



Parks and Recreation

Master Plan Refresh

DECEMBER 18, 2023
CITY OF BELLEVILLE, MICHIGAN
6 Main Street, Belleville, MI 48111

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Executive Summary

As of 2023, we present a comprehensive refresh to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, reflecting the evolving needs and aspirations of our vibrant community. This refresh builds upon the foundation established in the original master plan, incorporating valuable insights gathered through extensive community engagement, rigorous assessments, and contemporary best practices in parks and recreation planning. As mentioned in the Executive Summary of the 2003 version of this plan, particular elements or features may change over time, as this document is meant to evolve with us as the parks evolve and community needs and desires change.

This Parks and Recreation Master Plan Refresh is a dynamic and community-driven roadmap, embodying our commitment to creating and maintaining spaces that enhance the quality of life for residents of our community. By embracing innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity, we aim to cultivate an environment that fosters well-being, recreation, and community cohesion.

The plan will update the City of Belleville’s community demographics, using 2020 census data, the current parks and recreation inventory, and outline the roadmap for maintenance, upgrades, and improvements to the city’s park infrastructure. Belleville is known for its high quality of life, proximity to Belleville Lake, a “Main Street” downtown filled with locally owned businesses, and just a few minutes’ drive from major amenities.

The success of this refresh depends on continued collaboration with the community, local government, and stakeholders. Together, we look forward to bringing this vision to life and creating parks and recreational spaces that reflect the unique character and aspirations of our community.

Sincerely,

Jason Smith, MPA
City Manager

Introduction

This process started in 1995 with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which was redone in 2003 by the city, the Parks and Recreation Commission, City Council, and McKenna Associates. This update will celebrate the accomplishments made by the city since the 1995 plan and reflect the changes in the community's overall makeup. The refreshed plan will serve as a guide in decision-making, and aid in the targeting of available grant funding.

The plan includes an update of the social and demographic characteristics considered in the context of the community's historical, physical, and geographical circumstances. All the existing facilities and programs available in the city have been re-inventoried and reviewed. The inventory includes City, school, county, regional, state, and private facilities.

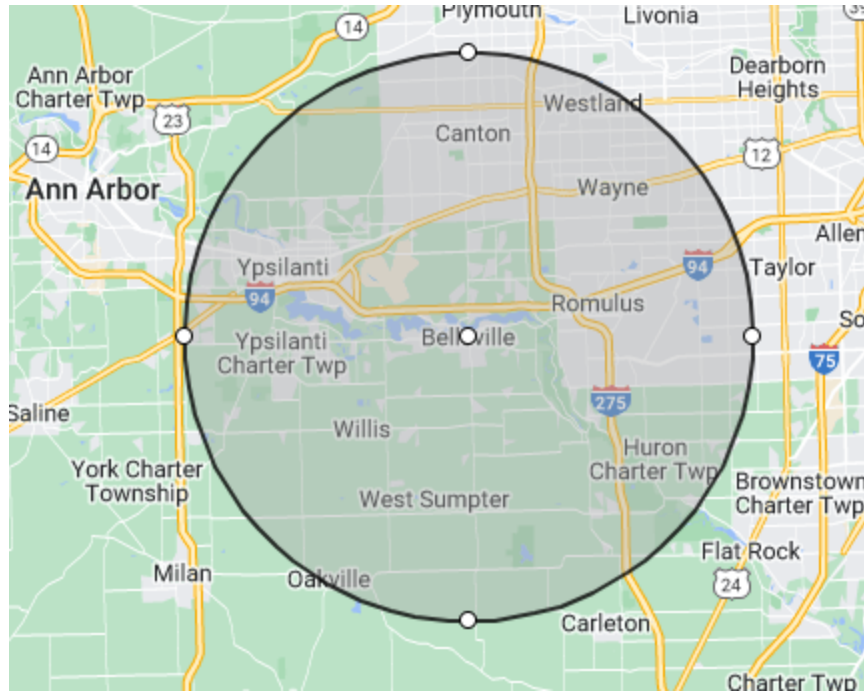
An important goal of the plan is to establish a basis for funding the various improvement projects and programming. The city has used a variety of funding sources including general fund revenues, and grants from State and Federal agencies. It is intended that additional funding be obtained from all available sources.

Community Description

Physical Characteristics

Regional Setting

From the 2003 plan: "The City of Belleville lies in the gently rolling terrain along the southern shoreline of Belleville Lake in the center of Van Buren Township in Wayne County, Michigan. While the city is mainly a residential community, it does contain a unique, and traditional downtown". The city is approximately 9 miles from Detroit Metro Airport to the east, and 21 miles from Ann Arbor to the West.



Map 1 - Regional Setting

Community Resources

The original plat of the Village of Belleville was recorded in 1848. In 1905, Belleville was first incorporated as a Village. In 1924-25, the Detroit Edison Company constructed a dam across the Huron River, which created the six-mile-long lake now known as Belleville Lake. In 1946, Belleville became incorporated as a city. The lake is active in the summer, with several boat launches and recreational activities taking place.

The community is also home to the Belleville Area District Library, with its new facility constructed in 2020. The library supports residents in the Tri-Community (Sumpter and Van Buren Townships, and the City of Belleville). The Belleville Area Museum, a partnership between the City of Belleville and Van Buren Township, re-opened in 2023 after interior renovations.

The city also features numerous places of worship and service clubs. The Belleville Yacht Club resides just outside the city limits but is very active in community events.

Educationally, Van Buren Public Schools features three schools within the city limits; Belleville High School, Owen Intermediate School (formerly South Middle School), and Edgemont Elementary School. Wayne County Community College's Western Campus sits just 4.5 miles from the city, with Washtenaw Community College 9.5 miles away. Eastern Michigan University is ten miles from Belleville, and the University of Michigan is 17 miles away.

Generalized Existing Land Use

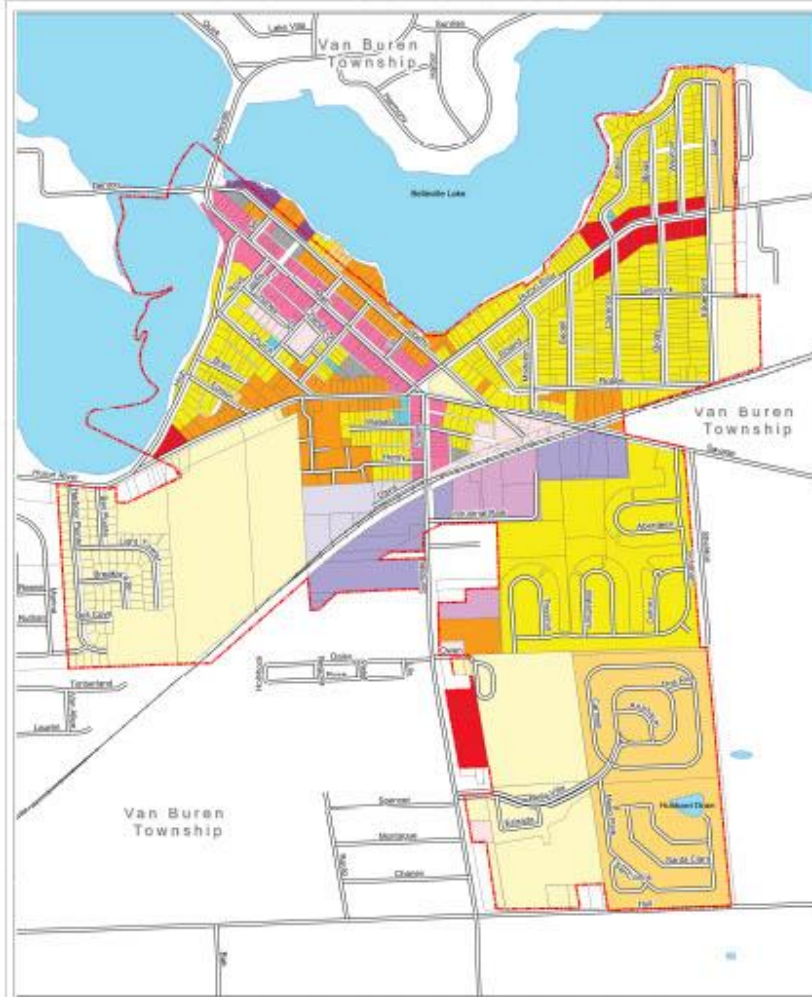
Residential uses are the dominant land use in the city. The commercial uses run through downtown and along the major arterial roads. Newly-constructed condos and single-family homes along Belleville Lake in the Doane's Landing area are zoned as a Planned Use Development. A small industrial area extends along the south side of the railroad tracks. The city features four parks within the city limits.

Many single-family homes are established on the east side of the city, with mixed uses emanating from the downtown area. There are two large subdivisions, Harbor Pointe to the west, and Victoria Commons to the east. To the south lies the Belle Villa neighborhood. Belle Villa Lakes is a senior community, and Belle Villa Meadows is a mobile home community.

Transportation

Belleville has several transportation options within a few minutes' drive of the city. I-94 is just north of Belleville, and I-275 is just two miles east. Willow Run Airport is just five miles west, and Detroit Metropolitan International Airport is eight miles east. Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) buses also provide transportation.

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Zoning Map City of Belleville Wayne County, Michigan

Digital User Note:
Click on a district heading in the map legend to go directly to the corresponding district regulations.



- R-1 One-family Residential (9,600 sq ft)
- R-2 One-family Residential (8,800 sq ft)
- R-3 Residential
- R-M Multiple-family Residential
- B-1 Local Business
- B-2 Central Business
- B-3 General Business
- O-1 Office Service
- I-1 Industrial
- I-2 Industrial
- I-P Industrial Park
- P-1 Vehicular Parking
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- Belleville City Limit

Adopted _____, 2013

Mayor _____

Clerk _____

clearzoning
CLEAR AND CONNECTED

Sources: Michigan Geographic Data Library,
City of Belleville
May 14, 2013



Population and Households

Growth Trends and Projections

Belleville is considered a “bedroom” community with most residents working outside the city. From 1980 to 2000, Belleville experienced some significant gains in population, thanks in large part to Harbor Pointe and Victoria Commons subdivisions being built. As accurately predicted by the 2003 parks plan, future growth did not sustain this rate, as new growth has emerged through smaller redevelopment projects and residential infill.

Table 1 - General Population Characteristics

Category	1980	2000	% Change 1980-2000	2000	2020	% Change 2000-2020	Total Change 1980-2020
Total Population	3366	3997	8.57%	3997	3978	-0.24%	8.33%
Total Households	1430	1842	12.59%	1842	1847	0.14%	12.73%
Average Household Size	2.35	2.16	-4.21%	2.16	2.2	0.92%	-3.30%
Average Family Size	2.89	2.87	-0.35%	2.87	2.08	-15.96%	-16.30%
Median Age	31	37.5	^ 6.5 years	37.5	40.9	^ 3.4 years	^ 9.9 years

From 1980 to 2020, the city has experienced an 8.33% increase in population, with the majority of that occurring from 1980 to 2000. After a decline in the last two decades of the 20th century, the average household size has increased in the first two decades of the 21st century, from 2.16 in 2000 to 2.2 in 2020. The community’s median age continues to rise, although at a slower rate. From 1980 to 2000, the median age jumped 6.5 years, and just 3.4 years from 2000 to 2020.

Age Structure

The type of recreation services needed in a community partly depends on the makeup of the population. The table below describes the sizes of Belleville’s age groups. The under 5 age group makes up 9.28% of the population. This group relies on “tot lot” style parks and day care facilities for its recreation needs. Children aged 5 to 19 place focus more on active recreation, such as basketball, ball fields (soccer, baseball, football, etc.), swimming, and indoor facilities. This demographic represents 13.17% of Belleville’s population (5.63% for ages 5-14, and 7.54% for ages 15-19). The 20 to 44 age group leans toward a hybrid of active recreation favored by the younger age groups, and passive recreation that older age groups tend to prefer. This group represents the largest age segment in Belleville, at 33.91%. Mature families (45-64) and retirement-aged population demand access to passive recreation, with a small need for some low-impact active recreation. These groups tend to focus on social meetings such as card games and bingo, as well as walking, jogging, and pickleball. The 45-64 age group is the second largest group in the city, at 25.09%, and the 65 and older group is the third largest at 18.55%.

The largest increase from 2000 is the 65 and older age group, increasing 3.39% in the last 20 years. This group is followed very closely by the Under 5 age group, at 3.32%. Belleville has seen the sharpest decline in the 5 to 14 age group, with a 6.4% drop, and the 20 to 44 age group with a decline of 4.07% since 2000.

Table 2 - Population Age Structure

Age Group	Life Phase	2000		2020	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 5	Pre-School	238	5.95%	369	9.28%
5 to 14	Elementary School	481	12.03%	224	5.63%
15 to 19	Secondary School	226	5.65%	300	7.54%
20 to 44	Family Forming	1518	37.98%	1349	33.91%
45 to 64	Mature Families	928	23.22%	998	25.09%
65 and Over	Retirement	606	15.16%	738	18.55%

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Belleville is a predominately white community, with 68.98% of the population identifying as white. This segment of the population saw the largest decrease between 1980 and 2020, down 28.29%. Individuals who identify as black saw the largest increase in population, making up 16.99% of Belleville’s population, an increase of 15.57% since 1980. The next largest segment is those identifying as multi-racial or other, at 6.99%, an increase of 6.31%. Residents who identified as Latinx make up 5.98% of the population, with those identifying as Native, Asian, or Pacific Islander making up 0.08% and 0.98%, respectively.

Table 3 – Population Racial Composition

Ethnicity	1980		2000		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	3274	97.27%	3499	87.54%	2744	68.98%
Black	48	1.43%	315	7.88%	676	16.99%
Latino	21	0.62%	101	2.53%	238	5.98%
Native		0.00%	16	0.40%	3	0.08%
Asian or Pacific Islander		0.00%	47	1.18%	39	0.98%
Other	23	0.68%	38	0.95%	278	6.99%

Education

Belleville continues to see increases in the post-secondary educational attainment. While 81.7% of the population report having completed high school, this is down from 87.7% in 2000, but an increase from the 1990 numbers. Residents reporting having completed a bachelor’s degree also declined to 20.2% from the 2000 numbers. The one segment where Belleville saw an increase in reported educational attainment was in the Graduate, Professional, and Doctorate degrees, at 12.1%. This number is up from 10% in 2000 and significantly higher than the 1990 reporting of 5.8%. Residents with a greater level of education tend to place a greater value and higher demand from their community on leisure activities.

Table 4 – Educational Attainment

Category	1990	2000	2020
High School Diploma	78.2%	87.7%	81.7%
Bachelor’s Degree	13.6%	24.2%	20.2%
Graduate or Professional Degree	5.8%	10.0%	12.1%

Income Characteristics

The median household income during the 2020 census for Belleville was \$51,602; which is up from the 2000 census reporting of \$44,196; however, this number is significantly less when the 2000 median household income is adjusted for inflation. The median income for the year 2000 when viewed in 2020 dollars is \$67,481.01. Based upon Belleville’s average family size of 2.08, approximately 28.13% of the population lives below the 2023 Federal Poverty Guidelines, which is \$39,440.

Table 5 – Income Characteristics

Income	Number	Percent
Under \$10k	260	6.54%
\$10k - \$30k	547	13.75%
\$30k - \$50k	638	16.04%
\$50k - \$75k	718	18.05%
\$75k - \$100k	284	7.14%
\$100k - \$125k	215	5.40%
\$125k - \$150k	76	1.91%
\$150k - \$200k	149	3.75%
\$200k and Above	143	3.59%

Income data has important recreation planning implications since residents with low to moderate incomes rely heavily on public recreation opportunities versus for-profit and private facilities. This is especially true for residents below the poverty line and senior populations.

Implications

The recreational implications of Belleville's characteristics include:

- Belleville Lake provides an excellent opportunity for water-related recreational programming and facility development. Belleville Lake is a community-wide and regional recreational resource.
- Good highway connections nearby facilitate development of recreational attractions that can be used to boost tourism in the community.
- The central business district is connected to the park system and surrounding residential neighborhoods. It can provide complementary recreational facilities for the community while providing useful facilities for community visitors and business. The downtown's proximity to Belleville Lake is an important community resource.
- Natural features that are not useful for development can be used for nature trails.
- The population makeup is such that there is a need for both active and passive recreation opportunities to satisfy the demands of all age segments. The makeup should be tracked regularly to evolve and adapt the plan to demographic changes.
- Income trends indicate the need for public facilities rather than private clubs. Pickleball courts, updated playscapes, and water resources will be well-received by this population.

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Inventory & Evaluation of Existing Recreational Resources

The City of Belleville has four primary outdoor parks covering approximately 37.06 acres.

Primary Parks

Horizon Park

Horizon Park is an approximately 1.31-acre linear park between High Street and Belleville Lake that provides exquisite views. Horizon Park is home to the Belleville War Memorial and features a picnic pavilion, arbor, benches and tables, restrooms, lake access and wonderful lake views. The Horizon Park Waterfront offers a lakeside boardwalk, courtesy boat docks, and ADA accessible canoe/kayak launch. A favorite activity of area residents is watching the sun set over the lake at Horizon Park.

Previous proposals to increase use have included the planting of spreader shrubs to prevent soil erosion at the bank, and a natural amphitheater.

Doane's Landing

At the foot of the Belleville Bridge, Doane's Landing is a community gathering place for individual quiet time and for fun events offering lakefront vistas.

Victory Park

Victory Park is a 1.75-acre park located in the heart of Belleville, at the intersection fondly known as "Five Points". Victory Park offers a children's play area, picnic facilities, a gazebo, and features a statue of the famous explorer LaSalle. It is home to the renovated Victory Station building. Victory Station is available to rent for meetings and special events. A statue of LaSalle was privately donated in 1985 and faces the Five Points intersection.

Village Park

This 24-acre park was developed in conjunction with Victoria Commons, a 220-unit single family residential development. It features an ADA accessible children's playground, walking trails, basketball courts, and sand volleyball courts. A striking feature of Village Park are three large ponds and the surrounding trails; the main path around the large pond was paved and made ADA accessible in 2010.

Secondary Parks and Community Spaces

Fourth Street Square

A section of Fourth Street from Main Street to an alley running behind the storefronts on the north side of Main Street was closed to create a downtown square in 1984. The square features seating and

landscaping and serves as the central point for events and programming within the Central Business District. It is the epicenter of most activities including the Farmer’s Market, Christmas Parade, LakeFest, and WinterFest.

Liberty Bell Park

Liberty Bell Park is located on the east side of Belleville Road as it becomes Main Street at the north entrance to Belleville. The park was officially designated as such in 1983 and has been maintained as a scenic greenspace. The site has Belleville Lake frontage with excellent views, and it is home to the “Booville” signage during the month of October.

Belleville High School

Belleville High School is located within the City of Belleville on over 34 acres of land. Included on this land are three ball diamonds, a football field with bleachers and lights, a track, and eight community tennis courts, which were funded by city organizations.

Owen Intermediate School

Owen Intermediate School is situated on about 29 acres. The school has a gym, football field, ball diamonds, and a soccer field that can be reserved by community organizations. This facility includes nearly five acres of dense woods and a ready-made nature study area.

Edgemont Elementary School

Edgemont Elementary School is located on over 8 acres and has a playground, soccer field, and gymnasium which are used for neighborhood activities. This area provides recreation opportunities and open space for surrounding residential neighborhoods.

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Summary of Recreational Deficiencies

Park space is sufficient. Ongoing maintenance and improvement of existing facilities will increase use and benefit the community.

Other observations of needs and deficiencies based on the preceding inventory and analysis include the following:

- Active non-school recreational facilities are limited in the city. Except for school grounds, there are no soccer or softball fields in the community. Village Park does include basketball courts.
- Belleville's circumscribed land area and small population limit the development of a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department with its own staff.
- Belleville's distinctive identity that includes a traditional town plan and Main Street, as well as its location on Belleville Lake give Belleville an attractive sense of place and make it an appealing destination throughout the region with significant recreational implications.
- The City of Belleville has significant regional recreational assets due to its location to Belleville Lake and Lower Huron MetroPark. Playing a crucial role in non-motorized pathways and networks to connect these assets to the people will be a key undertaking for Belleville.

Public Input & Survey

The city has not conducted any public input or survey work since the 2003 plan. At that time, the community had the following feedback:

- The geographic distribution of the parks rated very high, while recreation opportunities were ranked satisfactory to fair.
- A family recreation center, swimming, basketball/volleyball courts, and a visual/performing arts center received strong support for indoor facilities.
- Outdoor recreational needs included more non-motorized paths for jogging, cycling, and general exercise scored very high. Outdoor swimming, picnic facilities, and nature trails also received support.
- Residents voiced a desire for swim programming, nature and conservation programming, music, crafts, dance/theater and visual arts.
- The potential costs/fees, crowding, locations, limited hours, noise, security, and crime were listed as the most commonly cited problems.

Recreation Goals & Objectives

The City of Belleville has had much success in accomplishing several short-range objectives over the course of the 1995 and 2003 plans. The new goals for this plan are somewhat like the 2003 plan:

- Continue to enhance and improve the City’s parks by expanding the range of features for each facility as appropriate within the existing park footprints.
- Ensure that the needs of all age groups, such as teens and senior citizens, are addressed. Public/Private partnerships or an agreement with the school system to provide indoor facilities to offset the limited space available, particularly for a new indoor recreation facility.
- Continue to work in partnership with Van Buren and Sumpter Townships, Wayne County, and the State of Michigan to enhance recreational opportunities.

Parks and Recreation Plan

In reviewing the existing parks plan, the physical and demographic traits of the community, and the inventory of existing parks, an assessment of need was completed. The following projects are proposed for 2023-2033.

Proposed Projects

Project 1: Organizational Opportunities with Van Buren Township

The City of Belleville and Van Buren Township share numerous assets. The residents rely on many of Van Buren’s recreational activities, while Van Buren residents identify strongly with the character and sense of place in the City of Belleville. The need to work cooperatively and complementary to one another is imperative.

1. Develop an ad hoc joint working group or committee to identify and plan for recreation activities.
2. Investigate joint grant opportunities, particularly with greenways or downtown public space connectivity.

Project 2: Greenways and Non-Motorized Network

Over the last several years, a linked network of greenways and non-motorized paths across the entire state has gone from a vision to a reality. Working with organizations that are heavily involved in the trail connectivity will be important for the completion of these trails, as well as connecting the City to other regional assets.

1. Complete grants for route planning, concept design, and engineering.
2. Complete a Planning and Design study for connectivity.
3. Funding phased improvements.

Project 3: Horizon Park

Horizon Park has been identified by the City Council as the park that should be a “jewel” of the Belleville Park system. Proposals for development have been presented throughout the years.

1. Planting spreader shrubs to prevent soil erosion of the bank.
2. Continued/Improved boardwalks with safe lake level access, including ADA compliant access to the lakeshore.
3. Landscaping, terracing, or other methods of shore erosion.
4. Improved lighting along the walking areas.
5. Construction of a natural amphitheater.

Project 4: Park Improvements

Continue to improve and enhance existing city parks with ongoing maintenance, improved and updated facilities, such as playscapes, landscaping, and accessibility.

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Parks and Recreation Funding

Parks and Recreation Funding

Given the small size of the city and limited funding available, general revenues are dedicated to fund basic city operations. Capital funding of new projects is generally limited with most funding of new facilities provided through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. In addition to CDBG funding, the city also actively seeks grant opportunities.

The city does not employ a parks and recreation staff or director, nor does it sponsor organized recreational programming.

Funding Sources

There are several existing or potential funding sources available for park and recreation facility improvements.

- **General Fund.** The general fund is the basic operating fund of the city and the traditional source of operating funds for parks and recreation. General Fund revenues are derived from property taxes, state-shared revenues, federal grants, license and permit fees, charges for services, interest on investments, and court fines or forfeitures. Recreation program user fees are usually channeled through the General Fund.
- **Millage.** A property tax millage can be used to finance specific parks and recreation projects or for the operation of recreation facilities. The dedicated millage has gained favor in many communities because the voters are increasingly wary of approving millage increases for non-specified purposes. Approval by voters is required before a millage can be assessed. Any millage is subject to a periodic renewal by vote of the people.
- **User Fees.** Fees can be charged by the city to the users of specific recreation facilities or for enrollment in recreation programming. User fees can provide a substantial amount of support for certain parks and recreation facilities. Other communities in the region have established user fees for certain facilities.
- **Bond Programs.** Several bond programs can be used for parks and recreation facilities.
 - **General Obligations Bonds.** General Obligations Bonds are issued for specific community projects and may not be used for other purposes. These bonds are usually paid off with property tax revenues.
 - **Revenue Bonds.** Revenue Bonds are issued for construction of public projects that generate revenues. The bonds are then retired using income generated by the project.
 - **Special Assessment Bonds.** Special Assessment Bonds are issued to pay for projects that benefit a particular segment of the population. For example, recreation improvements

that benefit a defined subdivision or neighborhood could be financed using special assessment bonds, in which case the residents who receive the benefit would be assessed.

- **Create a Regional Recreational Authority.** The city should pursue an agreement with the other Tri-Community entities to create a broader funding base. Creation of a regional authority could achieve that goal.
- **State-Level Grants.** The State of Michigan has several departments that offer grants for various programming and assets. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is a prime source of parks and recreation grant funding.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).** Revenues obtained through the federal CDBG program can be used for a variety of projects, including development of recreation facilities.
- **Donations.** Businesses, corporations, private clubs, and community organizations will often contribute to recreation and other improvement programs to benefit the communities in which they are located. Private sector contributions may be in the form of monetary contributions, the donation of the land, providing volunteers, or the contribution of equipment and facilities.
- **Foundations.** A foundation is a special non-profit organization that is established as a mechanism through which land, cash, and securities can be donated for the benefit of parks and recreation services. The assets are distributed by the foundation Board of Directors.