



# Public Input

## *The Foundation for the Development of Recreational Goals*

### **Overview**

To comply with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' *Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation Open Space and Greenway Plans*, the Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission offered four opportunities for public input, along with a 30-day period for review and comment on the draft Recreation Plan.

The first opportunity for public input was an online survey. It was made available through links on the home page of Saginaw County ([www.saginawcounty.com](http://www.saginawcounty.com)), on the main page for the Parks & Recreation Commission ([www.saginawcounty.com/parks](http://www.saginawcounty.com/parks)), and on the project blog at [SaginawCountyRecPlan.wordpress.com](http://SaginawCountyRecPlan.wordpress.com). The Director of Parks and Recreation started an e-mail with the survey link that was forwarded to many citizens encouraging them to complete the survey as well. It was available for approximately four weeks from mid-December 2008 through mid-January 2009. The results of the survey are discussed in more detail later in this section.

The second opportunity for public input was an open house held at the Saginaw County Governmental Center in the City of Saginaw on Thursday, December 18, 2008, from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm. A listing of ideas and suggestions received at the Open House is provided in Appendix B. In general, the input given at the Open House was very similar to the feedback received from the online survey, but focused on improvements to the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail and ideas for intergovernmental cooperation. Approximately 12 people attended the open house.

Third, the project blog provided news about the development of the draft Recreation Plan, announcements, recreational information about the County's parks, maps, photos, and video that was shared online with the general public. Many of the blog features were interactive, allowing people to provide online comments. As of mid-January 2009, the project blog received 1,439 hits and 67 separate comments. Most of the comments were posted by individuals expressing strong community support for a possible future extension of the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail from the Village of St. Charles south to the Village of Chesaning. Other comments suggested ways to provide better restrooms, improved and new pathway connections within parks, and parking lot improvements. A compilation of all the blog comments are provided in Appendix B.

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Throughout the planning process, a number of e-mails were submitted with suggestions and input about improvements at the County's parks. Those comments are also provided in Appendix B.

The open house, online survey, and project blog were well publicized. The Director of Parks and Recreation issued a press release on Tuesday, December 9, 2008, to announce the December 18 open house, the online survey, and the project blog. The Saginaw News wrote a short article on Wednesday, December 17, 2008, announcing the open house and the web address for the project blog. Another article appeared in the Saginaw News on Friday December 26, 2008, regarding the opportunity for citizens to respond to the online survey and provide input. This notification and publicity information is included in Appendix D.

After the draft was completed in January of 2009, it was advertised as available for public review and comment for 30 days in the **Parks & Recreation Commission office and the Hoyt Library**. It was also posted on the project blog. The fourth and final public input opportunity was at an advertised public meeting held on **February 19, 2009** at the **County Governmental Center**.



**Saginaw County Recreation Plan**

FRONT PAGE   SHARE YOUR COMMENTS   MAPS OF PARKS   ABOUT THE PLAN

[The Start of a New Plan ->](#)

### Virtual Bike Ride: Saginaw Valley Rail Trail

10/22/2008 · 14 Comments

Watch a two minute tour of the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail! It's like you are in the sky, flying over your fellow bike riders, power walkers, and joggers for almost 10 miles.

Well... sort of. Actually, it's just aerial imagery from Google Earth. Watch as you ride over neighborhoods, wooded areas, and farm fields, starting at Lumberjack Park in St. Charles and finishing at Stroebel Road in James Township.

**Click here and take a survey**

**COUNTY PARKS**

- Inerman Memorial Park
- William H. Hathco Recreation Area
- Price Nature Center
- Ringwood Forest
- Veterans Memorial Park
- Saginaw Valley Rail Trail

*Throughout the development of the Saginaw County Recreation Plan, the project blog, online at SaginawCountyRecPlan.wordpress.com, was filled with interactive features and information about the planning process.*



## Online Survey Results

### *About the Respondents*

By Wednesday, January 14, 2009, 178 people responded to the online survey. Most of the respondents (78%) have lived in Saginaw County for over 20 years, as indicated by Question #11. Another 13% have lived in the County between 11 to 19 years. Together, these two groups account for over 90% of the responses. This rate of response from long-term Saginaw County residents could be an indicator of a stronger willingness to participate in the survey because they are likely to be more aware of the County's parks and feel a stronger attachment to them.

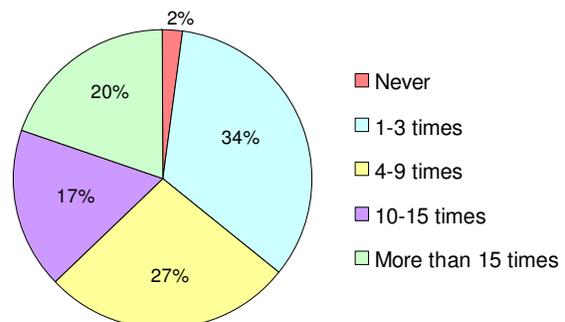
From Question #12, more than 47% of the respondents had three to five people living in their households. Another 39% were from households with just two persons. A little more than 11% were from single-person households. The other 2% came from a household with six or more persons.

In terms of age (Question #13), 41% of the respondents were 50 to 64 years old. About 25% were 40 to 49 years old. Just over 16% were between the ages of 20 and 39 years. Another 11% were 18 to 29 years old. And for those aged 65 and over, they comprised just around 7% of the survey responses. No one under the age of 18 completed the survey. According to the 2000 U.S. Census for Saginaw County, about 20% of the population is between the ages of 50 to 64. This age group responded to the survey at a rate of 41%. One possible explanation for the high response rate from this group may be related to how the online survey was announced. To announce the survey, a link was included in a bulk e-mail announcement that was sent to County employees, citizens that have signed up for the Parks & Recreation Commission e-mail newsletter, and other municipal officials in the area. They were also asked to forward the link to the survey to people they knew that lived in Saginaw County. In general, the bulk e-mail message tended to reach individuals at their job, who were likely to be people in higher positions, and hence, would be older.

A summary of the results to the survey is contained in Appendix B. The following paragraphs and charts discuss the results and summarize the open-ended questions.

### *Frequency of Park Usage*

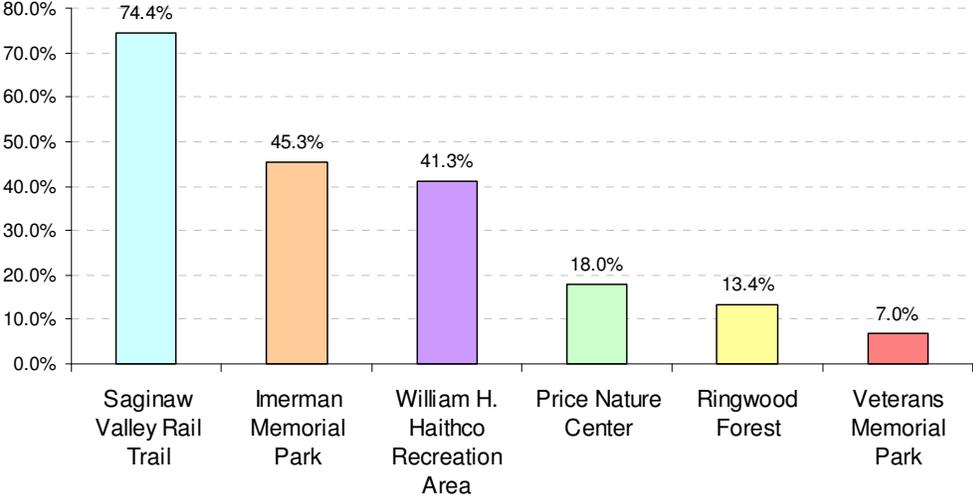
Question #1 asked, "How many times have you or your family used a Saginaw County park in the past year?" The following chart shows how frequent respondents used a County park in the past year.





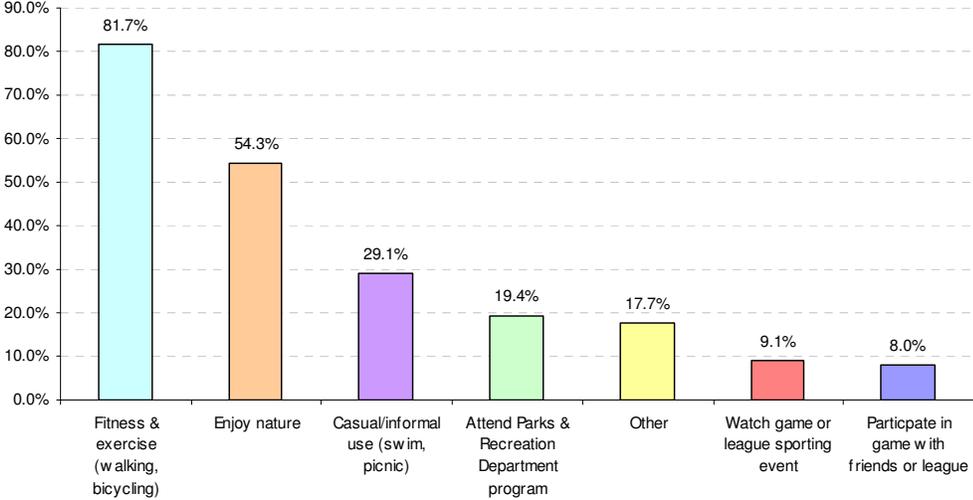
***The Parks that People are Visiting***

Question #2 asked, “Which of the following Saginaw County parks have you visited in the past year?” The following chart shows how the parks are getting used. Respondents could check all the parks they used in the past year. The Saginaw Valley Rail Trail is the clear stand-out, with approximately three-quarters of the respondents using that park.



***Reasons People go to the County Parks***

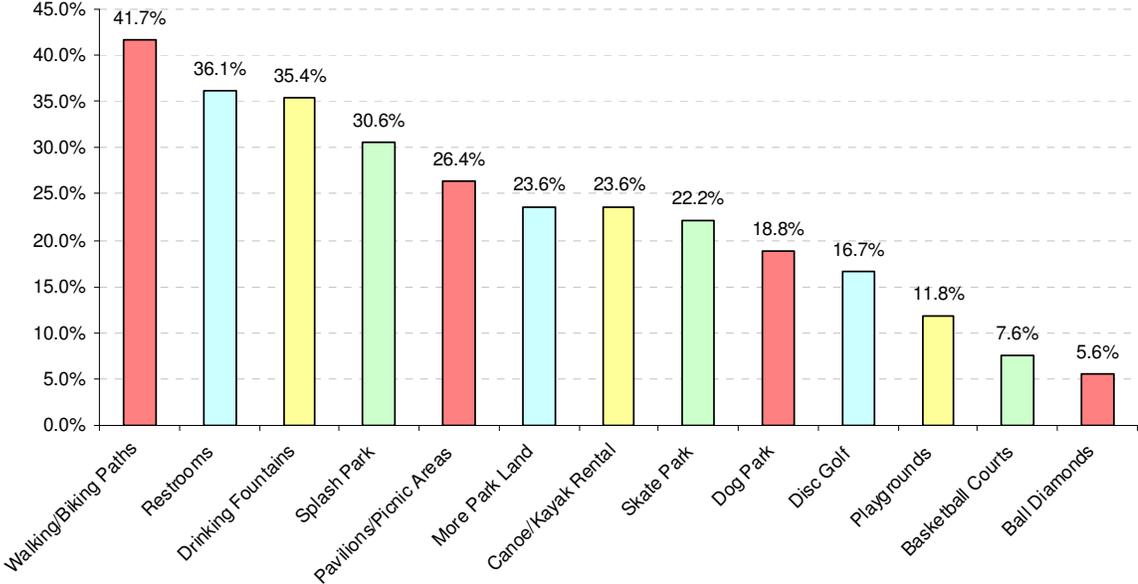
Question #3 asked, “Why do you and/or your family visit Saginaw County parks?” The following chart shows the reasons. Respondents could check all the reasons why they used the parks in the past year. Most use the County parks for fitness and exercise (82%). Just over half want to go out and enjoy nature. About 17% answered the open-ended portion of the question, and their reasons ranged from taking their dog to the dog park, cross-country skiing, taking photographs, and going fishing.





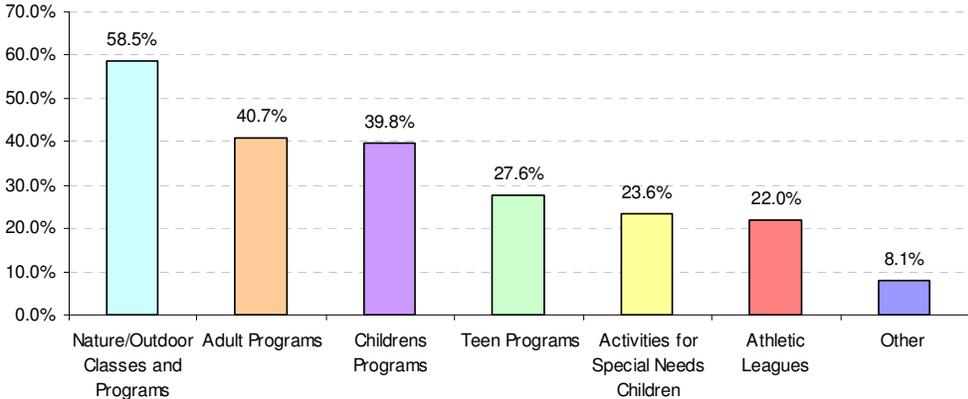
**Other Recreational Facilities Needed**

Question #4 asked, “What additional facilities/amenities would you like to see added to Saginaw County parks?” The following chart shows respondents preferences. At the top of the list were walking/biking paths at 41.7%. Respondents thought Imerman Memorial Parks was the location that needed them the most. The next two were restrooms (36.1%) and drinking fountains (35.4%), both mainly suggested for the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail. A splash park was next (30.6%), of which respondents tended to believe it should be located at William H. Haithco Recreation Area. Details of the individual amenities and where respondents chose to located them are included in [Appendix B](#).



**Other Recreational Programs or Activities Needed**

Question #5 asked, “What types of recreational programs or activities would you like to see added in Saginaw County parks?” Respondents could check all that applied. In the chart below, 58% said more nature or outdoor programs are needed. Of the 8% that chose “other,” suggestions ranged from programs for senior citizens to more open swims.



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### ***Evaluation of Various Aspects of Saginaw County Parks and Recreation***

Question #6 asked, “Please evaluate the following aspects of Saginaw County Parks and Recreation.” Respondents could rate the quality of programs, the quality/friendliness of staff, the variety of facilities/amenities, maintenance and appearance of parks, and safety and security. For each of these five aspects, respondents consistently rated them favorably.

### ***Addressing Park Accessibility and Persons with Disabilities***

Question #7 asked, “If there is a person with a disability in your family, please indicate which of the following would make the Saginaw County parks more user-friendly for you and your family member.” Over 82% of the respondents did not have anyone in their family with a disability. Of the 18% who did, they thought that flatter grades and accessible restrooms would help make the parks more user-friendly.

### ***Park Funding***

Question #8 asked, “Saginaw County's parks are primarily supported by a voter-approved 0.1618 mill tax levy. This equals approximately \$12 annually on a home with a \$75,000 taxable value. This tax levy will be up for renewal in 2010. How do you feel about this tax levy which supports your Saginaw County parks?” Over 63% of the respondents believe the levy is fair and would support its renewal in 2010. About 33% would support an increase in the levy. About 3% would not support any renewal or increase in the Saginaw County parks tax levy.

### ***Likes, Dislikes, and Other Comments***

The last two questions in the survey asked respondents to write in answers for what they liked (Question #9) about Saginaw County Parks and Recreation and what they would do to improve them (Question #10). Respondents were thorough and many comments on a variety of topics were received for both questions.

When asked what they liked best about Saginaw County Parks and Recreation, 85 respondents offered comments. Many noted the easy access to the parks, cleanliness, quality of maintenance, and how they liked the rail trail. Regarding what respondents thought could be done in terms of improving the parks, 86 people answered this question and offered ideas about restroom improvements, rail trail connections to other points within Saginaw County, collaboration with surrounding counties in the planning of future non-motorized pathways, increased security, and new opportunities for recreation along the rivers such as kayaking.





# Goals & Objectives



## *Transforming Ideas into Reality*

Developing goals and objectives is an important part of the parks and recreation planning process. The overall goal of the Parks & Recreation Commission is to provide recreation opportunities for the Saginaw County community and region it serves. More specific goals are based on the demographic characteristics of the population served, the physical and environmental characteristics of the area, and the input of the community.

Goals are the broadest level. They are over-reaching and general. Objectives carry out the purpose of the goal. An action program is the last level, as it identifies specific projects and programs to be pursued over the next five years. The action program can include organizational, staffing, programming, public information, and operation and maintenance actions. The Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission formulated the following goals and objectives based upon the characteristics of the overall community, the input received at the open house, the online survey, comments received on the project blog, and other factors such as sports participation trends.

### **Goal A: Promote multi-use path connectivity throughout the three-county region.**

The Saginaw Valley Rail Trail extends for almost ten miles through the southwestern portion of Saginaw County and, based on the comments received from all the types of input received for this plan, it is wildly popular. One could say it is the jewel of the parks system. Over 80% of the online survey respondents are using the County parks for fitness and exercise purposes such as walking, hiking, and bicycling, and the Saginaw Valley Rail certainly satisfies that need. By sheer force of its popularity, the rail trail is a



tremendous asset that is used frequently and has broad-based support. Furthermore, all forms of non-motorized transportation are becoming increasingly important across the United States. Multi-use paths, paved trails, and bike lanes are increasingly being used for recreation and transportation purposes. Of course, as with any park or trail, improvements are necessary and enhancements will go a long way toward ensuring long-term viability as well as

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increasing the quality of life for Saginaw County residents. The following objectives are designed to support this goal and to help strengthen the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail over the years.

Objective: Connect the existing rail trail to a planned connection in Saginaw Township.

Objective: Participate in the ongoing Regional Path project and continue to work with surrounding Counties.

Objective: Determine possibility of expanding the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail south of the Village of St. Charles.

Objective: Determine the possibility of Saginaw County Parks & Recreation developing a rail trail link from Zilwaukee to Bay County.

**Goal B: Promote and provide diverse recreational opportunities to satisfy all age groups and levels of ability.**

Providing a diverse range of recreation opportunities that are appropriate for different age groups and user types will help improve the health and fitness, as well as the quality of life for Saginaw County residents. These opportunities will also be fun and will create long-lasting memories and should help retain families in Saginaw County. Census data show that Saginaw County is aging relatively fast when compared to the rest of Michigan, and improvements to recreation may help encourage more participation across the population spectrum. Results from the online survey, specifically Question #5 which addressed other recreational programs or activities needed in County parks, show a need for programs for children as well as adults.



Objective: Continue to add amenities to Saginaw County park facilities based upon community input and need.

Objective: Provide passive and active programming for a variety of ages and abilities of the population throughout Saginaw County.

Objective: Continue to work with existing recreation partners in the community to provide support to programs, leagues, and special events. Explore options for new and expanded partnerships to provide additional recreational opportunities.



**Goal C: Develop recreation opportunities that focus upon and take advantage of Saginaw County’s water resources such as the Tittabawassee River, Saginaw River, and Haithco Lake.**

Many of the comments received from the community input methods support increased opportunities for access to the Tittabawassee River and Saginaw River, as well as Haithco Lake. These are unique resources that offer new opportunities for active and passive recreation. Furthermore, results from the online survey also indicate a strong desire for more nature and outdoor-related programming.

Objective: Enhance existing and develop new public fishing opportunities in Saginaw County.

Objective: Develop opportunities, alone or in partnership with others, to educate citizens about the area’s natural resources in Saginaw County.

**Goal D: Identify and encourage accessibility improvements at County parks by incorporating Universal Design in all new updates and when upgrading existing amenities, as appropriate.**

Many of the parks in Saginaw County are already handicap accessible, but improvements are needed. Input from the community suggests a need to improve the accessibility of existing facilities, further bolstered by the fact that U.S. Census data from 2000 show that 20.3% of the civilian non-institutionalized population aged 5 and over in Saginaw County has a disability. This goal and subsequent objectives are designed to support improvements in County parks that address accessibility.

Objective: Determine which parks in Saginaw County should receive universal access improvements.

Objective: Prioritize the parks that are determined to receive universal access improvements.

The National Recreation and Park Association knows why parks are important in this country. From *Top 10 Reasons Parks Are Important*, an article on [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org):

- 1) Public parks provide millions of Americans with the opportunity to be physically active.
- 2) Parks have true economic benefits.
- 3) Parks provide vital green space in a fast-developing American landscape.
- 4) Parks preserve critical wildlife habitat.
- 5) Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions.
- 6) Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness.
- 7) Recreational programs provide organized, structured, enjoyable activities.
- 8) Community recreation services provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth.
- 9) Therapeutic recreation is an outlet that individuals with disabilities have.
- 10) Public parks embody the American tradition of preserving public lands.



**Goal E: Determine the recreational needs and wants of all Saginaw County citizens, including those living in urban areas.**

Comments from the community input open house indicate a need for quality recreation opportunities throughout all of Saginaw County. Within Saginaw County there are a total of 35 local municipalities, which include three cities, five villages, and 27 townships. Many provide local parks and community recreational facilities. State and federal agencies also provide recreational opportunities. The management of these public facilities is the responsibility of the elected boards and commissions of the respective entity. The Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission recognizes the health benefits, positive economic impacts, and overall contribution to quality of life that recreation provides to the residents of Saginaw County. As such, the Parks & Recreation Commission supports efforts to improve all recreational facilities and services within the County. With approximately 30% of the County’s population located in the City of Saginaw, access to recreation opportunities is important. The Parks & Recreation Commission recognizes this need and wishes to collaborate with communities in order to promote recreation throughout Saginaw County.

Objective: Collaborate with other communities to develop a mutual understanding of recreation needs for identified population groups.

**Goal F: Retain public land for future generations.**

Saginaw County is proud of its parks and recreational facilities and realizes they contribute to the quality of life of its residents. When access to natural areas is enhanced, these areas are a draw for not only residents, but also for tourists, contributing to the larger economic development picture in Saginaw County. New lands may need to be acquired so specific facilities can be added or so that special natural features can be preserved.

Objective: Retain existing parkland and acquire new public lands to meet the recreational needs of the community.

Objective: Preserve and protect open space and significant natural features in Saginaw County.

**Goal G: Promote and enhance the financial stability of Saginaw County’s parks.**

Many public input comments about Saginaw County’s parks said they were beautiful and well-maintained. Saginaw County takes prides in its beautiful rivers and open spaces, and the parks are no exception. The Parks & Recreation Commission wants to keep its recreational facilities attractive and functional for generations to come. As the Parks &

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Recreation Commission improves and develops new facilities, there is increasing need for funding of ongoing maintenance and upgrades. There is further pressure on the overall County budget due to declining economic conditions. Additional sources of funding and income would be very beneficial for the Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission. These may include additional income-generating facilities at the parks.

Objective: Investigate a long-term park maintenance revenue source such as an endowment.

Objective: Investigate additional park usage to increase park visits and income.



# Action Program

## *Working Hard for Results*



### **Overview**

With goals and objectives in place, the Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission developed a five-year action program that will enable them to move toward accomplishing the goals and objectives. The action program details the direction the Parks & Recreation Commission wishes to take over the next five years in order to maintain and improve the quality and diversity of its park and recreation opportunities.

Potential projects were assigned a priority of 1 through 5, with 1 being most important and 5 being least important. Each action item on the project list relates to one or more of the lettered goals from the *Goals and Objectives* section of this plan. Potential capital improvements described in this plan have been established to not only provide a framework for decision makers, but to also enable Saginaw County to apply for grant funding for the proposed projects.

The project list is not a fixed element nor is it exhaustive. The project list reflects the results of the input received from the Parks & Recreation Commission, County staff, the open house, the online survey, and the project blog. Future circumstances, especially availability of funding, may change priorities or require reprioritization of items.

The action program is shown in the table at the end of this section.

### **Financing Potential Improvements**

Funding for parks and recreation capital improvements can come from a range of local, state, and federal programs. Grant funding is available for parks and recreation projects. However, applicants need to target potential funding agencies and programs very carefully so as to meet the specific criteria required. Appendix D contains a current listing of programs and agencies that can provide funding for parks and recreation projects.



| <b>Saginaw County Recreation Plan</b>   |                        |                 |   |
|---|------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>Project List</b>   |                        |                 |   |
| <b>Action Item</b>  | <b>Relates to Goal</b> | <b>Priority</b> | <b>Justification</b>  |
| Extend the rail trail from Stroebel Road to the Center Road bridge area in Saginaw Township.                              | A, B, F                | 1               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public input comments.</li> <li>▪ Improves accessibility and functionality.</li> <li>▪ Staff input.</li> </ul> |
| Add new picnic and pavilion areas, including drinking fountains, at select locations along the rail trail.                | A, B, D                | 3               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public input comments.</li> </ul>  |
| Develop a canoe launch and fishing platform on the Tittabawassee River or Saginaw River.                                  | B, C, D                | 3               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public input comments.</li> <li>▪ Improves accessibility and functionality.</li> <li>▪ Staff input.</li> </ul> |
| Investigate the feasibility of a splash park at William H. Haithco Recreation Area or Imerman Memorial Park.              | B, D, E, F, G          | 2               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public input comments.</li> <li>▪ Improves accessibility and functionality.</li> <li>▪ Staff input.</li> </ul> |
| Investigate the feasibility of developing a new dog park at the William H. Haithco Recreation Area or other County parks. | B, D, E, F, G          | 4               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public input comments.</li> <li>▪ Improves accessibility and functionality.</li> </ul>                         |
| Continue to investigate the potential expansion of the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail south of the Village of St. Charles.     | A, B                   | 5               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From public input comments.</li> </ul>   |
| Continue to investigate the potential of a rail trail link from Zilwaukee to Bay County.                                  | A, B                   | 5               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From public input comments.</li> <li>▪ Staff input.</li> </ul>   |



# Planning Process



## *Community Outreach and Saginaw County's Commitment to Strong Planning Principles*

In an effort to provide quality recreational opportunities for its citizens, Saginaw County has developed this recreation plan as a tool to guide the development of park and recreational facilities over the next five years. This plan represents its ongoing commitment by the County to establish recreational goals and objectives for the region. The plan will also provide Saginaw County with eligibility for grants from the Department of Natural Resources to assist the County in reaching its recreational goals. To start, Saginaw County contracted with Spicer Group of Saginaw to assist the Parks & Recreation Commission with the completion of this plan. The first meeting was held in October 2008. The Parks & Recreation Commission then met with the planning consultant, Spicer Group, two more times prior to the public hearing in February 2009.

Data was collected about Saginaw County, such as demographics and an inventory of the facilities within the six parks owned and operated by the Parks and Recreation Commission. This data was gathered from a number of resources such as County staff, the 2003 Saginaw County Recreation Plan, the Saginaw County Parks & Recreation Commission, research of aerial images provided by Google Earth, and through field visits. This information helped determine where Saginaw County was in terms of providing recreational facilities in comparison to recommended standards.

A total of four opportunities for input and participation were provided during the development of this plan, the results of which were described in an earlier section of this plan. Based upon the existing information and the public input, the Parks & Recreation Commission developed goals for parks and recreation in Saginaw County. The Parks & Recreation Commission also planned for an action program to accomplish the goals of the plan.

Spicer Group completed a draft recreation plan which was subsequently available for review on January 18, 2009 at the **County Courthouse in Saginaw, Hoyt Library**, and online at **SaginawCountyRecPlan.wordpress.com**. The 30 day Notice of Review was published in the Saginaw News on **January 18, 2009**. The fourth and final opportunity for community input occurred at the advertised public hearing held prior to adoption of the plan, which was held on **March 00, 2009**, with the Board of Commissioners. Then, the plan was transmitted to the County Services Committee for their review.

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Saginaw County passed a resolution to adopt this recreation plan at the Board of Commissioners meeting on **March 00, 2009**. Copies of the recreation plan were transmitted to the East Central Michigan Planning & Development Regional Commission and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in **March of 2009**. Copies of the notification advertisements, the public hearing minutes, the resolution, and the transmittal letters are included in Appendix D.