near the University's North Campus.

The University of Michigan was established in 1841 in downtown Ann Arbor. The University owns approximately 1,700 acres of land within the City limits. Roughly 485 acres are used for indoor and outdoor recreational purposes, including parkland (portions of Nichols Arboretum) and sports complexes (football stadium, Chrysler Arena, etc.).

The Ann Arbor park system contributes to the built environment, including pools and sport complexes such as Fuller, Veterans Memorial and Buhr Parks, as well as numerous athletic fields, recreational facilities such as Cobblestone Farm, the Farmers Market, golf courses, and community centers. Land utilized for parks in Ann Arbor is an integral part of the City with more than 2,000 acres that are part of the park system.

- b. **TRANSPORTATION.** Transportation has been an important factor in the shaping of the physical form of Ann Arbor. The walking distance scale of the downtown with the adjacent older neighborhoods is one example of transportation shaping the form of the urban environment. Today, transportation in the Ann Arbor area is heavily

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dependent on the automobile. The road network is a radial pattern oriented toward the downtown, with the interstate freeways forming an outer ring. The major routes radiating from downtown are Plymouth, Washtenaw, Packard, State, Liberty, Huron, Miller, and Main. The Fuller/Glen/Geddes route is also a major carrier of traffic related to North Campus and the medical center. Within the freeway ring, Huron Parkway and Eisenhower Parkway form a partial ring serving the south and northeast areas.

Public transit and non-motorized transportation are important alternative means of transportation in the City. Bus service is provided by three major public agencies: the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (AATA), the University of Michigan, and the Ann Arbor Public Schools. The AATA provides transit service in the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and the townships of Pittsfield, Ypsilanti, and Superior. It is the only service to provide bus transportation to the general public, including paratransit services for people with disabilities and senior citizens, Night Ride and Holiday Ride services for times when there is not regular bus service. The University of Michigan bus service functions primarily as a link from the North Campus to the Central Campus. The Ann Arbor Public Schools provides bus service to children attending public schools located in the district. Bicycle lanes are planned or built along numerous arterial roadways. There are currently 33 miles of bike lanes, 9 of which were added between 2007 and 2010, and nearly 3.5 miles of ‘sharrow’ segments (share the road symbols). The City’s sidewalk system is relatively complete, with the exception of some gaps which occur along park frontages, some major roads, and neighborhood streets. A City-wide Non-Motorized Plan was completed in 2007. This comprehensive plan addresses the infrastructure deficits of the pedestrian and bicycling system. The park system contains over 52 miles of paved non-motorized pathway.

In June 2006, Major John Hieftje introduced a “Model for Mobility,” a transportation vision for the City of Ann Arbor. Key elements of this vision include alternative forms of transportation such as walking and bicycling. The vision expands on the City’s bus, rail, and train system to support a more regional mode of mobility and reduce Ann Arbor’s reliance on auto travel. Three components of this vision include an east-west regional transit route that would link the central core of Ann Arbor, including the downtown, University of Michigan Central Campus and the University of Michigan Medical Center, with communities in southeast Michigan, a possible north-south connection that would use existing railways between Ann Arbor, Milan and Howell, including portions of the Ann Arbor Railroad and the TSB Railway’s operating territory, and a local connector system that would link the two regional railroads with a local streetcar system running from west to east through the downtown, across the Central, Medical, and North campuses of the University of Michigan.

In 2009, an intermodal transportation center, named Fuller Road Station, was proposed for Fuller Park on the south side of Fuller Road where the existing parking lot is located. The structure would be used for parking for University of Michigan hospital system employees as well as the public and would include a bicycle station and bus area. A future phase could include a train station. This project went before the City Planning Commission in September 2010.

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Two railways traverse the City, including the Ann Arbor Railroad, running north/south, and the Norfolk Southern Railroad, running east/west. An Amtrak station is located on the north side of downtown, adjacent to the Huron River.



2. The Natural Environment

The City contains a variety of landforms, the most prominent being the Huron River valley. Other natural features include steep slopes, woodlands, wetlands, meadows, fens, and six creeksheds that flow to the Huron River.

- a. **NATURAL FEATURES PLAN.** The City's Natural Features Plan, adopted in June 2004, identifies significant natural features located within the City, including the Huron River, wetlands, floodplains and floodways, woodlands, landmark trees, native plants, and greenway linkages. The plan provides a general description of each natural feature and identifies protection measures through goals and implementation strategies.

Natural features in the City of Ann Arbor are regulated under an array of federal, state, and local laws. Nonetheless, the City currently does not have local ordinances to help protect groundwater, groundwater recharge areas, savannas, prairies, native plants, or animal ecosystems. For certain natural features (watercourses, wetlands, woodlands, landmark trees, 100-year floodplain, steep slopes, and endangered species habitats) there is limited local protection through Chapter 60 - Wetlands Preservation Ordinance; Chapter 63 - Storm Water Management and Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control; and Chapter 57 - Subdivision and Land Use Control, the Land Development Regulations and Attachment A: Guidelines for the Protection and Mitigation of Natural Features. These regulations do not apply to single or two-family homes or lots; therefore, a large part of the City's natural features depend upon the stewardship of its citizens for protection.

Within the park system, as well as other City owned-land, the Natural Area Preservation Division works as stewards of the natural areas. They maintain and improve natural areas by removing invasive species, landscaping with native vegetation, and inventorying flora and fauna.

- b. **WATER RESOURCES.** The Huron River is the central natural feature of the City. It transports water and sediment, it stores and moves floodwaters, and it is the major source of drinking water for the City (Barton Pond). Associated with the river are

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tributaries, wetlands and meadows, and the City's most significant topography. The Huron River Watershed is made up of all land that drains either directly into the Huron River or into the streams, or tributaries, that feed into the Huron River, including Allen Creek, Mallets Creek, Honey Creek, Traver Creek, Millers Creek, Fleming Creek, and Swift Run. The tributaries create vital wildlife corridors and natural habitat.

The river within the Ann Arbor area has been impounded by the construction of four dams: Barton, Argo, Geddes, and Superior. The dams have resulted in the alteration of the river, creating impoundments used for drinking water as well as recreational pond activities. Much community discussion has taken place regarding whether to remove or retain Argo Dam, which is used for recreational purposes.

Green space dominates the shores of the river through much of the City, with ownership either by the City or the University, although both single family and multi-family developments back up to the river in several locations.

Pedestrian and visual access to the Huron River is limited throughout the City due, in part, to the railroad corridor blocking access and industrial development that was a part of the history of the river.

Over time, watersheds and their tributaries have been altered as a result of farming, urbanization, and other forms of development. Many of these changes threaten local and downstream water quality and quantity. As development occurs, impervious surfaces deliver pollutants to waterways. Furthermore, these tributaries in urban areas are often overwhelmed by volumes of storm water running at speeds the streams cannot sustain without erosion and habitat damage. In some parts of the City, development has taken priority over the natural landscape, so that streams have "disappeared" into storm sewer pipes beneath the surface. The Allen Creek is one such example, whereby the stream was buried during the 1920's through much of the west and south branches.

An additional problem associated with land development is the proliferation of invasive weeds filling in open water areas, such as near the Gallup Canoe Livery, the backwater at Furstenberg Park, and South Pond.

Sewage and erosion ordinances of the City and the County are being reviewed for their compatibility with respect to recreation and open space uses, and several joint projects have been accomplished. River and creekshed issues have evolved to include state of the art functions in storm water management through the introduction of soil bioengineering and the creation of water gardens and bioswales.

- c. **ELEVATION AND STEEP SLOPES.** Elevation and slopes are the physical characteristics that contribute to the generally rolling land character considered one of Ann Arbor's most visible natural assets. Elevations of the City range from approximately 749 feet above sea level near the Huron River to about approximately 1,000 feet above sea level in areas near the water treatment plant (Sunset and Newport Roads) and near Maple Road and Liberty Street. Higher elevations within the City provide opportunities for dramatic views of the City's river valley. These areas of the City are represented as parkland at several locations, such as the capped landfill at the Swift Run Service Center in the southeast area, Leslie Park in the

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northeast area, Cedar Bend Nature Area in the central area, Ruthven Nature Area and Huron Hills Golf Course in the northeast area, and Wurster, Hunt, and Bluffs Parks and Bird Hills Nature Area in the west area.

- d. **VEGETATION AND TREE COVER.** Vegetation, especially tree cover, is one of Ann Arbor's most significant features. The City contains over 40,000 street trees, 6,600 in mowed areas of parks as well as hundreds of thousands of trees in forested urban parks. Many of those trees are large landmark trees that contribute to the City's image as "Tree-town." Existing high quality woodlands and landmark trees have some protection by City ordinance.

The City's tree cover varies geographically: in the downtown, large buildings, streets and parking lots dominate with mostly younger trees. Trees in the downtown area grow in disturbed soils under harsh conditions so that healthy growth, let alone tree survival, is difficult. In residential areas of the City, especially the older neighborhoods, tree cover is more prominent.

Between 2002 and 2008, the Emerald Ash Borer decimated thousands of Ash trees. Since that time, a massive effort to remove and replant both street and park trees has helped to mitigate the loss; however, it will take many years to regenerate the urban forest. Because of this issue, a greater emphasis has been placed on diversifying the urban forest to prevent massive loss of single tree species.

There has also been an effort to convert lawn areas to native species, and to create and maintain prairies as well as wetlands and rain gardens. The change is a result of a growing awareness of the ecological benefits of deep-rooted plants that result in increased storm water filtration, as well as a desire to preserve the cultural heritage of the region by restoring plant communities that were common when Ann Arbor was settled. These restoration efforts include removal of invasive species as well as collection of seeds from native species.

- e. **OPEN SPACE, GREENWAYS AND LINKAGES.** Open space is commonly characterized as the natural landscape, including scenic vistas, parkland, vacant land, farmland, and linkages and greenways connecting natural areas. The City of Ann Arbor has always prided itself in maintaining a green image through the preservation of open space, parkland, and natural features. The Huron River provides scenic views from both the water and from areas throughout the valley. The preservation of open space along some transportation corridors has contributed to the sense of openness, including Huron Parkway, Geddes Road, Fuller Road, and Glazer Way.

The City's parks play a significant role in providing open spaces through parkland acquisition and preservation. Parks also provide natural and recreational linkages. These linkages help to protect wildlife and preserve a variety of ecological systems, while recreational linkages provide greater opportunities for alternative transportation, accessibility to parks, neighborhood connections, and enhanced community participation.

Over the years, the development of land near the City's fringe and in the surrounding townships has altered the perception of Ann Arbor's open space. Changes include development of vacant land along major transportation corridors leading into the City, such as South State Street, Washtenaw Avenue, and Jackson Avenue.

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Furthermore, much of the rural landscape surrounding the City has changed to suburban uses, such as housing and commercial development, permanently changing the scenic viewsheds and sense of open space within the City, at its borders, and surrounding the City.

In response to the changing landscape, the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage millage was passed in 2003 to protect and preserve open space outside of the City. The millage, discussed in detail in the chapter on Land Acquisition, has so far resulted in the protection 1,863 acres of farms and natural areas.

E. History of the Parks and Recreation System

The City of Ann Arbor's parks and recreation system originated soon after the City's settlement in 1824. According to City records, the first park was Hanover Square, dedicated in 1836 and located at Division and Madison Streets, now bisected by Packard Street. By 1905, when the first Board of Park Commissioners was appointed, the park system had grown to approximately ten acres with the additions of Felch Park (now the University of Michigan's Power Center), Cedar Bend/Island Park, Fairview Cemetery, the City's first garden cemetery, and several scattered small triangular areas like "The Rock" at Washington Park located at Washtenaw Avenue and Hill Street.

In 1910, the City purchased the County Fairgrounds to create Burns Park. By 1918, the system had expanded to 122 acres and included Douglas Park, Argo Bathing Beach, the Glen (the City-owned portion of Nichols Arboretum), Riverside Park, and West Park.

The parks and recreation system became actively involved with historical considerations in 1928, when markers were erected to indicate the old Native American trail through West Park and the site of the City's original settlement on Huron Street, west of Ashley. Federal-



1915 Boat Livery on Argo Pond

funded work programs in the 1930's resulted in improvements to West, Fuller and Riverside Parks, Plymouth Parkway, lawn extensions, and several smaller projects. Demand for outdoor recreation facilities greatly increased after World War II, especially ball diamonds. Substantial acquisitions in the 1950s included Buhr Park and Veterans Memorial Park (the former County Fairgrounds). The City established a tree nursery on the airport property for park and street plantings.

In 1957, the City of Ann Arbor and the Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education collaborated to provide a summer recreation program. They jointly established the Recreation Board, which was charged with advising all City and school recreation programming issues. The Recreation Advisory Commission has functioned continuously since its inception to advise both the City Council and the Board of Education regarding public recreational concerns.

The 1960's saw continued City growth, further major expansion of the parks and recreation system, and several particularly significant events. In 1962, the City Planning Commission published Ann

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Arbor's first Parks and Open Space Plan. The plan envisioned a program of acquisition and development to meet a 20-year need for parks and open space. It recommended acquiring approximately 710 additional acres of parkland, including a third golf course. The Leslie Golf Course, Park and Woods, and the Detroit Edison properties along the Huron River were purchased pursuant to this plan.

In April 1966, City voters approved a \$2,500,000 bond issue for park acquisition and development. With over \$800,000 in federal matching grants, about 400 acres of new park properties were obtained, three outdoor swimming pools and three artificial ice rinks were constructed, eight major parks underwent new development, and 15 more parks were improved.

In April 1971, voters approved another \$3,500,000 bond issue for parks and recreation. Of these funds, \$400,000 was spent for the Mack Swimming Pool, \$1,000,000 was anticipated for land acquisition, and \$2,100,000 for park improvements and development with emphasis on public access to undeveloped parks along the Huron River valley (e.g., Geddes, Argo, and Barton Pond areas) in addition to neighborhood parks and playgrounds (e.g., Huron Highlands, Glacier Highlands, Lansdowne, Esch, and Sugarbush). Several parks were improved or renovated through bond funds.

Since the 1962 plan, there has been a concerted effort to complete the pattern of recreational open space along the Huron River from Barton Pond to Geddes Pond. Other significant natural areas, such as Bird Hills and Marshall Woods, have been acquired. Although Ann Arbor lacks a completed system of connected natural areas, City residents take pride in the preservation of substantial open space along the Huron River (now a State-designated Country Scenic Natural River over most of its length upstream from the City).

In 1981, the Parks and Open Space Plan was updated, laying the groundwork for a 1983 millage for Park Rehabilitation and Development. This plan also established the Citizens' Park Advisory Commission.

The 1988 Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan recommended acquisition of key parcels to enhance existing parks and serve areas that were lacking in parkland. In 1988, a ½ mil for parkland acquisition was approved by City voters. Over 306 acres of park land were acquired through this millage. Subsequent acquisition millages were approved in 1993 and 1998. Additional parkland has been acquired through the development process and via developer dedication.

In 1989, voters approved renewal of the ½ mil for park rehabilitation and development. The ½ mil that was approved for six years by the voters has allowed rehabilitation and development of neighborhood parks, as well as facilities such as the Veterans Memorial Park Arena and Pool, Cobblestone Farm, Buhr Ice Arena, and Furstenberg Park. In 1993, a .4725 mil for park maintenance and repair was approved to repair park features and facilities, catch up on deferred maintenance, protect natural areas, and increase accessibility to park and recreation resources. Voters approved a renewal of the Park Rehabilitation and Development Millage in 1995 for six more years. A major feature of the millage program was the renovation of Fuller and Buhr Park Pools.

The 1993 millage included the addition of the Natural Area Preservation Program, tasked with developing a systematic manner in which to manage natural areas. The program has evolved over the years to include a devoted following of volunteers and park stewards, and has expanded its reach to incorporate other City-owned land.

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In 2002, a four-year Park Repair and Restoration Millage was approved to address natural area preservation, forestry and horticulture in parks, and non-routine repair and restoration for the park system. The inclusion of these activities marked a recognition that the park system had grown and evolved to the point where funding for maintenance was no longer sufficient and restoring natural areas and the urban forest was given greater emphasis. In 2005, a new 1.25 mil six-year Park Maintenance and Capital Improvements millage was approved which combined the functions of the two expiring millages. Some of the major accomplishments to date of this millage include renovation of Cobblestone Farm Barn, replacement of the refrigeration floor system at Buhr Ice Arena, implementation of the West Park master plan, and the development of Bandemer Park.

Between 2002 and 2004, the City staff was reorganized into administrative areas instead of departments. As part of this reorganization, the Parks Department was split into two service areas, with the planning and recreation functions being part of the Community Services Area and the maintenance functions being part of the Public Services Area.

In 2007, the Park Ranger system was eliminated due to budget reductions, and the Police Department took over the role of providing security for the park system. Although controversial at the time, the change was accepted by the public and a cooperative relationship developed between service areas.

In 2008, the volunteer program was expanded into a formal Adopt-a-Park program, and included neighborhood parks and community parks in addition to natural areas. The change resulted in many more residents becoming involved with community projects. In 2010, a second position was created to foster the volunteer program at the recreation facilities.



Some of the more significant issues that arose during the period between 2006 and 2010 included the community debate surrounding the future disposition of Argo Dam as well as the Huron River Impoundment Management Planning; the viability of certain recreation facilities, including the Senior Center, Mack Pool, and the golf courses; the proposed intermodal transportation center (Fuller Park Station), at Fuller Park; the debate over Huron Hills Golf Course, which has prompted community conversation regarding appropriate use of park land; the debate concerning care of existing versus proposed facilities and their associated maintenance, including a potential skate park proposed for Veterans Memorial Park; and a Council resolution requiring that any proposed sale of parkland be placed on a ballot for a general vote of City residents. Concerns over how to manage budget reductions while maintaining programming and facilities to a standard expected by the community will continue to be one of the more challenging issues facing the Parks and Recreation system.