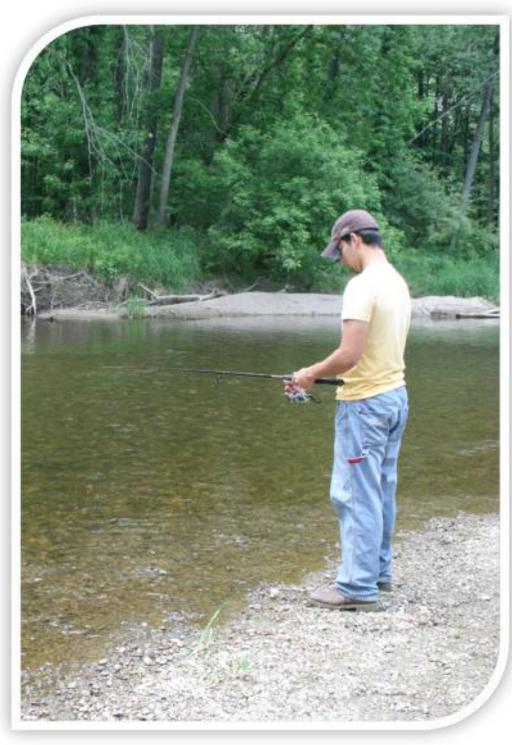




# PLANNING GOALS & STRATEGIC ACTIONS

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Fort Gratiot County Park, 2014

## INTRODUCTION

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### THE BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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St. Clair County is a vibrant, growing 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.

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### EMERGING ISSUES

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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 43.4 years and more than half (53.8%) of the county's population is at least 40 years old.

The aging of the “baby boom” generation is changing the age structure of communities across the state of Michigan. Those born during the baby boom of 1946 to 1964 created a bulge of persons in their forties and fifties. In the 2010 Census, the largest age group was persons aged 45 to 54. As the largest age cohort moves into their fifties and sixties in the next decade and their seventies and eighties in the following decade, there will be a significant increase in the already large elderly population.

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”

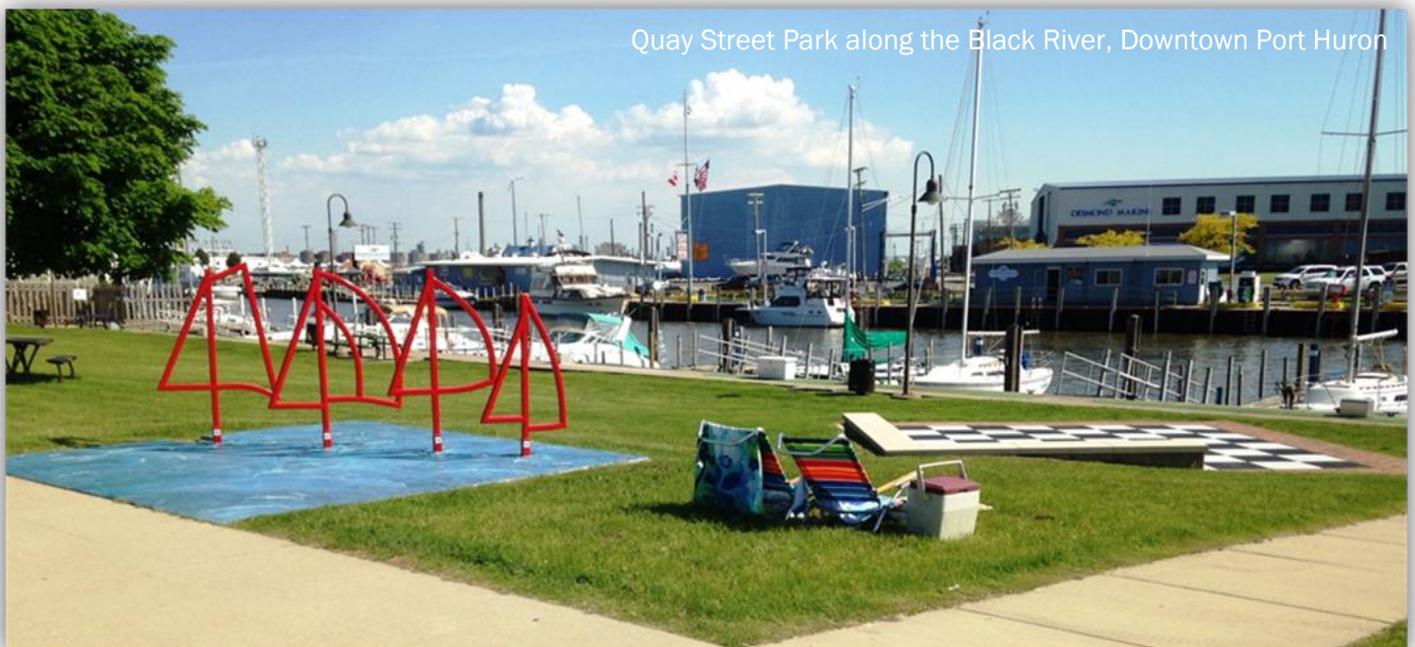
There are very few 20 to 24 year olds in the county. This information suggests that few persons this age stay after high school graduation. That means few young workers, college students, young singles or young married couples live in the county. The loss of young adults in the State of Michigan has been well-documented in recent years. According to the 2015 American Community Survey, there were 9,592 residents (6%) between the ages of 20 to 24. 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.”

### Recreational Opportunities for Youth

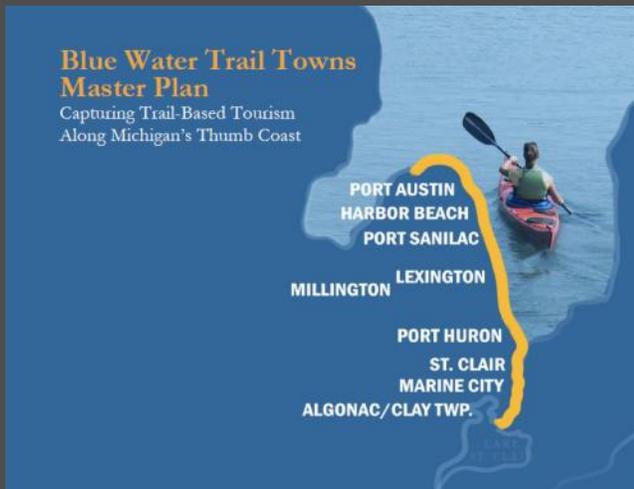
The greatest percentage of the county’s population, 36.5%, is within the 45 to 64 age group. The next largest percentage of the population, 29.8%, is under 24 years of age and 10.7% are under 10 years old, which suggests that, in addition to providing more services for the elderly within the community, 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 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.



## PLACEMAKING IN SCC: BLUE WATER TRAIL TOWNS



One of the most important drivers of economic development in the Blue Water Area is tourism. Many communities throughout the Thumb are working to increase their share of visitation by enhancing local attractions and amenities, or placemaking. Central to these efforts is an emphasis on the region's extensive blueways and greenways trail systems. According to the American Trails organization, "a trail can bring at least one million dollars annually to a community, depending on how well the town embraces the trail."

In 2013, the St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), along with regional partners in the Thumb and the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), kicked off a project to help local communities

build on existing bike trail and water trail assets by developing a comprehensive "Blue Water Trail Towns Master Plan." The Trail Towns approach identifies trails as the focal point of a tourism-based strategy for economic development and revitalization. The Blue Water Trail Towns Master Plan provides community leaders and business owners with detailed guidance on ways to capitalize on greenways and blueway connections for a more vibrant tourist trade.





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, eco-tourism, agri-tourism, cruise ship tourism, and a trend for families and aging citizens to take vacations closer to home. St. Clair County’s position as a semi-rural area with public beaches on Lake Huron, the St Clair River, and Lake St. Clair within an hour’s drive of the Detroit metropolitan area makes it a desirable, recreational “nearby getaway.”

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, the ongoing development of new “greenways” trails will help connect the communities of Southeast Michigan through the creation of a connected green infrastructure, including biking and hiking paths, conservation corridors and habitats among and between communities. Greenways are linear open spaces, including habitats and trails, which link parks, nature preserves, cultural features or historic sites with each other, for recreation and conservation purposes.

# PEOPLE, PLACE AND PROSPERITY

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## POPULATION OVERVIEW

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Because of its location at the base of Michigan’s Thumb, St. Clair County is an amalgamation of rural heritage and metropolitan influence.

- The county population is heavily concentrated along the St. Clair River. Port Huron, the seat of St. Clair County government, is located 160 miles west of Toronto and 60 miles northeast of Detroit.
- Over 62% of St. Clair County workers that live within the county, also work in St Clair County. The percentage of the labor force that travels to jobs outside St. Clair County (36%) is higher than the state average of people who work outside their home county. Throughout Michigan, 69.5% of the labor force work in their county of residence. Most of the St. Clair County residents who are leaving the county to work are commuting to jobs in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties.
- Residents in northern St Clair County enjoy country scenes and lifestyles more aligned with rural Sanilac, Tuscola, and Huron counties. Likewise, St. Clair County is a commerce and service center for rural residents of Sanilac County who come, primarily to the Port Huron area, for groceries, commodities, and healthcare services.

### Population Trends

St. Clair County is among the 15 most populated counties in Michigan. US Census Bureau statistics show that St Clair County had:

- 145,607 people in 1990
- 164,235 people in 2000
- 163,040 people in 2010
- 161,008 people in 2014

SEMCOG projects that 167,261 people will live in the county by 2040.

The county’s population had been increasing steadily since at least 1960. In the 2010 Census, that steady growth in population came to an end and the county actually lost about 1% of its population.

Within St. Clair County, most of the communities that lost population from 2000 to 2010 were located in the southern part of the county. Ira Township experienced a 25.7% decrease, Casco Township lost 13.5%, Columbus Township lost 11.8%, and Algonac lost 11.3% of its population. Additionally, all of the cities in the county lost population except for Marysville, which experienced a 2.8% increase.

Nearly 90,000 people left the State of Michigan between 2005 and 2008, with 63 of 83 counties losing population. Michigan experienced a 0.6% population loss from 2000 to 2010 – the only state to lose population during that time.

### Population Distribution

According to the 2014 American Community Survey, the profile of general demographic characteristics for St. Clair County shows population distribution according to categories of gender, age, and household types.

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	79,793	49.6%
Female	81,215	50.4%

Age	Number	Percent
0 to 9 years	18,445	11.7%
10 to 19 years	21,707	13.5%
20 to 44 years	46,085	28.6%
45 to 64 years	49,245	30.6%
65 years & older	25,126	15.6%

The median age is 42.4 years. Almost half of the St. Clair County residents (46.2%) are at least 45 years old. Since 2010, the county’s population of those 45 and older has increased while the population of those 19 years and under has decreased, which has numerous implications for recreation planning.

Race	Number	Percent
White	150,979	93.8%
Black/African American	3,614	2.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	337	0.2%
Asian	857	0.5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Some other race/Two or more races	5,221	3.2%

In 2014, St. Clair County also had a Hispanic or Latino population of 4,888 persons, who are included in one or more of the race categories above. The U.S. Census Bureau does not designate Hispanic or Latino as a race category, but as “a point of origin” or “ancestry type.”

**Population with Disabilities**

According to the 2014 American Community Survey, there were 25,917 residents five years of age and older who were disabled in St. Clair County. This is 16.2% of 159,840, the total civilian non-institutionalized population. Disabled persons are not located in specific areas, but live in all areas of the county.

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## HOUSEHOLDS OVERVIEW

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U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that St. Clair County had:

- 62,072 households in 2000
- 63,841 households in 2010
- 64,182 households in 2014

SEMCOG projects that St. Clair County will have 68,960 households by 2040. Through 2040, SEMCOG projects that:

- The number of households with elderly citizens will *increase*.
- The number of households with children will *decrease*.
- The number of households of non-elderly persons with no children will *decrease*.

**Building Permit Activity**

Between 2005 and 2016 there were 2,114 building permits issued in St. Clair County. The top five communities with the most building permits issued were Kimball Township with 279, Fort Gratiot Township with 194, Clay Township with 179, St. Clair Township with 130, and Port Huron Township with 129 permits.

The five communities with the fewest permits issued were the Village of Emmett with one, the City of Memphis with two, the City of Yale with three, Marine City with 12, and Brockway Township with 22 permits. All communities within St. Clair County experienced a significant decline in the number of building permits issued between 2006 and 2011. Since 2012 the majority of the communities’ building permits have leveled off and stopped declining or have seen modest increases, but not to the levels prior to 2006. The average number of permits issued in St. Clair County between 2005 and 2016 is 176.

## INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

The median household income in St. Clair County was \$48,703 in 2014. This was slightly lower than the Michigan median household income of \$49,087. According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey there are 43,466 families, of which 11% have an income that is below the poverty level. Of the total number of families in the county, there are 18,895 with children under the age of 18 with 18.3% below the poverty level. Compared to the State of Michigan as a whole, the county has a lower percentage of both families living below the poverty level and families with children under 18 years below the poverty level. Moreover, there are 4,775 families headed by a single female head of household with related children under 18 years old in the county, of which 45.9% is below the poverty level.

County Income Distribution	Households	Percent
Less than \$10,000	4,327	6.74%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	3,922	6.11%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	7,334	11.43%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	7,396	11.52%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	9,895	15.42%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	12,797	19.94%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8,315	12.96%
\$100,000 and higher	10,196	15.89%

ESRI, Inc., reports that the largest employer categories in St. Clair County in 2016 were, in order: Services, Manufacturing, Retail Trade, Construction, Transportation/Utilities, Finance/Insurance/Real Estate, Public Administration, Wholesale Trade, Information, and Agriculture/Mining.

The six-county *Economic Growth Alliance* region (St Clair, Macomb, Oakland, Lapeer, Genesee, and Livingston counties) gained 22,521 jobs in 2015. Between 2010 and 2015, the region gained a total of 94,273 jobs. This is a big turnaround since 2009 when the region lost 109,369 jobs that year alone. As a region, the unemployment rate was 9.6% in 2013, 8.1% in 2014, and 6.1% in 2015.

For St. Clair County, the annual unemployment rate in 2015 was 7.1%, which was 2.6% lower than the annual unemployment rate for 2014, which was 9.7%. As of August 2016, the unemployment rate in St. Clair County was 6.5%.

The Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget’s Labor Market Information reports that the average monthly labor force in St. Clair County for the year 2015 totaled 72,335. Of those, an average of 67,169 were employed and 5,166 were unemployed each month.

## 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.” The vision, for the first time:

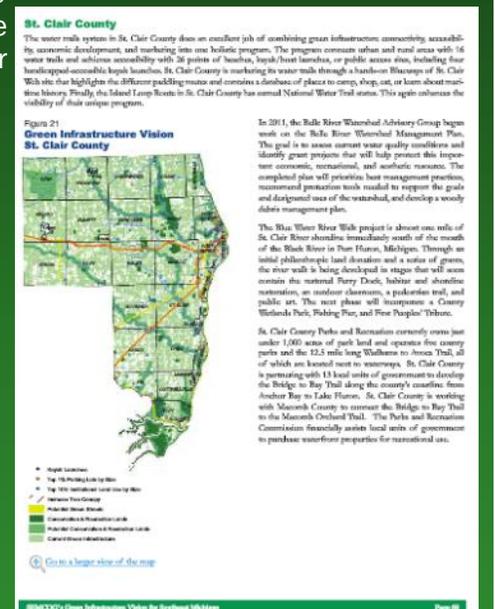
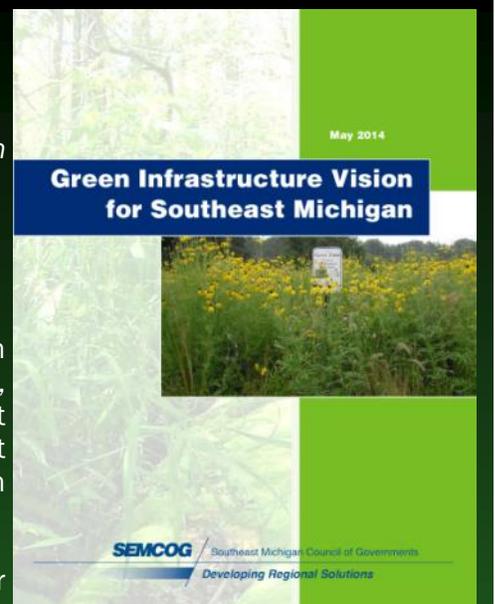
- Benchmarked green infrastructure in Southeast Michigan,
- Established a regional vision for where we want to go, and
- Identified regional policies on how to get there.

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 nonmotorized 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.





## PLANNING GOALS AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

### 6 STRATEGIC FOCAL AREAS

<b>1</b>	<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>
<b>2</b>	<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>
<b>3</b>	<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>
<b>4</b>	<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>
<b>5</b>	<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 to other county and municipal parks and community trail systems.</p>
<b>6</b>	<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>

# 18 PRIMARY PLANNING GOALS

<b>Administration</b>	<p><b>STRONG COLLABORATION</b> Network with federal, state, county, local and nonprofit recreation providers. Collaborating with community partners allows for resource sharing, community awareness, economies of scale, innovative problem solving, and access to funding.</p>	<p><b>EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT</b> Work to continually innovate and deliver a high quality recreational experience for St. Clair County citizens and visitors. Provide outstanding customer service in all aspects of PARC's service delivery.</p>	<p><b>LEADERSHIP IN RECREATION</b> Stay abreast of the latest trends and best practices in parks and recreation, trail planning, and public service delivery.</p>
<b>Finance</b>	<p><b>EFFICIENT FUNDING MECHANISMS</b> Ensure that PARC has adequate financial resources for park and trail acquisition, development, and maintenance now and into the future.</p>	<p><b>COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL PLANNING</b> Create short-term and long-term business and operations plans for each PARC facility in order to understand financial opportunities and liabilities and to establish a new system for data collection and analysis.</p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT</b> Continue to identify and evaluate long-term capital maintenance needs for PARC assets and incorporate those needs into the County's Capital Improvement Program.</p>
<b>Parkland</b>	<p><b>STRATEGIC PROPERTY ACQUISITION</b> Acquire lands and facilities that are viable parks and recreation opportunities for both present and future county citizens.</p>	<p><b>PARKS FOR ALL PEOPLE</b> Understand the changing demographics in St. Clair County and the Southeast Michigan region. Plan parks and facilities that serve our aging population and attract young professionals and families.</p>	<p><b>PRESERVATION OF RESOURCES</b> Support the conservation and stewardship of land, water, and natural resources. The quality of life for every person in St. Clair County is improved by clean, accessible parks and open space.</p>
<b>Facilities &amp; Infrastructure</b>	<p><b>WELL-MAINTAINED INFRASTRUCTURE</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>MODERN FACILITIES &amp; AMENITIES</b> 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 asset management plans and individual park business plans.</p>	<p><b>QUALITY USER EXPERIENCE</b> Develop and maintain recreational facilities that draw people in to experience nature, experience their communities, and to be active outdoors. Create experiences that make people want to keep coming back to the parks.</p>
<b>Greenways &amp; Blueways</b>	<p><b>CONNECTED GREENWAYS/BLUEWAYS</b> Connect land and water trails within the county to natural areas, recreation areas, riparian corridors, community centers, and other trail systems within the region.</p>	<p><b>MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION</b> Promote and support multimodal solutions that address the long-term mobility needs of St. Clair County residents and businesses.</p>	<p><b>ACTIVE, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES</b> Ensure PARC participates in efforts to promote individual and community well-being and promote parks as a means to combat negative health trends throughout the county.</p>
<b>Places &amp; Spaces</b>	<p><b>INCREASED MARKETING &amp; TOURISM</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>LIVABLE COMMUNITIES</b> Highlight the impact of parks and recreation on creating highly desirable communities that provide residents with a high quality of life and economic prosperity.</p>	<p><b>CULTURAL &amp; HISTORIC PRESERVATION</b> Continue to develop and promote cultural and historic resources at the Fort Gratiot Light Station and other PARC facilities, including the Historic Village at Goodells County Park.</p>

# 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.

## PARC's ADMINISTRATION GOALS:

- STRONG COLLABORATION
- EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT
- LEADERSHIP IN 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 Sherriff's Department to provide cost-effective patrol of county-owned parks and recreation facilities, grounds and trails.
- Actively collaborate with SEMCOG and the I-69 Thumb Region on matters pertaining to parks, recreation 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 necessary resources to achieve local goals.

## **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. During (and after) the recession of 2008-2011, many local units of government saw diminished recreation budgets. PARC is fortunate to be funded by a special 0.49 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.

#### **OUR FINANCE GOALS:**

- **EFFICIENT FUNDING MECHANISMS**
- **COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL PLANNING**
- **STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT**



### ***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.

### ***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:**

- Develop a business plan for each county park.
- Develop a five-year financial plan identifying major investments and funds dedicated to priority goals.
- Integrate planned major investments into the St. Clair County Capital Improvement Program on an annual basis.
- Analyze the financial liabilities of existing assets and PARC's ability to maintain and support those assets.
- Regularly evaluate PARC's fee structures and establish an acceptable level of cost recovery through user fees.
- Regularly conduct an evaluation of PARC's plan implementation efforts - for both the Master Recreation Plan and individual park plans.
- Establish a mechanism to monitor and record facility usage and begin using those metrics 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.
- Identify 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.

## PARKLAND

PARC’s focus for existing parks is to continue development activities that allow for Goodells, Columbus, and Fort Gratiot 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.

#### OUR GOALS FOR PARKLAND:

- STRATEGIC PROPERTY ACQUISITION
- PARKS FOR ALL PEOPLE
- PRESERVATION OF RESOURCES



### **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 both the southern and 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 *Southeast Michigan Greenways Plan* 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.
- 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.
- Construct a children's playground near the Columbus County Park Lodge. Ensure that all PARC playgrounds are regularly inspected and safe.

### **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 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.
- Manage the former farm fields at PARC facilities to re-establish native wildlife and plant communities.
- 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 associated PARC facilities.
- Develop programs to interpret the natural, cultural and physical resources and educate the public of their importance.

## **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.

#### **OUR FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS:**

- **WELL-MAINTAINED INFRASTRUCTURE**
- **MODERN FACILITIES & AMENITIES**
- **QUALITY USER EXPERIENCE**



### ***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.

### ***FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL 2: MODERN FACILITIES & 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 permanent parking lots with vault toilets off Big Hand Road and Kronner Road.
- Develop ADA-accessible walkways and trails to enhance connectivity in PARC facilities.
- Install ADA-accessible canoe/kayak launches in appropriate locations, including on the Belle River at Columbus County Park, on the Black River at Woodsong County Park, and at the Marine City Dredge Cut in Algonac.
- Continue working with the Michigan Mountain Biking Association to develop a looped mountain biking trail system west of Kronner Road at Columbus County Park.
- Investigate the potential for developing a disc golf course at PARC facilities.

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

#### **STRATEGIC ACTIONS:**

- Continue Bridge to Bay Trail signage improvements and wayfinding.
- Pursue the year-round usage of PARC facilities and trails.
- Enhance informational and directional signage to all park and trail facilities. 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.

## **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 to other county and municipal parks and community trail systems. Greenways and blueways provide our residents with an abundance of benefits, including personal health, economic prosperity, increased property values, environmental health, and community connectivity.

#### **OUR GOALS FOR GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS:**

- **CONNECTED GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS**
- **MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION**
- **ACTIVE, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**



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

Connect land and water trails within the county to 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:**

- Develop a Griswold Road trailhead in conjunction with the proposed new Amtrak Station in Port Huron Township.
- Add a connector trail between New Baltimore and Ira Township along M-29.
- Connect the Bridge to Bay Trail to the Macomb Orchard Trail along Gratiot Road 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.
- Assist Fort Gratiot Township in connecting the Bridge to Bay Trail system to Fort Gratiot County Park, including a safe M-25 pedestrian crossing at Metcalf Road.
- Connect to other land and water trails owned or operated by neighboring counties.
- Extend the Wadhams to Avoca Trail to Yale.
- Work with transportation agencies to provide non-motorized access to trail, parks, and greenways consistent with the *St. Clair County Non-Motorized Guidelines*, the *Regional Trails and Greenways Vision for St. Clair County* and the *Southeast Michigan Greenways Plan*.
- Consider acquiring abandoned railroad rights-of-way for future trails.
- Coordinate with local units of government to complete the Bridge to Bay Trail by providing technical assistance and funding support for the required local matching funds for acquisition and development grants.
- 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: MULTIMODAL 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.
- 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), 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.
- Support the creation of bike share programs in St. Clair County downtowns that utilize existing and future segments of county trails.



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

St. Clair County ranks 50th out of 83 Michigan counties in terms of overall health according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 13% of our population is in fair or poor health and 32% of St. Clair County adults are obese. 24% of St. Clair County residents who are age 20 or older report they have no leisure-time physical activity. About 17% of St. Clair County adults smoke and another 20% 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:

- 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.



# 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.

## OUR GOALS FOR PLACES AND SPACES:

- INCREASED MARKETING AND TOURISM
- LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
- CULTURAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION



### ***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 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.

### ***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 a modern parking lot in accordance with the HSR and site plan.
- Reconstruct the 1913 gate at the end of Garfield Street.
- Protect the Light Station buildings from weather damage in accordance with the deed, which includes:
  - Replacing the roof on the Duplex Keeper's Building.
  - Addressing the tuck pointing on buildings as needed.
  - Replacing the roof of the retired Coast Guard station.
  - Replacing the roof of the Single Keeper's building.
  - Reactivating the heating system for the retired Coast Guard station.
- Work with the Port Huron Museum to facilitate programming at the Fort Gratiot Light Station site, including:
  - Providing access to the equipment building for a gift shop, ticketing and displays.
  - Providing access to the retired Coast Guard station for programming, displays, and overnight programs.
  - Providing access to the Duplex Keeper's Building for exhibits and museum offices.
  - Providing access to the Light Station grounds for special events and programs.
  - Accommodating archeological digs on the Light Station grounds.
- 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.