

Planning Brief

Parks & Recreation Planning

**Acquisition and development of
parks and open space benefit communities
in many ways.**



A 2012 report by the Outdoor Industry Association reports that the purchase of outdoor gear and vehicles, and dollars spent on trips and travel for recreational activities result in 6.1 million American jobs, \$646 billion in outdoor recreation spending each year, and \$80 billion in federal/state/local tax revenue. Access to parks and recreation opportunities can benefit homeowners, too. A 2011 study by the University of Cincinnati found that people are willing to pay a premium of \$9,000 for homes that are within 1,000 feet of bike paths. In 2009, the Trust for Public Land found seven major factors that contribute a positive, measurable economic impact to communities: property value, tourism, direct use, health, community cohesion, clean water, and clear air. Creating and maintaining a healthy parks and recreation system helps attract and support businesses, residents, and the environment.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources understands the benefits of parks and open space to its residents and businesses. In fact, one of the DNR Priority Statements is to “foster the growth of Michigan’s resource-based economy and be recognized as the leader in trail-based recreation.” To back this up, the State invests in the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund (MNRTF). This fund was established to support acquisition of land and development of parks and trails. In order to be eligible for this funding, communities are required to have a community parks and recreation plan that is updated every five years. This plan should include the following elements:

- **Community Description:** An overview of the community, its demographics, natural features, and economic condition.
- **Administrative Structure:** A summary of how the parks and recreation facilities are managed, including staff, volunteers, and appointed board or commissions.
- **Inventory of Existing Parks, Natural Resources and Recreation Facilities:** A description of the public (and private when significant) parks and recreation facilities in the community. Consider accessibility of parks and open spaces, particularly as the population ages. For example, if a park has a picnic area, there should be a few picnic tables that can accommodate wheelchairs—and be accessible by firm pathway. Consider, too, how park linkages can connect to surrounding neighborhoods and business areas.
- **Description of the Planning & Public Input Process:** It is important to include public input in the planning process, both to ensure the community’s needs are being met, and also to show support for local planning initiatives. Involve local recreation providers. These can be park supervisors, county, and state park staff where applicable. Neighboring communities, too, should discuss how together they can meet the recreation and conservation needs of the region. In addition, local businesses that cater to recreation, like outfitters and rental companies, should be included.
- **Goals & Objectives:** The planning process should result in a set of goals and objectives the community wishes to pursue in the short- and long-term.
- **Action Program:** The action program describes specific strategies for accomplishing the goals and objectives.

Communities considering pursuing 2013 MNRTF funding should have their recreation plans completed by March 2013 in order to submit a grant application by April 1, 2013. If you have any questions about the recreation plan process, feel free to contact staff at Clearzoning.