

## Chapter 5: Action Program

While the fiscal context of the City of Ypsilanti does not currently allow for significant spending on the park system, many improvements are still realistic. This plan is optimistic, while acknowledging financial constraints, that much is possible over the next five years. This attitude is based on the many recent and ongoing successes in the recreation system, including,

- The continuing volunteer-funded and -administered programming at the Rutherford Pool, Senior Center, and Parkridge Center
- The many improvements made to Parkridge Park by Ypsilanti Health Coalition partners
- The disc golf course at Waterworks Park, using volunteer labor and donated materials
- The construction and maintenance of community gardens at Parkridge, Recreation, and Frog Island Parks
- The partnership with the Depot Town Community Development Corporation to improve, maintain, and program Riverside and Frog Island Parks
- The collaboration with Eastern Michigan University, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, and Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan to complete several links in the Border-to-Border Trail

All of these accomplishments have come at little or no expense to the City, instead growing out of shared interests with regional partners or through tapping the energy and talents of Ypsilanti residents. As implementation of projects from the Action Plan will rely on the involvement of these volunteers and regional partners, prioritization of projects is necessarily loose, recognizing that opportunity will dictate which projects come to fruition. The plan goals and implementation schedule have been designed with this in mind.

### RECREATION VISION AND GOALS

This plan aims to balance the desire for a high quality parks system and recreational opportunities with the limited fiscal capacity of the City of Ypsilanti to provide those opportunities. The plan therefore envisions that the City will play a custodial role, with available resources focused on oversight and basic maintenance of the underlying parkland. Within this system, neighborhoods, Friends groups, and other volunteer and community groups will provide programming and maintenance through formal partnerships with the City. Additionally, the City will build upon existing relationships with regional partners, such as Washtenaw County, Eastern Michigan University, Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital, area non-profits, and the surrounding Townships.

#### **Goal 1: Maintain a safe, clean, and welcoming recreation system.**

- Improve security at parks, including sightlines and lighting
- Ensure accessibility at all facilities and park shelters
- Address any unsafe conditions in play equipment and structures
- Provide clear signage identifying parks and facilities and outlining hours and policies

- Implement environmentally sustainable improvements and maintenance practices to reduce costs while protecting the environment
- Establish and expand neighborhood partnerships or other alternatives for maintaining tot lots and smaller parks

**Goal 2: Provide recreation programming through effective partnerships**

- Facilitate decentralized programming by exterior groups and agencies
- Develop clear structure for recreation relationships, outlining roles, responsibilities, and communication between city and program partners
- Inventory and communicate to and from residents existing recreational assets and programs
- Pursue coordinated regional recreation opportunities

**Goal 3: Engage recreation users in sustainable park and facility maintenance**

- Involve recreation user groups in upkeep of system through sustainable fee structure and in-kind activities
- Coordinate marketing of events to maximize participation
- Continue to support neighborhoods and business districts with special events

**Goal 4: Continue implementation of Huron River Corridor Master Plan**

- Complete linkages between riverfront parks, and enhance links to business districts and neighborhoods
- Enhance the individual character of each Huron River Park with updated facilities to meet current recreational, cultural, and social needs, while also respecting the historic character of these parks.
- Take advantage of the Huron River's distinctive appeal as a focal point for residents, businesses, visitors, and economic development efforts to encourage private reinvestment in the City
- Continue to pursue partnerships to realize the full potential of the Huron River corridor through recreation programming, and to encourage complementary redevelopment of private land

**Goal 5: Provide high quality non-motorized transportation networks within the City and linking to surrounding communities**

- Complete the Border to Border Trail segments within the city and continue to participate in regional greenway planning efforts
- Ensure safe and pleasant routes to parks and recreation facilities from neighborhoods, schools, and business districts
- Pursue a variety of funding for walking and biking improvements, including health, recreation, and transportation sources
- Continue to perform street repairs in ways that improve the walking and biking environment

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT AND PROGRAMMING PLAN

Recommendations are provided for specific parks where possible, with general, system-wide recommendations following. Each recommendation indicates in parentheses the specific goals that are advanced. The partnership and volunteer orientation of this plan, and of the City's recreation system, means that many of the recommendations, particularly where programming is concerned, must be somewhat nebulous. As the exact form of programs and many capital improvements will be the result of working with neighborhood groups, private entities, and regional partners, recommendations tend to be for processes, rather than projects.

### Huron River park system

#### *Peninsular Park*

The current state of Peninsular Park does not reflect the potential of this park, as this plan's demographic analysis shows a very high potential user base in the immediate area. Peninsular's neighborhood has a high overall population density, as well as a high number of children, households in poverty, and households without access to an automobile – all factors that establish demand for neighborhood park space.

- *Identify and engage neighborhood stakeholders. (3, 4)* Residents near Peninsular were underrepresented in the public input process. The area lacks any identified neighborhood association or community gathering place. Additionally, many nearby residents are located in Ypsilanti Township, and were not targeted by the process. Any action at Peninsular should begin with a more intensive neighborhood engagement process to identify specific needs.

- *Issue an RFP for private redevelopment of the Powerhouse. (1, 2, 4)* The park's most prominent feature is the aging powerhouse. As the City will not be able to rehabilitate the structure in the foreseeable future, it should seek a private partner for an adaptive reuse project. Whether this partner wishes to repair and recommission the dam; provide a recreational facility, such as a canoe livery; or establish a café or other neighborhood-oriented business, the City will benefit from private investment in and enlivenment of the park, even if the redevelopment does not provide a large revenue stream. This RFP would best be issued after completion of the dam assessment, but before any action is taken, in order to allow



**Figure 5-1: The 1867 Edison powerhouse**, in Peninsular Park, is an Ypsilanti landmark. Seeking a private partner may be a way to both address the structure's physical deterioration and add a use to the park that can serve as a focal point for the neighborhood.

bidders the greatest flexibility. A bidder interested in the aesthetic appeal of the dam, for example, may be offered the option of paying for dam repairs as a part of powerhouse rehabilitation.

- *Improve appearance and signs at entrance, including directional signage from Huron River Drive. (1, 5)* Residents frequently cite Peninsular's unwelcoming appearance as a reason for not visiting. Providing clearer sightlines at the park entrances can help address safety concerns, and improved signs and formal pedestrian facilities (rather than dirt paths), can establish a sense that the park is cared for. Signs at the intersection of Huron River Drive and LeForge should direct new visitors to the park, including both automobile traffic and B2B users.

### ***Railroad Street Shoreline***

The completion of a riverfront path between LeForge Road and Forest Avenue continues to be a long-term recreation goal that is not likely to be achieved in the scope of this plan. However, the incremental assembly of riverbank access will need to be continued in order to enable that eventual goal.

- *Continue assembling easements on private shoreline. (4, 5)* As a long-term goal, this process will rely on donations of easements by property owners or during the site planning process for redevelopment of sites. The Ypsilanti Public School District bus garage facility is likely the next low-hanging fruit during this process.
- *Consider development of City-owned land, potentially in conjunction with bus garage. (1, 4)* As public land, the EDC parcels are vacant, unmonitored space with minimal natural resource value. To a private owner, they would be a sizeable parcel with enviable river views for residential or office use. Development of this land would improve the security of an eventual river walkway through casual monitoring by the site's users. Ideally, this site and the YPSD garage facility would be packaged to provide a larger and more valuable site at the time that the District is ready to vacate that property. The single private property owner between these two sites could be approached for interest in participating in such a joint offering. The value of this City-owned land is not simply in the sale price, but in ensuring compatible development. A development agreement should be in place prior to sale to ensure timely implementation of a development plan that maintains this parcel's public access, with a clawback provision in place if the development plan is not followed. Prior to any such action, a public access easement must be recorded on the river frontage.

### ***Riverside and Frog Island Parks***

As a result of partnership with the Depot Town CDC, Frog Island Park and Riverside Park have been considered in much more detail than the other parks; the CDC both provided for detailed design work to be undertaken, and is expected to undertake many of the recommendations made over the first two to three years of the plan. The recommendations for Riverside Park aim to enhance its role both as a passive retreat for residents and as a setting for community events, while the recommendations for Frog Island build on its more active elements. Those recommendations are summarized here; Appendix F contains further detail on each of these items, as well as the full Conceptual Site Plans. Potential interconnected improvements at the Riverside Arts Center and Freighthouse are also detailed; while these would be outside of the formal scope of the CDC's work, the public input process around the two parks suggested that

the planning process should consider how these spaces might work with the two parks. The possibilities presented for these areas also show how ideas that the public input process suggested for Riverside or Frog Island Parks, but which might not be good fits for those parks, might be accommodated elsewhere.

Recommendations for Riverside Park, detailed in the Appendix, include:

- *Improve park access, visibility, and image From the Michigan Avenue corridor, and from the intersection of Huron and Cross Streets. (1, 5)*
- *Expand and improve the non-motorized path network and accommodate the Washtenaw County Border 2 Border (B2B) Trail. (5)*
- *Create a formal sledding hill and park overlook. (1)*
- *Create a children's play area and discovery garden. (3, 4)*
- *Enhance the link between the park and the Riverside Arts Center (RAC). (5)*
- *Improve and enhance the park's south end; provide a new pavilion, pond, bioswale, canoe landing, and B2B Trailhead. (3, 4)*
- *Create a passive space along the Huron River (4)*
- *Stabilize banks, enhance ecological functions, and improve user access to the Huron River. (4)*
- *Convert perimeter lawn areas to prairie, and stabilize slopes along the West Park bluff. (4)*
- *Enhance park planting. (3, 4)*
- *Renovate the existing dock. (1)*
- *Improve park lighting, signage, and waste collection system. (1)*

Recommendations for Frog Island Park, detailed in the Appendix, include:

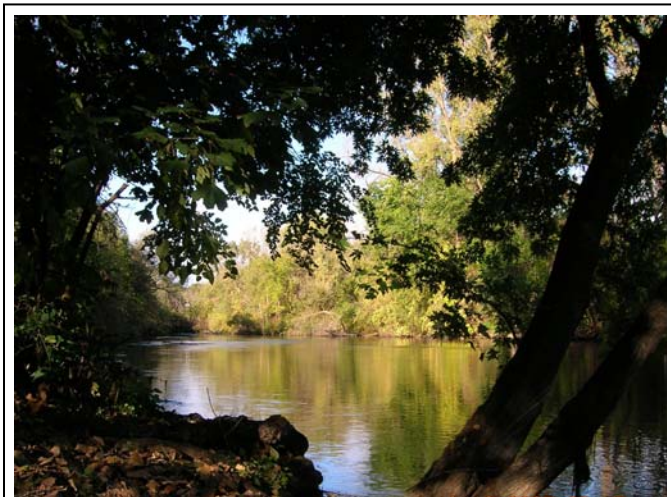
- *Improve park access, visibility, and image from Cross St., Rice St., and Forest Avenue. (1, 5)*
- *Relocate the Recycling Center. (1)*
- *Redesign the Rice Street corridor to function as a pedestrian-friendly park access drive; develop park main entrance and neighborhood links. (1, 5)*
- *Accommodate the Washtenaw County Border 2 Border (B2B) Trail and improve the non-motorized path network. (5)*
- *Enhance spectator areas east and west of the soccer field. (2)*
- *Explore options for a new multipurpose band shell / pavilion. (2)*
- *Enhance stage and spectator facilities at the existing amphitheater; develop a process to facilitate community-based programming. (2)*
- *Complete construction of the Frog Island Community Garden. (2, 3)*
- *Develop the north end of the park as a natural area. (1, 4)*
- *Stabilize banks, enhance ecological functions and improve access to the Huron River. (4)*
- *Enhance park planting. (3, 4)*
- *Improve park lighting, signage, and waste collection system. (1)*

### ***Water Street riverfront (River's Edge/Gilbert Park)***

- *Coordinate linear park design with appropriate adjacent redevelopment. (4, 5)* While the non-motorized trail will be a part of any plan, the final form of the Water Street area will affect the location and function of any larger nodes of parkland along the Huron River frontage in this area. A successful design for the riverfront linear park will include connectivity between Riverside and Waterworks Parks and the B2B Trail, public access to the river, and environmental considerations such as native plantings and creative and effective stormwater management.

### ***Waterworks Park***

While use of Waterworks Park has risen drastically with the installation of the disc golf course, it remains generally underutilized. Due to the low level of demand emerging from either the demographic analysis or the public input process, and the uncertain relationship of Waterworks to the Water Street area, the disc golf course will probably remain the only formal activity in this park until another such private proposal comes forward. Any intensive work at this site will need to investigate any below-ground infrastructure remaining from the water treatment plant.



**Figure 5-2:** The park system's Huron River frontage remains hidden and lightly used in many places, such as this segment passing between Waterworks Park and the Water Street area.

- *Improve bicycling and walking access from residential areas. (5)* In addition to the B2B segment passing through Water Street, which will connect to Waterworks via the existing footbridge, access to Waterworks from neighborhoods to the west can be improved. The 2006 *Non-Motorized Plan for Washtenaw County* identifies bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Catherine Street that would provide this improved connectivity.
- *Improve directional signage. (1)* In addition to on-site signs clearly identifying the park made visible from Catherine and Factory Streets, as well as wayfinding signs on Huron Street at either Catherine or Harriet could increase traffic to the park, particularly for the disc golf course and any future activity that has a similar regional draw.
- *Remain open to future partnerships. (2, 3)* Several suggestions have been made for the unused space in Waterworks. These include a soccer field, for league play or use when Frog Island is occupied; a dog park, to reduce off-leash use elsewhere; a driving range, as a potential revenue source; or a canoe livery, to serve Ann Arbor to Ypsilanti runs as the last take-out point before the low clearance I-94 bridge. Whether these or other plans are brought as volunteer-driven initiatives or as proposals for private concessions, this sort of regional activity could take advantage of Waterworks' proximity to major roads to both welcome visitors to Ypsilanti and help to enliven the park.

- *Pursue continued river access to south. (4)* As the Visteon/ACH plant to the south of Waterworks Park is repurposed or redeveloped, its future owners and users should be engaged with the goal of extending public access to the riverfront south from Waterworks Park, through that area.

## Neighborhood and Mini-Parks

### ***Candy Cane Park***

The demographic analysis showed low residential density in the immediate neighbourhood around Candy Cane Park. Likewise, fewer survey respondents identified it as one of their most-visited parks. The park did, however, seem to be well-used by youth, with a high response rate among surveys collected at the high school.

- *Install identifying and wayfinding signs. (1, 5)* As with other parks, entrance signs identifying the park are currently not well-located. The northern entrance to the park is easy to bypass without noticing, and should be improved. Additionally, the park should take advantage of its proximity to the B2B Trail – while it's unlikely a direct route between the two could be acquired, signs on Hewitt and Cornell could help direct visitors between the park and Trail.
- *Continue user involvement in equipment and bathroom maintenance. (1, 2, 3)* Survey respondents identified the sports and playground equipment and bathroom availability as priorities at this park, but these facilities have high ongoing maintenance demands. Past volunteer upkeep efforts should be built upon in Candy Cane, which functions more strictly as a neighborhood park than any other, due to its physical seclusion and lack of adjoining school, business district, or other community-wide amenities. While relatively few survey respondents seemed interested in an Adopt-a-Park effort for Candy Cane at this time, maintaining these facilities at the level requested will require engagement of the neighborhood and other park users.

### ***Parkridge Park***

While relatively few survey respondents identified Parkridge as a target park, this is likely a product of low response rates from that neighborhood. The area immediately around Parkridge ranks at the top of all of the demographic demand factors, including total number of residents as well as concentrations of children, seniors, children in poverty, households without access to a car, and residents with disabilities. Additionally, the Recreation Commission's visits to the park observed significantly more use of Parkridge than most other parks, making this park a clear priority.

- *Support existing community efforts. (2, 3)* A number of community organizations are active in and around Parkridge Park, including the Heritage Park and other neighborhood associations, Ypsilanti Housing Commission, Ypsilanti Health Coalition, and Messiah Temple. These organizations have successfully pursued both physical improvements (primarily using grant funding) and some programming in the park, such as Growing Hope's long-running Perry Learning Garden. The Recreation Commission

should engage these groups as examples of successful individual efforts, and determine how to support and sustain their efforts.

- *Perform additional community engagement, if necessary. (2, 3)* While the survey received a low response rate, the park is clearly well-used and important to the community. The groups that are already engaged in the park have already engaged various users, and could provide good channels for performing further engagement.
- *Continue basic maintenance and visibility improvements. (1)* Recent brush removal has improved visibility and physical repairs have been made to some of the sports facilities. Additional work could include night-time lighting, to provide visibility into the park; removal of bathroom enclosure from picnic shelter, to improve sightlines; further repairs to facilities, such as the play structure; and increasing visibility of signage at streets.
- *Seek alternatives for providing bathroom facilities. (1, 3)* While the existing bathrooms in the picnic shelter have been targets of vandalism in the past, the number of children and youth using the park suggest that availability of bathrooms will be important. Whether bathrooms are located in the park itself, or through arrangement with a neighboring use, providing bathrooms on some basis (e.g. daytime hours only, or with park reservation only) and making that availability known would improve the usability of the park.
- *Revisit lease of land from Housing Commission and School District. (2, 3)* The City's lease of the property on which Parkridge Park is located expires on April 1, 2011. Since Parkridge is an important neighborhood park, the City should discuss the means of maintaining its use with the Housing Commission and School District prior to that time. This could be done most simply by extending the lease, or could involve some other arrangement to guarantee continued public access. Additionally, it would be essential to revisit the options regarding what body should operate the park. Possibly the Housing Commission, or school, rather than the City, as the primary partner could provide access to any additional funding sources.

### ***Prospect Park***

Prospect is generally considered to function well, and has an attractive mixture of facilities. No critical issues are apparent at this time, and the resident survey indicated general satisfaction, aside from issues present generally in the park system, such as availability of bathrooms.

- *Restore bathroom facilities for group use. (1)* While vandalism has been a problem for the bathroom facilities in the past, this amenity is important to organized use of the park. Making arrangements for bathrooms to be available at least to organized activities and group reservations of the park will support the active community use of Prospect Park.
- *Coordinate a community garden with the neighborhood association or Adams Elementary. (2, 3)* A number of neighborhood residents are active in community gardens in other areas of the city, or have expressed interest in these gardens. Additionally, several other schools in the Ypsilanti Public School District host learning gardens on their sites – an activity very appropriate to Adams' science focus. Dedicating a portion of the park to a community or school garden will establish direct individual and

neighborhood care over a portion of the park, as well as providing another activity bringing users to watch over the entire park.

- *Consider rain garden or “wet meadow” treatment for Luna Lake. (1)* While a hard-sided, engineered pond approach to Luna Lake would require significant ongoing maintenance, a rain garden planting scheme could be an attractive but low maintenance alternative for this part of Prospect Park.

### **Recreation Park**

The mix of facilities and activities in Recreation Park is generally very popular, and the park has no obvious needs for new facilities. While some capital improvements have been recently made to the Senior Center and Pool, additional needs are expected, particularly to the pool – the Friends groups for these facilities have established operational funding models, but additional funding will be needed for further capital costs.

- *Identify and pursue funding strategy for pool repair or replacement. (1)* The pool is a very popular community amenity, as evidenced by the willingness of the Friends group to operate it and of the success of fundraising for operations. Of existing facilities in the recreation system, the pool presents the most urgent needs for capital improvements to remain operational, likely requiring complete replacement. In this case, attention will need to be turned from maintenance and operations to a major capital campaign. As the pool is a regional amenity, neighboring Townships and the County should be invited to participate in this effort. Forming a regional pool authority could be one option for formalizing a cooperative venture to replace the pool.
- *Focus on basic maintenance. (1)* The mixture of activities in Recreation Park seems to be generally appropriate and well-used. While some other parks could benefit significantly from different activities, engagement of neighbors and users in Recreation Park should best focus on enhancement of the existing park uses.
- *Investigate bathroom facilities available seasonally or with park shelter reservations. (1)* As with other parks, bathrooms are a constant request in Recreation Park. The Little League leases portable toilets during their season, which also serve general park users. As a step towards full-time restroom availability, a partnership with the nearby neighborhood associations or a portion of park facility rental fees could be devoted to extending that lease through the park’s summer peak use season.
- *Include schools and Ypsilanti Township in any improvements or activities. (2, 3)* The western boundary of Recreation Park is Chappelle Elementary School. The school and the neighborhood to the west and south of it are in Ypsilanti Township, including a significant number of households with children. As neighbors of the park, these stakeholders should be included in discussion of park improvements, coordination of volunteer efforts, and other activity in Recreation Park.
- *Consider skate park construction. (2, 3)* A number of community members have recently expressed an interest in creating a skate park. Recreation Park would likely be the most appropriate location for this amenity, due to its proximity to large numbers of youth and area schools. A number of communities around the country have seen successful volunteer-coordinated and –constructed skate park projects. The typical result from permitting advocates to construct a dedicated facility is a reduction in unwanted skateboard activity elsewhere in the community, such as on school grounds or

business districts. Local skateboard advocates may be engaged in the creation of a skate park, similar to the construction of the disc golf course in Waterworks Park. A skate park could also be appropriate in locations such as Parkridge or Waterworks Park.

***Carrie Mattingly, Charles Street, and Edith Hefley tot lots, and south Ainsworth lot***

The general recommendation for these four properties is to immediately transfer them to neighborhood care if possible, or to private ownership as another option. As they have very small, if any, user bases, typically consisting of only nearby households, removing them from the public maintenance burden and placing their care into neighborhood hands will not only eliminate maintenance costs, but also allow direct control by the actual users. If the named tot lots (Carrie Mattingly and Edith Hefley) are converted to some other use, the Recreation Commission should find alternative ways to honor their namesakes.

- *Vacate Ainsworth Parcels. (3)* The two mid-block parcels in Ainsworth are almost invisible and have poor public access. As a result, they appear to receive negligible use, except by immediately adjacent neighbors. These properties are not buildable, as they lack street frontage. The neighborhood may be approached to discuss maintaining this as public land but coordinating private care, however, the most practical way to formalize public care of these areas is likely to split this area and add it to the adjacent private parcels.
- *Turn over Edith Hefley tot lot to neighborhood care. (3)* This lot appears to receive significant use, despite its proximity to Recreation Park. Approximately 10% of survey respondents noted it as one of their most-frequently visited parks. As the surrounding area has several well-established neighborhood associations, and many survey respondents noted willingness to participate in an Adopt-a-Park or occasional improvements to this lot, the neighborhood care option should be pursued immediately.
- *Turning over Charles Street tot lot to private care would be one option. Thinking to the future, another option based on its location is to consider sale. (3)* As with Edith Hefley, the neighborhood should be asked to organize care of this lot, but the request may be less successful. The Charles Street lot received very little attention from survey respondents; none noted an interest in an Adopt-a-Park arrangement. Additionally, the lot is not part of any formal neighborhood association, making coordination of neighborhood care difficult. The playground equipment could be moved to Prospect Park, to minimize maintenance needs of this lot and maximize access to the equipment. Sale of this buildable lot would be one option; however, its location in line with Thomas Street means that it could have value as a potential extension of that street east to Twin Towers, to support possible future subdivision of large lots on Troy Street and Holmes Road.

***Freighthouse***

While there is general support for the idea of restoring the Freighthouse to its role as a community center, neither capital nor operational funding plans exist for that goal – the Freighthouse, like the pool and other community centers, would need to operate self-sufficiently, as the City's former operational funding is no longer available.

- *Investigate all feasible options for returning Freighthouse to use. (1, 2)* While the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse continue to pursue the volunteer effort to restore the Freighthouse as a community use, alternatives must also be considered, in case that effort does not prove successful. Options to consider include:
  - Partnering with private entity for management of the Freighthouse as community center
  - Reconfiguring Freighthouse into gallery- or market-style collection of small business spaces
  - Private business use compatible with some public use (similar to the nearby Corner Brewery's role as an community events space)
  - Commuter rail station or other rail-related use
  - Soliciting other private business use through RFP or other means

While these options vary in their ability to actively maintain the Freighthouse's former role in the community, a public-private partnership or long-term lease could provide private financing for the physical restoration of the Freighthouse and a positive contribution to the community, preserving it for the future use of the community.

### System-wide Improvements

The Recreation Commission's inventory of the park system identified a number of improvements related to maintenance, lighting, and signage that were generally necessary across the park system. Some of these have been called out within individual parks in the Action Plan, where they are seen to be of particular concern, but are also noted here for pursuit throughout the system, as and where funding and labor resources permit.



**Figure 5-3: Several parks have low visibility** from nearby streets, or little indication that they are public parkland. Better signage on Leforge Road, for example, would be an easy way to make Peninsular Park appear more welcoming.

- *Improve appearance and visibility of park signs. (1)* At many park entrances, signs are absent or poorly visible. Signage at all entrances should identify the parks in an obvious and attractive fashion to both pedestrians and drivers (including an orientation perpendicular to the public right-of-way); some parks may additionally warrant directional signs at nearby intersections.
- *Perform safety inspections of sports and playground equipment, repairing, removing, or replacing any problematic equipment. (1)* Some of the equipment at various parks appears to require maintenance or be in a state of disrepair. These needs should be evaluated and addressed as resources permit.

- *Remove invasive species and add appropriate plantings. (1)* Of particular importance along the Huron River, but appropriate throughout the system, is the need to remove invasive or noxious plants. Location-appropriate native plants provide habitat, stabilize the riverbank, and filter stormwater, among other benefits, providing low-maintenance value once established. Implementing this recommendation will likely be labor-intensive and rely on volunteer efforts, perhaps in coordination with Ypsi Pride Day or Huron River Day. Initiatives such as the Washtenaw Land Trust, Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program, and Ann Arbor Natural Areas Program may be able to provide technical assistance.
- *Create templates for Adopt-a-Park efforts and volunteer agreements. (1, 3)* To date, the various Friends groups, the community gardens, the disc golf course, the DTCDC partnership, and other private efforts within the parks have followed very ad hoc processes for working with the City, or, in some cases, did not follow any process at all. In order to encourage future efforts, clarify those already in existence, and ensure that private efforts do not conflict with the city's maintenance (or other private groups), the Recreation Commission should define and publicize processes and guidelines for such initiatives that detail concerns such as utility costs, liability, and contact persons.
- *Formalize existing Friends groups and relationships with City. (2, 3)* The existing Friends groups are models for generally successful volunteer management of City recreational amenities, but many have no legal status, nor any formal agreements with or relationship to the City. For the benefit of both the Friends groups and the City, formal agreements should be created to clarify the rights and responsibilities of each. For some of the groups, this will likely require some form of legal incorporation in order to provide an entity that the City is capable of entering agreements with, though this legal status does not necessarily need to be as complex as Federal 501(c)(3) non-profit status.
- *Create and distribute informational resources on parks and programming. (2)* The events and activities that take place in Ypsilanti's parks and recreation facilities are numerous enough, and organized by enough disparate groups, that many of them receive less attention than they should. Many survey respondents stated that they did not know about the parks in the system, with 39% stating that they felt more information would encourage them to use the parks and programs more. Increasing use of recreation facilities and participation in programs and volunteer groups is necessary to engage users and build on existing efforts. The Recreation Commission can, alone or with community partners, inventory recreational programs; publicize opportunities to reserve parks or facilities for private events; network with and coordinate various efforts within the city; and otherwise assume an enabling and facilitating role.
- *Coordinate planning and programming with neighboring communities and County. (2)* The City has already had a number of successes working with Washtenaw County agencies on projects such as the B2B Trail and programs coordinated by the Public Health Department. These partnerships should be continued and built upon, and existing cross-usership between community recreation facilities formalized. One option would be to pursue a joint recreation master planning process with Ypsilanti Township in 2012, as this plan approaches the end of its life.
- *Create casebook to support and coordinate fundraising efforts. (3)* Maintaining the parks and recreation facilities to high standards requires financial resources, and, while

the Friends groups in particular have had fundraising successes, projects such as the Freighthouse and pool will require substantial additional resources. Providing a casebook outlining the community's successes so far, identifying a vision, and outlining the financial needs in detail can help when approaching potential funders.

- *Coordinate with neighboring communities and County to implement regional planning goals. (2)* Chapter 2 of this plan identifies a number of regional plans relevant to the provision of recreation to Ypsilanti residents. These plans address regional needs and approaches to open space, non-motorized transportation, and mass transit. The City's limited resources may in some cases be most effectively used to cooperatively work towards these region-wide goals.
- *Create sound standards and investigate dedicated sound system for events. (1)* Ypsilanti's parks host a number of events that not only engage residents but serve as a regional draw to the City, including the Heritage Festival, Michigan Summer Beer Festival, Elvisfest, and numerous others. These events have the potential to be a nuisance to neighbors, though, particularly where amplified music is featured. Creating and enforcing clear standards for sound levels during events can help prevent potential nuisances, and should be considered for the entire park system. Where regular events are held or anticipated, such as the proposed permanent stage in Frog Island Park, a dedicated sound system may be appropriate. A "resident" sound system could be designed with the layout of the park in mind to provide ample sound for events while minimizing the spill over to neighbors.
- *Involve schools in park improvements and maintenance. (2, 3)* Parkridge, Prospect, and Recreation Parks are all immediately adjacent to Ypsilanti Public School District buildings, and the parks generally receive a lot of use by children and youth. As primary users of the parks, the school district, parent groups, and student groups should be involved in the future of those parks. These stakeholders may provide insight into how to implement various recommendations from this plan, and may also be partners in recreation programming and maintenance.

## **PATHWAY SYSTEM AND NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION**

Both as a recreational activity and as an important means of reaching community amenities, non-motorized transportation (biking and walking) has received increasing attention in recent years. While the Border to Border Trail is the highest profile local effort, several lower-profile programs and policy efforts have also been active. The Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) inventoried biking and walking deficiencies in a 2006 plan; the Washtenaw County Public Health Department has been working with City and Ypsilanti DDA staff on a number of efforts, including Safe Routes to School and Bike Ypsi; and the Ypsilanti Bicycling Coalition has recently emerged as a bicycle education, advocacy, and programming group.

Non-motorized transportation appears to be very important to Ypsilanti residents; survey respondents identified "Expand network of biking and walking routes" as second only to basic maintenance and safety issues as a priority, with 70% of respondents saying it was an "important" or "most important" priority. Additionally, a survey of 250 downtown and Depot

Town employees on commuting behavior found that a high percentage of these employees walk or bike to work – 8%, compared to a national average of 4.3% - and that 34% portion live within 5 miles of their workplace, and therefore could walk or bike to work. Some of the issues cited that prevented these respondents from biking or walking to work were environmental – perceptions of safety or lack of appropriate routes.

- *Complete in-City portions of B2B Trail. (2, 4, 5)* Within the span of this plan, the Border to Border trail should be complete, contiguous, and clearly marked within the City of Ypsilanti. This effort is already well underway via a coordinated effort with County and regional partners, and should remain a priority.
- *Prepare a non-motorized transportation plan for the City. (2, 5)* A plan that identifies physical and policy barriers to biking and walking and defines a strategy for removing those barriers is a necessary step before proceeding past the B2B Trail. A non-motorized plan would aid in applying for Federal transportation funding programs for additional implementation moneys, as well as providing a basis for network coordination with adjacent communities. Considering Ypsilanti's small size, the neighboring townships should be approached to participate in this planning process.
- *Perform walkability and bikeability audits around parks and recreation facilities. (5)* Detailed examinations of the area immediately around parks and facilities can identify and address issues from sidewalk condition to vehicular traffic, providing a basis for improving the safety and enjoyment of biking or walking. Walkability audits would be most appropriate within a 1-2 block radius, while a bikeability audit could be community-wide; these could be performed as neighborhood groups, schools, or other partners were interested in participating. Scattered bicycle and pedestrian improvements have been made in recent years, and a 2004 walking audit of downtown noted some issues, but a more coordinated evaluation would help prioritize future projects.

## **POTENTIAL FUNDING APPROACHES**

As the City of Ypsilanti's budget has tightened over the past several years, general fund expenditures on recreation improvements and operations have been significantly reduced, and the remaining general fund support for parks maintenance is likely to be eliminated during the five year life of this plan. While alternative funding has been found for some programming and improvements, via private fundraising, grants, and the Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, none of these are dedicated or guaranteed funding sources.

Various potential funding mechanisms are described below. Many of these have been used by the City at some point in the past; some would require action by a higher level of government.

### **General Fund**

As noted, the City's general fund is unlikely to be a source of support for the parks and recreation system during this plan's course. In recent years, Ypsilanti's ability to maintain general fund support for the recreation system has dwindled. In fiscal year 2002-2003, when the previous version of this plan was created, Recreation Administration and Parks Maintenance

totalled \$754,009 in general fund expenditures. In the current fiscal year, 2007-2008, \$204,056 is budgeted for Parks Maintenance, and even that may drop to zero during the five-year span of this plan.

### **Local, Regional, or County Dedicated Millage**

A property tax millage can be used to finance specific park and recreation projects such as parkland enhancements or land acquisition or for the operation of recreation facilities. This option is available to local governments, Counties, and regional authorities. Currently, Washtenaw County has dedicated property taxes of approximately 0.5 mills for parks and recreation, and approximately 0.25 mills for natural areas preservation; the City of Ann Arbor has a 1.1 mill dedicated property tax for parks maintenance and capital improvements; and Pittsfield Township has a 0.5 mill dedicated property tax for parks and recreation funding.

Over a dozen survey respondents suggested a dedicated parks and recreation tax. With a 0.5 mill dedicated property tax generating about \$183,000 annually – slightly less than current costs of mowing and basic maintenance, this could be an option for providing parks maintenance funding.

A regional recreation authority could also be formed under Public Act 321 of 2000 with neighboring communities that would have the ability to seek a regional millage. This option would not likely provide a massive influx of money into Ypsilanti's recreation system, however, as the authority's spending would also be regional in scope. Such an authority would have greater benefits in terms of coordination of programming and maintenance than in dollars.

### **User Fees**

Some recreational activities lend themselves well to support through user fees. The Rutherford Municipal Pool, for example, charges for admission, with family and annual rates available. If user fees are used to support recreation programming, though, coordinators must consider the potential for exclusion of residents who cannot afford the user fees. Where significant user fees are used to fund programming, sliding scale charges or scholarships may be appropriate.

Additionally, user fees may be charged on a per-event basis, rather than per-person, in the form of park or facility reservations. These reservations can allow a group or event, such as a family or company picnic, or a wedding, exclusive use of certain park facilities, and provide some amount of revenue for facility maintenance. Reservation fees can be scaled based on what facilities are reserved, time of day or year, and extra amenities such as use of bathrooms or electricity, or alcohol permits. The City does currently offer park reservations, managed by volunteers from the Jaycees, though this opportunity is not well advertised, and fairly limited in its scope.

### **Lease Arrangements and Concessions**

In some cases, communities successfully lease parkland or management of particular operations to private companies. These leases can take a variety of forms, ranging from the ability to use a small corner of the park to site a cell tower, to paying for the right to run a commercial canoe livery from a public park. The City's partnership with the Depot Town CDC is one type of this

arrangement, but with the CDC providing capital improvement and maintenance services rather than a cash lease.

Since Ypsilanti's parkland is limited, as is its ability to add parkland during future development, leasing portions of parkland to private concerns should be carefully considered to ensure that it does not impede the park's ability to serve the community.

### **Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) Grant provides funding assistance for state and local outdoor recreation needs, including land acquisition and development of recreation facilities. This assistance is directed at creating and improving outdoor recreational opportunities and providing protection to valuable natural resources. These are grants between \$15,000 and \$500,000 with a required minimum local match of 25 percent.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provide grants to local units of government to acquire and develop land for outdoor recreation. At least 50 percent match on either acquisition or development projects is required from local government applicants. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) makes recommendations to the National Park Service (NPS), which grants final approval. Ypsilanti has received money from these sources in the past for a number of park projects, as noted in the Recreation Inventory.

### **Federal Funding Programs**

A number of Federal programs provide money that may be used for recreation-related projects. For example, Ypsilanti has recently used Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program funds for construction of segments of non-motorized pathway, and has used Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for capital improvements to the Senior Center, Parkridge Center, and Pool. Each of these funds is limited in the types of projects that it can be used for, however, and recreation projects must be weighed against other needs within the City when these funds are available.

### **Donations and Foundation Grants**

Businesses, corporations, private clubs, community organizations and individuals will often contribute to recreation and other improvement programs to benefit the communities in which they are located. Private sector contributions may be in the form of monetary contributions, the donation of land, the provision of volunteer services or the contribution of equipment or facilities. A foundation is a special non-profit legal entity established as a mechanism through which land, cash and securities can be donated for the benefit of parks and recreation services. The assets are disbursed by the foundation Board of Directors according to a predetermined plan.

A number of recent projects in Ypsilanti have been funded by donations or foundation grants made either to the City or private groups. The Friends groups attached to various facilities are almost entirely funded in this way, and a number of one-time projects are completed through grant funding.

## IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

While many of the recommendations in this plan will be pursued as the opportunity presents itself, the Recreation Commission has identified a number of the above recommendations as implementation priorities. These recommendations are those that are seen as organizational prerequisites to the success of other portions of the plan, the most urgent needs, or those which engaged partners already exist with whom to coordinate. These include:

*Create templates for Adopt-a-Park efforts and volunteer agreements.* The Commission will immediately begin work on guidelines and baseline agreements for partnerships between the City and volunteer recreation initiatives. This step is seen as critical for clarifying and managing these relationships, and for encouraging additional efforts.

*Formalize existing Friends groups and relationships with City.* As the most highly visible examples of volunteer recreation programming in the City, the relationships with the existing Friends groups should be the first that are formalized. This process will likely happen in parallel with the crafting of templates for other efforts, as the past experience of the Friends groups and issues identified during their formalization will inform that process.

*Create casebook to support and coordinate fundraising efforts.* As both the pool and the Freighthouse will require substantial capital fundraising, in addition to the operational costs of the various facilities, laying the groundwork for those efforts is a priority. The City's 2020 Task Force may be able to assist the Recreation Commission in this effort, having already dedicated effort to a vision for Ypsilanti.

*Identify and pursue funding strategy for pool repair or replacement.* With the closure of the Rutherford Pool imminent, a capital campaign for the pool's replacement or major repair is expected to be most effective while active use of the pool is still fresh in the community's memory. Efforts are already underway to bring additional volunteers into this effort, as well as to approach potential regional partners, such as the Townships and County, and building on this momentum is seen as important.

*Perform safety inspections of sports and playground equipment, repairing, removing, or replacing any problematic equipment.* As resources permit, any basic safety issues should be identified and addressed. It is anticipated that small issues exist that can be addressed with minimal dedication of resources, and possibly by skilled volunteers. In addition, some identified accessibility issues may be targeted proactively, rather than considering them only in the course of other work.

*Complete in-City portions of B2B Trail.* As a high-profile regional project that already has significant visible progress and momentum from a number of project partners, the B2B Trail should be diligently pursued to completion. Plans are in place, in addition to some funding commitments, to complete some of the remaining gaps in the City's portion of the system, putting this project very close to completion.

With the Depot Town CDC's agreement to take charge of improvements and maintenance in Riverside and Frog Island Parks, implementation priorities within those parks will be determined by the CDC. This plan anticipates that B2B Trail-related upgrades to the pathways in those parks will be a high priority.

*Prepare a non-motorized transportation plan for the City.* Promoting bicycling and walking for both transportation and recreation was deemed a very high resident priority in both the survey and in written feedback on the draft plan. A number of pieces are in place for creating a non-motorized transportation master plan for the City, including the WATS non-motorized plan, and the B2B planning process, and creating such a plan could increase the City's eligibility for both recreation and transportation funding sources. Various stakeholders are already in place to collaborate with the Commission on this process, including the WBWC, the Ypsilanti Bicycling Coalition, Bike Ypsi, and the County's Parks and Recreation Commission and Public Health Department.