

PUBLIC INPUT & PLANNING PROCESS







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.

2017-2021 Master Recreation Plan Development

The process that led to the development of this 2012-2016 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.
- Discussion among all PARC committees regarding 2017-2021 goals and objectives.
- 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 June through November in 2016. The survey was completed by 258 respondents.
- A public visioning workshop held on August 24, 2016 at Goodells County Park.
- A public visioning workshop held on September 29, 2016 at the Algonac Banquet Center.
- A joint Board of Commissioners/Parks and Recreation Commission workshop held on November 3, 2016 to present an overview of public input and discuss future goals and objectives.
- Drafting of the Master Recreation Plan document.
- 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 January 4, 2017 and ended on February 2, 2017.
- A public hearing held on February 8, 2017 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.
- An update on the Master Recreation Plan to the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, Environment and Public Works Committee on February 2, 2017.
- Adoption of the Master Recreation Plan by the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners at its February 16, 2017 meeting.
- Transmission of the Master Recreation Plan to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).
- Transmission of the Master Recreation Plan to SEMCOG.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INPUT

LOCAL LEADERSHIP 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. A summary of the leadership survey can be found on the following pages.

Leadership Survey Highlights

- 100% think parks are critical for quality of life.
- 93% think that PARC should assist local communities in developing additional non-motorized trails.
- 93% feel that PARC should assist local communities in developing additional kayak/canoe launches.
- 91% feel that St. Clair County parks are in good condition and are well-maintained.
- 88% feel that parks are important for economic development.
- **79**% think that PARC should explore new opportunities to collaborate on community and/or waterfront revitalization initiatives.
- 77% are satisfied with recreation opportunities available to residents.
- 72% feel that PARC should develop additional parks in appropriate locations.
- 35% agree that PARC should assist local communities in developing additional skate parks. Another 35% are unsure.
- 23% feel that PARC should assist local communities in developing additional dog parks, while 47% are unsure.

What Improvements or other Amenities are Needed?

- Install Internet/Wi-Fi access at St. Clair County parks.
- Invest in and improve existing parks.
- St. Clair County needs a park with access to the St. Clair River.
- A waterfront park is needed in southern St. Clair County.
- A new County park in the western part of St. Clair County.
- Link the Wadhams to Avoca Trail to the Bridge to Bay Trail.
- County needs additional hike/bike trails along rivers and streams.
- Explore the feasibility of indoor recreational facilities.

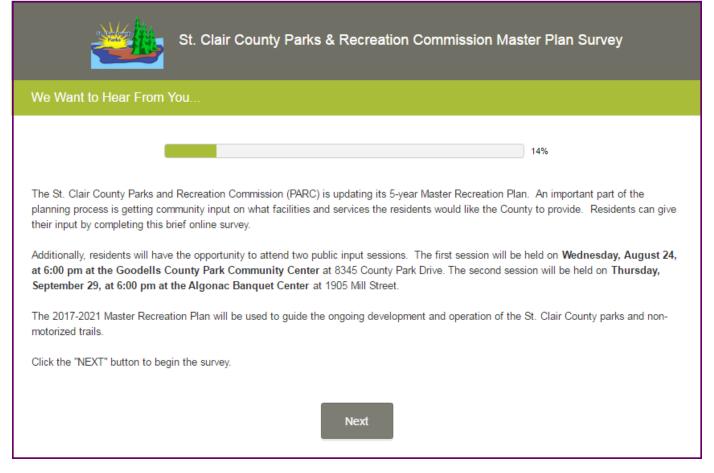
Issues to Address in the Master Recreation Plan Update:

- Development of a five-year vision.
- Improved technology to communicate with residents.
- Long-term maintenance plan and budget projections.
- Age-appropriate facilities for seniors and children.
- More collaboration with local parks and recreation departments.
- More indoor activities and winter activities.
- Look for acquisition opportunities in the southern and western parts of St. Clair County.

COUNTYWIDE ONLINE SURVEY

From June through December 2016, an online survey was available to any resident to provide input on parks and recreation in St. Clair County and the update of the Master Recreation Plan. Respondents were presented with 17 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 258 respondents to the online survey. While the responses came from all parts of the county, the largest percentage (47.6%) of respondents lived in Port Huron and its surrounding communities - Port Huron Township, Fort Gratiot Township, Kimball Township and the City of Marysville. Just over 43% of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49. Another 35% were between ages 50 and 65. Roughly 13.5% of respondents were age 29 or younger.

Online Public Survey Highlights...



There were 254 responses to the question, "Have you visited any of the following St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) parks and/or recreation facilities?

- 78.0% visited Goodells County Park
- 63.8% visited Fort Gratiot County Park
- 61.0% used the Wadhams to Avoca Trail
- 55.5% visited the Fort Gratiot Light Station
- 39.8% used the Bridge to Bay Trail
- 30.3% visited Columbus County Park
- 16.9% visited Woodsong County Park
- 7.9% have never visited a county park

Another 33.9% indicated that they had visited or paddled one of the 16 Blueways of St. Clair water trails.

When asked about visitation frequency over the past 12 months:

- 31.1% said they had visited a St. Clair County park more than 10 times
- 26.8% said they had visited a St. Clair County park between 3-6 times
- 15.0% said they had visited a St. Clair County park between 7-10 times
- 17.3% said they had visited a St. Clair County park once or twice

When asked how often they used a St. Clair County non-motorized trail over the past 12 months:

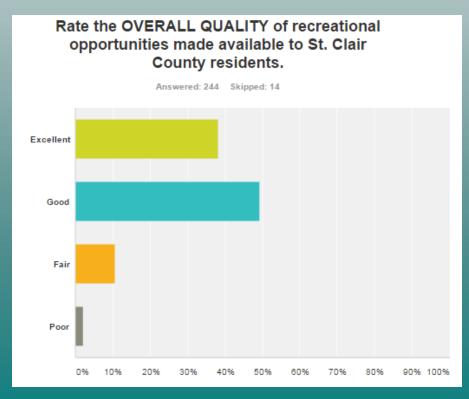
- **22.1**% said they had used a trail more than 10 times
- 19.0% said they had used a trail once or twice
- 18.6% said they had used a trail between 3-6 times

In terms of the furthest distance people would travel to a park:

- 43.3% said they would travel 30 or more minutes
- 24.0% said they would travel between 20-30 minutes
- 20.1% said they would travel between 10-20 minutes

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of operation and maintenance of St. Clair County parks. Here is how they rated various aspects of county park facilities:

	~	Excellent w	Good 🔻	Fair 🔻	Poor w	Unknown/Not Applicable	Total
~	Condition of Buildings	32.24% 79	46.94% 115	9.80% 24	1.63% 4	9.39% 23	245
~	Natural Areas Stewardship	28.75% 69	45.00% 108	7.92% 19	1.67% 4	16.67% 40	240
~	Mowing/Tree Trimming	28.69% 70	51.23% 125	6.15% 15	2.05% 5	11.89% 29	244
~	Parking	29.10% 71	47.13% 115	12.30% 30	2.46% 6	9.02% 22	244
~	Restroom Cleanliness	22.13% 54	42.62% 104	11.89% 29	5.74% 14	17.62% 43	244
~	Signage and Information	24.08% 59	46.53% 114	14.69% 36	3.27% 8	11.43% 28	245
~	Nature Trails	30.33% 74	40.16% 98	9.02% 22	1.64%	18.85% 46	244
~	Trash Removal	26.75% 65	44.44% 108	10.70% 26	2.88% 7	15.23% 37	243
~	Security	13.58% 33	32.10% 78	19.34% 47	6.17% 15	28.81% 70	243



Respondents were then asked what initiatives should be a high priority for PARC:

Answer Choices w	Responses w
Acquiring land for future development	31.09% 74
 Acquiring waterfront land for water-based recreation 	47.90% 114
Developing and improving existing facilities	50.42% 120
Developing more active recreation (canoeing, fishing, etc) opportunities	51.26% 122
Developing more passive recreation (hiking, picnicking, etc) opportunities	46.64% 111
 Developing more indoor recreation (recreation center, active field complex, etc) opportunities 	34.87% 83
▼ Preserving natural areas	47.90% 114
Developing nature and historical programming	37.82% 90
Working with local communities to expand and connect non-motorized trails	52.94% 126
Total Respondents: 238	,

Respondents were also asked about what trail initiatives the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission should be investing in as a priority:

Answer Choices w	Responses	~
Paved trails within our parks	43.81%	99
▼ Nature trails	62.39%	141
▼ Water trails	42.48%	96
■ Bridge to Bay Trail network	37.17%	84
▼ Extending the Wadhams to Avoca Trail north to Yale	42.04%	95
▼ Funding local trail projects	39.82%	90
▼ Equestrian trails	16.37%	37
▼ Mountain bike trails	23.45%	53
Total Respondents: 226		

When asked how they would like to receive information about PARC activities and events, the response was:

Answer Choices ▼	Responses	~
▼ Brochures	40.69%	94
▼ Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)	64.50%	149
▼ St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission Newsletter	60.17%	139
Print Media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, etc)	22.94%	53
■ Website (http://www.stclaircounty.org/offices/parks/)	58.44%	135
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	9.52%	22
Total Respondents: 231		

Respondents were then asked the open question, "What other suggestions/comments do you have relative to the future of parks and recreation opportunities in St. Clair County? Following is a summary of input received:

- Trail connections (parks, new trails to existing trails)
- Natural hiking trails/mountain biking trails
- Updating and maintaining existing amenities is a must
- More marketing/increased messaging for people to get outside
- More water parks/beaches and increased waterfront access
- Improve beach at Fort Gratiot County Park
- Increase accessibility (special needs, seniors, etc)
- More camping space/rustic camping
- Expansion of equestrian trails
- Need more to appeal to kids and young adults
- Need indoor facilities
- More dog parks
- Disc golf is a growing sport in St. Clair County and there is a need for more courses
- More educational opportunities
- Greater security presence

Word Cloud Summarizing Frequent Topics from the Online Survey Comments and Suggestions:

Kayak Launch Growing Riding Points Communities
House Beach Adults Love Continue Water
Doing a Great Job Trail Encourage County
Waterfront Disc Golf Courses PH Twp
Facilities Easier Place Newsletter Think Far
Opportunities Sport Good Work

PUBLIC VISIONING MEETINGS

The Metropolitan Planning Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission held two public visioning meetings - one on August 24, 2016 at Goodells County Park and another on September 28, 2016 at the Algonac Banquet Center. At each meeting, county planners gave a background presentation highlighting county growth trends, demographic and economic information, and recreation trends. Attendees were then broken into small groups and asked to brainstorm together in a series of visioning exercises using three basic questions. Following is a summary of the input received during the two public visioning meetings.

Visioning Meetings:

What's Great at St. Clair County Parks?





- No fees
- Open land
- Variety of recreation
- Splashpad
- Hiking paths/trails
- Well-maintained
- Pace and progression
- In tune with current trends
- Something for everyone
- Significant acquisitions
- Fort Gratiot Light Station (tourists)
- Leadership
- Wetlands park
- Water trails

Visioning Meetings:

Room for Improvement?



- Freshen older buildings
- No Wi-Fi/Charging Stations
- More ADA parking
- Parks in western and southern St. Clair County
- Need fitness stations
- Invasive species control
- Need recreation programs
- Need more rustic benches
- Perception of millage inequity
- Need to diversify our income
- Lack of public involvement

Visioning Meetings:

What Would You Like to See in the Future?

- Connect Wadhams to Avoca Trail to Bridge to Bay Trail
- Zip lines/ropes course
- Park marquee
- Disc golf
- Amphitheater/band shell
- Children's self-guided trails
- Signature event for each park
- Bridge across Belle River
- Tunnel or bridge from Goodells Park to the Pine River Nature Center
- Water park

- Ferry to Bay bike tour
- St. Johns Marsh walkway
- Trail to Yale and Richmond
- Man-made rapids in a city
- More kayak outfitters
- Pocket parks
- Bus service to County parks
- Fishing ponds
- Archery
- Zoo or aquarium

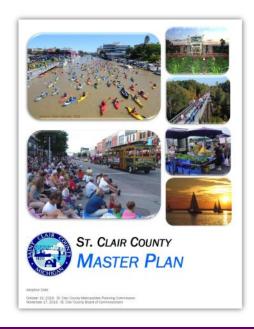
JOINT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS/PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

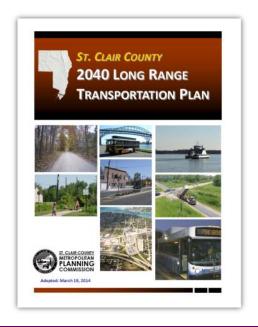
The St. Clair County Board of Commissioners and the Parks and Recreation Commission held a joint planning workshop on November 3, 2016 to have an open discourse about the Master Recreation Plan update, discuss public input received via the online survey and the visioning meetings, and identify ways the two bodies can collaborate more effectively.

County commissioners and PARC members had the opportunity to ask a lot of questions and to brainstorm new endeavors that the county may want to pursue from a recreation standpoint - both programmatic and administrative.

Key themes resulting from this joint workshop included:

- Improving information sharing between the BOC and PARC on park plans and projects;
- Improving how capital projects are planned;
- Looking for new opportunities for partnerships and collaboration;
- Exploring creating a signature event for each park as an 'entry point' into recreational programming;
- Continuing existing acquisition practices;
- Establish a focus group to look at potential for new county parks in western and southern St. Clair County:
- Undertaking an evaluation of the current condition of parks and facilities;
- Focusing on maintaining existing infrastructure and facilities; and
- Developing business plans and a long-term maintenance plan for PARC facilities.





RELATION TO THE ST. CLAIR COUNTY MASTER PLAN (2016)

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.

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 2030 LRTP, St. Clair County has taken a proactive approach in planning and constructing non-motorized facilities throughout the county.

In 2005, the county began the Bridge to Bay Trail project, which eventually evolved into a broader countywide plan that identified future trail connections. Since then, specific guidelines for the St. Clair County non-motorized network have been adopted and plans are in place to implement future non-motorized improvements.

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

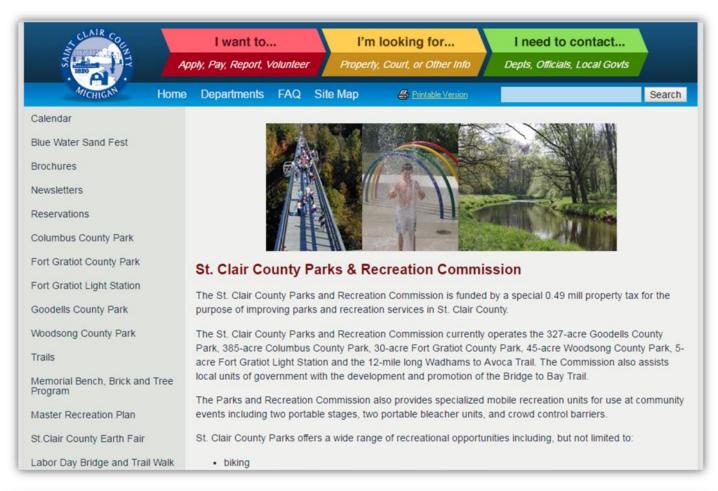
- Promote alternative transportation options for area residents and employees that are reliable and accessible to all users.
- Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities within major new residential and commercial developments.
- Encourage "Complete Streets" in planning and constructing major transportation 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.

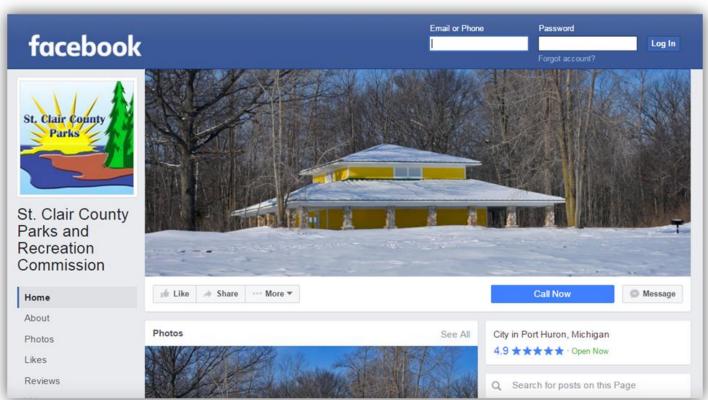
BLUE WATER CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING - PLAN REVIEW

The Blue Water Center for Independent Living/Team Access has been requested to review the draft Master Recreation Plan and to comment on and make recommendations on issues of accessibility and usability by people with disabilities.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION (PARC) WEBSITE

Once the draft Master Recreation Plan update was complete, each chapter was placed at PARC's website, http://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 January 3, 2017, in advance of the February 8, 2017 public hearing.





PARC AND 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.

Additionally, the MPC administers a Facebook fan 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).

Beginning in June 2016, PARC and the MPC utilized their social media pages to send out links to the online public survey, as well as follow up reminders for people to complete the survey.

MASTER RECREATION PLAN: PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines, PARC finished drafting the text for the Master Recreation Plan three weeks prior to the public hearing and notified the public by means of a news release and media coverage, 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 February 8, 2017.

Survey Says: The preferred social media platforms of survey respondents...

Answer Choices	▼	Responses	,
Facebook		92.31%	192
Twitter		21.15%	44
Snapchat		17.31%	36
Instagram		24.04%	50
Tumblr		0.96%	2
Pinterest		31.25%	65
Other (please specify)	Responses	4.81%	10

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 69,037 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.

