

FIVE-YEAR RECREATION PLAN

draft 2026-2030





Five-Year Recreation Plan 2026-2030

For the Village of Middleville,
Thornapple Township, & Thornapple
Kellogg School District



Thornapple Area Parks and Recreation Commission Board

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1. INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of this 2026 - 2030 Community Recreation Plan is to enable the Village of Middleville, the Township of Thornapple and the Thornapple Kellogg School District to improve the quality of life for its citizens. A recreation plan represents a foundation policy statement about what a community is, what its residents' value and what those residents hope the community will become in connection with parks and recreation facilities and services.

In the late 1990s, the Village of Middleville, the Township of Thornapple and the Thornapple Kellogg School District determined that a collaborative approach to planning and the delivery of recreation facilities and services would best serve the citizens of the community. Consequently, the Thornapple Area Parks and Recreation Commission (TAPRC) was established, with representation from the three jurisdictions serving on the TAPRC Board. Chapter 3 discusses the administrative character and organizational structure of TAPRC in detail.

TAPRC appreciates the significant contribution of recreation to the quality of life and the physical health of its citizens. This recognition has been manifested in this effort to update its Recreation Plan with the hopes of improving the local park system and enhancing amenities. While quality of life in the community is excellent, the three entities have chosen to take an active role in enhancing recreation opportunities by updating this plan.

Parks and recreation planning is an exercise engaged to anticipate change, promote needed change, and to control or direct recreational development in such a way as to benefit the entire community. It has the aim of harmonizing the available recreational resources and activities with the environmental, aesthetic, and cultural requirements of the community.

This Community Recreation Plan provides a policy and decision-making guide regarding future improvements. Key planning issues are identified, a clear set of goals and objectives are outlined, and specific implementation projects are identified. This Plan reflects the community's deep concern for natural features, a strong commitment to strengthen sense of community, and a desire to heighten awareness of local and regional amenities. The plan outlines the preferred future for parks and recreation and a comprehensive plan to realize it.

While the current Parks and Recreation Plan was originally drafted in 2016 and updated in 2021, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) requires that recreation plans be reviewed and updated every five years to keep them current. Following the DNR's guidelines establishes TAPRC's eligibility to apply for grant funds that would otherwise be unavailable. Therefore, the purpose of this plan is to determine and prioritize future improvements, and also to establish eligibility to apply for certain grant funds to assist in implementing the plan's recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy and implementation direction of this Plan aims to improve community recreation through four strategic goals focused on riverfront enhancements, trail development, facility improvements, and athletic complex planning. While the goals and objectives and action program are described in detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, the following includes a consolidated description to help serve as an reference and set the tone for the vision outlined in this document.

Goal 1: River-Themed Improvements

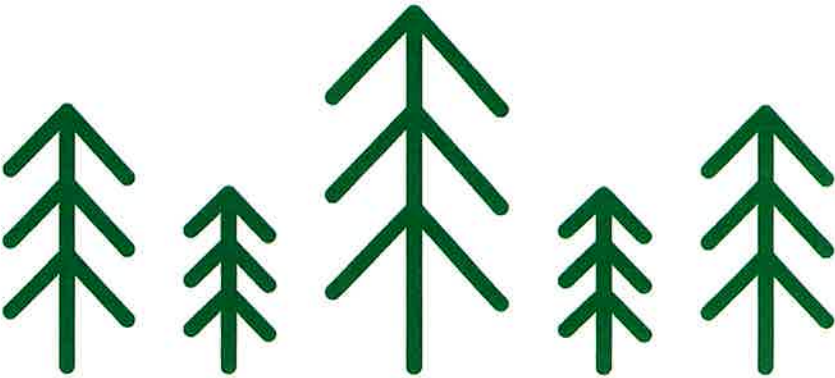
The Thornapple River will be elevated as a defining community asset supporting recreation, tourism, and environmental sustainability. Key initiatives include expanding river access between the dam and boat launch, improving fishing and viewing opportunities, and creating safe pedestrian access points. The Plan envisions establishing a formal water trail with new launch sites, rest areas, and tubing access, alongside the installation of birdwatching and fishing platforms and interpretive signage to enrich user experience and awareness of the river’s natural and cultural significance.

YEAR	ASSOCIATED ACTION PROGRAM STEP
2026	Expand and improve public access to the Thornapple River within the Village and between the Village and Parmalee Road through brush clearing, bank stabilization, and other low-cost enhancements.

Goal 2: Trails and Non-Motorized Facilities

TAPRC will foster a comprehensive network of trails and connections linking neighborhoods, schools, parks, and regional destinations. Priorities include paving and extending the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail, developing trailheads with restrooms, maps, and water stations, and partnering with local and state agencies to secure funding. Collaboration with the Thornapple-Kellogg School District will promote safe walking and biking routes, while improved signage and wayfinding will enhance safety and encourage use.

YEAR	ASSOCIATED ACTION PROGRAM STEP
2027	Continue the development and extension of the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail, by securing right-of-way land necessary to complete connections north to Caledonia and south to Hastings.
Flexible	Develop a sign program and improve wayfinding signage for the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail.



Goal 3: Maintenance and Improvement of Existing Park Facilities

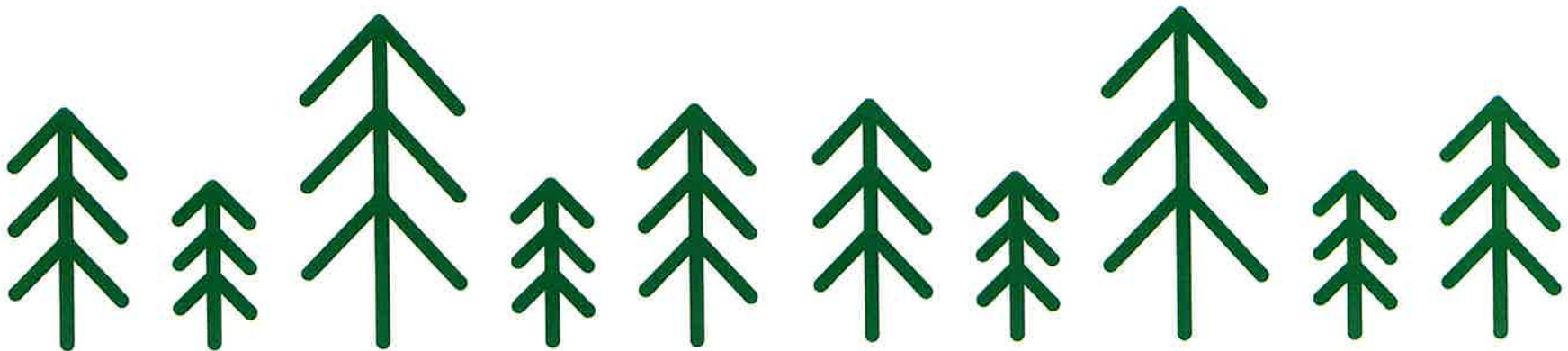
TAPRC is committed to maintaining high-quality, accessible, and modern park facilities. Efforts will focus on achieving ADA compliance and universal design, developing concept plans to guide park investments, and adding amenities to improve comfort and usability. Identifying locations for new amenities—such as pickleball courts—will respond to evolving community needs.

YEAR	ASSOCIATED ACTION PROGRAM STEP
2028	Conduct a comprehensive inventory of all park facilities and prioritize parks for concept plan development.
2029	Complete one to three park concept plans.

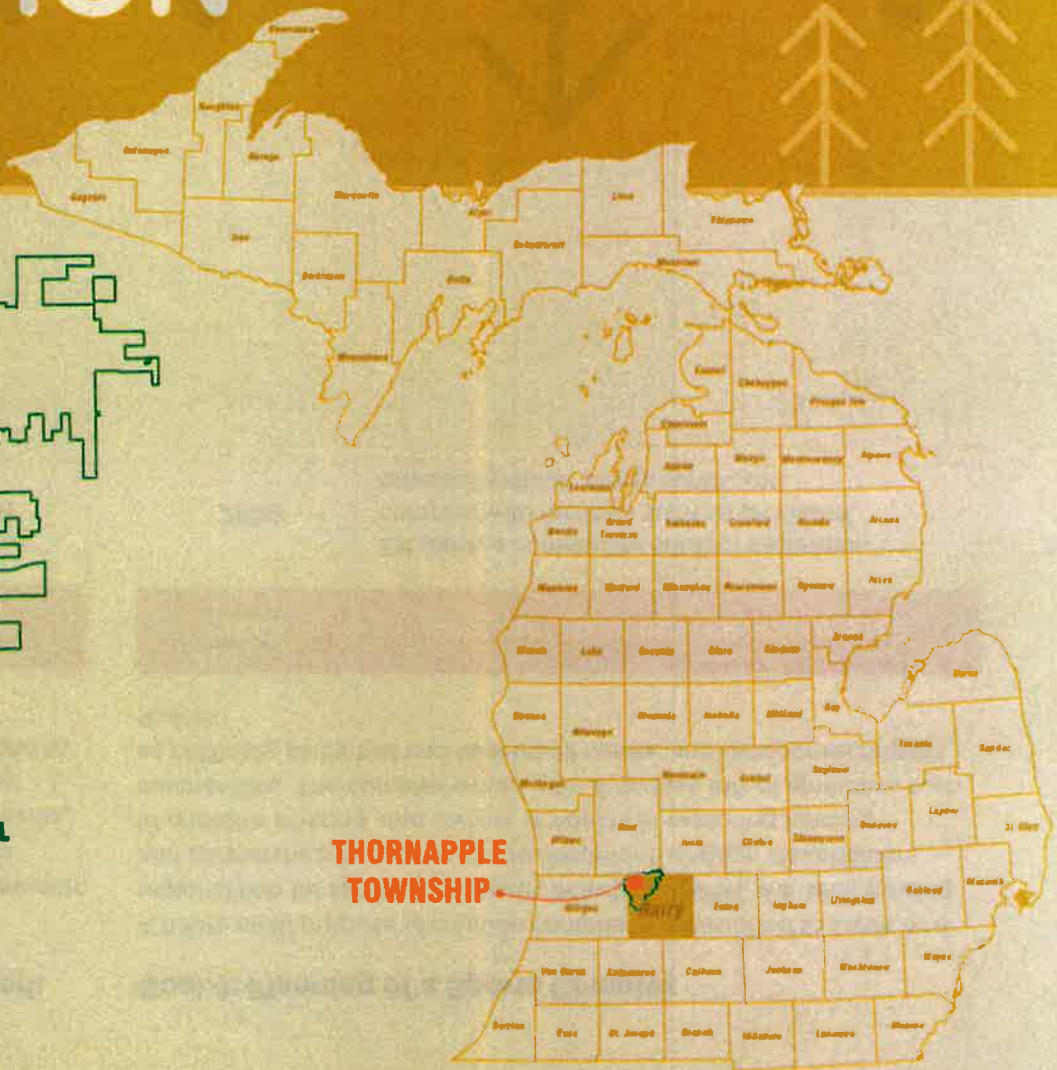
Goal 4: Planning of a Sports Complex

A future multi-purpose recreation complex is envisioned to serve as a regional hub for sports and athletic activities. TAPRC will seek funding and partnerships to support its development, engage stakeholders to prioritize phasing, and involve residents in exploring funding mechanisms. The complex would offer a diverse mix of amenities such as ballfields, pickleball and basketball courts, and outdoor recreation spaces.

YEAR	ASSOCIATED ACTION PROGRAM STEP
2030	Establish a community outdoor recreation complex with facilities such as pickleball, baseball/softball, playgrounds, etc.



DESCRIPTION



The TAPRC service area includes the Village of Middleville, the Township of Thornapple and the Thornapple Kellogg School District, in northwest Barry County. The Thornapple Kellogg School District extends beyond the village and township political boundaries, and overlies several additional townships. These other townships are served by this recreation plan to the extent that they fall within the Thornapple Kellogg School District.

CHARACTER OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Village of Middleville is a turn of the century community, with a traditional main street and a scenic river flowing alongside its downtown. The 2.1-square mile Village was established in the nineteenth century amidst agricultural fields and open land, and retains much of its original character. Single-family residential neighborhoods are the dominant land use in the Village. Many of the homes are almost one hundred years old and are built on smaller lots compared to homes in Thornapple Township, establishing a quaint, close-knit community character. Walkable, tree-lined streets lead to the central business district, bounded on the west by the Thornapple River and Stagecoach Park. The central business district includes a small concentration of businesses and has benefited from several aesthetic and functional enhancements that make the area more attractive to pedestrians. More conventional, strip retail development exists along M-37.

M-37 is the primary transportation route in northwest Barry County, providing connections between Hastings, which is southeast of the service area, and Grand Rapids to the northwest. The mostly two-lane state highway serves approximately 10,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day in the service area. M-37 also experiences a high percentage of motor freight or commercial truck traffic, primarily serving the industries in Hastings and Middleville.

The Village is located about 9 miles northwest of Hastings, the seat of Barry County, and about 4 miles from Caledonia Township, which was Kent County's second fastest-growing community between 2010 and 2020.

Thornapple Township is primarily a rural community that has experienced relatively rapid growth. Neighborhoods are suburban in character, with curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs, but many residents live large-lot rural parcels scattered along county roads. Homes in the Township are relatively newer than homes in the Village, and median household incomes tend to be higher in the Township.

The Township boasts scenic open spaces and some significant natural features, which contribute to the beauty and desirability of the community. The undeveloped lands within the TAPRC service area are predominantly croplands/pasture and deciduous upland forest. Significantly, large blocks of forest land exist in the nearby Yankee Springs and Middleville State Game areas. These valuable resource areas are owned by the State of Michigan. Privately owned woodlands are also extensive within the service area, including large homesteads in Thornapple Township and areas within the Thornapple River valley.

Middleville is surrounded by Thornapple Township and although the two municipalities are politically distinct, the two jurisdictions frequently collaborate on public services.

THORNAPPLE KELLOGG SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Thornapple Kellogg School District is one of the largest school districts in the area geographically, at 125 square miles. The district enrollment has been steadily increasing since the 2015/2016 school year. Following is a summary of enrollment figures for the school district:

Table 2.1. Student Enrollment, Thornapple Kellogg School District

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
3,167	3,165	3,163	3,148	3,064

*Source: MI School Data

THE THORNAPPLE RIVER

The TAPRC service area is crossed by the Thornapple River, a prominent natural feature in Barry County. The Thornapple River basin is within the Grand River Watershed. The Thornapple River originates in Eaton County near the City of Eaton Rapids, and flows west through Hastings and Middleville, then north through the townships of Caledonia and Cascade, where it empties into the Grand River.

Historical settlement within the Thornapple River Valley and watershed reflects that of many Michigan rivers. Native inhabitants found abundant game and fish in and near this waterway. Ke-Wi-Go-Che-Keen was the Indian word for areas near the river. This word is translated into English as “thornapple.”

The river offers excellent bass fishing; and bluegill, sunfish and rock bass are also plentiful. Suckers, pike and carp are less frequent. Forest game species include white-tail deer, ruffed grouse and turkey. Muskrats and mink are among furbearing animals commonly found along the river. Water fowl include mallards, black ducks, wood ducks, and blue-winged teal. Diving ducks include scamp and ring-neck, which use the dam impoundments at LaBarge, Middleville and Irving as migratory nesting and feeding areas. The common mergansers and golden-eye ducks winter on the river. Further, river otter, osprey, beaver, and bald eagles have been reported by land owners and canoeists.

The Thornapple River is a prized natural feature in the local community, and is a substantial recreational resource. It has also served as a draw for residential growth and is valued as an amenity and an aesthetic resource.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The local community is served well by social and cultural events and resources. These include the Woodpecker Festival in April, the Memorial Day Parade, the Labor Day Bridge Walk, Heritage Day, and the River Bank Music Series every summer Friday evening in the amphitheater in East Bank Riverfront park. Furthermore, the Christmas Parade and Holly Trolley promote sense of community. The Lions Club sponsors all of the parades, the Taste of Middleville and the Chili Cook-off.

Additionally, the Thornapple Kellogg School Community Library provides summer reading and activity programs for children and the Thornapple Trail Association provides outdoor learning experiences for children via the No Family Left Indoors program. The Thornapple Arts Council is active in providing arts to the area through their Arts and Eats program. The Thornapple Kellogg School District provides free concerts and minimal cost theatrical productions for the public. The Village Players of Middleville present an annual dinner/theatre program to raise money for school scholarships. The Rotary provides guest speakers on various subjects every Tuesday. Also, there is a gymnastics studio in the area that offers various programs.

A very active Downtown Development Authority sponsors the River Bank Music Series and the Farmers Market. The Farmers Market on Friday afternoons and evenings is increasingly popular and has evolved into a major community social event.

National 24-hour Challenge, which began in 1983, is a 24-hour bicycle-riding event which is staged in Middleville annually. The event brings bicycling enthusiasts, churches, community organizations and businesses together in an effort to promote health and well-being.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Population Change

Northwest Barry County and the region overall have experienced steady growth rates. According to the US Census, all communities in the vicinity have experienced at least double-digit percentage growth rates between 1970 and 2020. The American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that these trends have largely continued into 2023 estimates. These communities have typically seen the strongest growth rates in the County, due to proximity to the growing Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Middleville's growth rate (29% increase from 2010-2020), however, has been higher than other incorporated communities in Barry County, which may be partly attributed to a series of annexation agreements between the Village and Township that have enabled the Village to expand.

Age Distribution

Contemplating age characteristics can assist in determining the type of recreational facilities that may be desired by the community. For example, if a large portion of the population were younger, the community may benefit from additional active recreation facilities, such as playgrounds. Similarly, a significant senior population may have implications for more passive recreational opportunities, such as trails and community centers, as well as accessible amenities.

The 2010 Census indicates that the median age of Thornapple Township and Middleville are 36.2 years and 32.4 years, respectively. Comparatively, 2023 ACS data indicates a median age of 35.3 in Thornapple Township and 31.3 in Middleville. The median age represents the mid-point in the range of all ages; one-half of the population is younger and one-half of the population older. Middleville has a younger population than all surrounding communities and both the Township and Village are younger than the County and State. This is likely due to the extent of young families drawn to the Thornapple Kellogg School District. Other communities in the service area tend to have a higher median age similar to the County and State.

Disability Status

In planning for improvements to park facilities, it is important to contemplate the needs of those with disabilities. The 2023 American Community Survey reports that 8.1% of Thornapple Township residents and 8.3% of Middleville residents have some disability. Comparatively, 14.7% of Michiganders and 13.6% of Americans have a disability. Generally, the percentage of service area residents with a disability is therefore slightly lower than these other broader overall communities; however, the needs of the disabled need to be contemplated in the design of facilities and programs.

Residents with unique needs are dispersed throughout the community. Known concentrations of individuals with unique needs are located in the Lincoln Meadows Senior Citizen Apartments and Carveth Village Independent and Assisted Living, both located in the Village. Each of these facilities is located within walking distance to a park. It will be important to give special attention to specific park amenities and the routes to those amenities during this planning effort, to help ensure that residents of Lincoln Meadows and Carveth Village can use public recreational facilities.





HOUSING

The 2020 Census reports that 82.3% of the total housing stock in Thornapple Township was made up of owner-occupied dwellings, similar to the County's home-ownership rate of 83.4%. According to the Census Bureau, the Township home-ownership decreased slightly (1.4%) from 2010 to 2020. In the Village, this figure is 69.5%, similar to the State's rate of 72.1%. The Village home-ownership rate also decreased slightly (2.3%) to from 2010-2020. As rental properties typically change hands more frequently, a 30.5% rental rate in 2020 and 21.5% in 2023 in the Village suggests a fairly stable residential population, even if home-ownership rates are lower than in the Township.

The 2020 Census reports that 2.5% of housing units in the Township and 2.5% of housing units in the Village are vacant. In addition, the rental vacancy rate in the Village was 1.4% and the home-owner vacancy rate was 0.3% in 2020. The Township had a rental vacancy rate of 1.2% and the homeowner vacancy rate was reported as 0.3%. The decrease in vacant homes could likely be attributed to the population increase in the greater Grand Rapids area. Comparatively, 2023 American Community Survey estimates suggest a very low vacancy rate of 1.8%.

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3. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



The Thornapple Area Parks and Recreation Commission (TAPRC) is the appointed body that functions as the main governing entity representing parks and recreation interests. TAPRC was formed to better serve the parks and recreation needs of the community and the three member units – Thornapple Township, the Village of Middleville, and the Thornapple Kellogg School District. Accordingly, the member units utilize separate recreation departments within their respective organizational structures. Additionally, members units also employ individuals for specific maintenance related duties. This Chapter of the Community Recreation Plan will describe how park and recreation functions in the community are administered.

ORGANIZATION AND ROLES

Leadership Structure

TAPRC was created under provisions of the Urban Cooperation Act of 1967. Using this Act, the Village of Middleville, the Township of Thornapple and the Thornapple Kellogg School District joined in an agreement to provide collaborative recreation services. The effective date of TAPRC was February 23, 2000. TAPRC is a distinct public corporation with powers and duties as established in the agreement. As expressly stated in the agreement, TAPRC has been formed “for the purpose of planning, operating and providing park and recreation programs for the citizens of the member units.” Each member unit appoints three members to the TAPRC Board, a nine-member body; and each Board member serves 4-year terms. The Board has been delegated significant authority under the terms of the agreement, and is the highest governing body having jurisdiction over expenditures concerning recreation facilities within the member communities.

Recreation Staff

TAPRC does not currently employ any staff. In the Village, the Department of Public Works staff maintains all of the Village parks, except the Crane Road Ball Fields, which TAPRC maintains. The school district’s maintenance staff cares for the school facilities.

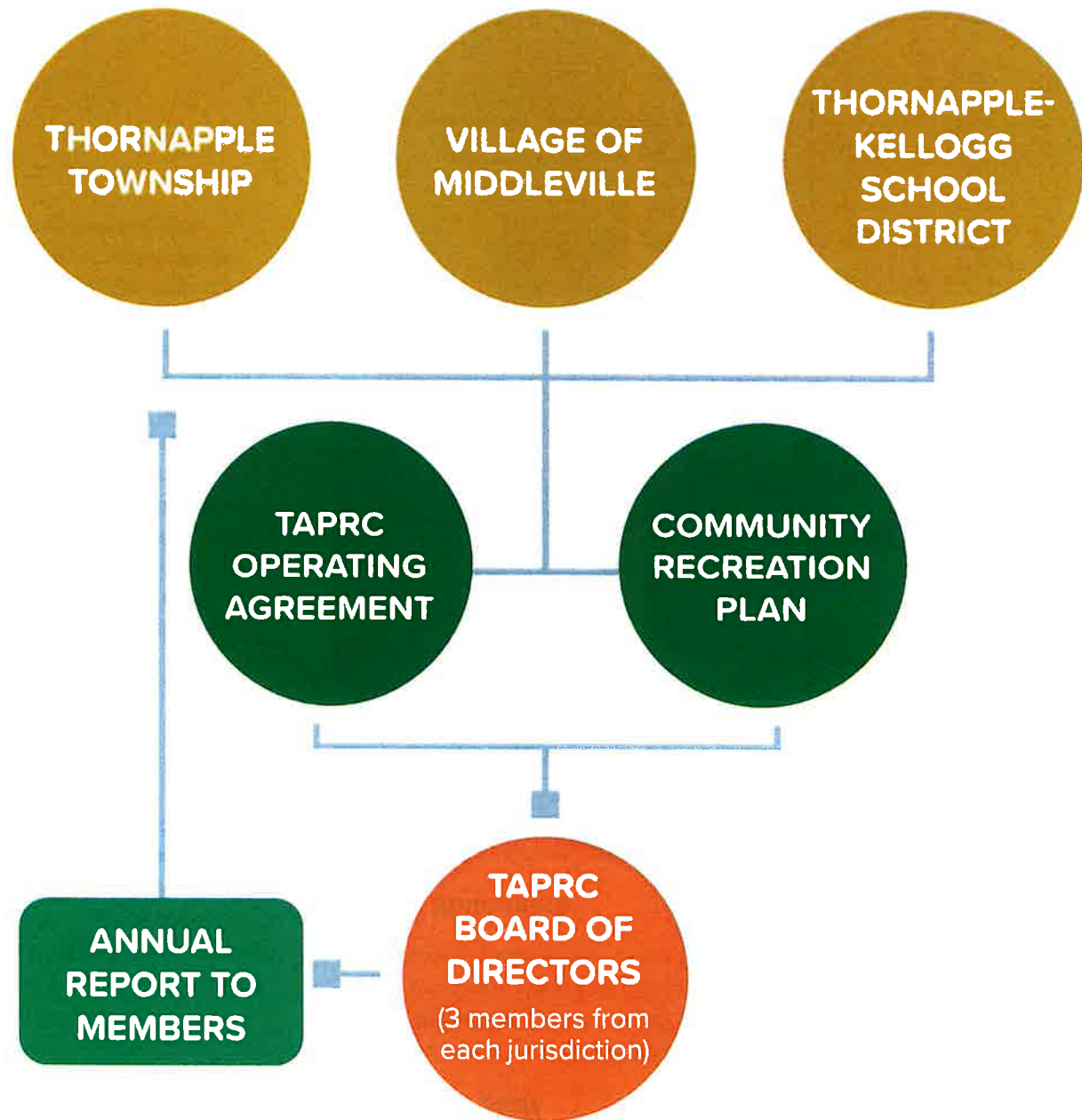
TAPRC Volunteers

Volunteers are primarily utilized by the individual units (Village, Township, School District) in maintaining and programming their spaces. As the TAPRC has shifted away from managing leagues, the role of volunteers has changed as well.



Organizational Chart

Following is a simple chart that depicts the relationship of TAPRC with other entities that may influence policies pertaining to parks and recreation in the Thornapple area. The TAPRC Board encourages broad participation and is dedicated to continuing interest in the community's recreational resources.



Middleville's Volunteer Framework

The Village of Middleville has historically partnered with the Thornapple Trail Association for maintenance of the 3.5 miles of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail owned by the Village. The Village currently covers 100% of the maintenance costs associated with the trail, which include mowing, trimming and brush clearing.

Middleville is fortunate to have a strong volunteer system in place. The shared maintenance of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail is only one of the established partnerships. The Village also collaborates with the Barry County United Way Day of Caring. This two-day effort in Barry County mobilizes volunteers to make a difference in the community. The Village relies on these days in the fall to complete a variety of tasks in support of parks and trails. These include trimming, spreading mulch, painting and maintaining play structures, establishing and maintaining the disc golf course, weeding, and planting, and maintenance of the parks and trails signage systems.

An additional partnership includes the Thornapple Kellogg School District. Several athletic teams, honor societies and other school groups have volunteered their time to assist with maintenance of parks and trails, which they use from time to time for training purposes. These efforts are vital to Middleville's parks system.

CURRENT BUDGET AND FUNDING

Under the terms of the Agreement, TAPRC receives an annual contribution of \$3,000 from each of the three member units. The funds are intended to cover operations and administration. Additional member unit contributions are based on the TAPRC annual budget request for planning efforts, operations, land acquisition, and capital improvement projects. Additionally, each member unit pays a third of the cost of TAPRC's bi-annual audit.

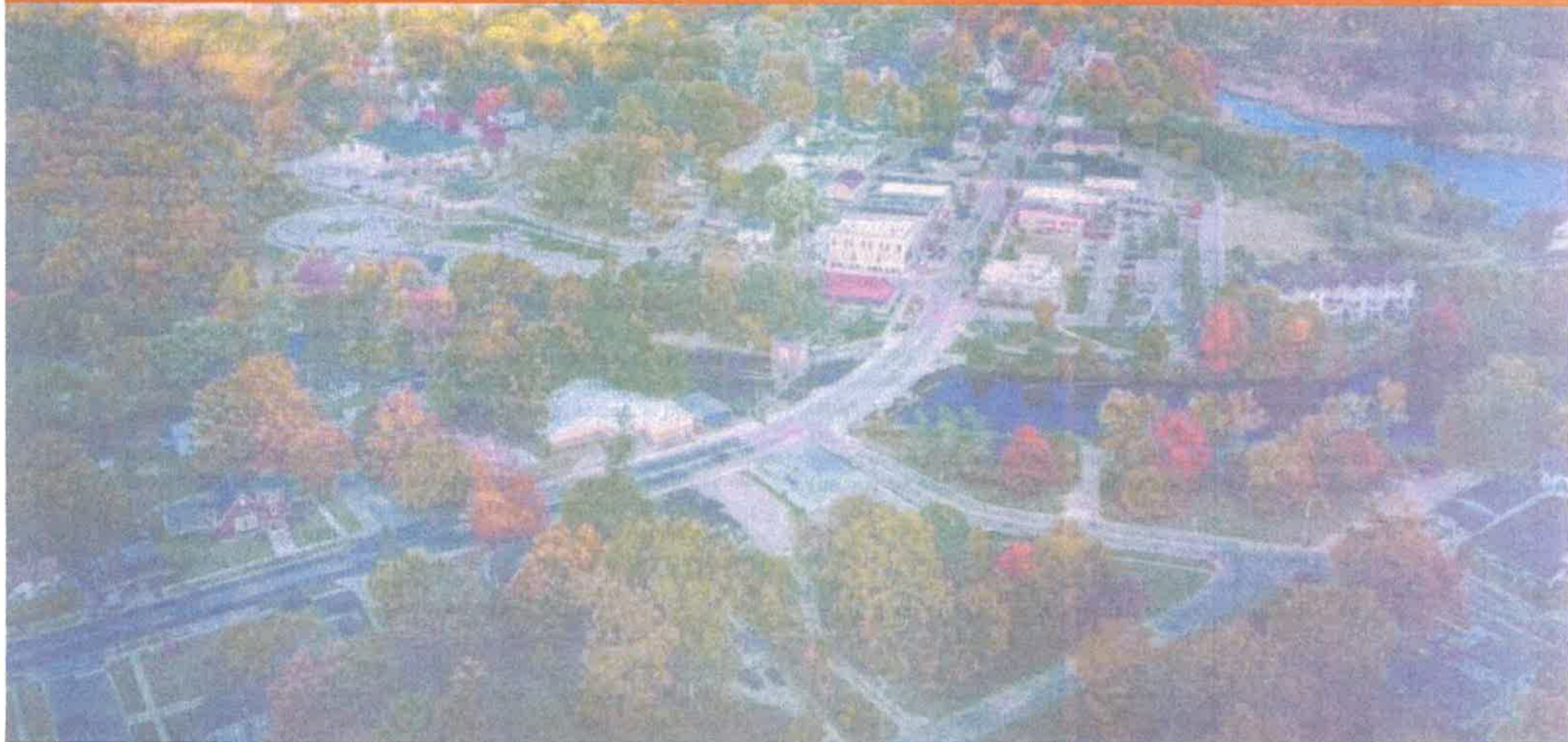
TAPRC parks and recreation activities are funded with general fund dollars from member units; there are no separate millages. The total revenue/expenditures anticipated in the 2025 proposed budget is approximately \$35,290.

The primary endeavor of TAPRC during its initial years of operation was to foster and build participation in community recreation programs. TAPRC has also funded improvements to Riverside Park – such as clearing and grading to create more usable space – and improvements to the boat launch and canoe portage on the Thornapple River. Additionally, TAPRC has funded improvements to the Crane Road Ball Fields facility.

Presently, the Village and School District maintain recreation facilities under their respective ownership. The Township does not currently own any recreational facilities.

Expenditures	2025 Budget
Audit Fees	\$4,000
Professional Fees	\$15,000
Office Supplies, Postage, Printing	\$40
Heritage Day Advertising	\$50
Heritage Day Supplies	\$200
Capital Purchases	\$16,000
Total	\$35,290

4. RECREATION INVENTORY



The inventory and analysis of facilities was conducted by TAPRC's planning consultant and builds on previous recreation planning efforts with the intent of developing a comprehensive perspective. The following elements were sources of information or considerations during the development of this chapter:

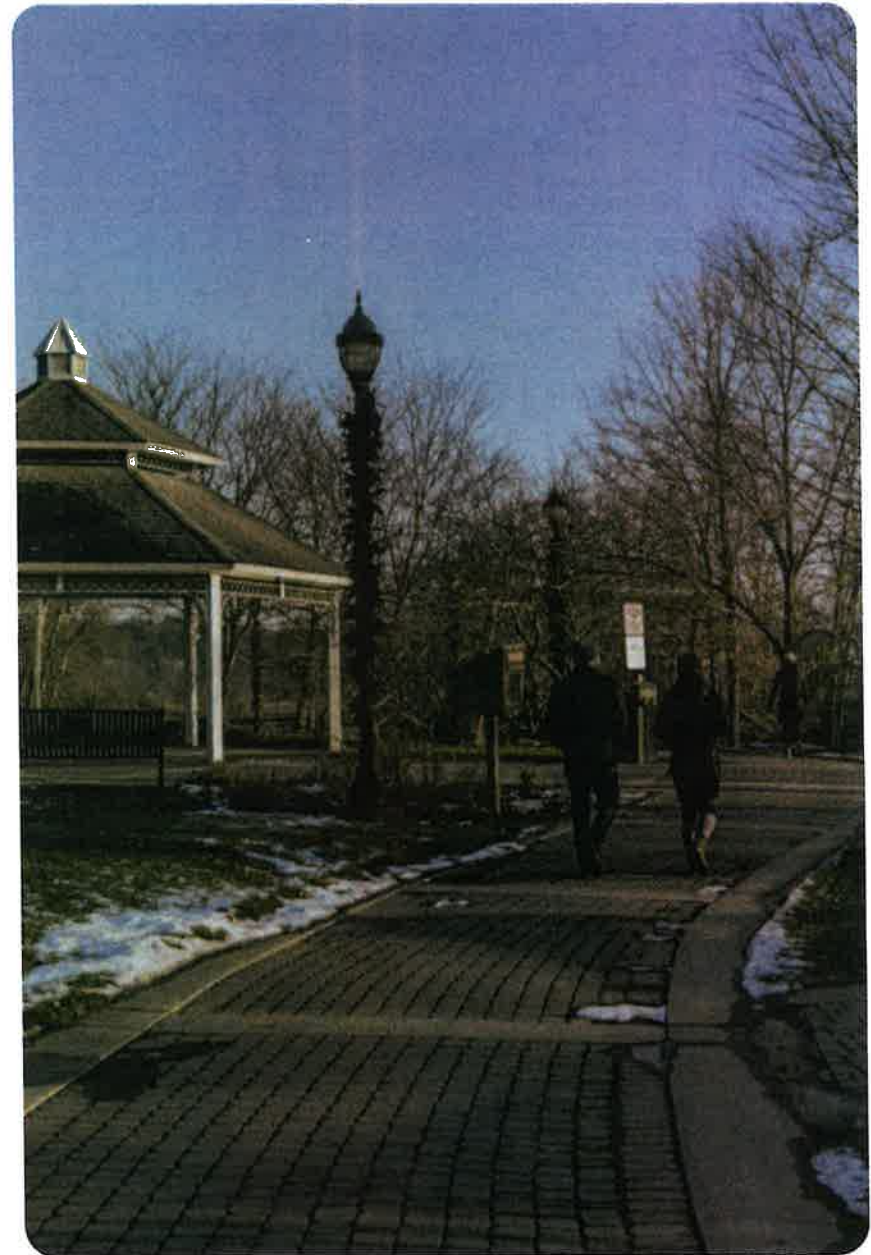
- The first-hand knowledge and informed opinions of community leadership and interested and committed citizens who participated in public input exercises associated with this Plan.
- National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standards.
- The distinctive natural and recreational character of the Thornapple River Valley area.

The NRPA has established generally recognized standards for classifying types of parkland based on size and function. These designations have generally been adopted or referenced by the DNR in plan preparation guidelines; and provide one method of defining the purpose and use of facilities, although other methods exist. Public, municipal facilities in the service area are classified using this system.

TAPRC FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

The Village of Middleville owns and operates nine sites for recreational use. These include Calvin Hill Park, Crane Road Ball Fields, a segment of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail, Riverside Park, Lions Sesquicentennial Park, Spring Park, Stagecoach Park, Wildwood Trails, and the Middleville Dog Park. Thornapple Township does not directly own or maintain recreational land. The Thornapple Kellogg School District owns and maintains several school recreational facilities.

The following is a summary of Village and School District facilities:



CALVIN HILL PARK

Calvin Hill Park is a 1.1-acre facility that may be categorized as a neighborhood park because it meets neighborhood-based recreation needs and is accessible on foot for neighborhood residents. This park includes a basketball court, play equipment purchased and installed in 2002, some older play equipment, a small wooden skateboard park, and a small mowed open space. This park is bordered by Park, Ellis, and Fremont Streets. The property is the site of the former Calvin Hill School.



Calvin Hill Park

MOBY

PAUL

FREMONT

Parking

Basketball
Court

Play Equipment

Open Space

Play
Equipment

Picnic Tables+
Shelter

Wooden
Skateboard Park

Parking

GRAND RAPIDS



CRANE ROAD BALL FIELDS

The Crane Road Ball Fields facility is special use park located in Thornapple Township, but is owned by the Village of Middleville. The facility is 12 acres and offers three ball fields and gravel parking. The ball fields are used in-season for youth and adult softball and baseball. The Crane Road Ball Fields is the site of a reclaimed landfill closed in the 1970s. Poor soil quality and lack of access to utilities prohibit significant investment in improvements to this facility.



Crane Road Ball Fields

Gravel Parking

**Baseball/
Softball Fields**

STAGECOACH PARK

Stagecoach Park is a 1.2-acre facility strategically located in downtown Middletown, adjacent to the Village offices, the main street, the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail, and the Thornapple River; and is therefore very visible in the community. The facility may be classified as a mini park because of its relatively small size and its specific purpose. The park features two period-style gazebos, one used for display of the Villages' stagecoach and the large gazebo used for picnics, weddings, and live music. Modern restrooms are provided in the Village Hall.



Stagecoach Park

Gazebo

River
Overlook

Gazebo

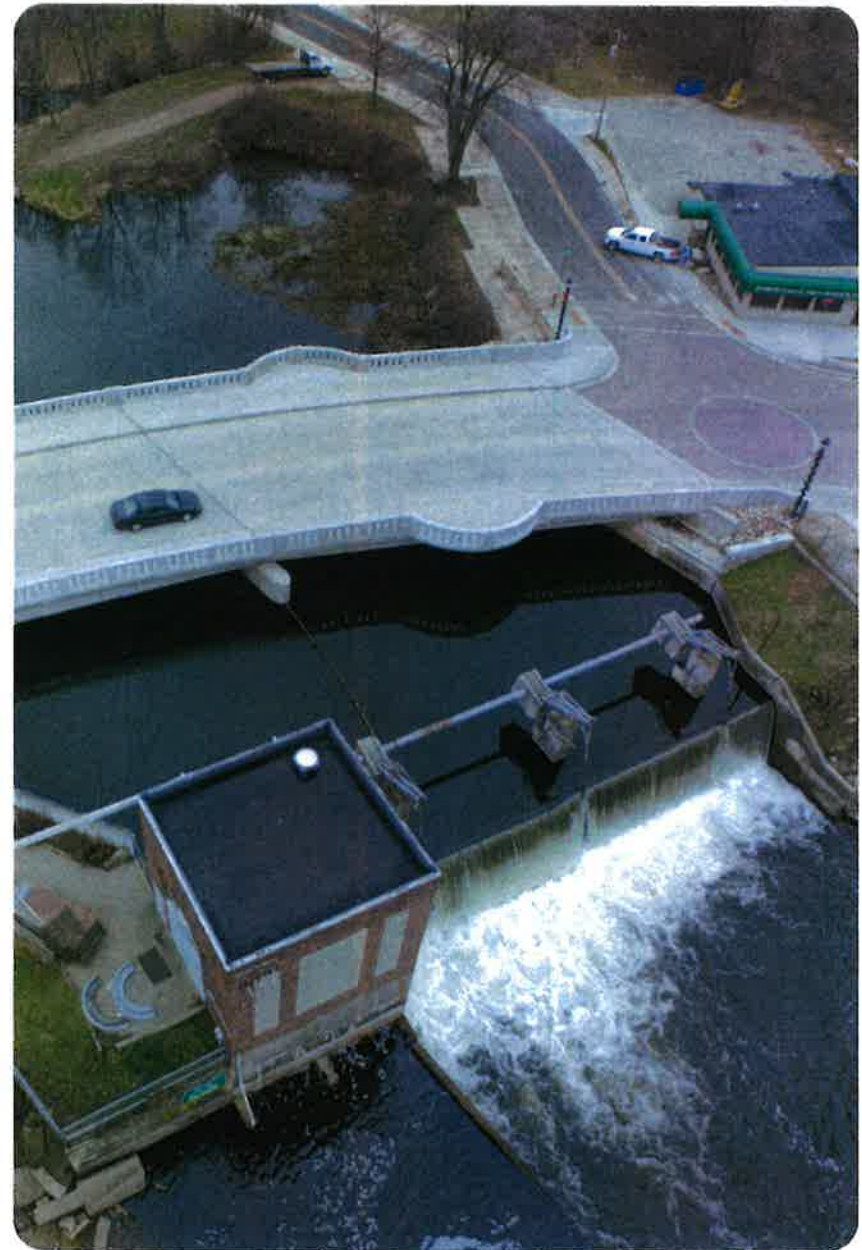
Paul Henry -
Thornapple Trail

ST JAMES

MILL POND

RIVERSIDE PARK

Riverside Park is a 1-acre facility located on the Thornapple River. Riverside Park was improved by TAPRC to provide better boat launch access to the river, lawn area and passive use. These improvements involved earth changes via MDEQ permit, selective clearing of scrub brush and dead trees, improving the drive access for the boat launch/canoe livery and placement of stone rip rap to stabilize the shoreline. While the boat launch is the only physical amenity, the park is a popular shore fishing spot.



Riverside Park

MAIN

ST JAMES

MILL POND

Thornapple
River Public
Access

BUSSELL

DEARBORN

LIONS SESQUICENTENNIAL PARK

East Bank Riverfront Park Riverfront Park is a 4-acre facility located at the Middleville dam and along the east bank of the Thornapple River. This community park encompasses private land acquired by the Village and a park known as Lions Sesquicentennial Park and New Pavilion Park. The facility offers river viewing, picnicking, a universally accessible canoe/kayak launch, bank fishing below the dam, and the Riverbank Music Series which is hosted in a new amphitheater constructed by the Downtown Development Authority. The Village has also recently constructed a new restroom facility. The Park generally serves the needs of Middleville's Downtown and surrounding neighborhood, as well as those shopping, dining, or visiting the farmer's market. Future plans for the park include river access improvements, playgrounds, and other amenities serving downtown patrons.



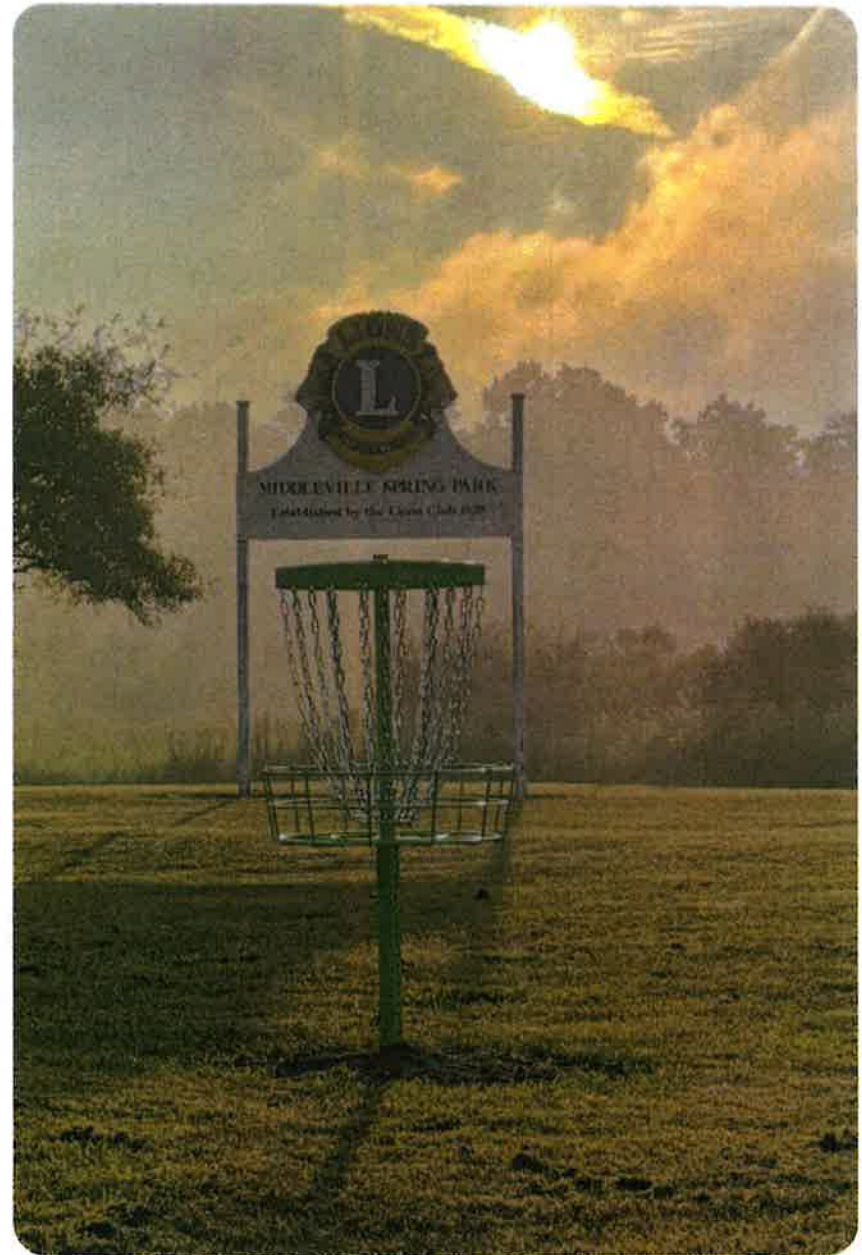
Lions Sesquicentennial Park



LIONS SPRING PARK

Lions Spring Park is the Villages' largest facility, comprising about 24 acres of land. Lions Spring Park may be classified as a community park, as its relative size and extensive amenities are designed to serve the larger community. Lions Spring Park offers a baseball/softball diamond used for league play, a disc golf course, a picnic shelter, several outdoor barbecue grills, play equipment, and picnic tables. This park also contains a unique spring fed natural area including a rare sedge fen. The south 8-9 acres is undeveloped and in natural condition.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality identified Lions Spring Park as a wetland mitigation site in connection with the removal of wetlands for the extension of Crane/Finkbeiner Road. As such, a portion of the park is now a State wetland mitigation site, meaning that wetlands were added to the park to compensate for wetlands removed during road construction elsewhere in the community; these wetlands will be permanently protected. While the wetland mitigation project reduced the size of the existing baseball/softball field in the park, it also resulted in expansion of the park's acreage. The wetland mitigation area also lends itself to passive recreation opportunities, such as interpretive signage, rustic trails, a wetland boardwalk, etc.





Lions Spring Park

BROADWAY

MISTY RIDGE

M 37

HOLES

Baseball/
Softball Field

Playground

Picnic Tables+
Shelter

Restrooms

Parking

Wetlands

WILDWOOD TRAILS PARK

Wildwood Trails is one of the Village's newest parks located in the heart of a housing and retail development. The 20-acre park features 1.45 miles of rustic walking trails through a white pine stand, hardwoods and open meadows. The trails are unpaved and the park functions essentially as a natural open space.



Wildwood Trails Park

Trails

Woodlands

Trailhead

Parking

OAK BROOK

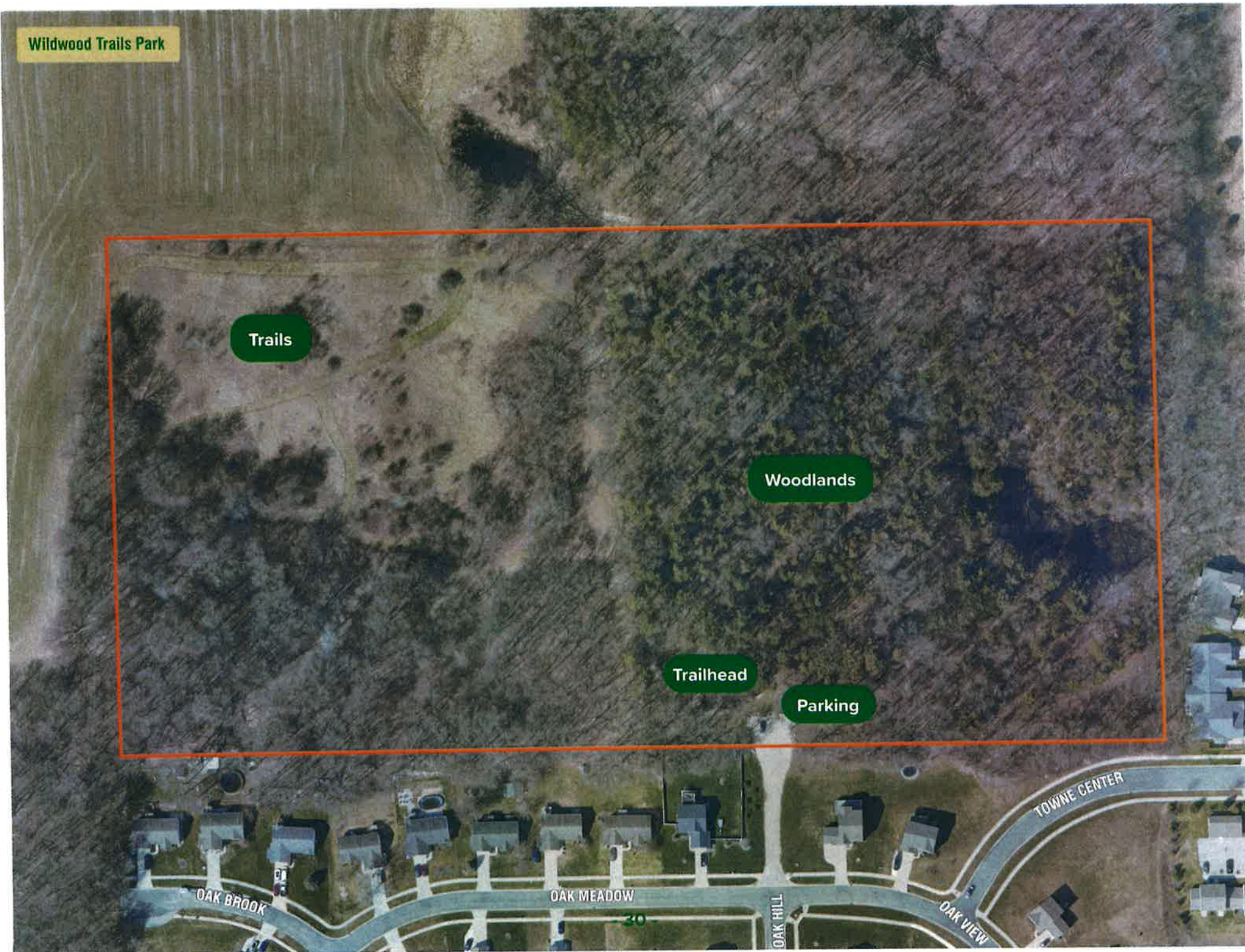
OAK MEADOW

OAK HILL

OAK VIEW

TOWNE CENTER

20



MIDDLEVILLE DOG PARK

The Middleville Dog Park is located on a 5.41 acre parcel that also houses a water tower and community garden. Identified as a priority in the 2022 - 2026 Plan, this facility contains a fenced area for both small dogs and large dogs, as well as an unimproved parking area.



Middleville Dog Park



Parking

Community
Garden

Fenced Play Area
(Large Dogs)

Fenced Play Area
(Small Dogs)

SHERMAN



PAUL HENRY-THORNAPPLE TRAIL

The Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail is a 42-mile multi-purpose trail that can be classified as a Linear Park. The trailway is being built in phases and will ultimately connect Grand Rapids with Hastings, Vermontville and Eaton Rapids and link with other trails, as well. Paved sections of the trail include 4 miles in Kentwood, over 5 miles in Gaines and Caledonia townships, and 3.6 miles between Middleville and Irving. In addition, in Hastings, 2.5 miles of the trail are paved.

Stagecoach Park, discussed below, is adjacent to the Middleville Village Hall and functions as a trailhead staging area for the regional trail. Approximately 4.5 miles of the trail is paved and 5 miles are owned by the Village of Middleville. The Village of Middleville added 1 mile of paved, scenic trail from the Village Hall north to Crane Road in 2016. The Village partners with the Thornapple Trail Association to maintain this segment of the trail. The scenic trail parallels the Thornapple River in Middleville and offers stunning scenery. A series of exercise plaques and a handicap accessible fishing pier were installed in 2009 along the trailway. Winter time on this trail affords wonderful cross-country skiing and fat tire biking opportunities. Motorized vehicles are prohibited.

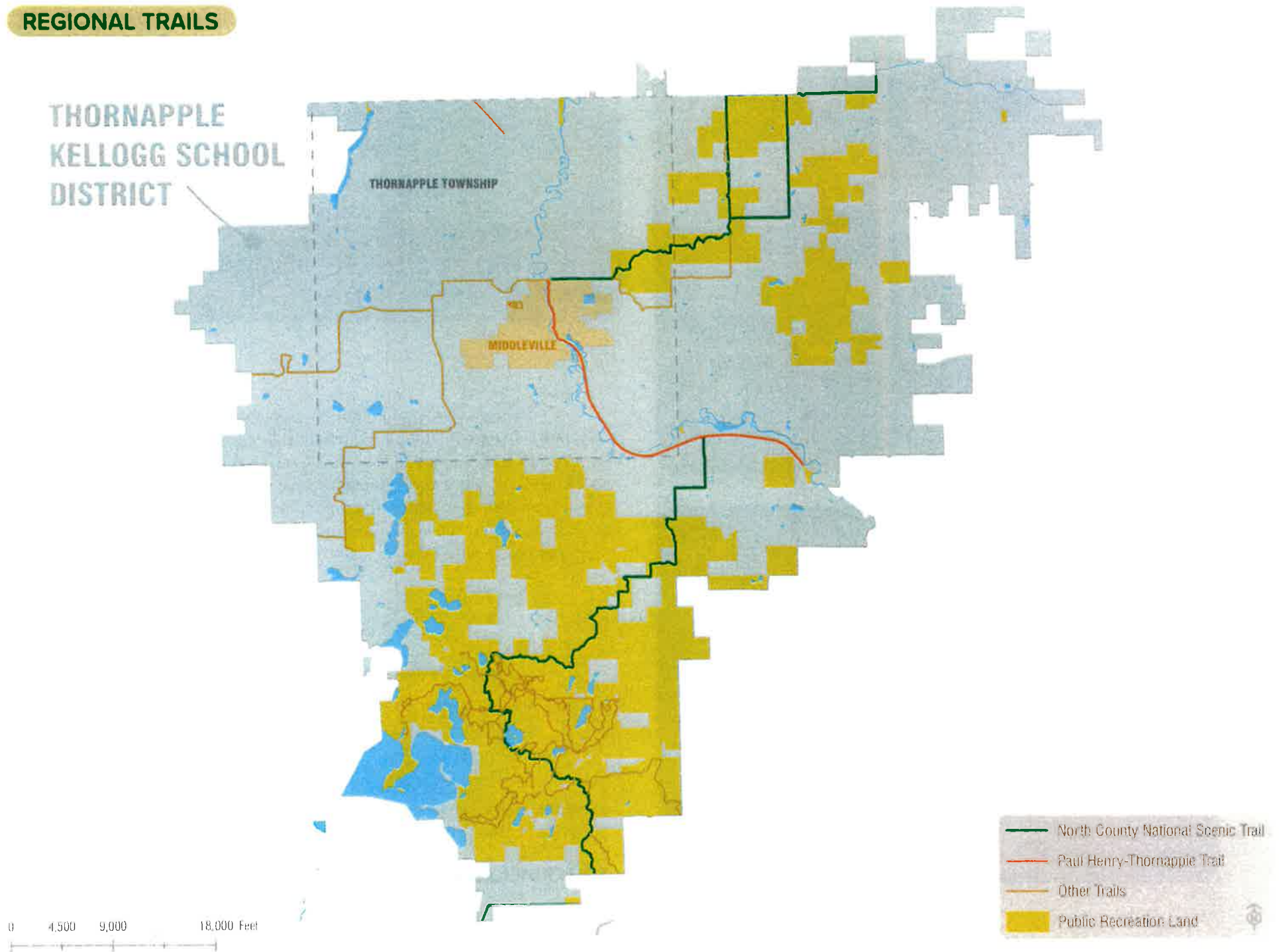
NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL

The National North Country Scenic Trail forms a linear greenway that traverses the American landscape from North Dakota to upstate New York. Near the TAPRC service area, the trail runs from northern Orangeville Township northward through the Barry State Game Area then continuing northerly to the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail. For 4.5 miles the North Country Trail and Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail are coincident. The North Country Trail continues through the Village of Middleville to Crane Road then east along Crane Road to the Middleville State Game Area. It then meanders northeasterly into Kent County.



REGIONAL TRAILS

THORNAPPLE
KELLOGG SCHOOL
DISTRICT



THORNAPPLE KELLOGG SCHOOL DISTRICT FACILITIES

As a participating TAPRC governmental entity, the Thornapple Kellogg School District facilities are used for many TAPRC recreation programs. Currently, TAPRC uses the following facilities:

- Page Elementary JV softball field
- McFall Elementary JV baseball field
- Thornapple Kellogg High School varsity baseball field
- McFall Elementary flag football field
- Lee Elementary t-ball field

The school district offers 3 playgrounds, 5 baseball and softball fields (all of which are not used for TAPRC programs), an artificial turf football/soccer field, a practice soccer field, a non-regulation sized pool, and approximately 8 basketball hoops although formal outdoor courts are not provided. Additionally, the district utilizes several large open green spaces for school athletic team practice. Indoors, 8 volleyball and 10 basketball courts are provided, although the facilities overlap.



Thornapple Kellogg Middle & High School + Page Elementary School



Lee Elementary School

T-Ball
Field

Parking

Open Space

Playground

Parking

JOHNSON

6TH

MINSTEHR



McFall Elementary School

MAIN

Basketball Court

Open Space

Parking

Playground

Parking

Baseball Field

STADIUM

GREENWOOD

SUNSET RIDGE

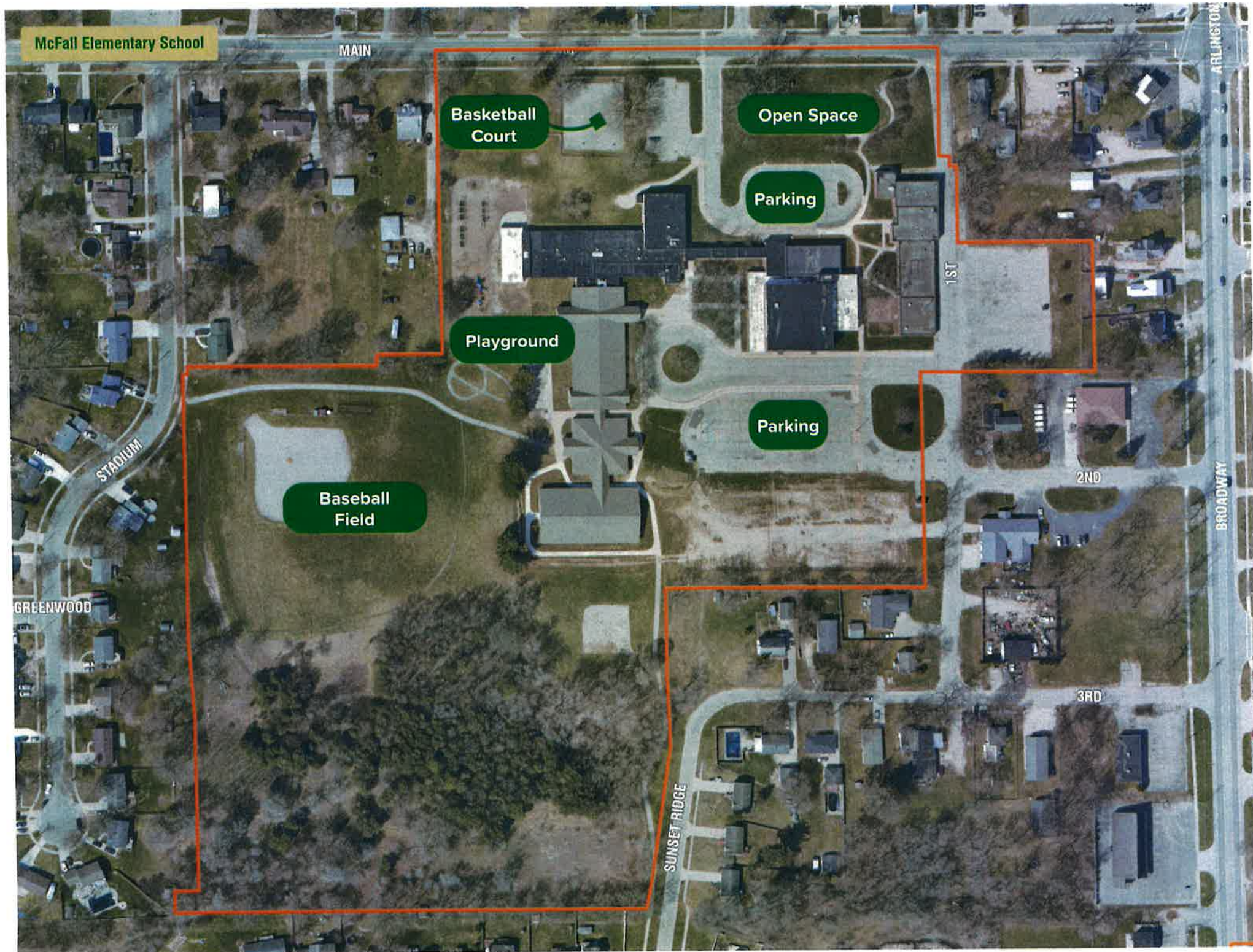
1ST

2ND

3RD

BROADWAY

ARLINGTON



Thornapple Kellogg Schools Early Childhood Center

Playground

Parking

BENDER



The TAPRC service area includes extensive and unique natural areas, largely owned by the State of Michigan. Following is a summary of these and other facilities that, while located in or near the TAPRC service area, are not TAPRC or member unit facilities. Note that Barry County has no public recreation facilities within the TAPRC service area. Appendix A offers a regional perspective of these facilities.

STATE OF MICHIGAN FACILITIES

Barry State Game Area and Yankee Springs State Park

The Barry State Game Area is a large State facility located primarily in Yankee Springs Township with additional contiguous areas in western Rutland Township and the north tier of sections in Orangeville Township and Hope Township. Activities permitted in the Barry State Game Area include hiking, backpacking, camping and hunting in-season.

Yankee Springs State Park is located on Gun Lake and offers both rustic and improved campsites, a public swimming beach, a concession stand and a public boat launch. The 2,680-acre Gun Lake is located mostly in Yankee Springs Township and attracts numerous summer vacationers. The lake's shores have also acted as magnets for year-round residential development. The Yankee Springs Recreation Area, a 5,200-acre state forest, is located adjacent to Gun Lake and provides popular amenities such as trails, camping and fishing, attracting large numbers of day use and camping patrons. It is adjacent to the Barry State Game Area and when combined the two State facilities total approximately 22,000 acres.

Middleville State Game Area

Lands included in this 320-acre State Game Area are located within Irving Township and Thornapple Township. The western portions of this game area have significant relief and extensive woodlands. The Crane Road Ball Fields are adjacent to the west edge of this State Game Area and share common access from Crane Road. Hiking, backpacking, camping and hunting in-season are common activities.

MDNR Public Access Sites

Within the TAPRC service area, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) operates ten public access sites for boat launching. There is one site in Thornapple Township at the north end of Duncan Lake. Most other sites are in Yankee Springs Township, including Deep Lake, Hall Lake, Gun Lake, Long Lake, Williams Lake, Payne Lake and Chief Noonday Lake. There is also a small access site in the Village of Middleville providing access to the Thornapple River. This site is north of the dam and west of the river. Additionally, there is a DNR access site on the Thornapple River between Irving and McCann Roads.

PUBLIC PARKS IN ADJACENT COMMUNITIES

Yankee Springs Township

Yankee Springs Township owns and maintains one park – the Yankee Springs Township Park. The facility is 9.9 acres and offers play equipment, a gazebo, walking paths and pickle-ball courts. This facility is supplemented by the State recreation land and the presence of Gun Lake.

According to the Township website, additional facilities in the Township include the Historic Bowens Mill site, Horseman's Campground, Long Lake Recreation Area, Graves Heritage Trail, Gun Lake Campground, Pine Scenic Area, Deep Lake Campground, and Devil's Soup Bowl.

Irving Township / Village of Freeport

Irving Township, east of Thornapple Township, does not own any parkland; however, a segment of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail traverses through the community. The Village of Freeport, which is located within Irving Township, offers one park. Moore Park is a 20-acre facility offering frisbee golf, a basketball court, a volleyball court, a skate park (ramps are not currently provided), two sets of play equipment, two ball fields, modern restrooms, a pavilion, picnic tables, bleachers, a one-mile long trail through the woods, and a soccer area. Additionally, a 100-foot walking path connects the park to the public library. It is also

notable that the Grand Rapids Audubon Club owns an 80-acre wildlife preserve, Maher Sanctuary, in Irving Township, which is probably best known for its stunning scenery and rare bird sightings.

Caledonia Charter Township / Village of Caledonia / Caledonia Community Schools

The Caledonia community offers several public park facilities, including a segment of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail. Caledonia Lakeside Park (43 acres) and the Caledonia Community Green (19.7 acres) are located in the Village. The Caledonia Community also has the 91-acre Two Rivers Park, Thornapple River Bend Park (209 acres), Leopard Preserve (51.7 acres), an access to Campau Lake, Ruehs Park (5 acres) and an undeveloped, 20-acre youth sports complex.

Rutland Charter Township

Rutland Charter Township does not own any parkland, but a segment of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail traverses through the Township. Aside from State game areas, the only public recreational area in the community is the Barry Expo Center, the home of the Barry County Fair. The site is 160 acres and offers 260 campground sites with water and electric hook-up and serves as a venue for a variety of events. A notable privately-owned facility in Rutland Township is the Whispering Waters Campground and Canoe Livery, which is strategically located on the Thornapple River and at a current terminus of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail.

Gun Lake Casino & Resort

The Gun Lake Casino is located southwest of the service area in Allegan County's Wayland Township. The facility offers a variety of gaming machines, stations and tables and is affiliated with the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomí Indians, sometimes referred to as the Gun Lake Tribe. Recently, a hotel and resort pool complex was added, providing year-round indoor amenities.

GOLF COURSES

There are no golf courses or country clubs in Middleville or Thornapple Township. Nearby golf courses include Yankee Springs Golf Course, Mullenhurst Golf Course, Gun Ridge Golf Course, and The Legacy at Hastings. In addition, other facilities include Saskatoon Golf Club and Tyler Creek Golf Course and Campground in Alto, Broadmoor Country Club in Caledonia, Thornapple Pointe Golf Club in Cascade, and Stonewater Country Club in Gaines Township.

ACCESSIBILITY

Federal and State laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of physical ability in connection with public recreational facilities. Developed park facilities must comply with barrier-free design standards. Public facilities in Middleville have been evaluated to understand the need for improvements relating to barrier-free accessibility. In addition, as park development is considered in the future, barrier-free accessibility is a significant priority item to help ensure that recreation can be enjoyed by all residents and visitors of the community.

Following is a summary of an adapted scoring system generally in accordance with DNR standards:

- Level 1. None of the facilities in the park meet accessibility guidelines. Little pavement is provided and access routes to the facilities are not easily accessible.
- Level 2. Some of the facilities meet accessibility guidelines, but many of the facilities or the access routes to them are not easily accessible.
- Level 3. Most of the facilities meet accessibility guidelines. Parking areas and walkways are paved; and while most facilities are generally accessible, some barriers may exist for certain people because of age, ability or situation.
- Level 4. All of the facilities meet accessibility guidelines. The park is accessible and the routes to facilities within the park are accessible, but some play or other equipment may not be designed for everyone.
- Level 5. Universal design guidelines were used to design the entire park.

The following table summarizes the accessibility of public facilities located within Middleville:



PUBLIC FACILITIES ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

FACILITY	OWNERSHIP	ACCESSIBILITY LEVEL / SUMMARY
Calvin Hill Park	Village	2 / This park features some paved on-street parking nearby and a paved route to the swing-set. Off-street, on-site universally accessible parking is not provided. Play equipment does not utilize ramps and transfers and sits on grass and stone instead of a unitary safety surface, which may complicate access. Routes to most amenities are unpaved.
Crane Road Ball Fields	Village	1 / All amenities and access routes to them are unpaved. Non-paved parking is featured, as well as non-paved walking routes to ball fields. Accessible seating areas are not provided.
Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail	Village	4 / The south end of the Trail, which connects to Stagecoach Park, is paved and wheelchair users frequent this segment.. The north end of the trail, which connects to East Bank Riverfront Park, is also paved with a universally accessible trailhead located at Crane Road. The Trail and adjacent access routes to the Trail have been constructed following principles of accessible design. The planned segment of the Trail north of the Village has yet to be developed.
Stagecoach Park	Village	4 / This park offers on-site universally accessible parking and a paved trail. Restrooms and gazebos are universally accessible and thoughtfully located, with level routes to facilities.
Riverside Park	Village	1 / This park features gravel parking; paved, universally accessible parking spaces are not provided. The boat launch is gravel, which may limit the maneuverability of a wheelchair in the area.
Lions Spring Park	Village	1 / Spring Park features gravel parking and uneven lawn area, making wheelchair use difficult. A considerable portion of the park is in a natural condition, but developed amenities do exist. Play equipment is accessible, but is underlain by woodchips. The routes to features are unpaved and therefore inaccessible

PUBLIC FACILITIES ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

FACILITY	OWNERSHIP	ACCESSIBILITY LEVEL / SUMMARY
Lions Sesquicentennial Park	Village	4 / Paved on-street and on-site parking is nearby, including universally accessible spaces. The canoe and kayak launch is also universally-accessible. Most facilities can be accessed by paved access pathways; however, some steep grades exist near the river.
Wildwood Trails Park	Village	1 / This park's amenities and access routes to them are not paved. Gravel and wood-chipped trails are rustic and inaccessible. However, this facility is primarily intended as a natural resource area at this time, not an improved park. Nonetheless, as any future improvements are made in the future, it is appropriate to ensure that facilities and amenities and routes to them are accessible, including parking areas.
Middleville Dog Park	Village	1 / This park's amenities and access routes to them are not paved. A gravel drive and gravel parking area are largely inaccessible. The fenced dog park area is grass and does not contain expanses of pavement or paved walking loops. Future improvements could include a paved pathway, paved parking area, and seating in the dog park area.
Thornapple-Kellogg School District Facilities	School District	4 / The high school and middle school offer accessible tennis courts and ball fields with paved access routes connecting amenities and parking areas. However, the gravel parking area adjacent to the soccer fields is not accessible. Other parking lots serving school facilities are paved. The t-ball field at Lee Elementary does not utilize a paved path and is not accessible. McFall Elementary offers a paved path connecting the Misty Ridge subdivision to a ball field, playground, and the flag football site. However, the playground is not supported by a unitary playing surface.

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5. PLANNING PROCESS



INTRODUCTION

A planning and public input process was necessary to assist TAPRC in assessing the park, recreation, and open space needs in the community. This updated Plan is the culmination of extensive public outreach with community members and stakeholders.

In an effort to solicit citizen input, two methods of public outreach were conducted: an online community survey and a series of pop-up engagement events. These methods helped assist the TAPRC in articulating the values of residents and stakeholders. Williams & Works facilitated the public engagement process.

PLANNING METHODS

Numerous tools can be used to determine the recreational needs of a community. One approach to assess a community's needs is to compare park metrics or facilities data. Another approach is to use systems planning to identify local issues, priorities, and levels of service that can be determined via community input to inform the planning process. Given the TAPRC's multi-jurisdictional arrangement and smaller population size, there is limited third-party data from similar communities to utilize a park metrics approach. Thus, this effort focuses on a systems planning approach. However, we have included some National Recreation and Park Association service area metrics for reference.

When using the systems planning approach to parks and recreation development, the results of public engagement can be used to guide the development of recommendations. The systems planning approach uses local metrics, priorities, needs, and community-wide issues to guide planning efforts. As efforts are implemented, the system can be evaluated to measure success and guide future planning goals. This creates a regular feedback loop. The approach begins with collecting existing conditions data and an evaluation of past planning efforts,

which this Plan has included, and identifying potential gaps, needs, opportunities, and completed or missed goals. Upon completion of this step, a public engagement strategy can be developed to ensure that the Plan outcomes and implementation strategies align with local needs and desires. Finally, this approach recognizes that this planning effort is a snapshot in time, and that parks and recreation needs, desires, and metrics are always changing.

SCOPE OF PROCESS

The review and update process included the following tasks:

- **Review of Existing Plan:** A review of the existing planning document was completed by the consulting team, and content, priority issues, and future projects were discussed with the TAPRC at the kick-off meeting.
- **Update Community Data and Inventory:** An update of the community description, including social characteristics (population trends and demographics) and physical characteristics (natural resources, etc.) was made to meet the requirements of the DNR and to inform the pop-up engagement events and community survey. The TAPRC's administrative structure and park inventory were also reviewed and adjusted to reflect changes over the last five years.
- **Pop-Up Engagement and Community Survey:** With a better understanding of the current conditions and priority recreation issues in the service area, the TAPRC solicited public input through pop-up engagement events on June 27th, July 4th, and August 1st, 2025. The TAPRC also utilized an online community survey open from June 9, 2025, to August 15, 2025. A work session was held by the TAPRC Board on August 18, 2025, to review the results of the pop-up engagement and receive an update on the progress of the community survey.

- **Goals & Objectives and Action Program Work Session:** Based on input received from the public, the TAPRC reviewed and refined the goals, objectives, and action plan, setting the future direction for parks and recreation in the community. This work session was held on August 18, 2025 during a publicly accessible meeting.
- **TAPRC Joint Workshop:** Since the TAPRC is made up of three independent bodies of government, the Board opted to have a workshop where all three boards were brought together to discuss policy, projects, and future priorities. This workshop was held on September 22, 2025 during a publicly accessible meeting.
- **30-Day Review:** A draft of the Recreation Plan was compiled, reviewed, and approved for draft distribution by the TAPRC. Citizens were provided an adequate opportunity (at least 30 days) to review and comment on the Plan prior to the public hearing.
- **Public Hearing and Adoption:** The Recreation Plan was adopted by the TAPRC Board and each entity on INSERT.
- **Transmittal to County and Regional Planning Commissions and MDNR:** The Recreation Plan was distributed to Barry County and the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission in INSERT. The Recreation Plan was then transmitted to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for eligibility certification.

POP-UP ENGAGEMENT

The TAPRC hosted three Pop-Up Planning events to gather public input. These events were designed to bring the planning process directly to the community in casual, accessible settings where people naturally gather. Two of the pop-ups took place at the Village of Middleville's Farmers' Market on June 27 and August 1, while the third was held on Friday, July 4, during the Independence Day fireworks celebration. Each event provided an opportunity for residents and visitors to learn

more about the plan, share their ideas, and take part in fun, interactive activities.

The events drew countless attendees, including long-time residents, young families, and visitors from outside the area. The age range of participants was broad, spanning from young children accompanied by their parents to older adults with deep connections to the community. The atmosphere was welcoming and engaging, with colorful displays, friendly staff, and hands-on ways to participate. All attendees were encouraged to explore the activities, ask questions, and share their opinions about the future of parks and recreation in the TAPRC area. A detailed public engagement report with results is located in the appendix.

ONLINE SURVEY

From June 9, 2025 to August 15, 2025, an online community survey was available to collect public input on parks and recreation facilities and amenities within the TAPRC service area. The responses provided valuable quantitative data to help guide goal-setting and inform plans for future park and recreation improvements.

The survey was organized to gather responses from the residents of the TAPRC area. A total of 13 questions were asked via the online survey tool Survey Monkey. A total of 230 responses were received by the deadline, with an 80% completion rate. Typical time spent taking this survey was approximately 7 minutes.

The survey was successful as it resulted in objective, quantifiable information from a large number of people compared to typical participation in other forms of public input like community open houses or visioning meetings. The survey enabled respondents to provide anonymous replies using a "check-the-box" format to expedite the completion of the online form and maximize the rate of response. Some

questions allowed the respondents to leave other comments that may not have been covered with the multiple-choice options. Responses were kept as written by the respondent with a few exceptions for capitalization and some spelling corrections. A detailed public engagement report with results is located in the appendix.

SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Considering the results of the systems planning approach through public engagement provides a reliable resource in developing goals, objectives, and a list of recreation needs for the TAPRC service area.

Throughout the public engagement period, feedback indicated strong support for parks and recreation and a desire to continue to improve the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail, access to the Thornapple River, improvements to existing park facilities, and construction of an athletic complex. These themes and priorities are directly reflected in the goals and objectives and action program. Working together on a multi-jurisdictional basis, specifically regarding improvements to the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail and Thornapple River access, will be important for the success of implementation.

As noted previously, a public engagement report outlining detailed results of the public engagement process is located in the appendix.

SERVICE AREA

In addition to evaluating the systems approach, it is also important to review park distribution throughout the community. It is helpful to closely review where residents live, with the goal being to locate important park facilities within proximity to a concentration of rooftops; and to plan new facilities near areas that are underserved, with easy access to parkland. The NRPA promulgates “service area” standards for different types of park facilities, as follows:

- Mini Parks, 0.25 miles or less
- Neighborhood Parks, 0.25 to 0.5 miles
- Community Parks, 1.0 to 2.0 miles
- Regional Parks, approximately 30 minutes of drive time

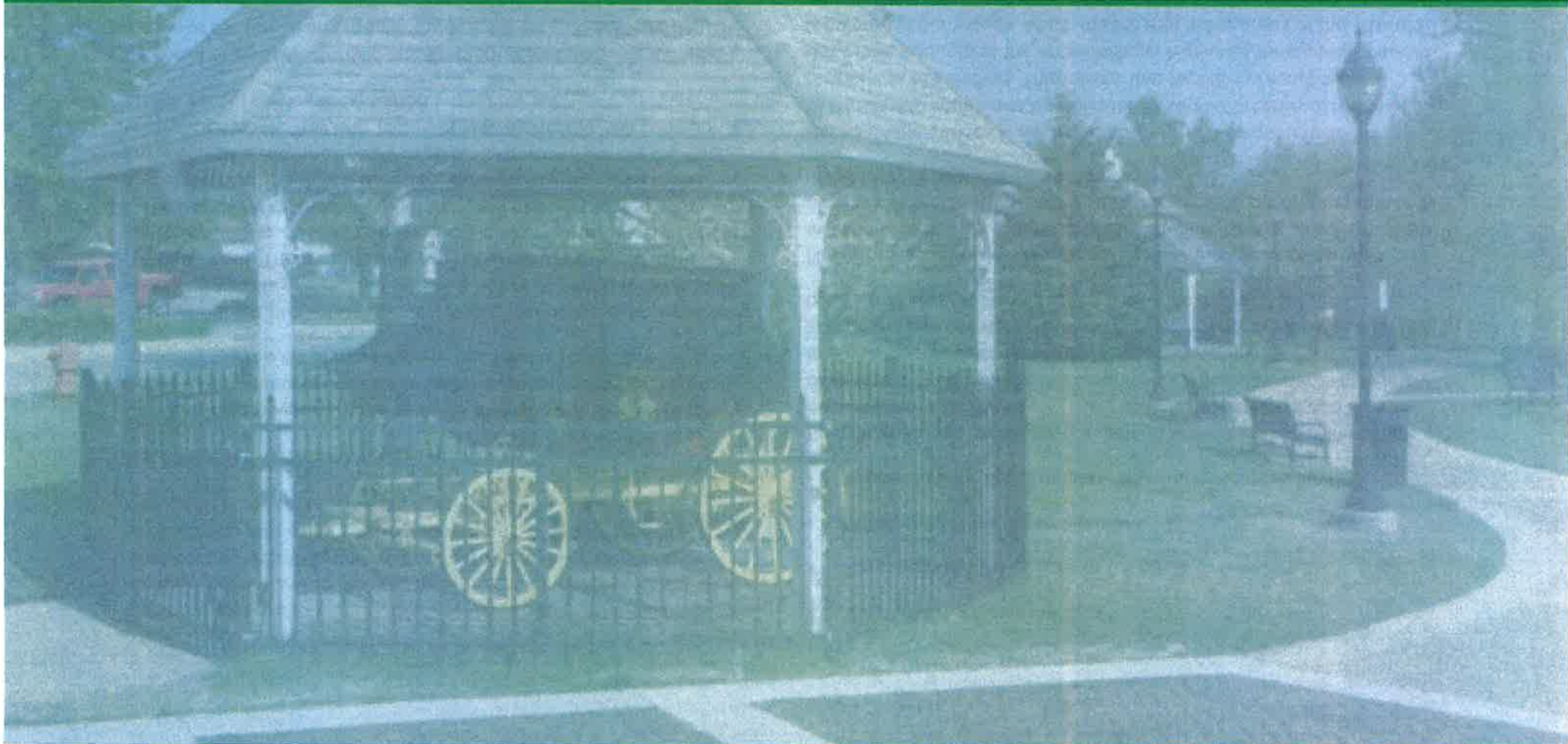
Special use areas do not have a defined service area, per the NRPA; because these facilities have more specific target users and naturally draw from a broader area. Although service area standards may imply that only people residing within a certain distance of a park will be sufficiently and conveniently served, public parks are intended for use by all community residents and are open to the public.

Nevertheless, it is generally ideal to consider areas outside of an existing service area radius for additional park land acquisition to help ensure that residents are adequately served with parks geographically distributed throughout the community.

Based on the service areas listed above, the 2.4-square mile Village of Middleville appears to be adequately served in terms of regional distribution of parkland. This means that facilities are sufficiently dispersed throughout the entire Village. However, most public parkland is located in the Village, which means that many areas of the Township are not likely “covered” by a service area.

Moreover, improving accessibility and non-motorized connections to all existing facilities may be one tool to establish an even more meaningful and connected recreation network and to strengthen walkability in the community.

6. GOALS & OBJECTIVES



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

A series of goals and objectives have been developed to form the foundation of this Recreation Plan. The goals are intended to describe a desirable end state or the condition of recreation in the TAPRC service area over the life of this plan, but some goals will remain relevant beyond this timeframe. The goal statements are intentionally general but are felt to be attainable through concerted efforts. The objective statements tend to be more specific and may be regarded as milestones in the journey to achieve the larger goal. The feedback resulting from community input and online survey acted as a catalyst for these goals. The goals and objectives are supported by the Action Program, presented in Chapter 7.

Goal 1. River-Themed Improvements

The Thornapple River will become an iconic community resource used for recreational activities and special events that help bolster the local economy via increased tourism. Enhanced access to the water and to the Village via the water will be provided while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the water resource.

1. Add or improve access to the riverfront between the dam and boat launch north of the bridge. Facilitate fishing from shore, visibility of the water's edge through selective cutting of vegetation, and safer pedestrian access to the river (steps, ramp, etc.)
2. Establish the river as a water trail, facilitate bike-canoe loops, and offer informal places to rest overnight alongside the river.
3. Improve the boat launch at Riverside Park and remove debris from the river to enable access to and from the river.
4. Support and develop new public launch site between the Village of Middleville and Parmalee Road to extend the water trail, improve safety, provide parking facilities, and inhibit trespassing.
5. Provide for a tubing take-out location at the trailhead located south of Crane Road.
6. Install bird watching and fishing platforms and interpretive signage along the Thornapple River, with particular focus along the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail.

Goal 2. Trails and Non-motorized Facilities

The residents and visitors of the TAPRC service area will enjoy a network of trails and safe and inviting connections to local and regional points of interest and recreational facilities.

1. Explore funding opportunities or general resource partners, including the DNR, Barry County Parks and Recreation, Thornapple Trail Association, People for Bikes, Barry County Road Commission, MDOT, West Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance.
2. Pave the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail in the Village from Irving Road to McCann Road and connect that segment north to Caledonia.
3. Connect the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail to the southern boundary of the Thornapple-Kellogg School District boundary.
4. Ensure that trailhead and staging areas are planned at reasonable intervals, offering modern restrooms, interactive and complete mapping kiosks, and water stations.
5. Work with Thornapple-Kellogg School District to provide sidewalks and pathways to walk and bike between school, neighborhoods, and public parks (such as Safe Routes to School).
6. Advocate for projects and activities that improve walking and biking for member entities.
7. Ensure that non-motorized signage is used to promote wayfinding and use of facilities while also encouraging safety.

Goal 3. Maintenance and Improvement of Existing Park Facilities

The citizens of the TAPRC service area will benefit from parkland that is accessible, usable and offers safe, modern equipment.

1. At a minimum, design facilities in compliance with ADA requirements and strive to achieve universal design.
2. Develop concept plans for parks in the TAPRC service area to help identify potential improvements and investment.
3. Explore preferred locations for pickleball courts.
4. Add and improve amenities and infrastructure at park facilities to increase accessibility, comfort, and usability.

Goal 4. Planning of a Sports Complex

The TAPRC service area will benefit from a multi-purpose activity center offering a variety of recreational opportunities for the region.

1. Explore funding opportunities for the development of a recreation complex offering a multitude of activities.
2. Coordinate with area stakeholders to determine the types of facilities most important to the community, including pickleball courts, ballfields, basketball courts, community center, etc.
3. Engage the citizenry of the TAPRC service area to solicit feedback on the various funding sources the residents would support for the future development of a sports complex.

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7. ACTION PROGRAM



The TAPRC has prepared the following Action Program, based primarily on the expertise of residents and area leaders, and the goals and objectives listed in Chapter 6. The Action Program details what the community plans to achieve within the next five years or more.

The Action Program does not supplant the goals and objectives, but should be used in conjunction with the goals and objectives. Many of the goals and objectives presented may be long-term in nature, and in many instances, entities in addition to TAPRC will need to work together in order to fully implement them.

However, parks and recreation planning should be viewed as flexible; and the timing of new projects may, in part, be influenced by the availability of property; requirements of funders; and cooperation of a multitude of entities. Moreover, public opinions and ideas may change or be refined over time; and this plan may be amended from time to time to reflect shifts in perception and needs. Priorities should be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary.

ACCESSIBILITY

The principles of universal design are supported by this Plan. As recreational facility development or improvement is considered in the future, barrier-free accessibility is a significant priority item to help ensure that recreation can be enjoyed by all residents and visitors of the Thornapple River Valley.

Improvements can include proper unitary surfaces for wheelchairs, accessible picnic tables and restrooms, resting benches frequently placed along a walking route, and transition plates between elevation changes. To alert someone to pay attention, contrasting color or texture treatments or interpretive stations should be used. Gentle slopes, Braille, and play equipment that is easy to get to and use are strongly encouraged. Water access areas should include portable or temporary matting to allow wheelchair users an easy, gently-sloping route to the water. In play areas, unitary surfaces, such as poured-in-place rubber tiles can be used, instead of shredded wood chips, sand or some other non-unitary surface which makes wheelchair use difficult.

POTENTIAL RESOURCE PARTNERS

A variety of resource partners and potential funding sources may exist to assist in implementing the strategic implementation summary provided on the following pages. A non-exhaustive summary of these resources is provided below.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources offers grant programs that should be contemplated by TAPRC as it implements this plan.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund can provide assistance for TAPRC's outdoor recreation projects, including land acquisition and physical development of park facilities. This assistance is intended to bolster existing facilities, protect critical natural resources and establish new parkland. This opportunity should particularly be contemplated for general acquisition and development activities.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is similar to the Trust Fund grant described above, in that it is meant to help fund land acquisition and park development.

Additionally, the DNR offers the Recreation Passport Grant Program, created in 2010 to be used for the development of public recreation facilities for local units of government. This funding is derived from the sale of the Recreation Passport which replaced the resident Motor Vehicle Permit (MVP) for state park entrance. The program is focused on renovating and improving existing parks, but the development of new parks is eligible.

Natural feature preservation has historically been the primary award criteria; and as such, this opportunity should especially be taken into account when planning for new passive recreation facilities. In addition, the LWCF now places emphasis on trails, "green" technology in outdoor recreation, universal design and coordination among recreation providers.

Trails and Non-Motorized Facilities

Trails encourage health and wellness, enhance quality of life, and promote sense of community. Trails also can improve non-motorized system safety. Aside from the programs described above, several other entities can provide assistance with trail funding and/or planning. These include the regional planning agency, Barry County, the People for Bikes, the Thornapple Trail Association, the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition, and the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance.

In addition, the Michigan Department of Transportation may provide funding for numerous types of projects that encourage safe, accessible and efficient forms of multi-modal transport, including non-motorized facilities and other improvements related to transportation. Grant programs to review include the Transportation Enhancement Program, Small Urban Program, and the Federal Local Safety Program.

Additionally, the Recreation Improvement Fund Grant and Recreation Trails Program Grant may help to fund projects that connect facilities on DNR-owned property. A DNR division or bureau is always the applicant, but a local government partnership may be considered if the project contributes to DNR goals and is located on, or linked to, DNR land. Given the extent of State land within the TAPRC service area, exploring these grant programs in connection with non-motorized linkages to State parks is a recommended long-term planning activity.

River-Themed Improvements

Waterways Program Grants is a DNR-based initiative aimed at assisting communities in the design and construction of recreational boating facilities. Local units of government are eligible to apply, and although the minimum match required is 50%, preference is given to applicants who can exceed that match.

Regional Planning and Leveraging Resources

Grant application guidelines increasingly include a provision for regional coordination and cooperation. TAPRC will generally receive more “points” for a grant application if it can demonstrate that the proposed project is the result of collaboration with an adjacent community or multiple units of government. While the very nature of TAPRC already exudes regional cooperation, further exploration of regional collaboration possibilities should be continued, especially when planning for future trail connections that may traverse more than one community.

In addition, most recreation grants will stipulate a minimum required local match. It is possible to be awarded grant dollars from multiple funding sources, and use the monies leveraged from one source as a partial match for another. An example might be a local trail project, where the community uses MDOT funds as the match for a DNR grant and vice versa. This can help save local government resources and is permitted by some grant programs. TAPRC should also seek partnerships with the many local organizations interested in augmenting quality of life in the community. These may include, without limitation, Barry Community Foundation, Thornapple Area Enrichment Foundation, Corewell Health Pennock Foundation, Barry County United Way, Paul Henry Thornapple Trail Association, Chief Noonday Chapter of the North Country Trail Association, and the many service clubs in the area. These entities may offer pecuniary contributions, volunteer services, or the gift of equipment.

IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

The following is the five-year capital improvement plan for the TAPRC service area. Each project or proposed action is listed along with a target year for implementation. The rationale for each action or project is discussed on the pages following the schedule. With regard to funding sources, it is the intention of the entities to match local funds with state, federal, and/or private funds whenever possible.

YEAR	ACTION	PROBABLE COSTS	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE(S)
2026	Expand and improve public access to the Thornapple River within the Village and between the Village and Parmalee Road through brush clearing, bank stabilization, and other low-cost enhancements.	To be determined	
2027	Continue the development and extension of the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail, by securing right-of-way land necessary to complete connections north to Caledonia and south to Hastings.	To be determined	
2028	Conduct a comprehensive inventory of all park facilities and prioritize parks for concept plan development.	To be determined	MDNR Grants, general fund, private contributions/donations, fundraisers and foundations.
2029	Complete one to three park concept plans.	To be determined	
2030	Establish a community outdoor recreation complex with facilities such as pickleball, baseball/softball, playgrounds, etc.	To be determined	
Flexible	Develop a sign program and improve wayfinding signage for the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail.	To be determined	

APPENDIX

FIVE-YEAR RECREATION PLAN 2026-2030

www.villageofmiddleville.org/thornapple-area-parks-recreation/

