

# TRAVERSE CITY PARKS + RECREATION

5-YEAR PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to the entire community and city staff for their input and collaborative efforts on the creation of this document, and for helping to guide the vision of the City of Traverse City's next five years of parks and recreation initiatives.

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01

# INTRODUCTION

## THE FUTURE OF TC PARKS + RECREATION

Parks, recreation facilities, and open space are essential components of a thriving community. They provide recreational, social, environmental, and economic benefits that directly contribute to a high quality of life. Access to well-planned parks and green infrastructure supports physical activity, strengthens social connections, enhances environmental stewardship, and promotes overall community well-being.

The City of Traverse City recognizes the importance of proactive recreation planning and remains committed to leading the delivery and enhancement of recreational opportunities. The update of this Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan reflects the City's dedication to anticipating growth, responding to changing community needs, and strategically guiding the development and improvement of facilities, programs, and natural areas.

Recreation planning enables the city to thoughtfully expand and maintain parks and amenities in a manner that maximizes public benefit. Parks provide spaces for gathering activity, relaxation, and

connection to nature. Green infrastructure strengthens neighborhood livability, supports environmental resilience, and contributes to property value stability and community connectivity. Access to recreation is also closely linked to improved mental and physical health outcomes, including reduced rates of inactivity-related conditions.

As the City of Traverse City continues to evolve, it remains committed to enhancing and diversifying its recreational offerings. This plan represents the collective input of residents, stakeholders, and local officials, and establishes a coordinated strategy for aligning recreational resources with the environmental, cultural, and community character of Traverse City over the next five years.

### PLAN PURPOSE

The 2026–2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan serves as a strategic guide for the future of recreation facilities, programs, and open spaces in Traverse City. It is designed as an adaptive planning tool that

enables the city to prioritize investments, respond to emerging trends, and strengthen the role of parks and recreation in the daily lives of residents over the next five years.

Preservation, management, improvement, and expansion of the recreation system within Traverse City are the building blocks that form the framework for the overall Parks and Recreation Master Plan report. Key planning issues are identified, a clear set of goals and objectives are outlined, and specific implementation strategies are delineated.

Grounded in community input and aligned with the mission of the Parks Department, this plan establishes a clear framework for policy decisions, capital improvements, and operational priorities. It provides direction for evaluating land acquisition opportunities, park development and renovation projects, park maintenance, trail expansion, and the enhancement of recreational programs and services. In addition, the plan addresses maintenance operations, administrative practices, and long-term asset management to ensure system sustainability.



The city recognizes the vital role that parks and recreation play in supporting quality of life, promoting physical and mental health, preserving natural resources, and fostering community connection. This updated plan reflects Traverse City’s commitment to improving park infrastructure, expanding public trail networks, protecting natural areas, and strengthening a sense of place throughout the community.

The plan also identifies current recreation challenges, anticipates future needs, and outlines prioritized actions to meet those needs within the five-year planning horizon. By integrating data analysis, public engagement, and system evaluation, the document ensures that parks and recreation investments remain aligned with community values and growth patterns.

Finally, this plan fulfills the requirements of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) five-year planning process. Adoption and submission of this Master Plan maintain the City’s eligibility



for state recreation grant funding and demonstrate Traverse City's ongoing commitment to coordinated, strategic, and community-driven recreation planning.

## PLAN SCOPE

The scope of the 2026–2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan encompasses the management, improvement, and strategic expansion of the City of Traverse City's parks and recreation system. The plan evaluates existing facilities, identifies opportunities for enhancement, and establishes a clear framework to guide decision-making over the next five years. This planning effort includes all City-owned recreation assets, including developed parks, undeveloped open space, trail systems, and recreational programming. The plan outlines key issues, defines measurable goals and objectives, and establishes prioritized implementation strategies to ensure coordinated and fiscally responsible progress. While the primary focus of this plan is within the municipal boundaries of the City of Traverse City, consideration is given to the broader regional context. The plan acknowledges recreational facilities in the county and neighboring jurisdictions that are accessible to Traverse City residents, as well as the use of City facilities by residents from surrounding communities. These regional dynamics influence demand, usage patterns, and long-term planning considerations.

The Action Program section of this report establishes a five-year implementation timeline, identifying recommended



projects, operational initiatives, and capital improvements to be advanced during the 2026–2030 planning period.

## CITYWIDE COORDINATION

The 2026–2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan is being advanced during a period of coordinated citywide planning initiatives focused on community health, environmental stewardship, and equitable access to parks and natural resources. This plan reinforces and builds upon those broader efforts by prioritizing connectivity, expanding access to recreational amenities, and strengthening the preservation of open space and natural areas.

The Master Plan aligns with and supports recent citywide planning initiatives that have established a strong foundation for the future of Traverse City’s public realm. By integrating shared goals and complementary strategies, this plan ensures that parks, trails, and open spaces remain central to the City’s long-term



vision for livability, sustainability, and community well-being.

- Traverse City Capital Improvement Plan 2025-2026
- Traverse City Strategic Action Plan – May 2025
- Traverse City Master Plan Supplemental Report 2024
- Traverse City Master Plan Magazine 2024
- Traverse City Mobility Action Plan 2024
- Brown Bridge Quiet Area Management Plan 2023

## THRIVING PARK SYSTEM

The 2026-2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan considers all aspects of the previous 2021 plan update including physical assets and community needs within Traverse City. The previous plan documented conditions and trends at the time and contained many ideas for improvements; some of which have been realized. The following identifies changes to the park system since the previous update:

### SENIOR CENTER

The new Senior Center represents a transformative investment in community recreation infrastructure, expanding from 5,780 square feet to more than 18,000 square feet, inclusive of covered patios and integrated outdoor gathering spaces. The thoughtfully designed, north-facing orientation maximizes expansive views of the surrounding parkland, public beach, and West Grand Traverse Bay. This enhanced setting strengthens opportunities for senior recreation, wellness

programming, and social engagement while creating a welcoming, accessible destination within the park system.

### **TRAVERSE AREA RECREATION TRAIL (TART) IMPROVEMENT & EXTENSION**

In 2022, the city launched the TART Improvement and Extension Project, extending the non-motorized trail system between West End Beach and the intersection of Peninsula and Eastern Avenue. The segment between West End Beach and Murchie Bridge functions as a key hub within the regional trail network, linking the TART Trail, Leelanau Trail, and the Boardman Lake Loop Trail to support both transportation and recreational use. Extending the trail to Eastern Avenue will create a critical connection to the city center, improving access for residents on



the east side of the city and the Old Mission Peninsula while enhancing connectivity, mobility, and recreational opportunities throughout the region.

### **BOARDMAN LAKE LOOP TRAIL**

The south connection of the Boardman Lake Loop has been completed, resulting in a fully continuous trail approximately five miles in length. This completion enhances regional trail connectivity, providing residents and visitors with an accessible, scenic route for walking, running, and cycling around Boardman Lake.

### **SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING**

The city has installed new park signage, wayfinding elements, and trail markers at all parks to improve navigation and enhance the visitor experience. Additional informational kiosks and interpretive education panels have been added at select locations to provide educational opportunities and highlight natural, cultural, and historical features throughout the park system.

### **BROWN BRIDGE PARKS IMPROVEMENT FUND PROJECTS**

In 2019, voters in Traverse City approved a ballot measure authorizing the City Commission to use funds from the Brown Bridge Trust Fund for park capital improvements and land acquisitions. Over the past five years, these funds have been instrumental in supporting significant upgrades across the park system, including improvements at the following parks and recreational facilities:

- Hickory Hills - Master Plan Phase



2 Improvements: Installation of snowmaking infrastructure on the Nordic Trails in the wooded area near the entrance, new snowmaking hydrants along Swede Trail to enhance system efficiency, and the addition of a third booster pump to increase snow production capacity. These upgrades support consistent winter recreational opportunities and improved trail conditions for users.

- F&M Park: Installed new basketball hoops and playing pad to support active recreation.
- Boon Street Park: Added playground structures and swings to enhance play opportunities for children.
- Indian Woods Park: Upgraded playground equipment, added a hill slide, and constructed a walkway connecting both sides of the park and key amenities.
- Arbutus Court Park: Installed a quarter-size basketball court to provide additional recreational options
- Jupiter Gardens: Added seating along the TART Trail, created a defined

walking path with landscaped flower beds, and installed a water filling station.

- Ashton Park: Introduced nature-inspired playground structures to encourage imaginative and active outdoor play

## MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The 2026 – 2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan builds upon the framework established in the 2021 Parks and Recreation Plan, and previous plans, evaluating both existing physical assets and evolving community needs. Many of the goals, policies, and system priorities identified in the previous plan continue to guide decision-making and remain relevant to the City’s park and recreation system.

This updated plan reaffirms those foundational elements while refining and expanding upon them to reflect current conditions, public input, and emerging opportunities. Where appropriate, strategies from prior planning efforts have been carried forward and strengthened to





ensure continuity, long-term consistency, and sustained progress over the next five years.

While previous planning efforts identified conditions, trends, and recommended improvements, many of which have since been implemented, the Traverse City region has experienced significant growth in tourism, development, and year-round visitation over the past five years. This sustained growth has increased demand on parks, waterfront areas, trails, and recreation facilities, reinforcing the need for continued investment and system enhancements.

At the same time, recreation patterns have evolved. Changes in how residents and visitors use public spaces—accelerated in part by the global pandemic—have heightened interest in outdoor recreation, trail connectivity, natural area access, and flexible community gathering spaces. This plan builds upon past initiatives while primarily focusing on meeting the evolving recreational needs of the growing Traverse

City area through the following planning process:

**PHASE 1: INVENTORY AND ENGAGEMENT**

During this phase, the project team developed a comprehensive strategy for public outreach while initiating data collection to establish the foundation for the unified Master Plan. The goal was to gather baseline information to support informed decision-making and guide the development of park system recommendations.

The team conducted a thorough analysis of existing parks and trail conditions and built a strong understanding of the local context. Key components of this analysis included:

- 1. Updating the system-wide inventory of parks, trails, and facilities.
- 2. Establishing levels of service and assessing community needs.
- 3. Evaluating system-wide resources, use patterns, and connectivity.

Concurrent with the technical analysis, the project team conducted extensive community engagement. An online survey



and pop-up meetings facilitated small-group discussions, allowing residents to share perspectives on strengths, gaps, and opportunities within the park system. Feedback from these engagement activities was synthesized to inform potential goals and to shape a community-wide vision that reflects local priorities and values.

### **PHASE 2: GOAL SETTING**

An assessment of existing park system conditions, combined with input from community members, provided the foundation for developing a comprehensive vision and supporting goals for Traverse City's parks and recreation system. Through this process, the project team collaborated with the city to identify a set of guiding pillars that will inform future decision-making on park improvements. These pillars serve as a framework for both individual community projects and broader, long-term initiatives, ensuring that future investments reflect community priorities and strategic objectives.

### **PHASE 3: REPORT FINALIZATION**

In the final phase of the planning process, the project team worked closely with City staff to develop the Action Plan and identify priority capital improvement projects for the next five years. Draft recommendations were reviewed by city staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission to ensure alignment with community needs and operational goals. The draft plan was then made available for a 30-day public review period and was formally adopted by the City in June 2026.



SAFE DRINKING  
WATER



02

# COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

## GETTING TO KNOW TRAVERSE CITY

### PLAN JURISDICTION

This section defines the jurisdictional scope and focuses of the Master Plan, provides an overview of the community, and identifies key local factors that influence parks and recreation planning. The 2026 - 2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan has been prepared to guide decision-making for the City of Traverse City and addresses all aspects of the City's parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and programming. While the primary focus is on City-owned assets and services, the Plan also considers recreational facilities and programs that serve adjacent communities, recognizing the regional nature of recreation use and partnerships. This Master Plan is intended to enhance quality of life for residents and visitors to Traverse City while also supporting recreational opportunities for individuals and families throughout the surrounding county. By acknowledging both local and regional dynamics, the Plan positions the City's park system as a vital community asset and a contributor to the broader regional recreation network.

### REGIONAL SETTING

Traverse City encompasses approximately 8.66 square miles, including 8.33 square miles of land and 0.33 square miles of water. The majority of the city lies within Grand Traverse County, with a small portion extending into Leelanau County. As the county seat of Grand Traverse County and the largest city in Northern Michigan, Traverse City serves as the economic, cultural, and governmental center of the region. Located in the northwest portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Traverse City anchors the regional metropolitan area and represents the primary population center in Northern Michigan. The city is uniquely positioned at the head of the East and West Arms of Grand Traverse Bay, a protected natural harbor connected to Lake Michigan and separated by the Leelanau Peninsula. The Old Mission Peninsula divides the bay into its eastern and western arms and is characterized by rolling hills, orchards, and vineyards. Traverse City contains shoreline along both arms of Grand Traverse Bay and borders

the townships of East Bay, Elmwood, Garfield, and Peninsula. Situated within the Boardman River Valley, the city is surrounded by forested hills, agricultural lands, vineyards, and numerous inland lakes. This distinctive natural setting, combined with continued residential and commercial growth in surrounding townships, contributes to the City’s strong regional identity and recreation demand.

Known as the “Cherry Capital of the World,” the region is nationally recognized for cherry production. The annual National Cherry Festival attracts approximately 500,000 visitors, reinforcing the City’s role as a major tourism destination. These geographic, environmental, and economic characteristics play a significant role in shaping parks and recreation planning, influencing land stewardship priorities, waterfront access, trail connectivity, and seasonal recreation demands.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Prior to European settlement, the area now known as Traverse City was part of the



ancestral territory of the Council of Three Fires—an alliance of the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi peoples. The region served as an important travel corridor along what is now referred to as the Old Indian Trail, historically used by Indigenous communities, including earlier Hopewell cultures and later the Anishinaabe, to travel between present-day Cadillac and the Grand Traverse Bay area.



The region was initially claimed by France and later became part of the British Province of Quebec before being ceded to the United States in 1783 under the Treaty of Paris, entering the Northwest Territory. Permanent European American settlement began around 1847, when Captain Horace Boardman purchased land at the mouth of the Boardman River (formerly known as the Ottawa River). A dwelling and sawmill were constructed near the river’s mouth. In 1851, the mill was sold to Hannah, Lay & Company, comprised of Perry Hannah, Albert Tracy Lay, and James Morgan whose investment and expansion of the milling operation attracted additional

settlers. Perry Hannah is widely recognized as a founding figure in the City's early development.

Originally part of Omeena County, which was established in 1840, the area became part of the reorganized Grand Traverse County in 1851. The county seat was designated at Boardman's Mills, located in present-day downtown Traverse City. The arrival of rail service in 1872, via a spur connecting to the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad, significantly accelerated settlement and economic growth. The rail line followed the Boardman River and Boardman Lake, terminating near the waterfront along what is now Grandview Parkway. Improved transportation access opened the region to expanded settlement, commerce, and industry.

Traverse City was incorporated as a village in 1881, marking a period of substantial commercial growth, and was later incorporated as a city on May 18, 1895. This historical evolution from Indigenous homeland to regional economic center



continues to shape the City's identity and informs contemporary planning efforts, including the stewardship of natural resources, waterfront access, and community gathering spaces within the parks and recreation system.

## PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Natural resources have long shaped the culture, economy, and identity of the Traverse City community. The City's beaches, dunes, forests, wetlands, and water bodies are central to its quality of life and tourism-based economy. Balancing public access with long-term preservation is fundamental to sustaining these assets for future generations.

Traverse City is located within the northwestern flank of the Michigan Basin, a large geologic formation underlying much of the state. The region's topography was significantly shaped by ancient glacial activity, which carved deep lakes and rolling hills that define the area's scenic





character. The sand dunes along Lake Michigan represent a unique and fragile geologic formation and ecosystem. These dynamic landscapes are highly susceptible to wind and water erosion and can be degraded by overuse or inappropriate development. Careful stewardship and thoughtful recreational planning are essential to protecting these sensitive environments while maintaining public access.

This distinctive geologic and environmental context influences land use, stormwater management, shoreline stability, habitat preservation, and recreational development. Understanding these natural systems is critical to ensuring that park and recreation improvements are both environmentally responsible and resilient over time.

**TOPOGRAPHY**

The present-day topography of the Traverse City area was formed by the retreat of glacial ice approximately 12,000 years ago, followed by ongoing river

movement and fluctuations in the level of Lake Michigan. The mean elevation of the Grand Traverse- region above Lake Michigan is estimated at 230 feet, or 808 feet above the level of the sea. Elevations in Traverse City range from approximately 571 feet above sea level along the bays to about 780 feet in the southern portions of the city and on the peninsula. Moving further east and west, elevations rise to exceed 1,000 feet, contributing to the region’s rolling hills and scenic landscape.

**CLIMATE**

Lake Michigan plays a significant role in shaping the climate of Traverse City. The lake effect contributes to increased cloud cover and snowfall during the fall and winter months, while also moderating seasonal temperature extremes. As a result, temperatures tend to be cooler in late spring and early summer and milder in late fall and early winter compared to inland areas.

The Traverse City area’s location on the 45th Parallel (midway between the North





Pole and the equator) provides it with four distinct seasons, making it a year-round destination. Traverse City experiences a humid continental climate characterized by the four distinct seasons, including cold winters, warm summers, and transitional spring and fall periods. Summers are generally warm and humid but slightly moderated by proximity to the lake, while winters range from moderate to severe and are marked by substantial snowfall.

On average, the city experiences precipitation on approximately 141 days per year, with annual totals of roughly 33 inches of rainfall and 108 inches of snowfall. These precipitation levels support the region's streams, lakes, wetlands, and overall ecological health. Average temperatures range from winter lows near 15 degrees Fahrenheit to summer highs around 81 degrees Fahrenheit.

This climate profile supports a diverse range of year-round recreational opportunities; from winter sports and trail use to summer beach activities and water-

based recreation. Seasonal variation is a defining characteristic of the community and directly influences park planning, facility design, maintenance operations, and programming throughout the year.

## **SOILS**

The characteristics of the majority of soils within Traverse City impose minor constraints on development. In general, sandy loam and sandy soil are most common. Loamy soils of the Emmet-Leelanau association are found primarily at the east and west ends of the city, as well as in the peninsula, and sandy soils of the Rubicon association is most commonly found in the central areas of the city. These soils are, for the most part, well drained and have low available water capacity. Physical limitations to their development, when they do occur, exist because of excessive slopes. Organic soils offer the greatest physical constraint to development within the city. These soils are generally poorly drained, occurring primarily in depression areas. Most often this soil coincides with the wetland and floodplain areas of the city. Severe limitations are attached to development on organic soils due to poor drainage, low bearing capacity and frost action commonly exhibited.

## **WILDLIFE**

The Boardman River Valley is home to an abundant variety of animal species, including whitetail deer, squirrels, cottontail rabbits, ruffed grouse, raccoons, beavers, otters, foxes, coyotes, bobcats and an occasional black bear. In addition, many species of waterfowl and shorebirds

can be found in Grand Traverse Bay and Boardman Lake. The river habitat hosts amphibian and reptile species as well as a variety of fish, including trout, steelhead, salmon, pike carp and walleye

## **WATER RESOURCES**

Traverse City is located within the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed, which encompasses approximately 976 square miles of land. The watershed extends across significant portions of Antrim, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties and includes 55 townships and municipalities. As the largest municipality within the watershed, the City of Traverse City plays a central role in regional water resource stewardship.

The Grand Traverse Bay Watershed is widely recognized as one of Michigan's premier destinations for tourism and outdoor recreation. Its lakes, rivers, forests, and shoreline landscapes are foundational to the area's economy and quality of life. Protection and thoughtful management of these natural systems are essential to sustaining continued growth, environmental health, and the long-term vitality of the community's parks and recreation resources.

### **BOARDMAN RIVER**

The Boardman River watershed originates at the southern edge of the Grand Traverse Bay watershed and extends across portions of Grand Traverse and Kalkaska Counties. The river begins in the Mahan Swamp and flows northward before entering Grand Traverse Bay in downtown Traverse City.



Upstream of Boardman Lake (Upper Boardman River), is designated by the State as a “Blue Ribbon” Trout Stream and Natural River, offering exceptional recreational opportunities including fishing, paddling, wildlife observation, and trail-based activities within adjacent natural areas.

Downstream of Boardman Lake (Lower Boardman River), the river meanders through increasingly urbanized areas of the city, which is more heavily influenced by stormwater runoff and urban infrastructure.

Strategic restoration efforts, green infrastructure, shoreline stabilization, and stormwater management improvements present meaningful opportunities to enhance water quality, habitat function, and recreational experiences along the river corridor. Stewardship of the Boardman River remains central to the City's parks and recreation vision, balancing ecological integrity with public access and community engagement.

## **BOARDMAN LAKE**

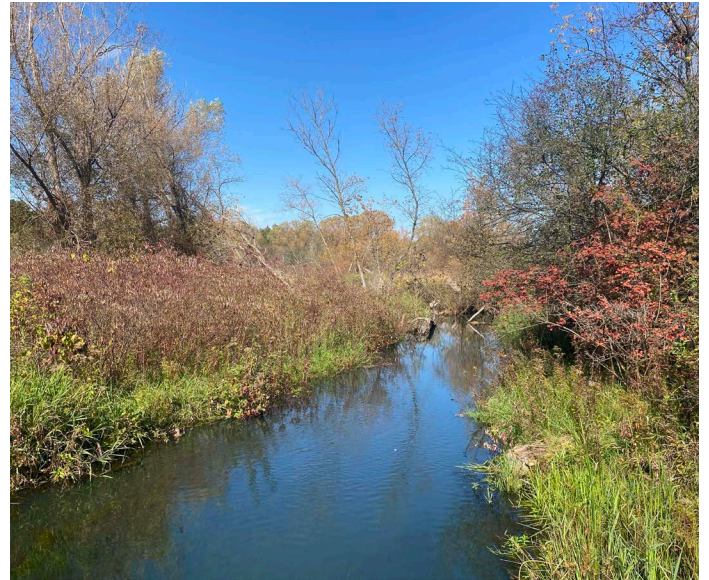
Boardman Lake is a 339-acre inland lake that nearly bisects the City of Traverse City and serves as a defining recreational and ecological asset. The lake is widely used by residents and visitors for boating, paddling, fishing, wildlife viewing, and passive enjoyment.

The Boardman River flows into and out of Boardman Lake, with the lakeshed extending eastward to the headwaters near the Village of Kalkaska. The lake has an average depth of approximately 25 feet and a maximum depth of 71 feet. Currently, downstream impoundment at Union Street Dam maintains the lake level at approximately 9.1 feet above its natural elevation.

Public access to Boardman Lake is provided at the north end via a boat launch at Hull Park and at the south end through a canoe and kayak launch at Medalie Park. Both facilities are owned and managed by the City's Parks and Recreation Department and play an important role in supporting non-motorized and motorized water recreation.

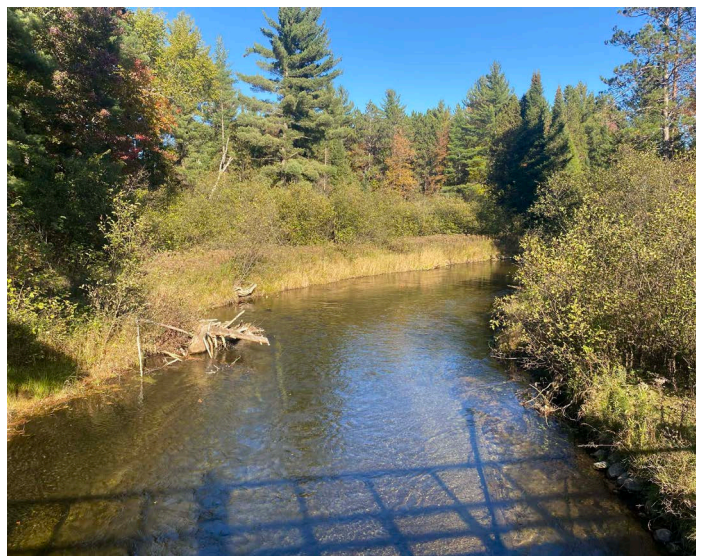
## **FISHPASS**

FishPass is a pioneering initiative to enhance fish passage and ecological health in the Boardman River. In 2016 Traverse City was selected as the first site to construct and implement this innovative technology. FishPass functions as a species-sorting system, allowing native fish to migrate upstream for spawning and habitat access while preventing non-native or invasive species from advancing. The



facility is designed as a flexible platform to test and refine technologies for separating native and non-native species.

In addition to fish passage, the FishPass project includes complementary improvements to support recreation and environmental stewardship, such as natural stream restoration, canoe and kayak launches, a pedestrian bridge, and a dedicated research center. These features enhance ecological function, public access, and educational opportunities, aligning with the City's parks and recreation goals.



## **KIDS CREEK**

Kids Creek, a tributary of the Boardman River, flows generally along the US 31 corridor. Within the City of Traverse City, the creek extends from the southern city limits along the west side of US 31 before joining the Boardman River. Portions of Kids Creek have been routed underground, with some sections “daylighted” to the surface at select locations.

Kids Creek serves as a primary channel for floodwater in Traverse City. The creek also supports recreational fishing and contributes to the broader watershed, ultimately discharging into the Boardman River and reaching Lake Michigan near Clinch Park. These downstream waters provide a variety of recreational opportunities, including boating, shoreline activities, and waterfront access, highlighting the importance of Kids Creek within the City’s parks and recreation framework.

## **MITCHELL CREEK**

The East Branch Mitchell Creek Sub-Watershed is the smallest sub-watershed within Traverse City, located in the southeast corner of the city. Although the creek itself is not used for swimming or boating, it discharges into East Bay at the western edge of Traverse City State Park, a highly visited swimming beach in East Bay Township. The health and management of this sub-watershed are important for maintaining water quality downstream and supporting recreational uses at the State Park, as well as protecting ecological integrity within the broader watershed.



## **GRAND TRAVERSE BAY**

Grand Traverse Bay, an arm of Lake Michigan, is a defining natural feature of the region and a foundational asset to the City’s parks and recreation system. The bay includes approximately 132 miles of shoreline, spans nearly 10 miles at its widest point, extends roughly 32 miles from its northern reaches to its base in Traverse City, and reaches depths of up to 590 feet. The bay is divided into its West and East Arms by the Old Mission Peninsula, which extends approximately 18 miles northward into the water. Recognized as one of the few remaining high-quality embayments within the Great Lakes system, Grand Traverse Bay is widely regarded for having some of the highest water quality among the larger bays of Lake Michigan. This exceptional natural resource supports a wide range of recreational activities including boating, swimming, fishing, paddling, and shoreline use, and plays a central role in shaping the community’s identity, tourism economy, and long-term stewardship priorities.



## LAKE MICHIGAN

A defining natural feature of Traverse City is Lake Michigan. Lake Michigan's expansive shoreline features significant dune systems and diverse coastal landscapes that contribute substantial environmental, recreational, and economic value to the region. Within the City of Traverse City, approximately 5.5 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline provides critical public access and opportunities for swimming, boating, paddling, fishing, and shoreline recreation. Water quality remains a foundational asset for the community, directly supporting tourism, outdoor recreation, and overall quality of life. Protection, access, and long-term stewardship of Lake Michigan should be prioritized, ensuring that residents and visitors can continue to enjoy this resource year-round.

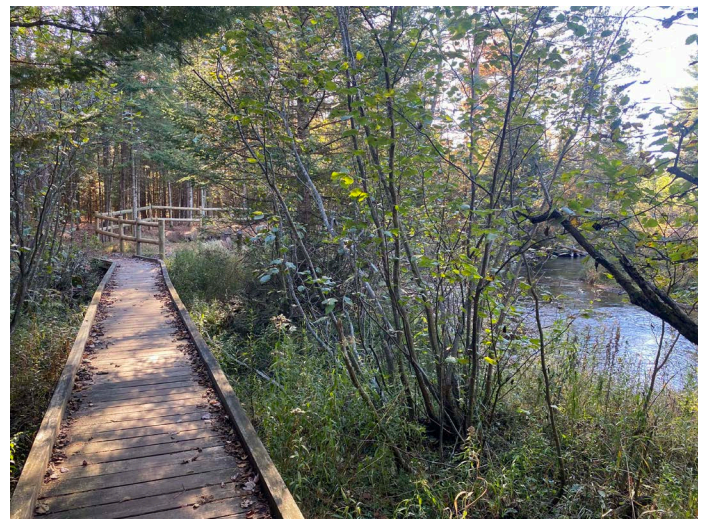
## LAND RESOURCES

In addition to substantial water resources, Traverse City contains significant areas of land that have remained relatively undisturbed. Collectively these areas are not only significant in size but also

demonstrate a wide variety of natural habitats. Several kinds of grasslands, forest and wetland communities can be identified in these areas. Such environmental diversification results in a wide array of wildlife that inhabits the City of Traverse City including a number of unique plants and animals. These areas can provide educational, recreational, aesthetic and wildlife preservation benefits with minimal development or maintenance costs.

## WETLANDS

Wetlands represent some of the City's most valuable and sensitive natural resources, providing essential ecosystem services that directly support environmental health and community resilience. These systems function as natural filters, improving water quality by capturing sediments and pollutants, while also serving as critical habitat for birds, amphibians, fish, and other wildlife. In addition, wetlands have the capacity to store significant volumes of water during periods of heavy precipitation and gradually release it over time, helping to reduce downstream flooding and stabilize hydrologic systems.





Within Traverse City, the largest concentrations of wetlands are located along Kids Creek between the City's southwestern boundary and 11th Street, and along Mitchell Creek east of 3 Mile Road. Wetlands in the City generally fall into two primary categories: emergent wetlands, characterized by seasonal flooding, saturated soils, and herbaceous vegetation; and forested wetlands, which contain more woody vegetation and experience comparatively less soil saturation.

Approximately 222 acres of wetlands exist within City boundaries, with an additional 235 acres identified as potential restorative wetlands. These restorative areas have been recognized by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) as suitable for wetland rehabilitation due to historic wetland presence or favorable restoration conditions.

Protection and restoration of wetlands are critical strategies for supporting water quality, habitat preservation,



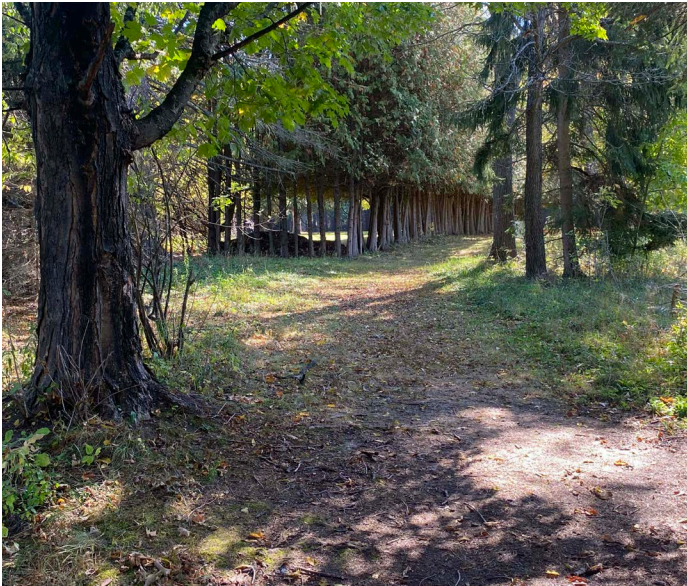
flood mitigation, and the long-term sustainability of the parks and recreation system.

**TREE CANOPY**

Trees are among the most valuable natural assets in the community and are essential to the health, character, and resilience of the urban environment. Traverse City's urban forest includes street trees, trees located on public property and within parks, and those on private lands that collectively contribute to the overall canopy.

Urban trees provide a wide range of environmental, social, and economic benefits. These include stormwater interception and infiltration, moderation of urban heat, improved air quality, noise reduction, wildlife habitat, and enhanced aesthetic appeal. In addition, access to a healthy tree canopy contributes to public health, community identity, and overall quality of life.

The City is committed to the management of all trees located on City-owned public



land within municipal boundaries. Effective urban forest stewardship includes three primary management components: planting, ongoing maintenance, and removal when necessary to ensure safety and long-term system health.

Traverse City has been recognized as a Tree City USA community by the Arbor Day Foundation for 36 consecutive years, reflecting its sustained commitment to responsible tree management and investment in canopy preservation. Urban forest maintenance follows best management practices designed to promote tree health, structural integrity, and compatibility with the built environment.

The Parks and Recreation Department maintains and regularly updates a comprehensive inventory of City-owned trees to guide maintenance planning, risk management, species diversification, and long-term canopy goals as part of this Master Plan.

### **NATURE PRESERVES**

Numerous nature preserves are located throughout the greater Traverse City region, many of which are protected, owned, and managed by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. These conserved lands provide important ecological protection while also offering valuable recreational opportunities, including hiking, wildlife observation, and passive outdoor experiences.

The presence of these preserves strengthens the regional network of natural areas and complements the City’s parks and recreation system by expanding access to trails, scenic landscapes, and habitat-rich environments. Ongoing collaboration with regional conservation partners supports shared goals of land stewardship, public access, and long-term resource protection.

**Boardman Valley Nature Preserve** is a 125-acre property located in Garfield Township along both sides of the





Boardman River. The preserve offers opportunities for hiking, fishing, canoeing/kayaking, cross-county skiing, seasonal hunting, and nature watching.

**Hickory Forest** is a 76-acre area owned by the Recreational Authority of Traverse City and Garfield Township that showcases steep, rolling topography compelling for passive public recreation and resource preservation. The property is mostly comprised of mesic northern forest and harbors exceptional floristic quality with habitat for many faunal species that rely upon this forest type. The site is contiguous to Hickory Hills Park and offers 2.5 miles of trails, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, and hiking.

**Hickory Meadows** is a 112.5-acre area owned by the Recreational Authority of Traverse City and Garfield Township that show cases scenic views and wildlife viewing. Located on the West side of Traverse City, Hickory Meadows features several miles of trails which are groomed during the winter ski season. Paths

meander through meadows and upland forests to enjoy skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, and dog walking.

## SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

An understanding of population trends and demographic characteristics is essential to planning a responsive and sustainable parks and recreation system. Population growth patterns, along with indicators such as age distribution, income levels, education, and employment trends, help inform decisions regarding facility types, program offerings, and service levels. Evaluating these factors ensures that recreational amenities evolve alongside community needs and remain aligned with demand. Traverse City exhibits several defining socioeconomic characteristics that directly influence parks and recreation planning:

### TOURISM-DRIVEN ECONOMY

Tourism is a central component of the local economy, contributing significantly to employment and business vitality. The area's natural beauty, waterfront setting, and small-town character attract visitors throughout the year, creating both opportunities and seasonal pressures on parks, beaches, trails, and public spaces.

### ARTS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The region supports a strong arts and cultural community, with galleries, studios, festivals, and public events contributing to its identity. Public spaces often serve as venues for cultural programming and

community gatherings, reinforcing the importance of flexible, well-designed civic spaces.

### **SMALL-TOWN CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY COHESION**

Traverse City maintains a distinct small-town atmosphere, characterized by historic architecture, walkable neighborhoods, and strong civic engagement. This sense of community shapes expectations for accessible, welcoming, and well-maintained parks.

### **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY**

The community values openness and inclusivity, welcoming residents and visitors from varied backgrounds. Parks and recreation planning must continue to prioritize equitable access, diverse programming, and inclusive design.



### **OUTDOOR RECREATION**

The City's preserved natural landscapes, including the Lake Michigan shoreline, Grand Traverse Bay, Boardman Lake, inland waterways, and surrounding dunes, provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. Beach access, trail connectivity, boating, hiking, and wildlife observation are foundational to the community's identity and quality of life.

### **EDUCATION AND LIFESTYLE PREFERENCES**

The region attracts individuals and families who prioritize education, cultural enrichment, and outdoor living. This lifestyle orientation supports demand for lifelong recreation opportunities, environmental education, and community-centered programming.

### **AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE**

Agriculture remains a significant part of the regional economy, particularly fruit production such as cherries and grapes. Local farms, vineyards, and farmers markets contribute to the area's character and seasonal rhythms. This agricultural heritage enhances tourism, supports local food systems, and reinforces the importance of land stewardship.

### **SEASONAL POPULATION FLUCTUATIONS**

Due to its tourism-based economy, Traverse City experiences notable seasonal population increases, particularly during the summer months. These fluctuations create peak demand for parks, beaches, waterfront access, parking, and event spaces, requiring adaptive management and infrastructure planning.

Together, these demographic and socioeconomic factors shape the context in which the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is implemented, ensuring that facilities and programs respond to both resident needs and regional visitation patterns while preserving the community’s distinctive character.

## POPULATION TRENDS

According to the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census, the City of Traverse City has a population of 15,678, representing a 7.8 percent increase since 2000. The U.S. Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program places the city’s 2024 population at approximately 15,782, indicating steady and moderate growth over the past two to three decades. Table 2.1 illustrates population trends within the City of Traverse City over the past 30 years.

micropolitan or metropolitan statistical areas. Between 2010 and 2020, the Traverse City Micropolitan Area experienced approximately 7 percent population growth, making it the fourth fastest-growing region in the state during that period, following the Lansing–East Lansing, Grand Rapids–Wyoming, and Ann Arbor regions. Table 2.2 provides population growth comparisons among Michigan’s fastest-growing regions.

Understanding population trends in surrounding communities is also important when planning for future park and recreation needs. Population growth in nearby townships and the broader urbanized area influences demand for parks, trails, and recreation services within the city. Table 2.3 compares population trends among Traverse City, adjacent townships within the Traverse City

Table 2.1: Population Growth - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau			
Year	Population	# Change	% Change
1990	15,156	n/a	n/a
2000	14,532	-624	-4.1
2010	14,674	142	1.0
2020	15,678	1,004	6.8

Traverse City is also the center of a Micropolitan Statistical Area, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as an urban cluster with a population between 10,000 and 50,000 residents. The Traverse City Micropolitan Area includes Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, and Kalkaska counties. Michigan has 16 designated

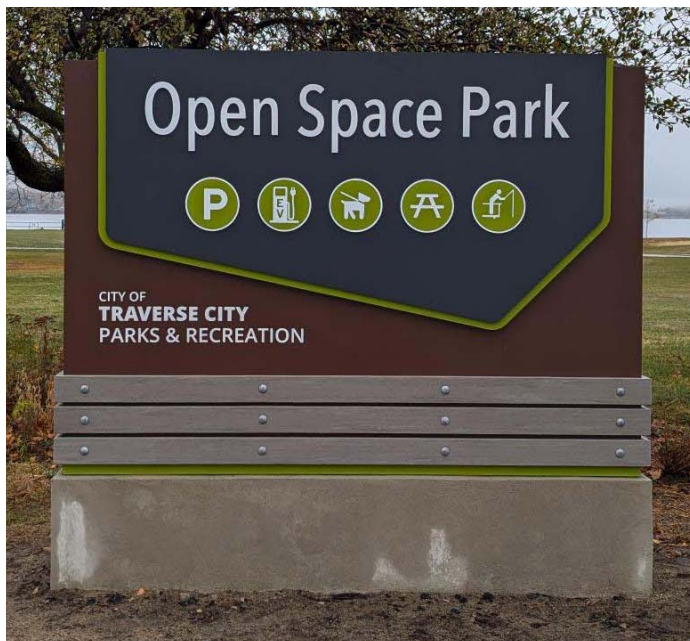
Urbanized Area, Grand Traverse County, and the State of Michigan. An urbanized area is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a densely developed core with surrounding areas of lower population density that function as part of the same regional community.

Table 2.2: Regional Population Growth - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau			
Region	2010 Population	2020 Population	Change
Lansing-East Lansing Metro Area	464,036	541,297	77,261 (16.6%)
Grand Rapids- Wyoming Metro Area	993,670	1,087,592	313,432 (9.5%)
Traverse City Micro Area	143,372	153,448	10,076 (7.0%)
Cadillac Micro Area	47,584	48,725	1,141 (2.4%)

Over the past decade, population growth within Traverse City has been slightly slower than that of neighboring townships and the county overall. The Traverse City Urbanized Area grew by approximately 8.4 percent, slightly exceeding the 7 percent growth recorded in the broader micropolitan area. As the regional population continues to increase, strategic land acquisition, continued investment in existing parks and trail infrastructure, and ongoing collaboration among regional partners will be important to ensure the park system continues to meet the needs of residents and visitors. (See table 2.3).

### SEASONAL POPULATION

While the 2020 U.S. Census reports Traverse City’s population at 15,678, this figure represents only a portion of the people present in the community at any given time. As a popular tourist destination, the area experiences significant seasonal fluctuations in population. It is estimated that Traverse City attracts over 7 million visitors annually. The combined presence of year-round residents, seasonal homeowners, seasonal workers, and overnight visitors can increase the population to 43,623 during the winter and up to 234,875 during peak summer tourism periods.



At the county level, Grand Traverse County’s population varies considerably throughout the year, ranging from approximately 109,000 residents in February to more than 161,000 people in August. During the peak summer season, an estimated 41 percent of the population consists of seasonal residents and visitors. Although seasonal residents and tourists are present only part of the year, they place meaningful demands on the region’s parks, trails, beaches, and recreational facilities. In addition, the area attracts a large number

Table 2.3: Regional Population Comparison - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau			
Community	2010 Population	2020 Population	Change
East Bay Township	10,663	11,589	926 (8.7%)
Elmwood Township	4,503	4,892	389 (8.6%)
Garfield Charter Twp	16,256	19,499	3,243 (19.9%)
Peninsula Township	5,433	6,068	635 (11.7%)
City of Traverse City	14,674	15,678	1,004 (6.8)
Traverse City Urbanized Area	47,109	51,065	3,956 (8.4%)
Grand Traverse County	86,986	95,757	8,771 (10 %)
State of Michigan	9,883,640	10,077,331	193,691 (1.9%)

of day visitors who travel to Traverse City for day trips and weekend recreation. While these visits are short-term, they further increase the use of parks and recreation amenities. As a result, planning for the park system must consider both the permanent population and the significant seasonal influx of visitors to ensure facilities and services can accommodate peak usage periods.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic analysis is a foundational component of effective parks and recreation planning. Understanding population characteristics, including age distribution, household composition, income levels, cultural diversity, and growth trends, provides critical insight into the community's needs, preferences, and participation patterns.

This data-driven approach enables the city to plan and prioritize facilities, programs,

and services that are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to current and future demand. By aligning park amenities and recreational offerings with the evolving profile of the community, the city can ensure equitable access, strengthen quality of life, and deliver experiences that serve residents of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

### AGE

The age distribution of a community may influence the types of facilities and programs needed. The median age of the City of Traverse City is 42.2 which is slightly younger than the median age of Grand Traverse County (43.5) and the Traverse City Micropolitan area (46.1); but older than the median age of Michigan (40.5) and the national average of 39.2. The median age represents the midpoint in the range of all ages within the Traverse City area. Understanding age demographics is useful in identifying the type of recreational facilities that may be needed, desired, or

**Table 2.4: Population by Age - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau**

Age	Traverse City	Traverse City Micropolitan Area
Male	7,698 (49.4%)	78,189 (49.9%)
Female	7,895 (50.6%)	78,445 (50.1%)
Under 18	2,584 (16.6%)	28,403 (18.1%)
18 and over	13,009 (83.4%)	127,680 (81.5%)
18-24	1,344 (8.6%)	10,367 (6.6%)
25-34	2,373 (15.2%)	17,623 (11.3%)
35-49	2,817 (18.1%)	28,678 (18.3%)
50-64	2,746 (17.6%)	30,843 (19.7%)
65 and over	3,729 (23.9%)	40,720 (26%)

under-provided. For example, a younger population may desire more active types of facilities while an aging population may desire more passive types of facilities. Table 2.4 illustrates the breakdown of population for Traverse City and the Traverse City Micropolitan Area based on age and gender (based on 2020 census).

Population trends in Traverse City and the broader Traverse City Micropolitan Area reveal similar demographic patterns that are important to consider in parks and recreation planning. Both areas have a relatively higher proportion of residents over the age of 49 and a smaller share of residents in the 18–34 age range. Overall, approximately 42–46 percent of the population is age 49 or older, with about 24–26 percent age 65 and above. When combined with the 35–49 age group (approximately 18 percent), nearly two-thirds of the population—about 64 percent—is over the age of 35.

As the population continues to age, the demand for accessible, low-impact, and

passive recreational opportunities is expected to increase. Parks and recreation facilities that emphasize accessibility, scenic enjoyment, walking opportunities, and comfortable gathering spaces will remain important components of the park system. At the same time, approximately 16–18 percent of the population is under the age of 18. When combined with the 18–34 age group, roughly 40 percent of the population is younger or in the family-formation stage of life. This demographic trend suggests continued demand for active recreation amenities such as playgrounds, sports facilities, trails, and family-oriented programming. Balancing these needs will be important to ensure that the parks and recreation system continues to serve residents of all ages and abilities.

### **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

The proportion of the population with some type of disability should be considered when planning parks and recreational facilities and programs, especially with a high population of

those over the age of 55. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandates that all public services, including park facilities, be barrier-free. As the population ages, the proportion of people with one or more disabilities generally increases, and this trend is consistent for Traverse City. Disabilities include vision, cognitive, auditory, or ambulatory impairment, self-care, and limitations to living independently. According to the U.S. Census data, it is estimated that approximately 9% of the residents under the age of 65 in Traverse City live with a disability which is lower than the State of Michigan average of 14.4% and lower than the national average of 26%. These figures indicate that, while the overall population of persons with disabilities is modest, there still exists an important contingent of residents who rely on accessible places to recreate.

**INCOME**

A successful parks and recreation system includes providing affordable, equitable recreational opportunities to all members of the community. It is important to understand the availability of disposable income for recreation within the community as household incomes may vary within the region.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of people living at or below the poverty line in Traverse City is 12.3% which is moderately lower than the adjacent Garfield Township, but higher than the local townships and the county.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated 2020-2024 median household income level for Traverse City is \$74,087 which is about a 21.7% increase from 2010. The median household income in Traverse City is slightly higher than the state of Michigan (\$72,875) but lower than the county (\$82,486). The Traverse City Micropolitan Area, which includes Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, and Kalkaska counties, has a median household income of \$80,889. It is important to note that the data from the U.S. Census includes only information from year-round residents. The median household income would likely be higher if seasonal residents were included as individuals that own seasonal properties in the city and tend to be wealthy. Table 2.5 illustrates the median household income of Traverse City compared to adjacent communities.

Per capita income measures the average income earned per person in a given area in a specified year, and to evaluate the standard of living and quality of life of the population. Table 2.6 illustrates the per

**Table 2.5: Median Household Income -**  
**Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau**

East Bay Township	\$85,291
Elmwood Township	\$94,417
Garfield Charter Twp	\$66,082
Peninsula Township	\$116,449
City of Traverse City	\$74,087
Traverse City Urbanized Area	\$80,889
Grand Traverse County	\$82,468

Table 2.6: Per Capita Income - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau	
East Bay Township	\$41,359
Elmwood Township	\$56,409
Garfield Charter Twp	\$38,961
Peninsula Township	\$72,393
City of Traverse City	\$53,432
Traverse City Urbanized Area	\$45,393
Grand Traverse County	\$46,948

capita income of Traverse City compared to adjacent municipalities. Based on the higher level of income and lower level of poverty in the Traverse City area, residents may have disposable income to spend on parks and recreation and may support expansion and development of park facilities.

### EMPLOYMENT

Approximately 62.6 percent of Traverse City residents aged 16 and older are employed across a variety of industries. The largest employment sectors include health care and social assistance, retail trade, manufacturing, accommodation and food services, and construction. In recent years, employment in the city has grown at an average rate of roughly one percent annually. The most common occupational groups among residents include management positions, sales and related occupations, and office and administrative support roles.

According to U.S. Census data, the city's unemployment rate is approximately 4 percent, slightly higher than Grand

Traverse County's rate of 3.7 percent but below the national average of 4.3 percent. Overall, the strength of the local employment base indicates a stable economy that supports continued investment in parks, recreation facilities, and community services.

The average commute time for Traverse City residents is approximately 17.2 minutes, which is notably shorter than the national average of about 25 minutes. Most residents commute by automobile, with approximately 65 percent driving to work (58 percent driving alone and 7 percent carpooling). Alternative modes of transportation are also utilized, including walking (6 percent), bicycling (6 percent), public transit (1 percent), and other methods such as ride-sharing or motorcycles (3 percent). In addition, approximately 19 percent of the city's workforce works from home. These commuting patterns highlight the community's accessibility and the growing importance of walkable, bike-friendly, and neighborhood-based recreational amenities.

### HOUSEHOLDS

Traverse City offers a range of housing types and densities that support a diverse community. According to U.S. Census data, the city contains approximately 7,191 households (see Table 2.7), with an average household size of about 2.1 persons. Of these households, approximately 16.6 percent include individuals under the age of 18, while about 24 percent include residents aged 65 and older. Additionally, approximately 71.5 percent of households

Table 2.7: Households - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau			
	Total Households	% of Grand Traverse County	% Traverse City Micro
East Bay Township	5,230	12.6	8
Elmwood Township	2,026	4.9	3.1
Garfield Charter Twp	8,769	21	13.4
Peninsula Township	2,131	5.1	3.3
City of Traverse City	7,191	17.4	11
Grand Traverse County	41,361	100	63.2
Traverse City Micropolitan	65,429	n/a	100

are classified as family households, while 28.5 percent are non-family households. A household includes all individuals occupying a housing unit, whereas a family household consists of two or more individuals related by birth, marriage, or adoption and living together.

The city contains approximately 8,479 housing units, of which roughly 85 percent are occupied. Of the units occupied, about 64 percent are owner-occupied and 36 percent are renter occupied. Single-family homes account for approximately 67 percent of the housing stock, while multi-family units represent about 33 percent. Since 2010, the number of housing units in Traverse City has increased by approximately 15 percent, reflecting steady growth in the community. As residential development continues, maintaining and expanding parkland, recreational facilities, and open space will be important to ensure the park system continues to meet the needs of current and future residents.

**LAND USE**

Land use patterns play an important role in determining the appropriate location and distribution of parks and recreational facilities. Recreational amenities are most effective when they are accessible to concentrations of residents and located near areas where people regularly gather.

In Traverse City, land use generally falls into four primary categories: exempt, residential, commercial, and industrial. Exempt land includes non-taxable properties such as government facilities, schools, religious institutions, and nonprofit organizations. This category represents the largest share of land use in the city, totaling approximately 2,300 acres, or about 43 percent of the total land area. Residential land comprises nearly 2,000 acres, accounting for approximately 37 percent of the city’s land area. Commercial land represents roughly 910 acres, or about 17 percent of the total land area, and is primarily concentrated along established commercial corridors and activity centers.



Industrial land makes up a relatively small portion of the city, totaling approximately 184 acres, or about 3 percent of the land area, and is generally located within designated industrial parks and corridors.

Understanding these land use patterns helps guide the strategic placement of parks, trails, and recreational facilities to ensure convenient access for residents and support the overall livability of the community.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Traverse City is served by a well-developed transportation network that provides residents and visitors with multiple options for accessing parks, recreation facilities, and community destinations.

The roadway system includes a hierarchy of major arterials, minor arterials, and collector streets that facilitate both local and regional travel. U.S. 31 is the city’s primary major arterial and carries the highest traffic volumes in the community, connecting the city to other local and regional metropolitan areas. Minor arterial and collector roads support moderate-length trips and provide local connections.

Rail service in Traverse City is limited to a freight line owned by the Michigan Department of Transportation and operated by the Great Lakes Central Railroad. The rail corridor circles Boardman Lake and connects to areas south of the city along Woodmere Avenue and Cass Street, extending west toward Parsons Road and terminating near Williamsburg.

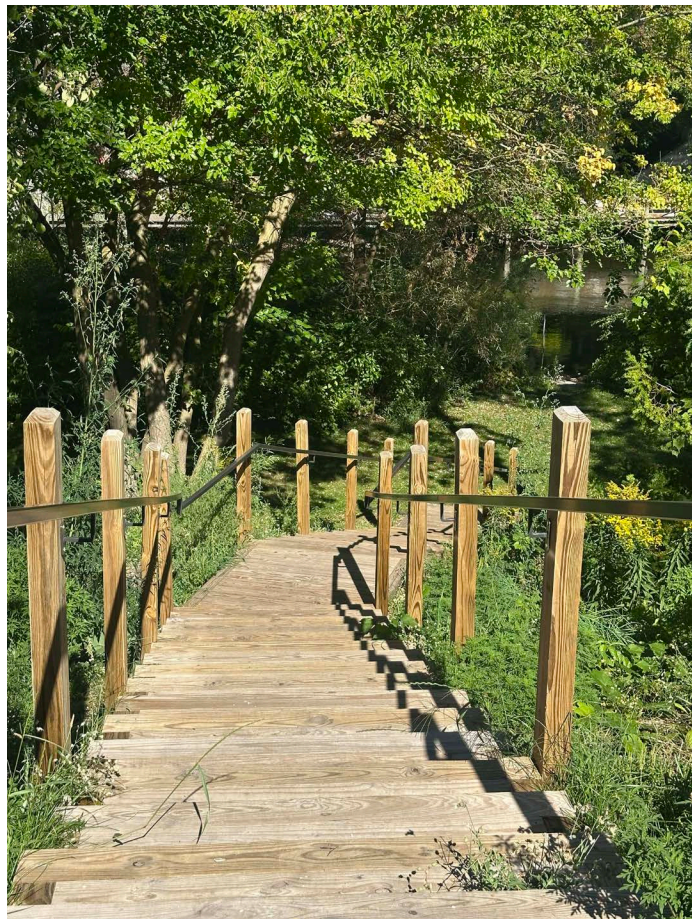
Air travel is provided through Cherry Capital Airport, located within the city limits and governed by the Northwest Regional Airport Authority. The airport offers commercial service through several airlines, providing nonstop flights to numerous destinations across the United States and supporting both tourism and regional connectivity.

Public transit in the region is provided by the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), which serves Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties. Many of BATA’s fixed transit routes originate within the City of Traverse City and extend into surrounding townships and rural areas, providing an important mobility option for residents and visitors.



Traverse City is also supported by an extensive network of regional and local trail systems that provide both recreational opportunities and alternative transportation routes for residents and visitors. Key components of this network include the 11-mile TART Trail, the 17-mile Leelanau Trail, the Boardman Lake Loop Trail, and the Vasa Trail system. These facilities contribute to a well-connected trail network that promotes healthy lifestyles, improves mobility, and enhances access to parks, natural areas, and community destinations.

Together, these transportation systems support access to recreational amenities, parks, trails, and waterfront destinations throughout the Traverse City area.



## **NEIGHBORHOODS**

Traverse City is comprised of a diverse collection of neighborhoods that contribute to the community's character and identity. These areas range from historic, walkable neighborhoods near the downtown core to established residential districts and lakefront communities throughout the city. The variety of neighborhood types supports a broad range of housing options and lifestyles, while also influencing the distribution and accessibility of parks, open spaces, and recreational amenities.

Several neighborhood associations help represent local interests and foster community engagement within the city. These include the Orchard Farms, Slabtown, Kids Creek, Central Neighborhood, Old Towne, Midtown Centre, Boardman, Oak Park, Traverse Heights, Triangle, Indian Woods, and Base of Old Mission Peninsula (B.O.O.M.) Neighborhoods. These organizations play an important role in supporting neighborhood connectivity, community identity, and collaboration on park and recreation initiatives throughout Traverse City.

MORGAN FARMS

BASE OF OLD MISSION PENINSULA (BOOM)

SLABTOWN

INDIAN WOODS

BOARDMAN

OAK PARK

TRIANGLE

MIDTOWN CENTRE

KIDS CREEK

CENTRAL

OLD TOWNE

OAKWOOD TERRACE

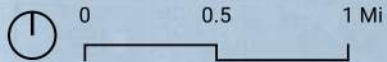
TRAVERSE HEIGHTS

FERNWOOD

**NEIGHBORHOOD MAP LEGEND**

■ TRAVERSE CITY NEIGHBORHOODS [14]

□ TRAVERSE CITY - CITY LIMITS



03

# ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

## TRAVERSE CITY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The City of Traverse City operates under a Council-Manager form of government. The Council-Manager Plan is a system of local government that combines the political leadership of an elected City Commission with the professional managerial experience of the City Manager. The Mayor and City Commissioners are elected officials who set broad policy direction for the City.

### **CITY COMMISSION**

The City Commission consists of a mayor and six Commissioners. Commissioners are elected to four-year terms, staggered every two years. The mayor is elected every two years and is the presiding officer of the Commission. The City Commission is responsible for adopting and amending city laws and ordinances, determining city policies and standards, and authorizing the annual city budget.

### **CITY MANAGER**

The City Manager serves as the chief administrative officer of the City and is re-

sponsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of municipal government. Appointed by the City Commission, the City Manager provides professional leadership and administrative oversight for all City departments and staff, including the Parks and Recreation Department.

In this role, the City Manager advises the City Commission on operational and policy matters, develops recommendations for consideration, and implements Commission-approved actions. The City Commission conducts official business at regularly scheduled public meetings, where decisions are made collectively based on staff analysis and recommendations.

### **PARKS + RECREATION COMMISSION**

The Parks and Recreation Commission serves as an advisory body to the City Commission on matters relating to the operation, development, and planning of parks, recreation and cemetery services and activities. Six of the seven

commissioners are appointed by the City Commission and serve staggered terms of three years. The seventh member is the City Manager’s appointee. The Commission was formed under the authority of Section 30 of the Charter of the City of Traverse City.

## **PARKS + RECREATION DEPARTMENT**

In 2025, the Parks and Recreation Department transitioned from being housed within the Public Services Department to operating as a standalone department, strengthening its strategic focus and operational capacity. The Department is led by the Parks and Recreation Director, who reports directly to the Deputy City Manager.

The Department oversees the operation and maintenance of parks, cemetery, trails, tree canopy, beaches, and special facilities, and is responsible for the development and delivery of recreation programs serving the community. The Parks and Recreation Department manages more than 30 park and recreational facilities, including all City parks; Hickory Hills Ski Area; Brown Bridge Quiet Area; Oakwood Cemetery; two

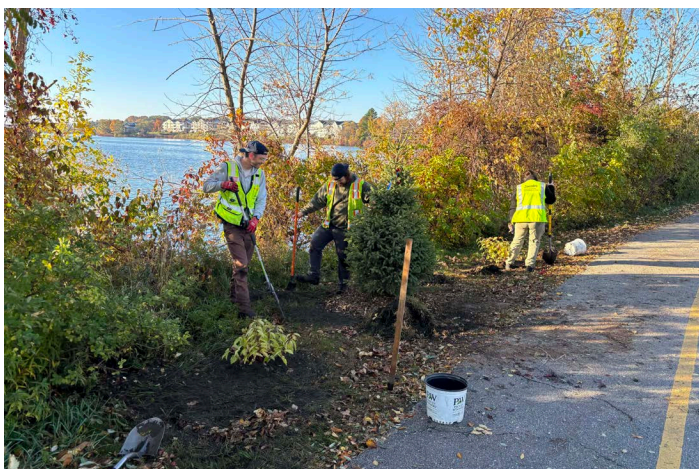
outdoor ice-skating rinks; and Duncan L. Clinch Marina.

In addition to facility oversight, the Department is responsible for park operations and maintenance, recreation programming, and management of the City’s urban forestry program, ensuring high-quality public spaces and services across the park system.

### **STAFFING**

The Parks and Recreation Department is supported by a combination of full-time staff and seasonal employees. Staffing includes department leadership, administrative personnel, maintenance staff, parks laborers, cemetery personnel, and dedicated resident volunteers. An organizational chart illustrating departmental structure is provided in Figure 3.1.

The Parks Department also works collaboratively with multiple City divisions to ensure efficient operations and coordinated service delivery. The Streets Department, Fleet Management Department, and the Department of



# PARKS + RECREATION DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

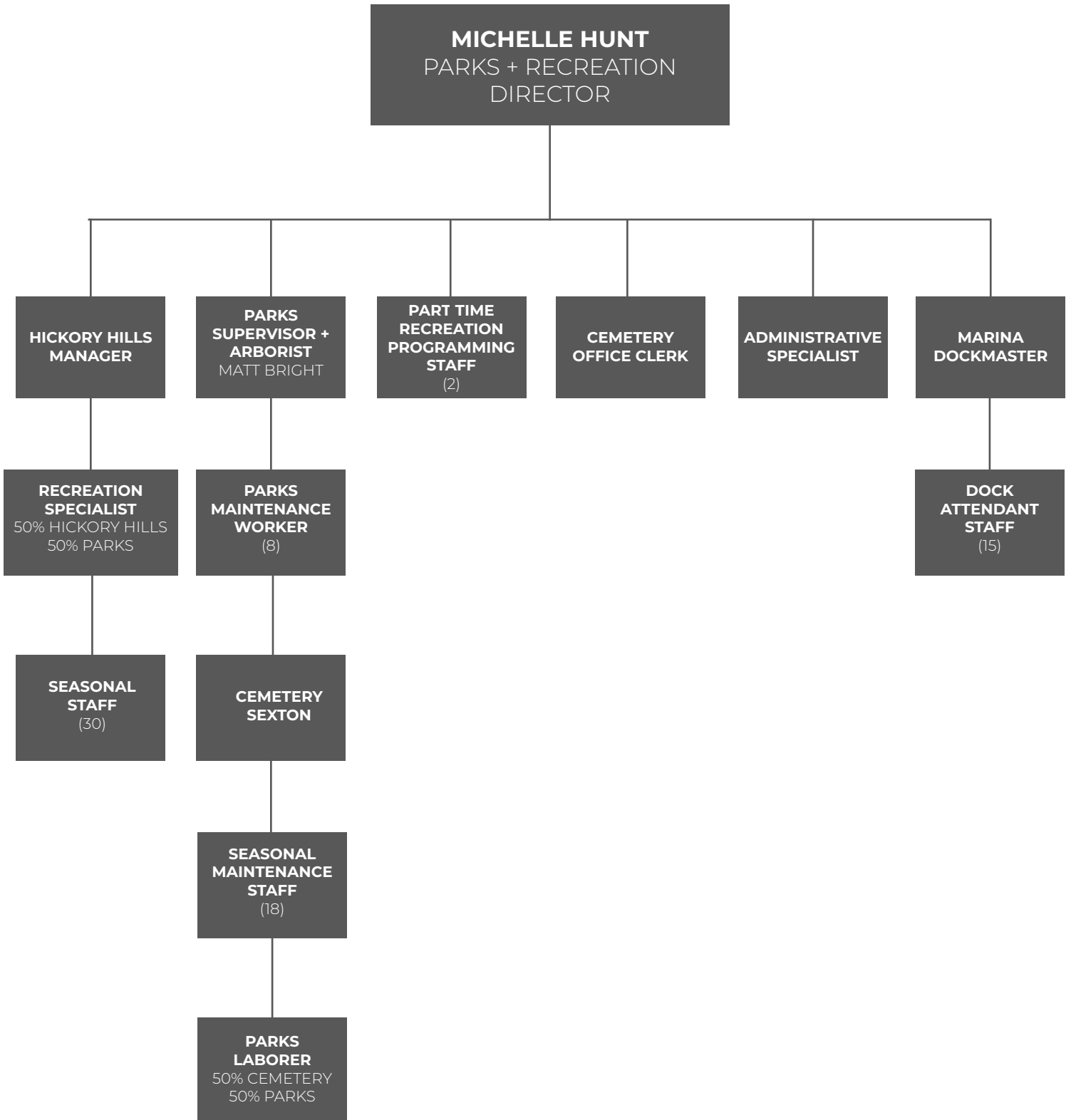


FIGURE 3.1 | Traverse City Parks And Recreation Organizational Chart.

Municipal Utilities provide operational and infrastructure support. The Planning and Zoning and Engineering Departments assist with facility planning and design, grant development, and long-range planning initiatives.

### **OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE**

The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the operation, maintenance, and repair of public parklands, facilities, and amenities throughout the city. In addition to managing parks, the Department oversees the operation and maintenance of Oakwood Cemetery, provides garbage collection services in the downtown and Old Town areas, and administers the City’s urban forestry program. This program includes the care and maintenance of more than 16,000 street trees, as well as trees located in parks and within the cemetery, along with numerous perennial and shrub beds and the annual planting and maintenance of approximately 10,000 seasonal flowers.

The Department also constructs and maintains two outdoor ice-skating rinks, operates Hickory Hills Ski Area, assists with



snow plowing of select public parking lots, and maintains the Union Street Dam and spillway, including debris removal. During major community events, including the National Cherry Festival each July, the Parks and Recreation Department dedicate significant staff time to event preparation, logistical support, and post-event cleanup. These diverse responsibilities reflect the Department’s central role in maintaining public spaces, supporting community events, and enhancing quality of life citywide.

### **RECREATION PROGRAMS + PARTNERSHIPS**

Traverse City maintains a well-managed and diverse parks system that supports a broad range of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Utilizing City parks, as well as school and county facilities, the Parks and Recreation Department offers year-round programming for youth and adults. Programs are coordinated with other local agencies and organizations to complement—not duplicate—existing services within the community. Activities are available to both residents and non-residents.



### **CITY-OPERATED PROGRAMS**

**Adult Volleyball Leagues** The City organizes beach volleyball leagues during the summer.

### **PARTNER-OPERATED PROGRAMS**

Several recreation programs operate on City-owned property through partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, and private businesses, expanding community access to specialized activities:

1. Traverse Area Community Sailing (T.A.C.S.): A summer youth sailing program located at the north end of Boardman Lake at Hull Park. The program provides children with opportunities to learn sailing skills. Community donations have supported the construction of docks and a boat storage facility.
2. Grand Traverse Area Ski Club (GTSC): The GTSC offers youth ski instruction at Hickory Hills Ski Area, with pathways into competitive ski racing. The Club has also contributed significantly to fundraising efforts supporting capital improvements and equipment upgrades at the facility.

3. Traverse Area Community Rowing: This organization provides instructional rowing programs and recreational rowing opportunities on Boardman Lake for both beginners and experienced rowers.
4. Traverse Area Pickleball Association and Friendly Pickleball Group: Use of the Slabtown Courts for games, programs, and instruction.
5. Senior Center Network: The Senior Center is part of the Senior Center Network managed by Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Department with the programming provided by the County. The city owns and maintains the Senior Center building and grounds.
6. Grand Traverse Conservation District: The city partners with the Conservation District for management of the Brown Bridge Quiet Area.
7. Children's Garden: Use of Hull Park for the children's garden.
8. Public Private Partnerships: The city partners with local businesses and service providers to deliver recreational and enrichment programming within City parks and facilities. These partnerships expand the range of experiences available to the community, activate public spaces, and leverage private expertise to complement City-led programming. The following partnerships are currently in place:
  - Kayak equipment rental at Clinch Park.
  - Concession operation at Cinch Park.

Through these programs and partnerships, the city leverages public facilities and

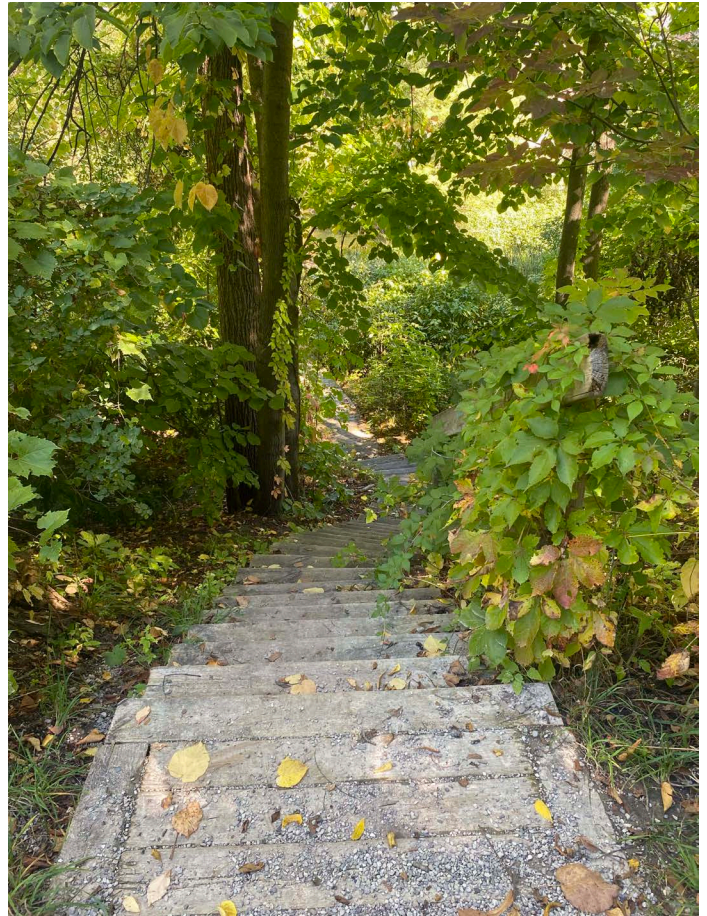
community collaboration to deliver diverse recreational opportunities that enhance quality of life and promote active living.

### **PARKS + RECREATION BUDGET**

The primary source of funding for the Parks and Recreation Department is the City's General Fund, which is largely supported by property tax revenue. For Fiscal Year 2025–2026, the City's total General Fund expenditure budget is \$26,276,200. The Parks and Recreation Department's adopted budget for the same fiscal year is \$2,329,900, representing approximately 9 percent of the overall General Fund. Personnel costs, including salaries, wages, and fringe benefits, comprise the largest portion of the Department's budget at approximately 53 percent. Additional detailed budget information is provided in the Appendix.

### **MAINTENANCE**

Parks Department staff provide snow removal services at multiple City facilities, including the Water Treatment Plant, Carnegie Building, Fire Stations #1 and #2, the Senior Center, 26 public parking lots, eight bridges, and four bridge sidewalks. The Department's Certified Arborist oversees management of the City's urban forest canopy, including maintenance of all City-owned trees, updating the tree inventory, assessing tree health, and coordinating year-round pruning, maintenance, and removals. Staff responsibilities also include annual tree and flower planting, mowing, trash removal, playground inspection and repair, beach grooming, irrigation system



maintenance, and general property upkeep across the park system.

In addition, staff administer an average of 140 low-impact park use permits annually across 15 parks, ensuring appropriate use of public spaces while maintaining safety and resource protection.

### **ADVISORY BOARDS**

The city places significant value on citizen engagement and relies on community participation through advisory boards and commissions to help guide municipal decision-making. These volunteer bodies contribute professional expertise, lived experience, and diverse perspectives that strengthen the City's ability to respond to evolving community needs.

Recommendations provided by these advisory groups inform the City Commission and Administration in establishing priorities, policies, and investments related to parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. Their input ensures that planning and implementation efforts remain community-driven, transparent, and responsive. The following advisory boards and commissions play a role in supporting parks and recreation planning and decision-making.

### **BROWN BRIDGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Brown Bridge Advisory Committee provides recommendations to the City regarding the restoration, preservation, and long-term protection of the Brown Bridge



property. Working under the direction of the City Manager, the Committee supports stewardship of this significant natural area and helps guide policy and management decisions that maintain the ecological integrity and public value of the property.

Established by the City Commission on October 4, 1993, the Committee meets quarterly and serves in an advisory capacity. Its role includes reviewing site conditions, evaluating management practices, and recommending actions that align with the City's conservation and recreation objectives.

The Committee consists of twelve members, with at least half of the membership comprised of City residents to ensure strong local representation. Membership includes one member of the City Commission, selected by the Commission, and the City Manager or the City Manager's designee. The remaining members are appointed by the City Commission. All appointments are for three-year terms, providing continuity and consistent oversight of the Brown Bridge property.

### **HICKORY HILLS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Hickory Hills Advisory Committee serves in an advisory capacity to the City Commission and City Manager, providing recommendations for the operation, restoration, preservation, and long-term protection of Hickory Hills. The Committee supports the responsible stewardship of this important recreational and natural



resource and offers guidance on planning documents, capital improvements, and policy decisions affecting the facility. The Committee meets monthly on the fourth Thursday at Hickory Hills Lodge. Its work ensures that future investments and operational strategies align with community priorities and the City's broader parks and recreation goals.

The Committee consists of twelve members appointed by the City Commission, each serving three-year terms expiring on June 30. Membership includes the City Manager or the City Manager's designee, who serves as a voting member in accordance with the City Charter; one member of the Parks and Recreation Commission; and one member of the City Commission. A minimum of six members must be City residents, ensuring strong local representation in decisions affecting Hickory Hills.

## **BUDGETING + FUNDING**

Detailed budgets for parks, programs, services, and maintenance are provided

in the Appendix of this document. Operational and programming costs for the Parks and Recreation Department are primarily supported through the City's General Fund, supplemented by user fees and grant funding.

### **TAXES**

Local property taxes represent the primary revenue source for the General Fund. These revenues are generated through the assessment of residential and industrial properties within the City at established millage rates.

### **GRANTS**

Park development and capital improvements have been supported through a variety of state and federal grant programs, including the Michigan Coastal Management Program, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, the Michigan Recreation Bond Fund, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. A summary of grant funding is provided at the end of this section.



## FEES AND CHARGES

Revenue is also generated through program participation fees and facility rentals. Fees and charges are reviewed annually to maintain an equitable structure. In addition to these primary funding sources, the Department utilizes alternative revenue streams and special funds to support operations, maintenance, and capital improvements for park facilities, including:

### CARNEGIE BUILDING FUND

The objective of the Carnegie Building Fund is to collect, preserve and present the cultural history of the Grand Traverse region. Rental agreements with The Crooked Arts Council and the Grand Traverse Rock and Mineral Club will be combined with contributions from the



General Fund to cover operational costs of the building and provide for future significant building repairs.

### SENIOR CENTER FUND

This fund accounts for maintenance and care of the recently completed Senior Center Building. The fund includes money provided by Grand Traverse County to subsidize repairs and maintenance of the building through the end of the senior services management contract.

### BROWN BRIDGE MAINTENANCE FUNDS

This fund is used to account for the repairs and maintenance costs at the Brown Bridge Quiet Area. It is funded by cell tower leases.

### TREE ORDINANCE FUND

This fund was separately established in 2022 to account for the collection of proceeds related to the City's Tree Ordinance and track expansion of the City's tree canopy.



## **BROWN BRIDGE TRUST PARKS IMPROVEMENT FUND**

The City's Brown Bridge Trust was established to hold revenue from oil and gas exploration rights and royalties located on the 1,300-acre Brown Bridge Quiet Area property 11 miles south of Traverse City. The fund was created by the voters through an amendment to the City Charter in 1978 and the principal balance may only be used when specifically authorized by the city's electorate. In 2025 voters approved the transfer of \$3 million from the Brown Bridge Trust to be used for identified capital improvement projects in City Parks.

## **PUBLIC / PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

The City generates revenue through annual agreements with private businesses that operate or provide services on City park property. These partnerships establish defined terms for use and compensation, ensuring that business activities within public spaces contribute financially to park operations, maintenance, and ongoing system improvements.

## **PRIVATE DONATIONS AND GIFTS**

Donations, gifts, or grants that come from private sources such as foundations, businesses, firms or individuals. Recent examples include the Oleson Foundation, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, Inc. (TART), Rotary Charities, Grand Traverse Ski Club, VASA Ski Club, Preserve Hickory, and Friendly Garden Club.. These programs have provided not only matching funds but incentives to improve the City's recreational assets.

## **GRANT INVENTORY**

The City of Traverse City has been successful in obtaining grants from numerous sources for several decades. The following identify the city's grant history.

### **GRANT NUMBER: 26-00333 LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND**

Veteran's Memorial Park Development (1972)  
Grant Amount: \$37,518.10

### **GRANT NUMBER: 26-10247 LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND**

Boardman River Access (1981)  
Grant Amount: \$30,207.00

### **GRANT NUMBER – TF704 MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

West Grand Traverse Bay Acquisition (1983)  
Grant Amount: \$300,000.00

### **GRANT NUMBER TF88-184 MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

West Bay Beach (1988)  
Grant Amount: \$280,950.00

### **GRANT NUMBER TF92-199 MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Riverfront Acquisition (1992)  
Grant Amount: \$228,500.00

### **GRANT NUMBER TF99-160 MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Hull Park Waterfront (1999)  
Grant Amount: \$365,730.00

### **GRANT NUMBER TF02-151 MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Boardman Lake Trail – East (2002)  
Grant Amount: \$500,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF05-104 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Boardman Lake Trail – West (North) (2005)  
Grant Amount: \$500,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF10-062 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Clinch Park Bayfront Revitalization (2010)  
Grant Amount: \$450,800.00

**GRANT NUMBER 26-01712 LAND AND  
WATER CONSERVATION FUND**

Clinch Park Beach Bathhouse/Restroom  
Development (2011)  
Grant Amount: \$210,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF11-060 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Boardman Lake Trail - West (South) (2011)  
Grant Amount: \$210,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF15-0196 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Clancy Park Improvements (2015)  
Grant Amount: \$124,400.00

**GRANT NUMBER – 26-01786 LAND AND  
WATER CONSERVATION FUND**

Hickory Hills Cross Country Ski Trailhead  
(2017)  
Grant Amount: \$150,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER – RP17-0042  
RECREATION PASSPORT FUND**

Hickory Hills Renovation (2017)  
Grant Amount: \$75,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF17-0072 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Hickory Hills Renovations (2017)  
Grant Amount: \$100,000.00



**GRANT NUMBER TF19-0075 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Improvements to Indian Woods Park (2019)  
Grant Amount: \$50,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF19-0078 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Hickory Hills Snowmaking (2019)  
Grant Amount: \$50,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER TF20-0193 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Fish Pass Project – Union Street Dam Park  
Improvements (2020)  
\$300,000

**GRANT NUMBER TF22-0162 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Bayfront Restroom Amenities (2022)  
\$200,500

**GRANT NUMBER TF23-0059 MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND**

Brown Bridge Quiet Area Spring Lake Land  
Acquisition (2023)  
\$2,352,200

04

# RECREATION INVENTORY

## TRAVERSE CITY PARKS, RECREATION + OPEN SPACES

### INVENTORY OF PARKS + RECREATION

Understanding the existing park and recreation system in the City of Traverse City is a vital step in developing a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The park inventory provides a comprehensive overview of the community's current parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces, documenting their locations, sizes, amenities, accessibility and general conditions. This information establishes a baseline for evaluating how well the existing system serves residents today.

The inventory process included a field review of all publicly owned parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces managed by the City of Traverse City. Each site was observed to identify available amenities such as playgrounds, athletic fields, trails, picnic areas, natural spaces, and supporting infrastructure.



Observations related to accessibility, connectivity, maintenance needs, and overall functionality were also noted.

By documenting the existing features and highlighting areas for potential

opportunities of the current system, the park inventory helps identify gaps in recreational opportunities, geographic service areas, and potential improvements to existing facilities. These findings, combined with community input and demographic analysis, inform recommendations that will guide future investments and strategic decision-making over the next five years. The City of Traverse City is home to a wide range of park and recreation facilities. In this chapter, a brief description and assessment of 36 parks has been provided.

## **NRPA PARK CLASSIFICATIONS**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides a widely used and adopted framework that helps classify parks based on size, function, and populations served. Utilizing this classification during the park inventory helps communities to organize their park systems into categories with each classification generally reflecting a park's

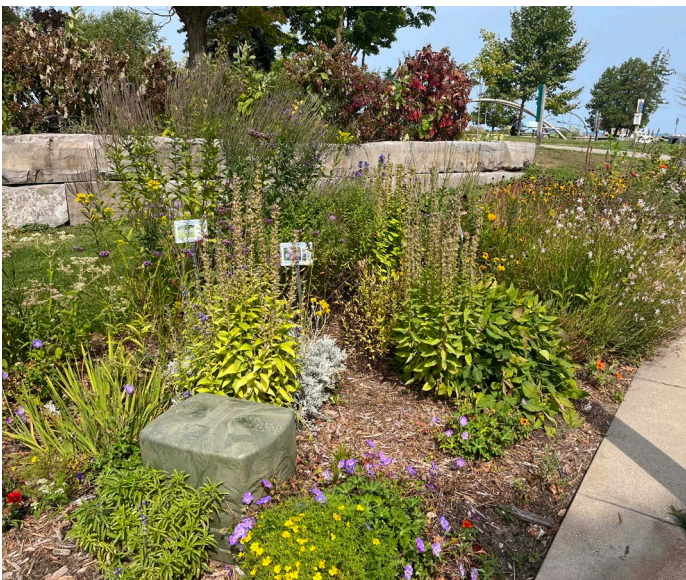
purpose, the size range, and the types of amenities that each facility may include. The following classification categories used in this analysis are:

- 1. MINI PARKS**
- 2. NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**
- 3. COMMUNITY PARKS**
- 4. REGIONAL PARKS**
- 5. NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS**
- 6. SPECIAL USE AREAS**

By categorizing parks into standardized typologies, the city can more easily assess and evaluate their existing park system and the way it is distributed across the community to help identify gaps in park access and the opportunities that might be available for future park planning and development.

The Traverse City Parks and Recreation Department controls and manages approximately 1,687.74 acres of land which include developed parks, waterfront areas, and less developed natural areas (refer to the Traverse City Park and Recreation map).

Most of Traverse City's park acreage is held in four natural resource parks totaling 1,487.36 acres. Six mini parks comprise 1.4 acres, ten neighborhood parks comprise 16.58 acres, nine community parks add 44.68 acres, one regional park adds 119.9 acres, and six special use parks add 17.82 acres to the park system.



Typically, smaller open spaces address localized needs, while larger parks and open space draw users from farther away for destination activities. The uses offered at a park vary by category. Mini Parks are specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population of specific groups. Neighborhood parks are considered the most critical for local, walkable park access and community health as these types of parks provide a range of playground amenities and recreational opportunities for residents. Community parks are larger in size and often feature a greater concentration of sports fields and other recreation amenities to meet demand for a broader area. Natural resource areas are lands set aside for preservation of natural resources. These sites are typically unsuitable for development but can support recreational activities at a level that preserves the integrity of the natural resource. Special use parks are areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities.

## **PARK ACCESSIBILITY SCORING**

As part of the overall park inventory and assessment phase, accessibility ratings are also used to evaluate the way in which the current park systems are designed to provide access to a wide range of all abilities for park users. These ratings typically determine accessibility of elements like accessibility routes and pathways, parking, entrances, playground equipment, restrooms, and seating areas. The primary objective is to ensure that the city's park system features park amenities

that make these spaces easily usable for individuals with a diverse range of needs and abilities, such as mobility, sensory, or other physical limitations. Simultaneously, incorporating accessibility ratings as part of the park inventory helps explore locations where improvements can be made, and provides the city with a critical basis to use as they respond to park planning, development, and updates are made.

Incorporating accessibility ratings into the park inventory and analysis is critical for helping the community commit to providing equitable access and park resources for a diverse range of users. Accessibility scores are typically informed by the standards set forth by the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA), which can help provide the framework that guides the design for accessible design in outdoor public spaces. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) has established a five-point accessibility rating scale (based on ADA standards) to help evaluate how well a park meets accessibility guidelines. The following rating scale was used during the park inventory stage and is as follows:

**1 = none of the facilities or park areas meet accessibility guidelines**

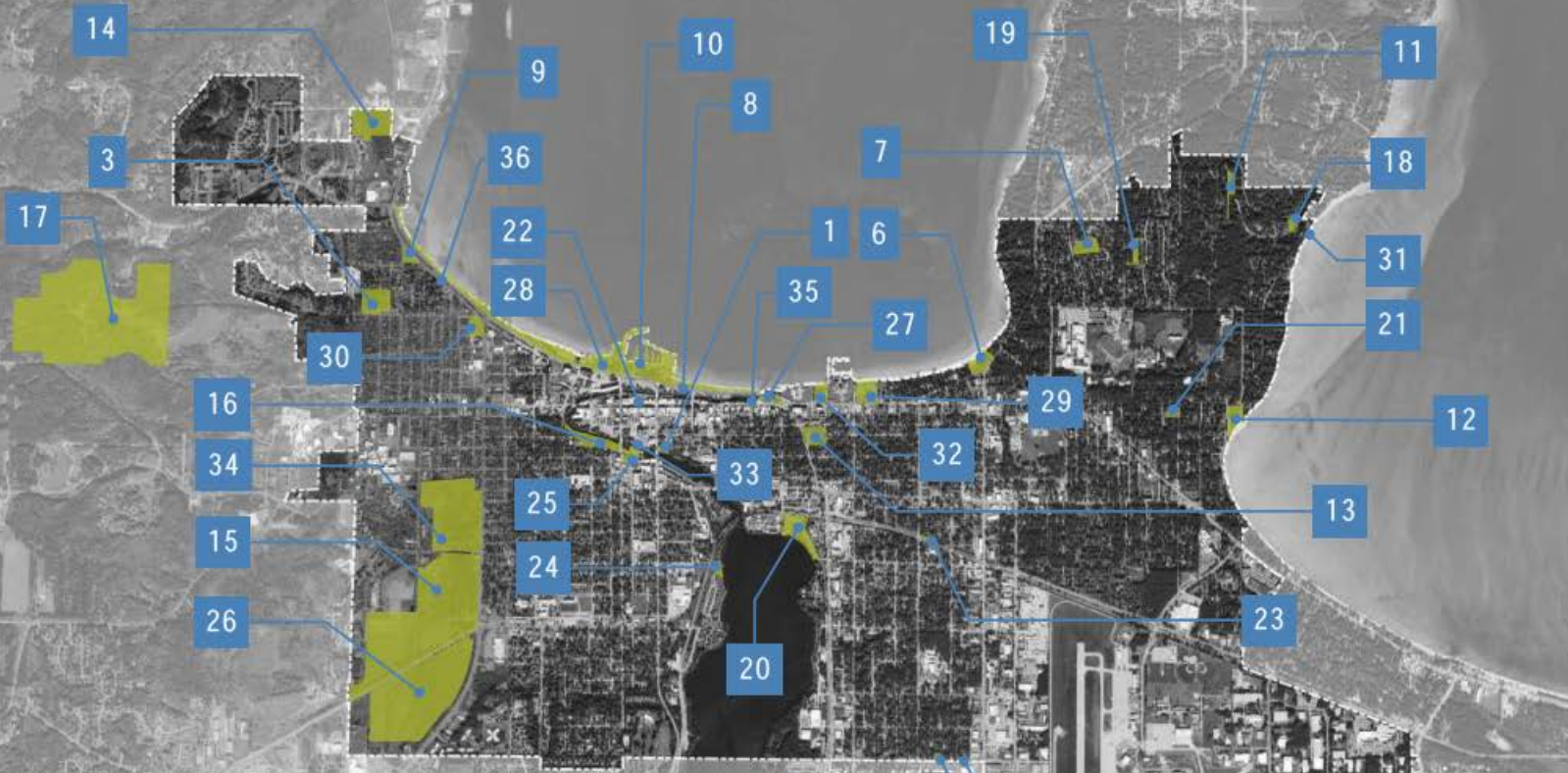
**2 = some facilities or park areas meet accessibility guidelines**

**3 = most facilities or park areas meet accessibility guidelines**



**4 = the entire park meets current accessibility guidelines**

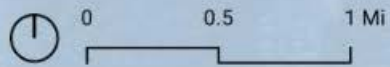
**5 = the entire park was developed or renovated using principles of universal design**

# THE CITY OF TRAVERSE CITY PARKS + RECREATION FACILITIES MAP



## MAP LEGEND

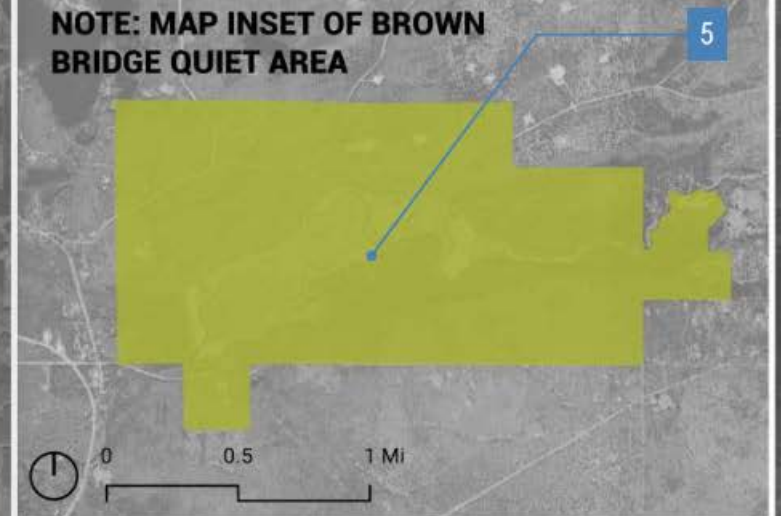
-  TRAVERSE CITY PARKS + RECREATION PROPERTIES
-  TRAVERSE CITY - CITY LIMITS



## PARKS + RECREATION LEGEND

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. AMERICAN LEGION PARK    | 18. HIGHLAND PARK              |
| 2. ARBUTUS COURT PARK      | 19. HULL PARK                  |
| 3. ASHTON PARK             | 20. HURON HILLS PARK           |
| 4. BOON STREET PARK        | 21. INDIAN WOODS PARK          |
| 5. BROWN BRIDGE QUIET AREA | 22. J. SMITH WALKWAY           |
| 6. BRYANT PARK             | 23. JUPITER GARDENS            |
| 7. CLANCY PARK             | 24. KAYAK LAUNCH               |
| 8. CLINCH PARK             | 25. LAY PARK                   |
| 9. DARROW PARK             | 26. MEIJER'S SILVERBROOK ACRES |
| 10. DUNCAN L CLINCH MARINA | 27. MINI PARK                  |
| 11. DUTMERS NATURAL AREA   | 28. OPEN SPACE                 |
| 12. EAST BAY PARK          | 29. SENIOR CENTER BEACH        |
| 13. F + M PARK             | 30. SLABTOWN CORNER            |
| 14. FULTON PARK            | 31. SUNRISE PEACE PARK         |
| 15. GRAND TRAVERSE COMMONS | 32. SUNSET PARK                |
| 16. HANNAH PARK            | 33. UNION STREET DAM           |
| 17. HICKORY HILLS REC AREA | 34. VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK     |
|                            | 35. WELLINGTON PLAZA           |
|                            | 36. WEST END BEACH             |

## NOTE: MAP INSET OF BROWN BRIDGE QUIET AREA



# 01. AMERICAN LEGION PARK

0.49 ac

Neighborhood Park

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## FEATURES:

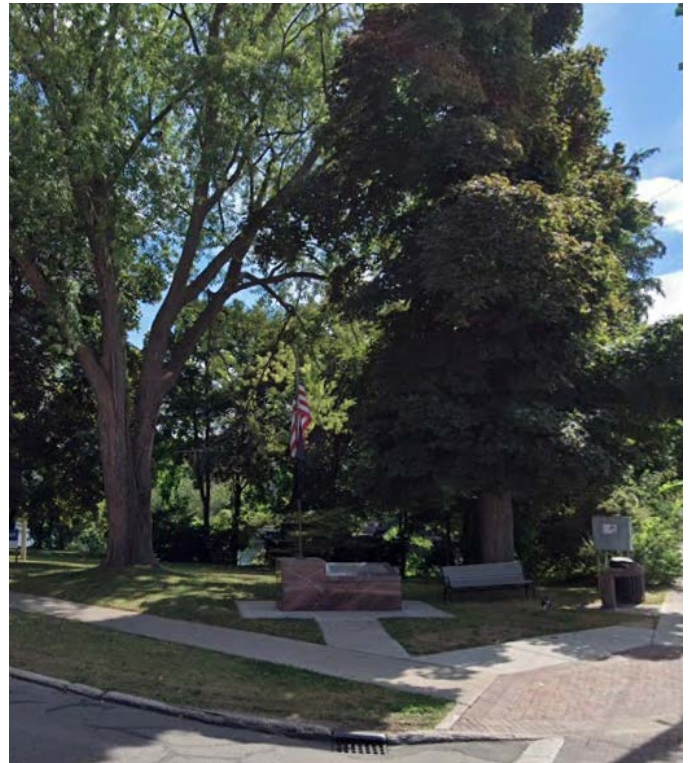
- Memorial to Area Veterans
- Picnic Tables
- Walking
- Fishing
- Street Parking
- Seating/Picnic Areas
- Access to Boardman River
- Water Filling Station



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Provide additional accessible walkways from street edge to river
- Provide additional seating and accessible picnic tables for users throughout the entire site



# 02. ARBUTUS COURT PARK

0.12 ac

Mini Park

## FEATURES:

- Walking
- Benches
- Basketball Court
- Street Parking
- Picnic Tables



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Provide an accessible path to the basketball court and picnic tables
- Add bike loop



# 03. ASHTON PARK

6.36 ac

Neighborhood Park

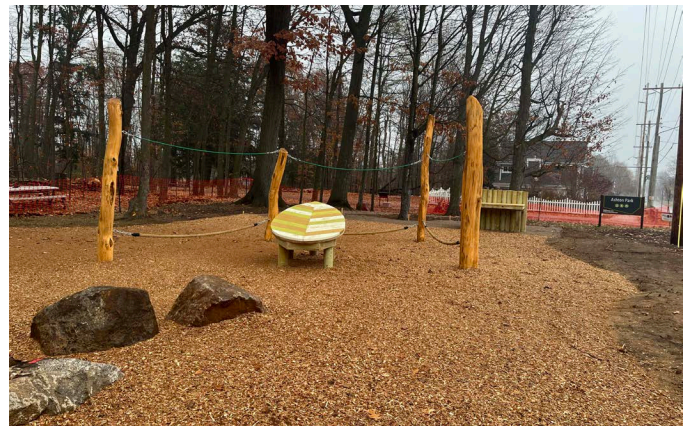
## FEATURES:

- Old Growth Forest of Beech, Hemlock, Oak, and Maple Trees
- Walking and Hiking Trails
- Self-Guided Nature Trail
- Seating Amenities
- Playground Equipment
- Basketball Court
- Street Parking



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

ASHTON PARK IS USED AS A NATURE STUDY AREA BY THE ADJACENT SCHOOL, WILLOW HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.



## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible paths within the park and to the neighboring school
- Interpretive signage and plant ID plaques



# 04. BOON STREET PARK

0.34 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Walking
- Basketball Court
- Playground Equipment
- Seating Amenities
- Street Parking
- Picnic Tables

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the basketball court and playground equipment
- Playground equipment is not accessible due to raised curbs; consider adding ramps for access

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 1



# 05. BROWN BRIDGE QUIET AREA

1,310 ac

Natural Resource Area

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## FEATURES:

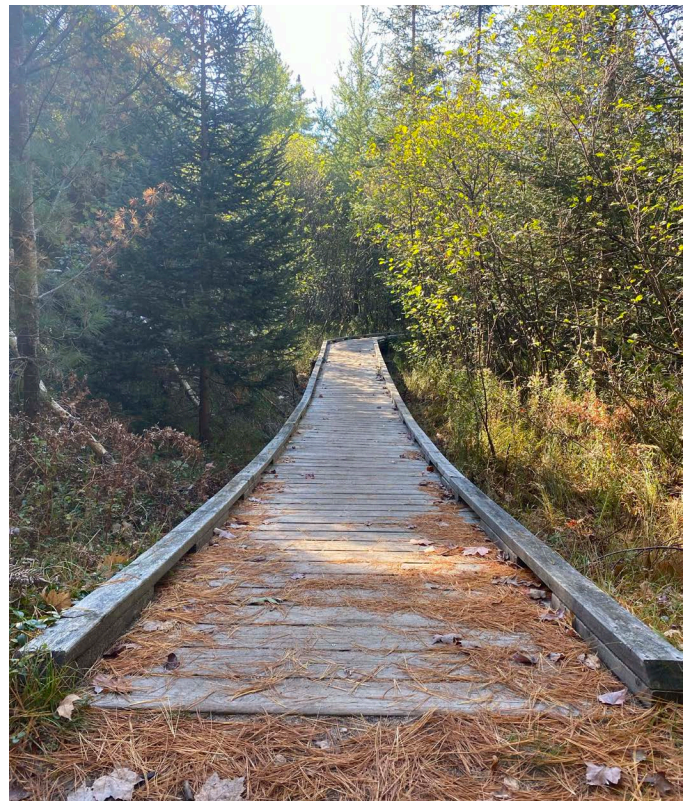
- Walking and Hiking Trails
- Canoe Launch for Paddling
- Fishing
- Seating Amenities
- Pavilions/Shade Structures
- Restrooms
- Access to Boardman River
- Grasshopper Creek Permit Hunting Area
- Scenic Outlooks
- Snowshoeing and Cross Country Skiing
- Trail Head
- Natural and Wildlife Observation
- Parking Areas

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Additional interpretive and wayfinding signage
- Improvements to canoe launch for barrier free access
- Invasive and exotic species management

*MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT FOR LAND ACQUISITION (2023)*

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2



# 06. BRYANT PARK

3.29 ac

Community Park

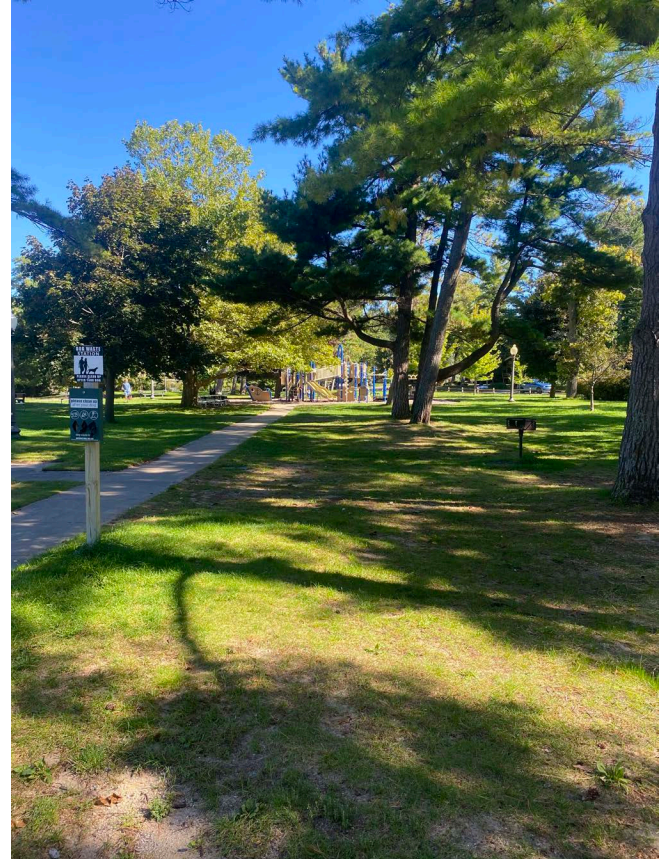
## FEATURES:

- Beach Access + Swimming (with ADA access to the beach area)
- Walking Paths
- Access to Grand Traverse Bay
- Play Equipment
- Restrooms
- Seating Amenities
- Grilling and Picnicking
- Water Filling Station
- Parking Lot
- Public Art

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible pathways to playgrounds, benches, grills and picnic tables
- Provide barrier free grills and picnic tables

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3**



# 07. CLANCY PARK

3.03 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Play Equipment
- Basketball Court
- Walking Paths
- Seating Amenities
- Shelter
- Water Filling Station
- Open Space for Field Games
- Street Parking

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 4**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Additional benches that are more accessible
- Consider replacing the merry-go-round and adding an accessible path

*MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (2015)*



# 08. CLINCH PARK

10.17 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- ADA Beach Access + Swimming
- Walking Paths
- Play Equipment
- Splashpad
- Concessions
- TART Access
- Con Foster Building
- Restrooms
- Fishing
- Kayak Launch and Rentals
- Seating Amenities
- Grilling
- Water Filling Station
- Parking Lot

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Additional seating and picnic tables
- Additional interpretive and wayfinding signage
- Repurpose the Con Foster Building, or demolish the building and build a large event pavilion
- Increase tree canopy
- Additional foot wash stations and outdoor shower

*MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (2010)*

*MDNR LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND GRANT (2011)*

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3



# 09. DARROW PARK

1.16 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Walking Paths
- Play Equipment
- Portable Restrooms
- Seating Amenities
- Grilling
- Picnicking
- Water Filling Station
- Street Parking



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Consider adding permanent restrooms
- Accessible path to grills and picnic tables



# 10. DUNCAN L. CLINCH MARINA

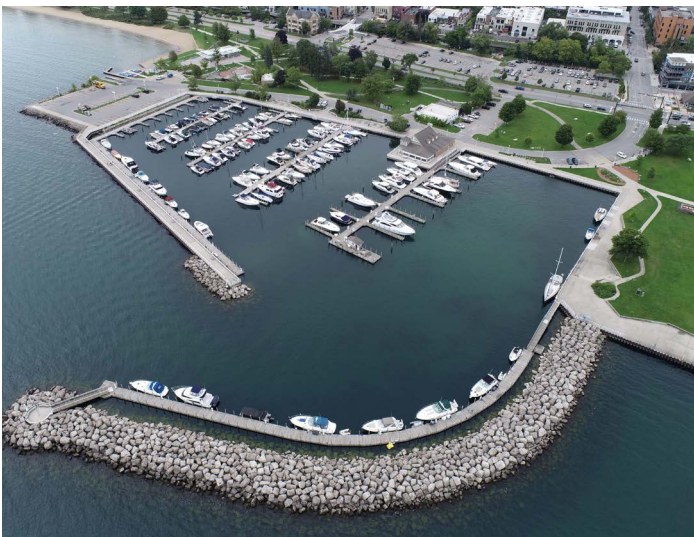
1.42 ac

Special Use Area

## FEATURES:

- Water Access for boaters including 71 seasonal and 48 transient slips, 1,000 ft of broadside space, and boat launch ramp
- Water and Electric
- Showers
- Gas/Diesel Pump
- Grills and Picnic Tables
- Cable TV
- Laundry
- Walking Paths (including pier)
- Parking Lot
- Restrooms

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 4**



# 11. DUTMERS NATURAL AREA

1.61 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Natural area
- Walking
- Limited on street parking

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 0**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Add accessible paths
- Add seating, picnic tables and interpretive signs



# 12. EAST BAY PARK

3.13 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- Picnic Tables and Seating
- Grills
- Restrooms
- Playground Equipment - ADA playground equipment available
- Access to East Grand Traverse Bay
- Swimming
- Boat Launch Ramp
- Parking Lot
- Water filling station



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible paths to grills and picnic tables
- Accessible path to swings
- Improvements to boat launch
- Barrier free access from all barrier free parking spaces (currently, only one has a path to it)
- ADA beach mat



# 13. F & M PARK

3.22 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

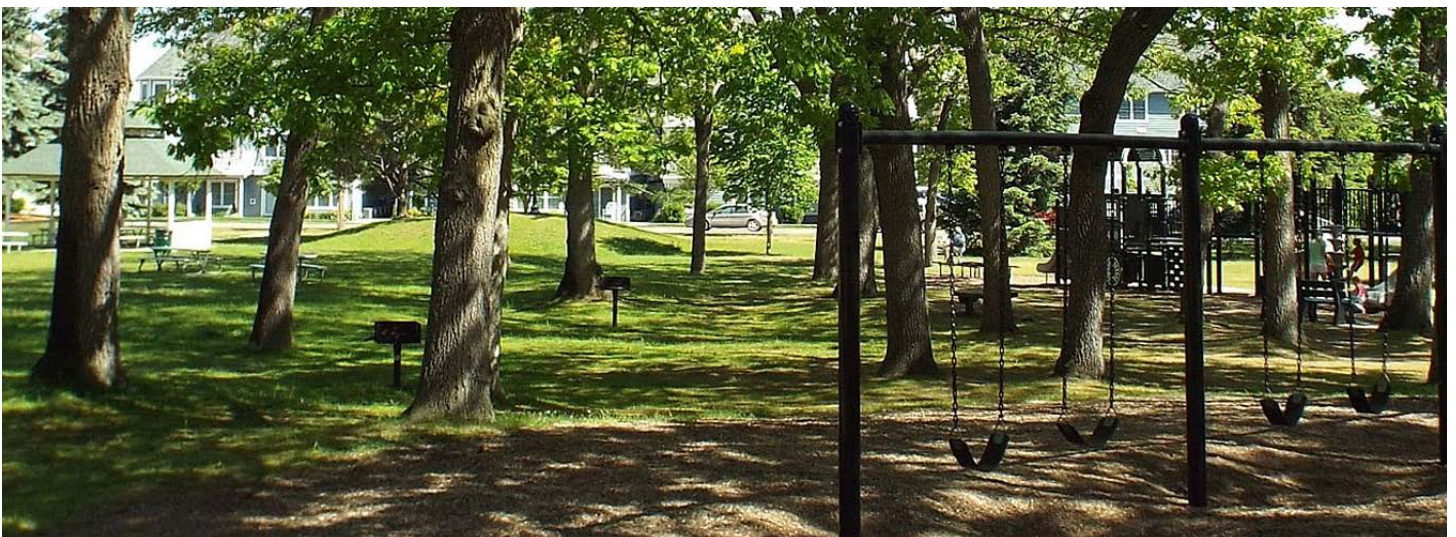
- Playground Equipment - ADA play equipment available
- Picnic and seating areas
- Grills
- Pavilion/shelter
- Water filling station
- On street parking
- Portable Restrooms Available
- Cherry's Kid events during Cherry Festival
- Popular location for year end school parties and field trips
- Ice Skating Rink (seasonal)
- Bike Loops
- Basketball Court

**F+M PARK GOT ITS NAME FROM A FLORIDA AND MICHIGAN FRUIT PACKING COMPANY THAT USED TO BE ON SITE.**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Internal accessible paths including connections to basketball court, playgrounds and picnic tables

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2



# 14. FULTON PARK

9.31 ac

Natural Resource Area

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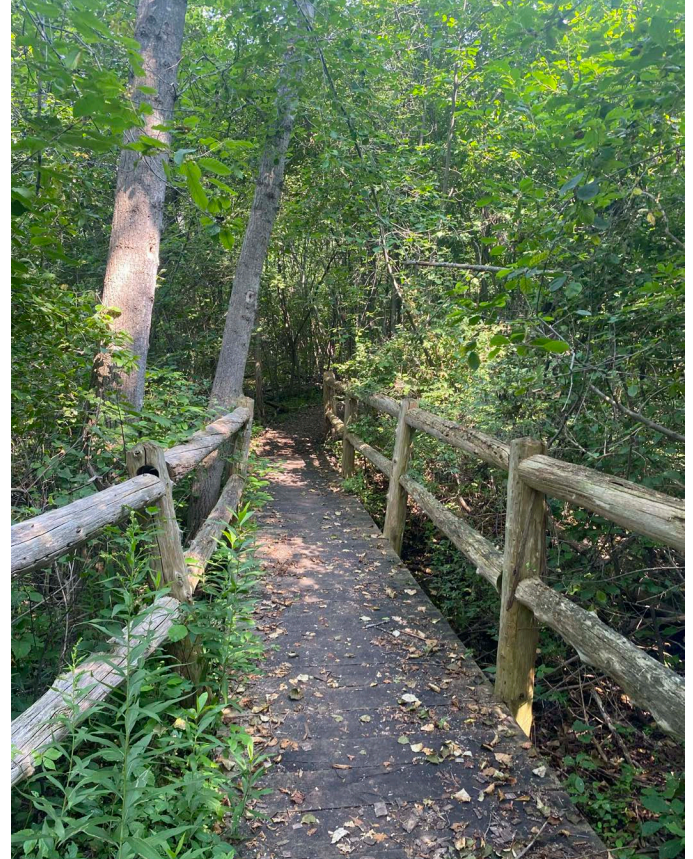
## FEATURES:

- Natural Areas
- Self-Guided Natural Trail
- TART Access
- Seating Areas
- Walking and Hiking Trails
- Parking Lot

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path from parking lot into the park
- Internal accessible paths
- Expanded parking
- Additional seating
- Interpretive signage

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 1



# 15. GRAND TRAVERSE COMMONS

118.36 ac

Natural Resource Area

## FEATURES:

- Natural Areas
- Walking and Hiking Trails
- Picnic and seating areas
- On Street Parking
- Women's Walk and Men's Walking Trails (used by patients)
- Access to Kids Creek
- Nature and Wildlife Observation
- Wetlands and Nature Study

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

**THE GRAND TRAVERSE COMMONS WAS FORMERLY THE SITE FOR THE TRAVERSE CITY STATE HOSPITAL.**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Additional internal pathways, both accessible and nature trails
- Interpretive signage related to history, flora and fauna
- Seating areas



# 16. HANNAH PARK

4.12 ac

Community Park

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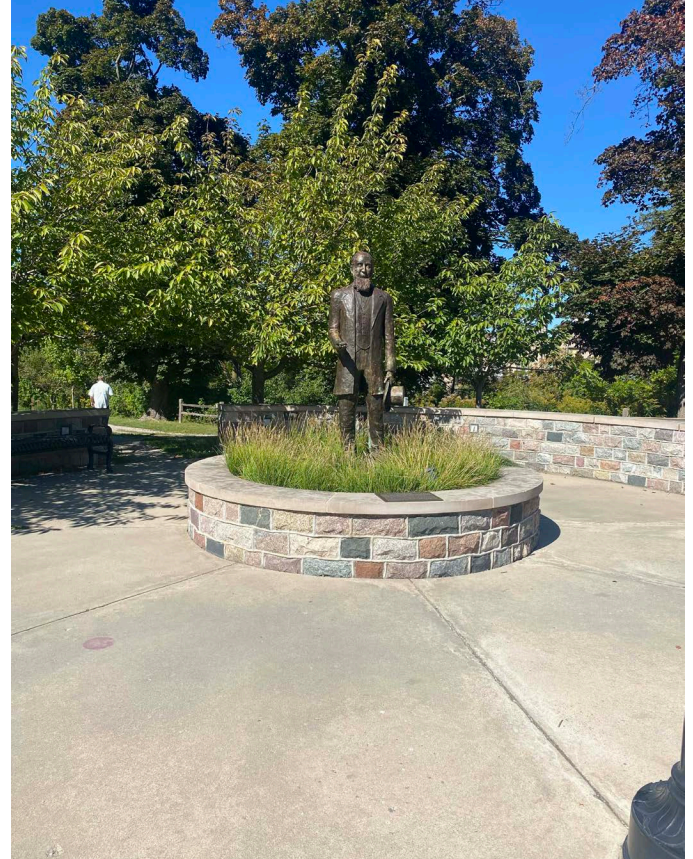
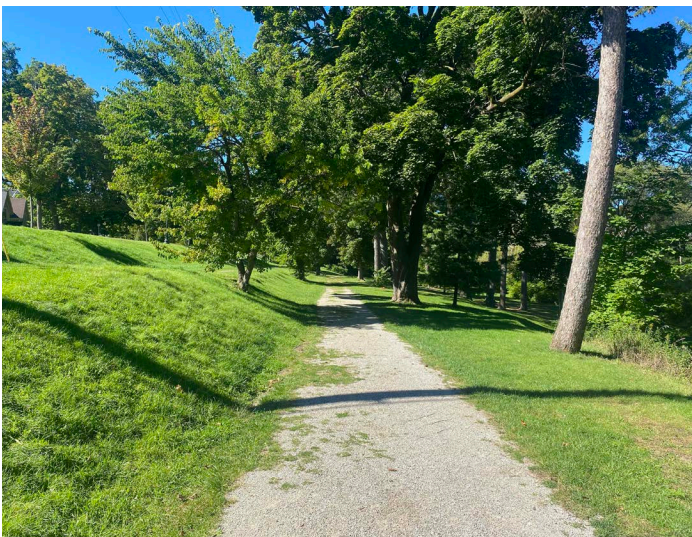
## FEATURES:

- Picnic and seating areas
- Perry Hannah Statue
- Walking and Hiking
- Fishing
- Access to Boardman River Edge

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to waters edge
- Addition of outlook or fishing deck
- Additional seating areas
- Accessible paths within park

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2



# 17. HICKORY HILLS RECREATION AREA

119.9 ac

Regional Park

## FEATURES:

- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Walking and Hiking
- 16 Downhill Skiing Runs with Multiple Skill Levels
- (2) 18 Hole Disc Golf Courses
- Restrooms
- Lodge available for private event rentals
- Maintenance Building
- Lighting for Night Skiing
- Cross Country Skiing
- Parking Lot



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible paths throughout the site
- Mountain bike trail system
- Summertime recreational opportunities
- Hickory Hills Recreation Area has a site specific Master Plan and the City will be pursuing an update to this plan in the near future.



*THREE MDNR GRANTS THROUGH THE PASSPORT RECREATION GRANT, TRUST FUND GRANT, AND LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (2017)  
MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (2019).*

# 18. HIGHLAND PARK

1.35 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Natural Areas
- Walking
- Open Space for Field Play
- Slide
- Picnic table
- On Street Parking

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 0**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible paths into and around the park
- Addition of playground equipment



# 19. HULL PARK

6.21 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- Walking
- Fishing
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Boardman Lake Water Access - Boat Launch Ramp
- Multi-use Recreation Building with Meeting Area
- Boardwalks, Docks, Overlook Decks
- Traverse Area Community Rowing (TACR) Provides Community Rowing Program
- Traverse Area Community Sailing (TACS) Provides Sailing Lessons
- Boardman Lake Trail Access
- Restrooms
- Water Filling Station
- Pavilion



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 4

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the picnic tables
- Additional bike facilities such as tire changing and air filling stations
- Parking expansion

*MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (1999)*



# 20. HURON HILLS PARK

0.93 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Picnic Tables
- Open Space for Field Games
- Small Hill for Sledding
- On Street Parking

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 1

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Add accessible paths to and within the park
- Add playground equipment



# 21. INDIAN WOODS PARK

0.62 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

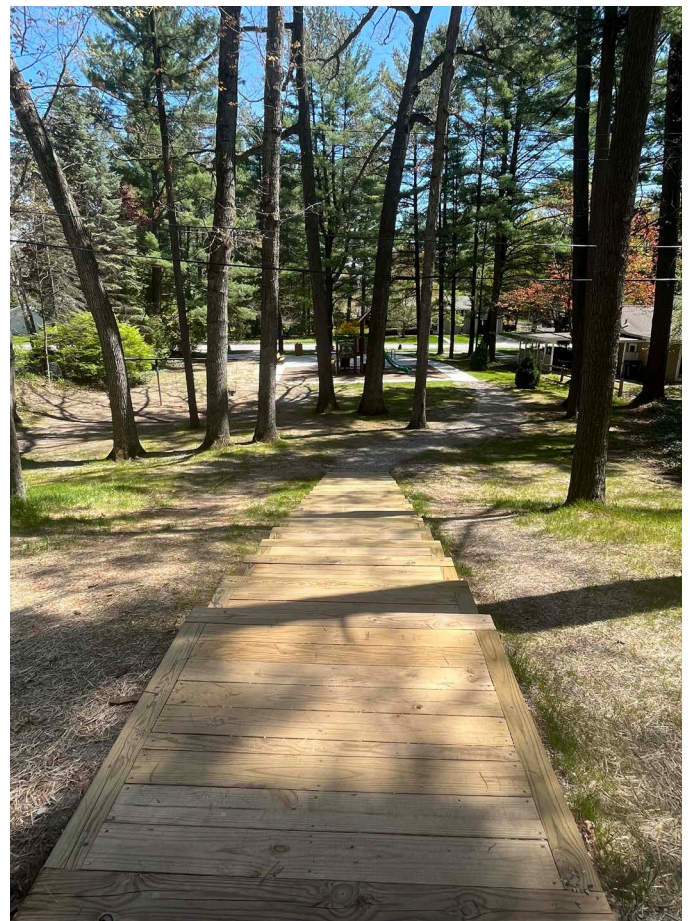
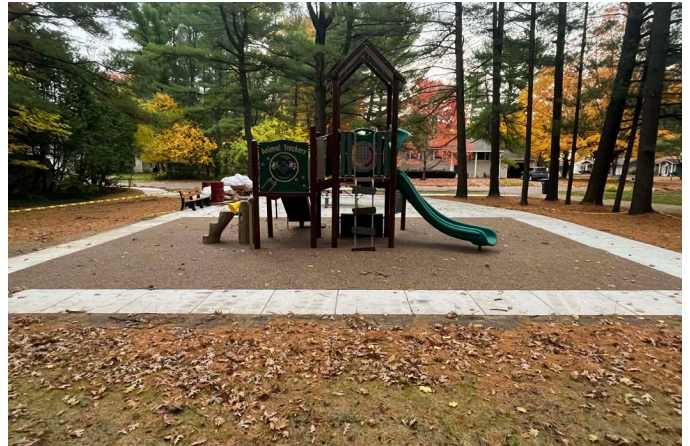
- Playground Equipment
- Hill Slide
- Gravel Path
- Bike Racks
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- On-street Parking

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Pave gravel path
- Barrier free connection to picnic tables

*MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (2019)*



# 22. J. SMITH WALKWAY

0.09 ac

Mini Park

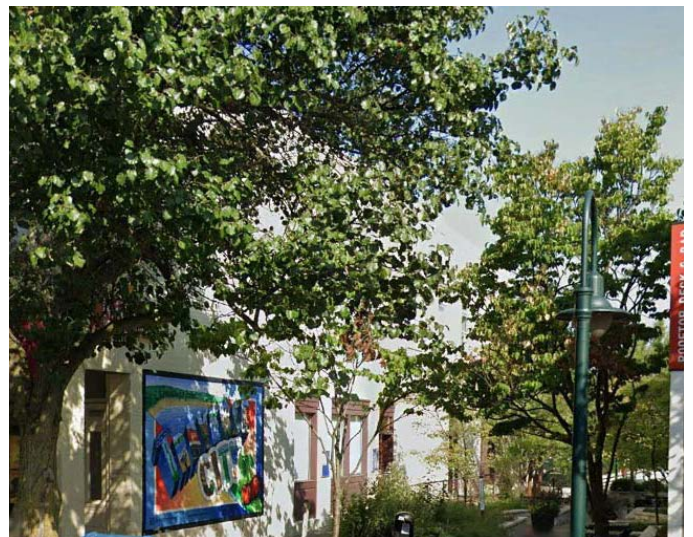
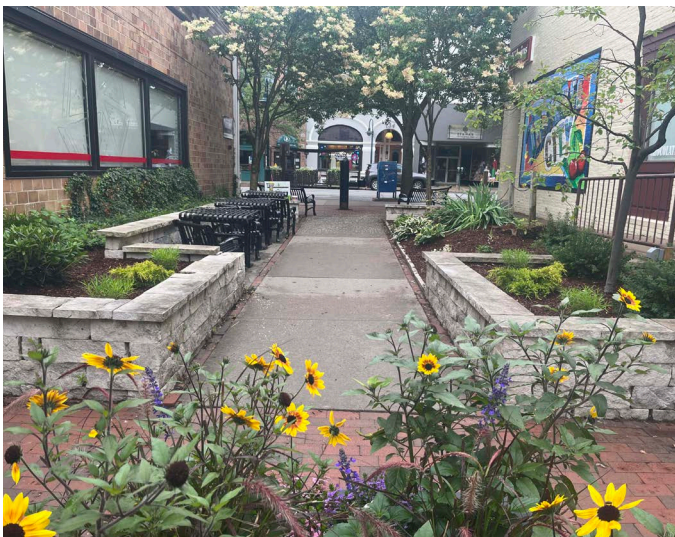
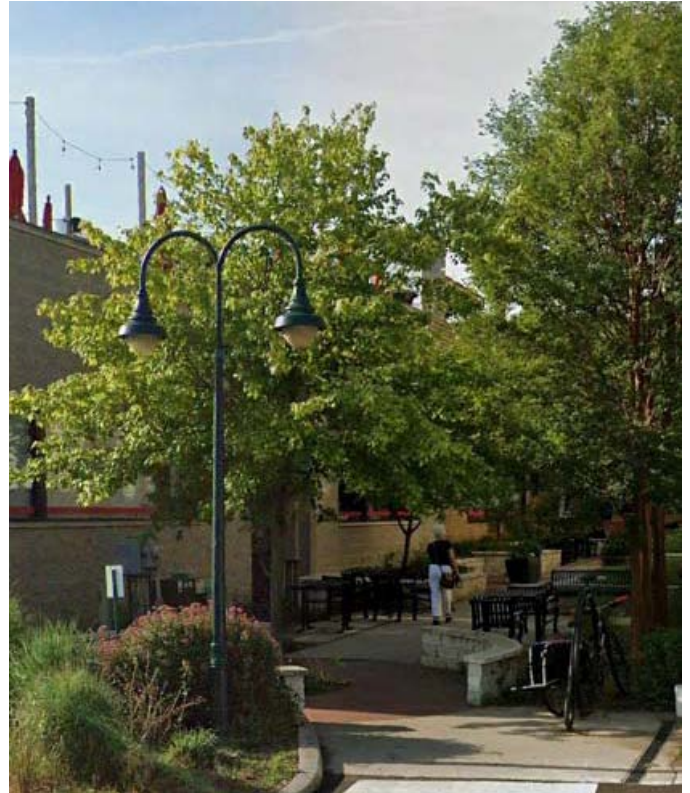
## FEATURES:

- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Walking Area
- Water Filling Station
- Metered Parking Lot

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 4**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Wayfinding signage



# 23. JUPITER GARDENS

0.32 ac

Mini Park

## FEATURES:

- Walking
- TART Trail Connection
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Peace Pole by the Rotary Club
- Planet Jupiter Model as Part of a Scaled Solar System Installation Along the TART Trail
- Water Filling Station
- Bike Repair Station
- On Street Parking



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Consider covered seating area or pavilion
- Edible gardens
- Barrier free picnic tables and access



# 24. KAYAK LAUNCH

0.70 ac

Special Use Area

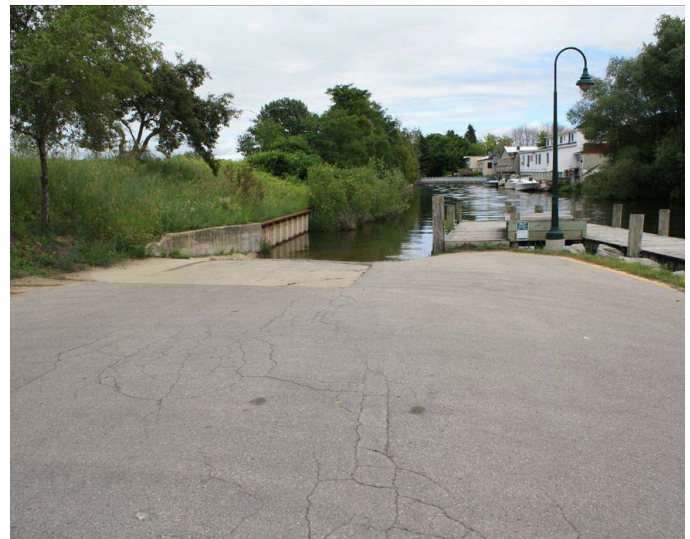
## FEATURES:

- Walking Areas
- Boardman Lake Trail Access
- Pavilion
- Bike Loops
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Fishing
- Water Access - Kayak Launch including ADA Launch

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Consider addition of parking and restrooms
- Additional bike facilities



# 25. LAY PARK

0.69 ac

Neighborhood Park

## FEATURES:

- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Public Art
- Paved Pathways
- Water Filling Station
- On Street Parking

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the picnic tables

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3



# 26. MEIJER'S SLIVERBROOK ACRES

58.12 ac

Natural Resource Area

---

## FEATURES:

- Natural Areas
- Kids Creek Access
- Walking and Hiking Areas
- On Street Parking

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 0

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Consider boardwalks or viewing platforms
- Consider seating areas or nature paths



# 27. MINI PARK

0.69 ac

Mini Park

## FEATURES:

- Fishing
- Boardman River Access
- TART Trail Access
- Vietnam Veteran's Memorial
- Plaza and Sculpture Honoring Traverse City as "Coast Guard City"
- Walking Areas
- Metered On Street Parking

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the sculpture plaza
- Wayfinding signage



# 28. OPEN SPACE PARK

## FEATURES:

- Walking Paths
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- TART Trail Access
- Cherry Festival Site
- Access to West Grand Traverse Bay
- Fishing
- Water Filling Station
- Flexible Event and Programming Space

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3



## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Increase tree canopy and landscaping improvements
- Add a pavilion and/or an amphitheater
- Add seating areas including covered seating, bench swings, barrier free seating
- Add bike racks
- Improvements for electrical set up and music equipment for events

# 29. SENIOR CENTER BEACH

3.9 ac

Special Use Area

## FEATURES:

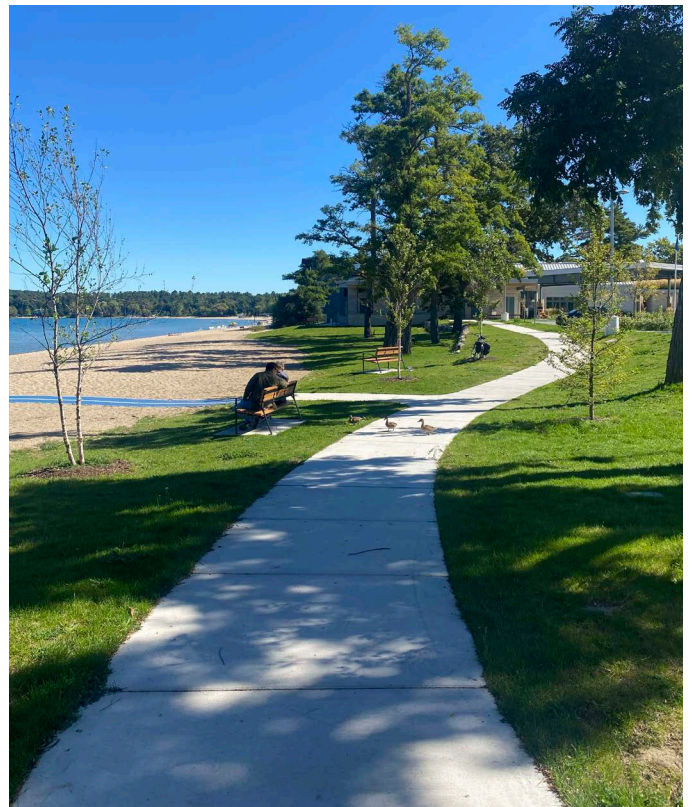
- Beach Access
- Swimming
- Access to West Grand Traverse Bay
- Picnic and Seating Areas
- Restrooms
- Senior Center Facility
- Tennis and Pickleball Courts
- Shuffleboard
- Water Filling Station
- Parking Lot



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the picnic tables and seating areas
- Beach mat for accessibility



# 30. SLABTOWN CORNER

2.42 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- Lighted Tennis courts
- Lighted Pickleball Courts
- Restrooms
- Wags West Dog Park with both Small and Large Dog Fenced in Areas
- Playground Equipment
- Picnic tables
- Water Filling Station
- Parking



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the pickleball court area
- Paved seating area within dog park areas
- Consider a pavilion or shade structure at pickleball courts



# 31. SUNRISE PEACE PARK

0.09 ac

Mini Park

## FEATURES:

- Access to East Grand Traverse Bay
- Beach and Swimming Access
- Fishing
- Seating area
- Parking



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 0

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Due to the steep drop off it is not possible to get a barrier free path to the water - Consider an overlook deck to allow for viewing access



# 32. SUNSET PARK

2.24 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- Beach / Swimming
- Fishing
- Playground Equipment
- Picnic / grills
- TART Trail Access
- Bike Racks
- Open Space
- Parking

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accessible path to the picnic tables and play equipment
- Beach mat for accessibility to the beach area
- Consider upgrading playground equipment
- Add a covered pavilion



# 33. UNION STREET DAM AREA

1.0 ac

Special Use Area

## FEATURES:

- FishPass
- Fishing
- Riverwalk
- Pedestrian Bridge
- Canoe/Kayak Launch
- Interpretive Overlook
- Low Impact Stormwater management

**ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 3**

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Continue future phases of Fishpass project

*\*NOTE: RECEIVED A MDNR TRUST FUND GRANT (2020)*



# 34. VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

1.01 ac

Special Use Area

## FEATURES:

- Maintained in Partnership with the Grand Traverse Area Veterans Coalition
- Gold Star Mother Statue
- Pavilion
- Walking Path
- Seating Areas
- Access to Kids Creek
- Picnic tables
- Water Filling Station
- Adjacent to Grand Traverse Commons



## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Marked and signed barrier free parking

*MDNR LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND GRANT (1972)*



# 35. WELLINGTON PLAZA

0.09 ac

Mini Park

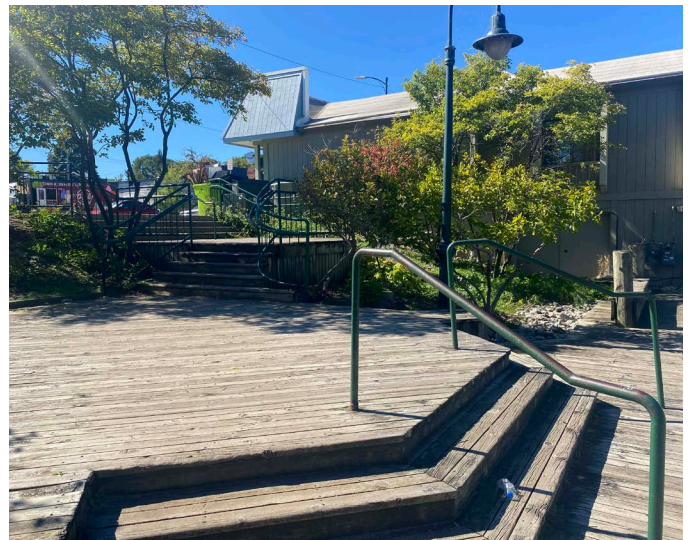
## FEATURES:

- Fishing
- Seating Areas
- TART Trail Access
- Transient Boat Docks
- Access to Boardman River
- Connected to Mini Park

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Update boardwalk decking and seating areas
- Access to the river is only possible through Mini Park - providing wayfinding signage may be helpful



# 36. WEST END BEACH

9.89 ac

Community Park

## FEATURES:

- Beach / Swimming area
- Sand Volleyball Courts
- TART Trail Access
- Picnic Area / Grills
- Restrooms
- Parking
- Drinking Fountain
- Fishing

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- Although the TART provides access at the south end of the park border, there are no accessible pathways from the TART to the beach, water, volleyball courts, or seating areas

## ACCESSIBILITY SCORE: 2



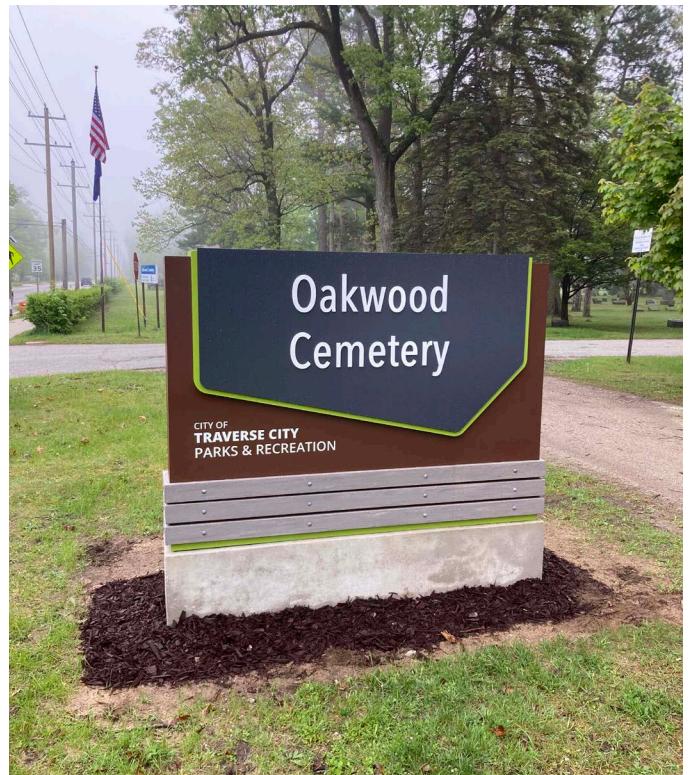
# 37. OAKWOOD CEMETERY

**65 ac Cemetery**

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Oakwood Cemetery, owned, operated, and maintained by the city, is a significant historic and cultural landscape within the community. Established in 1861 and designed in the tradition of a “garden-style cemetery,” the site encompasses approximately 65 acres of park-like setting. The property historically includes four distinct cemetery areas: the Catholic Cemetery, the City Cemetery, the Jewish Cemetery, and the Northern Michigan Asylum Cemetery, the latter of which is largely unmarked.

Beyond its primary function, Oakwood Cemetery serves as an important passive open space that reflects the community’s heritage. It is the final resting place of many individuals who played a role in shaping the development and character of Traverse City, contributing to its historical and cultural significance within the park and recreation system.



	Size (ac)	Accessibility Rating	Park Category	Basketball	Tennis	Pickleball	Play Equipment	Restroom	Fishing	Beach / Swimming	Picnic Shelter	Picnic Tables / Grills	Sand Volleyball	Off-Street Parking	Water Access	Benches / Seating
American Legion Park	0.49	2	N						X		1	X			X	X
Arbutus Court Park	0.12	2	M	1								X				X
Ashton Park	6.36	2	N	1			3					X				X
Boon St Park	0.34	1	N	1			1					X				X
Brown Bridge Quiet Area	1,301.57	2	NR					1	X		1	X		X	X	X
Bryant Park	3.29	3	C				2	1	X	X		X		X	X	X
Clancy Park	3.03	4	N	1			1				1					X
Clinch Park	10.17	3	C				1	1	X	X		X		X	X	X
Darrow Park	1.16	3	N				1	1*				X				X
Duncan L. Clinch Marina	1.42	4	SU					1	X			X		X	X	X
Dutmiers Natural Area	1.61	0	N													
East Bay Park	3.12	3	C				1	1	X	X		X		X	X	X
F&M Park	3.22	2	C	1			2	1*			1	X		X		X
Fulton Park	9.31	1	NR													X
Grand Traverse Commons	118.36	2	NR									X				X
Hannah Park	4.12	2	C						X			X			X	X
Hickory Hills	119.9	2	R					1				X		X		X
Highland Park	1.35	0	N				1					X				
Hull Park	6.21	4	C					1	X		1	X		X	X	
Huron Hills Park	0.93	1	N									X				
Indian Woods Park	0.62	3	N				1					X				
J. Smith Walkway	0.09	4	M									X		X		X
Jupiter Gardens	0.32	3	M									X				X
Kayak Launch	0.7	3	SU						X		1	X			X	X
Lay Park	0.69	3	N									X				X
Meijer's Silverbrook Acres	58.12	0	NR						X						X	
Mini Park	0.69	3	M						X					X	X	
Open Space Park	9.79	3	SU						X			X			X	X
Senior Center Beach	3.9	2	SU					1	X	X		X		X	X	X
Slabtown Corner	2.42	3	C		2	6	1	1				X		X		
Sunrise Peace Park	0.09	0	M						X						X	X
Sunset Park	2.24	2	C				1		X	X		X		X	X	
Union St Dam	1	3	SU						X						X	X
Veterans Memorial Park	1.01	3	SU								1	X				X
Wellington Plaza	0.09	2	M						X						X	X
West End Beach	9.89	2	C					1	X	X		X	8	X	X	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1687.74</b>			<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>			<b>7</b>		<b>8</b>			

M = Mini Park, N = Neighborhood Park, C = Community Park, R = Regional Park, SU = Special Use Park, NR = Natural Resource Park

\* Port-a-johns

Paved Paths	Nature Paths	Nature Observation	Boardwalk / Dock	Boat Kayak Launch	Dog Park	Open Space	Disc Golf	Ice Skating	Concessions	Drinking Fountain	Memorial / Art	Hunting	Skiing, Snowshoeing	Splashpad	
X										X	X				American Legion Park
X															Arbutus Court Park
	X	X													Ashton Park
															Boon St Park
	X	X	X	1								X	X		Brown Bridge Quiet Area
X										X					Bryant Park
X						X				X					Clancy Park
X				1					1	X				1	Clinch Park
X										X					Darrow Park
X			X												Duncan L. Clinch Marina
	X	X													Dutmers Natural Area
				1						X					East Bay Park
								1		X					F&M Park
X	X	X													Fulton Park
	X	X													Grand Traverse Commons
	X	X									X				Hannah Park
X	X	X					2						X		Hickory Hills
	X	X				X									Highland Park
X			X	1		X				X					Hull Park
															Huron Hills Park
	X														Indian Woods Park
X										X					J. Smith Walkway
X										X					Jupiter Gardens
X				1											Kayak Launch
X										X	X				Lay Park
	X	X													Meijer's Silverbrook Acres
X											X				Mini Park
X						X				X					Open Space Park
X										X					Senior Center Beach
					1					X					Slabtown Corner
															Sunrise Peace Park
X						X									Sunset Park
X			X	1											Union St Dam
	X									X	X				Veterans Memorial Park
X			X												Wellington Plaza
X										X					West End Beach
				6	1		2	1	1					1	<b>TOTAL</b>

## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Traverse City region is widely recognized for its exceptional access to outdoor recreation within a diverse and scenic landscape. Within a short drive of the city, residents and visitors can access a wide range of recreational destinations, including a national lakeshore, multiple state parks, regional ski areas, extensive state forest lands, a state game area, public swimming beaches, inland lakes, and an expanding network of biking and hiking trails.

Several regional ski areas are located nearby, including Mt. Holiday and Hickory Hills, with additional major ski resorts located within approximately one to one-and-a-half hours of the city, such as Crystal Mountain, Nub’s Nob, Shanty Creek, Boyne Mountain, Boyne Highlands, The Homestead, and Caberfae Peaks. Beyond these destinations, the region’s historic sites, scenic peninsulas, bays, orchards, and vineyards contribute to the area’s unique character and draw visitors from across Michigan and the country. Collectively,



these regional natural and recreational resources provide a wide range of year-round outdoor opportunities that enhance the quality of life for residents while supporting the region’s tourism economy.

## REGIONAL FACILITIES

Numerous state and federal recreation areas are located within the greater Traverse City region and provide significant recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors. Activities such as camping, hiking, scenic touring, and nature observation are common uses within these areas.

In addition to national and state facilities, adjacent counties and townships also offer recreational opportunities that serve city residents and visitors. Grand Traverse County and communities such as Acme Township, Blair Township, East Bay Township, Garfield Township, Green Lake Township, Long Lake Township, Whitewater Township, and Elmwood Township all provide local parks and recreation amenities within the broader region.



When considered together, the extensive network of city, county, township, state, and national recreation resources provides Traverse City residents with exceptional access to a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities and enhances the overall quality and diversity of the regional park and recreation system.

### **Sleeping Bear Dunes**

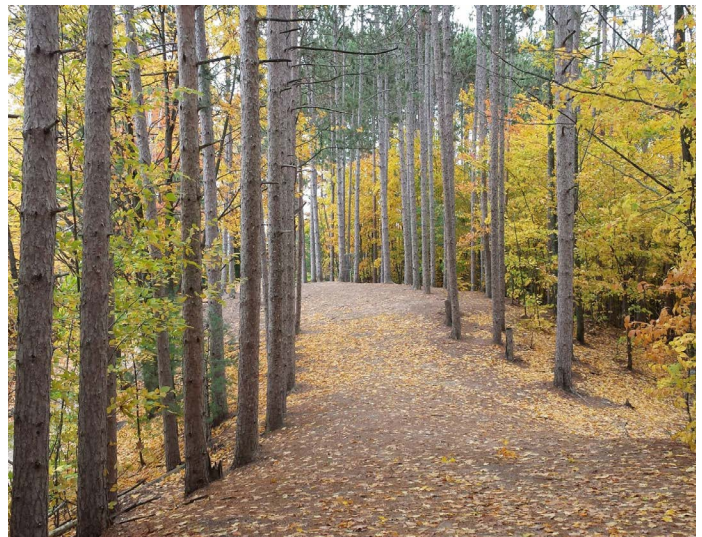
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is a nationally significant resource located near Traverse City, renowned for its expansive sand dunes, scenic Lake Michigan shoreline, forests, and inland lakes. Managed by the National Park Service, Sleeping Bear offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, including hiking, swimming, camping, wildlife viewing, and scenic driving.

### **Keith Charters Traverse City State Park**

Traverse City State Park is a state-managed recreation area located along the shoreline of East Grand Traverse Bay. The park provides a range of recreational opportunities, including camping, swimming, picnicking, and beach access, making it a popular destination for both residents and visitors. Operated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the park serves as an important regional asset that complements the City's park system by offering waterfront access, overnight accommodations, and day-use amenities.

### **LeeLanau State Park**

Leelanau State Park is a state-managed park located at the northern tip of the



Leelanau Peninsula, offering a unique blend of natural beauty and recreational opportunities. The park features rustic camping, hiking trails, shoreline access along Lake Michigan, and the historic Grand Traverse Lighthouse. Managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the park provides opportunities for outdoor recreation in a more remote and natural setting.

### **Old Mission State Park**

Old Mission State Park is a state-managed park located at the northern tip of the Old Mission Peninsula, where East Grand Traverse Bay meets West Grand Traverse Bay. The park features shoreline access, picnic areas, and scenic views of both bays, making it a popular destination for sightseeing, photography, and passive recreation. The park is also home to the historic Mission Point Lighthouse, which serves as a cultural and historical attraction within the site. Operated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the park provides a unique recreational experience focused on natural beauty, heritage, and day-use activities, complementing the



broader regional parks and recreation system.

### **Arbutus Lake State Forest**

Arbutus Lake State Forest provides a large, undeveloped natural landscape that supports a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, and seasonal activities such as snowmobiling. The area also offers access to nearby inland lakes and trail networks, contributing to the broader regional system of non-motorized and nature-based recreation. Its proximity to Traverse City allows residents and visitors to easily access a more remote, natural setting, complementing the City's park system by providing expanded opportunities for passive recreation, environmental education, and connection to northern Michigan's natural resources.

### **Power Island**

Power Island is a county park located in the West Arm of Grand Traverse Bay and provides approximately 202 acres of wooded island parkland. The island is



accessible only by boat and features hiking trails, picnic areas, and primitive camping opportunities.

### **Twin Lakes Park**

Twin Lakes Park is a 175-acre park located along North Twin Lake. The park includes Gilbert Lodge, a meeting and dining facility capable of accommodating up to 200 people, as well as a dormitory building that can house up to 142 overnight guests. The property includes hiking trails and a public beach, and the facilities are frequently used for retreats, weddings, meetings, and group gatherings.

### **Boardman River Nature Reserve**

The Reserve encompasses approximately 505 acres along the Boardman River south of Boardman Lake. The reserve contains



more than seven miles of trails used for hiking, nature study, fishing, paddling, and wildlife observation. The Boardman River Nature Center, which opened in 2008 and is operated by the Grand Traverse Conservation District, provides environmental education programming and serves as a gateway to the reserve.

### **Grand Traverse County Civic Center**

The Civic Center is a 45-acre multi-use recreation complex located within the city limits. Amenities include an indoor ice arena, indoor swimming pool, skate park, multiple baseball and softball fields, basketball courts, a one-mile paved walking and biking trail, an amphitheater, and reservable picnic shelters.

### **Medalie Park**

Medalie Park is a 15-acre park located at the south end of Boardman Lake. The park includes picnic areas, a reservable picnic shelter with restrooms, paved walking and biking trails, a canoe launch, and fishing platforms. The East Boardman Lake Trail connects the park to Hull Park at the north end of the lake.

### **Beitner Park**

Beitner Park provides canoe and kayak access to the Boardman River and is located just south of the Boardman River Nature Reserve.

### **Bartlett Park**

Bartlett Park serves as a trailhead for the Vasa Pathway trail system. The 40-acre property includes parking, restrooms, and a warming shelter, and provides access to

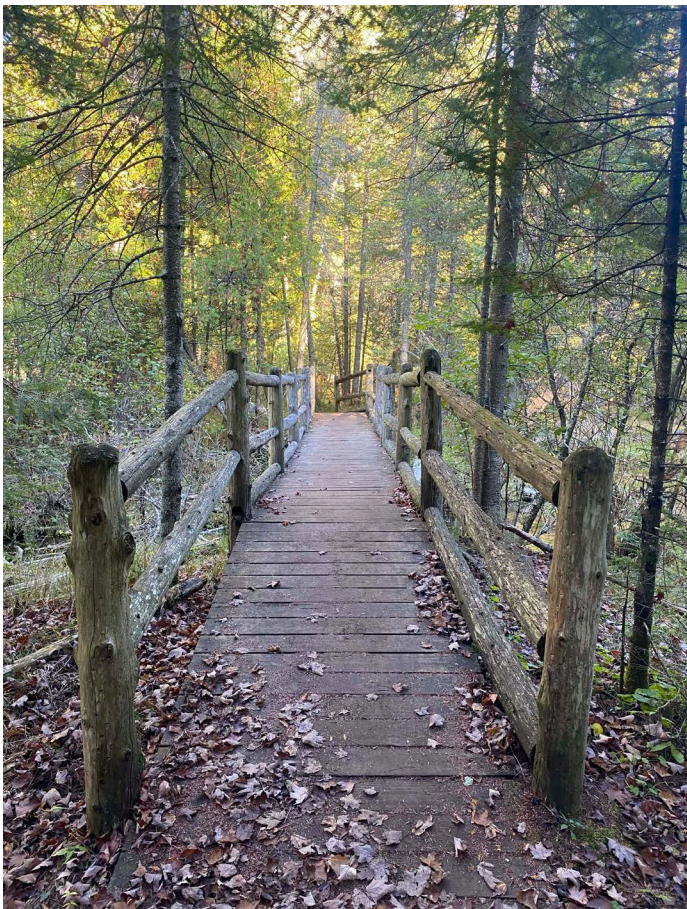
more than 34 kilometers of non-motorized trails used for cross-country skiing, hiking, and mountain biking.

### **Keystone Soccer Complex**

The soccer complex is a regional soccer facility developed in partnership with Traverse Bay Area Youth Soccer. The complex includes 16 soccer fields developed on approximately 40 acres of a 77-acre site located south of Traverse City.

### **The Bunker Hill Property**

Bunker Hill includes a segment of the TART Trail between Bunker Hill Road and Five Mile Road, contributing to the region's expanding non-motorized transportation and recreation network.



## **OTHER COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

In addition to municipal and county parks, a variety of other properties within Traverse City and the surrounding area provide recreational opportunities that complement the City's park system. Educational institutions, private facilities, and other community-serving properties contribute additional spaces for both organized and informal recreation.

School facilities in particular play an important role in supporting community recreation. Many school campuses include playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and indoor gymnasiums that are used for school programming as well as community activities outside of school hours. Within the City limits there are several public, parochial, and charter schools, along with Northwestern Michigan College, all of which provide facilities that support recreational use and youth athletics.

Private facilities also contribute to the community's recreational landscape. For example, the Traverse City Country Club provides a large open green space along the southern edge of the city. While primarily serving members, these types of privately managed open spaces contribute to the overall character of the community and expand the amount of preserved green space within the area.

Collectively, these educational, private, and institutional properties help supplement the public park system by providing additional locations for sports, recreation,

# OTHER PARK + RECREATIONAL FACILITIES MAP

WILLOW HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

TRAVERSE CITY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY CIVIC CENTER

EASTERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SENIOR CENTER

NORTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

DR. JAMES DECKER MUNSON ARBORETUM

DENNOS MUSEUM

CENTRAL GRADE SCHOOL

OAKWOOD CEMETERY

TCAPS MONTESSORI

TRAVERSE HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY

TRAVERSE CITY COUNTRY CLUB

TRAVERSE CITY STATE PARK

TC WEST MIDDLE SCHOOL

GREAT WOLF LODGE

TC CITY HIGH SCHOOL

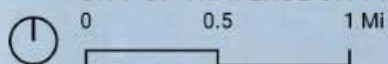
REFFITT NATURE PRESERVE

BOARDMAN RIVER NATURE CENTER

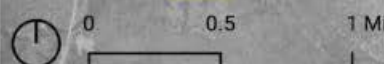
KEYSTONE SOCCER COMPLEX

## MAP LEGEND

- TRAVERSE CITY PARKS + RECREATION PROPERTIES
- TRAVERSE CITY - CITY LIMITS
- OTHER PARK + RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN THE CITY OF TRAVERSE CITY AREA



**NOTE: MAP INSET OF BROWN BRIDGE QUIET AREA**



and outdoor activity throughout the Traverse City area.

### **Traverse City Area Public Schools:**

- Central Grade School
- Courtade Elementary
- Eastern Elementary
- Glenn Loomis Montessori
- Silver Lake Elementary
- Traverse Heights Elementary
- Willow Hill Elementary
- TC Central High School
- TC West High School –
- Traverse City High School
- International School at Bertha Vos
- East Middle School
- West Middle School

### **Other local schools:**

- Trinity Lutheran School
- Immaculate Conception Elementary
- St. Francis High School
- St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton Middle School
- The Children’s House Montessori
- Traverse City Christian School
- Grand Traverse Academy
- The Greenspire School
- New Campus School TBAISD
- Oak Park School TBAISD

### **Other Facilities**

#### **Senior Center**

The Senior Center is located on city property and is operated through an intergovernmental agreement with Grand Traverse County. The facility provides daily programming and services for the community’s older adults.

#### **City Opera House**

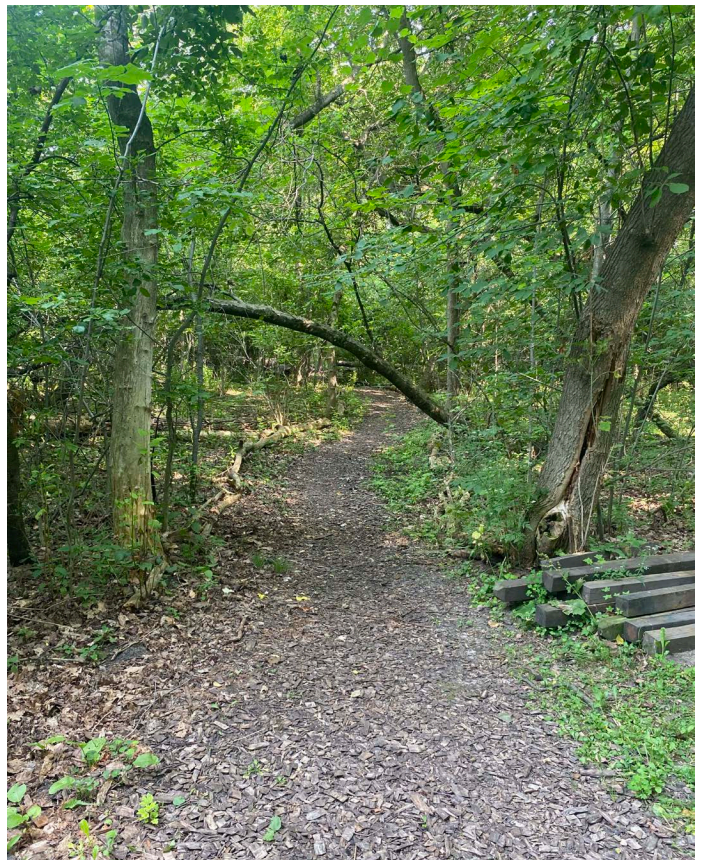
The City Opera House is a historically significant cultural asset and serves as a prominent destination for arts, culture, and community events.

#### **Discovery Pier**

Discovery Pier is a scenic waterfront pier located along West Grand Traverse Bay in Traverse City. The pier offers fishing, walking, and observation opportunities, providing expansive views of the bay and surrounding shoreline.

#### **Dennos Museum Center**

Dennos Museum Center is a regional art museum located on the campus of Northwestern Michigan College. The museum serves as a hub for arts education, community programs, exhibitions, and cultural events.



## Mt Holiday Ski Resort

Mt. Holiday Ski Resort is a regional ski and recreation area located just outside Traverse City. The resort offers downhill skiing, snowboarding, and terrain for winter sports enthusiasts of all skill levels, along with snow tubing and lessons.

## Great Wolf Lodge

Great Wolf Lodge is a privately operated, family-oriented resort that serves as a major recreational destination within the Traverse City area. The facility features a large indoor water park with slides, pools, and interactive play areas, along with lodging, dining, and additional entertainment amenities.

## Grand Traverse Resort

Grand Traverse Resort and Spa is a privately operated, full-service resort located just east of Traverse City that serves as a major recreational and tourism destination in the region. The resort features golf courses, indoor and outdoor pools, spa services, fitness facilities, dining, and conference space.

## Traverse City Country Club

Traverse City Country Club is a privately owned recreational facility located within the city that provides golf and related amenities for members and guests.

## Community Wide Organizations

### Traverse City Little League

Traverse City Little League offers recreational baseball divisions of play for boys and girls, league ages 4-16. Although

the Little League is a separate entity from the Traverse City Parks Department, they provide recreational services to the youths of the community.

### Sara Hardy Downtown Farmer’s Market

The Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market is operated by the DDA and is managed by SEEDS on a contract basis. The market provides opportunities for community gathering and support for local farmers.

### Traverse City Tourism

Traverse City Tourism promotes the greater Traverse City area as a leisure and business destination.



## Making the Connection: Non-Motorized Trails

Non-motorized transportation facilities are a key component of a connected parks and recreation system. A well-integrated trail network encourages physical activity, supports healthy lifestyles, reduces traffic congestion, lowers air pollution and fuel consumption, and enhances overall quality of life. Trails, greenways, and park pathways provide safe, carbon-free transportation options while linking residents to popular destinations, parks, and each other.

Active transportation, including walking, bicycling, and other non-motorized travel, has long been a priority for the City of Traverse City. The city has developed a Mobility Action Plan that identifies strategies to enhance active transportation throughout the community and integrates non-motorized travel considerations into the planning and design of public streets and infrastructure.

Within Traverse City's city limits, there are roughly 14.6 miles of existing dedicated non motorized trails that provide off street

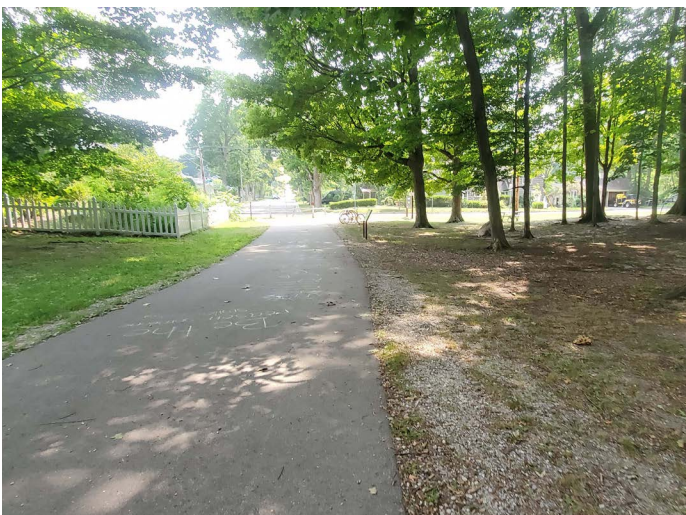


walking, biking, and shared use pathways for recreation and transportation. Key components of that non motorized trail mileage include specific routes such as the Traverse Area Recreation Trail (TART), which is approximately 10.5 miles long, and other local paths like the Boardman Lake Loop Trail at about 4 miles that provide both recreational and transportation access for users.

In addition to dedicated non-motorized trails, there are approximately 15.4 miles of on-street bicycle lanes and 1 mile of dedicated cycle tracks within the city. This equates to a total of 31 miles of existing dedicated bicycle facilities. These facilities form an important part of the community's active transportation network, providing connectivity for cyclists to key destinations, parks, and other trail systems throughout the city.

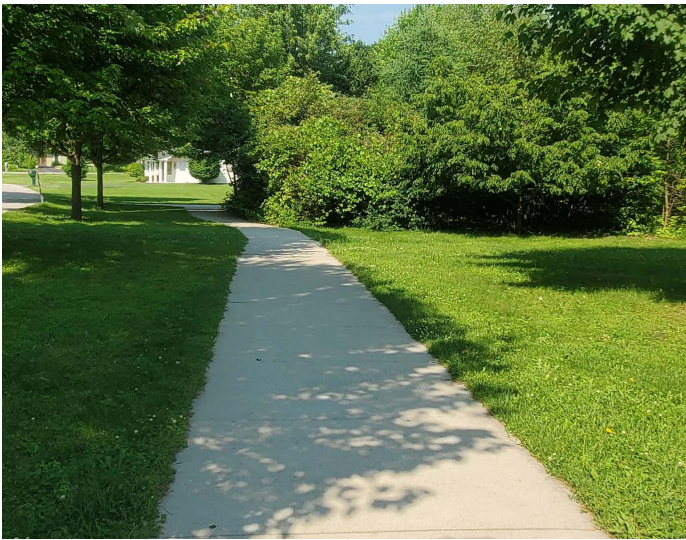
### Traverse Area Recreation Trail (TART)

The TART system is managed by TART Trails, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1998.



## TART

Traverse Area Recreation Trail (TART) is an 10.5-mile paved urban transportation and recreation corridor connecting key neighborhoods, parks, schools, and commercial areas throughout Traverse City. The eastern end point is at M-72/Bates Rd in Acme Township, and the western endpoint is at Carter Rd in Traverse City, where it links with the Leelanau Trail. TART serves as a critical community amenity by enhancing connectivity, supporting healthy lifestyles, providing safe routes for commuting and recreation, and linking residents to the city's natural and cultural resources.



### TART in Town

The TART in Town includes several point-to-point bike routes in downtown Traverse City.

- Cross-Town Route is an east-west bike route that currently goes from TC Central High to the Commons and Munson Medical Center.
- Rose Street Route is a north-south connector on the east side.
- Elmwood Street Route is a north-south

connector on the west side.

- TART in Town are on-road routes.

### Boardman Lake Loop Trail

The 4-mile Boardman Lake Loop Trail encircles Boardman Lake just south of downtown Traverse City, providing a mix of recreational and transportation opportunities. The Loop Trail connects residents and visitors to a variety of destinations, including parks, the library, residential neighborhoods, and local businesses.



### Traverse Ridge Trail

The Traverse Ridge Trail is a collaboration between TART Trails, SEEDS, and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. Initially constructed as a pilot project to construct .5 miles of sustainable single-track trail behind the Oleson Plaza, this trail is part of a larger vision to join Hickory Meadows with the Grand Traverse Commons Natural Area.

### **Acme Connector Trail**

The Acme Connector Trail is a 2-mile non-motorized pathway that links the Traverse Area Recreation Trail (TART) to the Acme area. The trail extends from the current TART Trail terminus at Bunker Hill Road to the intersection of M-72 and US-31 in Acme, with an additional segment providing access to nearby commercial areas.

### **Vasa Pathway**

The Vasa Pathway is a regional trail system located on state forest land that offers a series of looped routes (3K, 5K, 10K, and 25K) accommodating a range of skill levels from beginner to advanced users. The pathway supports year-round recreational use, including cross-country skiing, trail running, hiking, mountain biking, and nature observation.

### **Vasa Skillz Loop**

The Vasa Skillz Building Loop is designed to provide a dedicated space for beginner and intermediate riders to develop mountain biking skills in a safe and progressive environment. The facility includes two one-mile single-track loops featuring a variety of skill-building elements such as jumps,



table tops, berms, and rock gardens. The loops are located within the trailhead area of the Vasa Pathway on a 40-acre parcel owned by Grand Traverse County.

### **Winter Sports Single Track**

The 15K Winter Sports Singletrack is a seasonal trail system located on state forest land and owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The system provides approximately 15 kilometers of groomed trail designed for winter recreation activities, including fat tire biking, snowshoeing, and classic cross-country skiing.

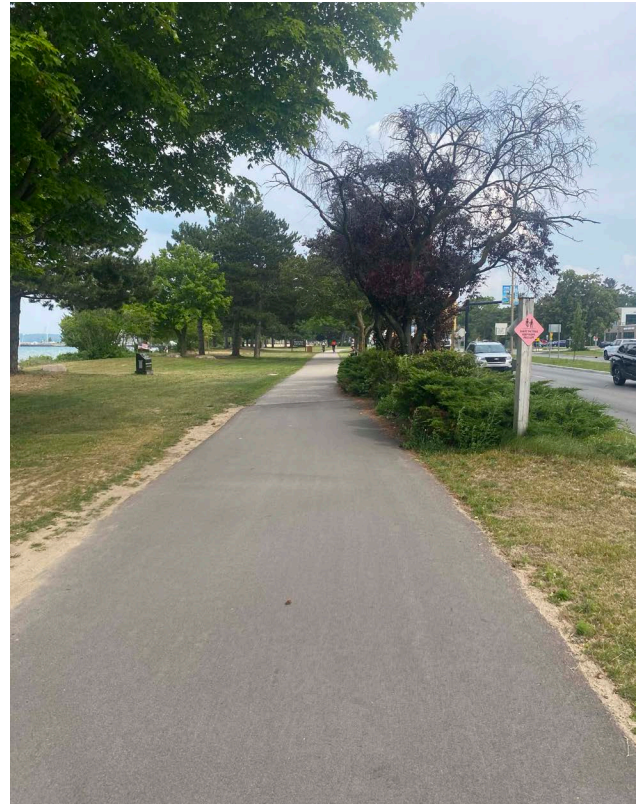
### **Mall Trail**

The Mall Trail is an approximately 2-mile non-motorized pathway that parallels US-31 from 14th Street to South Airport Road near the Grand Traverse Mall. The trail provides an important connection between downtown Traverse City and surrounding commercial areas, offering residents safe and convenient access to businesses, restaurants, and services.



### **Leelanau Trail**

The Leelanau Trail is a 17-mile paved, off-road trail that provides a key non-motorized connection between Traverse City and Suttons Bay. Developed along a former railroad corridor, the trail offers a scenic route through forests, farmland, vineyards, and along lakes and ponds, making it a popular destination for both recreation and active transportation.



### **Buffalo Ridge Trail**

The Buffalo Ridge Trail is an approximately 1.5-mile non-motorized pathway that currently connects The Village at Grand Traverse Commons to Traverse City West Middle School and the YMCA of Northern Michigan. The trail also provides access to key community destinations, including the TBA-ISD main office and conference center, Historic Barns Park, and the Botanic Garden at Historic Barns Park.



05

# PLANNING PROCESS

## GROUNDTRUTHING

During the early phase of the planning process, background data was collected through site investigations and a review of available reports to establish a current snapshot of Traverse City’s parks and recreation system. This effort evaluated existing facilities, program offerings, and service availability relative to community needs.

A combination of methods was used to assess current and future recreation needs, including:

- **Location and distribution of park space throughout Traverse City**
- **Quantity of parks acreage and amenities**
- **Analysis of demographic trends**

These methods provided a data-driven foundation for identifying gaps, priorities, and opportunities within the park system.

## PARK EQUITY + ACCESS

Park access equity refers to the fair and inclusive distribution of parks, green spaces, and recreational facilities to ensure that all residents and visitors—regardless of race, income, age, or location—have equitable opportunities to access and benefit from these resources. Achieving park equity within the Traverse City requires addressing potential disparities in park availability, quality, and proximity across neighborhoods. Key components of an equitable park system include:



## **GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION**

Ensuring parks and recreational facilities are evenly distributed across neighborhoods, including urban and outlying areas, with particular attention to historically under-served or marginalized communities.

## **PROXIMITY AND ACCESSIBILITY**

Promoting walkability, bikeability, and access via public transportation to reduce barriers and ensure residents can reach parks within a reasonable distance of their homes.

## **QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE**

Maintaining high-quality parks and amenities across all neighborhoods, regardless of socioeconomic status. This includes safe and well-maintained playgrounds, trails, sports fields, picnic areas, restrooms, and landscaped spaces.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSIVITY**

Engaging residents in park planning, design, and programming to ensure parks reflect the needs, preferences, and cultural identities of the communities they serve, and that spaces are welcoming to all users.



## **EQUITABLE INVESTMENT AND FUNDING**

Prioritizing equitable allocation of resources for park development, enhancement, and maintenance, particularly in areas that have experienced historic underinvestment. Advancing park access equity requires collaboration among local governments, community organizations, and residents to promote fairness, inclusivity, and community well-being in park planning and management.

## **LEVEL OF SERVICE**

Level of Service (LOS) standards provide guidance for evaluating how well a park system serves its population and helps inform investment decisions related to land acquisition, facilities, and amenities. These standards evolve over time as demographics, programming trends, and community needs change.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) maintains the Park Metrics database and publishes an annual Agency Performance Review, which together have replaced traditional, static park standards. These resources provide nationally recognized benchmarks and trend data.





The project team used data from the NRPA Park Metrics database and the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review to:

- Understand national trends in parks and recreation services
- Benchmark Traverse City against comparable communities
- Inform planning discussions related to park land, amenities, and facilities

Traverse City was compared to peer communities with populations under 20,000 (based on the City’s population) and communities with populations between 100,000 – 250,000 (based on both the population of the Traverse City Micropolitan Area and the increase in population due to summer tourists). These comparisons helped evaluate the adequacy of park acreage and amenities on a per-capita basis. While national benchmarks provide valuable context, they are intended as guidelines and must be interpreted based on local conditions, preferences, and resources. The ultimate goal of recreation planning is to respond to the specific needs and priorities of the Traverse City community.

### SERVICE AREA ANALYSIS

NRPA guidelines classify parks, open spaces, and greenways based on their size and functional role within the overall park system. Each park type includes an associated service area that reflects minimum standards for geographic balance and accessibility. Classifying parks in the system ensures the entire community is served by a wide range of park and recreational facilities. Figure xx delineates the service area for each park in Traverse City.

Typical service area standards include:

- **Mini Parks:** ¼ mile or less
- **Neighborhood Parks:** ¼ to ½ mile
- **Community Parks:** ½ to 3 miles



Mapping and analysis of park service areas showed that overall coverage is strong in urban areas near the waterfront. However, gaps in service exist in portions of the inland areas of the city. Key findings include:

- Many parks are clustered in areas of higher population density and along the waterfront, which is typical of a waterfront community.

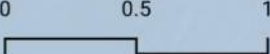




**MAP LEGEND**

-  TRAVERSE CITY PARKS + RECREATION PROPERTIES
-  TRAVERSE CITY - CITY LIMITS


0      0.5      1 Mi



**PARK SERVICE AREA LEGEND**

-  COMMUNITY PARK  
(1/2 - 3 MILE RADIUS)
-  NEIGHBORHOOD PARK  
(1/4 - 1/2 MILE RADIUS)
-  MINI PARK  
(<1/4 MILE RADIUS)

**NOTE: MAP INSET OF BROWN BRIDGE QUIET AREA**



0      0.5      1 Mi

- Coverage gaps exist in the following locations:
  1. Northwest residential areas – Fulton Park provides passive recreation opportunities, however there is no neighborhood parks in this area.
  2. West-central part of the city between Grand Traverse Woods and Boardman Lake.
  3. East-central part of the city between Boardman Lake and the airport.
  4. Far east area of the city north of the airport.

**PARK AND OPEN SPACE ACREAGE**

A key indicator of level of service is the amount of accessible park and open space acreage available per resident. For this analysis, “accessible” acreage excludes golf courses, cemeteries, undeveloped land, and school properties.

The NRPA data base demonstrated a median park acreage per 1,000 residents as follows:

- All agencies – 10.2 acres per 1,000 residents
- Agencies less than 20,000 residents – 10.9 acres per 1,000 residents
- Agencies between 100,000-250,000 residents – 10.3 acres per 1,000 residents

The City of Traverse City maintains an extensive park system that provides a substantial amount of open space and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Including the Brown Bridge Quiet Area and Hickory Hills, the city manages approximately 1,687.7 acres of parkland. Based on a resident population of



approximately 15,593, this equates to about 108 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents—well above national parkland benchmarks. If the Brown Bridge Quiet Area and Hickory Hills properties are excluded due to their location outside the immediate city limits, Traverse City still maintains approximately 266 acres of parkland within or near the core of the community. This represents roughly 17 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, which also exceeds national standards for parkland provision. These figures indicate that Traverse City is well positioned to accommodate future population growth while maintaining a high level of park access. As a result, future planning efforts can focus on maximizing the value of existing park assets through strategies such as expanding recreational facilities within existing parkland, upgrading aging amenities, and enhancing maintenance and overall park quality.

When evaluated within the context of the broader Traverse City Micropolitan Area, which has a population of approximately 156,600 residents, the park system still performs strongly. Using the total 1,687.7 acres of city-managed parkland, the ratio equates to approximately 10.8 acres per 1,000 residents, still exceeding national benchmarks for communities of comparable size. In practice, the amount of available recreational land in the region is even greater when considering the numerous regional parks, trail systems, and nature preserves throughout the surrounding area. This broader network of recreational resources helps ensure that the region can continue to meet park and recreation demands, even during peak tourism seasons when population levels increase significantly.

The NRPA also provides recommended acreage standards by park classification. NRPA standards state that per 1,000 residents, 0.25 acres of mini parks, 1 acre of neighborhood parks, and 5 acres for community and regional parks are needed to meet the needs of the community (SEE TABLE 5.1). While Traverse City falls below recommended guidelines for certain

park classifications, these benchmarks are intended to serve as general planning references and should be considered within the context of the community's unique characteristics, recreational demand, and operational capacity. Traverse City's park system includes a significant amount of nature-based parkland—exceeding 1,400 acres—as well as a large regional park and several special-use parks that provide specialized recreational opportunities. Together, these resources contribute to a diverse park system that helps meet the recreational needs of residents and visitors alike.

### **PARK AMENITIES**

Park amenities are the built features within Traverse City's park system that support a wide range of recreational opportunities. These amenities generally fall into two categories: passive recreation and active recreation. Passive recreation typically involves low-intensity activities that emphasize relaxation, scenic enjoyment, and informal use by smaller numbers of users, such as walking, picnicking, or nature observation.



Table 5.1: Park Type Comparisons			
<b>NRPA Mini Park Acreage</b>	<b>Mini Park Acreage Provided</b>	<b>NRPA Mini Park / 1000</b>	<b>Mini Park / 1000 Provided</b>
3.90	1.40	0.25	0.09
<b>NRPA Neighborhood Park Acreage</b>	<b>Neighborhood Park Acreage Provided</b>	<b>NRPA Neighborhood Park / 1000</b>	<b>Neighborhood Park / 1000 Provided</b>
15.90	16.58	1.00	1.04
<b>NRPA Community Park Acreage</b>	<b>Community Park Acreage Provided</b>	<b>NRPA Community Park / 1000</b>	<b>Community Park / 1000 Provided</b>
78.00	46.10	5.00	2.90

Table 5.2: Park Facility Comparisons				
<b>Amenities</b>	<b>All Agencies</b>	<b>&lt;20,000k</b>	<b>100k - 250k</b>	<b>Traverse City</b>
Playgrounds	3,737	2,000	5,000	1,199
Basketball	8,500	4,479	9,742	3,898
Ball Fields	4,749	1,958	6,821	1,949 *
Fields	5,946	2,578	7,993	445 *
Tennis	6,794	3,500	8,587	3,898
Dog Park	47,247	10,188	76,509	15,593
Gardens	35,065	8,800	57,676	15,593
Pools	46,900	9,745	59,857	15,593 *
Skate Park	55,772	10,776	109,934	15,593 *
Pickleball	10,419	3,483	19,822	2,228
Volleyball	26,904	7,057	39,166	2,228
Splash Pad	49,392	13,391	61,418	15,595
Disc golf	66,923	7,402	113,800	7,796
Ice Rink	19,533	9,338	98,156	7,796
Senior Center	61,822	13,966	123,671	15,593
Nature Center	132,230	8,832	143,480	15,593
Amphitheater	57,438	13,933	109,454	15,593 *
Comm Center	34,058	10,000	58,027	0
Restrooms	5,455	2,359	6,782	2,598
Rec Center	32,091	9,875	57,200	0
Waterpark	57,438	13,933	109,454	0

\* Provided by Grand Traverse County facilities within the city

Active recreation, by contrast, requires dedicated space and facilities designed to accommodate more physically exertive activities. Examples include athletic fields, playgrounds, courts, open play areas, and specialized facilities such as pools or spaces designed for organized activities. A well-balanced park system should provide opportunities for both passive and active recreation, offering a diverse range of amenities that serve residents of varying interests, abilities, and age groups. These amenities are essential components of the park experience and contribute to creating spaces where users feel welcome, comfortable, and safe. Ensuring that the park system includes an appropriate number and variety of amenities is critical to meeting community needs.

As the demographics of Traverse City continue to evolve, it is important that park amenities are periodically evaluated to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to changing user groups. To better understand potential gaps or surpluses in park amenities, Level of Service metrics from the National

Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) benchmarking database were reviewed. The analysis indicates that Traverse City's basic park amenities, when evaluated on a per capita basis and compared with similar communities, generally align with national benchmarks. There are no significant geographic gaps in service, although ball fields and soccer fields are provided as part of county facilities. Amenities intended to serve nearby neighborhoods—such as playgrounds—are generally well distributed throughout the city, supporting walkable access for many residents.

While the NRPA benchmarking database provides a valuable framework for evaluating traditional park amenities, it does not capture all forms of recreation that are important to the Traverse City community. As a waterfront community, Traverse City offers a wide range of water-based recreational opportunities that are not reflected in the database. These include activities such as swimming at public beaches, fishing, canoeing and kayaking, and motorized boating. These water-related amenities are





an integral part of the local park and recreation system and significantly enhance the overall recreational experience. They support community gathering, attract visitors to the area, and provide unique outdoor recreation opportunities that are closely tied to the region's natural resources and waterfront character (SEE TABLE 5.2)

## PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

The combination of benchmark analysis and community input provides clear direction for the future of Traverse City's parks and recreation system. Overall, the City has been successful in providing a strong foundation of basic park amenities that are well distributed throughout the community. Moving forward, residents have expressed interest in expanding the diversity of recreational opportunities through the addition of new, innovative, and specialized amenities. Public feedback also highlighted a strong desire for expanded trail networks, improved access to natural areas, and additional community gathering spaces.

Among these priorities, the continued development and enhancement of walking and bicycling trails would provide significant benefits to the largest number of residents. Community survey responses indicated strong support for upgrading and expanding the existing trail system to improve connectivity and accessibility throughout the city. In addition, community members expressed interest in additional indoor recreation opportunities, including facilities that support fitness, sports, and year-round programming. These priorities reflect the community's interest in a balanced park system that supports both outdoor recreation and indoor activity opportunities. (Additional details regarding public engagement and community feedback are discussed in the following chapter.



06

# PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

CO-AUTHORING THE FUTURE OF PARKS

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## THE PURPOSE

Community engagement is a critical component of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan process. Public participation ensures that the plan reflects the needs, priorities, and values of residents and park users while proactively encouraging residents and stakeholders to help co-author what the future of the parks system could be. This phase is a crucial step in validating on-the-ground perspectives and helps bridge an important gap between planning and lived experiences. By gathering feedback from community members, stakeholders, and local organizations, the planning process helps identify current strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the park and recreation system. Throughout the planning process, the community was provided opportunities to share input and ideas about parks and recreation facilities, programs, and what opportunities might lie ahead future improvements.

The feedback gathered through these engagement efforts helped inform the goals, priorities, and recommendations presented in this master plan, ensuring that the park system continues to support recreation, health, environmental stewardship, and community connection.

## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Traverse City has a an active and engaged base of community members and residents who are passionate about the use of these public spaces. The city strongly encourages the community to be engaged citizens who take a hands-on role in helping to curate the future of parks in recreation in their city. As part of the initiative to garner a diverse range of community knowledge and perspectives on the city's parks and recreation system, public input was facilitated over the course of summer and fall 2025 through two primary participatory strategies:



1. An online survey made available to the public to fill out and complete
2. Attending community-based events to table + engage the public in parks-planning activities
3. A survey conducted with the Traverse City Parks Commission
4. A survey conducted with the Brown Bridge Advisory Committee

## ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey was developed to garner strategic input from city residents and community members on a wide range of parks and recreation topics, including park usage, maintenance, programming, and visions for the parks systems. The survey was promoted and disseminated through a range of methods:

- The City of Traverse City’s Website
- Yard Signs with QR codes placed at each of the city’s parks
- Post cards with QR codes placed at community spaces and handed out at each of the community event sessions

## COMMUNITY EVENTS SESSIONS

This component of the planning process involved attending three community-based events and meeting the community where they were at. Each community-based session involved a range of participatory activities intended to help with co-designing the future of parks and recreation in Traverse City. Community Events attended were the following.

- **SESSION #1 | Friday Night Live**
- **SESSION #2 | Traverse City Farmer’s Market**
- **SESSION #3 | Up North Pride**

During each of the community sessions participants were asked to 1) help map their current park use 2) identify what their priorities would be on a variety of park and recreation topics, and 3) to share any visions they might have as the city plans for the next five years of parks and recreation. (NOTE: additional details on the survey and community-based session activities are provided in the appendices.)



## PUBLIC INPUT | KEY INSIGHTS

Results from the public input process helped showcase several themes and areas that should be prioritized as the city makes strides for planning, design, and other development in the future. Below is a brief summary of some of the key take-aways and insights from both the online survey and the community event sessions.

### KEY INSIGHTS | ONLINE SURVEY

The online community survey engaged 492 participants. The survey served as an avenue for the community to provide in-depth insights into things like top priorities

for activities, space and amenity needs, improvements, safety concerns, and general information about usage habits. (NOTE: For more detailed information about the survey structure and findings, refer to the appendices.) Key insights from the online survey helped provide context and guidance on the creation of the action plans outlined in future chapters.

APPROXIMATELY  
**190**  
PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMMUNITY SESSIONS

### KEY INSIGHTS | COMMUNITY SESSIONS

#### ACTIVITY #1: Community Mapping

Participants were asked to map their park usage in an effort to help visualize park-using patterns. Different colored pins represented:

- Park(s) people used the most
- Park(s) people didn't utilize and
- Park(s) people wished they took more advantage of

The key insight suggests using the community mapping to better understand user behavior (i.e. why people are or are not using certain spaces), which parks and recreational facilities need to be priorities and why, or which parks may warrant more attention. Align park usage with the community priorities identified from engagement activity #2 (community priorities). Start to brainstorm how to address 'park deserts' and work with communities in the future to brainstorm park expansion efforts.





**ACTIVITY #2 Community Priorities**

Community priorities were assessed based on four different themes:

1. Activities
2. Landscape Features
3. Amenities
4. Comfort

Top Priorities for **Activities** included:

- Nature Trails
- Biking
- Markets + Events

Top Priorities for **Landscape Features**

included:

- Native plantings
- Green Infrastructure
- Waterfront Landscape Interventions

Top Priorities for **Amenities** included:

- Water Access
- Restrooms
- Splash Pads

Top Priorities for **Comfort** included:

- Pedestrian Safety
- Heat Relief
- Public Safety

The key insight from this activity suggests utilizing these priorities to help inform decision making for future park and recreational planning.

**ACTIVITY #3: Community Visions**

In this activity, participants were asked to share any larger visions or other open-ended, big-picture ideas. Visions were documented in an effort to capture the community’s unique and creative ideas for the future of parks and recreation in Traverse City. Key insights suggest integrating community visioning as part of the long-range planning efforts, implementing and building on ideas indicated by the community, and continuing to seek this form of input incrementally throughout future planning processes.



07

# VISION + PILLARS

## GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

### TRAVERSE CITY PARKS AND RECREATION VISION

Inspire a connected park system that celebrates our community's vitality, enhances access to diverse recreational opportunities, honors our waterfront and environmental stewardship, and invites all people to explore, connect, and thrive.



# TRAVERSE CITY PARKS AND RECREATION PILLARS

The Pillars represent the foundational principles and core values that guide the planning, development, and management of parks and recreation within the community. In Traverse City, these Pillars establish the framework for a comprehensive and cohesive vision for the future of the parks and recreation system, ensuring alignment with the community's long-term goals and aspirations. They serve as guiding tenets for policy formulation, strategic planning, and decision-making processes. By embedding these principles into all aspects of planning and implementation, the community can ensure the creation and stewardship of a vibrant, equitable, and sustainable system of parks and trails that enhances the overall well-being and quality of life for residents and visitors alike.



## COMMUNITY WELL-BEING & ACCESSIBILITY

Ensure equitable access to safe, inclusive, and welcoming parks and green spaces for people of all ages, abilities, and identities. Provide spaces that foster physical well-being, mental health, and social connection.



## WATERFRONT CONSERVATION & PROTECTION OF GREEN SPACE

Protect and enhance the city's green spaces, urban forests, and waterfronts by preserving their scenic, ecological, and recreational value; providing equitable public access, and ensuring long-term stewardship of the broader watershed.



## LOCAL COLLABORATION

Strengthen ties and provide structure for local partnerships to work collaboratively to create innovative programs and events that foster a thriving regional park system



## CONNECTIONS

Provide and maintain a comprehensive, safe, and connected system of non-motorized trails, mountain biking trails, and nature trails; including infrastructure that facilitates equitable access and active use throughout traverse city.



## MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF FACILITIES

Invest in quality maintenance and management of our existing parks, green spaces, facilities, equipment, and infrastructure to ensure long-term health, accessibility, and community value.



08

# ACTION PLAN

## ESTABLISHING A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

While this Parks and Recreation Master Plan establishes a long-term vision for the future of Traverse City's park and recreation system, successful implementation will require a clearly defined and achievable course of action. The Action Plan and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) identify recommended improvements, development projects, and policy initiatives to be pursued during the five-year planning period. The Vision and Pillars outlined in the preceding section provide the framework for development of the Action Plan.



The Capital Improvement Plan builds upon the Action Plan by identifying priority capital projects and estimating anticipated costs on a park-by-park and project-by-project basis. The five-year planning period covered by this plan extends from 2026 through 2030. While not all identified needs can be addressed within this period, the Action Plan prioritizes projects that are feasible and achievable within the initial five-year period and establishes a foundation for future updates.

The Action Plan emphasizes the reduction of identified deficiencies and the strategic expansion and improvement of park and recreation facilities in a manner that responds to current needs while enhancing the diversity and quality of recreational opportunities available throughout the city. These needs were identified through the public input process, as well as through an evaluation of existing park standards and an analysis of demographic and population trends. The Action Plan outlines specific

strategies and priorities to address these needs, while the Capital Improvement Plan identifies those capital projects most likely to be implemented within the next five years. The proposed implementation schedule is intended to remain flexible to accommodate changing priorities, funding availability, and emerging opportunities, and to support the pursuit of grant funding, including Michigan DNR grant assistance. The priorities and action plan items for the 2026 Parks and Recreation Master Plan are as follows (not listed in particular order):

### **ACTION A: IMPROVEMENTS TO EXISTING FACILITIES**



To ensure the most effective use of city resources, priority will be given to projects that enhance existing facilities and optimize the potential of city-owned properties. Renovation, reuse, and modernization of current facilities are considered high-priority initiatives. This includes improvements that remove accessibility barriers, upgrades to existing equipment and amenities to maintain safe, clean, and contemporary standards, and the redevelopment or expansion of parks to eliminate redundancy and fully realize the site's potential. Potential future projects may include as opportunities arise and funding becomes available:

#### **All Parks**

- Barrier free improvements related to accessibility, parking, and signage.

- Replacement and upgrades to site furnishings including benches, picnic tables, trash receptacles, grills, and bike racks. Identify standards for site furnishings for consistency between parks and ease of replacement parts.
- Tree plantings to increase canopy within the city and provide additional shade to help mitigate urban heat island effects.

#### **Waterfronts**

- Improvements to shorelines to include stabilization and erosion control.
- Improvements to storm water management system and consider green infrastructure to help improve water quality.
- Barrier free improvements to provide access to beaches and waterfront areas.

#### **Boardman Lake**

- Improvements to loop trail access at 16th Street crossing.

#### **Brown Bridge Quiet Area**

- Development of new trailheads and additional trails.
- Viewing platforms for nature observation.

#### **Bryant Park**

- Improvements to pedestrian and bicycle paths to improve accessibility.
- Parking lot improvements.
- Erosion control and shoreline stabilization.

#### **Clinch Park**

- Rebuild retaining walls.

#### **Darrow Park**

- Update playground equipment.

### **East Bay Park**

- Additional seating and grills and a new pavilion.

### **F&M Park**

- Replace gazebo with new pavilion.
- Update playground equipment.

### **Fulton Park**

- Boardwalk repair and other trail improvements.
- Invasive species removal.

### **Grand Traverse Commons**

- Invasive species removal.
- Enhancement / expansion of trail system.

### **Hannah Park**

- Trail and access improvements.
- Pedestrian scale lighting.

### **Highland Park**

- Update playground equipment.

### **Hickory Hills**

- Development of mountain bike trails / course.
- Expansion of summer-based activities.

### **Hull Park**

- Building improvements, new pedestrian lighting along trail, and water bottle filling station.
- Add interpretive signage.

### **Slabtown Corners**

- Reconstruction of the Tennis and

Pickleball Courts.

- Update playground equipment.

### **Sunset Park**

- New picnic shelter and restrooms.

### **Volleyball Courts**

- Sand replacement, grills, and seating areas.

## **ACTION B: REDUCE OR MINIMIZE OPERATING COSTS.**



In an era of tighter budgets and increasingly competitive grant opportunities, the city will prioritize projects that help reduce long-term operating costs. This includes initiatives that enhance operational efficiency, lower maintenance demands, or replace outdated or costly equipment and features. Projects that incorporate alternative energy sources, utilize recycled or sustainable materials, or have the potential to generate revenue will also be given high priority.

## **ACTION C: CONSERVE, PRESERVE, AND ENHANCE NATURAL FEATURES AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS.**



Community outreach revealed strong support for expanding the use and protection of the area's natural features while implementing environmentally

sustainable practices. Priority actions include managing invasive species, offering nature-based programming, developing soft-surface nature trails, using native plantings, installing interpretive signage, and incorporating recycled materials and alternative energy sources. Further strategies include sustainable design and maintenance practices such as establishing a Dark Skies Ordinance, implementing waste management, and recycling programs, coordinating park conservation designations, and providing public education on invasive species and native plantings.

**ACTION D: EXPANSION OF NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS**



The expansion and improvement of accessible non-motorized facilities was strongly supported by the results of the public engagement process. Non-motorized facilities typically include sidewalks, off-road pathways, recreational trails, nature trails, hiking trails, and bicycle lanes. Priority projects include expansion of the Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation (TART) Trail system, development of paths within parks, and projects that enhance greenway corridors, provide accessible connections to parks and lakes, eliminate barriers, and enhance the overall system.

- Brown Bridge Quiet Area: Trail and trailhead development.
- Boardman Lake Loop Trail Access.

- Bryant Park Access: Improved pedestrian and bicycle access.
- Continue to partner with the Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation (TART) Trails and regional agencies to plan, develop, and enhance a connected non-motorized trail system that links parks, schools, neighborhoods, downtown, the waterfront, and commercial areas within Traverse City to surrounding communities.
- Prioritize the development and improvement of accessible pathways within existing parks to strengthen connections to the regional trail network, improve internal circulation, support universal accessibility, and promote active transportation and healthy lifestyles.
- Seek opportunities for trailhead development at existing park sites.
- Identify gaps in existing sidewalk networks and work to complete them.
- Provide safe pedestrian crossing facilities where existing trails cross roadways.
- Make the inclusion of new bicycle lanes and signage a priority for future roadway reconstruction projects.

**ACTION E: PLANNING FOR FUTURE PARKS AND RECREATIONAL NEEDS**



As the community grows and evolves, Traverse City remains committed to enhancing recreational opportunities for all residents and visitors. To ensure parks and recreation offerings continue

to meet the needs of the community, ongoing investment and exploration of new facilities, services, and program opportunities are essential. Planning for future parks and recreation facilities for future generations to enjoy is a priority. This may be reflected in projects that spark economic development, seek opportunities for land acquisition, or pursue additional funding mechanisms. The following are examples of potential projects the city may consider in the future as opportunities arise to meet this focus:

### **Land Acquisition**

Traverse City will actively seek opportunities to acquire land for recreation and preservation as it becomes available. Priority areas for acquisition include parcels adjacent to existing parks, trails, and waterfronts. Future potential acquisitions aim to expand current parks and trails, enhance neighborhood connections to recreational and natural areas, and increase overall parkland acreage. Additional acquisitions may include easements for trail development, environmentally sensitive areas, or green spaces that support community recreation and sports activities.

### **Winter Recreation / Winter Sports Complex**

The public feedback indicated that winter recreation is a high priority for programs to add to the city park system. Such activities include cross-country skiing trails, downhill skiing, sledding, ice skating trail loop, Ice rink for hockey, and snowmobiling.

### **Community Gardens**

Community Gardens would be in different parts of the city in connection with a local park. The Garden would have a volunteer committee, hold programs on gardening, food sustainability, and other garden and food related topics.

### **Mountain Bike Trails**

In addition to the outdoor experiences found in the Traverse City parks system, a mountain bike trail system could be developed that would appeal to bikers of all skill levels from gentle grades through a peaceful forest setting to trails for the more adrenaline-charged. This may also lead to potential programs on bicycle safety and building cycling skills.

### **Bocce Courts**

Bocce is an emerging activity, and space would be allocated for the installation of courts with development of clinics, leagues, and tournaments.

## **ACTION F: DEVELOP DIVERSE, BALANCED, AND INNOVATIVE PARK FACILITIES.**



Given the area's mature park system and the influx of tourists each summer, developing diverse facilities and incorporating innovative features is a priority for Traverse City. Creating a balanced parks system that offers modern amenities and activities for residents and visitors of all ages, across all seasons, is essential. The following are examples of

projects the city may consider in the future in response to resident needs:

### **Community Recreation Center**

As a complement to the County-owned Senior Center, a Community Recreation Center could be developed to accommodate year-round, indoor sports, programming, and social activities. This may include the construction of a new facility, or the conversion of an existing building.

### **Edible Trail**

Creating edible forest landscapes of fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, and more along existing trails to encourage stops along the route to pause and enjoy nature, while enjoying some of what nature provides. An Edible Trail project could provide learning opportunities for nurturing the ecosystem while increasing access to local, sustainable food. In addition, providing space for community gardens can provide benefits to the community including stress relief, promotion of healthy lifestyle and wellness, education, environmental stewardship, and landscape beautification.

### **Water Trail**

Develop mapping for water trails throughout the community and create mapping and unified signage for water trails. Consider the development of a boathouse to function as a launching point for additional water-based activities.

### **Cultural / Native American Interpretive Center**

As part of a collaborative effort between

area organizations, and Traverse City Parks & Recreation, a cultural center exhibition area could be created to enhance history and cultural opportunities in the city. This center could be located along the existing trail system and feature exhibitions, presentations and potentially art, classroom, and gallery space.

### **Botanical Gardens**

A themed garden area could be developed as a place of beauty and serenity to reconnect with the outdoors and provide good stewardship of the land. Educational opportunities may be built into all garden exhibits and events, and foster appreciation of native plants of northwestern Michigan. Programs could focus on plant education, gardening, and the environment.

### **Sculpture Garden Park**

To enhance cultural experiences in the parks, sculptures may be used to guide visitors along walkways in a peaceful setting. Many of the sculptures could have a nature and/or local history-oriented theme and use the park setting as the backdrop.

### **Non-Motorized Watercraft Rental and Amenities**

Development of a non-motorized watercraft rental facility for paddle boards, kayaks, and canoes, and add rental stations to beach parks in the city.

### **Bike Share Rental and Amenities**

Develop bike share rental program and add rental stations to parks throughout the city. Other amenities would include bike repair stations at each park.

## Public Cultural Arts

The city has a history and focuses on arts that can be incorporated into murals, sculptures, and other media for public art interpretation. These public art works can also be developed into self-guided and guided historical tours of the city and park system.

## Other Amenities

The following were mentioned as being desirable facilities worth further exploration during the public engagement process:

- Additional Splash pad
- Swimming pool
- WiFi in parks
- Increase Park marketing and awareness
- Interpretive signs for historic, cultural, and environmental education
- Habitat Restoration
- Wildlife viewing platforms
- Nature-based activities

## **ACTION G: PROVIDE A STRUCTURE FOR LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE CITY TO CREATE REVENUE GENERATING, INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES AND SEASONS.**



In addition to providing innovative park facilities, it is equally important to provide exciting programs and activities to meet the growing demand for fitness, wellness, and active recreation. This need was highlighted during the community

outreach process, and the city recognizes the need for diverse programming for all ages and the benefits of year-round park utilization. Currently the city does not have the infrastructure or staff in place to administer programs and therefore will consider partnership opportunities with local for-profit groups to meet this need. Partnership opportunities include allowing for-profit groups to use city owned parks for revenue generating recreational based, programs and activities. The city has identified parks that may be used for partnership opportunities, and the type of revenue generating programs and activities permitted within city parks, which are summarized below. The city will also develop a scoring matrix that will be designed to assist in the assessment of viable partnership opportunity requests from for-profit groups.



## PARK FACILITIES AND PERMITTED USES SUMMARY

Park / Facility	Permitted Uses and Activities
American Legion	Neighborhood gatherings; non-motorized watercraft launch
Arbutus Court	Neighborhood gatherings
Ashton Park	Neighborhood gatherings; partnership with Willow Hill Elementary
Boon Street	Neighborhood gatherings
Bryant Park	Weddings; family gatherings; non-motorized watercraft rental; fitness classes; watercraft demonstrations; Coast Guard training
Clancy Park	Neighborhood gatherings
Clinch Park Beach	Watercraft and bike rentals; concessions; food truck parking; winter sauna events
Darrow Park	Neighborhood gatherings; bike rental; fitness classes
East Bay Park	Church events; watercraft demonstrations; cookouts; non-motorized watercraft rental; food truck parking; fitness
F & M Park	Fitness classes; business functions; family gatherings; movies in the park; pavilion rental
Fulton Park	Neighborhood gatherings
Hannah Park	Neighborhood gatherings; art activities; fish-related events; yoga; fitness; performing arts
Highland Park	Neighborhood gatherings
Hull Park	Sailing; rowing; watercraft and bike rentals; fitness; pavilion rental; library and TART Trail events; food truck parking
Huron Hills	Neighborhood gatherings
Indian Woods	Neighborhood gatherings
J. Smith Walkway	Plant sales; holiday events; musical performances
Jupiter Gardens	Neighborhood gatherings
Lay Park	Holiday events; street sales
Open Space	Dancing; fitness; art shows; food trucks; large events; movies; festivals
Senior Center Beach	Pickleball; swimming; watercraft rental; weddings; gatherings
Slabtown Corner	Pickleball; tennis; leagues
Sunrise Peace Park	Neighborhood gatherings
Sunset Park	Church events; weddings; food trucks; fitness classes
Veterans Memorial	Feeding events; political events; veteran-focused programming
West End Beach	Volleyball leagues and tournaments; swimming events; gatherings; food truck parking
Hickory Hills	Alpine and Nordic skiing; disc golf; mountain biking; hiking; geocaching; weddings; gatherings; filming

# CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In November 2025, voters approved a ballot initiative to spend up to \$3 million, between November 2025 and November 2030, of the Brown Bridge Trust Fund and used for city park capital improvements and/or improvements that increase accessibility to city park land and/or acquisition of property to be designated as parkland. As part of the ballot, a list of projects was developed and approved based on community input and feedback from city staff, the Parks and Recreation Committee, the Hickory Hills Advisory Committee,

and the Brown Bridge Trust Fund Ad Hoc Committee. The Capital Improvement Plan reflects the voter approved project list and shows the breakdown of anticipated projects for the next five years. Although funding for these projects will come from the Brown Bridge Trust Fund, the city will also plan to seek other funding and in-kind assistance as opportunities arise for other projects and needs from all available sources such as Federal and State funding programs, charitable foundations, local businesses, service organizations, and other governmental agencies. (Refer to the attached Capital Improvement Plan).

## City of Traverse City 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan 2026 - 2030 Capital Improvement Schedule - Potential Projects

	Project	Cost	Relates to Action
<b>PARKS</b>			
Lake Shore	Shoreline stabilization, beach access, water quality, erosion control		B, D
Various	Additions and upgrades to waste receptacles, picnic tables, and benches		B, C
Various	Additions and upgrades to playground equipment, sport amenities, interactive features, pavilions, and pedestrian lighting		B, E
Various	Addition of trees to increase canopy and shade		B, C, D
Slabtown Corners	Pickleball and Tennis Court Reconstruction		B, E
Byrant Park	Improvements to improve pedestrian and bicycle access		B
Various	Barrier Free access improvements		A, B
<b>TRAILS</b>			
Brown Bridge Quiet Area	Trail and trailhead development		A, B
Hickory Hills	Mountain bike trail design and development		A, B, E
Boardman Lake	Loop Trail Access		A, B

## POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES / PARTNERS

A variety of funding sources and resource partners may exist to assist with the implementation of proposed recreation projects. A summary of the primary sources is listed below:

### MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND

The MNRTF can provide assistance for the city'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. Development project grants may range between \$15,000 and \$300,000; there is no limit to acquisition requests. The minimum required local match is 25%.

### MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES PASSPORT GRANT

The Passport grant fund program is primarily focused on renovating and improving existing parks, however the development of new parks is considered eligible. The Minimum grant request is \$7,500 and the maximum grant request is \$150,000. The minimum required local match is 25%.

### LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

The LWCF is like the Trust Fund grant described above, in that it is meant to help fund land acquisition and park development. The minimum grant request amount is \$30,000 and the maximum

grant request amount is \$300,000. The minimum required local match is 50%. Natural feature preservation has historically been the primary award criteria; and as such, this opportunity should especially be considered 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.

### MDOT TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (TAP)

The TAP fund is a grant program that funds non-motorized paths and streetscapes that enhance the community's inter-modal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. The program uses federal funds to promote walkability, alternative transportation options, and place based economic development to improve the quality of life for communities. The minimum required local match is 20%.

### NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION FUNDING

The State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program supports State highway safety programs designed to reduce traffic crashes and resulting deaths, injuries, and property damage. Grant funds are provided to states, the Indian Nations, and Territories each year according to a statutory formula based on population and road mileage. Funds may be used for a wide variety of highway safety activities and programs including those that improve pedestrian and bicycle safety. The minimum required local match is 20%.

## **CONGESTION MITIGATION AND AIR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CMAQ)**

The CMAQ Program assists areas designated as non-attainment or maintenance under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 to achieve and maintain healthful levels of air quality by funding transportation projects and programs. Projects funded under the CMAQ program must be in areas that were designated as non-attainment areas. Funds may be used for the construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities; non-construction projects related to safe bicycle use; and the establishment and funding of state bicycle/pedestrian coordinator positions, as established by ISTEA, for promoting and facilitating the increased use of non-motorized modes of transportation. The minimum required local match is 20%.

## **CLEAN MICHIGAN INITIATIVE LOCAL RECREATION GRANTS (CMI)**

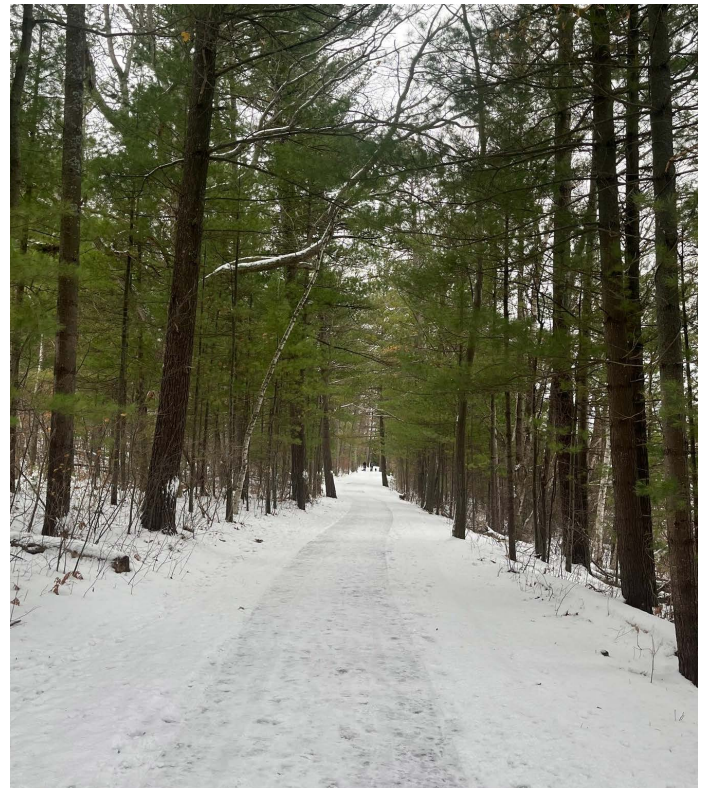
The program provides funding for the development and renovation of indoor or outdoor public recreation facilities and infrastructure. The goal of the program is to enhance or develop recreational opportunities by improving or replacing an existing public facility, by meeting the recreational needs of the residents, or by attracting tourists. Grants are awarded for non-acquisition projects in amounts between \$15,000 to \$750,000, based on the need for the project, capability of the local community to operate and maintain the improvement, and quality of the site and project design.

## **HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HSIP)**

HSIP funds can be used for pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements. States may obligate funds under HSIP to conduct any highway safety improvement project on any public road or publicly owned bicycle or pedestrian pathway or trail; or Safety projects, as provided under the FLEXIBLE funding for states with a strategic highway safety plan.

## **MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES TREE PLANTING GRANTS**

Through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), there are two tree planting grant programs that will assist in funding park landscape enhancements and reforestation projects. Applicants must provide at least 50% of the total project cost.



### **ARBOR DAY MINI-GRANTS.**

This mini-grant program is designed to provide information and technical assistance to municipal governments and volunteer groups for urban and community forest activities related to Arbor Day. Applications are due in July with maximum grant request of \$20,000.

### **URBAN COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM.**

This program provides the same services as above plus management plans, inventories, and maintenance activities. These activities do not have to be related to Arbor Day. Applications are due in July with maximum grant requests of \$20,000.

### **WETLAND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

The goals of the Environmental Protection Agency's wetland program and the Clean Water Action Plan are to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands in the U.S. by conservation and increasing wetland acreage and improving wetland health. State, tribal, and local governmental agencies, interstate, inter-tribal, and local government associations are eligible to receive grant funds. Applications are due in the fall with a required 25% minimum local match. For more information, visit their website at: [www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/grant\\_guidelines](http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/grant_guidelines).

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)**

The Grand Traverse County Community Development Department implements the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in all Grand

Traverse County communities. Funds are distributed from the federal government to the County on a formula basis. The formula considers the extent of poverty, population, housing overcrowding, age of housing, and population growth lag about other metropolitan areas. The funded activity must meet one of the CDBG national objectives (i.e., it benefits low and moderate-income people, prevention or elimination of slums or blight, or a particular urgency because existing conditions pose a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community).

### **PEOPLE FOR BIKES**

The People for Bikes Grants Program strives to put more people on bicycles more often by funding projects that leverage federal funding and build momentum for bicycling. They seek to assist local organizations, agencies, and citizens in developing bicycle facilities. Bikes Belong Coalition accepts applications for grants quarterly for up to \$10,000 each and will consider successor grants for continuing projects.



## **AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY NATIONAL TRAILS FUND**

The National Trails Fund, sponsored by the American Hiking Society, provides support to grassroots, non-profit organizations working toward establishing, protecting, and maintaining foot trails in America. Grants help give local organizations the resources they need to secure access, volunteers, tools, and materials to protect America's public trails. Support is provided for projects that increase trail lands, including the cost associated with the acquisition of trails, trail corridors, and conservation easements.

## **CITY FUNDS**

The general fund, the parks budget, bonds, and the parks capital improvement account are possibilities to help fund new and improved facilities in the City.

## **PARK MILLAGE**

A special millage can help the city generate funds for development, acquire park land, or to use as leverage for grant applications.

## **LOCAL FUNDRAISING**

The Traverse City area is full of active, community-minded residents. Businesses, corporations, private clubs, community organizations, and individuals often contribute to recreation and other improvement programs to benefit their community. Private sector contributions may be in the form of monetary contributions, the donation of land, the provision of volunteer services, or the contribution of equipment or facilities.



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# APPENDIX

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