

# PLANNING GOALS AND STRATEGIC ACTIONS

# 5





FORT GRATIOT COUNTY PARK



## INTRODUCTION

### BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

St. Clair County is a vibrant, beautiful community with a great citizenry and a high quality of life. This is an exciting time for the county, and parks and recreation should be an integral part of the county's image, character, and quality of life. Specifically, strong parks and recreation programs have the ability to:

- **Provide social benefits** by connecting people with neighbors of other ages, incomes, backgrounds, and abilities. Parks and recreation build community pride and spirit.
- **Provide economic benefits** by improving the quality of life in the community and helping to attract businesses and residents to the county. Top-rate parks and recreation facilities are a competitive advantage for St. Clair County in economic development.
- **Provide benefits to the environment** by connecting people with and educating them about nature. In addition, greenways can provide alternative transportation opportunities. Parks and open space are essential weapons in the county's arsenal against sprawl and environmental degradation.
- **Provide benefits to individuals** by promoting physical fitness and self-improvement. Opportunities for exercise and being outdoors result in greater physical fitness, emotional well-being, and connectivity to nature.

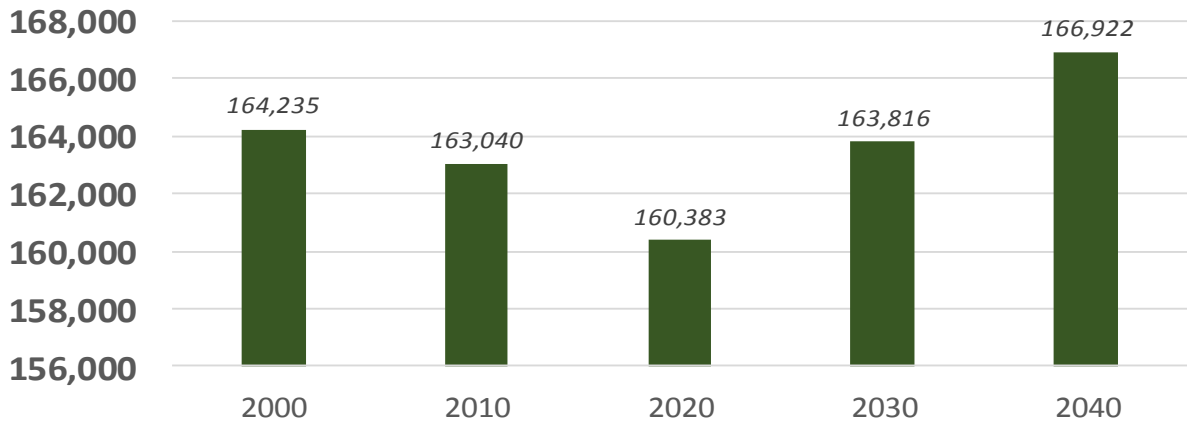
### EMERGING ISSUES

Over the next five, ten, and even 20 years, there are some emerging issues unfolding in St. Clair County that will have numerous implications for recreation planning, including:

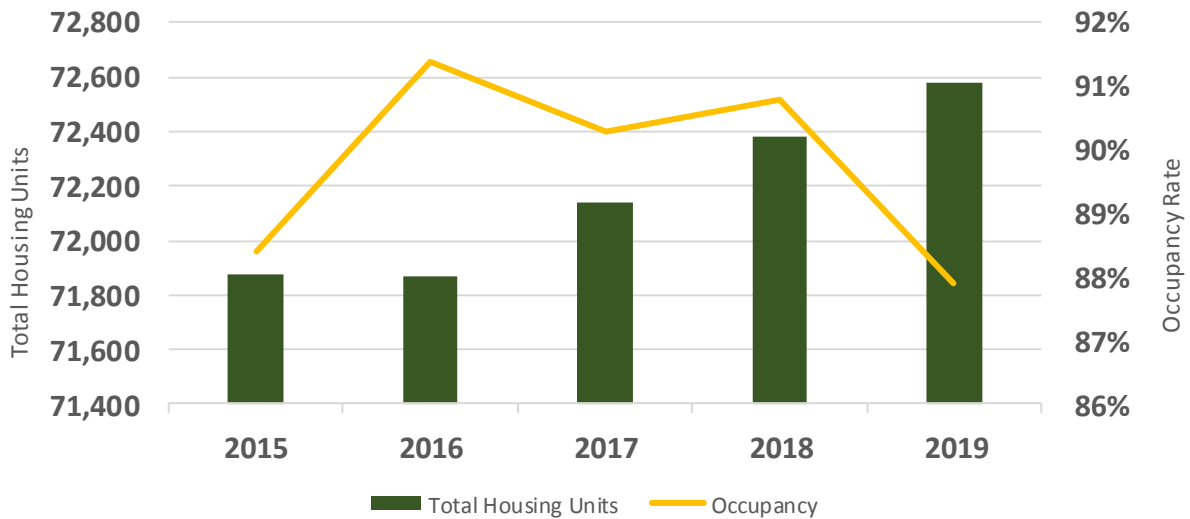
#### An Aging Population

The first issue is that the county will continue to be the home for an ever-increasing aging population. The median age of county residents is 43.8 years and more than half (54.2%) of the county's population is at least 40

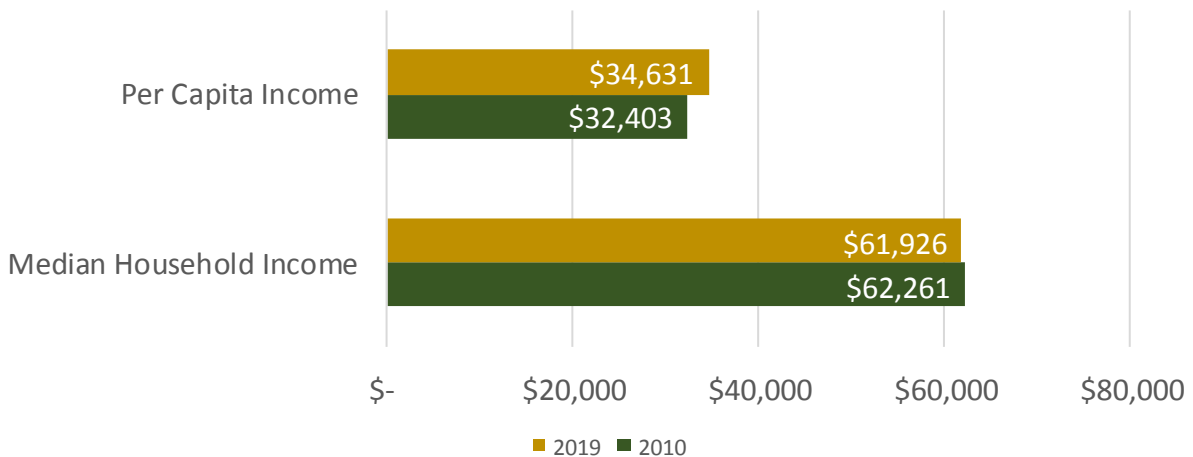
## Population in St. Clair County 2000-2040



## Total Housing Units and Occupancy Rate

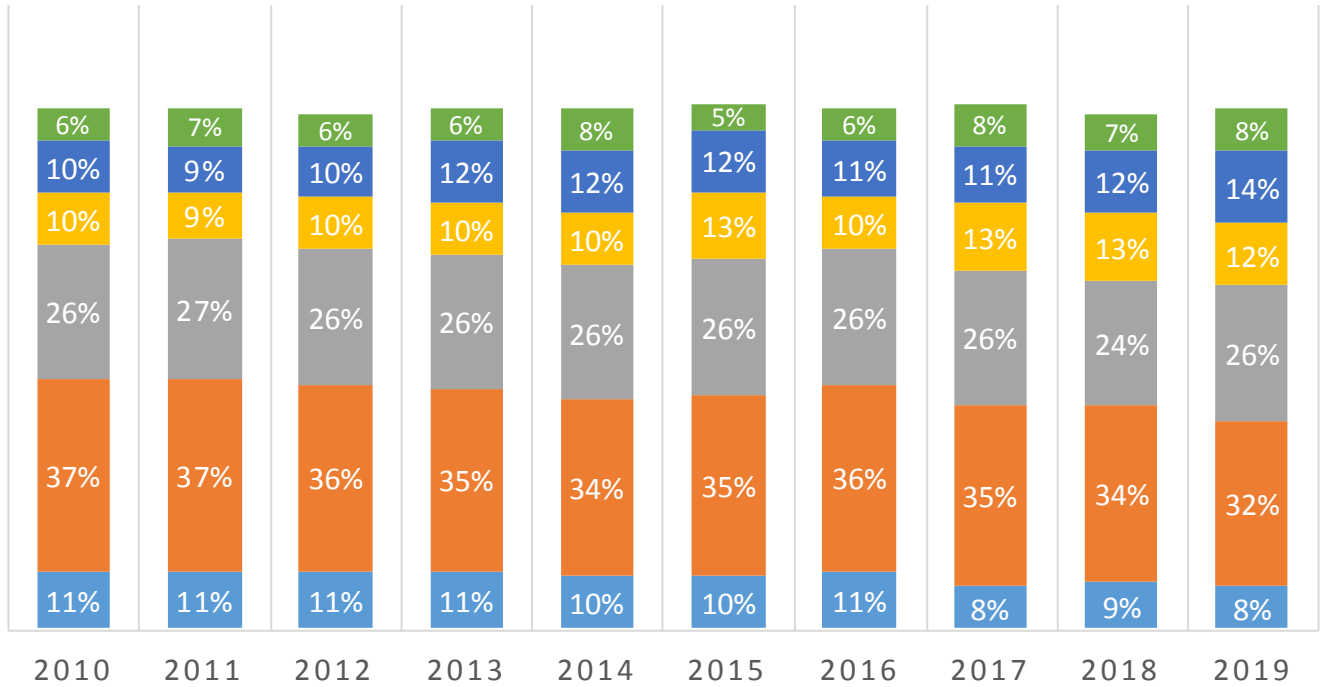


## Income 2010-2019



## ST. CLAIR COUNTY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT 2019

■ Less than high school graduate    ■ High school graduate    ■ Some college No Degree  
■ Associate's Degree    ■ Bachelor's degree    ■ Graduate Degree Or More



## Labor Force and Unemployment Rate



years old. SEMCOG projects that by 2045, a quarter of the County's population will be 65 years of age or older. The Parks and Recreation Commission needs to keep this in mind as it plans out new park amenities and trails. Additionally, the Commission should strategically partner with other organizations to enhance older residents' access to parks and recreation facilities to continue living active, healthy lives.

PARC should be cognizant that as more and more county residents retire, there will be an increased number of older residents with the time and income to spend on leisure. This is true for a number of reasons. More people are living longer, more people are retiring earlier, and retirees are more active in lifestyle than ever before.

### **“Brain Drain”**

There are very few 20 to 24 year olds in the county. This information suggests that few persons this age stay after high school graduation. That means few young workers, college students, young singles or young married couples live in the county. The loss of young adults in the State of Michigan has been well-documented in recent years. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, there were 9,399 residents (6%) between the ages of 20 to 24 and only 18,278 residents in their twenties altogether. The exodus of young adults is continuing in the present decade. This loss of college-aged young adults and college graduates has been nicknamed the “brain drain.”

It is well documented that young professionals and families are seeking out a high quality of life when deciding where to live. They want good schools, access to a wide variety of recreational opportunities, and options for entertainment. Parks and trails have a big impact on quality of life and influencing decisions on where to live.

### **Recreational Opportunities for Youth**

The greatest percentage of the county's population, 30%, is between the ages of 50 and 69. The next largest percentage of the population, 29.2%, is under 24 years of age and 10.3% are under 10 years old, which suggests that, in addition to providing more services for the elderly within the community, the County and its communities may also need to target more recreational opportunities toward young children and teenagers.

### **Economic Development and Placemaking**

Quality of life can be defined in many ways; however, most definitions are likely to include parks and recreation opportunities as a major component. On a global scale, there are no great communities that do not have great parks and recreation amenities. In today's world, economic development efforts start with being able to market a



*GREAT LAKE-TO-LAKE TRAIL, ROUTE #1 INAUGURAL RIDE, SEPTEMBER 2019*

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high quality of life. Companies now look beyond simple infrastructure concerns when deciding where to locate. They look for areas that offer recreational, cultural, and entertainment amenities – all things that factor into a high quality of life. Companies go where talented individuals are located. Talented individuals choose where they live based on quality of life issues.

The term “placemaking” can mean many different things. When it comes to community planning, it often means simply creating better community spaces in our cities, villages, and townships. St. Clair County and its local units must work to create places that will draw people in – places that make residents and visitors alike feel as though that particular town is the place to be. By creating more functional, interesting places, shops and businesses in our downtown areas can thrive, jobs can be created and sustained, and the already high quality of life in the county will increase. Recreation plays a huge role in effective placemaking, because people want to live in places that have options for recreation, options for entertainment, and other options for how they spend their time.

### **The Tourism Industry in St. Clair County**

Most of St. Clair County’s tourist attractions are along the eastern and southern coastline in the form of beaches, parks, and marinas. There are few recreational areas inland. Local communities offer special events, such as parades and annual or semi-annual festivals.

St. Clair County is in a prime position to attract even greater amounts of tourism dollars thanks to the park and trail facilities, historical features, beaches, agri-tourism, cruise ship tourism, and a trend for families and aging citizens to take vacations closer to home. In recent years, there has been a significant boon in the number of new restaurants, boutique hotels, theaters, shopping, and entertainment options in downtowns up and down the shoreline, including Port Huron, St. Clair, Marine City, and Algonac.

The Blueways of St. Clair features 17 paddling routes along St. Clair County waterways, which serve as a tourist attraction for water enthusiasts from throughout Southeast Michigan. Kayaking and canoeing are continuing to grow in popularity and PARC expects increased use of the county’s paddling routes.

In addition, there is an ongoing collaborative effort to connect St. Clair County’s trail network with the larger regional system, including connections to the Macomb Orchard Trail, the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail, and the Great Lakes Way.

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Green infrastructure is our system of natural resources that provide the critical ecological services necessary to maintain a healthy environment for humans and wildlife. Parks and open space are important components of green infrastructure. This includes local, state, and federal parks, land conservancy properties, and other natural areas. Open space that extends across community boundaries provides opportunities for parks and recreational use. It can also conserve natural features such as habitat for plants and animals.

Land that has major development constraints can be targeted as future protected open space or parks. Areas with steep slopes, poorly draining and unstable soils, and poor access should be identified to help plan future land acquisition priorities. A community’s open space and greenway network should connect to the network of neighboring communities to create a connected regional network. This will help ensure ecological health as well as expand recreational opportunities for all residents.



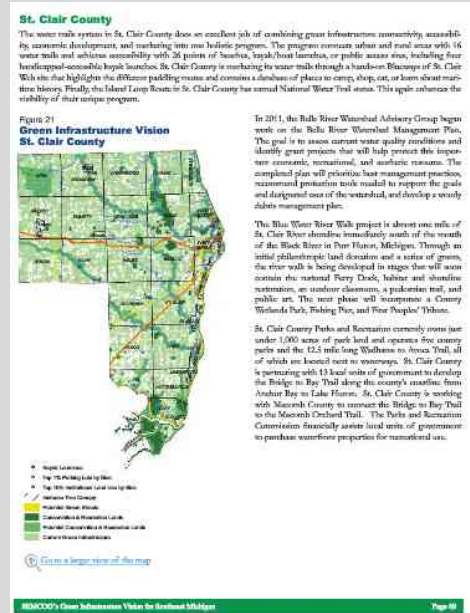
## SEMCOG GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE VISION FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN: HIGHLIGHTS

In May 2014, SEMCOG completed the “Green Infrastructure Vision for Southeast Michigan.” Among other things, the Green Infrastructure Vision examined green infrastructure’s impact on the economy, tourism, transportation, infrastructure, water quality, air quality, vacant land, and health. It also zoomed in on each of the seven counties in Southeast Michigan, including St. Clair County, and identified existing green infrastructure assets, connections, and goals.

Among the highlighted green infrastructure assets in St. Clair County, the document focuses on the Blueways of St. Clair, the Belle River Watershed Plan (and other watershed planning efforts), the Blue Water River Walk, and the numerous assets of the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC).

Regional policy areas identified in the Vision include:

- Increasing tree canopy in Southeast Michigan;
- Protecting existing high quality wetlands through land use regulation;
- Using green infrastructure to manage storm water runoff;
- Increasing public green infrastructure in local and regional parks;
- Encouraging preservation of high-valued agricultural lands and development of community gardens to provide a quality local food network and continue the economic vitality of the agricultural industry;
- Increasing green infrastructure along riparian corridors and connecting these corridors to parks and other natural areas;
- Seeking opportunities to construct green infrastructure in priority areas such as roadways, institutional properties, parking lots, riparian corridors, and downtown areas;
- Ensuring natural areas have maintenance plans to maintain quality;
- Increasing public access to public parks in small towns within rural areas;
- Using access to green infrastructure as a means to attract young professionals;
- Increasing public access along the Great Lakes and connecting channels, including the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair;
- Prioritizing funding for trail improvements to fill gaps within the Southeast Michigan trail network;
- Integrating water trails with public green infrastructure along riparian corridors to the extent possible, including canoe/kayak launch areas;
- Coordinating non-motorized trail planning with green infrastructure planning to assist in meeting the needs of a green infrastructure network that uses trails as a linkage;
- Incorporating green infrastructure elements into publicly-funded projects;
- Promoting the use of complete and green streets as appropriate in transportation improvements; and
- Using vacant land to increase protected green infrastructure around existing parks and natural areas.



## SEMCOG PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN: HIGHLIGHTS

In 2019, SEMCOG completed the “Parks and Recreation Plan for Southeast Michigan.” This plan was developed to ensure that the region’s recreation system meets the quality of life, health, and accessibility needs of its residents and visitors, as well as local and regional economic development and environmental priorities.

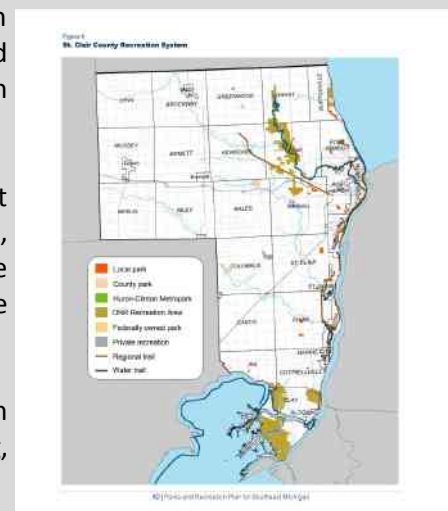
SEMCOG established a Parks and Recreation Task Force, comprised of 65 representatives from local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, land conservancies, trail councils, health care providers, and other organizations to provide input and guide development of the plan. The task force met five times over the course of a year-long planning process. Members identified common challenges and priorities to establish the framework for this plan, and deliberated on the regional policies and actions. The St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission and the Metropolitan Planning Commission both had representatives on the task force.

The task force’s overarching goal for the region was to ensure that Southeast Michigan’s recreation system meets the quality of life, health, and accessibility needs of its residents and visitors, as well as the economic development and environmental priorities and goals of the region and local communities.

The plan contains the following six regional policies to address common challenges and supports a systems approach to park planning, development, maintenance, and programming:

- **Integrate community health** and wellness initiatives with outdoor recreation opportunities;
- **Ensure equitable access** to recreation opportunities for people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities in Southeast Michigan;
- **Promote the economic value** of parks and recreation in Southeast Michigan;
- **Support conservation and stewardship** of natural and cultural resources, in balance with outdoor recreation opportunities;
- **Raise awareness** among Southeast Michigan residents and visitors about outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the region; and
- **Foster collaboration** among outdoor recreation stakeholders.

SEMCOG’S VISION IS FOR ALL PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN TO BENEFIT FROM A CONNECTED, THRIVING REGION OF SMALL TOWNS, DYNAMIC URBAN CENTERS, ACTIVE WATERFRONTS, DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS, PREMIER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND ABUNDANT AGRICULTURAL, RECREATIONAL AND NATURAL AREAS.





## PLANNING GOALS AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

### TABLE 5-1: 6 STRATEGIC FOCAL AREAS

1	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION</b></p> <p>The Parks and Recreation Commission aims to continue its history of providing quality recreational experiences through effective management, innovative service delivery, and collaboration with community stakeholders.</p>
2	<p><b>FINANCE</b></p> <p>PARC's long-term financial directive is to maintain strong financing strategies to address the need for park acquisition, park development, facilities and infrastructure maintenance, and environmental stewardship.</p>
3	<p><b>PARKLAND</b></p> <p>In terms of property acquisition and maintenance, PARC's focus is to rectify current acreage deficiencies by acquiring lands and facilities that are viable parks and recreation opportunities for both present and future citizens.</p>
4	<p><b>FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p> <p>PARC's overarching facilities and infrastructure goal is to ensure quality, safe, and functional amenities at each of its facilities and along the countywide non-motorized trail network.</p>
5	<p><b>GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS</b></p> <p>PARC's primary greenways and blueways focus is to provide for a multi-use regional trail and blueways system that connects community assets and links to other county and municipal parks and community trail systems.</p>
6	<p><b>PLACES AND SPACES</b></p> <p>A community's sense of place is tied to its well-being and prosperity. PARC strives to work with community stakeholders to bolster placemaking efforts that highlight the waterfront, cultural and historical resources, and the natural environment.</p>



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## ADMINISTRATION

One of PARC's primary focal points is to continue to expand and build upon a solid administrative foundation that has allowed the organization to effectively and efficiently carry out its mission of providing recreational opportunities to St. Clair County residents. Over the years, PARC has demonstrated a high degree of organizational effectiveness - the ability of an organization to utilize its knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively fulfill its mission. The Parks and Recreation Commission, in conjunction with the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners and PARC administration, have a proven track record of delivering innovative parks and recreation services through strong management, broad-based collaboration, and providing leadership in parks and recreation.

### ADMINISTRATION GOAL 1: STRONG COLLABORATION

The importance of strong organizational collaboration to the success and well-being of a community cannot be overstated. Working with other stakeholders and organizations with common goals is strategically advantageous and, in current times, it is essential for securing funding, building capacity, and carrying out projects. Collaborating with community partners allows for resource sharing, community awareness, economies of scale, innovative problem solving, and access to funding.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Network with federal, state, county, local and nonprofit recreation providers.
- Encourage and promote use and support from the community, nonprofit conservation organizations, local businesses, and citizens. Continually work to expand PARC's volunteer network.
- Communicate and meet regularly with the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners to ensure ample time for project planning, gathering information, and project review.
- Work with all law enforcement agencies to provide security for all county-owned parks and recreation facilities, grounds and trails.
- Continue working with the Sheriff's Department to provide cost-effective patrol of county-owned parks and recreation facilities, grounds and trails.
- Actively collaborate with SEMCOG, the Community Foundation, Friends of the St. Clair River, the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, Michigan Trails Southeast on matters pertaining to recreation, trails, and tourism.
- Collaborate with government, businesses, economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other entities to support parks, trails, and other environmental stewardship efforts.

### ADMINISTRATION GOAL 2: EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Work to continually innovate and deliver a high quality recreational experience for St. Clair County citizens and visitors. Above all else, all PARC commissioners and employees share the primary job of ensuring citizens' (aka 'customers') recreational needs are met. To ensure PARC is managed well, PARC officials must understand customer needs, communicate effectively, and be aware of PARC's vision and mission at all times.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Attend parks and recreation conferences, workshops, training programs, and other educational classes to expand PARC's knowledge base.
- Regularly engage the public to find out what citizens need/want in terms of parks and recreational opportunities.

- Ensure that all staff members are aware of PARC’s vision and mission. Provide staff with the necessary training and resources to do their jobs well.
- Promote sustainability and efficiency practices at PARC facilities to the extent that it is feasible, cost-effective, and practical.
- Provide outstanding customer service in all aspects of PARC’s service delivery.
- Provide adequate funding for operational needs and adequate staffing for PARC facilities.

### **ADMINISTRATION GOAL 3: LEADERSHIP IN RECREATION**

Staying abreast of the latest trends and best practices in parks and recreation, trail planning, and public service delivery is imperative for PARC going forward. PARC strives to be a model county park system within the state of Michigan.

#### **Strategic Actions:**

- Ensure that PARC commissioners, managers, and staff stay abreast of the latest trends and best practices in parks and recreation.
- Advocate for parks and recreation through participation in local, regional, state, and national recreation organizations and committees.
- Ensure St. Clair County Parks and Recreation is considered a model when it comes to the delivery of parks and recreation services to residents.
- Provide project planning support and assistance to local units of government to ensure they have the



*FORT GRATIOT COUNTY PARK*



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## FINANCE

PARC's financial focus is to maintain solid financing strategies to address the need for park acquisition, development, maintenance and stewardship. Funding is a critical component for communities trying to develop or improve parks. Additionally, creative funding strategies are necessary to effectively maintain existing trails and to plan, design, and build new trails. PARC is fortunate to be funded by a special 0.5 mill property tax for the purpose of improving parks and recreation services in St. Clair County and must continually demonstrate effective stewardship of those millage funds. In order to do this effectively, PARC must pursue specific financial goals that will continue to provide value and quality services to citizens and local units of government.

### FINANCE GOAL 1: EFFICIENT FUNDING MECHANISMS

Ensuring that PARC has adequate financial resources for park and trail acquisition, development, and maintenance now and into the future. Moreover, working with the Board of Commissioners and County administration to develop functional and accurate budgets and forecasts.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Continue to distribute 25% of the annual millage revenues to local units of government - based on the latest U.S. Census figures - for planning, maintenance, and development of parks and recreation facilities and programs.
- Work with the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners to seek renewal of the countywide Parks and Recreation millage in 2022.
- Research and recommend, as appropriate, potential income-generating mechanisms to support county parks.
- Continue to aggressively pursue public and private grants and donations.
- Work with the Community Foundation to maintain and expand agency funds for county parks and trails.
- Maintain grant programs for local units of government to assist in the acquisition of small parcels for waterfront preservation, skate parks, dog parks, trails, and canoe/kayak launches.
- Continue to assist local units of government in accessing grant opportunities for parks and trails.

### FINANCE GOAL 2: COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL PLANNING

Create short-term and long-term business and operations plans for each PARC facility in order to understand financial opportunities and liabilities and to enhance park usage tracking and metrics. Begin multi-year planning for maintenance, development, acquisition, and capital improvements.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Maintain updated business plans for each county park as necessary.
- Continually utilize the Long Term Maintenance Table to identify and manage major investments, assist with planning decisions, and prioritize capital improvements.
- Regularly evaluate PARC's fee structures and establish an acceptable level of cost recovery through user fees.
- Use data and metrics from PARC counters and other tracking mechanisms in order to inform future decision-making.
- Track the income and expenses of each site and program.

### FINANCE GOAL 3: STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

Continue to identify and evaluate long-term capital maintenance needs for PARC assets and incorporate those needs into the County’s Capital Improvement Program. Business and operations plans for each park will identify recurring renovation needs, projected lifecycles for infrastructure and equipment replacement, immediate project needs, and projected costs for capital assets.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Continue to identify and annually plan for capital improvements for all PARC facilities. Maintain an accurate inventory of major park assets and improvements (amenities and features valued at greater than \$5,000 and having an ordinary useful life of ten years or more) maintained by PARC.
- Regularly assess the current condition of park assets, identify benchmarks for industry accepted cyclical maintenance standards, and provide criteria to prioritize needs for renovation or replacement of assets.
- Use the County’s Capital Improvement Program to guide PARC’s annual budgeting and capital maintenance project submittals.
- Plan and schedule capital projects to coincide with the availability of funds to finance needed improvements.
- In order to preserve county assets, maintenance and repair projects should be a higher priority than the construction of new facilities.



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## PARKLAND

PARC's focus for existing parks is to continue development activities that allow for Goodells, Columbus, Fort Gratiot, and the Blue Water River Walk County Parks to be used as multi-purpose facilities that can be used year-round. PARC's focus for Woodsong County Park is to continue its development as a natural area for all county citizens and their guests. Acquiring land for parks and recreation use in order to rectify acreage deficiencies is a high priority for the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission. It is also a priority that cannot be assigned a specific schedule because, by their nature, land acquisitions are hard to predict. PARC must be flexible enough to aggressively pursue appropriate land acquisitions whenever they become available. Land acquisitions are usually "one-shot" opportunities that, if missed, are unlikely to ever come around for a second chance.

### **PARKLAND GOAL 1: STRATEGIC PROPERTY ACQUISITION**

Acquire lands and facilities that are viable parks and recreation opportunities for both present and future county citizens. Property acquisitions should be targeted in underserved areas and in locations that will allow PARC to rectify acreage deficiencies based on per capita standards.

#### **Strategic Actions:**

- Explore the acquisition of a culturally or naturally significant property or properties in the western part of St. Clair County for the eventual development of county park facilities.
- Identify appropriate waterfront properties that could be acquired and developed and integrated into St. Clair County's existing green infrastructure network.
- Explore other potential locations for acquisition of significant property or properties, such as:
  - ◆ Significant properties in conjunction with the regional trail plans and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory.
  - ◆ Properties up and down stream from Columbus County Park, particularly riverfront properties.
  - ◆ Properties adjacent to existing PARC facilities.
  - ◆ Opportunities for extending the Wadhams to Avoca Trail from Avoca to Yale to the county line.
- To the greatest extent possible, property acquisition and park development projects should reflect the master plans of the local municipality, the county, the state and adjoining regions.
- Understand the financial implications of acquisition through the use of financial analysis tools. Build potential acquisitions into the individual business plans developed for each facility.

### **PARKLAND GOAL 2: PARKS FOR ALL PEOPLE**

Understand the changing demographics in St. Clair County and the Southeast Michigan region. Our population is aging and parks and recreation amenities and programs will need to adjust to population shifts. Additionally, recreation opportunities that appeal to young professionals, families, and children must also be provided to attract new residents and maintain St. Clair County's high quality of life.

#### **Strategic Actions:**

- Anticipate the needs of the changing community and structure PARC facilities accordingly.
- Bring children and families into St. Clair County Parks and provide them with reasons to become lifetime patrons.
- Explore the potential for adding amenities that promote physical activity for senior citizens and other features that appeal to an aging population.



## GOODELLS COUNTY PARK



- Examine potential opportunities to develop indoor recreation amenities that will promote year-round facility usage, especially during colder winter months.
- Regularly engage stakeholders of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds and ask for their input on future parks and recreation amenities and future planning activities.
- Serve an aging population with social, recreational, active and healthy opportunities.
- Ensure that all PARC playgrounds are regularly inspected and safe.
- Develop North Channel County Park according to park master plans and community input.

### **PARKLAND GOAL 3: PRESERVATION OF RESOURCES**

According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the mission of public parks and recreation at all levels should support the conservation and stewardship of land, water, and natural resources. Parks serve an essential role in preserving natural resources and wildlife habitat, protecting clean water and clean air, and providing open space for current and future generations. The quality of life for every person in St. Clair County is improved by clean, accessible parks, trails, and open space.

#### **Strategic Actions:**

- Control and/or mitigate the impacts of invasive species on the biodiversity of plants and animals. Plant additional plant species as needed.
- Develop and implement a plan to manage large woody debris in rivers flowing through PARC properties and stabilize the shoreline to reduce soil erosion and improve fish habitat.
- Encourage the propagation of species of plants and animals that are native and indigenous to St. Clair County.
- Protect and maintain the quality of water resources both on and near PARC facilities.
- Develop programs to interpret the natural, cultural and physical resources and educate the public of their importance.
- Maintain and grow the partnership with Friends of the St. Clair River and other environmental groups in support of their stewardship of our region's natural resources.

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## FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

When it comes to PARC's general facilities and infrastructure, the focus is to ensure quality, safe, and functional amenities at every county park and along its non-motorized trail network. Paramount in this focus is ensuring that all county residents and their guests have a great experience using St. Clair County parks. Great experiences come from having access to nature, being active outdoors, making memories with loved ones, and learning new things about the community or environment. This focal area goes hand-in-hand with the identification of long-term capital maintenance needs and ongoing business planning for individual facilities. Each PARC property is unique and provides a different user experience for residents and visitors.

### FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL 1: WELL-MAINTAINED INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide a continued high level of service to residents and visitors in a safe, clean manner that protects the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the county. Ensure that PARC infrastructure functions properly and contributes to a patron's overall enjoyment of a facility.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Replace high maintenance items with more sustainable, low maintenance items.
- Maintain existing and explore new partnerships for maintenance and operation of PARC facilities.
- Provide and maintain appropriate public access to areas designated for public use.
- Explore opportunities to utilize green infrastructure over older, traditional infrastructure when possible. Look for ways to implement recommendations in SEMCOG's *Green Infrastructure Vision for Southeast Michigan*.
- Incorporate rain gardens, bioswales, porous pavement, and other techniques used to manage storm water runoff when improving PARC facilities. Explore other low-impact development (LID) tools that can be implemented in PARC facilities.
- Address recurring maintenance needs based on the priorities identified in individual park business plans and the Long Term Maintenance Table.

### FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL 2: MODERN FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

Maintain and update existing parks and facilities before constructing new facilities. Ensure that PARC officials have a strong understanding of the current and coming trends in parks and recreation and build modernization activities into capital improvement projects and individual park business plans.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Work to develop each park following the goals and objectives of each individual park master plan and business plan.
- Develop parking lots and restroom facilities in appropriate manners based on location and need.
- Develop ADA-accessible walkways and trails to enhance connectivity in PARC facilities.
- Install ADA-accessible canoe/kayak launches in appropriate locations at PARC-owned facilities.
- Continue working with mountain biking advocacy groups to develop additional mountain bike trails at appropriate locations at Columbus and Woodsong County Parks.

### FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL 3: QUALITY USER EXPERIENCE

Develop and maintain recreational facilities that draw people in to experience nature, experience their communities, and to be active outdoors. Ensure that all PARC facilities are well-designed and well-maintained.

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Make sure equipment and infrastructure is safe and functional. Create experiences that make people want to keep coming back to the parks.

**Strategic Actions:**

- Work with the Regional Trails Governing Board and other regional and community partners to implement the St. Clair County Trails Plan and the signage and wayfinding plan for the Bridge to Bay Trail.
- Pursue the year-round usage of PARC facilities and trails.
- Enhance informational and directional signage to all park and trail facilities as needed. Improve entrance and events signage on main roads.
- Advocate and facilitate barrier-free access to all PARC facilities, trails, and greenways whenever feasible.
- Work to make programs, features, and special exhibits more accessible to the general public.
- Work with regulatory agencies to maintain and protect swimming beaches at PARC facilities.
- Establish a signature event for each PARC facility as a gateway to additional programming and seek partners to eventually run those events.
- Provide for overflow parking where needed at PARC facilities.
- Construct additional picnic facilities as needed.





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## GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS

PARC's overarching focus for greenways and blueways is to provide for a multi-use, regional trails and blueways system that connects community assets and links to other county and municipal parks and community trail systems. Greenways and blueways provide our residents with an abundance of benefits, including personal health, transportation options, economic prosperity, increased property values, environmental health, and community connectivity.

### GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS GOAL 1: CONNECTED GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS

Connect land and water trails within the county to downtowns, natural areas, recreation areas, riparian corridors, community centers, and other trail systems within the region. Connectivity enhances the quality of life in St. Clair County while at the same time reducing habitat fragmentation and encouraging additional recreation opportunities. Connecting the network of greenways and blueways will require a coordinated effort of local, regional, state, and federal stakeholders, as well as private landowners.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Work with partners to implement the St. Clair County Trails Plan. Assist local communities in filling identified gaps in the Bridge to Bay Trail.
- Connect the Bridge to Bay Trail to the Macomb Orchard Trail along Fred Moore Highway as part of the statewide Great Lake to Lake Trail.
- Connect the Bridge to Bay Trail to the Wadhams to Avoca Trail in Port Huron and Port Huron Township.
- Extend the Wadhams to Avoca Trail to Yale.
- Connect to other land and water trails owned or operated by neighboring counties.
- Work with transportation agencies to provide non-motorized access to trail, parks, and greenways consistent with local, county, and regional non-motorized plans.
- Consider acquiring abandoned railroad rights-of-way for future trails.
- Research and pursue grant opportunities from a variety of public and private sources.
- Continue to develop and promote the Blueways of St. Clair and partner with local units of government to provide additional canoe and kayak launches along the Blueways.
- Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) along all trail routes.
- Develop rustic walking/hiking trails throughout PARC facilities.
- Work with equestrian stakeholders to develop equestrian trails in appropriate locations. Provide adequate parking and river crossings for equestrian activity at PARC facilities.

### GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS GOAL 2: MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION

Now, more than ever, multimodal solutions are critical in addressing the long-term mobility needs of St. Clair County residents and businesses. Our residents are getting older and our communities are working to attract new residents who desire a variety of mobility options. Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. Parks and trails play an important role in the provision of multimodal transportation options.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Work with local communities to encourage their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right-of-way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.

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- Collaborate with local partners to secure “Safe Routes to School” funding for implementation of trail extensions in appropriate areas.
  - Work with local units of government and law enforcement on educating people on bicycle and pedestrian safety.
  - Actively participate in non-motorized planning and implementation activities with groups such as the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), Michigan Trails Southeast, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), and other agencies.
  - Assist local communities, county departments, and other community organizations in developing strong grant applications seeking funding for multimodal projects that will benefit St. Clair County.
  - Encourage cost-effective trail patrols throughout the county.
  - Explore opportunities to integrate non-motorized transportation infrastructure within existing transit routes.
  - Work with and support local adoption of Complete Streets policies and bicycle and/or pedestrian mobility plans.

### **GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS GOAL 3: HEALTHY, ACTIVE COMMUNITIES**

St. Clair County ranks 52nd out of 83 Michigan counties in terms of overall health according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 19% of our population is in fair or poor health and 34% of St. Clair County adults are obese. 27% of St. Clair County residents who are age 20 or older report they have no leisure-time physical activity. About 23% of St. Clair County adults smoke and another 21% have indicated they participate in binge or heavy drinking. County and local parks are in a prime position to afford residents with an accessible and inexpensive means for changing their lifestyle behaviors. A healthy population enhances the overall quality of life and economic prosperity of a community.

#### **Strategic Actions:**

- Increase marketing of parks and trails to raise awareness and increase utilization.
- Work with community partners to develop plans and guidelines that offer incentives to create walkable and bikeable communities and increase the demand and awareness for physical activity.
- Work with local road agencies to develop Complete Streets policies that can be integrated in to local master plans.
- Work with the St. Clair County Health Department and other partners on initiatives to combat alarming county health trends and build upon positive momentum.
- Include articles and information on health and fitness in the PARC Newsletter that is distributed to all residents.
- Promote active living and healthy initiatives in PARC marketing materials.
- Explore amenities and/or programming that could be implemented in PARC facilities to promote healthy lifestyles and physical fitness.
- Promote walking as a means of transportation and highlight alternatives to vehicle transportation.
- Increase public awareness about where people can walk, bike, or paddle.

**Great Lake to Lake Trail, Route 1 Inaugural Ride, September 23, 2019**





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## PLACES AND SPACES

A community's sense of place is tied to its well-being and prosperity. PARC strives to work with community stakeholders to bolster placemaking efforts that highlight the waterfront, cultural and historical resources, and the natural environment. Bringing people and place together, parks and trails play a key role in creating desirable spaces and contribute to St. Clair County's overall quality of life. Parks bring vitality to communities and enrich the lives of residents.

### PLACES AND SPACES GOAL 1: INCREASED MARKETING AND TOURISM

Position PARC facilities as a key economic engine that provides unique destinations and attracts visitors to experience St. Clair County. Partner with tourism organizations in the region to cross-promote PARC assets and other tourist draws in St. Clair County.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Actively participate in the *Blue Meets Green* economic development group that works to bolster people, places, and prosperity in St. Clair County.
- Work with the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau on marketing and promotion of the county and ensure that PARC facilities are highlighted and promoted in countywide and regional marketing materials.
- Through the development of facility-specific business plans, track usage and activity to more strategically market and promote PARC facilities to certain user groups.
- Partner with other tourism-related businesses and organizations to cross-promote and pool resources.
- Work with the Economic Development Alliance (EDA) of St. Clair County and other stakeholders to enhance PARC's impact on business attraction and retention. Capitalize on parks and recreation being an economic engine for St. Clair County.
- Increase marketing and promotion of PARC facilities and countywide trails. Ensure that County Parks, the Bridge to Bay Trail, and the Wadhams to Avoca Trail have widespread name recognition.

### PLACES AND SPACES GOAL 2: LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Highlight the impact of parks and recreation on creating highly desirable communities that provide residents with a high quality of life and economic prosperity. According to the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University, America's local and regional public park agencies generated nearly \$140 billion in economic activity and supported almost one million jobs from their operations and capital spending alone in 2013. Truly livable communities have a sense of place. Parks and trails provide green space and open space that contributes to the community's identity.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Participate in local and regional placemaking initiatives aimed at revitalizing downtowns and creating vibrant community spaces. Understand the important role parks and recreation can play in placemaking.
- Incorporate arts and cultural activities into recreation planning.
- Work with local units of government and other partners to implement the recommendations of the *Blue Water Trail Towns Master Plan*.
- Continue to seek opportunities for local organizations to host community events within PARC facilities.
- Consider how trail extension projects can help to connect neighborhoods and provide residents with additional access to services.



### PLACES AND SPACES GOAL 3: CULTURAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

PARC's focus on cultural and historic preservation is centered on the full restoration of the Fort Gratiot Light Station buildings in accordance with the deed requirements put forward by the federal government and to increase access to this historical treasure. Additionally, Goodells County Park is home to a Historic Village that highlights St. Clair County's past.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Work with local tourism and marketing partners to promote the Light Station as a destination and to increase public access to and awareness of the facility.
- Construct amenities at the Light Station in accordance with the HSR, site plan, and Long Term Maintenance Table.
- Reconstruct the 1913 gate at the end of Garfield Street.
- Protect the Light Station buildings from weather damage through appropriate improvements and repairs in accordance with the deed.
- Work with the Port Huron Museum to facilitate programming at the Fort Gratiot Light Station site, including.
- Collaborate with the Friends of the Fort Gratiot Light Station to benefit the restoration of the Light Station buildings and grounds, and site interpretation.
  - ◆ Solicit donations and raise funds to financially support restorations.
  - ◆ Maintain an Agency Directed Fund with the St. Clair County Community Foundation.
  - ◆ Assist with grant writing and historical research.
  - ◆ Provide competent volunteers to aid with restoration projects.
  - ◆ Recruit volunteers to assist with the maintenance of flower beds and grounds.
  - ◆ Promote the Light Station through social media.
- Preserve and expand the Historic Village at Goodells County Park.
- Seek outside funding assistance to construct an arena building near the exhibit barns at Goodells County Park and a third pavilion at Fort Gratiot County Park.
- Seek outside funding assistance for a historic farm equipment display/demonstration facility for the machines that are already owned by the Farm Museum.