

Courtland Township
DRAFT Parks and Recreation Master
Plan
2022-2026



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This document, the Courtland Township Recreation Master Plan, is intended to guide present and future recreational resource development within the township, including park land, parks facilities, recreational programs, and public open spaces.

This plan, in addition to serving as a guide for recreation facilities and program development, is prepared to satisfy the requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Recreation plans are required by the MDNR for state and federal grant eligibility.

Community Description

Location & History

Courtland Township is a part of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area and is located about 10 miles northeast of the City of Grand Rapids. Since the late 1980's the Township has been going through a transformation, from an agricultural to a rural residential community. As more people move to Courtland Township there is an increasing need to maintain the existing natural features of the township to preserve it's rural atmosphere.

At one time Courtland Township was comprised of three communities. Courtland Center, Evans, and Sheffield. Courtland Center was located on the corner of Myers Lake Avenue and 13 Mile Road. First settlers were Barton Johnson in 1838 and Alexander Dean in 1839. Courtland Township was organized in 1839 and the village was named after it. It was given a post office as Courtland on January 30, 1841, with Philo Beers as its first postmaster. The office operated until November 19, 1860. The Courtland Center post office was opened on October 24, 1856, with John Woodruff as its first postmaster. This office operated until February 15, 1901. Evans was located on Redmond about ½ mile south of Benham Road. The first settler in this area was Barton Johnson in 1838. Evans was a station on the Toledo, Saginaw & Muskegon Railroad. George W. Morris became Evans' first postmaster on May 3, 1888. Sheffield was originally located on Myers Lake Avenue at 15 Mile Road. Sheffield was also a station on the Toledo, Saginaw & Muskegon Railroad. The station was established in 1888 with S.D. Saunders at its railroad agent. Charles Sipple became the first postmaster on March 6, 1891, and this post office in Courtland Township operated until April 30, 1906. These small communities died out when the railroad eliminated the two railway stations and when the automobile became the norm.

Climate

West Michigan has a fairly balanced climate, extended intervals of extreme hot or cold are rarely experienced. The warm season lasts from May to September, with an average daily high temperature above 72°F. The hottest month of the year in West Michigan is July, with an average high of 82°F and low of 63°F. The cold season lasts from December to early March, with an average daily high temperature below 41°F. The coldest month of the year is January, with an average low

of 19°F and high of 31°F. Rain falls throughout the year in West Michigan. September sees the most rainfall, with an average of 3.2 inches. The month with the least rain in is January, with an average rainfall of 0.8 inches. The snowy period of the year lasts from approximately November to April. The month with the most snow is January, with an average snowfall of 6.8 inches. The snowless period of the year lasts for 7.0 months, from April to November.

Water Resources

Property with water access is still in high demand throughout the township, with buyers looking for year-round water recreation opportunities. With so much of the water-front property being developed into homes, lawns, boat docks, parks, and beaches, what's left does not contribute to the character of the lake in a meaningful way. However, some smaller lakes such as Tamarack, Davis, and Carlson still have a majority of undeveloped water frontage. The township may hope to take measures to prevent these lakes from being overdeveloped.

In Michigan, the greatest causes of non-point source contamination are agricultural practices, lawn chemicals, and soil erosions. Buffer zones should be established around lakes and streams to prevent bank erosion. Development should be prohibited in these areas. However, since much of the water's edge, at least along the lakes, has been developed, the emphasis for providing buffers should be undeveloped frontage, and along the township's streams.

Stegman Creek, Rum Creek, Becker Creek and Shaw Creek are tributaries to the Rogue River, which has a designation as a Michigan Natural River corridor. Under State regulation, some protection is offered for the creek edges; the Courtland Township Zoning Ordinance includes the necessary requirement of a 25 foot undisturbed strip of vegetation along these creeks. This setback is meant to provide a vegetated buffer to absorb runoff from developed areas and reduce erosion into the creek bed.

Soils

The soils in Courtland Township are characterized by two broad categories according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service (refer to the Courtland Township General Soil Classification map, Map 2). The north half of the Township consists of Rubicon-Croswell-Deer Park association, which is nearly level to steep, well drained to moderately well drained, sandy soils on out wash plains, beach ridges, and dunes. This classification does not necessarily make good farmland, as the soil tends to be low in fertility and susceptible to wind erosion but does make a good soil for development as it can provide good foundations for structures and septic systems.

Population

The population of Courtland Township has been growing for the past 50 years, nearly doubling in the past 20 years. Based on the most recent 2020 census the township has a population of 9,005 residents and will continue to grow. According to projections from LSL Planning, the population will continue to climb, reaching nearly 13,000 residents by the year 2030. See Courtland Township Census information below. New or improved infrastructure, increased housing needs, potential commercial and service needs, and new industrial development may occur with new population. The goal of this plan will be to help Courtland Township prepare for future recreational needs.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) | ▲ 9,016 |
| PEOPLE | |
| Population | |
| Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) | ▲ 9,016 |
| Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2021) | ▲ 9,022 |
| Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2021, (V2021) | ▲ -0.1% |
| Population, Census, April 1, 2020 | 9,005 |
| Population, Census, April 1, 2010 | 7,678 |
| Age and Sex | |
| Persons under 5 years, percent | ▲ 4.4% |
| Persons under 18 years, percent | ▲ 27.4% |
| Persons 65 years and over, percent | ▲ 13.4% |
| Female persons, percent | ▲ 54.2% |
| Race and Hispanic Origin | |
| White alone, percent | ▲ 96.8% |
| Black or African American alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.5% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.0% |
| Asian alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.4% |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.0% |
| Two or More Races, percent | ▲ 2.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino, percent (b) | ▲ 1.1% |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent | ▲ 96.0% |
| Population Characteristics | |
| Veterans, 2016-2020 | 501 |
| Foreign born persons, percent, 2016-2020 | 1.5% |
| Housing | |
| Housing units, July 1, 2021, (V2021) | X |
| Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2016-2020 | 91.3% |
| Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2016-2020 | \$278,500 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2016-2020 | \$1,678 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2016-2020 | \$555 |
| Median gross rent, 2016-2020 | \$1,076 |
| Building permits, 2021 | X |

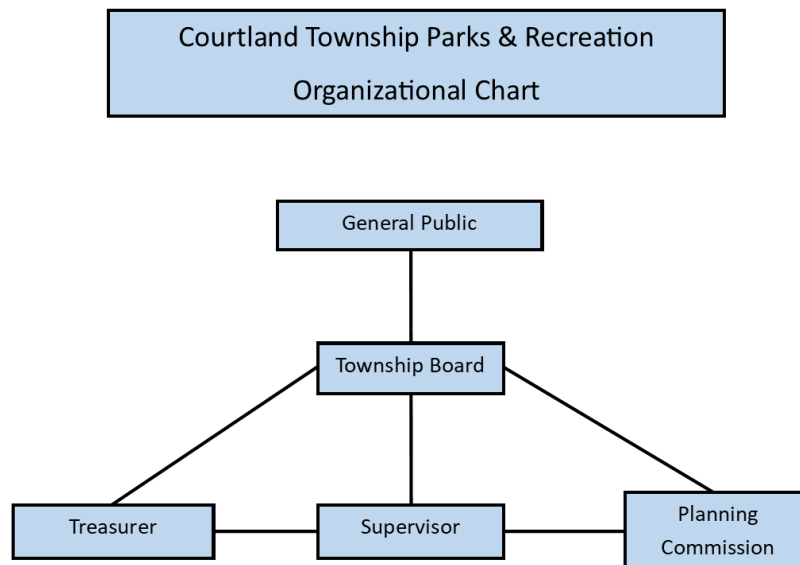
Administrative Structure

Recreation planning is a method for anticipating and arranging recreational improvements so that they may be implemented on a reasonable schedule and without an adverse effect on a community’s administrative and financial structure. An effective recreation plan will recognize the practical relationship between a community’s administrative structure and its ability to follow through on a recommended recreational improvement program.

Townships are a product of Michigan’s early history, and Michigan is one of 20 states that currently have some form of township government. There are two types of townships in Michigan - general law and charter townships. Charter township status is a special township classification created by the Michigan Legislature in 1947 to provide additional powers and streamlined administration for governing a growing community. Courtland currently operates as a general law township.

A township board consisting of seven members—a clerk, supervisor, treasurer, and four trustees, serves as the Courtland Township elected government. The township board is responsible for hiring of an assessor, fire chief and other necessary personnel to operate the township properly and efficiently.

The Township Supervisor acts as the board chairman as well as overseeing the day-to-day operations of all the Township departments and preparing the annual fiscal budget. The Treasurer, popularly elected, is responsible for overseeing the disbursement of funds for these purposes. Funding for parks and recreation comes from the Township's general fund.



Relationships

Relationships with Other Public or Private Organizations

Courtland Township has partnered with volunteer community organizations such as the 4-H and the Boy Scouts for cleaning land area, planting new trees, marking tree names, and similar activities.

Park Budget and Funding

Annual and Projected Budgets

Townships serve other governmental units by providing tax collection services. To avoid imposing an unnecessary burden on citizens to pay separate property taxes to the township, schools, special assessment districts and the county, Michigan townships provide uniform assessment of property values and collect all property taxes on behalf of the other units of government. Only a very small portion of the taxes collected is retained by the township for its own operating purposes. The Michigan Constitution and state statutes also limit the amount of property tax millage that townships can levy for general township operations. General law townships are allocated at least 1 mill from the constitutionally limited 15/18 mills allocated among townships, the county, public schools, and the intermediate school district.

The following sums represent the general funds expended for park operation and maintenance for 2017-2022 (fiscal year ending in February) and capital outlays. These funds include expenses incurred because of park planning and projected parks capital improvements and labor:

(Placeholder numbers from previous plan)

| | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 2013 | \$29,301.00 |
| 2014 | \$99,935.00 |
| 2015 | \$129,542.96 |
| 2016 | \$150,543.66 |
| 2017 | \$74,512.62 |
| 2018 (budgeted) | \$100,000 |

Resource Inventory

Recreation Programming

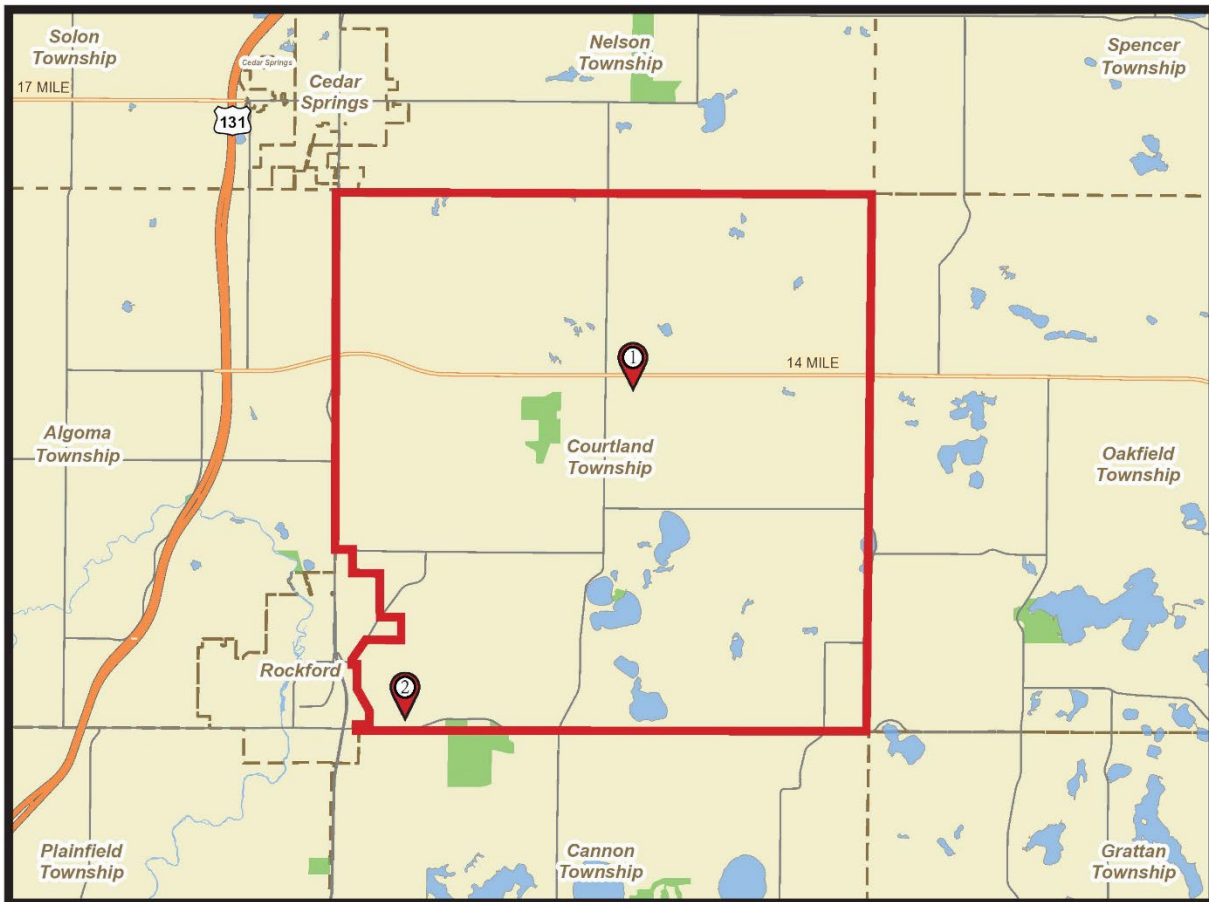
There are currently no active recreational programs administered by the Township. For the most part recreational programs are administered through the Rockford and Cedar Springs Area School Districts. The school districts are responsible for programs, staffing, and providing some facilities on the school campuses. The Township owns most of the park property located in the Township and is responsible for maintenance and capital improvements with the exception of Myers Lake Park and the northern portion of Luton Park that are owned and operated by the Kent County Parks Department.

Recreation Inventory

Courtland Township Parks and Recreation and their consultant, Prein & Newhof, conducted an extensive tour of the township and the recreational facilities located within its jurisdiction.

Courtland Township currently operates two recreational facilities within the township, Township Park and 10-mile Hatchery Park. The next few pages show an Overall Park System Map that identifies the location of the Township's parks and recreational facilities and detailed individual park maps that summarize the location, size, and amenities of each facility.

Overall Township Parks Inventory Map



- Courtland County Parks**
1. Courtland Twp Park & Disc Golf Course
 2. 10 Mile Hatchery Park

Courtland Township Hall Park

This is a community park located on 18.5 acres south and 30 acres west of the Township Hall and Fire Hall on 14 Mile Road. Currently the property amenities include playground equipment, a pavilion, picnic area, walking paths, volleyball court, parking, a softball diamond, pickleball courts, 18-hole disc golf course, and public restrooms. The master plan calls for phase two amenities including restroom, picnic facilities, additional play equipment, two official size soccer fields, an additional softball diamond, basketball court, tennis courts, and a dog park. The undeveloped portion of the site is predominantly scrub vegetation and open grassland typical of cultivated land that has begun the process of re-vegetation once farming uses are discontinued.



10 Mile Hatchery Park

Courtland Township also purchased the old fishery on Ten Mile Road with plans of making this area a park. 90% of the purchase price was funded by grants from Ducks Unlimited, the AWCA Grant Land Acquisition, and Schrems Trout. The Township is in the process of developing the parcel for public enjoyment. Two of the existing ponds will be improved for wildlife habitat and nature viewing. Approximately 1,275 feet of footpath is being installed, along with a short boardwalk, parking area, and entrance drive. Significant eradication of non-native species, and planting of native species, are also in process.



Township Parks and Recreation Resources

| Name | Type | Acres | Accessibility Rating | Amenities |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------|----------------------|---|
| Courtland Twp Park | Community Park | 20 | 2 | Ballfields, Playground, Disc Golf, Pickleball Courts, Gravel Parking, Paved Parking |
| 10 Mile Hatchery Park | Nature Area | 16.5 | 1 | Walking Path, Boardwalk, Gravel Parking, Nature Viewing |

Accessibility Scores:

- 1 = None of the facilities/ park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 2 = Some of the facilities/ park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 3 = Most of the facilities/ park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 4 = The entire park meets accessibility guidelines
- 5 = The entire park was developed/renovated using the principals of universal design

Grant-Assisted Parks

| GRANT ASSISTED PARKS | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| PROJECT # | PARK NAME | PROJECT YEAR | DESCRIPTION | GRANT STATUS |
| # | | | | Closed |

The beginning of the project number indicates the funding source as follows:

26 = Land and Water Conservation Fund

BF = Recreation Bond Fund

CM= Clean Michigan Initiative

TF = Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

Status Report for all Grant-Assisted Parks and Recreation Facilities

Planning Process

Public Input

Community recreational facilities cannot be effectively provided without some basis from which the type, quantity, location, need, and priority for that facility has been determined. Several methods for determining a community's recreation needs and priorities have been identified. These include observed use levels for existing facilities, comparisons of recreational facilities between similar communities, unique opportunities for certain types of facilities, guidelines or standards based on quantity per population, and projected population growth, to identify a few methods.

Courtland Township values the opinions and views of its residents and helped develop the following process to gather the community's thoughts by:

- The consultant, Prein & Newhof, worked with the Courtland Township Parks Commission over the course of several months via phone, email, and face to face meetings.
- Providing digital and hard copies of the survey to residents asking specific questions of the current parks and their dreams for the future.
- The Draft Plan was made available for public for 30 days to allow for public comment.
- Held a public hearing prior to adopting the park plan on x/xx/2022.

Survey Summary Results

There was a total of 231 responses to the survey, 226 were given online and 5 were filled out by hand. The survey shows that 71% of the participants are willing to support a ¼ or ½ mill levy for a specific park project and 69% of participants are in support of parks expansion. A majority of people responding to the survey are in the 55-64 and 65-74 year old age bracket, visit Courtland Twp Parks once a month, and prefer to be contacted through email or website.

The top things residents **like** about the existing recreational facilities in Courtland Twp are:

- The pickleball courts.
- The disc golf course.
- Everything is clean and well maintained.
- Everything can be enjoyed with friends and family.
- Accessibility and the proximity to home.

The top things residents **do not like** about the existing recreational facilities in Courtland Twp are:

- Lack of access to recreational water activities
- Lack of connectivity to surrounding communities and existing trail networks
- Lack of bike trails and designated bike lanes
- Lack of play equipment for older or handicapped children

Top 3 Reasons participants visit Courtland Twp parks:

- Close to home
- Cleanliness
- Safety

Top 5 recreational activities/ enhancements participants would like to see:

- Natural hiking trails
- More biking & walking trails
- Splash pad
- Festival and concert festival
- Outdoor water recreation

The top suggestions for new recreation facilities needed in Courtland Twp are:

- Trail / Pathway systems connecting to surrounding communities
- Natural Areas
- Large multi-use parks that serve the whole community

Other suggestions/ topics consistently brought up by responders throughout the survey are:

- A need for dog parks.
- Splash pads.
- Expanded playgrounds/ kid friendly activities.
- Expand Trail connectivity.
- Concerns over possible tax increases.
- Develop water recreation access to Myers Lake.
- Archery range with elevated platforms.
- Organized community activities (Yoga, arts & crafts, seasonal events, concerts, etc.)
- Natural features (bee/butterfly habitat, more shade trees, natural landscaping, etc.)

Goals and Objectives

The information received from the public survey was reviewed, calculated, and analyzed to identify the communities' goals and objectives. The Courtland Township residents who participated in the survey have provided valuable feedback regarding their wishes and desires for the recreational facilities and activities within the Township. The following goals and objectives were formulated based on the total number of surveys that were filled out.

Goal 1: To Acquire, develop, maintain, and preserve sufficient open space and to develop recreational facilities to serve the needs of the Township's present and anticipated population.

Objectives:

- Encourage, support, and develop a linear trail system to connect various park facilities with particular emphasis on connecting recreational resources through the planning and construction of a network of non-motorized trails. The Township should actively pursue acquisition of property and/or use easements on privately owned property in the township wherever practical. The development of a trail master plan would aid the Township in identifying priority areas of acquisition and development.
- Explore trailway linkages from area points of interest such as but not limited to the Brower Lake Nature Preserve, the City of Rockford, Luton Park, Myers Lake Park, Courtland Township Hall Park, Cannon Township non-motorized trail system and the White Pine Trail through the development of a trailway master plan.
- Acquire property adjacent to existing park properties whenever possible to allow for the greatest flexibility and offer economy of sharing infrastructure when expanding or adding recreation activities to existing dedicated parklands.
- Acquire additional park property as opportunities present themselves in high growth areas of the Township, which may be distant from existing park facilities. Most of the growth in the township has been south of 13 Mile Road and with this pattern to likely to continue, the township should be especially mindful of acquisition opportunities in these areas.
- Acquire additional property to preserve open space in keeping with the township's rich farming history.
- Actively canvas the local community looking to procure property.
- Explore opportunities for acquisition of sensitive properties along the various watersheds in the western half of the Township. These efforts should be coordinated with the Land Conservancy of Western Michigan.
- Improve access and use for all residents to the Township's lakes.

Goal 2: Develop a system of non-motorized paths which will link the Township to adjacent communities as well as linking the Township's residential areas with schools, parks, commercial centers, and waterways.

Objectives:

- Provide residents with a non-vehicular path system that provides opportunities for recreation as well as convenient and safe access to major destinations in the Township and connections to adjacent communities.

Potential Actions:

- Construct non-motorized paths to link developing residential neighborhoods in the Township with major activity areas, such as parks, schools, and retail areas.
- Develop and plan a non-motorized path system linking efforts by other surrounding communities such as Cannon Township and the City of Rockford.
- Construct trailway linkages from the Brower Lake Nature Preserve, the City of Rockford, Luton Park, Myers Lake Park, Courtland Township Park, Cannon Township, and the White Pine Trail.
- D. Explore interest, involvement, and possible formation of a Northeast Kent County integrated trails committee to promote, manage, oversee, plan and seek joint funding for trails in the regional area and to avoid duplication of efforts and to enhance the connect ability of the trails and ensure the best regional outcomes.
- Communicate with the County to add biking shoulders to county roads where possible.

Goal 3: Continue the improvement and development of use areas in Township Hall Park in accordance with the development master plan to satisfy the recreational needs and desires of the community.

Objectives:

- Develop new and expanded facilities and programs at the park including restroom facilities, play areas, picnic facilities, ballfields, soccer fields, dog parks, additional parking, and enhanced trail system that serves the residents of the township.

Potential Actions:

- Construct restroom facilities, play areas and picnic facilities as priority items identified in 2022 community survey
- Improve pickleball and disc golf parking areas.
- Improve lighting for access, parking areas, sports fields, and trail areas.
- Provide irrigation for all sports fields.
- Create designated area for off leash dog activities.

Goal 4: Continue the improvement and development of universal design concepts at all Township Park locations in accordance with the park's development master plan.

Objectives:

- Develop new and expanded facilities and programs at the park including new restrooms, picnic facilities, paved parking, walking paths, new play equipment, and lighting.

Potential Actions:

- Provide for universally accessible play areas.
- Provide for universally accessible picnic facilities and shelters
- Provide for additional paved parking areas and trails to provide barrier-free access to all areas.

Goal 5: To promote the coordination, cooperation, and expansion of recreational programs with other public agencies, private enterprise, citizen groups, and other interested organizations with the common goal of improvement of recreational opportunities for township residents.

Objectives:

- Encourage the participation of volunteers in the development of recreational facilities.
- Utilize public and private sector cooperation in the promotion of recreation and the improvement of recreational opportunities.
- Coordinate existing recreational projects with the school systems, community
- Encourage the cooperation and participation of adjacent townships such as Cannon, Algoma, Solon Townships, the City of Cedar Springs and the City of Rockford in the formation of a regional recreational advisory board in an effort to combine resources and avoid duplication of facilities and services.
- Develop cooperative relationship with Kent County to establish a joint use and access and parking area for the continued improvement of the Myers Lake Park.

Goal 6: To enhance the quality of life in the township by providing multi-generational, fully accessible, and safe recreational facilities that are responsive to the needs of all residents with high quality recreational facilities that effectively utilize available resources.

Objectives:

- Develop a variety of recreational facilities that reflect the changing and diverse needs of the Township residents while promoting the health and welfare of the overall community.
- Improve existing recreational facilities to fulfill the needs of Township residents more effectively and to encourage regular use of these facilities.
- Develop certain recreational facilities as identified by the survey and needs assessment and establish priorities for their development.
- Whenever feasible, take advantage of other resources for the development and maintenance of recreational facilities, such as non-local funding sources or the inclusion of concessions.
- Utilize design, construction, and maintenance practices that maximize the benefits provided for the resources expended.
- Plan improvements that offer both active and passive recreation opportunities.
- Develop unique recreational opportunities for elderly and physically challenged citizens. Every recreational opportunity should be fully accessible to all individuals whenever possible.
- Provide play areas that are in conformance with the “Playground Equipment Safety Act”.
- Provide outdoor exercise equipment that can be used by residents of all ages.

Goal 7: To continually improve the quality of and the opportunities for recreation in the township by reassessing community recreation needs, trends, and characteristics.

Objectives:

- Expand and develop community park advocates through formation of an effective parks & recreation advisory committee.
- Provide opportunities for the involvement of Township residents in the identification, selection, and development of recreational facilities.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Township’s efforts in fulfilling identified goals and objectives by providing opportunities for Township residents to evaluate the progress of recreational development.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Township’s efforts in providing fully accessible opportunities for Township residents.

Action Program

Through the knowledge of the Township Board and Planning Commission along with the input provided by the public survey it is apparent that the residents in Courtland Township support the millage, support park improvements/expansion, and love having the parks system. Although non-motorized trails and designated walking paths is a high priority and will continue to be, park improvement and expansion are important as well.

A variety of factors, including community characteristics, population trends, existing recreation facilities, and identified recreation needs, contribute to the formulation of specific recommendations for plan implementation. These specific recommendations represent the actions that can be undertaken to achieve the objectives that have been directed towards a community's recreation goals. These recommended actions also represent the substance and purpose of a recreation plan - the development of a strategy for effectively closing the gap between existing recreation opportunities and recreation needs.

In instances of emerging areas of recreational needs, such as the development of nonmotorized trails, it is logical to expect that the project limits will need to be established by the identification of key connection points that should not be excluded or limited by geo-political boundaries. Courtland Township should explore the cooperation and participation of adjacent communities such as the Cedar Springs, Rockford, and Kent County in the formation of a regional recreational advisory board to combine resources and avoid duplication of facilities and services.

In the opening discussions with surrounding township representatives, a common goal of the need for the development of a non-motorized path system to provide residents easier access to adjacent recreational amenities on a regional level was identified. To implement such a trail system, the following are suggested measures:

- Develop master plan for regional and local level trail systems.
- Establish local recreational and trail authority consisting of surrounding township representatives to facilitate decision-making and joint funding of acquisition, development, and maintenance of multi-jurisdictional trail projects.
- The Township should actively pursue acquisition and/or use easements on privately owned property in the township wherever practical.
- Communicate with the County to add biking shoulders to roads where possible.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Supplemental DNR Attachments

Survey Results

Public Notices

Public Meeting Agenda / Minutes

Formal Resolution to Adopt the Plan