

Park and Recreation Master Plan Williamston, Michigan 2009-2013

**Michelle Hyne, Mayor
Michael Moody, Mayor Pro-tem
Kenneth Zichi, Council Member
Scott VanAllsburg, Council Member
Carmen Siciliano, Council Member
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and
Lisa Hitchcock, City Manager**



**By
City of Williamston Parks and Recreation Commission
Modification of the 2005-2009 Plan developed by**

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Section I Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the 2009 – 2014 City of Williamston Park and Recreation Plan is to set the direction for Williamston over the next five years in the acquisition, development, renovation and provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. It takes into account the views of residents through a 2004 survey sent to 700 registered Williamston voters, builds on recent efforts to create a “walkable community” as evidenced in the 1999 “Park Corridor Plan” (Gove Associates 1999.) The plan builds upon the recommendations of the 2005-2009 park plan and links with current improvements to McCormick park, accounts for the upgraded school facilities and the devastation of the 2007 tornado, develops the southern part of the City along the Williamston Road Corridor, acquired oversight over Old Mill Park, and reflects the property deal between the City and schools..

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources requires an updated park and recreation plan to be submitted for approval every five years to be eligible for state and federal park and recreation grants such as those from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. This updated plan will act as an outline for enhancing the park and recreation opportunities in Williamston and will maintain eligibility for certain funding sources.

Methods

This document was developed by the City of Williamston Parks and Recreation Commission. The Commission was established as an outcome of the 2005-2009 park master plan. The commission met monthly beginning in 2005 and has been the point of contact for citizen to share their ideas and opinions. The current master plan represents the ideas and opinions shared by the citizens of Williamston to the commission. It reflects input obtained during 2 public workshops held on December 3, 2008 and January 20, 2009. A working draft of the master plan was made available to the public on February 3, 2009 with request for feedback. Additionally, a public hearing was held on February 11, 2009 before the Parks and Recreation Commission and the master plan was further discussed at the February 23, 2009 city council meeting.

Plan Preparation

The 2009-2013 Park and Recreation Plan for the City of Williamston was prepared by the City of Williamston Parks and Recreation Commission members, Ryan Sweeder (Chair), Earl Wolf (Vice-Chair), Phillis Chirico, Gwen Hulbert, John Pratt (City Council Representative), and Larry Wittrup in conjunction with City Manager Lisa Hitchcock.

Plan Timeline

| | |
|--|---|
| 2006-2009 | Monthly Parks and Recreation Commission meetings for public input on issues associated with parks |
| December 3, 2008 | Work Session of Parks and Recreation Commission to update master plan |
| January 20, 2009 | Work Session of Parks and Recreation Commission to update master plan |
| February 3, 2009 | Working draft of master plan made available to public for comment |
| February 11, 2009 | Public Hearing before Parks and Recreation Commission |
| February 23, 2009 | Discussion of master plan before City Council |
| Include public meeting specifically for master plan, approval by city council etc. | |

Section II Community Description

Administration

The following shows the organization structure of the City of Williamston. All city expenditures for parks and recreational purposes are approved by the City Council. The City of Williamston has a weak mayor form of government with a city manager.

City Council - Legislative body appropriating money for park and recreation function and passing park and recreation related ordinances. The council also directly supervises the city manager.

Council members are:

Michelle Hyne, Mayor
Michael Moody, Mayor Pro-tem
Kenneth Zichi, Council Member
Scott VanAllsburg, Council Member
Carmen Siciliano, Council Member
Traci Smith, Council Member
John Pratt, Council Member

City Manager – The City Manager is the CEO of Williamston City Government. The manager directly supervises department heads, including Planning and Zoning and Public Works. Lisa Hitchcock is the City Manager.

Office of Planning and Zoning – This office is responsible for park and recreation planning. McKenna Associates is the Planning and Development Administrator.

Department of Public Works – This office is responsible for park maintenance. Gary Haney is the Superintendent of Public Works.

Parks and Recreation Commission – The commission is a volunteer board of Williamston residents who fulfill an advisory role to the City Council on all matters pertaining to the City of Williamston parks.

All park and recreation programming is provided by cooperating non-profit entities in the community. The Red Cedar Recreation Association (RCRA) is the principal provider through youth and adult sports.

Parks and Recreation Budget

Table 1 summarizes the 2006 – 2009 budgets for parks and recreation within the City of Williamston. This includes funds that directly subsidize the Red Cedar Recreation Association (RCRA), a community non-profit organization providing youth and adult

athletic programming at Williamston parks, at the Williamston Community Schools and at other local public venues. The City provides \$10 per registration by any city resident in direct financial support of the RCRA's recreation programming. The Williamston Community Schools are the fiduciary of the RCRA.

Table 1: Parks and Recreation Budgets 2006-2009

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 08/09 budget |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Salaries & Wages | 17,701 | 12,499 | 16,514 | 20,000 |
| Fringe Benefits | 6,859 | 5,280 | 6,994 | 9,000 |
| Operating Supplies | 460 | 338 | 1,564 | 1,000 |
| Contractual Services | 12,350 | - | 25,831 | - |
| Insurance - Liab. / Prop. | 260 | 310 | 179 | 500 |
| School Pool Contract | 20,000 | 25,000 | 15,000 | 20,000 |
| Utilities | 2,869 | 3,173 | 2,679 | 5,000 |
| Repairs & Maintenance Building | 922 | 1,909 | 215 | 2,500 |
| Equipment Rental | | | 10,475 | |
| Total | 61,421 | 48,509 | 79,451 | 58,000 |

Location and Size

The City of Williamston is located in north central Ingham County. The City encompasses 2,842 acres and was incorporated as a village in 1877 and as a city in 1944.

Williamston is east south east of the Lansing/East Lansing metropolitan area. The corridor from East Lansing/Meridian Township to Williamston through Williamstown Township (Ingham County) is rapidly developing both for residential and commercial purposes with a subsequent decline in agricultural and wild land uses. On the south, the City of Williamston reaches to I96. This corridor along the expressway access to the City is also poised for rapid development. The area currently is only well linked to the downtown, the Red Cedar River and the city parks by roadway. There is a lack of non-motorized trail linkage. The township directly north and northwest of the City (Williamstown in Ingham County) is growing, with significant development taking place and more planned for the Grand River/M43 corridor. Further to the north (Woodhull Township in Shiawassee County), the northwest (Bath Township in Clinton County) and to the south (Wheatfield Township in Ingham County) are shifting from primarily agricultural/wild land uses to increasingly residential areas. This is especially true of Bath Township. To the east, Locke Township (Ingham County) is still primarily agricultural and wild land, while south of that and south east of Williamston are Leroy Township and the City of Webberville (Ingham County), which are experiencing more rapid growth due to their proximity to I96.

To the southeast of Ingham County along I96 is Livingston County, the fastest growing county in the state from 1990 to 2000 (36% growth in population). In total, this suggests

that the demand for park land in and near Williamston is likely to sharply increase as population rises and the amount of nearby wild land and open space declines, making way for development.

Natural Features

Topography

Topography in Williamston has little relief, but the Red Cedar River and its tributaries do have a defined floodplain. This lack of topographic change minimizes concerns about water erosion due to slope. However, it also makes areas of higher elevation especially valuable, such as the sledding hill in Deer Creek's Park.

Water Resources

The principal water resource in Williamston is the Red Cedar River. It is fed by a number of tributaries, including Deer Creek, which is the most extensive tributary in the City, flowing from the southwestern part of the City (adjacent to the City well field property) northward through Deer Creek Park. McCormick Park provides the principal public access to the Red Cedar in Williamston. Wetlands are found in the Red Cedar floodplain and in the southern part of the City near Linn Road, both east and west of Williamston Road. The Tobias-Linn Drain (an Ingham County Drain) also traverses the southern part of the City of Williamston.

Soils

The Soil Survey of Ingham County indicates that three predominate types of soil (Marlette, Oshtemo and Capac) are found in Williamston. The Marlette and Oshtemo soils are found in the well-drained areas and the Capac soils are found in the more poorly drained areas especially in the floodplain and wetland areas.

Climate

The Michigan State Climatologist reports that Williamston's climate is sub-humid temperate. In January, the typical daily temperature is 20.1 degrees and in July the typical daily temperature is 70.5 degrees. The total annual precipitation is 29.7 inches with most falling between April and September in the form of rain. The average seasonal snowfall is 40.2 inches. Williamston's four distinct seasons provide the opportunity for many seasonal recreation activities, including snow and ice activities such as sledding and skating.

Vegetation

The vegetation in Williamston is typical of south central Michigan, dominated by deciduous trees where other land uses (e.g. agriculture, turf, development, etc.) do not preclude the typical forest species. This is especially apparent in the Red Cedar floodplain where silver maple, American elm, cottonwood and green ash are common. There are many street trees in Williamston and they provide valued shade in the spring and summer, vibrant fall color and habitat for birds and other wildlife year round. Key street tree species are sugar and Norway maple, red and white oak, white ash and honey locust. A key vegetation concern is the emerald ash borer, which dooms all green, white

or exotic ash (e.g. mountain ash), regardless of size unless expensive insecticide treatments are regularly applied. Except for large specimen trees, the City should continue to identify and remove ash from the landscape. In public park areas, dead and dying ash trees could present a safety hazard. As a result of the 2007 tornado, 39 trees (including many ash trees) were removed from McCormick Park.

Wildlife

The Red Cedar River floodplain provides some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in the City. Mammals found there include white tailed deer, squirrel, raccoons, muskrat and mink. A wide variety of birds also use the floodplain, highlighted by waterfowl. Fish species in the Red Cedar include rock bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike and bluegills, as well as catfish, carp and suckers. The floodplain is important habitat for reptiles and amphibians as well as insects.

Across the rest of the city, especially the developed central and northern areas, many song birds are common, providing many residents the opportunity to enjoy bird feeding and observation. South near I 96, there is still open land that has the potential to benefit a wide variety of wildlife species. As this area is developed, creating habitat corridors along Deer Creek, the Tobias-Linn Drain, non-motorized trails/pathways and at retention/detention basins holds out the promise of a city with abundant wildlife that all residents, visitors and workers can enjoy.

Land Use

Table 2 shows the land use within the city of Williamston. Most of the undeveloped lands currently lie in the southern portion of the city. The land is broken down into the following categories as described in the Williamston Comprehensive Plan:

Exempt – This class contains property that is tax exempt. Typically, that is land that is in public ownership such as parks, schools, or other public properties.

Commercial – The commercial category includes areas with or without structures, where goods are distributed or personal business services are provided. This includes the retail sales of goods and services to local residents and consumers attracted from outside the community. The downtown commercial district, as well as single lot or highway, retail, wholesale and office space are included in this category.

Industrial – Industrial includes areas where raw or unfinished materials or commodities are used to produce a product. This includes industries whose manufacturing processes may cause emissions that are potentially detrimental to surrounding land uses.

Residential – These are areas where dwellings and their accessory buildings occupy the major portion of the land.

Developmental – Parcels in this category have been designated for future development.

Table 2: Land Use within the City of Williamston

| Classification | No. of Parcels | Area (acres) | Percent of Total |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Public/Exempt | 91 | 329 | 22.1% |
| Commercial | 151 | 184 | 12.4% |
| <i>Developed</i> | 127 | 131 | 71.0% |
| <i>Vacant</i> | 24 | 53 | 29.0% |
| Industrial | 20 | 240 | 16.1% |
| <i>Developed</i> | 11 | 94 | 39.1% |
| <i>Vacant</i> | 9 | 146 | 60.9% |
| Residential | 1,201 | 453 | 30.4% |
| <i>Developed</i> | 1,061 | 334 | 73.8% |
| <i>Vacant</i> | 140 | 119 | 26.2% |
| Developmental | 7 | 282 | 19.0% |
| CITY TOTAL | 2,842 | 1,488 | |

Source: City of Williamston – GIS Database

The southern less-developed area provides potential opportunity for the creation of future recreation opportunities that require larger space, or are more conveniently located for the southernmost Williamstonians.

Transportation

Several significant transportation corridors intersect or border the City of Williamston. State highway M43 (Grand River Ave.) bisects the city running east-west. Interstate 96 served by interchange 117 (Williamston Road), provides a direct expressway link on the southern part of the city. Crossing the Red Cedar River to the north from Grand River Avenue, Williamston Road/Putnam Street is the lone vehicular/pedestrian link for north – south traffic. The desire for a “walkable” community was clearly expressed in the 1999 Park Corridor Plan (Gove Associates 1999) and the draft Williamston Road Corridor Plan (Community Planning Associates 2004). In particular the 2004 plan calls for “pedestrian circulation to enable future and existing neighborhoods to be linked with sidewalks, hiking/biking trails and other pedestrian friendly designs”. It also calls for “connecting all existing and proposed residential developments to the downtown area”. This was reinforced in this current 2004-05 planning process through the recreation needs assessment. Plans are currently in place to improve the walkability of McCormick Park, but Memorial Park needs a similar pathway. However, for truly sustainable development, pedestrian connections should be available not only for neighborhoods but also for commercial and industrial areas as workers, visitors and residents need to better connect. Sidewalk improvements have been recently undertaken, but expansion toward Plymouth Landing and the industrial park or pedestrian/bike connections to other communities has not progressed significantly. Pedestrian/bike access will promote more healthy lifestyles such as walking to work, lunch or shopping or using a bicycle for exercise during work breaks instead of sitting.

Demographic Characteristics

All demographic characteristics cited are based on data provide by the US Bureau of the Census.

Overall Population

There were 3,441 people residing in Williamston in 2000. This is an 18% increase from the 1990 census population of 2,992, influenced to a large measure by the expansion of the Williamston City limits during that period. Williamston and DeWitt were the two fastest growing areas in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton Counties between 1990 and 2000. The 2009 projected population for Williamston according to the Williamston Comprehensive plan is 3480, representing a 1% increase from the 2000 census. However, with Williamston being a hub for the neighboring townships for goods, services and education, it is likely that the population pressure on City facilities will be considerably greater than that illustrated by the census of the City population levels. Of the population over 4 years of age, 14.4% are reported to have a disability by the US Census of 2000.

Households

There were 1,470 occupied housing units in Williamston in 2000. Of these, 65% were owner occupied and 35% were in rental units. This is an increase in owner occupied/decrease in rental occupied from 1990 where the Bureau of the Census reported that 59% of households were owner occupied and 41% in rental properties. The median household income in 2000 for City households was \$39,727, very similar to \$40,774 for households across Ingham County. Households headed by females comprise 11.6% of Williamston households and single-person households make up 32% of all households.

Age, Sex and Race

The age distribution of Williamston's population is gradually getting older with the single greatest population increase in the 45-54 age group over the past decade (Table 3). Somewhat surprisingly, the proportion of elementary and middle school aged residents has stayed relatively constant. The largest decline has been seen in the 25-34 year old group, likely reflecting people who moved in during the 1980s and have stayed to raise their children.

Females comprise the majority of Williamston residents (53%) while 47 percent are males. The racial make-up of the City is predominately Caucasian with 97% reporting their race as white to the US Bureau of the Census in 2000. In summary, every age category and men and women are well represented across the population. Hence, the City needs to take into account the full range of residents in their provision of outdoor recreational opportunity. Further, it is likely that the population will diversify as the nation's population does, making it important to continue to assess the recreational needs of a changing population. The City does not have enclaves of population with disproportionately high levels of persons with disabilities, seniors, those with lower incomes or specific ethnic identities.

Table 3. Age Distribution of Williamston Population by Age Range, 1990 and 2000.

| Age Range | Percent in 1990 | Percent in 2000 |
|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 0-4 | 8.8% | 8.0% |
| 5-9 | 7.7 | 7.8 |
| 10-14 | 7.0 | 7.1 |
| 15-24 | 14.8 | 13.0 |
| 25-34 | 20.1 | 16.4 |
| 35-44 | 14.5 | 15.8 |
| 45-54 | 8.1 | 12.5 |
| 55-64 | 7.4 | 7.1 |
| 65-74 | 6.5 | 6.4 |
| 75 and over | 5.2 | 6.1 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Education

The population of Williamston is well educated according to the State of Michigan statistics, with 68% of adults 25 and over having attended college. Of these over half having earned a bachelor's or graduate college degree. Further, the voters of the Williamston school district in a 2004 special election approved a bond issue which significantly upgraded the K-12 system in the district. One aspect of the bond was to renovate and improve the high school gymnasium and some associated athletic facilities. These amenities are available to use by the general public through a fee for use program.

Regional Considerations

The populations of the adjacent townships of Williamstown Township, Wheatfield Township, Leroy Township and Locke Township are growing. Respectively, they have grown by 13%, 5%, 3% and 10% between 1990 and 2000. Residents of these areas use Williamston as a hub for goods, services and education. It is also reasonable to suggest they use city parks, which along with the Williamston Community Schools (also in the city) provide the venue for youth and adult sports leagues programmed by the RCRA. With the exception of Williamstown Township, the other adjacent townships also lack a park and recreation infrastructure. In total, almost 12,000 people were reported in the adjacent townships in the 2000 Census. Coupled with Williamston's 3,500 residents, it is reasonable to picture Williamston's park and recreation infrastructure and programs serving more than 15,000 potential users.

Zoning

Williamston is a zoned community. McKenna Associates is the Planning and Development Administrator in the Office of Planning and Zoning. A zoning map is found on page 12.

[Insert Zoning Map on this page]

Section III Recreation Inventory

Recreation Facilities

The following inventory lists all of the public, semi-public and private recreation facilities located within Williamston and many of those in nearby communities. It also assesses problems of existing public recreation facilities in Williamston.

City of Williamston Inventory and Assessment

All parks are inspected annually by members of the Parks and Recreation Commission. Below are the assets and problems associated with each of the parks. Due to the relatively small area of Williamston, all of the parks service most all residents and many residents of neighboring towns.

1. McCormick Park

McCormick Park is centrally located within the City of Williamston on North Putnam Street. Inventory suggests the following park assets and challenges:

Assets

- Two picnic shelters
- Several picnic tables and grills
- Recreational sporting field
- Significant public river frontage (almost 1/4 mile)
- Two play structures
- Playground equipment that involved community support
- Access to the Red Cedar River including facilities for carry-in watercraft and fishing
- Restrooms
- Centrally located with the City of Williamston
- Bandshell
- Parking availability
- Signage

Problems

- Poor access for those with physical disabilities
- Unpaved parking
- Very limited access/opportunity for fishing especially for the disabled needed

2. Deer Creek Park

Deer Creek Park is located on Mechanic Street. The park is linked to a football field and track that is owned by the school district.

Assets

- Sledding hill
- Multi-use open space
- Wooded area located on the West boundary
- Adjoins Williamston Community Schools property including sports complex
- Ample recently-paved parking
- Small pavilion
- Gated access
- Signage

Problems

- There is minimal shelter or tree cover at the park other than on the western boundary

3. Memorial Park

Memorial Park is located on Highland Street next to the Elementary School.

Assets

- Almost ¼ mile frontage on the Red Cedar River
- Linked to area south of river by pedestrian bridge
- Adjoins Williamston Community Schools property
- Signage

Problems

- No pathways or facilities
- No parking
- Limited access

4. West End Park

West End Park is a wetland/retention area that is located off Grand River Ave. The area serves as wetland habitat and provides an area for wildlife watching. The area is lacking a sense of identity and is not clearly linked to the Williamston park system. There is no parking and a lack of any interpretive information. Public access is currently only available through a 12 foot wide easement out to Grand River Avenue.

5. Old Mill Park

West of Putnam Street Bridge including the 100 yd long river boardwalk, informational signage, historical plaza and gazebo. The man-made island has an extensive management plan focused on enhancing the visual appeal and natural habitat.

6. Williamston Community Schools Recreation Resources

The Williamston Community School District operates two elementary schools (Discovery and Explorer), one middle school and one high school. All of these schools are located within the City of Williamston. These school sites are designed primarily to meet the needs of the students, but do provide extensive recreation facilities and opportunities for school district residents, which includes all City of Williamston residents. The schools have indoor and outdoor recreational facilities such as gymnasiums, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, football fields, a track, a pool, sand volleyball court and soccer fields. The pool manager, two employees of the Red Cedar Recreation Association (a non-profit of which the Williamston Community Schools are the fiduciary), the high school and the middle school athletic directors all provide significant community recreation service. School facilities are used by community members on many occasions when not in use for school functions.

7. Lands Transitioning Between City and School Ownership

Negotiations are currently underway to exchange lands between City and School ownership. These assets will continue to remain accessible to the public throughout and after the completion of any exchange. Viewed through the lens of recreational availability, the following resources may be impacted.

Portion of Memorial Park

Assets:

- Adjacent to school lands
- Baseball/softball field

Problems:

- Tennis courts are poorly maintained
- Limited parking
- The equipment at the small play area is rusty and in disrepair
- Remains of a defunct swimming pool
- An abandoned building in need of removal

Williamston Area Community Center

The Community Center fills a variety of recreational and community programs needs. It currently is host to the library and senior center. Meeting rooms and classrooms are used by the community education department, the community foodbank, boy and girl scouts, a yoga class and can be reserved by any community groups or individuals. External to the community center is a large play area and the Williamston Schools Sports Complex.

Community center play area

Assets:

- Adjacent to community center

- Basketball courts (renovated in 2008)
- Young children's play area

8. Well Field

The current well field located off of Linn Road is a large piece of land owned by the City. Although not currently use for any recreational purpose, this area of land provides potential for future development with convenient access for the residents of the Plymouth landing area. One major drawback to development of this area for recreational purposes is the current inaccessibility to these lands by pedestrians or bicycles accompanied by its relative distance from downtown.

9. Miscellaneous City Land

A pocket park is currently located at City Hall. Another is planned for land owned by the Downtown Development Authority east of the bridge over the Red Cedar River on the north side of Grand River Avenue. These can provide islands of relaxation adjacent to development and can assist in channeling visitors from parking to local businesses. Additionally, Thurlby Park (a small strip of land) provides minimal public access downstream of the downtown area.

Park and Recreation Facilities in Nearby Communities

Williamstown Township Hall

Located at the corner of North Zimmer and Germany roads, the Township Hall lands are available to township residents for recreational use and for meetings of community clubs and organization. This land includes a pavilion, soccer field and baseball diamond.

Williamstown Township Park

Williamstown Township Community Park was built in 1996 and consists of 132-acres located approximately 3 miles west of downtown Williamston off Grand River Ave. The park lies on the banks of the Red Cedar River and currently has a sledding hill, nature trails, wildflower prairie, two soccer fields, a baseball field, dog walk, an open turf area for various activities an informational kiosk and a parking area (includes port-o-john facility.)

MDOT Roadside Park

The Michigan Department of Transportation roadside park is located at the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Meridian Road. It is located on the banks of the Red Cedar and is a 1.8 acre park with picnic tables, grill units, restroom facilities and canoe launch facilities.

Meridian Township Parks

Meridian Township has eighteen parks and natural areas available for recreational use. There are three parks that provide active interpretation: the Nokomis Learning center (a Native American Cultural Center), Harris Nature Center (an environmental education center) and Meridian Historic Village, which offers people the opportunity to experience the nineteenth century lifestyle.

Ingham County Parks

Ingham County Parks has a park system of more than 1,400 acres that includes seven main parks and two smaller parks in southern Ingham County. The closest parks to Williamston are Lake Lansing Park North and Lake Lansing Park South. Lake Lansing Park South (once a popular amusement park) is located on the southeast shore of Lake Lansing, the largest body of water within 30 miles of Lansing. The 30 acre-site includes a sandy beach bordered by four acres of grass. Besides swimming, fishing and paddle boats are available for water recreation. For land based recreation, the Friends of Ingham County Parks have funded the construction of a band shell providing a community performance space for music and community entertainment and events. In addition, there is picnicking, volleyball, horseshoes and other opportunities for general recreation. Lake Lansing North is larger with over 400 acres of land providing non-motorized trails, picnicking, softball diamonds, and volleyball. At the waterfront, a well developed boat launch for trailer and carry-in boats is available.

The other notable Ingham County Park is the Potter Park Zoo. This 85 acre park has housed animals since 1920 and its control recently moved from the City of Lansing to Ingham County. The park consists of the zoo, picnic area, pavilions, a portion of the City's river trail system, canoe rentals and significant riverfront lands.

Ingham County Fair and Exposition Center

The Ingham County Fairgrounds are located in Mason and are best known for hosting the ten-day Ingham County Fair. The fairgrounds are used continuously from early spring through early winter. The primary use of the fairgrounds is for equestrian shows. Other uses include livestock shows, pet shows, automobile shows and events such as circuses, swap meets and bicycles races. Throughout the winter months (November through March), the fairgrounds provide winter storage for boats, campers, motor homes and cars.

City of Lansing

The City of Lansing has over 100 park and recreation facilities. Those of exceptional regional importance that serve Williamston residents include:

- Fenner Nature Center: contains primarily natural areas and offers environmental education, summer day camps and nature walks.

- Rivertrail: an urban trail system that borders the Red Cedar and Grand Rivers. The river trail offers sites for picnicking, links to many attractions (e.g. Impressions 5 Museum, Lansing Community College, Lansing Farmers Market, Michigan State University, etc.) and also adjoins park and recreation facilities with a large amphitheater and festival grounds.

City of East Lansing

- The City of East Lansing has 24 parks. Four key regional parks are:
- Abbott Road Park: 130 acres of partially wooded areas and wetland areas linked to the paved Northern Tier Trail.
 - The Family Aquatic Center: on Abbot just north of Lake Lansing Road.
 - East Lansing Soccer and Softball Complexes: on Abbott Road at the north end of the City near the Family Aquatic Center.

Michigan State University

- MSU is located approximately eleven miles west of Williamston. It offers a large variety of recreational opportunities on campus including trails, natural woodlot areas, a planetarium, performing arts venues, Big Ten sporting events, and several gardens.

State of Michigan Facilities

- **Rose Lake Wildlife Research Area**- Located in Bath Township in Clinton County is the closest State of Michigan facility to Williamston. It is an 873-acre farmland and wildland site used for wildlife research also provides wildlife oriented recreation such as hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. In addition, many use the area for non-motorized trail activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing and bicycling.
- **Sleepy Hollow State Park** – Located in Clinton County 12 miles northwest of Williamston is a 2,700-acre park that offers camping, picnic facilities, playgrounds, a beach house, boat launches, swimming, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, hiking, bicycling and cross-country skiing.
- Three other state facilities offering outdoor recreation that are located within a thirty-mile radius of Williamston are the Dansville State Game Area (southern Ingham County), the Pickney and Brighton State Recreation Areas, both located in Livingston County.

Commercial and Non-Profit Recreation Facilities

There are several private sector organizations that address the recreation needs of some segments of the population. These commercial recreation facilities may not be accessible to all residents because they do charge user fees. The following list summarizes the types of commercial recreation facilities that are available in Ingham County and within thirty miles of Williamston.

- Williamston Community Fitness Center & Walking Track
- Williamston Senior Center
- Golf Courses (21)
- FunTyme (water park, putt-putt golf and go-kart facility)
- Harris Nature Center
- Woldumar Nature Center
- Campgrounds (Lansing Cottonwood, Moon Lake, PJ Family, Wheel Inn, Ingham County Fairgrounds)
- Athletic Clubs (Yoga and cycling center, Curves, YMCA, Court One, Gold's Gym, Powerhouse Gym and The Mac)
- Roller Skating (Edru Roller Skating Arena)
- Theater/Stage (Williamston Theatre, Boarshead Michigan Public, Lansing Civic Players Guild, The Riverwalk Theatre, Wharton Center for Performing Arts)
- Dance Studios
- Arts, Science and Education (The Depot Museum, Lansing Art Gallery, Impression Five Museum, Kresge Art Museum, MSU Museum, Abrams Planetarium, MSU Cyclotron, R.E. Olds Museum, Michigan Women's Historical Center, Michigan Museum of Surveying)
- Baseball Fields (Oldsmobile Park)
- Movie Theaters (Sun Theatre, Celebration! Cinemas, NCG Theaters, AMC Theaters, Lansing Mall 6)
- Bowling Alleys (Gold Star Lanes, Pro Bowl, Marvel Lanes and MSU Union)
- Shopping Centers (storefronts along Grand River Avenue , Frandor, Meridian Mall, Lansing Mall, and Eastwood Town Center)

SECTION IV

Background for 2005-2009

Overview-

Fulfilling one of the first recommendations of the 2005-2009 parks master plan, the City established a 7-member citizen Parks and Recreation Commission in 2005. This body meets monthly and has oversight for the park lands and plays an advisory role to the City Council on all matters pertaining to the parks. The commission provides a venue for citizens to share input or criticism about the parks.

In October 2007, a tornado swept through the city of Williamston and caused significant damage in both Deer Creek and McCormick Parks. Much of the focus by the commissions subsequent to this event was the reconstruction of the damage and planned replacement of lost trees and other assets.

The following sections provide specific background for the developments surrounding each of the major parks.

McCormick Park –

In 2006, the parks commission worked with Capital Consultants to develop a master plan for McCormick Park. This plan would integrate existing facilities; future funded facilities and proposed additions. Public hearings were held, plans reviewed and a finished plan was submitted to city council for approval during 2006 and 2007.

The commission worked with the Williamston Kiwanis Club and the Williamston Beautification Committee to begin to fulfill some of the envisioned items in the McCormick Park plan. During spring 2007, the Kiwanis Club donated a new “Tot-Lot” Playground, replacing a set of aging structures. During 2008, the Williamston Beautification Committee had raised enough money to initiate the installation of a bandshell within the park in accordance with the park plan. An initial concert/fundraiser was held in September 2008. The project is expected to be completed during the summer of 2009.

During 2007, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) proposed a new memorial be installed within McCormick Park. This project had considerable public support, so the McCormick Park plan was adjusted to include this new structure. On Memorial Day 2008, the VFW dedicated its new veteran’s memorial, near the Putnam Street bridge.

In the fall of 2007, the commission voted to complete a proposal for a Natural Resources Trust Fund grant as a means to help raise the money to fulfill the vision set forth in the Capital Consultants plan. This was completed and filed to the state in April 2008. The plan requested nearly \$400,000 with a 40% match by the city and the city was informed that the proposal would be funded in December 2008.

Memorial Park –

In 2006 the city council recommended a land swap with the Williamston School District. The city would give the school district the high-use playground area of Memorial Park (adjacent the

elementary school) in exchange for the “playground park” adjoining the old high school, now a city community center. The city would retain the river frontage natural area in Memorial Park.

Deer Creek Park –

This downtown park is primarily used by the Lion’s Club during Jubilee, for winter sledding and parking for High School football games. The “pit area” used for Jubilee’s Demolition Derby, was filled in and a temporary areas is erected for use during the Jubilee, allowing other use of the land throughout the rest of the year. In 2008, the parking lot was expanded and repaved, with improvements to the fencing and gate. The pavilion was also rebuilt due to damage by the 2007 tornado.

Old Mill Park –

In 2006 the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) requested the Parks and Recreation Commission to take oversight of this area including the river boardwalk, island and gazebo. In 2008, the Park and Recreation Commission renamed the area Old Mill Park (a name recommended by one of the city residence through an open call for names) to recognize the historical significance that the area played in the city of Williamston. In 2006, a Historical Plaza was built which includes the historic millstone (encased in concrete) and wayside display panels with interpretive information about the mill and bridge. The informational panels were donated by the Rotary Club.

The landscaping around the gazebo has been maintained by annual planting and upkeep by the Red Cedar Garden Club. In 2008, a long-term management plan for the island and riverbank areas was created and the initial stages have been implemented by Wildtype. The plan is designed to achieve the desire expressed by the public of creating an attractive natural area. The plan further limits invasive species and focuses on long-term management. The management plan includes yearly maintenance, which is vital to control invasive species, and will involve periodic burns offering an educational opportunity for the community about the vital role fire plays in the natural life cycle.

Community involvement with the island has been high to date. During multiple a Fall 2008 work days, 30+ volunteers cut and removed logs from the island. The result is a cleaner habitat featuring flood-tolerant native riparian trees and plantings. Volunteers are already being assembled for another spring island clearing.

Update on ACTION PROGRAM from 2005-2009

- 1. A citizen park and recreation advisory committee should be formed to work with the City Council and appropriate personnel in the executive branch of Williamston city government.** --Completed
- 2. Non-motorized trail expansion to link community assets including parks, schools, businesses, the Red Cedar River and neighborhoods should be a top priority.** --Initial work on development of paths in McCormick Park and repairs of sidewalks in disrepair. The topic remains a focus of the park plan. Have had discussions with Williamstown Township.
- 3. The quantity and quality of recreation opportunities related to the Red Cedar River needs to be improved by enhancing opportunity for water-based recreation (fishing, canoeing/kayaking) and adjacent non-motorized trails with universal access features that connect aesthetically pleasing public recreation spaces and community schools.** – In process through the renovation of McCormick Park. Future access improvements also planned at Memorial Park.
- 4. Each park (including linear and pocket parks) should be clearly designated, with an attractive entrance sign, appropriate parking, non-motorized trail opportunities, proper access for the disabled and a distinctive, inviting character.** -- Improved signage at all park locations. Improved parking at Deer Creek Park. Improvement in process for McCormick Park.
- 5. Williamston needs to better use existing public lands such as the well field area in the southern part of town, Thurlby Park near the Red Cedar River and other publicly owned spaces to create important park land, maintain open space and link people to nature. Some, such as the well field may provide the opportunity for developed recreation facilities needing a large land base (athletic fields, nature trails, etc.).** –No significant progress on this. (Should this still be considered a focus item, or is it a long term goal?)
- 6. Williamston needs to use water management features associated with new development (e.g. retention/detention basins) as ecological assets by using wetland plant species, irregular shorelines, varying depths and other techniques to maximize the aesthetics and wildlife value of these necessary aspects of development.**—Water management and ecological management is a key aspect in the improvements and maintenance plans for McCormick Park and Old Mill Park.

SECTION V

BASIS FOR ACTION

The current recreation needs assessment, the 1999 Park Corridor plan, McCormick Park Master Plan, the current recreation inventory and assessment of Williamston and nearby jurisdictions and the Michigan State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2008-2012 constitute the basis for the action presented in Section VI, Action Plan. Regarding the Michigan SCORP, the following Williamston action plan helps Michigan address the key state priorities of resource conservation, trails, community recreation, universal access, green technology and cooperation and coordination among governmental units. This alignment with state priorities make the City of Williamston eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation money administered by the State of Michigan.

In the past, National Recreation and Park Association standards prescribing a minimum level of recreation land or infrastructure (e.g. 10 acres of locally owned public parkland per 1,000 residents) were used in a prescriptive approach to define community recreation needs. This approach is not used in this plan. Rather, a more modern level of service (LOS) approach is adopted. In LOS, the community is fully engaged in the process. Acquisition and development are tailored to meet community identified needs and link with recreation opportunities provided in neighboring jurisdictions. For example, the older standards approach would not take into account that the City of Williamston is defined by more than political boundaries. It is a community, public school and recreational hub for 15,000 people, only 3,500 of which live in the City.

Key resources to assist in the proposed actions are funding sources administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. These include the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund (MNRTF), one time monies derived from the sale of leases and royalties on state owned hydrocarbon resources and protected by the Michigan Constitution to provide perpetual funding to support the acquisition and development of Michigan public outdoor recreation opportunities. Another source is the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the precursor to the MNRTF. This fund has been in place since 1965 and is also derived from hydrocarbon resources, those on federal lands and the outer continental shelf, through the sale of leases and the resulting royalties from extraction. A full review of such public funding resources can be found on the DNR website and in three Michigan DNR documents: “Michigan State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2008-20012”, “Recreation Grants Application Guidelines 2009” and “Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans”. All are available on the internet at www.michigan.gov/dnr.

The plan, once adopted by the Williamston City Council, can be readily amended. The DNR notes: “Plan amendments must be adopted by the same governing body that adopted the original plan, unless the resolution adopting the original plan included specific language delegating that authority to another entity.” Appropriate public input and public notice must be provided. A full discussion is provided in “Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans”.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the parks master plan is to create an environment that will allow local residents access to recreational activities and remove barriers to individuals living an active lifestyle.

The goals include the following:

- **Provide recreation opportunities** Recreation opportunities need to be developed for residents of all ages and abilities. There are currently limited local recreation opportunities for many different age ranges. Specifically, the plan seeks to increase the number of outdoor activities for children and adults including those with disabilities. Additionally, the plan will encourage further development of both public and private recreational opportunities such as adult recreational sports leagues or the building of a bowling alley.
- **Encourage an active lifestyle including walking, biking, skating** The community has expressed a desire to invest in a walkable community. Developing a network of paths will help remove accessibility as a barrier to maintain an active lifestyle and will lead to a decrease in obesity and an overall improvement in health
- **Build a strong community through social interactions** Community can only be built through social interactions. The parks plan seeks to create an environment where residents have space and motivation to interact and develop as strong a supporting community. The renovation of McCormick Park is one major step toward providing a central community gathering location.
- **Offering recreational access to and appreciation of the Red Cedar River** The renovation of McCormick Park and the enhancement of Old Mill Park focus in part on creating an appreciation of the Red Cedar River through education and access.
- **Offering Environmental education** The parks plan recognizes that the support for the natural environment begins through education. The parks play a key role in helping residents of all ages understand the impact that humans have on the environment and how individuals decisions can help minimize negative impacts on the environment.

SECTION VI

ACTION PROGRAM

The following items represent the key targets for progress during the timeframe of this masterplan. The order listed is not meant to denote a hierarchy, but simply a list of important goals.

- 1. McCormick Park Renovation** McCormick Park is the jewel of the City of Williamston Parks. The receipt of the DNR grant provides both motivation and support for fulfilling the McCormick Park planned upgrading into a premier park providing significant public benefit and educational opportunity.
- 2. Sidewalk from Downtown to Linn Road** Continuing to develop the walkability of Williamston is key to encouraging residents to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Connecting the southern residents of the city to the downtown via walkable and bikeable paths is key.
- 3. Expand recreation opportunities for children and families** Access to recreation is the first step in partaking in a healthy lifestyle and a strong community. Available activities need to be expanded and increased. These may include increased usage of the band shell, development of the well field, or the creation of new city assets such as the creation of a community ice rink or skate park, or by encouraging private investment in the form of the creation of recreational opportunities such as a new bowling alley.
- 4. Increase universal access to park** Many of the current parks are utilized by the more able bodied of Williamston's residents, but those with limited mobility are currently unable to appreciate the natural resources of Williamston. Increasing access to the natural resources of Williamston is key to building a broad-based support for the parks and to encourage education of all citizens. Specifically the increase of access to McCormick Park, Memorial Park and the improvement of the Old Mill Park Boardwalk should all be primary goals.
- 5. Incorporate green technologies** The City of Williamston should focus on increasing green technologies throughout the city and specifically in the parks. Employing green technologies are critical for cities as they will gain direct long-term benefit environmental and financial benefit through their usage. Although it is clear that some green technologies may be more expensive in the short term it is well documented that once all costs (including initial financial outlay, long term maintenance, and environmental cost) are considered the green technologies provide significant savings. Thus the parks should include the use of environmentally friendly materials, LED lighting, permeable pavement as well as water control mechanisms such as rain gardens to minimize erosion and damage.
- 6. Environmental Education** The park system should also encourage environmental awareness and education. The natural resources provided by the park provide ideal settings and opportunity to educate the public through signage and partnerships with other city groups including the schools.

Proposed Capital Budget

| Year | Action | Total Cost | Funding |
|--------------------|---|------------|------------|
| Short Term | | | |
| 0-2 years | Renovation of McCormick Park | \$800,000 | 1, 3, 4 |
| | Continuation of Old Mill Park maintenance plan | \$2,000/yr | 1 |
| | Continue Sidewalk renovations including extending Sidewalk access to Plymouth Landing entry and/or create bike lanes along Williamston Rd. | \$200,000 | 1 |
| | Improve Boardwalk in Old Mill Park | \$60,000 | 1,3 (LWCF) |
| | | | |
| Medium Term | | | |
| 2-4 years | Improvements/Landscaping of Deer Creek Park | \$40,000 | 1, 4 |
| | Create Trail along Memorial park riverfront, add some parking/river access (including paved access to pedestrian bridge south of the river) | \$150,000 | 1, 3 |
| | Skate Park (in conjunction with Kiwanis) | \$25,000 | 1, 4 |
| | Ice-Skating Rink and warming shed | \$10,000 | 1, 4 |
| | | | |
| Long Term | | | |
| 4+ years | Develop well field area (e.g. dog park, or sport field complex, Disc golf) | \$200,000 | 1, 3 |
| | Extend waterfront trail to western pocket park or Thurlby park | \$500,000 | 1, 3 |
| | Create paved pedestrian/bike access to Williamston township or Harris Nature Center. | \$250,000 | 1, 3 |
| | | | |

Suggested Funding Sources:

1. City Funds
2. Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)*
3. Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund (DNR) or other State grants*
4. Private Funds (Service organizations, community groups, donations, etc.)
5. Inland fisheries, Waterways Grants, etc. (DNR)*

* Local match required (minimum 25% for MNRTF; 20% for MDOT). Match for acquisition can include cash or bargain sale during the grant period. Match for development can include billable in-kind services performed during the grant period.

Appendix A – Literature Cited

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