
*Niles Charter Township
Community Parks, Recreation,
Open Space, and Greenway Plan*



2019-2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a community, Niles Charter Township has demonstrated complete understanding of the value, and broad scope, of benefits that comprehensive recreational planning can bring to residents and visitors. By committing time and resources to the planning process, the community has ensured a wide variety of opportunities for all to enjoy physical health, scenic vistas, enjoyable leisure time, intact natural resources, and have attractive places for abundant educational and social events. It takes dedicated participation and full cooperation of community leaders and residents to prepare a five-year plan. This participation involves attending committee meetings, performing on-site visits to inventory and assess current park conditions, preparing, conducting, and transcribing a community survey, and doing research to provide information for specific park projects.

Among those who are appreciated for giving generously of their time and demonstrating their commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all are the following:

Niles Charter Township Parks Commission

Jill DeLucia, Chair
Wayne Perkins, Treasurer
Sarah Craig, Secretary
Jordan Perkins
Christopher Warburton

Christine Vella, Township Board Liaison

Niles Charter Township Board

James Stover, Supervisor
Terry Eull, Clerk
James H. Ringler, Treasurer
Richard Cooper, Trustee
Herschel Hoese, Trustee
Daniel Pulaski, Trustee
Christine Vella, Trustee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of a five-year community parks, recreation, open space, and greenway plan is to establish policies that will achieve prudent and logical development of recreational programs and facilities. The plan also identifies existing facilities and provides guidance for the acquisition and development of future facilities or amenities. An integral part of the plan is the development of goals that reflect those policies and provides a method to regularly examine and evaluate the township's open space and recreational needs, project fulfillment, and overall direction. Niles Charter Township has a number of opportunities to provide venues that will educate, improve health (both mental and physical), increase social connections, and improve the economic and environmental characteristics in the area. When implemented, a thorough and regularly reviewed five-year plan can maximize each one of these opportunities.

Before the goals and projects incorporated into this five year plan were developed, an overall concept was discussed and a specific theme was established. This theme became a mission statement that guided the decision-making process as members of the steering committee worked to understand issues, develop solutions, and plan for the future. The following mission statement will continue to serve the community as a guide to maximize opportunities and overcome challenges as they arise.

Mission Statement

Compared to other communities our size, Niles Charter Township will have the finest, most comprehensive and most accessible park and trail system in Michigan and will be a national model of excellence.

Niles Charter Township will encourage the implementation of comprehensive recreation planning that includes parks, open space, greenways, and historic, cultural, and artistic components. Over the next several years, Niles Charter Township will focus on the following: completing the IN-MI River Valley Trail, increasing the use of grants, donations and volunteers, making the park's general areas more handicap accessible, coordinating with road agencies to include non-motorized facilities on roadways, bringing an indoor playground facility and a state-of-the-art all-sports complex to the community, maintaining and updating park amenities and landscaping, assisting with the 11th Street Corridor Project and providing assistance to baseball and softball leagues.

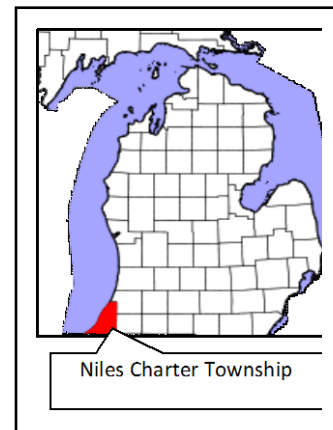
With the continued enthusiastic commitment and partnerships between the Parks Commission, township officials, businesses, and residents, Niles Charter Township will reap numerous health, social, and economic benefits from its parks and recreation opportunities.

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Understanding the physical and social characteristics of a community is an important aspect of planning for current and future recreational needs. A wide range of information such as climate patterns, natural resources, employment, and existing assets is taken into consideration when analyzing the recreational needs of the community and leading to the development of a viable action plan. In this section, various components of the community's demographics and physical landscape are presented and the connection is made to the overall goal relevant to that information.

Location

Niles Charter Township is located in the southeast corner of Berrien County in southwestern Michigan. The township is surrounded by Berrien Township to the north, Buchanan Township to the west, Bertrand Township to the south and east, Howard Township (in Cass County) to the east, and Indiana to the south. The City of Niles is located primarily in the southeast corner of the township with a small portion of the city in Cass County. There are five major highways providing access to and from large metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Illinois (approximately 95 miles west), and Detroit, Michigan (200 miles east).



Township residents responding to the community survey indicated considerable interest in future and current participation in recreational and leisure activities available in the above mentioned communities surrounding the township. Since some survey respondents are residents of these communities, it can be assumed that the interest is reciprocal and will continue to be a consideration for planning.

Climate

Southwest Michigan has a relatively mild climate with four well-defined seasons. Precipitation averages include 40 inches per year of rainfall and 69 inches of snowfall. The average July temperature is 83 degrees Fahrenheit and the average January low is 17 degrees Fahrenheit. There are approximately 173 days of sunshine.¹ This temperate climate allows many opportunities for the community to enjoy the vast array of seasonal recreational, open space, and greenway facilities within the township and surrounding areas.

¹ https://www.bestplaces.net/climate/city/michigan/niles_township

GOAL 1 - *Develop and support policies that will preserve and protect valuable water and land resources including properties with historic and/or cultural value.*

Natural Resources

Land

Niles Charter Township encompasses approximately 37.25 square miles of land and 1.07 square miles of water (US Census 2010). With a population of just over 14,000, the population density is approximately 380 people per land square mile. The agricultural and rural nature of the township is demonstrated by the following table indicating the distribution of different types of **land cover** by percent of total land.

▪ Urban	14%	▪ Forest	20%
▪ Farmland	48%	▪ Water	2%
▪ Orchard/Vineyard	1%	▪ Forested Wetland	3%
▪ Open Land	9%	▪ Wetland	3%

The natural scenic quality of an area with so much forest and farm land provides substantial benefits and opportunities. Protecting vistas and view sheds encourages tourism revenue, attracts positive rehabilitation and renovation, preserves the unique natural charm of the area, and encourages civic pride.²

Topography

Rolling hills, low broad valleys, marshlands, and small lakes are characteristic of the glacial terrains found throughout the township. The elevation difference between the lowest and highest points is approximately 200 feet. The land along the St. Joseph River is low and relatively flat creating a wide flood plain across the center of the township. The land west of the City of Niles rises sharply and continues in a pattern of low hills between Niles-Buchanan Road and Weiser Road to the township's most western boundary. Other lands scattered throughout the township exhibit a more gentle relief.³

Soils

There are a number of soil types in the township. The Oakley-Oshtemo association is very prominent in the central area of the township, consisting of nearly level to steep, well-drained loamy soils on outwash plains and moraines. In the southern "panhandle" of the township the Spinks-Oakville-Oshtemo association is very much in evidence. These nearly level to very steep, well-drained sandy and loamy soils are found on moraines, till plains, outwash plains and beach ridges. Two other generalized groups are present: the Riddles-Oakley-Oshtemo and the Brady-Monitor-Gilford associations. The former is characterized by nearly level to very steep, well-drained loamy

² <http://www.scenic.org/easements/strategies>

³ *Niles Township Master Plan, 2002*

soils on outwash plains, moraines and till plains while the latter consists of nearly level, somewhat poorly drained and very poorly drained loamy soils on outwash plains, deltas and lake plains.

Careful consideration should be given to farmland in the northwestern sector of the township, where a considerable amount of Oakley loam is present. This soil type has 0-2% slope and is classified as prime agricultural land. A smaller pocket is located in the eastern end of the township adjacent to the Dowagiac River, but a significant portion appears to be in residential use. This soil is prevalent in Community Park and is well suited to supporting development.⁴

Water and Wetlands

There are many diverse water resources in the township including two rivers, (the St. Joseph and the Dowagiac) several miles of tributary streams (Brandywine Creek), and a large number of small lakes, ponds, and wetlands. These water resources provide several important functions including:

- Recreational opportunities (fishing/swimming/boating)
- Educational value and teaching opportunities
- Functional recharge areas for groundwater
- Aesthetic appeal
- Fish and wildlife habitats
- Water retention and flood control

Comprehensive recreation planning includes the development of water protection policies that will preserve the benefits and functions of this valuable natural resource. Water quality protection measures help to ensure pure drinking water, healthy fish populations for sport fishing, safe beaches, swimming areas, and other tourism-related venues. The best approach to protect water resources is to leave a naturally vegetated buffer (a no mow policy) along the edge to filter pollutants running off the land.

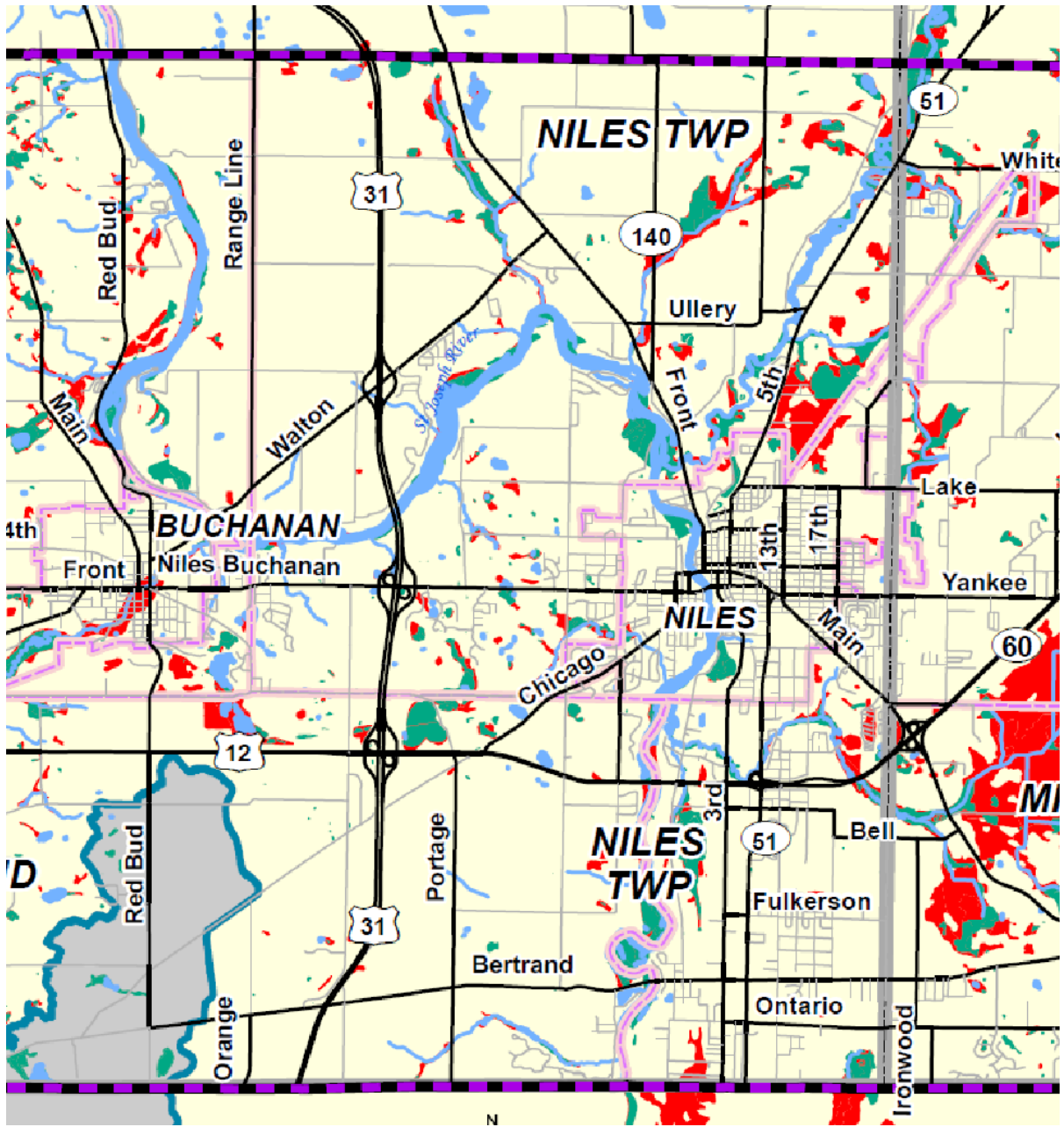
About 25% of the wetlands in Niles Township have been lost since pre-settlement times. The map on the following page shows areas where wetlands are now and where they were historically. It is important to protect the remaining wetlands and restore lost wetlands when possible. Wetlands are important to wildlife (flora *and* fauna) but wetlands also provide floodwater protection which can save billions of dollars in property damage every year. Wetlands provide buffers from stormwater by absorbing floodwaters and filtering water pollutants. One of the greatest threats to inland lands and streams is stormwater runoff. As rainwater runs off paved surfaces it collects pesticides, motor oil, pet waste, garbage, and other pollutants before flowing into natural bodies of water. By leaving wetlands intact and allowing for plenty of undeveloped property, stormwater can be absorbed and filtered thus



The St. Joseph River

⁴ *Niles Township Recreation Plan, 1995-2000*




reducing the contamination of the water resources. Preserving land that recharges the quantity and quality of drinking water is an important consideration for every community.







Wetlands

-  Existing
-  Historic

Watersheds

-  St Joseph River
-  Galien River
-  Kankakee

Base Layers

-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundary
-  NATS Area (Proposed)
-  Federal Aid Eligible Road

GOAL 2 - *Seek and establish connections between existing and future trails and pathways including greenways and waterways.*

Trails and Greenways

Trails, greenways, waterways, and open spaces are incorporated into recreational planning for many reasons. Throughout this five-year plan, references are often made to trails as they can have a substantial positive impact on the social, economic, and physical well-being of the community.

Trails provide opportunities for walking, running, skating, and bicycling for either individuals or families. As a health benefit, trails can facilitate safe and inexpensive exercise for those without easy access to other exercise venues such as health clubs. Trails might also provide transportation alternatives between school, work, home, social events, or other business. Trails are an important method of preserving natural areas while expanding recreational options that may become economic development opportunities. Residents and leaders in Niles Charter Township have expressed support for developing trails and connecting them with other trail systems in the region including northern Indiana.

Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission initiated a multi-jurisdictional effort to connect an existing trail in Niles City to trails in Indiana (South Bend/Mishawaka). The trail has been coined the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail and when complete will be a 34-mile trail connecting Niles, MI to Mishawaka, IN. The trail will be used by commuters, students, families and tourists as it will connect people to:

- 4 universities and several schools
- 4 downtowns (Niles, Roseland, South Bend and Mishawaka)
- 16 parks and 2 YMCAs
- 5 hospitals or major medical facilities
- Several historical and cultural attractions
- Businesses offering eating, lodging and shopping



Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission is dedicated to completing its section of trail and assisting efforts in Indiana to complete what could certainly become a regionally recognized and well-utilized alternative transportation / recreation corridor running from Plym Park in the City of Niles to downtown Mishawaka, Indiana.

In recent years many organizations and agencies have been promoting the concept of water trails or blueways as a means to highlight the recreational benefits of rivers. Water trails are simply rivers that are used for recreation. While some water trails may be formalized with developed facilities, interpretive information and maps, others are not as formally developed and may only be experienced

by a handful of individuals. A water trail is really any traditionally navigable waterway defined as having the capacity, in terms of length, width, and depth, to enable a kayak or canoe passage. Many people currently enjoy paddling on the Dowagiac and St. Joseph Rivers. A more developed water trail experience could be developed to enhance the recreational experiences on these rivers. Efforts such as these will cross political boundaries and Niles Township will have to work with neighboring jurisdictions to develop and promote water trails.

In addition to trails, other greenways (often referred to as “green infrastructure”) are beneficial for preserving natural landscapes and providing links between fragmented habitats to protect plants and animals. Greenways can be used as a tool for wetland preservation and for the improvement of air and water quality. Greenways often incorporate naturally vegetated buffer zones to protect streams, rivers, and lakes from stormwater runoff including vehicle waste, fertilizers, and pesticides. Open spaces also serve as floodplains to absorb excess water and reduce the risk of flooding in low-lying areas.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Animals such as white-tailed deer, pheasant, quail, and cottontail rabbits are common in the rural/agricultural areas of the township. Red fox, coyotes, raccoons, and squirrels are found in the woodlots and forest edges. With the expanse of river corridors present, migratory waterfowl, herons, and kingfishers are often observed utilizing the wetland habitat for food and nesting areas. Brandywine Creek, a tributary of the St. Joseph River, is a high quality trout stream supporting significant natural reproduction.



White-tailed Deer

The township is also home to a variety of songbirds, owls, hawks and turkey vultures. Well-planned land management includes development policies that encourage substantial diversity and numbers of native plants and animals including game animals and endangered species.





Potential Conservation Areas

Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) are defined as places on the landscape dominated by native vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. Scoring criteria used to prioritize sites include: total size, size of core area, length of stream corridor, landscape connectivity, and restorability of surrounding land, vegetation quality, and biological rarity score.

The map on this page shows ranked Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) in Berrien County. The map on the following page shows PCAs in Niles Township along with wetlands, parks, recreation areas and protected lands. The map shows a sizable area in the township (northwest side of the City of Niles) given the highest ranking for a PCA. Several other areas with “high” and “higher” areas are scattered throughout the township. This is important information for planners to consider when determining park development projects and/or land acquisitions or to assist with greenway or green infrastructure planning mentioned in the previous section.

Potential Conservation Areas Berrien County

Legend

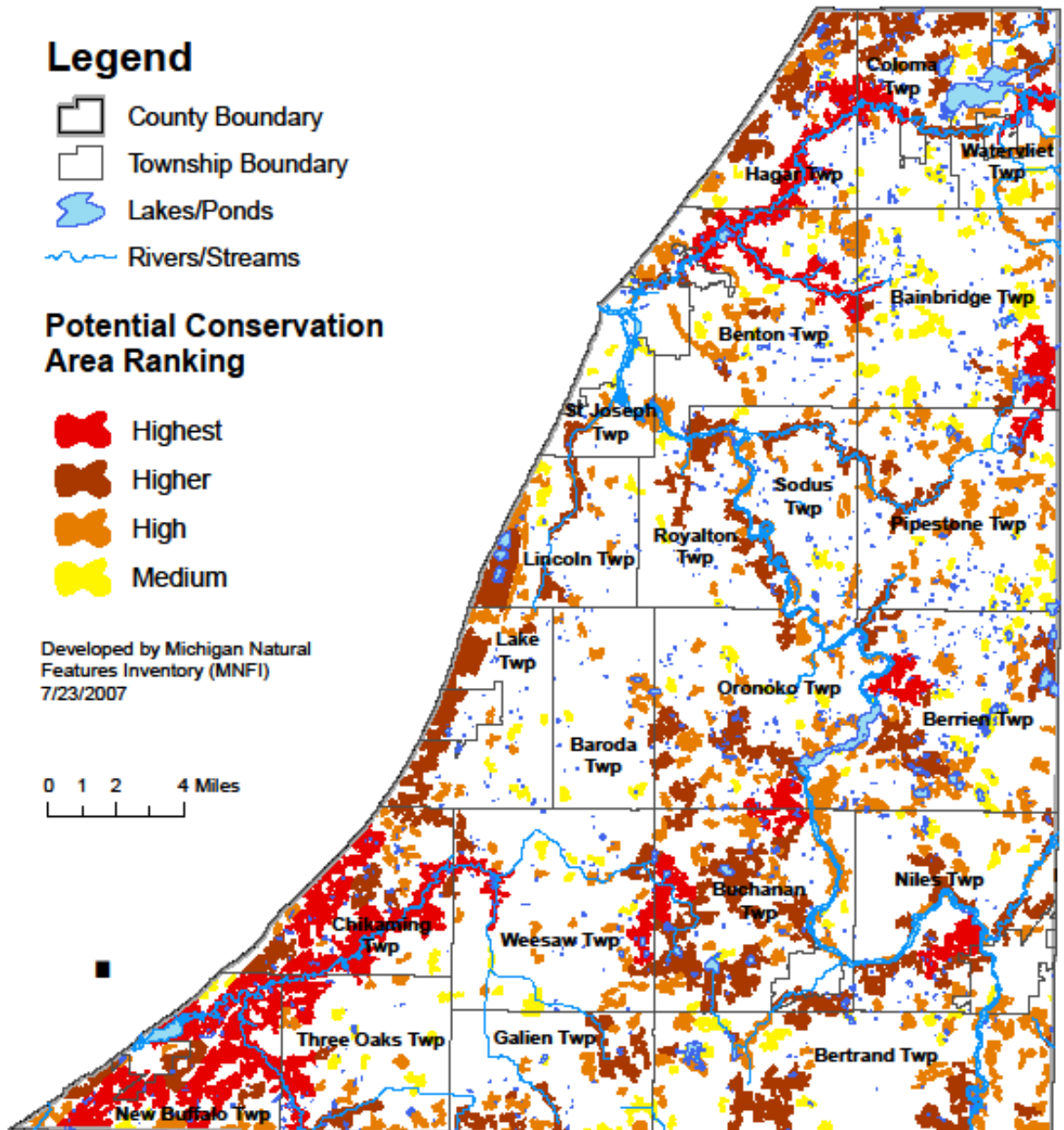
-  County Boundary
-  Township Boundary
-  Lakes/Ponds
-  Rivers/Streams

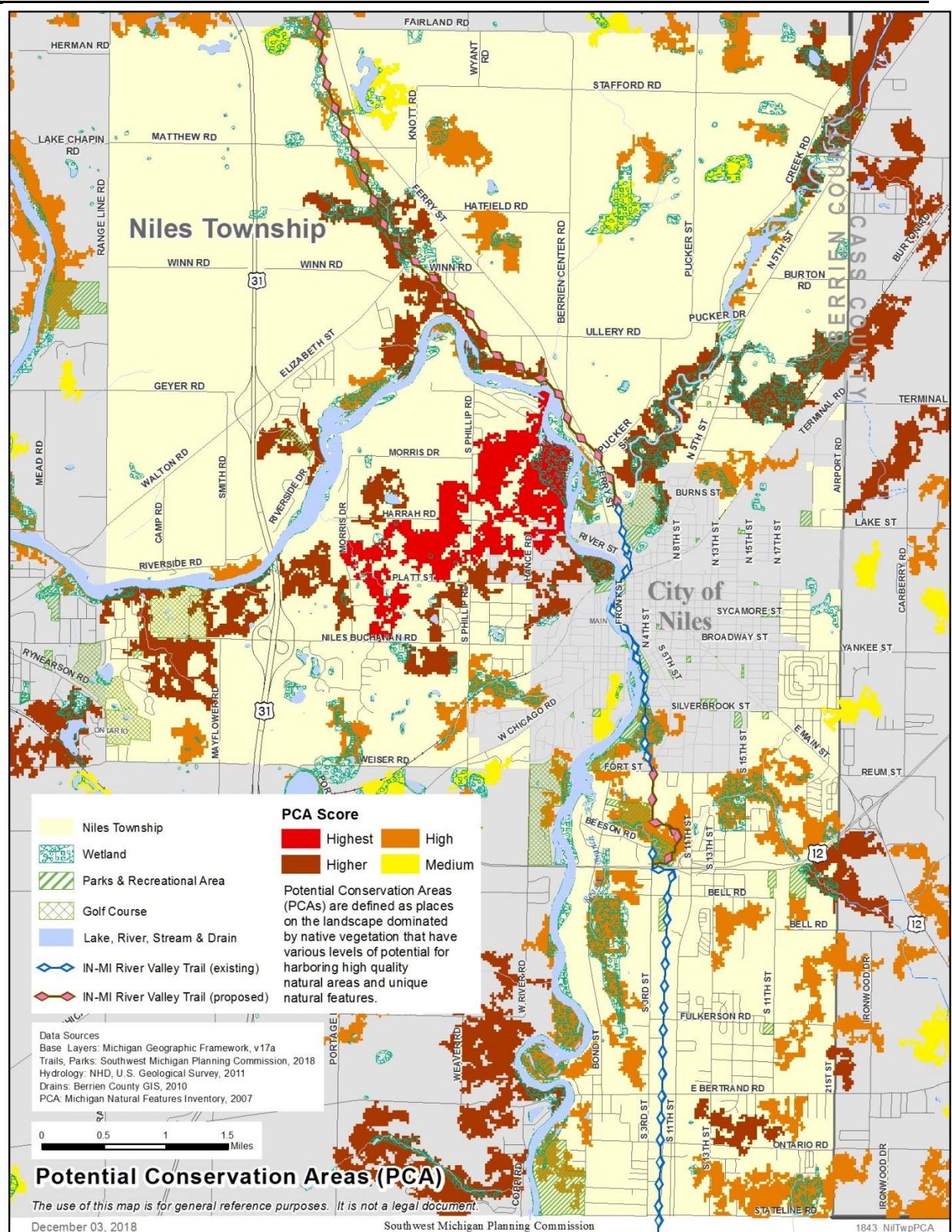
Potential Conservation Area Ranking

-  Highest
-  Higher
-  High
-  Medium

Developed by Michigan Natural
Features Inventory (MNFI)
7/23/2007

0 1 2 4 Miles





GOAL 3 - Respond to community characteristics and changing demographics by seeking to provide recreational opportunities for all with consideration of age and abilities.

Social Characteristics

General Population

The population in Niles Charter Township declined between the 1980 and the 1990 reports but recorded an increase of over six percent from 2000 to 2010. The population changes shown in the table below indicate that the growth rate in the township is relatively healthy compared to the City of Niles and Berrien County. In addition to understanding the population trends and characteristics of the township, the population characteristics of Berrien County and the City of Niles are also important considerations for recreation planning. Appealing parks, trails, and programs have the potential to attract visitors from the township’s closest neighbors leading to tourism expenditures.

Population Changes in years from 1980-2010⁵

Community	1980	1990	2000	2010	%Change 2000-2010
Niles Charter Township	13,165	12,828	13,325	14,164	+6.29%
City of Niles	13,115	12,458	12,204	11,559	-5.28%
Berrien County	171,276	161,387	162,453	156,813	-3.47%
State of Michigan	9,262,078	9,295,297	9,938,444	9,883,640	-0.55%

Gender Distribution

With a population that is almost equally distributed between females and males (slightly more females) it is important to provide recreational facilities and programming designed to meet the different needs of both groups. Although most parks and facilities are described as appealing by both genders, programming and activity planning should also consider the different needs, desires, and abilities of both males and females.

Gender Distribution and Median Age of Population in 2010¹

Community	Female	Male	Median Age(years)	% Age 65+
Niles Charter Township	51.7%	48.3%	41.9	17.3%
City of Niles	52.9%	47.1%	36.1	14.4%
Berrien County	51.3%	48.7%	41	16.3%
State of Michigan	50.9%	49.1%	38.9	13.8%

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

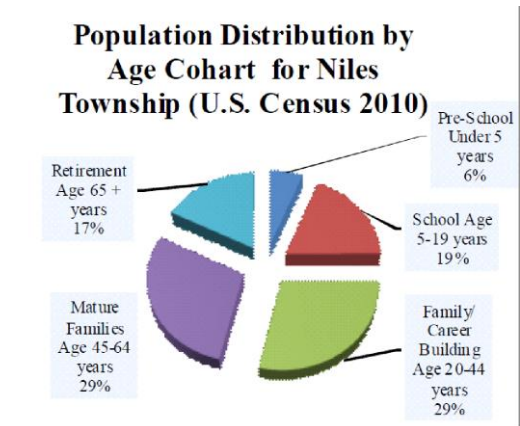
As the population ages in Niles Charter Township we need to invest in parks, trails, and recreation activities that are available for all types of residents including senior citizens. When providing recreation opportunities it is important to make sure that they can be accessible and accommodate the whole community comprised of residents of all ages.

Niles Charter Township has the high demographic of 17% of the population is 65 years and older. Niles Charter Township has increased its number of people 65 years of age or older since 2000.¹

Studies have shown that physical activity can improve symptoms of depression, reduce risk factors for chronic diseases and for even some of the frailest older adults, physical activity can improve functioning and mobility. Whether or not an individual regularly engages in physical activity is based on more than their individual willingness or motivation. The ability to exercise greatly depends on access to recreational facilities and local conditions including the presence of sidewalks and lighting in individual neighborhoods.⁶

Distribution by Age Cohort

The different recreational needs for various segments of the population are taken into consideration throughout the planning process. Although the cohorts shown in the chart below are not evenly distributed by number of years, demonstrating how segments of the population correspond with major life stages can help planners understand the importance of providing recreational facilities and programs for the entire community at every stage and for differing developmental abilities.⁷



The Pre-School cohort (under age 5 years) is generally supervised by a parent or caregiver while participating in recreational activities. Planning for the needs of this cohort should include planning for this secondary participant as well. In addition to playground equipment or activities suitable for small children, the experience will be enhanced if safe and comfortable observation areas are also provided. These areas could include tables, benches, drinking fountains, and bathrooms within line of sight of the activity.

Programs and activities that encourage interaction between children and adults are also highly desirable. Age appropriate facilities tend to be more important to the younger members of this group than programming; however, as the children become closer to school age, programming that will enhance and prepare them for organized and group activities also becomes highly desirable.

⁶ http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Aging/ag_aging_survey_5_1_08.pdf

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

The School-Age cohort (age 5-19 years) usually has access to ample and diverse recreational opportunities through school programming and facilities during the school year and often through the same channels during the summer months as well. It is very important for schools and communities to coordinate activities to provide plenty of opportunities for supervised physical and social activities because the greatest physical growth and social development will occur during this stage of life.

Increasing rates of obesity amongst young people has inspired a boost in parental interest for physical activity programs. Participating in well-planned activities can help this cohort in many ways such as learning to:⁸

- Be healthy and control weight
- Build self confidence
- Appreciate and care for the outdoors
- Choose positive activities over negative ones
- Develop leadership skills
- Be a team player
- Contribute to the community
- Handle stress and tension
- Perform better in school
- Practice self-discipline

The Family Forming/Career Building cohort often struggles to find time for personal leisure activities as the responsibilities of career and family tend to be at their highest levels between the ages of 20 and 44 years. After age 18, both men and women begin to favor indoor fitness activities over outdoor activities, a trend which appears to be related to the availability of more indoor “after-work-hours” opportunities than outdoor.⁹ This group however, also tends to have a great desire to encourage their children’s participation in sports and other outdoor activities.

In the early stages of this cohort, young families find accessibility and affordability to be two important considerations when choosing recreational activities. The development of greenways, including biking and hiking trails, provides family-style, inexpensive and healthy opportunities for physical and social development.

The Mature Family cohort corresponds closely with the baby boomer generation (age 50-65 years old in 2010) and will have increasing amounts of leisure time and be more active than the previous generation. As child supervision responsibilities decline and income levels peak this cohort seeks travel and other experiences that bring social and physical benefits. This group is also very likely to support neighborhood parks and activities but will also strongly encourage higher quality and more diverse opportunities.

As the Mature Family moves into retirement age it is worth noting that consumers over the age of 50 years control almost half of the consumer spending in the United States, and consumers age 65 and older are the most affluent of any age group.¹⁰

⁸ <http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/acyi/parenting/daytoday/Families/page.cfm?pg=Recreation%20Benefits>

⁹ *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants* (2007) www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org

¹⁰ <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisney.htm>

Members of the Retirement Age cohort seek creative self-expression as well as opportunities to develop and maintain self-confidence. Recreation adds an extra measure of enjoyment to the lives of aging persons enhancing both their physical and mental well-being.¹¹ Among the more favored outdoor activities, senior adults enjoy golf, fishing, walking, hiking, camping and gardening. Bird watching and traveling are also important.

As discussed further in the following section, this group tends to report more disabilities related to age; however, this group not only has the time to travel and participate in leisure activities, they also demonstrate an inclination to contribute to the community as volunteers in park support and auxiliary activities.

Persons with Disabilities

It is widely acknowledged that an important part of recreation facility and program planning is to seek understanding and demonstrate consideration for the needs of every member of the community. Disabilities can include physical or mental limitations but are not confined to any particular age group. Many individuals experience biological and psychological changes before age 65 that might not be identified as disabilities but could be accommodated by improved accessibility. This is true in many different areas but is a special concern for outdoor and indoor recreational facilities. The following table demonstrates the number of residents in the Niles area reporting some type of disability.

Disability Status of the Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population¹²

Age Cohort	Niles Charter Township		City of Niles	
	Number Reported	Percent of Population	Number Reported	Percent of Population
Population 5 to 17 years	2,164		2,154	
With a disability	160	7.4%	131	6.1%
Population 18 to 34 years	3,108		2,618	
With a disability	287	9.2%	109	4.2%
Population 35 to 64 years	5,362		3,814	
With a disability	776	14.5%	850	22.3%
Population 65 years and over	2,166		1,750	
With a disability	807	37.2%	775	44.2%

Even though disabilities are reported across every age group, those over age 65 years constitute the largest segment of the population with a disability. In Niles Charter Township this group is almost 37 percent of the population and in Niles City it is 44%.⁸

Far from not being interested in physical activity however, a 2005 study by the Open Doors Organization (ODO) found that more than 21 million adults with disabilities traveled at least once in

¹¹ http://www.gbod.org/coa/articles.asp?act=reader&item_id=10311

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

the preceding two years. More than 50 percent of adults with disabilities stayed in hotels while traveling during this same two-year period. In a 2002 study, the ODO found that spending by disabled travelers exceeds \$13.6 billion annually.¹³ Planning to accommodate those with disabilities could prove to be a wise economic decision as well as a socially responsible one.

Income and Poverty Levels

The availability of easily-accessible recreational opportunities is important for every segment of the population. However, this is especially true for those living below poverty levels whose options may be limited by transportation costs or inability to pay entrance or user fees. Although the percentage of families and individuals living below poverty level in Niles Charter Township is less than that of surrounding areas, it is still a significant amount and is a matter to be considered as recreation planning decisions are made.

Percent of Population Below Poverty Level (2012-2016) ¹⁴

	Individuals
Niles Charter Township	16.4%
City of Niles	30.6%
Berrien County	17.9%
State of Michigan	15.7%

The table below shows the growth in median household income for the township and compares surrounding areas. Both Niles Charter Township has seen more growth than Berrien County and the State.

Median Household Income¹⁵

Community	1989	1999	2010	1999-2010 % Change
Niles Charter Township	\$28,745	\$37,794	\$43,035	13.86%
City of Niles	\$23,700	\$31,208	\$31,757	1.75%
Berrien County	\$27,245	\$38,567	\$42,625	10.52%
State of Michigan	\$31,020	\$44,667	\$48,432	8.42%

¹³ <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisney.htm>

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

The tables below provide comparisons for median family income, per capita income, and demonstrate the income differences between males and females. Niles Charter Township has a higher median family and per capita income than the City of Niles but less than Berrien County and the State of Michigan. The gender discrepancy is fairly consistent over all levels of geography for full-time year round workers.

Local Income Comparisons ¹⁶

	Median Family Income	Per Capita Income
Niles Charter Township	\$50,461	\$22,889
City of Niles	\$40,512	\$17,242
Berrien County	\$58,771	\$26,390
State of Michigan	\$63,985	\$27,549

Income Comparison by Gender (2010)¹⁵

(Full-time, year round employment)	Male	Female
Niles Charter Township	\$39,884	\$28,918
City of Niles	\$35,382	\$25,819
Berrien County	\$45,280	\$31,137
State of Michigan	\$50,208	\$36,157

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

GOAL 4 - Enhance partnerships with surrounding units of government for the purpose of collaborative planning.

Regional Population

Although many areas in Niles Charter Township are quite rural, there is a significant regional population nearby to be considered in the Township’s planning efforts. Highway 51 transects Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles (north/south) and becomes Highway 933 at the Indiana state line. This highway is a major retail/commercial corridor connecting the township and the city with the South Bend metropolitan area in St. Joseph County, Indiana. (See table below for population figures.)

Population in South Bend Metropolitan Area¹⁷

South Bend	101,168
Mishawaka	48,252
Granger	30,465
Total Population in St. Joseph County, Indiana	266,931

This combined region, often referred to as “Michiana”, experiences a large daily exchange of commuting workers and shoppers crossing the state line and is home to several colleges and universities including Notre Dame which creates an annual increase in transitional population. Not only does the metropolitan area provide potential users of recreation facilities in the township, there are also a number of recreational opportunities and venues for township residents to experience outside of the township’s boundaries.

The completion of proposed trails (recreational and non-motorized) connecting northern Indiana with Niles Charter Township and Niles City, could stimulate significant growth in tourism, reduce vehicle traffic, and provide outstanding opportunities for physical fitness and social experiences.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

**Economics/Business and Industry
Employment**

The following table illustrates the categories of occupations and industry and the accompanying number of employees in each category as reported by the township’s residents.

**Niles Charter Township
Employed Civilian Population¹⁸**

Work force by Occupation	# of Employed	% of Total
Employed Civilian Population 16 years and over	6,200	
Sales and office occupations	1,627	26.2%
Management, business, science, and art occupations	1,566	25.3%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	1,524	24.6%
Service occupations	1,059	17.1%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	424	6.8%
Industry		
Manufacturing	1,456	23.50%
Educational, health and social services	1,267	18.90%
Retail trade	804	13.00%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	522	8.40%
Other services (except public administration)	467	7.50%
Professional, scientific, administrative, management/waste management services	444	7.20%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	415	6.70%
Construction	258	4.20%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	177	2.90%
Wholesale trade	177	2.90%
Public administration	90	1.50%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	88	1.40%
Information	79	1.30%

Manufacturing is the predominate industry but overall the work force (by occupation) has become quite diversified over the last few years. Although the regional economy has experienced a significant downturn in the last decade, the diversification of industry may contribute to stabilizing local income and employment rates. With current trends of increased transportation costs, residents will seek recreation venues closer to home and the radius of population attracted to township parks may also be positively affected. These are opportunities to consider when choosing park and program projects.

There are community benefits of parks and trails. Parks and trails build communities by providing a place for people to gather, socialize and be around other people. Today, we realize that parks are more than recreation and visual assets to communities; they are valuable contributors to larger

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

community policy objectives, such as public health, youth development, job opportunities, social and cultural exchange, and community building.¹⁹

School Facilities

The combination of recreation and education provides a strong foundation for youth to develop lifelong habits promoting physical health and well-being. Collaboration between the schools and the township could provide many opportunities to develop the total person, strengthen families, and help build a sense of community. Recreational pursuits can promote positive lifestyle choices, resilient youth, safe and productive environments, and enhanced quality of life. Niles Charter Township is served by the following school districts:

Buchanan Community Schools	Niles Community Schools	Brandywine Public Schools
Buchanan, Michigan	Niles, Michigan	Niles, Michigan

Niles Community Schools serves the northern portion of the Township and has an enrollment of approximately 4,932 students.²⁰ Brandywine Public Schools serves the southern part of the township and can accommodate approximately 1,323 students.²¹ Buchanan Community Schools covers the extreme western portion of the township and has approximately 1,625 students.²²



In addition to these public schools, there are several private/parochial schools in the area whose students often participate in recreational activities in the township. Within a 1-hour drive there are also the following institutions of higher education with student populations that could be interested in the township parks and other recreational venues and opportunities.

Michigan Colleges

Lake Michigan College, Bertrand Crossing, Niles & Benton Harbor
Southwestern Michigan College, Niles & Dowagiac
Andrews University, Berrien Springs
Western Michigan University Branch Campus, Benton Harbor
Siena Heights University, Benton Harbor

Indiana Colleges

Indiana University, South Bend
Purdue at IUSB, South Bend
University of Notre Dame, South Bend
St. Mary's, South Bend
Holy Cross, South Bend
Ivy Tech Community College, South Bend
Bethel College, Mishawaka
Trine University, Mishawaka

¹⁹ http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910_V1.pdf

²⁰ Niles Community Schools Enrolment Fall 2018 academic year

²¹ Brandywine Public Schools Enrolment Fall 2018 academic year

²² Buchanan Community Schools Enrolment 2017-2018 academic year

GOAL 5 – *Establish stable and secure funding for recreational development and maintenance.*

Investing In Parks, Recreation and Open Space

From promoting job growth to offering inexpensive opportunities to have fun, be physically active and spend time with family, outdoor recreation contributes both directly and indirectly to the local and regional economy and its citizen’s financial well-being. Outdoor recreation areas attract local and non-local visitors who stimulate the local economy, contribute to local and state taxes and create jobs. Opportunities for outdoor recreation can attract new business and talented workers and help keep established businesses competitive.²³

Parks, recreation, and open space amenities are among the most important components of quality of life. Furthermore, providing and promoting quality outdoor recreational opportunities can be a more sustainable way of attracting and retaining businesses.

For any action plan to be considered viable, a community must establish a system to achieve stable and secure funding. Many sources are available including state and federal grants, secured loans, donations from public and/or private entities, user fees, and municipal participation. There are also various methods and techniques that can be utilized to secure funding for projects and capital improvements.

One technique is to consider needs as separate and specific funding requests. Instead of looking for a few large sources to completely fund parks and recreation projects, each aspect can be singled out and addressed individually. This method broadens the base of funding opportunities as there are many sources offering small amounts for specific projects or amenities.

Identifying existing assets with potential income is another technique. Recreation is a broad-based term that can include art, history, culture, competitive physical venues, social events, education, preservation efforts, and leisure time. Each of these recreation types has the potential to be income producing with local and/or tourism participation.

²³ http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910_V1.pdf

GOAL 6 - *Create and implement a marketing campaign, including signage, to promote Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors.*

Tourism

The proximity of the township to a large population base (Michiana area) along with its exceptional natural resources and committed leaders provides an excellent foundation to establish the community parks and recreation facilities as a source of tourism-related income. As previously mentioned, the potential for tourist-related funding and economic stability is profoundly connected with recreation and natural resources.

The social and health benefits of trails, green infrastructure, and scenic vistas are generally recognized and often mentioned as important ingredients contributing to a high quality of life. These same ingredients however, are not always recognized as producing the significant economic benefit that they actually do contribute. Rural townships especially are beginning to realize the importance of connecting recreation to tourism to achieve economic revitalization.

The primary tourist attraction to an area may be the organized sport recreational activity, historic/cultural site, nature center, art exhibit, or trail but the benefits of being the secondary attraction are also positive for local restaurants, hotels, gas stations, grocery stores, and gift shops. The success of these entities in turn promotes a healthy and vibrant atmosphere for residents and visitors alike.

“Accumulating evidence indicates that open space conservation is not an expense but an investment that produces important economic benefits.” ~ *Will Rogers, President, The Trust for Public Land*

After a thorough inventory of existing assets and a comprehensive action plan are completed, creating and establishing a marketing campaign to promote the Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors is a very important step toward financial stability.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Plan Jurisdiction

This Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan is a five-year guide for the development and improvement of the parks and recreational facilities and programs for Niles Charter Township. Whenever possible, regional coordination and cooperation is sought with neighboring municipalities including the City of Niles, Bertrand Township, Buchanan Township, the City of Buchanan, Berrien Township, Cass County, St. Joseph County, Indiana and other relevant entities and organizations in the region.

Parks Operations and Management

Township Supervisor – The Township Supervisor is the chief administrator for the Township and is responsible for the daily management of Township business. The Parks Superintendent reports directly to the Supervisor.

Township Clerk – The Township Clerk provides general assistance to the Parks Commission.

Township Board – The Township Board allocates the funds necessary to operate and maintain the Township parks; however, the Parks Commission does not require Township Board authorization for the operations of the parks. The Township Board is also the appointed **Recreational Board** which is responsible for the directing the work of the park superintendent, determining the park maintenance budget and overseeing recreation league activities.

Parks Commission – The Parks Commission is comprised of five members elected to four-year terms and a trustee who acts as liaison to the township board. The Commission develops short and long term plans for parks and recreation and assists with implementing parks and recreation projects. The Commission advises the township board on directing funds to be used either as matching dollars for grants or capital improvements projects.

Parks Superintendent – The superintendent manages the parks on a daily basis and reports to the Township Supervisor. The superintendent is responsible for all maintenance activities as well as supervision of seasonal employees and volunteers.

Volunteers and Supporting Organizations - The Parks Commission has been very successful in stretching its budget through in-kind donations of labor and materials from various sources. Community service groups have also donated dollars earmarked for specific park improvements. The local Eagle Scouts have been involved in several projects. The township's cooperative efforts are ably demonstrated by its relationships with other area recreational providers such as the school. Independence Park is owned by the township, but is leased to Brandywine Schools under a 99-year agreement. Several organizations use the ball fields at S. Fireman's Park as well. The development of the proposed trail has involved meetings with surrounding communities and was the catalyst for a joint project for recreation mapping with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

Membership of the Township Board and the Parks Commission

Niles Charter Township Board

James Stover, Supervisor
Terry Eull, Clerk
James H. Ringler, Treasurer
Richard Cooper, Trustee
Herschel Hoese, Trustee
Richard Noble, Trustee
Christine Vella, Trustee

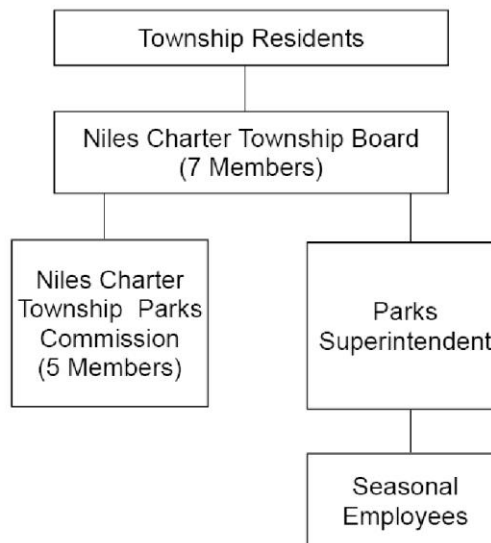
Niles Charter Township Parks Commission

Jill DeLucia, Chair
Wayne Perkins, Treasurer
Sarah Craig, Secretary
Jordan Perkins
Christopher Warburton

Christine Vella, Township Board Liaison

Organizational Chart

Niles Charter Township Organizational Chart



Budget

The parks budget is determined by the Township Board and is allocated from the Township's general fund. A request is submitted to the Township Board by the Parks Superintendent and the Park Commission. The 2018 Park Commission budget was \$15,000. The Superintendent's operations and maintenance budget was \$21,634.28 in 2018.

RECREATION INVENTORY

Niles Charter Township owns and/or operates seven park facilities constituting a total of about 100 acres. The parks provide a wide range of opportunities, from small neighborhood parks to active use community parks as well as quasi-regional parks such as Community Park, where passive pursuits and nature appreciation can be enjoyed. There are no entry or user fees for any of the park facilities other than the softball diamonds used for league tournaments and security deposits to reserve the pavilions.

Included in this section is a detailed inventory and barrier-free assessment of the township parks followed by a brief description of the parks in the City of Niles, historic/cultural sites, and a variety of regional recreational opportunities. Members of the steering committee performed site visits to evaluate and update park amenities and overall condition. Members also completed a standardized form assessing the barrier-free status of the parks and assigned rankings based on standard criteria. The following map shows the location of the parks that are owned or operated by Niles Charter Township.

Map of Parks and Recreation Areas owned or operated by Niles Charter Township



Parks Inventory, Evaluation, and Barrier-Free Assessment

Steering Committee members performed site visits to assess the overall condition of the parks, document inventory, and determine barrier-free accessibility. The purpose of ranking accessibility is to provide an accurate description of current conditions that will guide decisions for projects to improve accessibility for all residents.

Barrier-Free Assessment Rank Description

- 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 principles of universal design

Community Park

This 38.4 acre community park is located on Bond Street between Beeson and Fort Streets. Amenities include baseball/softball fields, playground equipment, community building, horseshoe pits, picnic tables and grills, hiking trails along Brandywine Creek, trout fishing. Playground equipment includes 2 Seesaws, 2 Spring Riders, 1 Sliding Board, 2 Swing Sets (1-two swing and 1-six swing), 1 Miracle Play Set



Recent Improvements include replacing the roof on the community building, installing additional benches near the playground equipment, improving entry walkways and signage.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 2

Parking is an open gravel area but with no specifically designated spaces. Level brick path approximately 100' from parking to shelter with a ramp from the shelter to the outdoor seating area. The shelter is one level. There is no accessibility to walking paths, playground equipment, ballparks, horseshoes, or picnic areas.

N. Fireman's Park

This 1.0 acre mini-park is located along M-51 and provides playground equipment, two in-ground benches, a picnic shelter with one picnic table, and 2 grills. Playground equipment includes: 2 Swing Sets (1 with seven regular swings and 1 toddler swing), 1 Miracle Play Set, 1 Small Spring Rider,

Recent improvements: None.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

There are no bathrooms or water fountains requiring accessibility upgrades. There is off-street parking and no specific barriers such as stairs to prevent access to this mini-park; however, there are no pathways other than open grass.

**S. Fireman's Youth Park**

This 13.1-acre neighborhood park is adjacent to the Township Hall at 320 Bell Road. Amenities include restrooms, 2 tennis courts which also have court lines for Pickle Ball, high quality Little League and softball fields, 1 picnic shelter, 8 picnic tables, and 3 grills. Playground equipment includes: 1 Slide Track Glider, 1 Merry-Go-Round, 1 Slide, 1 Bench Swing, 1 Twin Rider (alternative to seesaw), 1 Small Spring Rider, 1 Arch Swing Set (4 regular seats and 2 toddler seats), a handicap swing, 1 Set of Monkey Bars. This park is designated access/trailhead for the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail which will connect Niles to Mishawaka, IN.

Recent improvements include resurfacing tennis courts for use as pickle ball courts, installation of new benches near playground equipment, additional bleacher seating for softball field.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 2

Entrance route is stable and wide enough to allow access. The restrooms do not meet accessibility guidelines.

Fulkerson Park

This 4.2 acre neighborhood park is located at the corner of Fulkerson Road and S. 17th Street. Amenities include basketball courts, a Little League ballfield, play structures, picnic tables and grills.

Recent improvements include resurfacing and painting the basketball courts, installation of benches near playground equipment, brush removal along 17th St to permit access from the east.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 1**

The parking area is open and level but there are no designated spaces. There are no paved pathways but there are no stairs.

Samson Park

This 3.5 acre neighborhood park is located on Knight Road east of Holmes Drive. Amenities include playground equipment (Tot Lot), a picnic shelter/pavilion, four benches, and a sledding hill. Picnic facilities include 2 picnic tables and 1 grill. Playground equipment includes: 1 2-Bay Swing Set (2 tot swings and 2 regular swings), 1 12 ft. Overhead Glider, 1 Miracle Play Set, 1 Half Basketball Court.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

There are no steps or narrow passages, but there are no paved pathways. Parking area is open with no designated spaces.



Brandywine Creek Nature Park

This park is located at the corner of S. 3rd Street and U.S. 12 is owned by the State of Michigan and leased by Niles Charter Township. It has a parking lot, 2 benches and 1 garbage can. Currently the site provides rustic trails and fishing access site for Brandywine Creek, a coldwater trout stream providing urban trout fishing opportunities.²⁴



Recent improvements: In 2014, the parking lot was improved to serve as a trailhead for the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail. The new parking lot includes a handicap parking space and portable handicap-accessible restroom.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

There are no water fountains. Pathways are open but not paved; there are steps between the parking and pathways.

Ontario Park

Niles Township acquired this 1.5-acre parcel of land which sits at the intersection of the IMRVT and Ontario Rd. Future plans for this land include parking for trail use, bike amenities such as racks and bike repair station, water refill and a shelter for potential market space.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

There are no specific barriers; however not all facilities are designed to be barrier-free.

²⁴ http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10371_10402-142850--,00.html

Indiana – Michigan River Valley Trail

The Township has used funding from MDNR and MDOT and constructed 3.3 miles of non-motorized trail (for walking and biking) from Brandywine Nature Preserve to the Indiana state line in 2014. There are trailheads located at the state line, S. Fireman’s Park and Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. Niles Township is currently planning the next phase to connect with the City of Niles’ trail at Fort Street north of Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. When completed, the trail will be 34 miles connecting the City of Niles to Mishawaka, IN.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 4

This new trail was designed with accessibility in mind and meets all current standards.



Other Township and Nearby Recreational Opportunities

This map shows other recreational properties within Niles Township. Following is a description of several recreational offerings in the area.



Cultural/Historic Buildings and Property

Niles Charter Township recognizes the importance of the preservation of cultural and historic buildings and properties for educational purposes as well as the potential for tourism. The following are just a few examples of historic sites located near the township.

- **Fort Saint Joseph** - Built by the French in 1691 on the lower St. Joseph River, the fort was located where one branch of the Old Sauk Trail, a major east-west Native American trail, crosses the river. The fort was a significant stronghold of the fur trade at the southern end of Lake Michigan. The Fort is located on what is now the south side of Niles, Michigan.
- **Beeson Mansion** - This Greek Revival mansion was built in 1847. There is a crypt on the grounds, which is allegedly “haunted”.
- **Old Norfolk Railway** – This abandoned track is a potential trail route for the proposed trail way.
- **Original St. Mary's campus and cemetery** are on Bond Street just north of Bertrand Rd.
- **The Johnson Cemetery** is located on US-31 in Niles Township



Beeson Mausoleum

Regional Parks

The following regional parks are merely representative of the many diverse public parks in the area surrounding Niles Charter Township. These parks offer a wide variety of year-round activities and greatly enhance the quality of life for residents in the township.

- **Madeline Bertrand County Park** - 121 acres with picnic shelters, hiking trails, X-C skiing, disc golf course.
- **Love Creek** – 150 acres of natural area with a Fields & Forest Mountain Bike Trail, six miles of hiking trails, a mature Beech-Maple forest with spectacular spring wildflowers, cross-country skiing opportunities with groomed and lighted trails and ski rentals available.
- **Galien River County Park Preserve** - This undeveloped property includes a mix of upland and wetland habitats along the Galien River.
- **Silver Beach County Park** - Located in St. Joseph at the mouth of the St. Joseph River, this park features a clean, wide beach on Lake Michigan and public access to the South Pier.
- **Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Center** – Located in Buchanan Township, Fernwood features a 55-acre Nature Preserve and numerous other beautiful gardens surrounded by forest tucked into a landscape of 105 acres of cultivated and natural areas along the scenic St. Joseph River valley.

City of Niles Parks

Due to the proximity and close working relationship between the two municipalities, the parks in the City of Niles are an important aspect of the overall recreational opportunities available for the Township.

- **Losensky Park** – This Park is owned by City of Niles, but located in Niles Township. The 13-acre park is located on Pucker Street between Ullery and N. Fifth (M-51) with frontage along the Dowagiac River (with an island). Amenities include three benches and picnic facilities (3 picnic tables, 3 grills, and 1 trash can). This location is extremely popular for fishing. The City of Niles owns the retired and aging dam and is seeking funding to remove it and restore the Dowagiac River. Fishing opportunities could be improved and launching facilities for canoes/kayaks/drift boats could be added in coordination with this project. Since many people sled on the hill on the eastern edge of the property along M-51, improvements could be made to better accommodate this use. Losensky Park is also ideally located to be a destination spot or trailhead for a trail connecting with Plym Park in the City of Niles and connecting to the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail.
- **Birkholm Park** - provides a playground and picnic facilities.
- **Plym Park** – provides playground, picnic shelter, tennis courts, soccer, softball, basketball. This park is also integral to the trail system being developed to connect Township, City, and northern Indiana parks.
- **Eagle Street Park** – provides playground equipment.
- **Tot Park** – provides playground equipment.
- **Eastside Park** – provides a play structure, picnic shelter, softball/baseball fields, and basketball courts.
- **Saathoff Park** – provides a playground, soccer field, and basketball courts.
- **Clevenger Park** – provides a play structure and picnic shelter.
- **Riverfront Park** – offers a boat ramp, play structure, skate park, amphitheater, walking trails, picnic facilities and shelters.
- **Island Park** – has a walk bridge to island, picnic shelter, and playground equipment.
- **Marmont Street Boat Ramp** – public access to the St. Joseph River.
- **Southside Park** – has a play structure, baseball, basketball, picnic shelter.
- **Troost Park** – provides a playground area.
- **Thomas Stadium** – provides a baseball stadium.
- **FOP Park** – provides little league fields, play equipment and picnic area.
- **Cable Street Park** - provides soccer field and play equipment.

Water Activity - Public Access Sites

In addition to Lake Michigan, there are several rivers, creeks, and inland lakes with public access for swimming, fishing, and boating. The Dowagiac River, McCoy Creek and Brandywine Creek are designated trout streams. The following are just a few of the most popular:

- St. Joseph River
- Brandywine Creek
- Barron Lake
- Dowagiac River
- McCoy Creek

Area Campgrounds

- **Fuller's Clear Lake Resort**, Buchanan – swimming, canoe rental, playground
- **Nub Lake Campground**, Niles – camping, swimming
- **Spaulding Lake Campground**, Niles – camping, swimming
- **Three Braves Campground**, Buchanan – swimming, fishing, small boat rentals
- **Bear Cave**, Buchanan – swimming, boating, RV camping

Area Golf Courses

The following is a small sample of the private and public golf courses and country clubs available in Berrien County.

- Berrien Hills Country Club
- Brookwood Golf Course
- Grand Beach Golf Course
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - North/East Course
- Lake Michigan Hills Golf Club
- New Paw Paw Lake Golf Club
- Orchard Hills Country Club
- Pipestone Creek Golf Course
- Point O'Woods Country Club
- Whittaker Woods Golf Course
- Blossom Trails
- Dunes Club, The
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - East/West Course
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - West/North Course
- Lost Dunes Golf Club
- Oaks Golf Club, The
- Pebblewood Country Club
- Plym Park Municipal Golf Course
- Signal Point Club

Other Opportunities

Redbud Track and Trail – offers a nationally recognized motocross trail for amateur and professional riders of all age categories. There is a campground for participants on site.

Northern Indiana Parks Affiliated with Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail

St. Patrick's County Park – a large county owned park south of Madeline Bertrand (Berrien County Park)

Riverside Park – a park along the River Walk in South Bend

Howard Park - the bike trail passes through Howard Park, along the east bank of the St Joseph River.

Joe Kernan Park - this park sits along the east bank of the St. Joseph River and offers exercise equipment, bike trail and rowing and kayaking opportunities

Robert C. Beutter Park – a riverfront park close to the Riverwalk in Mishawaka

Status Report of Previous DNR Grant-Assisted Projects

Project/Grant Number: 26-00352
Project Title: Niles Community Center
Project Year: 1972
Project Description: Acquisition of three acres and installation service drive and park amenities
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: BF90-180
Project Name: Township Parks Improvement
Project Year: 1990
Project Description: Park amenities for Fulkerson and S. Firemen parks
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: 09-082
Project Name: Niles Community Park Expansion
Project Year: 2009
Project Description: Acquisition of 10.9 acres to expand Community Park
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: TF12-111
Project Name: IN-MI River Valley Trail Development
Project Year: 2012
Project Description: Construct 3.3 miles of non-motorized trail from Indiana state line to Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve
Project Status: Closed

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

The Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission partnered with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), the regional planning agency for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties throughout the planning process. The process included several meetings of the Township Parks Commission to review and update the mission statement, goals and action plan. A public input workshop was held on July 30, 2018 to gather public input on the mission statement, goals and action plan. The Parks Commission members also solicited input from residents with a questionnaire. (See results on next page.) The Parks Commission made changes to the plan based on comments received at the workshop and from the solicited input. In addition, a survey was conducted in July - August 2018 in conjunction with the development of the previous recreation plan for the Township, and the 2018 results are included in this plan as part of documenting public input. Throughout the planning process, residents, business leaders, and municipal representatives provided input and pledged support of the goals and action plan.

The Niles Charter Township Parks Commission recommended the draft plan for public comment at their December 10th, 2018 meeting. A public comment period was advertised and held from December 17th, 2018 to January 16th, 2019 to allow for additional public comment. A public hearing was advertised and was held on January 22, 2019 at a regular meeting of the Niles Charter Township Board. The Niles Charter Township Parks Commission passed a vote for the approval of the recreation plan, and to pass it to the Township Board for review and at their January 22nd, 2019 meeting. After a public hearing, the Niles Charter Township Board adopted the plan by resolution at their January 22nd, 2019 meeting.

Public participation was encouraged through several methods including:

- Holding Parks Commission meetings
- Hosting a public input workshop
- Soliciting public input through questionnaires
- Offering a public review and comment period culminating with a public hearing

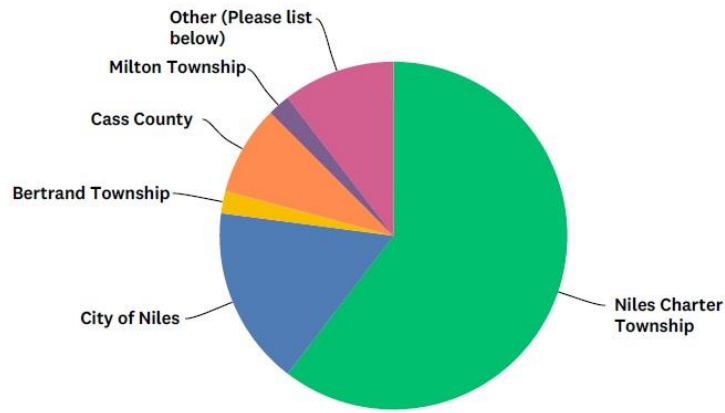
2018 Survey Results

There were 52 respondents to the public interest survey conducted as part of the planning process. The following charts and tables denote the results of that survey.

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

Q1 Where is your primary residence?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 2

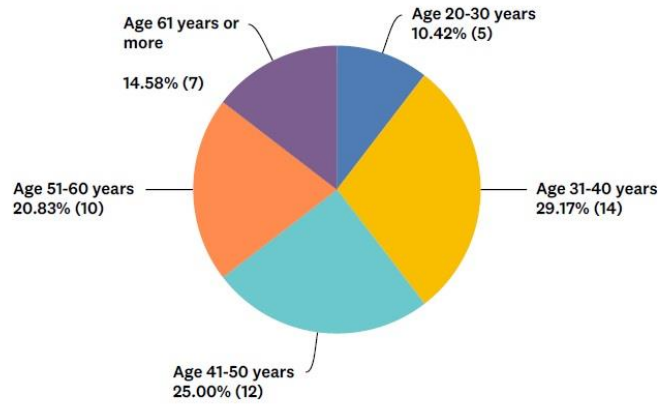


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Niles Charter Township	60.42%	29
City of Niles	16.67%	8
Bertrand Township	2.08%	1
Buchanan Township	0.00%	0
Cass County	8.33%	4
Milton Township	2.08%	1
Other (Please list below)	10.42%	5
TOTAL		48

#	OTHER (PLEASE LIST BELOW)	DATE
1	chikaming township	8/13/2018 9:18 AM
2	Howard Township	8/1/2018 1:16 PM
3	Bainbridge Township	7/30/2018 5:32 PM
4	South Bend	7/20/2018 4:02 PM
5	berrien springs	7/19/2018 4:43 PM

Q2 Please indicate your age group.

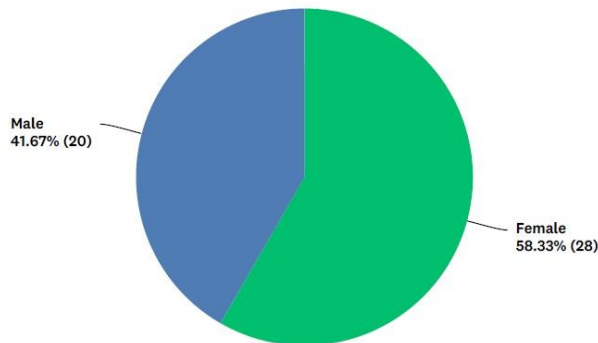
Answered: 48 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Age 13-19 years	0.00%	0
Age 20-30 years	10.42%	5
Age 31-40 years	29.17%	14
Age 41-50 years	25.00%	12
Age 51-60 years	20.83%	10
Age 61 years or more	14.58%	7
TOTAL		48

Q3 Please indicate your gender.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 2

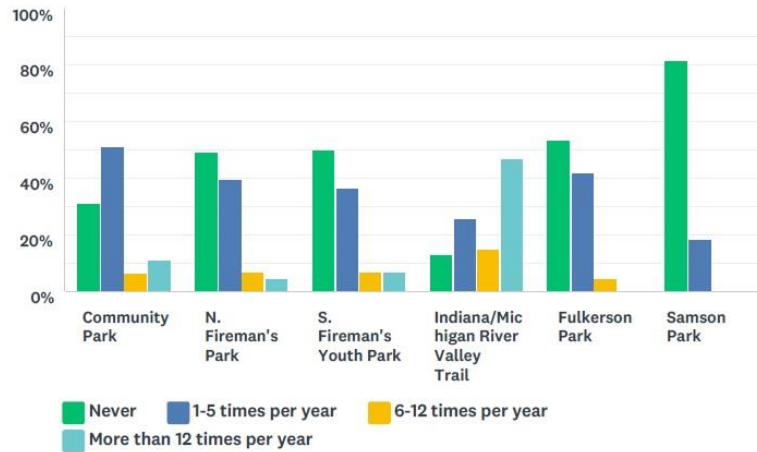


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	58.33%	28
Male	41.67%	20
TOTAL		48

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

Q4 How often do you use the following Niles charter Township parks and recreational facilities?

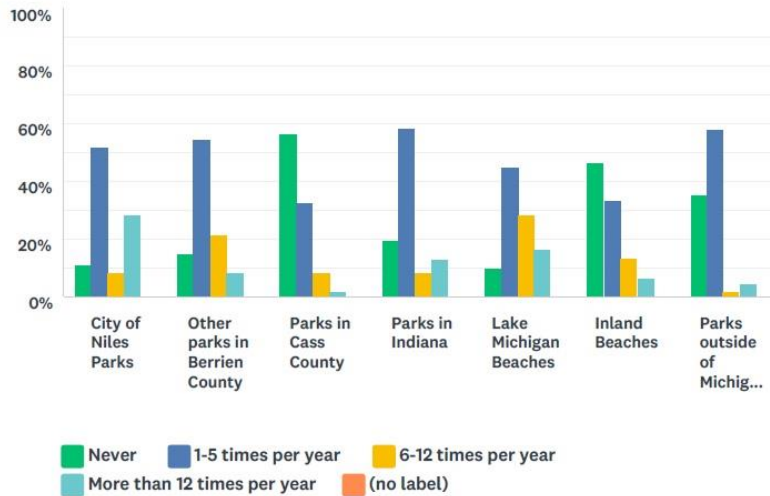
Answered: 48 Skipped: 2



	NEVER	1-5 TIMES PER YEAR	6-12 TIMES PER YEAR	MORE THAN 12 TIMES PER YEAR	TOTAL
Community Park	31.11% 14	51.11% 23	6.67% 3	11.11% 5	45
N. Fireman's Park	48.84% 21	39.53% 17	6.98% 3	4.65% 2	43
S. Fireman's Youth Park	50.00% 22	36.36% 16	6.82% 3	6.82% 3	44
Indiana/Michigan River Valley Trail	12.77% 6	25.53% 12	14.89% 7	46.81% 22	47
Fulkerson Park	53.33% 24	42.22% 19	4.44% 2	0.00% 0	45
Samson Park	81.40% 35	18.60% 8	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	43

Q5 How often do you use the following regional parks and recreational facilities?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1

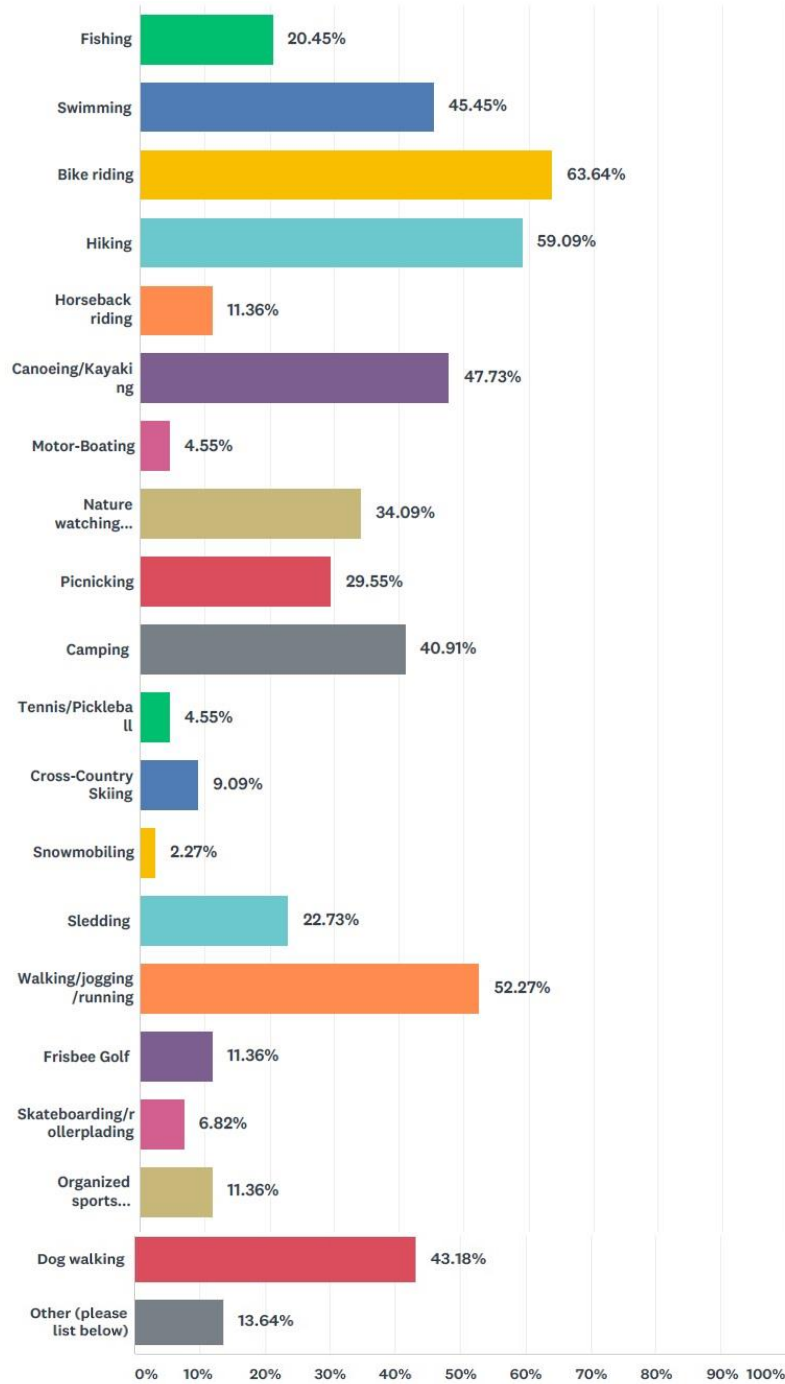


	NEVER	1-5 TIMES PER YEAR	6-12 TIMES PER YEAR	MORE THAN 12 TIMES PER YEAR	(NO LABEL)	TOTAL
City of Niles Parks	10.87% 5	52.17% 24	8.70% 4	28.26% 13	0.00% 0	46
Other parks in Berrien County	15.22% 7	54.35% 25	21.74% 10	8.70% 4	0.00% 0	46
Parks in Cass County	56.52% 26	32.61% 15	8.70% 4	2.17% 1	0.00% 0	46
Parks in Indiana	19.57% 9	58.70% 27	8.70% 4	13.04% 6	0.00% 0	46
Lake Michigan Beaches	10.20% 5	44.90% 22	28.57% 14	16.33% 8	0.00% 0	49
Inland Beaches	46.67% 21	33.33% 15	13.33% 6	6.67% 3	0.00% 0	45
Parks outside of Michigan and Indiana	35.56% 16	57.78% 26	2.22% 1	4.44% 2	0.00% 0	45

#	OTHER (PLEASE LIST BELOW)	DATE
1	Hiking at Fernwood	8/1/2018 4:25 PM
2	Potato creek, pokagon park, madeline bertrand park, st pats park	7/20/2018 9:17 AM

Q6 Which of the following are your favorite activities?(Please select only 6 activities)

Answered: 44 Skipped: 6



Continued:

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

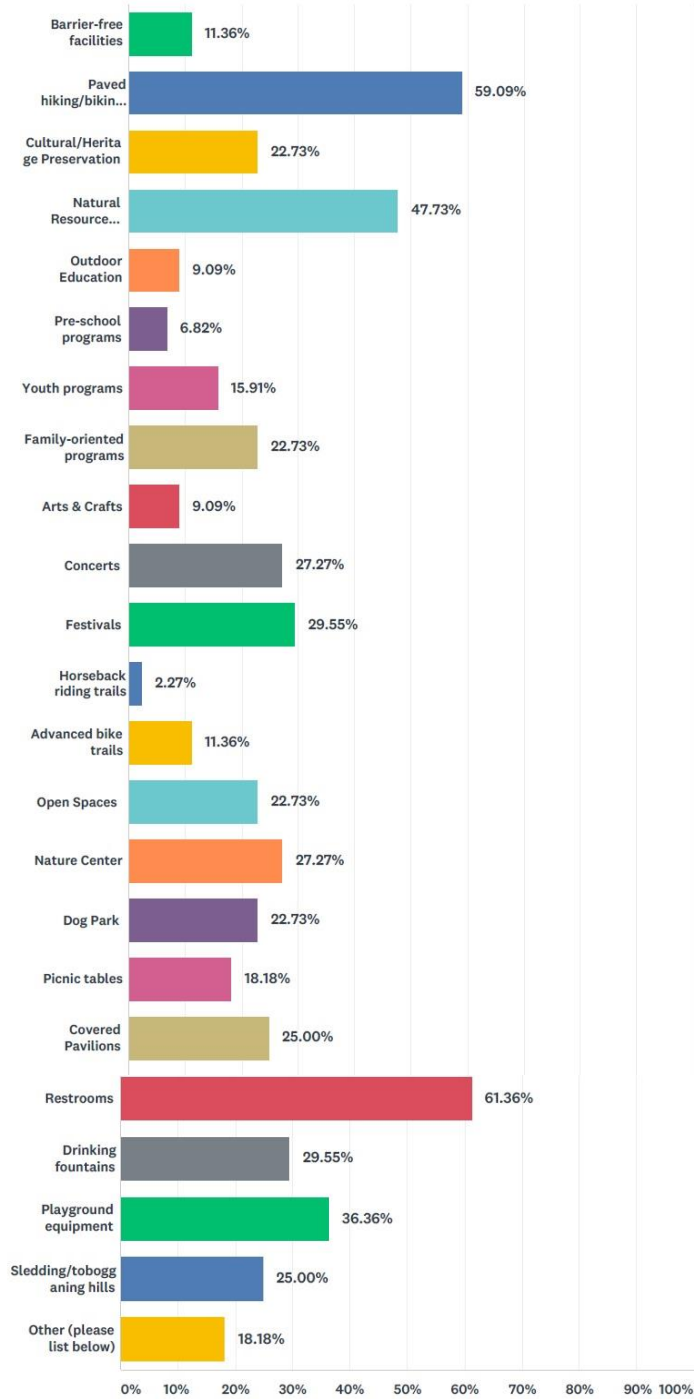
Q6 Which of the following are your favorite activities?(Please select only 6 activities)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fishing	20.45%	9
Swimming	45.45%	20
Bike riding	63.64%	28
Hiking	59.09%	26
Horseback riding	11.36%	5
Canoeing/Kayaking	47.73%	21
Motor-Boating	4.55%	2
Nature watching (Birds, etc)	34.09%	15
Picnicking	29.55%	13
Camping	40.91%	18
Tennis/Pickleball	4.55%	2
Cross-Country Skiing	9.09%	4
Snowmobiling	2.27%	1
Sledding	22.73%	10
Walking/jogging/running	52.27%	23
Frisbee Golf	11.36%	5
Skateboarding/rollerplading	6.82%	3
Organized sports (softball, hockey, bowling, etc)	11.36%	5
Dog walking	43.18%	19
Other (please list below)	13.64%	6
Total Respondents: 44		

#	OTHER (PLEASE LIST BELOW)	DATE
1	ice skating	8/3/2018 4:28 AM
2	Taking grandkids to playgrounds and splashpads	8/1/2018 4:32 PM
3	playgrounds	8/1/2018 11:49 AM
4	Dirt Bike Riding	8/1/2018 11:44 AM
5	Softball	7/19/2018 8:17 PM
6	Playground for kids	7/19/2018 8:12 PM

Q7 Which of the following are most important to you?(Please select only 6 of the following programs/amenities/facilities.)

Answered: 44 Skipped: 6



Continued:

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

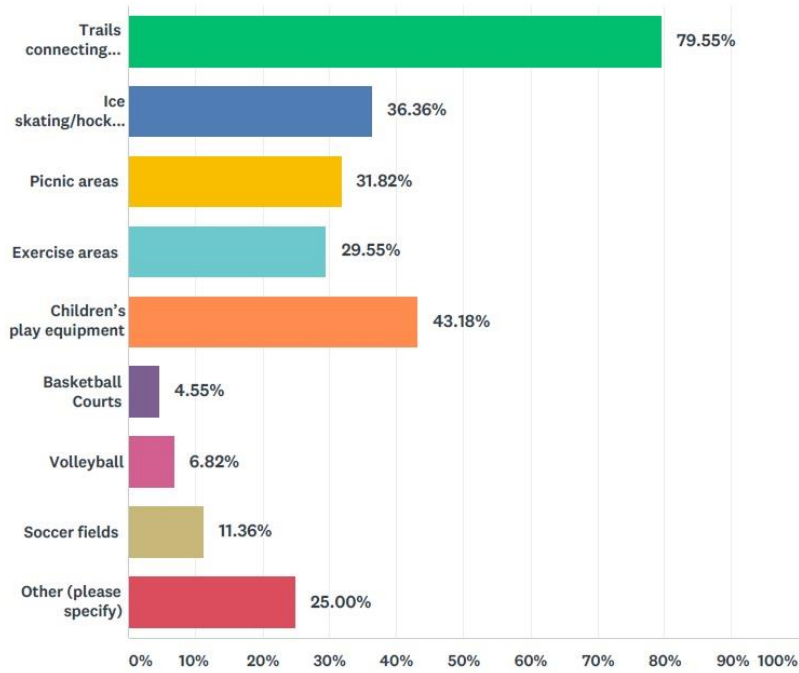
Q7 Which of the following are most important to you?(Please select only 6 of the following programs/amenities/facilities.)

#	OTHER (PLEASE LIST BELOW)	DATE
1	I would love to see a splash pad at one of our parks like the City of Mishawak has for summer fun! Riverfront Park in particular would be a great place for this.	8/8/2018 11:28 AM
2	safety in the restrooms and in the parks in general. fencing.	8/3/2018 4:28 AM
3	Trash and recycling facilities that are emptied regularly	8/2/2018 7:26 AM
4	Water features such as splash pads	8/1/2018 4:32 PM
5	Splash pad, splash park	8/1/2018 4:06 PM
6	Splashpad	8/1/2018 3:50 PM
7	Park benches, emergency call boxes	7/21/2018 1:09 AM
8	Natural Cleanliness	7/19/2018 8:48 AM

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

Q8 Which of the following would you like to see added to the parks in Niles Charter Township?(Please select all that apply)

Answered: 44 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Trails connecting other communities	79.55%	35
Ice skating/hockey rink	36.36%	16
Picnic areas	31.82%	14
Exercise areas	29.55%	13
Children's play equipment	43.18%	19
Basketball Courts	4.55%	2
Volleyball	6.82%	3
Soccer fields	11.36%	5
Other (please specify)	25.00%	11
Total Respondents: 44		

Continued:

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

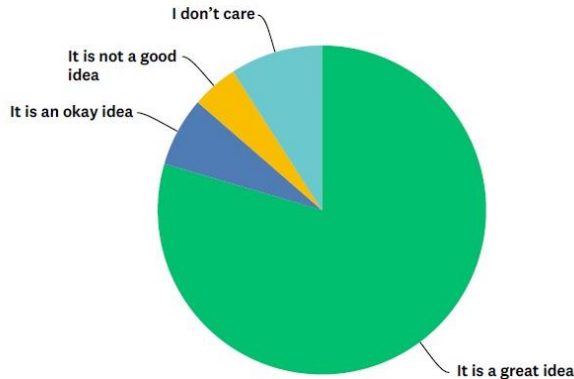
Q8 Which of the following would you like to see added to the parks in Niles Charter Township?(Please select all that apply)

1	Splash pad	8/8/2018 11:28 AM
2	Safety	8/3/2018 4:28 AM
3	splash pad; a bicycle safety town by bike trail- https://peoriaparks.org/facility/bicycle-safety-town/	8/1/2018 4:32 PM
4	Splash park	8/1/2018 4:06 PM
5	Splashpad	8/1/2018 3:50 PM
6	Frisbee golf	8/1/2018 1:20 PM
7	Dirt Bike Track for all ages	8/1/2018 11:44 AM
8	dog park	7/30/2018 5:12 PM
9	Softball fields	7/19/2018 8:17 PM
10	splash pad like in Warsaw, Indiana	7/19/2018 12:55 PM
11	Trails connecting all the parks and schools in the township. Designated fishing areas, Ontario Street Trail Head, amenities for trails/parks: Joy Johns, water fountains, benches, fix-it stations, shelters with picnic tables.	7/19/2018 12:03 AM

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

Q9 How do you feel about the Township working with neighboring municipalities to develop a hiking/biking trail running from Plym Park in Niles City north to Berrien Springs? (Please check only 1 answer.)

Answered: 44 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
It is a great idea	79.55% 35
It is an okay idea	6.82% 3
It is not a good idea	4.55% 2
I don't care	9.09% 4
TOTAL	44

Niles Charter Township Parks and Recreation Survey

Q10 What specific park or recreation project would you like Niles Charter Township to complete in the next 5 years?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 18

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	more paved trails and a dog park	8/13/2018 9:20 AM
2	A splash pad	8/8/2018 11:28 AM
3	Ice Skating Rink. Love the Milton Park, but the kids get bored there. Ages 11, 7 and two 5 year olds. Like the fact that there is a Port-a-Potty and there is a barrier fence. Gives you time to round up your kids if someone is approaching that you think is not a good person. Also like the fact that the buildings are there with people coming and going. SAFETY should be your number one priority now days. That is why I think the trails are a WASTE OF MONEY. THEY ARE NOT SAFE. No wooded area is unfortunately. And yes I took the survey and voiced my opinion on the trails. Thanks for putting out all the surveys....I am glad you are open to other people's ideas and opinions! And thank you for the work that you do!!	8/3/2018 4:28 AM
4	It would be great to see some restoration work to remove invasive plants and add more native species. Our parks are beautiful, but with proper maintenance and re-planting they will be beautiful for much longer!	8/2/2018 7:26 AM
5	Splash pad!!	8/1/2018 10:07 PM
6	Trail to Berrien Springs	8/1/2018 6:12 PM
7	improve/ expand playgrounds, splash pad, bicycle safety town. ALSO- not a park, but the area northwest of Niles (Niles- Buchanan Road, north on Philip.... really needs better/closer fire protection, the fire departments are too far away.	8/1/2018 4:32 PM
8	Splash pad/splash park	8/1/2018 4:06 PM
9	Splashpad	8/1/2018 3:50 PM
10	Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail	8/1/2018 1:20 PM
11	A hiking/biking trail running from Plym Park in Niles City north to Berrien Springs	8/1/2018 1:18 PM
12	Connecting the trails to the north	7/30/2018 5:35 PM
13	Continuing the trail to the North	7/30/2018 5:34 PM
14	Phase 2 of the bike path	7/30/2018 5:19 PM
15	dog park	7/30/2018 5:12 PM
16	IM River Valley Trail	7/30/2018 4:17 PM
17	ice rink	7/30/2018 2:48 PM
18	The bike trail.	7/21/2018 7:20 AM
19	Finish Bertrand park, bike trail to New Buffalo, bike trail to Cassopolis.	7/21/2018 1:09 AM
20	more bike trails	7/20/2018 4:04 PM
21	Any project that promotes healthy activities is a bonus for our community. We, as a lot of other communities in the midwest, have a lot of work to do to promote wellness in our area.	7/20/2018 9:21 AM
22	Splash Pad	7/19/2018 12:55 PM
23	Habitat restoration. Removing invasive species. Planting native species.	7/19/2018 11:53 AM
24	I'd really like to see the river trail connected to other communities.	7/19/2018 9:09 AM
25	While they do the m-51 bridge work, maybe put a pedestrian bridge over us-12 at 3rd street.	7/19/2018 8:48 AM
26	Walking/Biking trails	7/19/2018 7:48 AM
27	Paths connecting Drinking fountains	7/19/2018 6:58 AM
28	connect river valley trail to downtown	7/19/2018 6:50 AM
29	Finish the INMI trail at 3rd street	7/19/2018 6:47 AM
30	Bike trails	7/19/2018 5:04 AM
31	Indiana Michigan trail completion. Maybe a pedestrian bridge over US12 for safety.	7/19/2018 4:14 AM
32	IMRV Trail at Brandywine Creek and new Trailhead at Ontario Rd portion of IMRV Trail	7/19/2018 12:03 AM

2013 Public Input

The Parks Commission solicited comments for the plan from several residents during November and December 2013. Below is a summary of those comments from three questions. The numbers in parenthesis indicates if multiple people had similar comments.

What do you like about the Township parks?

The parks are natural

Free to use (2)

The kids have something to do; keep them off the street (3)

Fulkerson Park is well kept and the basketball court is well used

Well maintained (2)

People can have family gatherings (birthdays, graduations, reunions, etc) (2)

Ball fields

Trails

Natural scenery and paths

Quiet, peaceful nature trails (2)

Clean water (2)

Brandywine Creek Nature Park (natural, trees, creek) (2)

Like that Fireman's North Park is next door for developmentally disabled home (2)

What do you NOT like about the Township parks?

Things are falling apart

Destruction (2)

Not enough publicity

4th of July fireworks

Sometimes basketball is played too late at Fulkerson

There is drinking, drugs and sex that take place, especially on the trails

Lack of winter fun

Big fallen down tree at Brandywine makes it difficult to access bench by stream (4)

Overgrown paths at Brandywine (2)

No portable bathroom or water at N. Fireman's Park (2)

What do you want to see in the future?

More toys for kids

More trails for biking and walking; Walking and bike paths on all Township roads (2)

Have an inside activity/parks (2)

An ice skating rink (5)

Neighborhood parks

Updates at Community Park

Tennis courts

New cooking grills

A few more pavilions

Parks need to be patrolled by police on regular daily schedule. (2)

More winter fun

Remove fallen tree at Brandywine, clear paths while maintaining natural parts of the park (3)

Consistent manicuring of trails (Brandywine) (2)

N. Fireman's Park – accessible bathroom, enlarge pavilion, plant trees for shade, fence around park, new picnic tables, flowers, walking path around park

MISSION STATEMENT, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Parks, open spaces, and other recreational assets provide a number of benefits in terms of social, physical, economic, and environmental qualities. Niles Charter Township has the capacity to provide scenic beauty while encouraging healthy and enjoyable physical and leisure pursuits. These attributes are an important aspect of creating an appealing atmosphere that will encourage economic vitality.

Before developing the five-year action plan, the mission statement below was thoughtfully created to define and establish the township's commitment to comprehensive planning. The goals were also carefully developed to achieve the optimum balance of preserving and protecting natural resources with the attraction and development of business and population growth. While each of the goals addresses a specific area and establishes guidelines for future decisions, they are also broad-based to allow for the accommodation of project development as opportunities arise. Lastly, the implementation objectives outline the areas where the township will focus its work over the next few years. These objectives are reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Mission Statement

Compared to other communities our size, Niles Charter Township will have the finest, most comprehensive and most accessible park and trail system in Michigan and will be a national model of excellence.

Niles Charter Township will encourage the implementation of comprehensive recreation planning that includes parks, open space, greenways, and historic, cultural, and artistic components. In addition to the mission statement, the members of the steering committee also established six overall goals to provide an overall structure and parameters for current and future decision-making that will ensure the continuation of positive progress toward the maximization of recreational resources.

Overall Planning Goals

1. Develop and support policies that will preserve and protect valuable water and land resources including properties with historic and/or cultural value.
2. Seek and establish connections between existing and future trails and pathways including greenways and waterways.
3. Respond to community characteristics and changing demographics by seeking to provide recreational opportunities for all with consideration of age and abilities.
4. Enhance partnerships with surrounding units of government for the purpose of collaborative planning.
5. Establish stable and secure funding for recreational development and maintenance.
6. Create and implement a marketing campaign, including signage, to promote the Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors.

ACTION PLAN

The following is a five-year Action Plan (capital improvement plan) for the community parks, recreation, open spaces, greenways, and historic/cultural sites in Niles Charter Township. This Action Plan focuses primarily on projects that will expand and improve the usability of existing parks in the system and establish a framework for sustainability and further development in the future. It is the intention of the Parks Commission to seek funding opportunities from State and federal sources whenever possible to maximize private and local government funds.

General Park Projects

1. Utilize grants, donations and volunteers to limit financial liability and be fiscally responsible to township constituents. Look for sponsors for acquisitions and for upkeep of all park and trail facilities. Develop a “Friends of Niles Charter Township Parks and Trails” committee. Work with local legislators to bring park and recreation resources to our township.
2. Develop a comprehensive hike/bike trail system throughout the township. Complete the IN-MI River Valley Trail. Develop a Trail-specific trailhead park at Ontario Road. Coordinate with MDOT and County Road Commission to put in place a system that allows for roadside non-motorized facilities with all new road projects.
3. Bring a state-of-the-art, all-sports, lighted field complex to the township. Help our schools acquire and maintain access to state-of-the-art sport/recreation facilities.
4. Assist SMEGA with coordinating growth and greenspace utilization of area businesses and assist in the 11th Street Corridor Project.
5. Establish and maintain consistent, quality communication between the Park Commission and the Parks Superintendent regarding all facets of current and future park projects and endeavors.
6. Provide increased assistance to Niles Charter Township baseball and softball leagues in the form of upgraded facilities, fundraising, and coordination of communication needs.
7. Update all our park facilities, equipment and landscaping and make our park’s general areas 100% handicap accessible.
8. Bring an indoor playground facility to the community that is run either by a private enterprise or through an expanded parks commission. Assist any interested private enterprises with resources or information that would facilitate start-ups.
9. As budgets allow and parcels of land become available, it is the intent of the Township and the Parks Commission to improve park and recreation opportunities, create and connect trails and greenways, and preserve open space, natural resources and water quality.

Other Potential Projects

- 1. Develop a Marketing Plan** – When planning for the distribution of resources, important points taken into consideration include how often a particular park is used, number of visitors, and whether the visitors are local residents or tourists. To increase the use of the parks and to encourage recreational pursuits within the township, a comprehensive marketing plan will be developed. This plan will include not only wayfinding signs, but also promotional materials to stimulate interest in, and use of, the parks.
- 2. Develop Water Trails and Seek Heritage Water Trail designation for Dowagiac and St. Joseph Rivers**– Heritage water trails are routes on navigable waterways such as rivers, lakes, and canals designed and implemented to foster an interactive historical education experience. Historical markers posted on bridge crossings highlight historic events or themes related to the waterway. A companion guide provides a more detailed presentation of the historic material in addition to acting as a more conventional water trail guide with maps, put-in points, take-out points, rest stop locations, paddling conditions, etc. An interpretive program and exhibit at a local museum on or nearby the water trail may also be part of the experience. A website integrating the interpretive guides and an interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) will allow users to plan and select paddling routes, to access information on amenities on and near the rivers, learn about the rivers and watersheds, and to participate in river and coastline monitoring programs.²⁵ The Parks Commission will carefully consider the resources necessary to seek and maintain this designation and weigh all factors relative to the benefits of having the Dowagiac River and a portion of the St. Joseph River designated as a Heritage Water Trail. It will be important to involve neighboring jurisdictions and paddling and watershed groups.
- 3. Investigate Surveillance Cameras and Webcams** – The intent of this amenity is to increase the level of security at the parks and to be used as a promotional tool. Live webcams can draw attention to the Township’s website as well as be a way for users to check conditions such as the amount of snow on the sledding hill.
- 4. Consider Skate and Splash Parks and Ice Skating Rink** – Youth-related activities are very important to the health and well-being of the community and can quite readily become a tourism draw. Survey and visioning sessions continue to indicate strong desire in the community for a splash pad facility.
- 5. Upgrade sidewalks near Fulkerson School** – This could be done as part of a Safe Routes to School effort. For more information visit <http://saferoutesmichigan.org/>.

²⁵ <http://www.wmich.edu/glcms/watertrails/>

Individual Park Projects

Projects are listed for each park property. Each project has an associated time frame (year project is planned to begin), a general estimated cost and priority level (1=highest, 2=middle, 3=least). Following the list there is a general description of the projects.

Time Frame Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4 Year 5 = 2023-2024
 =2019-2020 =2020-2021 =2021-2022 =2022-2023

Projects for IN MI River Valley Trail

	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Establish a true trailhead at Ontario Bike Park to include adequate trail parking, water station, bike racks, and shelter for potential market or events.	1-2	TBD	1
Complete Phase II (Brandywine Creek Nature Park parking area to the City of Niles trail at Fort Street (This doesn't include land acquisition.) MDOT Project number 1800701	1-2	\$798,290 (does not include land acquisition)	1
Add monument for donors at S. Fireman's Park trailhead	2	TBD	1
Add kiosk with trail information at Fort Street, Ontario Bike Park	1-2	TBD	1
Promote/market trail system (develop a coordinated approach with businesses and neighboring jurisdictions)	1-5	TBD	1
Connect schools and businesses to the trail	5	TBD	3
Expand trail to Berrien Springs on proposed route	1-5	TBD	1

Project Descriptions

Ontario Bike Park - Repurpose an abandoned trailer park which is adjacent to the IMRVT, and develop appropriate parking and facilities to support trailhead activity. This could include 40 - 60 parking spaces, an open shelter for market space or events, water refill station, fitness court, and other amenities to complement trail traffic.

Phase II - The first choice for the Phase II route is through acquired land adjacent to the Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. A bridge in Brandywine Creek Nature Park crossing the creek will be needed. This may present an opportunity to improve fishing access to the creek. Less desirable options for Phase II are along 3rd Street or a spur route crossing 3rd Street to Beeson Street, Bond Street then Fort Street. Target completion is 2019.



RegionalPlan_JUL2018

<u><i>Projects for Community Park</i></u>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Improve newly purchased 10 acres by adding 2-4 small practice ball fields and improving parking and park access	4	\$20,000	2
Add a non-motorized trail running east-west through the park and connect park to the IN MI River Valley Trail	3	\$25,000	1
Add soccer fields	3	\$40,000	2
Repair water fountain	2	\$250	1
Provide barrier-free access to amenities (possibly along 3 rd Street) and improve accessibility of the park and shelter (pathways from parking, ramps to shelter, bathrooms, etc)	2	\$8,000	1
Explore possibility of rehabilitating or replacing park shelter/hall	1-2	TBD	1

Project Descriptions

Park improvements – In general, Community Park needs upgrades and improvements to the current amenities such as picnic tables, benches, trash cans, etc. Enlarging and refurbishing the ballfield would increase the desirability of this field and encourage more use.



Trail improvements – Providing barrier-free access, increasing the length, improving the condition and connecting the trail to the IN MI River Valley Trail would greatly enhance its overall appeal.

Water fountain – Although this project is part of the overall improvement project, it is

specific enough and critical enough to warrant individual mention and be assigned a Level 1 priority.

Barrier-free access – In addition to the trail improvements, modifying existing amenities to be barrier free, and ensuring that future amenities are also barrier free, would improve the park’s overall appeal by being available to more segments of the population.

Park shelter – The shelter is very popular, and rented virtually every weekend of the season. However, the building is old and in need of repair or replacement.

<i><u>Projects for N. Firemen's Park</u></i>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Study possible addition of soccer fields	1	TBD	1
Move slide	2	TBD	2
Add play equipment	2	TBD	2
Add water fountains	2	\$500	1

Project Descriptions

Soccer fields – This park has attributes that could make it a good location for the addition of soccer fields. There are no trees and most of the playground equipment is off to one side. Measurements will need to be taken to ensure that there is enough room for a field as well as allow for parking and a safety buffer zone between the field and the playground.



Slide – If soccer fields are added to this park, the current slide needs to be moved to a safer location out of the range of the soccer field. Even if the soccer field is not added, it would make the playground equipment more desirable to be closer together.

Water fountains – Responses from the community indicate a strong desire for water fountains in all of the parks and they are a beneficial and worthwhile addition for the comfort of park users.

<u><i>Projects for S. Firemen's Park (Youth Park)</i></u>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Walking trail	4	\$10,000-\$20,000	3
Upgrade playground equipment and move to safer location away from practice field	2	\$5,000-\$7,500	2
Increase safety measures for playground (consider adding fence)	2-5	\$2,500	1
Upgrade bathrooms and water fountains	2-4	\$15,000-\$20,000	1
Purchase property to the south for a sports complex	3-5	TBD	3
Expand parking	3	TBD	2
Ensure all parking and amenities meet ADA standards	1-5	TBD	1



Project Descriptions

Walking trail – Currently this park is one of the most used and appreciated parks in the township. One of the primary activities is little league baseball and also softball with several league games scheduled during the spring and summer. The possibilities for year round use could be increased with the addition of a walking trail around the perimeter of the park. This trail could also be used by visitors taking a break during one of the games or even when games are in progress.

Playground equipment – The playground equipment might be safer if it was moved a distance from the practice fields. Another consideration about the placement of the equipment however, is the primary users of this park are often the softball players; the secondary users are the observers of those games, but another group of secondary users are the other members of a family who are not involved in the game. Providing activities to appeal to this group (often younger siblings) within a safe distance to be observed by caretakers could improve the enjoyment of those attending the games.

Safety measures – In addition to moving the playground equipment, a fence would add to the security of park users and children using the playground during games and practice sessions.

Amenity upgrades – The bathrooms and water fountains are the primary amenities in need of upgrading. It would also be an improvement to provide barrier-free access to these amenities.

<u><i>Projects for Fulkerson Park</i></u>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Install water fountains or water pump	2	\$500	1
Improve practice field	3	\$5,000	2
Add soccer field	2-5	N/A	2
Add to playground equipment	1	\$500	1
Repair and paint all applicable amenities (fence, picnic tables, well buildings, entry gate etc.)	1	\$1,000	1
Consider addition of horseshoe pits	3	N/A	3
Add trash cans	2	\$200	2

Project Descriptions

Dog Park – Fulkerson is one of the parks with a couple of different options for the installation of a dog park.

Amenities – The installation of a water fountain, or at least a water pump, would improve this park for human users, and if chosen as the site for the dog park, for canine users as well. All of the amenities in this park need to be updated, repaired, and improved. Adding an adequate number of trash cans in strategic locations would reduce litter in the park.



Soccer field – There is possibly enough room for both a soccer field and a dog park. The presence of trees provides desirable shade in both of the two possible locations for the dog park. Planners will study feasibility of

both considering the compatibility of uses as well as the overall location of the park in relation to possible traffic generation affecting the surrounding neighborhood.

Horseshoe pit – Whether it is in this park, or one of the other township parks, horseshoe pits could provide an interesting past-time for visitors of any age.

<u><i>Projects for Samson Park</i></u>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Consider adding a fire pit with safety features	3	\$100	3
Explore feasibility of building a warming shed for winter sports	2	\$2,000	3
Repair light fixtures	1	\$500	1

Project Descriptions

Fire pit – There are safety concerns about adding a firepit for public use. Measures could be taken with the design and with park rules to minimize any danger. These factors will be considered before the decision is made.

Warming shed – To increase the winter season use of the park and to encourage use of the



sledding hill, a warming shed would be a very appealing amenity.

Light fixtures – Although not intended for night-time use, lighting, in good repair, would be a desirable addition to the park and would bring an additional element of safety to the neighborhood.

<u><i>Projects for Brandywine Creek Nature Park</i></u>	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Clean and maintain trails	1	N/A	1
Consider possible fish cleaning station	2	\$2,500	2
Provide accessible fishing opportunities	2	TBD	1
Purchase adjacent property and add additional trails (possible cross country skiing trails)	1-5	TBD	1
	1	TBD	1



Since this land is leased, any improvements to Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve should be coordinated with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Also see related projects listed for the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail which does run through this preserve.

There are no planned improvements for **Independence Park** at this time.

PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

Public Input Session

A public input session was held in July 30th, 2018. An article was published in the Niles Daily Star regarding the meeting.

Online survey available for people to share what they want to see at local parks

leaderpub.com/2018/08/01/online-survey-available-for-people-to-share-what-they-want-to-see-at-local-parks

By Kelsey Hammon Email the author Published 10:02 am Wednesday, August 1, 2018

July 31, 2018



NILES TOWNSHIP – While an open house to get public feedback on Niles Township parks is over, it is not too late for people to share what they want to see in their local parks.

AdChoices

ADVERTISING

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Monday night, the Niles Township Parks Commission hosted an open house at the township hall, with the hopes of hearing what people want to see improved in the parks. Only about a dozen attended to provide insight, but Jill DeLucia, the chairwoman for the Niles Township Parks Commission, said residents can still complete an online survey to share their feedback. The survey is available on the Niles Township website at nilestwpmi.gov. The survey can be accessed under the Departments tab and by clicking on the Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries tab. The survey is open through Aug. 17 and should not take more than a couple of minutes to complete.

DeLucia said the timing for the feedback is particularly important because the department's master plan expires in 2018.

Press Release Continued:

"What kinds of things have people seen in other parks and would like to see?" DeLucia said. "It is a great time to let us know with the survey, so that we can incorporate those ideas in the five-year plan and then go for the funding to make it happen."

As of Monday, DeLucia said people were mostly asking to see more from their parks. Many wanted to see increased amenities, such as the addition of a splash pad.

Those who attended the open house Monday also got a chance to ask questions about the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail. Because construction bids for the project came in at about \$250,000 over budget, the bids were rejected and the trail completion is now expected to be delayed about 10 months.

Suzannah Deneau, an engineer with Wightman & Associates, was present to field people's questions at the open house about this development and other aspects of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail. Wightman is the company helping to engineer the 1.2 miles of trail addition. Deneau said some people she spoke to Monday expressed disappointment that the trail was delayed.

Deneau said the increased bid cost was likely due to the current saturation of the construction market. She said the project will be re-bid in the winter time and they are hoping the timing will be a better for obtaining a bid.

Laura Heyne, of Niles Township, was among those who took the time to visit the township hall for the open house. Heyne is an avid biker and said she enjoys walking her dog along the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail. She said she attended the meeting to let park officials know they are doing a great job.

"I think [the parks] are very nicely maintained," Heyne said. "It's good the department allows input from the community and responds."

Heyne said she was disappointed that the trail will be delayed, particularly because there are not many other places to bike ride in Niles Township, because there are not many sidewalks.

"There's a danger to riding on the roads and the trail is a nice alternative," Heyne said.

Whether they like to ride their bike on the trail or play in the park with their children, DeLucia encouraged residents or non-residents who visit the park or trail to provide feedback.

Public Notice of Review and Comment Period

The public was invited to review and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan between December 17th, 2018 to January 16th, 2019. Copies of the Draft Recreation Plan were made available at the Niles Charter Township Hall and Niles Library. The plan was also available on the Niles Charter Township's website.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Draft Township 2019 – 2024 Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan will be available for public review and comment from December 17th, 2018 to January 16th, 2019. The plan can be accessed at the Township Hall (320 Bell Road, Niles, MI), the Niles District Library (620 E. Main Street, Niles, MI) and online at http://www.nilestwp-mi.gov/departments/parks_recreation_and_cemeteries/ Comments should be sent by mail to Niles Charter Township Clerk, 320 Bell Road, Niles, MI 49120 or by email to the Township Clerk teulk@nilestwpmi.gov or Administrative Assistant rhulett@nilestwpmi.gov

The Niles Charter Township Board will hold a Public Hearing regarding the approval of the Township's 2019-2024 Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan on January 21st, 2019 at 6:00 pm at Niles Charter Township Hall at 320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan. At this meeting, the public will have the opportunity to give oral and/or written comments and to ask questions regarding the plan.

Niles Daily Star:
Dec. 13, 2018
NOTICE

Public Notice of Public Hearing of the Proposed Plan

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE PUBLIC HEARING NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP, BERRIEN COUNTY 320 BELL ROAD NILES, MICHIGAN

To the residents of the Niles Charter Township, Berrien County, State of Michigan: Please be advised that the Niles Charter Township board will conduct a public hearing on the proposed township Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway 5year plan on Tuesday, January 22, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. A copy of the proposed 5year plan is available for public review at the Clerk's office, at 320 Bell Road, Niles Charter Township Fire Department at 3029 S. 3rd Street, Niles Charter Township Department of Public Works at 322 Bell Road, Niles District Library at 620 E. Main Street and Niles Charter Township website: www.nilestwpmi.gov
Terry E. Eull, Clerk

This notice is in compliance with PA 267 of 1976 as amended (Open Meetings Act), MCLA 41.72a (2) (3) and the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Niles Charter Township board will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audiotapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting or public hearing upon prior notice to the Niles Charter Township board. Contact the Clerk's office two (2)-days prior at (269) 684-0870 ext. 15 or ext. 23.

Niles Daily Star:
Jan. 10, 2019
PUBLIC HEARING

Resolution of the Township Board

Following the Public Hearing on January 22, 2019, the Township Board voted to approve the Recreation Plan through a Resolution of Adoption.

RESOLUTION 19-06
Niles Charter Township, County of Berrien, State of Michigan
A Resolution to adopt the 5 Year, 2019-2024 Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan for Niles Charter Township

WHEREAS, Niles Charter Township Park Board, with the assistance of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, has developed a comprehensive plan for the future use and development of township parks, recreational areas, open space and greenway areas and,

WHEREAS, a public hearing was held on January 22, 2019, during a regularly scheduled meeting of the Niles Charter Township Board of Trustees, to provide an opportunity for citizens to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Recreation Plan, and

WHEREAS, Niles Charter Township Park Board has developed the plan for the benefit of the entire community and wishes to adopt the plan as a document to assist in meeting the recreation needs of the community, and

WHEREAS, after the public hearing, the Niles Charter Township Board of Trustees voted to adopt this Recreation Plan

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Niles Charter Township Board of Trustees does hereby adopt the Niles Charter Township 2019-2024 Recreation Plan as a guideline for improving recreation for the residents of Niles Charter Township.

Moved by Ringler and supported by Vella that the forgoing resolution be passed this 22nd day of January, 2019 by the Niles Charter Township board, County of Berrien, State of Michigan.

AYES: Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper

NAYS: None.

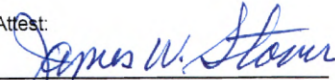
ABSENT: None.

ABSTAIN: None.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution is a true copy and complete copy of a Resolution adopted by the Charter Township of Niles, County of Berrien, State of Michigan, at a regular meeting held on January 22, 2019 and that public notice of said meeting was given pursuant to and in full compliance with Act No. 267, Public Acts of Michigan, 1976, as amended, and that the minutes of said meeting were kept and will be or have been made available as required by said Act.


Perry E. Eull,
Niles Charter Township Clerk

Attest:


James W. Stover, Supervisor

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – Public Hearing

The public was invited to a Public Hearing on January 22, 2019 at the Township Board meeting to ask questions and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan.

NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP JANUARY 22, 2019 REGULAR MEETING

Supervisor Stover called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Township Hall, 320 Bell Road. Hoese led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Cooper, Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover.

Public Hearing: Stover opened public hearing for the 2019-2024 Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan. There was no public participation. Stover closed public hearing.

Agenda Approval: Ringler motioned to approve the January 22, 2019 agenda as submitted. Pulaski supported.
All voting in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Special Guests:

1. November 2018 Police Report-Lieutenant Laesch presented the report to the board.

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items: None.

Consent Agenda:

Cooper motioned to approve the consent agenda as submitted. Vella supported.

1. January 22, 2019 Expenditures/Transfers			
General O & M	\$31,156.76	Fire O & M	\$47,003.49
Sewer O & M	\$125,110.05	Water O & M	\$3,972.64
Police	\$7.92	Street Lighting	\$2,178.26
Fire Capt. Imprv	\$3,001.68		
GRAND TOTAL	\$212,430.80		

2. January 7, 2019 Regular Meeting Minutes.
3. January 8, 2019 Special Meeting Minutes
4. December 2018 Building Report
5. December 2018 Fire Report
6. December 2018 Revenue/Expense Report
7. December 2018 Zoning/Code Enforcement Reports
8. Certificates of Completion for Paul Rainwater

ROLL CALL AYES: Cooper, Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover
NAYS: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Correspondence/Announcements: M-DEQ water report was presented. Announced recertification of Deputy Clerk. Permit application by the City to M-DEQ for Dam removal.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

Resolution 19-06/Adoption of 2019-2024 (5) Year Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan: Ringler motioned to adopt resolution 19-06 approving the 2019-2024 five (5) year Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan with amendments as presented. Vella supported the motion.

ROLL CALL AYES: Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper
NAYS: None. MOTION CARRIED

Reschedule April Meeting Dates: Eull motioned to reschedule the April 1, 2019 meeting to March 28, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. due to conflict with MTA Annual Conference. Hoese supported the motion.

ROLL CALL AYES: Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper, Eull
NAYS: None. MOTION CARRIED

(Minutes of Niles Charter Township Public Hearing)

Phase II Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail: Ringler motioned to approve additional \$35,720.00 for Phase II of the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail project, for a total Township Share of \$185,720.00.

ROLL CALL AYES: Pulaski, Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper, Eull, Hoese
NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED**

Berrien County Road Department Plan: Stover motioned to approve \$100,000.00 to Township roads in accordance with the Berrien County Road Department Plan. Cooper supported the motion.

ROLL CALL AYES: Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper, Eull, Hoese, Pulaski
NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED**

Resolution 19-07-Bell Road Drain 720: Stover motioned to adopt Resolution 19-07 approving repairs and maintenance to Bell Road Drain 720. Ringler supported the motion.

ROLL CALL AYES: Vella, Stover, Cooper, Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler
NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED**

Comments from the Public: Jeff Whittaker of Michiana Christian Embassy invited the Board to a luncheon on Monday, February 18, 2019 from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. Gerald Rohan owns four storage units in the area and wants to build more units on South 11th Street, but the Zoning has been upgraded to Industrial rather than General Business restricting additional units.

After discussion, Eull motioned to instruct the Planning Commission to change the Ordinance for storage units to be allowed in General Business under a special use. Vella supported the motion.

ROLL CALL AYES: Stover, Cooper, Eull, Hoese, Pulaski, Ringler, Vella
NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED**

Committee Reports:

Cooper: None.

Eull: None.

Hoese: None.

Ringler: None.


Pulaski: Advised the Landfill Board voted down the request for a study.

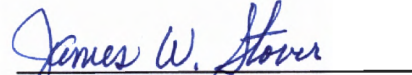
Vella: updated on SMCAS finances.

Supervisor's Report: None.

Stover adjourned meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Terry E. Eull, Clerk


James W. Stover, Supervisor

Letter to County Planning Commission



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION

376 West Main Street, Suite 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022
Phone: 269-925-1137 • Website: www.swmpc.org

January 29, 2019

Evan Smith, Planning Coordinator
Berrien County Community Development Department
Berrien County Administration Building
701 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Dear Mr. Smith:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Niles Charter Township: Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2019-2024 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the Township's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Martin
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Letter to Regional Planning Agency



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION

376 West Main Street, Suite 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Phone: 269-925-1137 • Website: www.swmpc.org

January 29, 2019

K. John Egelhaaf, Executive Director
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
376 West Main Street, Suite 130
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Mr. Egelhaaf:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Niles Charter Township: Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2019-2024 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the Township's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Martin
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Letter to Department of Natural Resources



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION

376 West Main Street, Suite 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Phone: 269-925-1137 • Website: www.swmpc.org

January 29, 2019

Grants Management
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 30425
Lansing, MI 48909-7925

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Niles Charter Township: Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2019-2024 and a completed checklist.

This five-year plan reflects the Township's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me. Your time and consideration are appreciated very much.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Martin
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Recreation Plan Certification Checklist



Michigan Department of Natural Resources-Grants Management
COMMUNITY PARK AND RECREATION PLAN

CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST

By Authority of Parts 19, 703 and 716 of Act 451, P.A. 1994, as amended, submission of this information is required for eligibility to apply for grants

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete, obtain certification signatures and submit this checklist with a locally adopted recreation plan.

All recreation plans are required to meet the content and local approval standards listed in this checklist and as outlined in the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Park and Recreation Plans* provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Plans must be submitted to the DNR through MiRecGrants **with** a completed checklist that has been signed by an authorized official(s) of the local unit of government(s) submitting the plan. Plans may be submitted at any time of the year, but no later than February 1 of the year the local unit of government is applying for grants.

PLAN INFORMATION		
Name of Plan: Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan 2019-2024		
List the community names (including school districts) that are covered under the plan and have passed a resolution adopting the plan.	County	Month and year plan adopted by the community's governing body
Niles Charter Township	Berrien	January 2019

PLAN CONTENT
<p>INSTRUCTIONS: Please check <u>each</u> box to certify that the listed information is included in the <u>final</u> plan.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Roles of Commission(s) or Advisory Board(s) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Department, Authority and/or Staff Description and Organizational Chart <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Annual and Projected Budgets for Operations, Maintenance, Capital Improvements and Recreation Programming <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current Funding Sources <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role of Volunteers <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relationship(s) with School Districts, Other Public Agencies or Private Organizations <p>Recreation Authorities or Trailway Commissions Only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Description of the Relationship between the Authority or Commission and the Recreation Departments of Participating Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Articles of Incorporation <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. RECREATION INVENTORY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Description of Methods Used to Conduct the Inventory <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inventory of all Community Owned Parks and Recreation Facilities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Location Maps (site development plans recommended but not required) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessibility Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Status Report for all Grant-Assisted Parks and Recreation Facilities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Waterways Inventory (if applicable) <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. RESOURCE INVENTORY (OPTIONAL)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS</p>

Recreation Plan Certification Checklist

6. DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

Description of the Method(s) Used to Solicit Public Input Before or During Preparation of the Plan, including a Copy of the Survey or Meeting Agenda and a Summary of the Responses Received

Copy of the Notice of the Availability of the Draft Plan for Public Review and Comment

Date of the Notice December 13, 2018

Type of Notice Legal Ad in Newspaper

Plan Location Township Hall, Niles Library, Website

Duration of Draft Plan Public Review Period (Must be at Least 30 Days) Dec. 17, 2018 - Jan 16, 2019

Copy of the Notice for the Public Meeting Held after the One Month Public Review Period and Before the Plan's Adoption by the Governing Body(ies)

Date of Notice January 10, 2019

Name of Newspaper Niles Daily Star

Date of Meeting January 22, 2019

Copy of the Minutes from the Public Meeting

7. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

8. ACTION PROGRAM

9. POST-COMPLETION SELF-CERTIFICATION REPORT(S)

PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION: For multi-jurisdictional plans, **each** local unit of government must pass a resolution adopting the plan. Prepare and attach a separate page for each unit of government included in the plan.

1. Official resolution of adoption by the governing body dated: January 22, 2019

2. Official resolution of the _____ Commission or Board, recommending adoption of the plan by the governing body, dated: _____

3. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to County Planning Agency dated: January 29, 2019

4. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to Regional Planning Agency dated: January 29, 2019

OVERALL CERTIFICATION

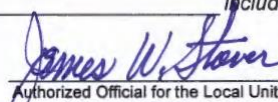
NOTE: For multi-jurisdictional plans, Overall Certification must include the signature of each local unit of government. Prepare and attach a separate signature page for each unit of government included in the plan.

I hereby certify that the recreation plan for

Niles Charter Township includes the required content, as indicated

(Local Unit of Government)

above and as set forth by the DNR.

 1-29-19

Authorized Official for the Local Unit of Government Date

This completed checklist must be uploaded in MiRecGrants.