

PUBLIC INPUT & PLANNING PROCESS

4



THE PLANNING PROCESS

The success of any planning process is reliant upon stakeholder involvement. St. Clair County has committed itself to pursue a proactive public outreach effort throughout the development of this plan. Efforts focused on soliciting community involvement to maximize awareness of the recreation planning process.

2022-2026 Master Recreation Plan Development

The process that led to the development of this 2022-2026 Master Recreation Plan included:

- A decision by the Parks and Recreation Commission to update the Master Recreation Plan in accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines.
- Contracting the services of the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission to manage the project and complete the update.
- A review of the existing Master Recreation Plan by the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission.
- A leadership survey distributed to members of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, Parks and Recreation Commission, PARC Committees, and the Metropolitan Planning Commission.
- An online, countywide survey, allowing residents to provide input from May through July in 2021. The survey was completed by 306 respondents.
- Drafting of the Master Recreation Plan document.
- Discussion among all PARC committees regarding 2022-2026 goals and objectives.
- Review of the Master Recreation Plan document by the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Metropolitan Planning Commission and the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners.
- A 30-day public review and comment period that began on December 5, 2021 and ended on January 5, 2022.
- A public hearing held on January 12, 2022 to receive additional citizen comments.
- A presentation of the Master Recreation Plan to all members of PARC, as well as the Metropolitan Planning Commission.
- Adoption of the Master Recreation Plan by PARC on January 12, 2022.
- An update on the Master Recreation Plan to the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, Environment and Public Works Committee on January 6, 2022.
- Adoption of the Master Recreation Plan by the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners at its January 20, 2022 meeting.
- Transmission of the Master Recreation Plan to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).
- Transmission of the Master Recreation Plan to SEMCOG and the Metropolitan Planning Commission.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INPUT

LOCAL LEADERS SURVEY

At the start of this planning process, members of the Board of Commissioners, Parks and Recreation Commission, Metropolitan Planning Commission, and PARC committees were given a survey to establish a framework on key planning issues related to parks and recreation in St. Clair County. There were 15 responses to the Local Leaders Survey. A summary of the leadership survey input can be found on the next page.

COUNTYWIDE PUBLIC SURVEY

From May through July 2021, an online survey was available to residents to provide input on parks and recreation in St. Clair County and the update of the Master Recreation Plan. Respondents were presented with

LOCAL LEADERS SURVEY SUMMARY

- **86%** feel we need more bicycle infrastructure in our communities.
- **93%** feel it is important for local communities to install bike lanes on local roads to provide a safe transportation alternative and create connections to the larger regional trail network.
- **100%** of the respondents indicated they would like to see the regional trail network expand to the western part of St. Clair County.
- **80%** think there are adequate resources available to senior citizens in St. Clair County.
- **53%** do not feel there is a lot to do for young people within the County.
- **64%** feel that the County should develop additional parks or add to existing parks.
- **73%** are willing to fund new park facilities or park improvements. **26%** are not.
- **23%** feel that PARC should assist local communities in developing additional dog parks, while **47%** are unsure.

What do you like about St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Facilities?

- Access to water for all residents.
- Biking and walking trails.
- Diversity and variety of parks with unique features.
- The countywide millage funding mechanism.
- Diverse locations throughout the county.
- Play areas for children.
- Well maintained structures and facilities.
- Quality of design and maintenance.

Improvements I would like to see in St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Facilities:

- Continue biking and walking trails to western part of county.
- Extend Wadhams to Avoca Trail to Yale.
- More trails/Connect bike trails to each other and to city centers.
- Continued maintenance of facilities.
- Trail improvement, more for handicapped people.
- Increased use by county residents.
- Continue to develop existing parks.
- More downriver.
- Restroom facilities at all locations.
- Increased funding to keep up with maintenance.
- More marketing toward tourism.
- Sites that can include winter and indoor activities.
- Development/maintenance of parks in southern end of the county.
- More trails for riding horses at Columbus and Goodells County Parks.
- Ropes course/Challenge course.
- Updated facilities in a timely fashion.

23 questions on the survey, covering such topics as park visitation habits, preferred method of receiving information, recreation preferences, and open ended questions that allowed for written answers and open idea submittals. In total, there were 306 respondents to the online survey. The online survey was an optimal solution for gathering public input during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020. In-person events were not able to be held during the planning process.

While the responses came from all parts of the county, the largest percentage (62%) of respondents lived in Port Huron and its surrounding communities - Port Huron Township, Fort Gratiot Township, Kimball Township and the City of Marysville. Approximately 42% of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49. Another 34% were between ages 50 and 65. Roughly 8.25% of respondents were age 29 or younger.

About half of the respondents said they visited St. Clair County parks more than ten times in the past year. 22% visited one or more of the County parks between three and six times over the past year. 58% of respondents are satisfied with the overall amount of park land in St. Clair County and 85% would like the County to develop additional parks or add to existing parks.

Highlights from the countywide survey are shown on the following pages.

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission. The page layout includes a profile picture and cover photo on the left, a navigation menu, and a central post. The post is from the commission, dated May 7, and is titled "We Need Your Help". The text of the post explains that the commission is updating its five-year recreation master plan and is seeking input from residents through a survey. The survey link is provided as <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/STCC2022>. The post has 13 likes, 2 comments, and 19 shares. A comment from Doug Borgman is visible, stating "Done." The page also features a "Page Transparency" section, a star rating of 5 stars with 3,201 likes and 45 visits, and a "Related Pages" section listing local businesses and sports teams.

COUNTYWIDE ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Trail-Related Survey Input:

- 28% did not use the Bridge to Bay Trail or Wadhams to Avoca Trail in the past year.
- 26% used one or both of the trails in the past year.
- 18% used one or both of the trails between 3-6 times in the past year.
- 85% would like to see the Wadhams to Avoca Trail extended to the City of Yale.

Summary of things people like best about St. Clair County Parks:

- Biking/Walking Trails
- The number and variety of parks
- Good locations/accessibility
- Waterfront areas/Access to water
- Playgrounds are new and well-maintained
- Parks are well-maintained and clean
- Well run and adequately funded
- Natural areas/habitats
- Not over-programmed
- Splash pads

Summary of General Improvements People would like to see:

- More beaches
- More biking/hiking trails; Extension of trails (both WTA & Bridge to Bay)
- More mountain bike trails
- Make it possible to walk/bike from one park to another
- Available parks in NW part of county
- Classes and workshops
- More/better signage
- More restroom facilities/Year-round restroom facilities
- Linking existing Township trails
- More kayak launches
- More equestrian trails
- Western area park
- Pave Wadhams to Avoca all the way
- More access to lakes and rivers
- Improved parking for trails
- More kids activities
- More promotion/advertising of parks to attract visitors
- More disc golf courses
- More improvements for runners

What Improvements would you like to see at Goodells County Park?

- Disc golf course
- More bike trails
- Equestrian trails
- Develop ponds for fishing for kids and families
- More restrooms and year-round restrooms
- More pavilions by the playground/splash pad area
- Better connection to the Pine River Nature Center
- More/better playground equipment
- Paved trails throughout the property
- Mountain bike trails
- Nothing...it is good as is

What Improvements would you like to see at Columbus County Park?

- More of a barrier between the playground and parking lot for safety
- Expand equestrian trails
- Better signage
- Signage about activities for all seasons
- More trails (paved and unpaved)
- Cross country trails
- Kayak launch area
- Cross country ski rental
- Give equestrians the trails back
- More/better mountain biking trails
- Enlarge the sledding area
- Better handicapped-accessible facilities

What Improvements would you like to see at Woodson County Park?

- Better parking, but not bigger
- More trails/extend the trails/more off-pavement trails
- Riverfront trail going north into the DNR woodlands
- Add a fishing dock
- Fishing or access points on water
- Existing structures need work to promote usage. Looks deserted
- Signage for the trails
- Continue mountain bike trails/More mountain bike trails
- Camping
- Kayaking opportunities
- Better upkeep of facilities
- Restrooms

What Improvements would you like to see at Fort Gratiot County Park?

- More picnic tables or benches
- More parking
- More pavilions
- Create a kayak launch
- Signage identifying native plants in the park
- More play equipment/larger playground area
- Improve the beach
- Connection to Bridge to Bay Trail
- Keep things as is

What Improvements would you like to see at the Blue Water River Walk?

- Signage identifying flowers
- Safety features/more security
- More local artists' work
- Better trash removal/more trash cans
- Better cleanup of goose droppings
- More discrete signage about how the trail can connect to other routes
- More trees and green areas
- Restrooms
- More benches/sitting areas
- Paved parking/parking lot is awful

What Improvements would you like to see along the Wadhams to Avoca Trail?

- Extend in both directions
- Connect to the Bridge to Bay Trail
- Fully paved trail
- Trash cans throughout the trail
- Increased safety measures/It doesn't appear safe
- Safety lights/call boxes
- Better trail markers and maps
- Bike repair/tire filling stations/water bottle fill stations
- Some entry points need better parking
- Trim back the brush...too overgrown
- More parking at entry points
- More spots to stop and take a break – more benches
- Interpretive signage along the trail

What Improvements would you like to see at the Fort Gratiot Light Station?

- Benches in sand area so people can sit and watch their children
- Upkeep to the lighthouse itself
- Better beach access
- Shade trees and picnic tables
- Add more kids activities like what is hosted by museum

What amenities would you like to see at the new County Park in Clay Township?

- Beach
- Nature trails
- Connect park to Bridge to Bay Trail
- Kayak launch
- Restrooms
- Fishing pier/separated fishing access
- Concession stand
- Picnic pavilions/shelters near the channel and shade trees
- Bike repair stations
- Accessible pathways/accessible amenities
- Never heard of it...needs marketing

What improvements would you like to see with hiking/biking trails in St. Clair County?

- More trails and connect existing trails to one another
- Connected, linked trails
- Safety measures
- Cleaner/more trail restrooms
- More mountain bike trails
- Better signage/mile markers
- The more, the merrier
- More awareness of available trails
- More trails on side roads/off main roads
- Bike lanes for transportation
- More improvements for runners
- Trails to connect to existing trails
- Connect to Macomb County biking trails

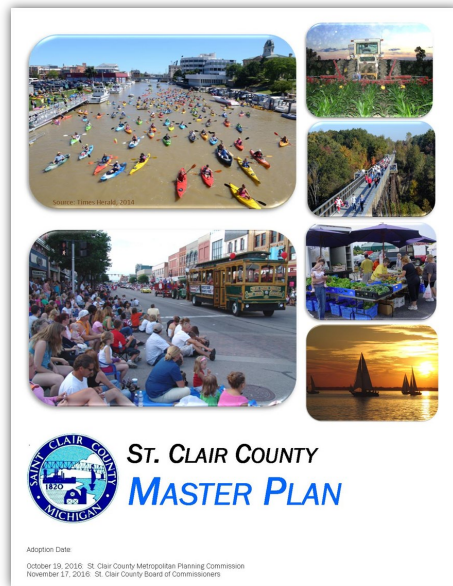


RELATION TO THE ST. CLAIR COUNTY MASTER PLAN

The St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and the Board of Commissioners adopted the St. Clair County Master Plan in November 2016.

The MPC identified numerous goals of the County Master Plan that are directly related to the County's recreational needs, including:

- **Recreation Opportunities:** Continue development of high quality parks and recreation facilities, community facilities, and public infrastructure.
- **Walkable Communities:** Promote greater access to complete, walkable neighborhoods. Connect people to healthy food, parks, shops, transportation options and other core services.
- **Focused Placemaking:** Make great places in our local communities by capitalizing on unique assets. Ensure that residents and visitors have multiple options for housing, transportation, recreation, and entertainment.
- **Healthy People and Places:** Create a healthy environment for people, decrease chronic and acute diseases, and promote access to fresh, healthy food in all St. Clair County communities.
- **Resource Protection:** Create a cleaner and greener built and natural environment - more trees, better air and water quality, and lower carbon emissions.
- **Efficient Public Services:** Reinvent and continually improve how effective and efficient public services are delivered to the public. Seek innovative ways to improve the quality and depth of public services.



Specific planning objectives and strategic actions related to parks and recreation in the St. Clair County Master Plan include:

- Work with community partners and stakeholders to develop and implement a Blueways of St. Clair Strategic Master Plan.
- Promote the special features within the county including forests, parks, trails, lakes, rivers, and other physical amenities.
- Link new and existing recreation facilities with non-motorized trails.
- Link new and existing trails and greenways with new and existing trails and greenways in neighboring counties.
- Promote county attractions in order to stimulate awareness that St. Clair County is a great place to live, work, and play, and enhance business attraction efforts.
- Create a prioritized list of areas underserved by parks and recreation spaces and develop a schedule for addressing each one.
- Help create a private operation/association to plan, promote, and support both Blueways and greenways, coordinating with business and government efforts.
- Continue to build upon the momentum of the Blue Water Trail Towns program and the Blueways of St. Clair to maximize economic development opportunities along trails and waterways.
- Work with partners to develop a bike share program in downtown Port Huron, integrating assets such as the Bridge to Bay Trail and the Blue Water River Walk.
- Participate in local, regional, and statewide initiatives to connect hike-bike trails and water trails.

The Metropolitan Planning Commission is currently updating the St. Clair County Master Plan, which is expected to be completed and adopted in 2022.

RELATION TO THE 2040 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (LRTP)

The St. Clair County 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan includes a Non-motorized Plan Elements section that highlights potential non-motorized improvements and trail expansion. Since the adoption of the 2040 LRTP, St. Clair County has taken a proactive approach in planning and constructing non-motorized facilities throughout the county.

The following summarizes non-motorized-related recommendations in the 2040 LRTP:

- Promote alternative transportation options for area residents and employees that are reliable and accessible to all users.
- Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities within major new residential and commercial developments.
- Encourage “Complete Streets” in planning and constructing major transportation improvements.
- Place a high priority on serving the needs of transportation disadvantaged including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and low income residents.
- Maximize bicycle and pedestrian access to roadways and transit facilities.
- Encourage transportation choices that benefit the environment including transit, carpooling, bike and pedestrian movement.
- Support alternative transportation modes to improve air quality.

RELATION TO THE 2019 ST. CLAIR COUNTY TRAILS PLAN

St. Clair County, along with the Community Foundation of St. Clair County and numerous local and regional partners, developed an updated countywide Trails Plan in 2019 that identifies existing gaps in countywide non-motorized trail networks, identifies preferred alternatives to eliminate those gaps, and prioritizes the timing and sequencing for completing needed connections. The overarching goal is to complete the Bridge to Bay Trail and Wadhams to Avoca trail networks, which includes connecting to the Macomb Orchard Trail and the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route #1, which runs from South Haven in the western part of the state to Port Huron in the eastern part of the state. More information about the St. Clair County Trails Plan can be found in Chapter 4.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION (PARC) WEBSITE

Once the draft Master Recreation Plan update was complete, each chapter was placed at PARC’s website, www.stclaircounty.org/Offices/parks/, allowing residents and other visitors to the website to access the Plan and thoroughly read through its content. The draft Plan was accessible on the website beginning on November 24, 2021, in advance of the January 12, 2022 public hearing.

PARC SOCIAL MEDIA

In the past few years, PARC has increasingly leveraged social media to expand its reach and keep the public informed. The prolific utilization of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter by the general public make it a communication medium that cannot be ignored.

PARC has developed and maintains a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/St-Clair-County-Parks-and-Recreation-Commission/114026198441>) where people with Facebook accounts can go and “Like” the page in order to receive updates and announcements from PARC in their Facebook newsfeeds. It has proven to be an effective way to spread the word about the great projects and activities in which PARC is involved. PARC also has an Instagram page (@stclaircountyparks.mi).

Additionally, the Metropolitan Planning Commission administers a Facebook page for The Blueways of St. Clair project, aimed at keeping citizens and visitors up-to-date on Blueways-related events, paddling information, and other news related to St. Clair County waterways. That page can be accessed at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Blueways-of-St-Clair/111881135522468?v=wall>. The Blueways of St. Clair is also on Twitter (@BluewaysStClair) and Instagram.

Beginning in May 2021, PARC utilized its social media pages to send out links to the online public survey, as well as follow up reminders for people to complete the survey.

St. Clair County Parks & Recreation Commission

[Review the 2017-2021 St. Clair County Master Recreation Plan](#)

The St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission is funded by a special 0.49 mill property tax for the purpose of improving parks and recreation services in St. Clair County.

The St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission currently operates the 365-acre Goodells County Park, 411-acre Columbus County Park, 30-acre Fort Gratiot County Park, 45-acre Woodsong County Park, 5-acre Fort Gratiot Light Station, 4-acre Wetland County Park, the Marine City Dredge Cut and the 12-mile long Wadhams to Avoca Trail. The Commission also assists local units of government with the development and promotion of the Bridge to Bay Trail.

The Parks and Recreation Commission also provides specialized mobile recreation units for use at community events including two portable stages, two portable bleacher units, and crowd control barriers.

St. Clair County Parks offers a wide range of recreational opportunities including, but not limited to:

- biking
- rollerblading/inline skating

PARC'S MARKETING AND OUTREACH MATERIALS

PARC hired a full-time Special Events/Marketing/Volunteer Coordinator in 2004, which was a goal of the 2002-2006 Master Recreation Plan.

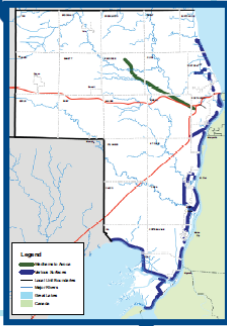
PARC employs a variety of marketing efforts, with each park and trail in the park system having its own dedicated website and brochure. Attractive brochures are distributed to every chamber of commerce in St. Clair County, to several Michigan welcome centers, Main Street Port Huron, and to various tourism boards. They are also distributed to all 32 municipalities in the county.

The PARC newsletter goes out to 65,724 households in St. Clair County, tri-annually in the spring, summer and fall. It is also distributed in the same manner as the brochures, as described above.

PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines, PARC finished drafting the Master Recreation Plan prior to the public hearing and notified the public by means of a news release and social media, that the draft copy was available for public review for at least 30 days. The draft document was available to be read at the PARC office, as well as on the PARC website. The public hearing was held during a regular PARC meeting on January 12, 2022.

St. Clair County Trail System



Trail System Information

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation also operates 11 miles of trails in the Avoca Trail system. For more information, call 810/989-6960 or visit www.stclaircountyparks.org.

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission

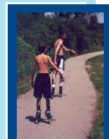
200 Grand River Avenue, Suite 205
Port Huron, MI 48060-810/989-6960
www.stclaircountyparks.org
www.bridgetobaytrail.org



Funding for the construction of Bridge to Bay Trail sections comes from the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation millage, local government funds and grants. Grant funds for the trail have been provided by the United States Government through the Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-first Century (TEA-21) program administered by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT); the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR); and the GreenWays Initiative program administered by the Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan.

Bridge to Bay Trail

St. Clair County, Michigan



St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission



200 Grand River Avenue, Suite 107
Port Huron, MI 48060-810/989-6960
www.stclaircountyparks.org
www.woodsongcountypark.org



Woodsong County Park is located at 14900 Rynn Road, Clyde, MI 48049. For a large print brochure, call 810/989-6960.

8/20/10-10/40 Printed 2012

Woodsong County Park

St. Clair County, Michigan



Discover Woodsong County Park!
www.woodsongcountypark.org

About Columbus County Park...

Columbus County Park is a 300-acre park that offers beautiful views of the Belle River and provides fishing, hunting, hiking, climbing, kayaking, biking and equestrian opportunities. Reservations are required for exclusive use of any park facility. For reservation information call 810/989-6960.



Funding

Funding to purchase Columbus County Park was made possible with a \$2.27 million grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The St. Clair County Parks and Recreation millage provided funding for the grant. Local match and ongoing development of the park.



Park Rules

- Columbus County Park is open from 8 am - 9 pm, Memorial Day through Labor Day (9 pm during the rest of the year)
- Trails in the park are for non-motorized use only.
- The lighted climbing hill is open daily from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm weather permitting.
- Pets must be kept on a leash. Owners must clean up after their pets.
- Hunting is allowed by permit only.
- Admission is free.

County Parks Information

St. Clair County is home to five county parks: Columbus County Park, Fort Gratiot County Park, Fort Gratiot Light station, Conde's County Park and Woodsong County Park. St. Clair County also operates the Woodhams to Avoca Trail and works with local units of government to develop the Bridge to Bay Trail.

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission



200 Grand River Avenue, Suite 107
Port Huron, MI 48060-810/989-6960
www.stclaircountyparks.org
www.columbuscountypark.org



Columbus County Park is located in the southwest part of St. Clair County, just minutes north of Gratiot Road. The park is located at 3670 Beaumont Road, Columbus, MI 48001. For a large print brochure call 810/989-6960.

8/20/10-10/40 Printed 2012

Columbus County Park

St. Clair County, Michigan



Discover Columbus County Park!
www.columbuscountypark.org

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