

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



2008 - 2013

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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 Board

August Kuehn, Chairman
Karl Tillman, Treasurer
Harry Thibault, Secretary
Aaron Mills

Joe Hulett, Park Superintendent

Steering Committee

John Danaher
Pam Duval
August Kuehn
Aaron Mills
Vance Stratton
Harry Thibault
Kevin Tonkin

Niles Charter Township Board

William Myers, Supervisor
Marge Durm-Hiatt, Clerk
James H. Ringler, Treasurer
Richard Cooper, Trustee
Ronald Goodwin, Trustee
Richard Noble, Trustee
Kevin Tonkin, 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

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 goals to provide overall structure and parameters for current and future decision-making that will ensure the continuation of positive progress toward the maximization of recreational resources.

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.

With the mission statement and overall goals in mind, the steering committee members conducted individual on-site assessments and inventories of each park and developed a five-year action plan to improve and increase the capacity for recreational opportunities and barrier-free access in the township. With these tools in hand, and with the enthusiastic commitment and partnerships between the Parks Board, township officials, businesses, and residents, Niles Charter Township will reap numerous health, social, and economic benefits from this responsible, comprehensive planning.

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 39.7 inches per year of rainfall and 63.5 inches of snowfall. The average July temperature is 85 degrees Fahrenheit and the average January low is 22.6 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 http://www.bestplaces.net/city/Niles_township_MI-CLIMATE-DATA-69905352061.aspx

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 38.5 square miles comprised of 37.7 square miles of land and 0.8 square miles of water. With a population of just over 13,000, the population density is approximately 350 people per 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 viewsheds 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 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.

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

³ *Niles Township Master Plan, 2002*

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

There are many diverse water resources in the township including two rivers, (the St. Joseph and the Dowagiac) several miles of tributary streams, 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.

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 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.



The St. Joseph River

⁴ *Niles Township Recreation Plan, 1995-2000*

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 Board has been in communication with park and trailways administrators in neighboring communities regarding the development of an inter-state trail. The following municipalities all have separate trailways that have the potential of being joined as a continuous, dedicated pathway extending over 15 miles in length and connecting all municipalities with a viable alternative recreation/transportation corridor.

- In Michigan: Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles
- In Indiana: St. Joseph County, the City of South Bend, and the City of Mishawaka

More than 50 percent of this trailway is already completed, running mostly along the scenic St. Joseph River. Niles Charter Township's Parks Board is dedicated to completing their portion of this comprehensive trail and has identified two potential routes. One route would use the abandoned railroad corridor/utility easement that runs north/south from the City of Niles' Riverfront Park to St. Joseph County, Indiana, one block west of 11th Street. Another potential route is from historic Fort St. Joseph in the City of Niles to Madeline Bertrand State Park, mostly along Bond Street. Both routes run through at least two of the township's parks and start/end where neighboring communities have tentative trail connections.

Completion of this trailway will require that representatives from all affected communities meet and combine efforts. Niles Charter Township's Parks Board is dedicated to facilitating such meetings and to the completion of what could certainly become a regionally recognized and well-utilized alternative transportation / recreation corridor running from the north end of the township through Plym Park in the City of Niles to Robert C. Beutter Park in Mishawaka, Indiana. (See Map)

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 provide natural 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

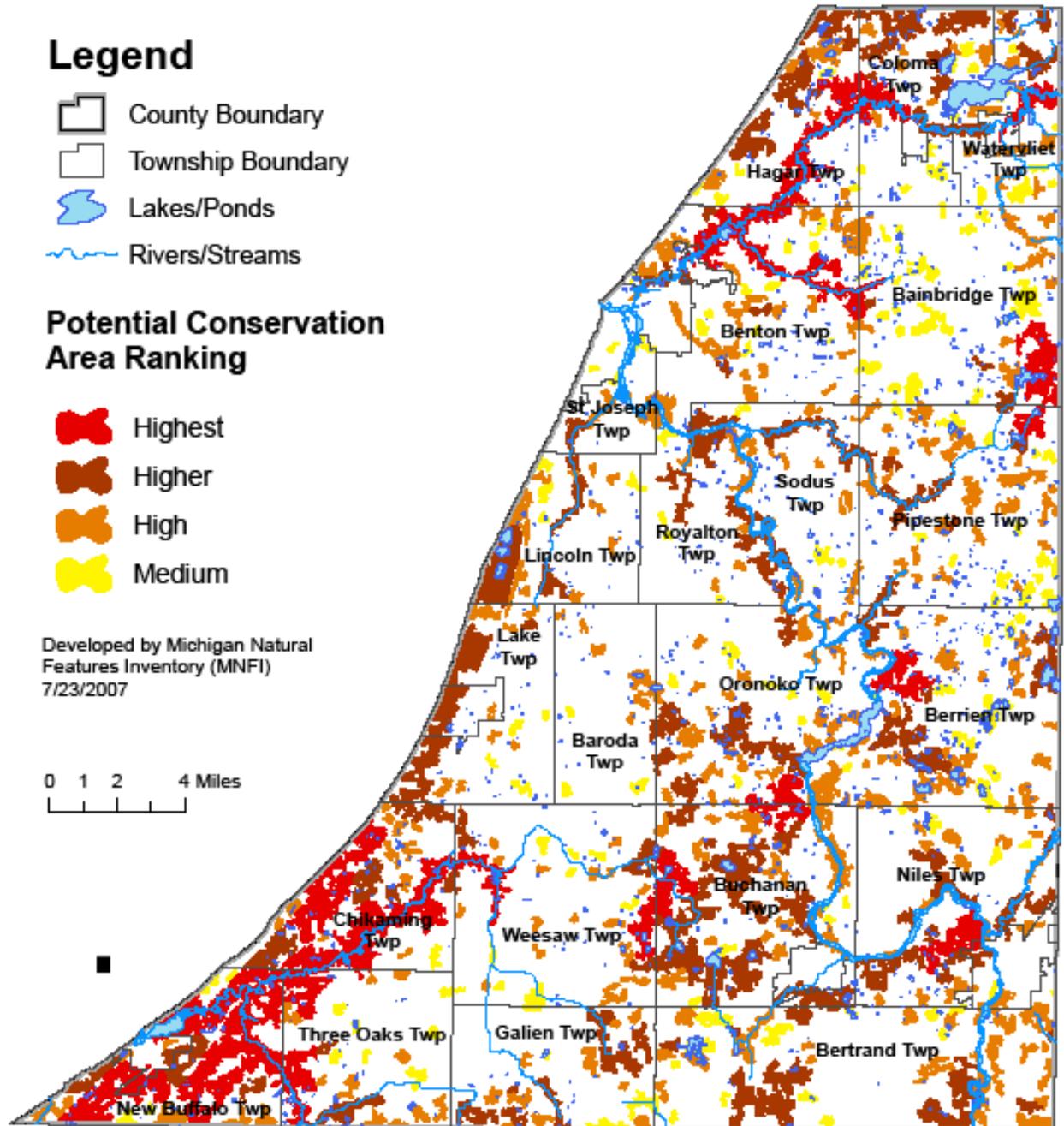
The township is also home to a variety of songbirds, owls, hawks and turkey vultures. Well-planned land management includes development policies that encourage substantial diversity and numbers of native plants and animals including game animals and endangered species.

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 the following page reflects a sizable area in the township (northwest side of the City of Niles) given the highest ranking as a PCA. Several other areas with “high” and “higher” areas are scattered throughout the township. This is potentially important information for planners to consider when determining park development projects and/or land acquisitions.

Potential Conservation Areas Berrien County



Data Sources: Michigan DNR IFMAP land cover circa 2000, Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) Biotics Database (2007), Michigan's Vegetation circa 1800, and the National Hydrologic Database stream lines.

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 Census reports but recorded an increase of almost four percent in the 2000 Census. 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 1980-2000⁵

| Community | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | %Change 1990-2000 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| Niles Charter Township | 13,165 | 12,828 | 13,325 | +3.87% |
| City of Niles | 13,115 | 12,458 | 12,204 | -2.08% |
| Berrien County | 171,276 | 161,387 | 162,453 | +0.65% |
| State of Michigan | 9,262,078 | 9,295,297 | 9,938,444 | +6.50% |

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 2000⁶

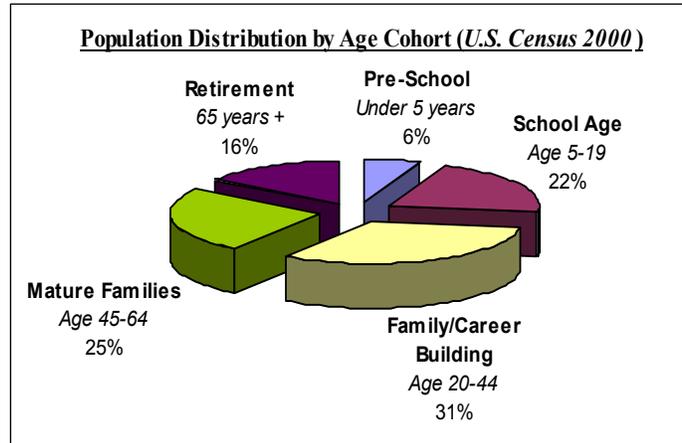
| Community | Female | Male | Median Age | % Age 65+ |
|------------------------|--------|-------|------------|-----------|
| Niles Charter Township | 51.3% | 48.7% | 38.7 | 15.5% |
| City of Niles | 53.2% | 46.8% | 35.3 | 15.4% |
| Berrien County | 51.5% | 48.5% | 33.7 | 14.4% |
| State of Michigan | 51.0% | 49.0% | 35.5 | 12.3% |

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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.



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.

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:⁷

- 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

⁷ <http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/acyi/parenting/daytoday/Families/page.cfm?pg=Recreation%20Benefits>

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.⁸ 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.



Bird Watching

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 group⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.

⁸ *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants (2007)* www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org

⁹ <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisney.htm>

¹⁰ http://www.gbod.org/coa/articles.asp?act=reader&item_id=10311

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 Population in 2000¹¹

| Age Cohort | Niles Charter Township | | City of Niles | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | Number Reported | Percent of Population | Number Reported | Percent of Population |
| Population 5 to 20 years | 3,033 | | 2,734 | |
| With a disability | 327 | 10.8% | 274 | 10.0% |
| Population 21 to 64 years | 7,389 | | 6,478 | |
| With a disability | 1,325 | 17.9% | 1,551 | 23.9% |
| Population 65 years and over | 2,095 | | 1,756 | |
| With a disability | 814 | 38.9% | 790 | 45.0% |

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 39 percent of the population; similarly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2002, more than 42 percent of those age 65 and older in the U.S. had disabilities.¹²

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 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.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

¹² <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisney.htm>

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

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 (1999)

| | Families | Individuals |
|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Niles Charter Township | 7% | 9% |
| City of Niles | 10% | 14% |
| Berrien County | 9% | 13% |
| State of Michigan | 9% | 12% |

Population Projections

The Niles Area Transportation Study (NATS) has collaborated with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to develop population projections based on the Regional Economic Model, Inc. Based on the model's allocations to Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZ); the township's population is projected to grow from the current 12,828 to 13,816 by 2015, a 7.7 percent increase. Much of this growth is expected to occur in the Traffic Analysis Zones close to the City, particularly those on the west and southeast sides.

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 Area¹⁴

| | |
|--|---------|
| South Bend | 107,789 |
| Mishawaka | 46,557 |
| Granger | 28,284 |
| Total Population in St. Joseph County, Indiana | 265,559 |

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, could stimulate significant growth in tourism, reduce vehicle traffic, and provide outstanding opportunities for physical fitness and social experiences.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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 Population¹⁵**

| Work force by Occupation | # of Employed | % of Total |
|--|---------------|------------|
| Employed Civilian Population 16 years and over | 6,694 | |
| Sales and office occupations | 1,699 | 25.4% |
| Production, transportation, and material moving occupations | 1,686 | 25.2% |
| Management, professional, and related occupations | 1,458 | 21.8% |
| Service occupations | 1,054 | 15.7% |
| Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations | 744 | 11.1% |
| Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations | 53 | 0.8% |
| Work force by Industry | | |
| Manufacturing | 1,701 | 25.4% |
| Educational, health and social services | 1,267 | 18.9% |
| Retail trade | 897 | 13.4% |
| Construction | 477 | 7.1% |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 421 | 6.3% |
| Professional, scientific, administrative, management/waste management services | 419 | 6.3% |
| Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services | 409 | 6.1% |
| Other services (except public administration) | 348 | 5.2% |
| Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing | 271 | 4.0% |
| Wholesale trade | 221 | 3.3% |
| Information | 97 | 1.4% |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining | 65 | 1.0% |
| Public administration | 101 | 1.5% |

Manufacturing is the predominate industry but overall the work force (by occupation) has become quite diversified over the last few years. Note that there is a large segment of the population employed in the educational, health, and social service industries which is projected to increase over the next decade.

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.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Income and Poverty Levels

The table below shows the growth in median household income for the township and compares surrounding areas. Both Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles have shown substantially less growth than Berrien County and the State.

Median Household Income¹⁶

| Community | 1989 | 1999 | % Change |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Niles Charter Township | \$28,745 | \$37,794 | 1.29% |
| City of Niles | \$23,700 | \$31,208 | 1.44% |
| Berrien County | \$27,245 | \$38,567 | 8.31% |
| State of Michigan | \$31,020 | \$44,667 | 9.87% |

The tables below provide comparisons for median family income, per capita income, and demonstrate the income differences between males and females.

Local Income Comparisons (1999)

| | Median Family Income | Per Capita Income |
|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Niles Charter Township | \$44,446 | 18,249 |
| City of Niles | \$38,870 | 16,584 |
| Berrien County | \$46,548 | 19,952 |
| State of Michigan | \$53,457 | 22,168 |

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.

Income Comparison by Gender (1999)

| (Full-time, year round employment) | Male | Female |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Niles Charter Township | \$35,037 | \$22,901 |
| City of Niles | \$31,395 | \$22,991 |
| Berrien County | \$36,582 | \$23,800 |
| State of Michigan | \$41,897 | \$28,159 |

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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 helps in building a sense of community. Recreational pursuits can promote positive lifestyle choices, resilient youth, safe and productive environments, and enhanced quality of life.¹⁷ Niles Charter Township is served by the following school districts:

Buchanan Community Schools
Buchanan, Michigan

Niles Community Schools
Niles, Michigan

Brandywine Public Schools
Niles, Michigan

Niles Community Schools serves most of the township with an enrollment of approximately 4,500 students. Brandywine Public Schools serves the southern part of the township and can accommodate approximately 1,500 students. Buchanan Community Schools covers the extreme western portion of the township and has approximately 1,800 students.¹⁸



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.

Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Lake Michigan College – Bertrand Crossing
Niles, Michigan

Indiana University
South Bend, Indiana

Southwestern Michigan College
Niles, Michigan

University of Notre Dame
South Bend, Indiana

Western Michigan University and Siena Heights
University, Branch Campuses
Benton Harbor, Michigan

¹⁷ http://www.ci.twentynine-palms.ca.us/Recreation_Plan.54.0.html

¹⁸ Niles Township Recreation Plan 1995-2000

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

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.

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.

Roles of Township 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 Board.

Township Board – The Township Board allocates the funds necessary to operate and maintain the Township parks; however, the Parks Board does not require Township Board authorization for the operations of the parks.

Parks Board – The Parks Board is comprised of five members elected to four-year terms and a trustee who acts as liaison to the township board. Other than salary-related items, the board's major expenses include general maintenance and utilities. The board works with the township board to dedicate funds to be used either as matching dollars for a possible grant or for 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.

Budget

The Parks Board budget is determined by the Township Board and is allocated from the Township's general fund. The budget for 2008 includes an operating budget of \$100,000 with \$6,000 allocated for capital improvements. (The same amount as 2007). A 2-3 percent increase in the overall budget is anticipated for 2009. Expenditures for park maintenance and other park acquisitions and projects are drawn from the park superintendent's budget. Any park expenditures over the budget are appropriated by the township board.

Volunteers and Supporting Organizations

The Parks Board 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. Losensky Park is actually owned by the City of Niles but is leased and operated by the township; Independence Park is owned by the township but is leased to Brandywine Schools under a

99-year agreement. Several organizations use the ballfields 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 Board

Niles Charter Township Board

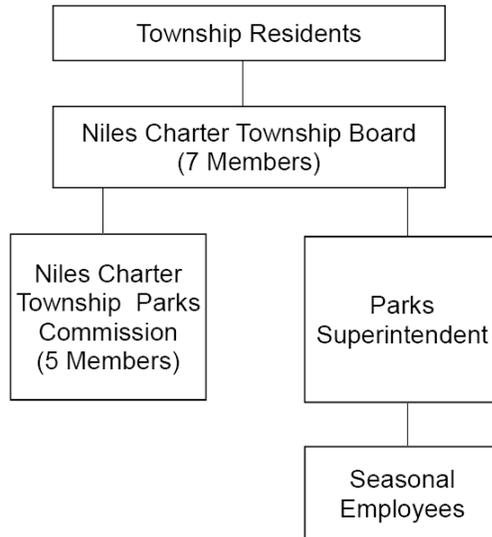
William Myers, Supervisor
Marge Durm-Hiatt, Clerk
James H. Ringler, Treasurer
Richard Cooper, Trustee
Ronald Goodwin, Trustee
Richard Noble, Trustee
Kevin Tonkin, Trustee

Niles Charter Township Parks Board

August Kuehn, Chairman
Karl Tillman, Treasurer
Harry Thibault, Secretary
Aaron Mills
Vacancy
Joe Hulett, Park Superintendent

Organizational Chart

**Niles Charter Township
Organizational Chart**



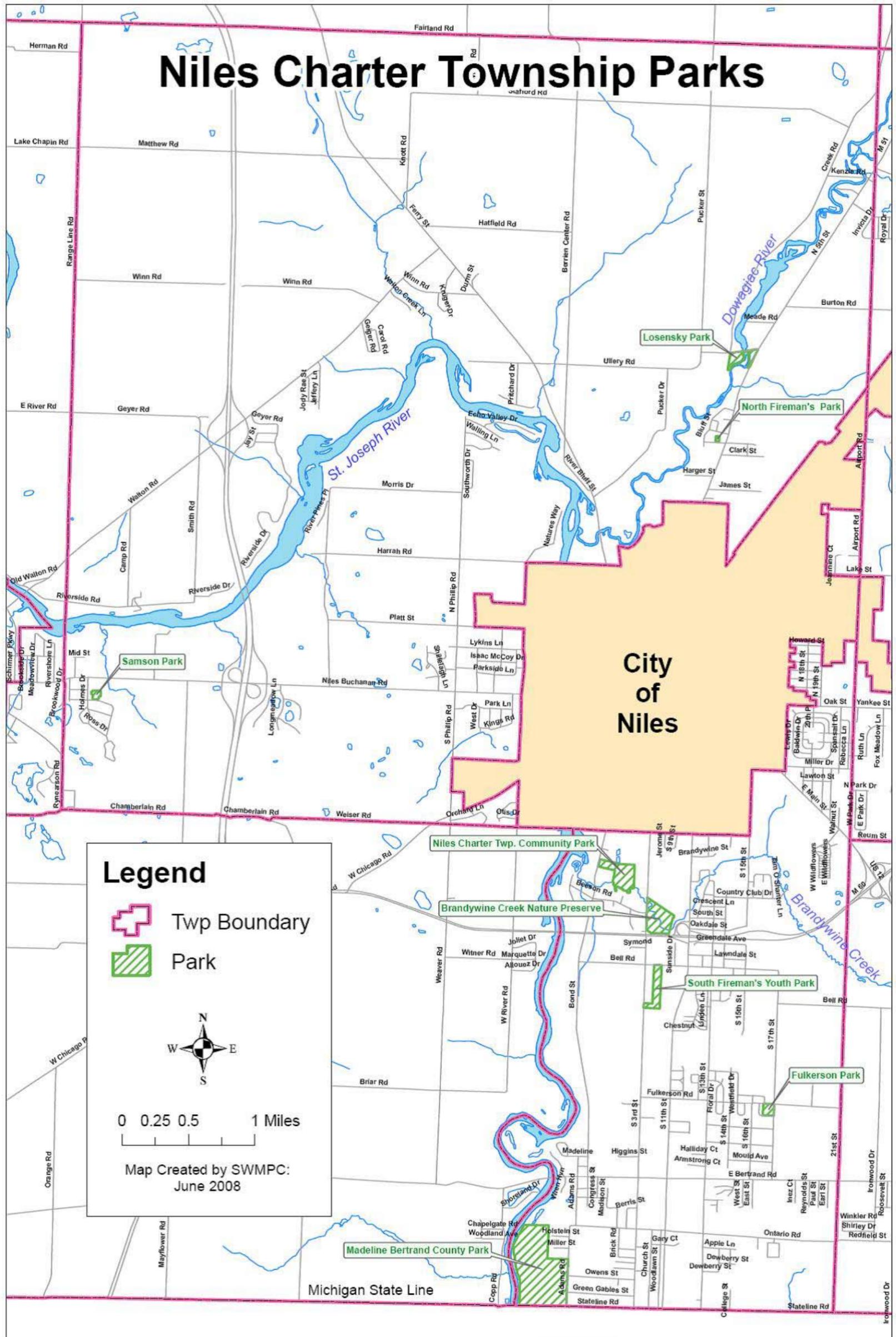
RECREATION INVENTORY

Niles Charter Township owns and operates seven park facilities constituting a total of 68.4 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 each of the township's parks.

Map of Township Parks



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 27.5 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

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

Parking is an open gravel area but with no specifically designated spaces. Level brick path approximately 100’ from parking to shelter but includes 2 steps to enter shelter. 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,

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, 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), 1 Set of Monkey Bars

Barrier-Free Assessment: 2

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

Losensky Park

This 13-acre neighborhood park is owned by the City of Niles and leased by Niles Charter Township. The park is located on Pucker Street between Ullery and N. Fifth (M-51) with frontage along Dowagiac Creek (with an island). Amenities include three benches, picnic facilities (3 picnic tables, 3 grills, and 1 trash can), and fishing.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

Although the approach and entrance areas are not paved, they are open, stable, and do not have stairs. There is a ramp (more than 36” wide) leading to a bridge area that would need to be stabilized to be accessible.

Fulkerson Park

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

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 winter toboggan run. 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. 2 benches and 1 garbage can. A new fishing access site on Brandywine Creek off of 15th Street in Niles was purchased by the DNR. This site will be managed by Niles Charter Township and will provide urban trout fishing opportunities.¹⁹

Barrier-Free Assessment: 1

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

Independence Park

The Township leases this 6-acre school park to the Brandywine School District. The park is located off Bell Road and is adjacent to Brandywine High School. The park includes a competitive high school softball field and batting cages, and a practice football field. There are no specific barriers preventing access.

Barrier-Free Assessment: 2

There are no specific barriers.

¹⁹ http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10371_10402-142850--,00.html

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 that is allegedly “haunted”.
- **Old Norfolk Railway** – This abandoned track is a potential trail route for the proposed trailway.
- **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

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.

- **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 at the St. Joseph River.
- **Southside Park** – has a play structure, baseball, basketball, picnic shelter.
- **Troost Park** – provides a playground area.
- **Thomas Stadium** – a baseball stadium.

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 following are just a few of the most popular:

- St. Joseph River
- Galien River
- Love Creek
- Rocky Gap
- Silver Beach
- Barron Lake
- Tiscornia Beach
- Weko Beach

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

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

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 Proposed Trail

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

Riverwalk – a trail under development beginning at Logan Street in Mishawaka and continuing to Central Park in South Bend.

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

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

The Niles Charter Township's Parks Board 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 began in February 2008 with an initial strategic planning session between a SWMPC representative and Parks Board representatives. A timeline for public participation and information-gathering activities was established. Steering committee membership and responsibility distribution were also discussed and agreed upon. The planning process concluded in July 2008 when the plan was formally adopted by the Township.

Public participation was encouraged through several methods including:

- Regular steering committee meetings
- A citizen survey made available through several sources including the local high school
- A public visioning session
- A public review and comment period culminating with a public hearing

Throughout every phase of the systems approach used to develop the plan, residents, business leaders, and municipal representatives provided input and pledged support of the goals and action plan.

Calendar of Meetings and Input Opportunities

February 13, 2008

Organization meeting with Parks Board
Niles Charter Township Hall

March 19, 2008

Public Visioning Session
Niles Charter Township Hall

March 19 – March 31, 2008

Public Opinion Survey
Surveys were available at the Township Hall, Senior Center, SWMPC website, schools.

March 26, 2008

Steering Committee Meeting
Niles Charter Township Hall

April 16, 2008

Steering Committee Meeting
Niles Charter Township Hall

June 11 – July 11, 2008

Public Review and Comment Period
The Draft plan was available at the Township Hall and the Public Library.

July 14, 2008

Parks Board Approval and Recommendation of Adoption by Township Board
Niles Charter Township Hall

July 21, 2008

Public Hearing – Township Board Adoption
Niles Charter Township Hall

Survey and Results

There were 132 respondents to the public interest survey conducted as part of the planning process. The following charts and tables denote the results of that survey.

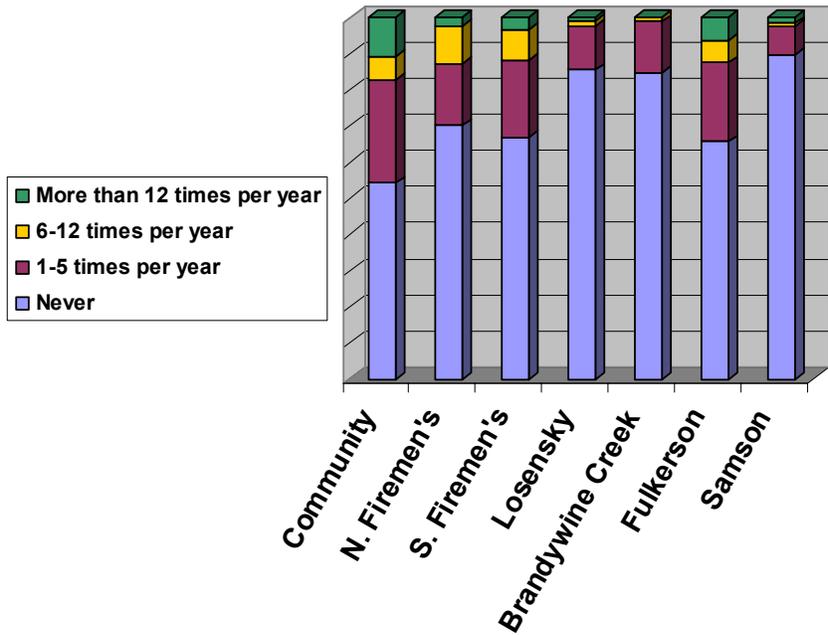
| <p>Question 1 Where is your primary residence?</p> <p>The survey was made available to residents of Niles Charter Township as well as surrounding communities to gather information about resident <i>and</i> regional usage. As expected, the largest percentage of respondents came from the township. Residents from the City of Niles were a close second.</p> | <table border="1"> <caption>Primary Residence Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Location</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Niles Charter Township</td> <td>38%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>City of Niles</td> <td>34%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cass County</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bertrand Township</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Milton Township</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Buchanan Township</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (See list)</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Location | Percentage | Niles Charter Township | 38% | City of Niles | 34% | Cass County | 9% | Bertrand Township | 8% | Milton Township | 2% | Buchanan Township | 4% | Other (See list) | 5% |
|--|--|-----------|------------|------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|-------------|-----|-------------------|----|-----------------|----|-------------------|----|------------------|----|
| Location | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Niles Charter Township | 38% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| City of Niles | 34% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cass County | 9% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bertrand Township | 8% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Milton Township | 2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Buchanan Township | 4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other (See list) | 5% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Question 2 Please indicate your age group.</p> <p>Although the survey was well-advertised and available through many channels, the majority of responses were collected from students in the Niles/Brandywine school district. This is reflected by the number of respondents in the 13-19 year old age group. Recognizing the youth as the future custodians and supporters of the parks, it is wise to cultivate their interest at an early age instilling a sense of pride and ownership of the facilities.</p> | <table border="1"> <caption>Age Group Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Age Group</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>13-19 years</td> <td>60%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>51-60 years</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>61+ years</td> <td>12%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>41-50 years</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>31-40 years</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20-30 years</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Age Group | Percentage | 13-19 years | 60% | 51-60 years | 14% | 61+ years | 12% | 41-50 years | 9% | 31-40 years | 3% | 20-30 years | 2% | | |
| Age Group | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13-19 years | 60% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 51-60 years | 14% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 61+ years | 12% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 41-50 years | 9% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 31-40 years | 3% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20-30 years | 2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Question 3 Please indicate your gender.</p> <p>The respondents were almost evenly distributed by gender.</p> | <table border="1"> <caption>Gender Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Gender</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>51%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>49%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Gender | Percentage | Male | 51% | Female | 49% | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 51% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 49% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Question 4

How often do you use the following Niles Charter Township Parks and recreational facilities?

Community Park is visited more often than any of the other parks in the township. This park has an active league calendar and is very well known. During the Visioning Session and the Steering Committee meetings, comments were often made that many of the parks are not known well by the general public. One reason given for this is the lack of signage.

Frequency of Township Park Visits

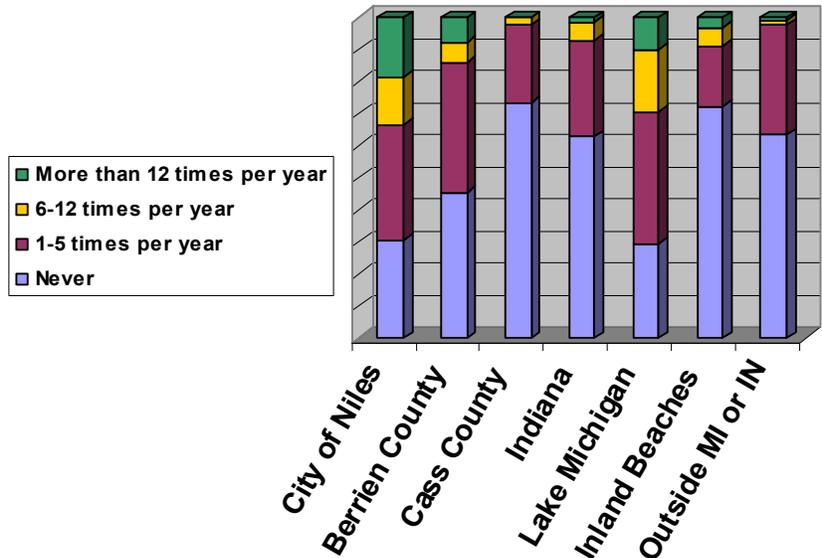


Question 5

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

Parks in the nearby City of Niles are visited more often than other regional parks or facilities. Lake Michigan is also visited more often than local inland beaches.

Frequency of Regional Park Visits



| <p>Question 6 Which of the following are your favorite activities? <i>(Please select only 6)</i></p> <p>The top 6 answers to this question include two trail-related and two water-related activities.</p> | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Favorite Activities</th> <th># Participating</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Swimming</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>Bike riding</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>Walking/etc</td><td>69</td></tr> <tr><td>Relaxing</td><td>68</td></tr> <tr><td>Camping</td><td>57</td></tr> <tr><td>Fishing</td><td>45</td></tr> <tr><td>Organized sports</td><td>42</td></tr> <tr><td>Hiking</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Sledding</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Dog walking</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Nature watching</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>Picnicking</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Snowmobiling</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Canoe/Kayaking</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>Motor boating</td><td>23</td></tr> <tr><td>Skateboarding</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>Horseback riding</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr><td>Frisbee Golf</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr><td>Cross Country Ski</td><td>9</td></tr> </tbody> </table> | Favorite Activities | # Participating | Swimming | 73 | Bike riding | 73 | Walking/etc | 69 | Relaxing | 68 | Camping | 57 | Fishing | 45 | Organized sports | 42 | Hiking | 32 | Sledding | 32 | Dog walking | 32 | Nature watching | 30 | Picnicking | 26 | Snowmobiling | 25 | Canoe/Kayaking | 24 | Motor boating | 23 | Skateboarding | 22 | Horseback riding | 17 | Frisbee Golf | 11 | Cross Country Ski | 9 | | | | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----|-------------------------------|----|-------------|----|---------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------|----|--------------|----|----------------------|----|---------------|----|-----------------|----|-------------------|----|--------------------------------|----|-------------------|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------|----|------------------|----|
| Favorite Activities | # Participating | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Swimming | 73 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bike riding | 73 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Walking/etc | 69 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Relaxing | 68 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Camping | 57 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fishing | 45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Organized sports | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hiking | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sledding | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dog walking | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nature watching | 30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Picnicking | 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Snowmobiling | 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Canoe/Kayaking | 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Motor boating | 23 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Skateboarding | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Horseback riding | 17 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Frisbee Golf | 11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cross Country Ski | 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Question 7 Which of the following are most important to you? <i>(Please select only 6 of the following programs, amenities, or facilities.)</i></p> <p>Restrooms were chosen as one of the most favored amenities by over half of the 132 respondents. Another simple amenity in the top 6 is picnic tables. Paved hiking trails were very high on this list as well. The inclusion of festivals, concerts, and outdoor education in the top 6 may be a reflection of the large number of young people responding to the survey.</p> | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Favorite Amenities</th> <th># Participating</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Restrooms</td><td>74</td></tr> <tr><td>Festivals</td><td>64</td></tr> <tr><td>Paved hiking trails</td><td>53</td></tr> <tr><td>Concerts</td><td>52</td></tr> <tr><td>Picnic tables</td><td>42</td></tr> <tr><td>Outdoor Education</td><td>39</td></tr> <tr><td>Drinking fountains</td><td>39</td></tr> <tr><td>Natural Resource Preservation</td><td>34</td></tr> <tr><td>Open spaces</td><td>34</td></tr> <tr><td>Arts & Crafts</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Playground equipment</td><td>31</td></tr> <tr><td>Youth programs</td><td>28</td></tr> <tr><td>Dog park</td><td>27</td></tr> <tr><td>Advanced bike trails</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Nature Center</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Family programs</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>Covered pavilions</td><td>18</td></tr> <tr><td>Cultural/Historic Preservation</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>Sledding hills</td><td>14</td></tr> <tr><td>Barrier-free facilities</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>Pre-school programs</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr><td>Horseback trails</td><td>12</td></tr> </tbody> </table> | Favorite Amenities | # Participating | Restrooms | 74 | Festivals | 64 | Paved hiking trails | 53 | Concerts | 52 | Picnic tables | 42 | Outdoor Education | 39 | Drinking fountains | 39 | Natural Resource Preservation | 34 | Open spaces | 34 | Arts & Crafts | 32 | Playground equipment | 31 | Youth programs | 28 | Dog park | 27 | Advanced bike trails | 25 | Nature Center | 25 | Family programs | 24 | Covered pavilions | 18 | Cultural/Historic Preservation | 16 | Sledding hills | 14 | Barrier-free facilities | 13 | Pre-school programs | 12 | Horseback trails | 12 |
| Favorite Amenities | # Participating | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Restrooms | 74 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Festivals | 64 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Paved hiking trails | 53 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Concerts | 52 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Picnic tables | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Outdoor Education | 39 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Drinking fountains | 39 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Natural Resource Preservation | 34 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Open spaces | 34 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Arts & Crafts | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Playground equipment | 31 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Youth programs | 28 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dog park | 27 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Advanced bike trails | 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nature Center | 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Family programs | 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Covered pavilions | 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cultural/Historic Preservation | 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sledding hills | 14 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Barrier-free facilities | 13 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pre-school programs | 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Horseback trails | 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| <p>Question 8 Which of the following would you like to see added to the parks in Niles Charter Township? <i>(Please select all that apply)</i></p> <p>Not only have respondents indicated biking and walking as favorite activities, trail connections appear to have support as a top priority for the five-year action plan.</p> | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Proposed Amenities</th> <th># of Responses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Trail connections</td> <td>64</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ice rink</td> <td>53</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Basketball courts</td> <td>52</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Picnic areas</td> <td>51</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Volleyball courts</td> <td>50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exercise areas</td> <td>42</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children's equipment</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (See list)</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Proposed Amenities | # of Responses | Trail connections | 64 | Ice rink | 53 | Basketball courts | 52 | Picnic areas | 51 | Volleyball courts | 50 | Exercise areas | 42 | Children's equipment | 28 | Other (See list) | 24 |
|--|---|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----|----------|-----|-------------------|-----|--------------|----|-------------------|----|----------------|----|----------------------|----|------------------|----|
| Proposed Amenities | # of Responses | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Trail connections | 64 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ice rink | 53 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Basketball courts | 52 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Picnic areas | 51 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Volleyball courts | 50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Exercise areas | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Children's equipment | 28 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other (See list) | 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Question 9 How do you feel about the Township and the City of Niles working together to develop a hiking/biking trail running from Plym Park in the City to proposed connecting trails in St. Joseph County, Indiana? <i>(Please check only 1 answer)</i></p> <p>A clear majority of respondents favor the proposed collaboration between the City of Niles and the Township to develop a hiking and biking trail. Only 1 percent expressed a negative opinion of the trail.</p> | <table border="1"> <caption>Survey Results for Question 9</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Great idea</td> <td>57%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Okay</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Don't care</td> <td>12%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not good</td> <td>1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Response | Percentage | Great idea | 57% | Okay | 30% | Don't care | 12% | Not good | 1% | | | | | | | | |
| Response | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Great idea | 57% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Okay | 30% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Don't care | 12% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Not good | 1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Question 10 What specific park or recreation project would you like Niles Charter Township to complete in the next 5 years?</p> | <p>See Appendix</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS

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.

Mission Statement

Niles Charter Township will encourage the implementation of comprehensive recreation planning that includes parks, open space, greenways, and historic, cultural, and artistic components.

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.

Heritage Water Trail designation – 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.²⁰ The Parks Board will carefully consider the resources necessary to seek and maintain this designation and weigh all factors relative to the benefits of having a portion of the St. Joseph River designated as a Heritage Water Trail.

Dog Park – The visioning session and the community survey revealed a strong interest in the incorporation of a dog park within one of the existing parks. The Parks Board will undertake the task of visiting each park and determining the feasibility of each for the most desirable location.

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.

Skate parks, etc. – Youth-related activities are very important to the health and well-being of the community and can quite readily become a tourism draw.

Land Acquisition – As budgets allow and parcels of land become available, it is the intent of the Township and the Parks Board to increase the size of existing parks, create and connect greenways, and preserve open space and natural resources.

²⁰ <http://www.wmich.edu/glcms/watertrails/>

Individual Park Projects

Projects for Community Park

| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Make improvements and consider enlarging ballfield | 3 | \$10,000 | 2 |
| Improve trail by increasing length and providing barrier-free access | 2 | \$5,000 | 1 |
| Add soccer fields | 2 | \$40,000 | 2 |
| Repair water fountain | 1 | \$250 | 1 |
| Explore options to purchase or acquire adjacent land | | TBD | 2 |
| Provide barrier-free access to amenities (possibly along 3 rd Street) | 1 | \$8,000 | 1 |
| Explore possibility of rehabilitating park shelter/hall | 3 | TBD | 2 |

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 the ballfield would increase the desirability of this field and encourage more use.

Trail improvements – Providing barrier-free access, increasing the length, and improving the condition of this trail would greatly enhance its overall appeal.

Soccer fields – With the growing popularity of soccer, the number of soccer fields in the area is not adequate to meet the demand. Providing local fields would enable some residents to participate in this sport without traveling to neighboring communities. An increased number of fields will also encourage residents of other municipalities to come to the township.

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.

Increase size – When property becomes available, it is a desire of the community to enlarge the size of this park.

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 – This shelter is showing signs of age and disrepair and when upgraded could become a popular amenity drawing people to the park.



Projects for N. Firemen’s Park

| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Study possible addition of soccer fields | 1 | N/A | 1 |
| Move slide | 2 | N/A | 2 |
| Purchase property to increase size of park | 2 | N/A | 2 |
| Add water fountains | 2 | \$500 | 1 |
| Add benches | 2 | \$500 | 2 |

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.

Property purchase – If the property to the east of the park becomes available, it would be a highly desirable addition to this park in terms of size and appearance.

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.

Benches – The intended primary users of the existing playground equipment are at least under age 10 years. Therefore, the secondary users of the park, the observers and caretakers, would appreciate a comfortable, shaded, seating area close enough to the playground to observe the activities.



Projects for S. Firemen’s Park (Youth Park)

| | 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 |

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 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.



Projects for Losensky Park

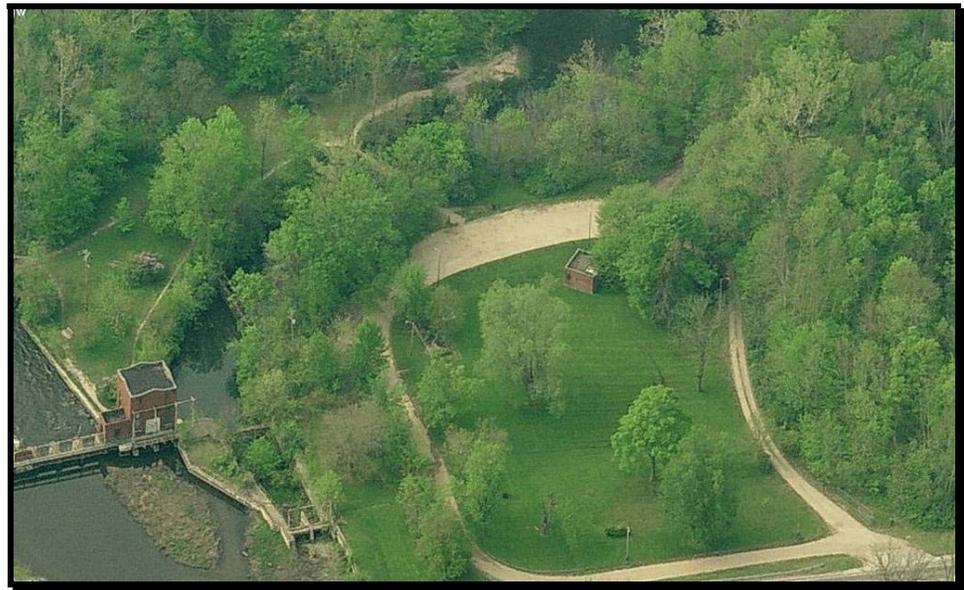
| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Explore feasibility of connection to Plym Park in City of Niles via trail system (Cost of actual trail TBD after study of options) | 1 | N/A | 1 |
| Build fish cleaning hut | 3 | \$5,000 | 2 |
| Possible location for dog park | 1 | N/A | 1 |

Project Descriptions

Trail system connection – Losensky Park is ideally located to be a destination spot or trailhead for the trailway connecting with Plym Park in the City of Niles and eventually with Beutter Park (Riverwalk Trail) in Mishawaka, Indiana.

Fish cleaning hut – With its location on the St. Joseph River, this park is frequently used as a fishing spot. Improving the park with a fish cleaning hut would greatly increase its desirability and usage. This would also provide an acceptable place for waste disposal.

Dog Park – This park has the space to possibly provide for the addition of a fenced-in dog park. Determining the compatibility of uses is an important consideration with this location.



Projects for Fulkerson Park

| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Consider possible locations for dog park | 1 | N/A | 1 |
| Install water fountains or water pump | 2 | \$500 | 1 |
| Improve practice field | 3 | \$5,000 | 2 |
| Improve and repair basketball courts | 2 | \$1,000 | 2 |
| Add soccer field | 2-5 | N/A | 2 |
| Make repairs 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.



Projects for Samson Park

| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Advertise this park through signage and addition to website with directions as part of marketing plan | 2 | \$200 | 1 |
| Consider adding a firepit 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

Signage – This park is not well-known because of its location within a small neighborhood subdivision out of sight of the main roads. Directional signage on Niles-Buchanan Road along with a park sign at the entrance of the park would help identify this park as available for public use. There is a small sledding hill that could also be noted and increase the year round appeal of the park.

Firepit – 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.

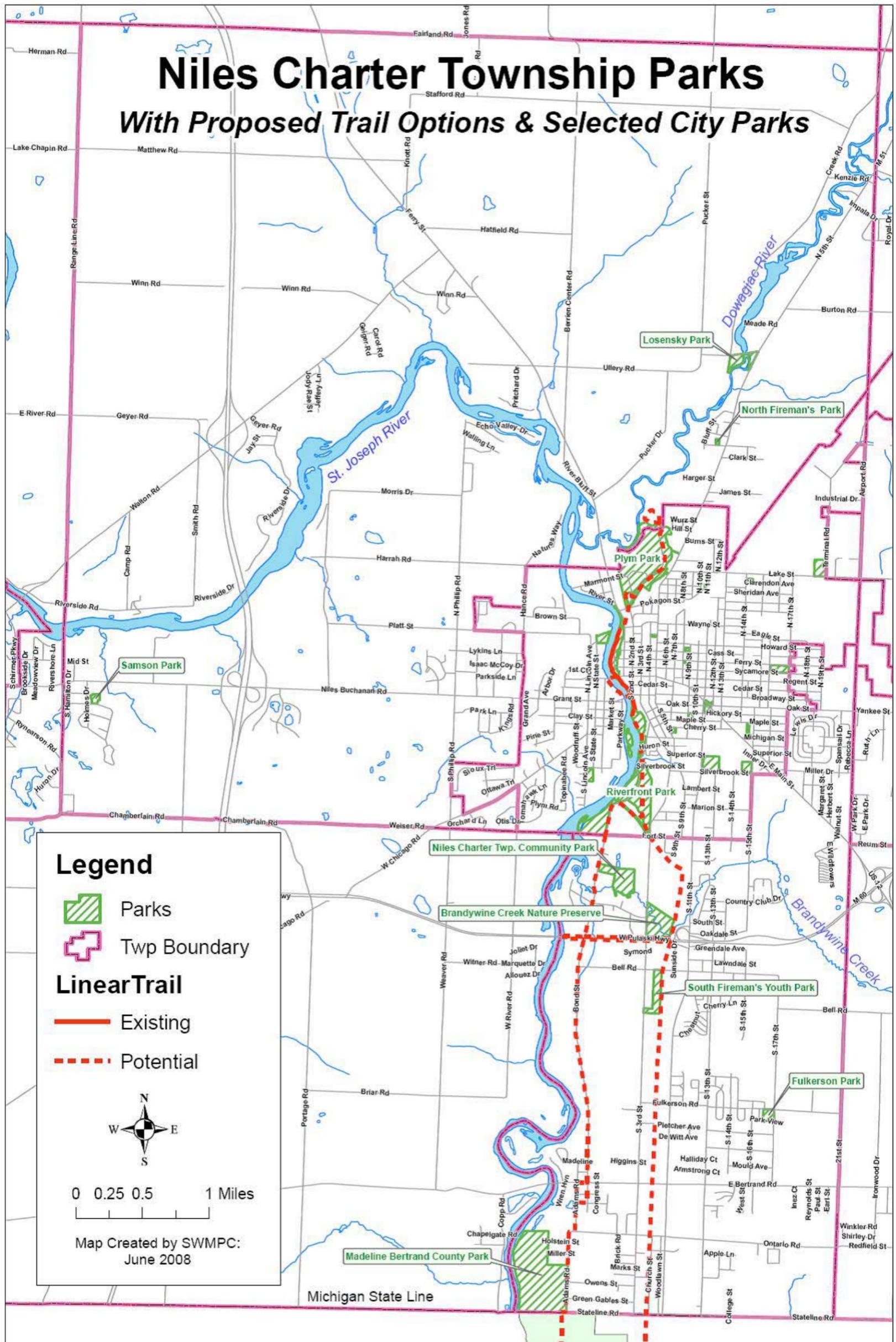
Light fixtures – Although not intended for night-time use, lighting, in good repair, would be a desirable addition to the park and would bring an additional element of safety to the neighborhood.



Projects for Brandywine Creek Nature Park

| | Time Frame | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Clean and maintain trails | 1 | N/A | 1 |
| Consider possible fish cleaning station | 2 | \$2,500 | 2 |
| Consider trail improvements including installation of bridge | 3-5 | \$2,500 | 2 |

Map of Proposed Trail
 (See description of trail in Action Plan – Page 39)



PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

Visioning Session

A visioning session was held March 19. In addition to the Niles Daily Star (below), announcements and invitations were posted on the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission's website, the Township Hall bulletin board, the Senior Center, and at Brandywine High School.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Niles Daily Star Online Edition. The main headline is "Niles Township seeks input about parks" dated Thursday, February 28, 2008. The article text states: "The Niles Charter Township Parks Board is seeking public opinion to help develop goals and projects for the parks and recreational facilities in the Township. All township residents are invited at the Township Hall (320 Bell Road) at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 19. This is a great opportunity to share your ideas for the future of the parks. Activities will include an opinion survey, a parks trivia contest, and plenty of opportunities for you to say what you like, what you don't like, and what you would like to see in the future for the parks and other recreational programming. The potential development of a Township hiking/biking trail connecting trailways in the City of Niles with proposed trails in St. Joseph County, Ind. will also be discussed. If you are unable to attend, you are encouraged to respond to the survey available at the Township Hall or download a copy from the following website: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission www.swmpc.org." A sidebar on the right features an advertisement for Jackie Murdoch, a real estate professional with Integrity Real Estate Professionals, including a phone number (269-684-5445) and a Chicago Title logo. The left sidebar contains navigation links such as "daily star menu", "news", "sports", and "today's poll".

Public Review and Comment Period

The public was invited to review and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan between June 11 and July 11, 2008. Copies of the Draft Recreation Plan were made available at the Township Hall and Township Library. The plan was also available on the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission's website.

Legal Notices 103

NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Niles Charter Township Parks Board will hold a Public Hearing regarding the approval and adoption of the Township's 2008-2013 Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan on July 14, 2008 at 7:00pm at Niles Township Hall at 320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan.

The Draft Recreation Plan will be available for the public's review and comment from June 11, 2008 - July 11, 2008 during regular business hours at the following locations in Niles Township: Township Hall (320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan) and the Niles District Library (620 East Main Street, Niles, Michigan).

Published: June 12, 2008

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www.nilesstar.com

Niles Daily Star, Niles, Michigan

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Published: June 12, 2008

THINK

RIDE NEEDED
to World War II reenactment at St. Joe/Benton Harbor Saturday, June 21. Call Norm at 269-683-5288 between 7 & 8 pm any day

Lost & Found 112
FOUND LOST BIG BLACK AND WHITE DOG
Please call (269)470-2154

FOUND MALE BLACK DOG
On Sunday, June 8, long shaggy hair, long tail and 4 white feet. Well behaved and friendly. Is currently staying at Dee's Auto Body at US12 & 60 Niles

LOST 2 DOGS
June 4, 2008 near Donnell Lake both Lab mix, one tan, one black if found please call (269)208-0983

Business Opportunities 200
POST OFFICE NOW HIRING!
Avg. Pay \$20/hr, \$57K/yr. incl. Fed Benefits and OT. Placed by adSource, not Aff. w/USPS who hires. 1-866-483-5617

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Open The Door To Your

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2 BEDROOM
1 bath house for rent. Full basement. 1 car garage, on double lot, \$600 security deposit, \$585 month plus utilities.
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3 bedroom, \$695 per month, with own fishing pier
Call Tony (574)303-0311

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With laundry room, nice fenced in yard, \$1500 down, \$500 month. USA Properties
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Houses for Sale 500
2 BEDROOM HOME
On 1 acre, own it for only \$550 per month. Call today
(269)782-3800 D&D Housing

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Large corner lot, new roof, updated electrical, newly painted, \$37,000. Call (269)782-7903, or (269)782-8044



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Brandywine Schools, 2 bedroom, 1 bath, 3 car garage with shop, full basement, 1 acre \$120,000
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Public Hearing - Township Board

The public was invited to a Public Hearing preceding the Township Board meeting (July 21, 2008) to ask questions and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan.

Legal Notices 103

Notice is hereby given that the Township Board of Trustees will hold a Public Hearing regarding the approval and adoption of the Township's Draft 2008-2013 Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan on July 21, 2008 at 7:05pm at Niles Township Hall at 320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan.

Published: July 11, 2008

Page 6 • Friday, July 11, 2008

FUTURIST BRIDES & GROOMS
 The Niles Daily Star, Cassopolis and Edwardsburg Area published a Wedding supplement. If we publish your engagement announcement you will receive this supplement at us at 615-693-725-0108, ext. 1230, Friday 9-5. Call ahead for availability. (269)687-7709

CLASSIFIEDS
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Serving Niles Since 1886

Legal Notices 103
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 Published: July 11, 2008
 General Notices 106

Business Opportunities 200
Considering a Career In Real Estate?
 Free Seminar, July 16th 7-8PM. \$50 discount on Pre-Licensing School for all who attend. To register call: 269-663-8585. Prudential One Realty.

Help Wanted 300
\$500 SIGN-ON BONUS!
 Guys & Gals! Tired of your Small

NO EMPLOYMENT REQUIRED
 Midwest runs, assigned conventional tractors, \$9,995. We offer full benefits and a competitive salary in an encouraging, fast-paced workplace. Applicants for this position should have a positive attitude and experience multi-tasking and an understanding of newspaper delivery. Experience in the field is a plus, but we will train the right candidate.

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NILES RIVER OAK
 1-2 bedrooms. Heat, water & trash paid.
 Call (269)687-8340
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\$300/MONTH!
 5 bed, 3 bath HUD. 4% down, 30 yrs @ 8%! For Listings 800-619-3816 x D794
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 2 bedroom, 1 bath on 2 acre all new doors, windows, paint, kitchen cabinets, gutter front steps, refinished pine wood floors, ceramic tile in bath, property includes a barn, \$81,000 (574)612-3546
 Cassopolis
DUTCH COLONIAL FARM HOUSE

Official Resolution of the Township Board

Following the Public Hearing on July 21, 2008, the Township Board voted to approve the Recreation Plan through a Resolution of Adoption.

RESOLUTION 08-06
Niles Charter Township, County of Berrien, State of Michigan
A Resolution to adopt the 5 Year, 2008-2013 Community Parks, Recreation,
Open Space, and Greenway Plan for Niles Charter Township

WHEREAS, Niles Charter Township, 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 July 14, 2008 during a regularly scheduled meeting of the Niles Charter Township Park Board, 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 Park Board 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 2008-2013 Recreation Plan as a guideline for improving recreation for the residents of Niles Charter Township.

Moved by Tonkin and supported by Noble that the forgoing resolution be passed this 21st day of July, 2008 by the Niles Charter Township board, County of Berrien, State of Michigan.

AYES: Cooper, Durm-Hiatt, Goodwin, Noble, Ringler, Tonkin
NAYS: None.
ABSENT: Myers

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 July 21, 2008 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.



Marge Durm-Hiatt,
Niles Charter Township Clerk

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

**NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP
JULY 21, 2008
REGULAR MEETING**

Clerk Durm-Hiatt called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Township Hall, 320 Bell Road. Noble led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Cooper, Durm-Hiatt, Goodwin, Ringler, Noble, Tonkin. Board members absent: Myers.

Appoint Chairperson: Durm-Hiatt motioned to appoint Ringler to chair the meeting in the absence of Supervisor Myers. Tonkin supported the motion.
All voting in favor. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Public Hearing: August Kuehn, chairman of the Niles Charter Township Park Commission, outlined the proposed master recreation plan and answered questions.

Agenda: Goodwin motioned to approve the agenda as printed. Cooper supported the motion.
All voting in favor. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Minutes: Durm-Hiatt motioned to approve the minutes for July 7, 2008 as submitted. Goodwin supported the motion.
All voting in favor. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Correspondence and Announcements: Durm-Hiatt read a letter from the City of Niles, thanking the Niles Charter Township Fire Department for their help during the critical fire in downtown Niles. Durm-Hiatt announced two MTA events for the board members to consider.

Clerk's Report: General O & M \$45,131.98, Fire O & M \$29,465.76, Sewer O & M \$14,166.75, Water O & M \$4,831.05, Public Improvement 770.65, Capital Improvement \$622.48, Fire Capital Improvement \$2,500.00, Sewer Maintenance Reserve \$2,872.10, **Grand Total \$100,360.77**
Cooper motioned to approve the clerk's report. Goodwin supported the motion.
ROLL CALL AYES: Tonkin, Cooper, Durm-Hiatt, Goodwin, Noble, Ringler.
NAYS: None **MOTION CARRIED.**

Comments from the Public: Tracy Vines read a letter, on behalf of Sharon Tyler, regarding her candidacy for state representative. Mrs. Pelkey asked if the board would consider an ordinance that would put limits on garage sales in the township. Sgt. Miller presented the May report of police activity in the township. Miller introduced Deputy Mark Hopkins and his K-9 partner "Diesel" that will be working in our community.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

Election Inspectors: Cooper motioned to approve the precinct election inspectors for the August 5, 2008 primary election. Goodwin supported.
All voting in favor. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Resolution 08-06 Master Recreation Plan: Tonkin motioned to accept the recommendation of the Township Park Commission and approve the 2008-2013 Niles Charter Township Recreation Plan, Noble supported.

ROLL CALL AYES: Cooper, Durm-Hiatt, Goodwin, Noble, Ringler, Tonkin.

NAYS: None

MOTION CARRIED.

Committee Reports:

Goodwin: None.

Noble: has been addressing tree issues on South 12th, road problems on Brick, and is working with AEP regarding a light fixture.

Ringler: None.

Durm-Hiatt: gearing up for the primary election, over 500 AV ballots have been sent out and training sessions are planned.

Tonkin: None.

Cooper: presented, for file, the building inspectors report for June.

Goodwin moved to adjourn at 7:30pm, Cooper supported.

All voting in favor.

MOTION CARRIED.

Respectfully submitted,



Marge Durm-Hiatt, Clerk

Published Synopsis of Meeting

**NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP
JULY 21, 2008
REGULAR MEETING SYNOPSIS**

Durm-Hiatt called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the township hall 320 Bell Road. Board members present: Cooper, Durm-Hiatt, Goodwin, Noble, Ringler, and Tonkin. Board member absent: Myers.

BOARD ACTION

Appointed Ringler to chair the meeting.
Held public hearing on the proposed recreation plan.
Approved agenda as presented.
Approved the July 7, 2008 meeting minutes.
Approved clerk's report, grand total: \$100,360.77.
Approved the election inspectors for the August 5, 2008 primary election.
Approved Resolution 08-06 Master Recreation Plan
Adjourned meeting at 7:30 p.m.
Complete minutes are available at the township hall.

Respectfully submitted,
Marge Durm-Hiatt, Clerk
Publish July 28, 2008

L00615197

Letter to County Planning Commission



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

185 East Main Street, Suite 701, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Phone: 269-925-1137 x 13 • Website: www.swmpc.org

klugs@swmpc.org

July 22, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Gruchot:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan 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,

Shelley Klug
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Letter to Regional Planning Agency



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

185 East Main Street, Suite 701, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Phone: 269-925-1137 x 13 • Website: www.swmpc.org

klugs@swmpc.org

July 22, 2008

K. John Egelhaaf, Executive Director
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
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 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,

Shelley Klug
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Department of Natural Resources Approval Letter



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



REBECCA A. HUMPHRIES
DIRECTOR

September 5, 2008

Ms. Shelley Klug
Associate Planner
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Ms. Klug:

SUBJECT: Niles Charter Township Recreation Plan

Please find attached your copy of the recreation plan checklist recently submitted to our office for approval. Your recreation plan has been approved.

Your recreation plan will expire **December 31, 2013**.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Our address is: **Grants Management, Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 30425, Lansing, MI 48909-7925.**

Sincerely,

Lisa McTiernan, Grant Coordinator
Grants Management
517-241-4717
mctiernanl@michigan.gov

LM:lh
Attachment
cc: Mr. William Myers, Niles Charter Township

Recreation Plan Certification Checklist



Michigan Department of Natural Resources-Grants Management

COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND GREENWAY 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, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans* provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). To be eligible for grant consideration, plans must be submitted to the DNR prior to the grant application deadline **with** a completed checklist that has been signed by an authorized official(s) of the local unit of government(s) submitting the plan.

| PLAN INFORMATION | | |
|--|---------|---|
| Name of Plan: Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan | | |
| List the community names (including school districts) covered by the plan | County | Month and year plan adopted by the community's governing body |
| Niles Charter Township | Berrien | July, 2008 |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

| 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 Annual and Projected Budgets for Operations, Maintenance, Capital Improvements and Recreation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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>Regional Authorities or Trailway Commissions Only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the Relationship between the Authority or Commission and the Recreation Departments of <input type="checkbox"/> 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 <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. RESOURCE INVENTORY (OPTIONAL)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS</p> |

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 June 12, 2008

Type of Notice Newspaper Ad

Plan Location Niles Public Library, websites, Township Hall

Duration of Draft Plan Public Review Period (Must be at Least 30 Days) 30 days

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 6/12/08 and 7/11/08

Name of Newspaper Niles Daily Star

Date of Meeting July 21, 2008 and July 14, 2008

Copy of the Minutes from the Public Meeting

7. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

8. ACTION PROGRAM

PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

Plans **must** be adopted by the highest level governing body (i.e., city council, county commission, township board). If planning is the responsibility of a Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Recreation Advisory Board or other local Board or Commission, the plan should **also** include a resolution from the Board or Commission recommending adoption of the plan by the governing body.

The local unit of government must submit the final plan to both the County and Regional Planning Agency for their information. Documentation that this was done must be submitted with the plan to the DNR.

Items 1, 3 and 4 below are **required** and must be included in the plan.

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: July 21, 2008

2. Official resolution of the Niles Charter Township Parks Commission or Board, recommending adoption of the plan by the governing body, dated: July 14, 2008

3. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to County Planning Agency dated: July 22, 2008

4. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to Regional Planning Agency dated: July 22, 2008

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 above and as set forth by the DNR.


 Authorized Official for the Local Unit of Government 8/18/08
 Date

This completed checklist must be signed and submitted with a locally adopted recreation plan to:

GRANTS MANAGEMENT
 MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
 PO BOX 30425
 LANSING, MI 48909-7925
 AUG 26 2008

MICHIGAN DNR
 GRANTS MANAGEMENT

DNR USE ONLY - APPROVAL

The recreation plan is approved by the DNR and the community (ies) covered by the plan, as listed on page 1 of this checklist is/are eligible to apply for recreation grants through

8/31/2008
 Date

By: 
 Grants Management 9/2/08
 Date