

CITY OF DOWAGIAC PARK & OPEN SPACE PLAN 2020 – 2025



ADOPTED TBD
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PARK & OPEN SPACE COORDINATOR

FORWARD

The City of Dowagiac has accomplished many of the goals and objectives outlined in its 2015 - 2020 Park & Open Space Plan. However, as in most communities, some goals change while new opportunities present themselves. The Plan provides an evaluation of open space resources in the City and its neighborhoods and prioritizes recommendations for the acquisition, improvement, and preservation of parks and open space. The Plan is intended to be flexible so that projects may be implemented as opportunities arise. Of the following goals, some are entirely new while others carry over from the previous plan.

1. Maintain and improve the physical integrity of the park system and improve accessibility.
2. Ensure the parks are available for general and spontaneous use of the neighborhood served.
3. Expand areas for youth sports.
4. Continue to expand trail system, linking Southwestern Michigan College trails to pathways and trails within the City.
5. Improve opportunities for passive nature experiences by providing amenities like additional or expanded fishing and viewing stations.
6. Develop, maintain, and promote conservation management practices for the City's natural resources.
7. Maintain, operate, and develop outdoor recreation and education programs that provide enriching experiences in people's lives and that increase public awareness of environmental relationships.
8. Expand scope of community recreation programming.
9. Construct a community center, swimming pool and ice rink.

INVENTORY OF MAPS AND FIGURES

Figure 1 - City Boundaries, Page 6

Figure 2 - Neighborhood Boundaries, Page 7

Figure 3 - City Park Sites Service Areas, Page 13

Figure 4 - School/College Sites Service Area, Page 14

Figure 5 - Action and 5-Year Plan Projects, Page 33-35

Supplement Packet – Public Input Data

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 46 years Dowagiac has made significant progress in the provision of parks and open space for its citizens. The community currently provides 16 parks of various sizes and types for community members. In addition to City parks, facilities maintained by the Dowagiac Union School District and Southwestern Michigan College contribute substantially to the recreation resources that are available to residents.

The provision of public parks by the government is deemed appropriate and necessary so long as these facilities meet the general base of recreation need of the community and are not restricted in their access in any way. Parks should be available for informal, spontaneous use as well as more formalized recreational pursuits such as organized sports leagues or nature seminars. The preparation of a formal park and recreation plan is necessary to insure the community that their needs are met adequately and the parks are situated throughout the community to serve all neighborhoods.

The purpose of this plan is to look again at the community, to view its accomplishments in the provision of park areas and facilities, and to look to the future while remaining cognizant of short-term needs. Information contained herein will aid decisions regarding opportunities to acquire, reclaim, and preserve significant natural systems and open space resources, and to expand its recreational, cultural, historical, and educational programs. Following the criteria established by Michigan Department of Natural Resources Recreation Services Division, this plan includes the following:

1. Community Description
2. Community Administrative Structure
3. Recreation Inventory
4. Description of Planning Process
5. Description of the Public Input Process
6. Goals and Objectives
7. Action Program

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Planning Area

Figure 1, page 7 shows the City limits of Dowagiac and the boundaries of the City's planning area, while Figure 2, page 8 shows the boundaries of the neighborhoods within the community. These physical boundaries are a significant consideration when planning parks and open space service areas.

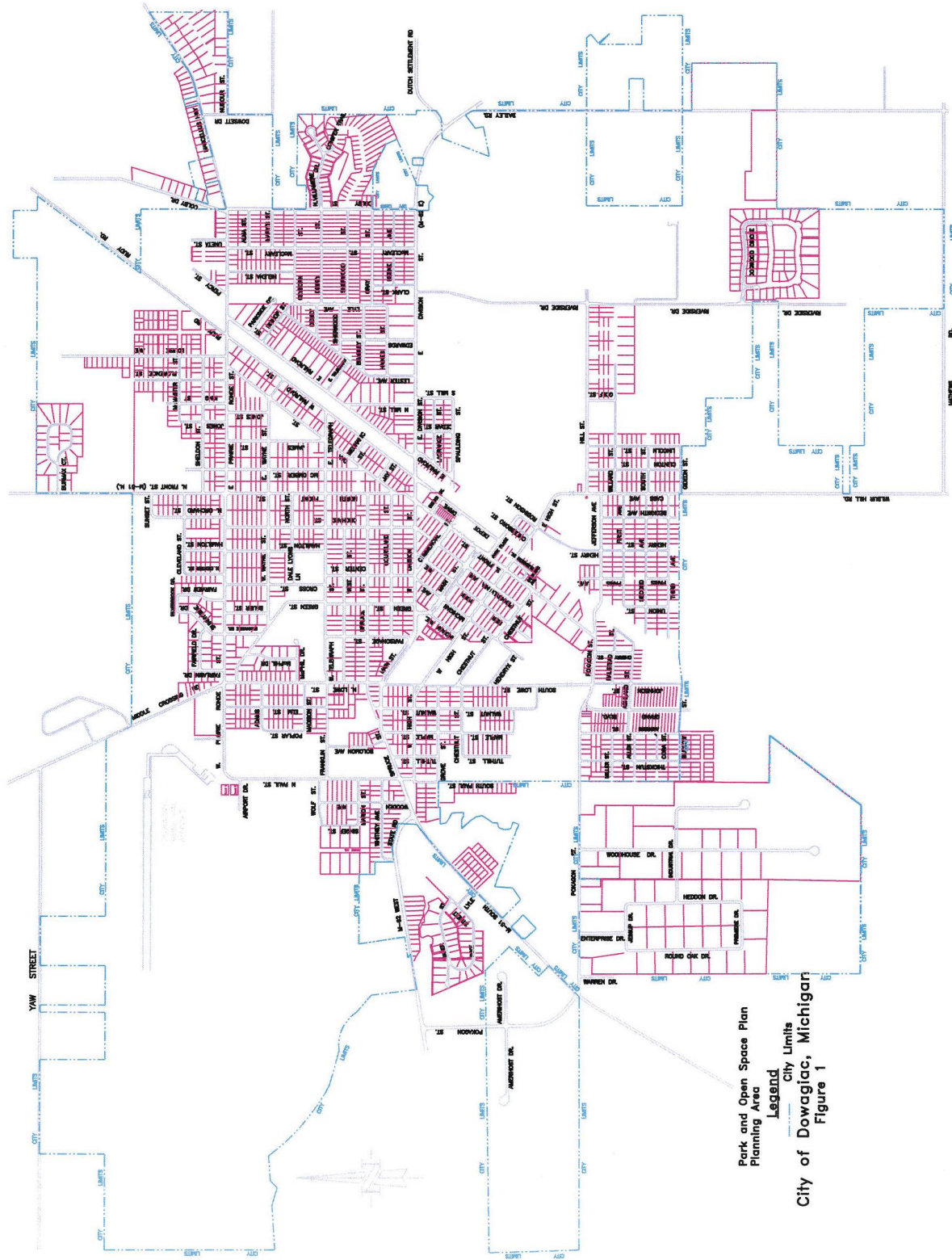
While the City of Dowagiac provides the majority of finances to support the parks system, a large portion of the users are residents of adjacent townships. This factor must be considered when contemplating future park and open space acquisition or development.

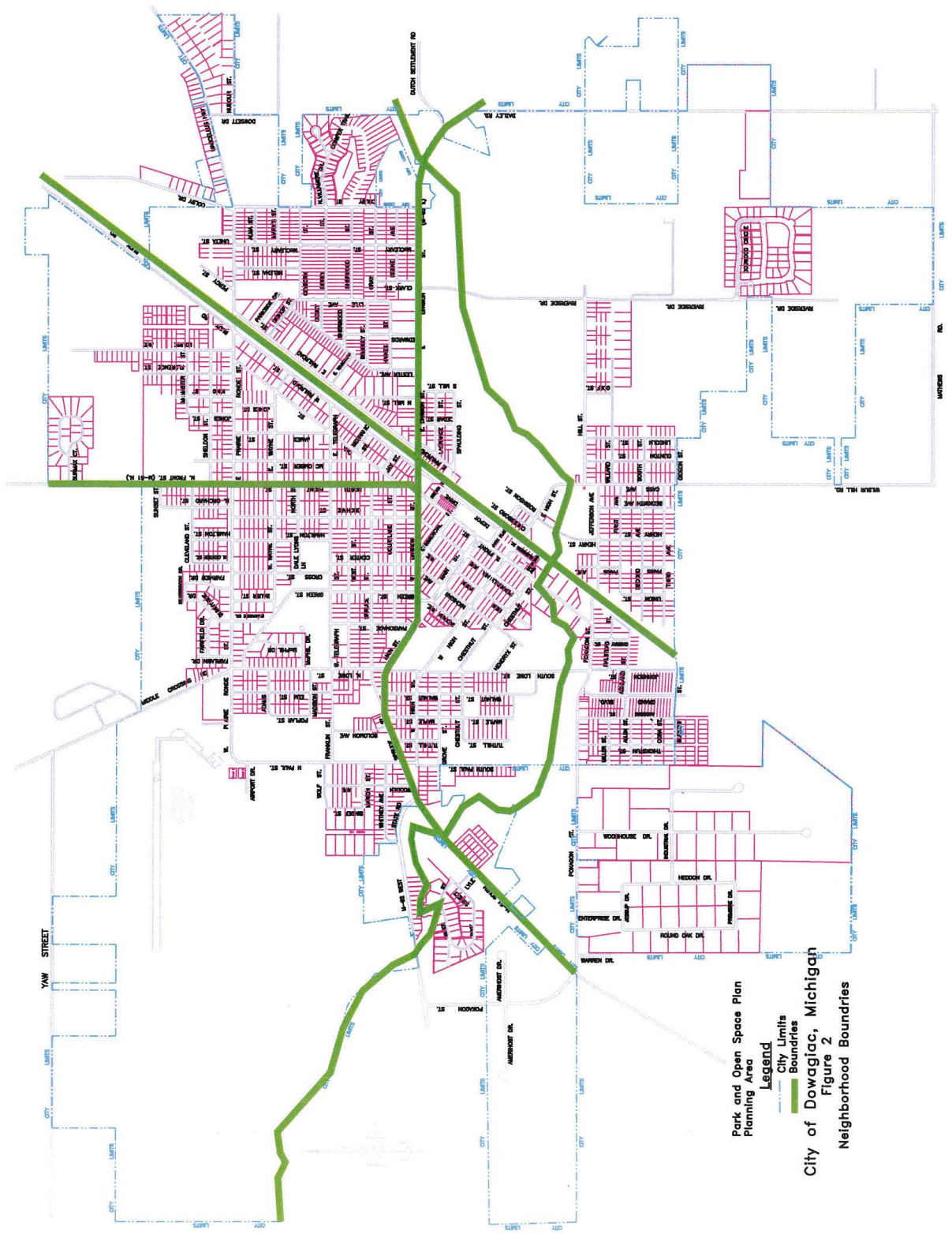
The focus of this plan will continue, for the most part, to be on Dowagiac and the needs of its citizens. However, the needs of the Dowagiac service area are noted and are considered in two ways. One way is in the development of a trail system linking the downtown to the Southwestern Michigan College trail system and the second is the continued effort of creating an area-wide recreation authority to more effectively meet the park and recreation needs of the area and the cost of providing them.

Population

The US Census Bureau reflects a historical decline in the population of Dowagiac. Based upon the State of Michigan, Department of Treasury, the population in 2018 was 5,879 (1), down from 6,147 in the 2000 census. Current population shows 5,826 in 2016. The population of the community has, in fact, been declining since 1960. These growth patterns will challenge the City both financially and physically in its efforts to provide adequate recreation areas, facilities, and programs as residents of adjacent townships continue to use City facilities and open space is consumed by housing on the city's boundaries. The chart on page 6, taken from the recently completed Cass County Recreation Plan, makes the fact clear. The percent change for the townships adjacent to Dowagiac (Wayne, Silver Creek, Pokagon, and LaGrange) is significant and greatly impacts Dowagiac as the City is the site of most active recreation facilities used by those residents (2). In addition, planning for recreation areas and facilities will be challenged as the city's population continues to age, thus changing the overall mix of recreation preferences.

1. *Office of City Comptroller/Reimbursement Records for Revenue Sharing*
2. *Participant Records Maintained by City of Dowagiac, Park and Recreation Department*





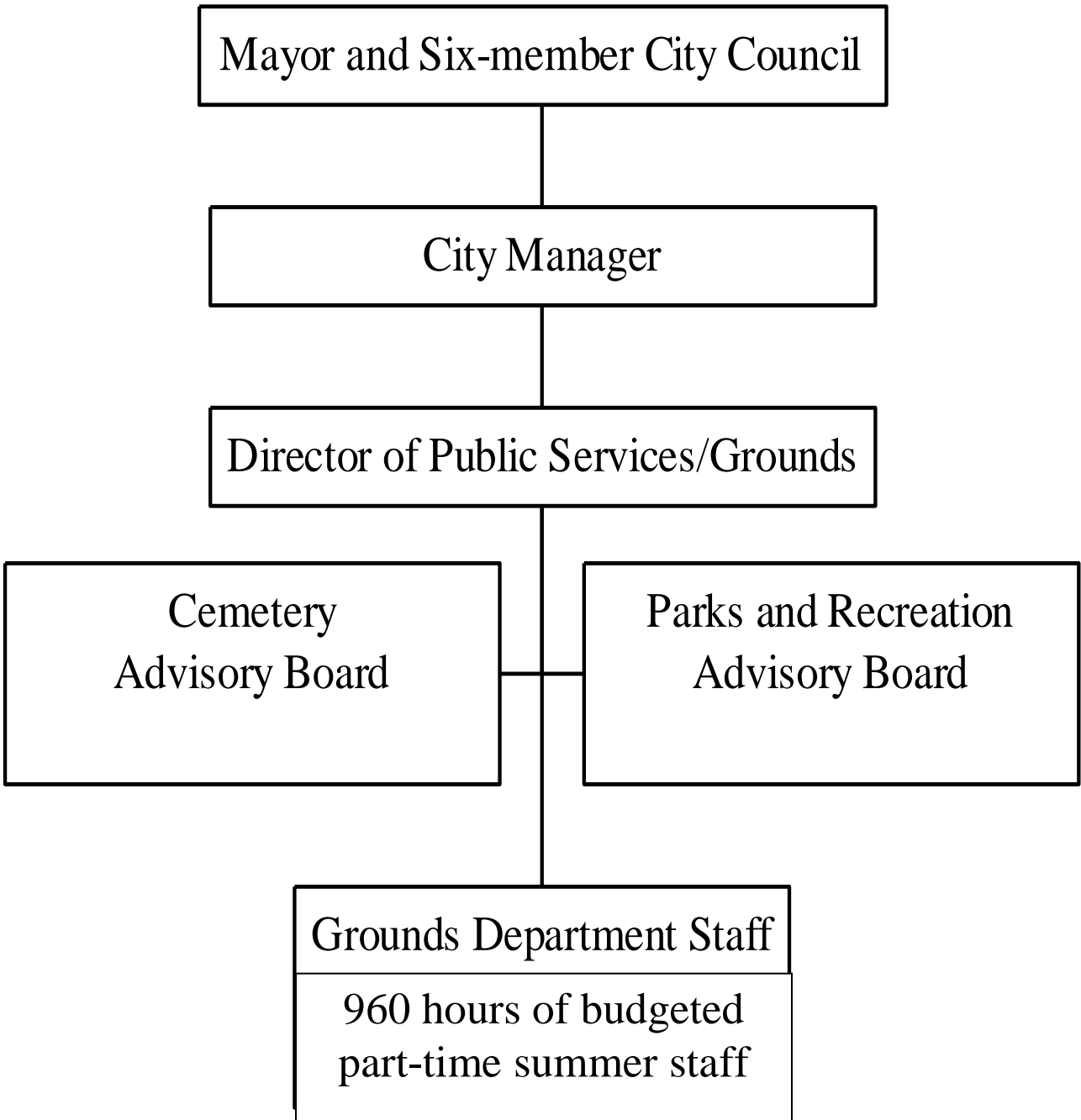
Population Changes in Cass County 1940 - 2010 ¹									
	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change 1940-2010
Cass Co.	21,910	28,185	36,932	43,312	49,499	49,477	51,104	52,293	138.7%
Calvin twp	899	996	1,172	1,347	1,643	1,813	2,041	2,037	126.6%
Dowagiac city	5,007	6,542	7,208	6,583	6,307	6,409	6,147	5,879	17.4%
Howard twp	1,451	2,952	4,622	5,497	6,524	6,378	6,309	6,207	327.8%
Jefferson twp	838	987	1,255	1,718	1,963	2,112	2,401	2,541	203.2%
La Grange twp	2,296	2,488	3,321	3,583	3,526	3,406	3,340	3,500	54.4%
Cassopolis village	1,488	1,527	2,027	2,108	1,933	1,822	1,740	1,774	19.2%
Marcellus twp	1,599	1,621	1,814	2,006	2,463	2,569	2,712	2,539	58.8%
Marcellus village	NA	1,014	1,073	1,139	1,134	1,193	1,162	1,198	18.1%
Mason twp	594	590	853	1,519	2,132	2,450	2,514	2,945	323.2%
Milton twp	619	1,179	1,541	1,727	2,235	2,284	2,646	3,878	327.5%
Newberg twp	883	907	1,023	1,174	1,382	1,627	1,703	1,632	92.9%
Ontwa twp	1,145	2,020	3,772	5,224	5,787	5,592	5,865	6,549	472%
Edwardsburg village	NA	616	902	1,107	1,135	1,142	1,147	1,259	104.4%
Penn twp	1,115	1,164	1,522	1,775	2,044	1,877	1,902	1,774	59.1%
Vandalia village	NA	360	357	427	447	357	429	301	-16.4%
Pokagon twp	1,254	1,518	1,935	2,189	2,394	2,188	2,199	2,029	61.8%
Porter twp	1,148	1,402	2,001	2,765	3,857	3,857	3,794	3,798	230.8%
Silver Creek twp	1,177	1,773	2,108	2,886	3,361	3,101	3,491	3,218	173.4%
Volinia twp	766	774	815	986	1,182	1,032	1,174	1,112	45.2%
Wayne twp	1,119	1,272	1,970	2,333	2,699	2,780	2,861	2,654	137.2%

Perhaps the most striking difference among varying growth rates of the county's local municipalities is the growth of the townships as compared to Dowagiac and the county's four villages. The combined growth rates of the county's 15 townships (131.1%) from 1950 – 2010 was 4.5 times greater than that of the villages (28.9%) and during the same period, Dowagiac's population decreased by 10.1%(2).

¹ U.S. Census Bureau

² Cass County Master Plan July 1, 2014

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Roles of Commission and Advisory Board

Administratively, the City is managed through a six-member Council, a Mayor, and a City Manager. The City Manager is responsible to the Mayor and Council for all City operations. Input for various City functions is provided through Boards or Commissions. The Park and Recreation Board is one of these boards (Act 156 of 1917). Local input is provided both formally and informally to the Parks Board which makes recommendations to the Mayor and Council. The Mayor and Council exercise final authority over budget, projects, plans, and the grants-in-aid requests outlined in those plans. The members of the Board are appointed by the Mayor and approved by Council.

Department, Staff Description and Organizational Chart

Overall park functions are contained within the Department of Public Services, which is responsible for administration, planning, and budgeting. Physical maintenance and preparation for activities are carried out through the Grounds Division of this department.

Annual and Projected Budgets for Operations, Maintenance, Capital Improvements and Recreation

The operations and maintenance budget for the Grounds and Parks function for fiscal year 2019-20 is currently set at \$277,700.00 with a 2% increase per year planned for future operations. The capital improvement budget is currently set at \$0 but may be amended to cover any required local match for grants attained.

Programming

The department does not handle recreational programming itself; rather various public or quasi-public agencies utilize City facilities for their programs (note previous paragraph). For example, the Dowagiac Union School District utilizes City parks for on-site summer programs. Similarly, various youth and adult sports programs run by volunteers utilize City facilities.

Current Funding Sources

All funding for the operations function of the Parks Department is derived from the city's general fund with capital improvement funds coming from various City funds as well as grants from private trusts, interest groups, and State/Federal grants-in-aid.

Role of Volunteers

The role of volunteers involved in our parks begins with our Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. This board is comprised of unpaid, City Council appointed, members that meet as needed to provide recommendations to Council for recreational or park related activities. Volunteers also carry out some of the day-to-day routine clean up tasks that are beyond the capacity of Parks staff and help create special touches throughout the parks system. There are also many organizations, community groups and individual volunteers that make contributions of time throughout the year. For example, every July, several community groups and many individual volunteers assist with the setup of the annual Steve's Run 5k/10k Roan and Trail Race dedicated to raising funds for cancer research and youth scholarships.

Relationship with School Districts and other Public/Private Agencies

Community facilities maintained by the Grounds Division are utilized by Southwestern Michigan College and the Dowagiac Union School District as well as various adult and youth sports organizations. The City works closely with both the Dowagiac Union Schools and Southwestern Michigan College in the cross-utilization of facilities. The Dowagiac Dogwood Fine Arts Organization and the City cooperatively developed a walking "SculpTour" to highlight the City's many public sculptures with walks ranging from .6 miles to 2 miles.

RECREATION INVENTORY

Methods Used to Conduct the Inventory

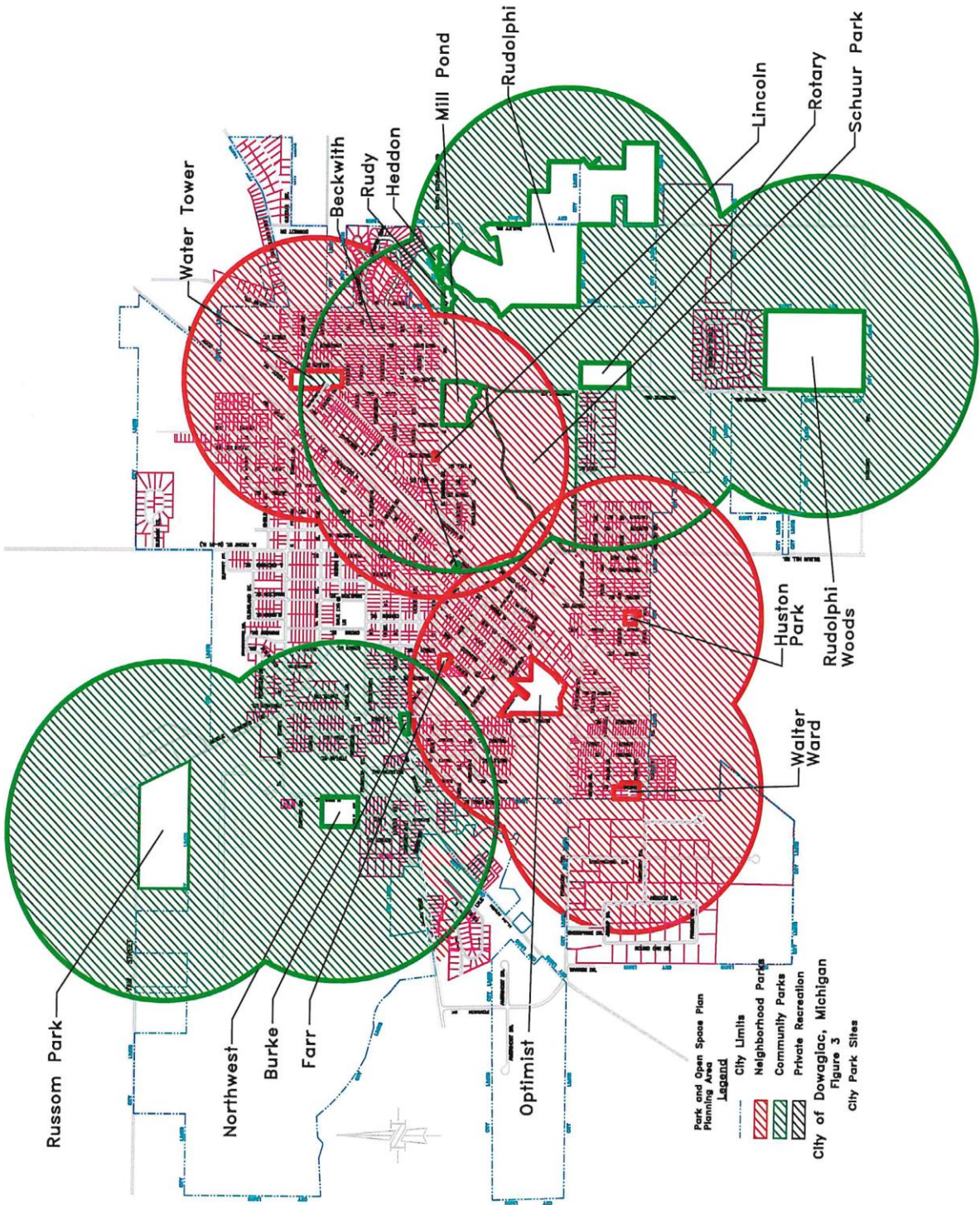
The methods used to conduct the inventory of the Dowagiac area parks and recreation opportunities was through research within the City departments and discussions with school officials. Parks are classified into three (3) categories: Neighborhood Park, Community Park, and Mini Park.

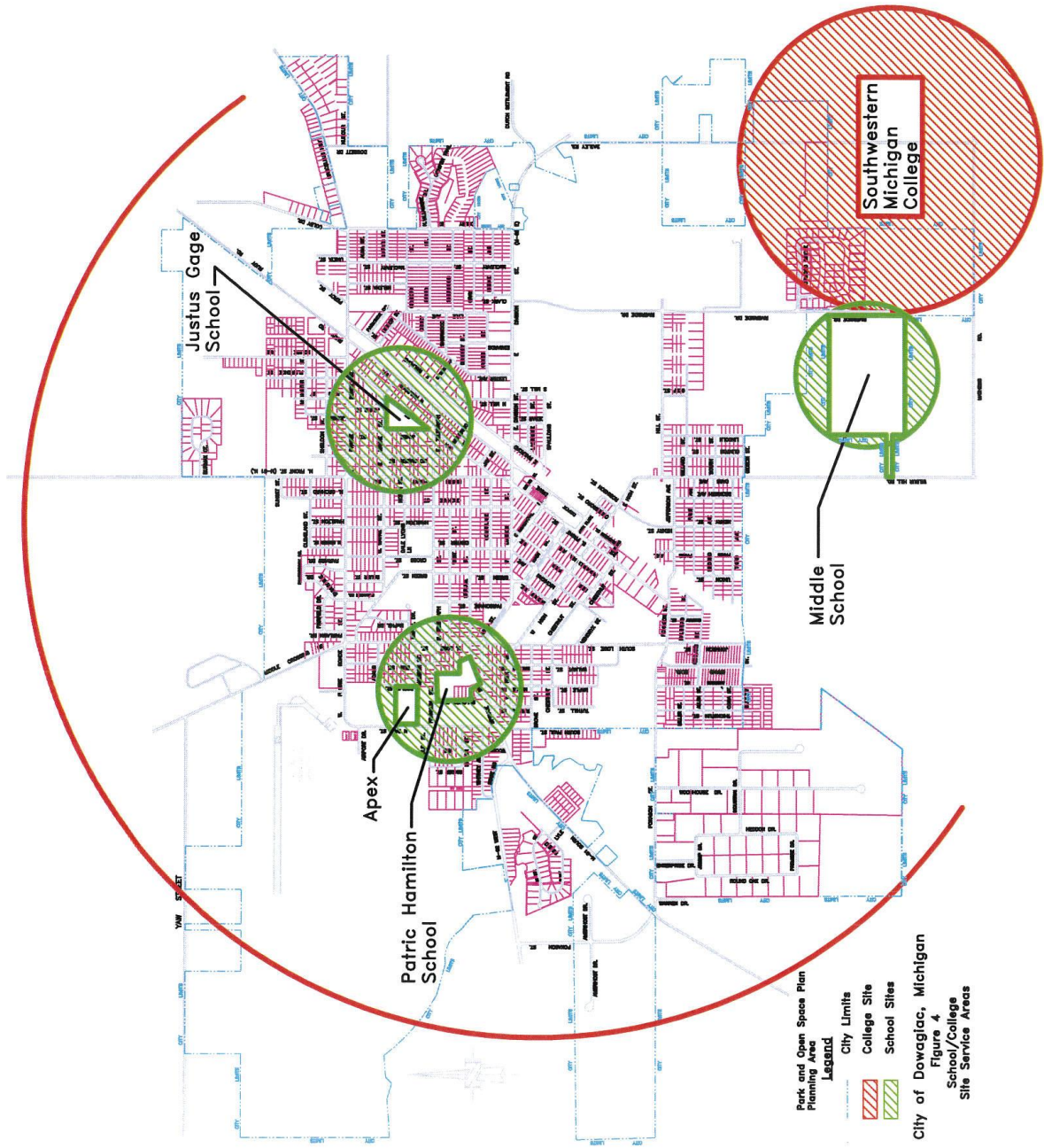
Recreation opportunities in and around the City of Dowagiac have continued to expand. While the City is a primary provider of recreation areas, the Dowagiac Union School District and Southwestern Michigan College also play important roles. School District facilities located in the northwest section of the City provide primary sites for softball and soccer. In addition, the completion of a new middle school in 2006 in the southeast section of the community provides similar facilities to this region of the City. School sites located within City neighborhoods provide important recreation sites. Facilities at Southwestern Michigan College have also become major recreation resources for the community within the past several years. It is anticipated that as residential neighborhoods expand to the south, the

role of the college as a recreation site will become more important. The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians offers a variety of recreational activities throughout the Dowagiac community as well. In addition to governmental or school sites, volunteers also organize baseball, softball, soccer, and football programs for youth ages 5-18 at private and public facilities.

The City provides 15 parks or open spaces ranging in size from 1/3 acre to 155 acres for a total of approximately 243 acres throughout the community. The school district provides recreation areas through six school sites totaling 40.5 acres. College game field areas total approximately 10 acres in addition to a 75-acre natural area. (See Figures 3 and 4, Pages 14 and 15)

Other recreation facilities available to Dowagiac residents include the Dowagiac Elks and Spruce Ridge golf courses. Arthur Dodd Memorial Park and Russ Forest Park provided by the Cass County Parks Department provide nature-related facilities less than 10 miles from the city.





Park Facilities/Accessibility Assessment

1) Russom Park - 18.0 acres (Community Park)

This park located in the far northwest section of the City supports an area wide youth sports program including baseball, softball, soccer and football, as well as biking and walking pathways and a universally accessible play area. Ample parking is available for spectators and park users.

Accessibility (3)

2) Heddon Park - 3.5 acres (Community Park)

Heddon Park provides bank-fishing opportunities for persons with disabilities and is likely the most popular park in Dowagiac's system. The park is used year round by all socio-economic groups for fishing, picnicking or just a spot to “get away“ for a while. **Accessibility (5)**

3) Water Tower Park - 5.0 acres (Neighborhood Park)

This park provides both active and passive recreation in the northeast center of the City. Active recreation facilities include a softball field, basketball courts, horseshoe courts, playground and newly renovated pavilion. Passive recreation is primarily centered around the picnic pavilion complete with grills and picnic tables. This park is situated adjacent to a low- and moderate-income housing project and directly serves the population of this housing project. **Accessibility (3)**

4) Optimist Park - 4.0 acres (Neighborhood Park)

This park is located in the central part of the City and is directly adjacent to the Dowagiac Creek. Passive recreation is the primary focus of this park due to its heavily shaded area and proximity adjacent to the creek.

Accessibility (3)

5) Mill Pond Park - 40.0 acres (Community Park)

The Mill Pond Park is located between the Dowagiac Creek and Dowagiac Elks Golf Course and encompasses nearly 35 acres of flood plain of the Dowagiac Creek. This park is totally passive in nature and provides access to the creek. The park serves as an outdoor laboratory for the school system's biology classes. This park will become even more important as the City plans to expand the trail system along Dowagiac Creek to this park. The value of a large natural area centrally located in the community is a priority.

Accessibility (2)

6) *Schurr (Cass Avenue Trailhead) Park - 1.0 acres (Community Park)*

This recently completed park provides an accessible fishing platform along the creek, rain garden plantings, built in play equipment, and benches for enjoying the natural areas. Phase 2 included acquisition of a property easement along the Dowagiac Creek that will effectively provide the ability to place a natural trail and/or pathway link along the creek from downtown to trails leading to the Southwestern Michigan College trail system and the City's trail system.

7) *Rotary Park - 10.0 acres (Community/Neighborhood Park)*

This facility is the focal point of many organized sports and active recreation within the community. Rotary Park includes a regulation baseball field, regulation lighted softball field, skatepark, restroom facilities, and shaded picnic and playground area. This park is also significant in that it is a connecting trailhead for nearly eight miles of cross-country walking and skiing trails contained in the Rudolphi Woods and Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge, which are located to the park's south and southeast. This park serves both as a neighborhood and community park. **Accessibility (3)**

8) *Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge and Rudolphi Woods - 155.0 acres (Community Park)*

These combined passive natural areas provide 155 acres of quiet recreation, nature study, and cross-country trails for the community. These areas, in combination to the contiguous 75-acre Southwestern Michigan College natural area, are particularly important in that they contain a major outdoor recreation resource. These areas, connected through Rotary Park, encompass approximately eight miles of cross-country walking, running, and ski trails along with various identification areas for native flora. In all, 235 acres are available in the east and southeastern section of the community. **Accessibility (2)**

9) *Walter Ward Park - 3.0 acres (Neighborhood Park)*

This park is located in the southwestern part of the City and has been developed through the use of State Bond Fund monies in the 1970's as well as grants from Department of Housing and Urban Development in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The City funded a major renovation in 2000-2002. Walter Ward Park is the focal point of the community in which it is situated. It is primarily active in nature by providing basketball courts, a softball field, playground equipment, and a picnic shelter. **Accessibility (4)**

10) Northwest Park - 5.5 acres (Community Park)

This park is located adjacent to the Dowagiac High School in the (as the name suggests) northwest part of the community and currently enjoys considerable “spontaneous” use. This park, combined with the adjacent school facilities, becomes a major open-space resource for the northwest segment of the community. **Accessibility (3)**

11) Huston Park – 1.0 acres (Neighborhood Park)

This park was recently acquired from the Dowagiac school system after closure of the adjacent elementary school. Huston Park is located in the southwestern section of the city and provides active and passive recreation centered around playground equipment and shaded seating areas. **Accessibility (3)**

12) Lincoln Park – .03 acres (Neighborhood Park)

This park was acquired from the Dowagiac school system after closure of the adjacent elementary school. Lincoln Park is located in the northeastern section of the city and provides passive recreation centered around playground equipment. **Accessibility (3)**

13) Farr Park - 1.1 acres (Mini Park)

Farr Park is totally passive in nature and was expanded as a result of the re-routing of highways M51 and M62 within the City. Through funds provided by the City and Downtown Development Authority, substantial improvements have made in this park. Floral displays, a veteran's flag display, as well as new sidewalks and seating have been established. A Tuck Langland bronze sculpture “Dance of Creation” provided the inspiration for the official City of Dowagiac logo. This park is a stop on the City’s walking “SculpTour”. **Accessibility (4)**

14) Rudy Park - 4.0 acres (Mini Park)

The City maintains Rudy Park on the eastern most side of Dowagiac that is situated adjacent to Mill Pond. This park, although not directly used by the public, is established for floral displays of native wildflowers and flowering trees. Passing motorists appreciate the beautiful landscape provided by the seasonal-changing display of color and blossoms. The modern sculpture “Active Hybrid” by renowned artist Richard Hunt provides a focal interest of this special mini park. This park is a stop on the City’s walking “SculpTour”. **Accessibility (3)**

15) Burke Park - 3.0 acres (Mini Park)

This passive park on M51/M62 West has been developed over the past several years with benches, sidewalks, and landscaping all which highlight a 30-foot monument dedicated to the soldiers of the Civil War. This park is a stop on the City's walking "SculpTour". **Accessibility (4)**

16) Beckwith Park - .03 acres (Mini Park)

Beckwith Park is located in the central business district. It was developed in 1997 through the Downtown Development Authority as a venue for special community events. This park is located in the Central Business District and hosts the majority of the City's cultural and downtown events. This park is a stop on the City's walking "SculpTour". **Accessibility (4)**

17) SculpTour – walking tour of park sculptures, .06 – 2 mile walk

SculpTour offers self-guided walking tours ranging from .06 miles of accessible paved sidewalks to a 2-mile walk within the City. The 13 sculptures are located in various city parks and green spaces which provide both active and passive recreational opportunities through walking the tour or park benches that provide a resting place to view the art work. **Accessibility (4)**

Park sites are shown on Figure 3, Page 13.

School/College Sites

The community's school sites are an important component in the recreation facilities inventory. As is illustrated in Figure 2, Page 4, the City can be divided into six distinct neighborhoods based upon physical barriers, be they the railroad, highways, or the Dowagiac Creek. Given this fact, the school sites, coupled with the location of City parks, provide most neighborhoods with varying types of recreation area close to home (see Figure 4, Page 15).

School/College Sites

As previously noted, facilities located at Southwestern Michigan College have become increasingly available to the community. As development occurs in the southern portion of the community, college resources will play an expanded role. College facilities include a 75-acre natural area with established trails, playfields for softball, baseball, soccer and football that provide park-like outdoor opportunities. The indoor gymnasium and fitness center function collectively as a community athletic center. Given the dual

roles the college facilities play, SMC serves as a community park as well as a community center (see Figure 4, Page 15).

Tables on page 22 summarize the existing public and private recreation facilities available to the residents of the Dowagiac community.

Private Recreation

Private recreation is limited to two 18-hole and one 9-hole golf course locally.

Recreation outside the Community

Cass County has an active and well-defined park system of nine park areas. Of these parks, two are within 10 miles of the City (Arthur Dodd Memorial Park and Fred Russ Forest) and provide excellent nature-related activities including picnicking, fishing, kayaking and canoeing on the Dowagiac Creek, hiking, and overnight camping in cabins. Seven additional parks are located throughout the county and provide access to several lakes. Noteworthy among these is Dr. T.K. Lawless Park near Vandalia, MI and approximately 15 miles from Dowagiac. This park encompasses 820 acres and provides numerous nature-related activities.

Dowagiac is situated approximately 25 miles from the metropolitan Mishawaka/South Bend area and the large number of both public and private recreation opportunities those communities offer. The City is situated 25 miles from the shore of Lake Michigan and Warren Dunes State Park. Allegan State Forest is a mere 50-mile distance from the City. In all, the citizens of Dowagiac and the surrounding area have very diverse recreation opportunities available to them within a very reasonable travel distance.

DNR RECREATION GRANT INVENTORY

Project No.: 26-00641

Project Title: Rotary Park

The four tennis courts originally constructed at this facility were removed in 2001 with the permission of the DNR as it had completed its useful life. In their place was constructed a lighted skate park which was one of the top priorities of the 2002 plan. The restroom/changing facility are slated for demolition in 2019-20 due to extensive vandalism and have been replaced with port-a-johns. The play area was completely renovated in 2005.

Project No.: 26-01023

Project Title: Rotary Park

The elements included in this grant (lighting of softball field, softball and baseball field fencing, landscaping and parking area) continue to serve the community and are in good repair.

Project No.: 26-01025

Project Title: Dowagiac Rudolphi Park

Walkways, trails, parking and roadway continue to serve the public as a major component of the community trail and nature system.

Project No.: TF 89-126

Project Title: Rudolphi Woods

This second phase of the Rudolphi open space system consisting of a 70-acre acquisition to protect natural features and trails continues to be used for nature interpretation, hiking, running and skiing.

Project No.: TF 94-100

Project Title: Northwest Park

This eight-acre acquisition has been developed with recreational softball, soccer, youth football, fencing and landscaping to serve the northwest section of the community.

Project No.: TF 98-1010

Project Title: Heddon Park

This development project improved a community fishing and picnicking site to accommodate handicapped persons and improve their access to outdoor recreation. All facilities are in good condition and the park is a major site in

the community's park system. The park improvements include paving the entrance road, boat launch, restroom, signage, and fencing.

Project No.: TF 08-021

Project Title: Youth Sports Park Acquisition

This eighteen-acre property contained a developed youth baseball and softball park built by their organizations. The property was purchased by the city to promote the continued use of these facilities as a youth sports park. Adjacent property was purchased by the abutting township for development of soccer fields.

Project No.: TF 11-016

Project Title: Silver Creek Russom Park Development

This development project improved an existing youth baseball and softball park with paved drives/parking, paved biking/walking paths, appropriate signage and landscaping. This project was an intergovernmental park project with the adjacent Silver Creek Township. This park serves the northwest section of the community.

Project No.: TF 17-0059

Project Title: Cass Avenue Park Development

This development project establishes a trailhead park close to the downtown business district. Amenities will include an ADA accessible fishing platform, mounding and built in playground equipment, pathways and paved parking. This park will provide access to fishing, jogging, walking, hiking for all levels of ability and age.

Project No.: TF 18-0117

Project Title: Elks Trail Easement Acquisition

This acquisition of an easement along the south side of Dowagiac Creek is for the purpose of building a trail to create access to an inaccessible stretch of the creek for fishing, walking, hiking and to link over 8 miles of existing trails.

City of Dowagiac
Existing Public and Private Facilities
Table 3

Location	Total Acres	Picnic Tables	Shelter	Benches/Bleachers	Restrooms	Playground	Playfield	Tennis Courts	Basketball Courts	Softball Diamonds	Baseball Diamonds	Fishing	Parking Spaces	Boat Launch	Trailer Parking	Water Access	Drinking Fountain	Walking/Hiking/CC Ski	Skateboard Park	Neighborhood Park	Community Park	Specialty Park
1 Russom Park	34.0			5/2		1	1				3		100				1	x			x	
2 James E. Heddon Park	3.5	3			1							x	20	1	10	x	1					
3 Water Tower Park	5.0	3	1		x	1	1		4	1			40				1			x		
4 Optimist Park	4.0											x				x						
5 Mill Pond Park	40.0											x				x						
6 Cass Avenue Park	1.0					1						x	10			x						
7 Rotary Park	10.0	4		1/3	x	1	x			1	1		100				2	x	1	x	x	
8 Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge & Rudolphi Woods	155.0					2				1			8					x				
9 Walter Ward Park	3.0	3	1				1		1	1			20				1					
10 Northwest Park	8.0						4			1			50									
11 Huston Park	1.0	1		2/0		1	1													x		
12 Lincoln Park	.03					1																
13 Farr Park	1.1			2/0																		
14 Rudy Park	4.0																					
15 Burke Park	3.0			2/0																		
16 Beckwith Park	.03																					
17 Union High School	19.0						3	3			1											
18 Dowagiac Middle School	10.0						1	8														
19 Patrick Hamilton Elementary	5.0					1	1		2													
20 Justus Gage Elementary	3.0					1			1	1												
21 McKinley Elementary	3.0					1	1															
22 APEX Sports Complex	4.0			0/2			1			2			100									
23 Southwestern Michigan College	85.0						1		1				300				1	x				
24 Spruce Ridge Golf Course	120.0																					
25 Elks Golf Course	62.7																					

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The current plan for Park and Open Space is based upon public input, national facility standards, as well as past plans and the remaining goals and objectives contained in them.

Public involvement and input are nearly continual in a community the size of Dowagiac. Councilmembers actively discuss the City's plans for the future and receive input. While the City has an outstanding park and recreation system, its park and open space needs continue to change in response to changing circumstances (in demographics, economic cycles, etc.). The planning process aims to ensure that the community can enjoy park and open space resources that are evenly distributed throughout the City.

A particular advantage of working in a small community such as Dowagiac for over two decades is the one-to-one relationships developed with a large number of citizens. Such relationships provide invaluable information regarding recreation preferences. In addition to direct personal input the following methods were utilized for data collection.

1. **Focus Groups** – Meetings were held with all youth sports organizations, the Russom Park Board, school officials and the Young Professionals Group.
2. **Workshops** – Formal meetings were held with the park board, and Mayor, City Council, Council Members, City Manager, and Department Heads.
3. **Preliminary Planning Public Hearing** – A formal Public Hearing was held to present goals and objectives brought forth through the actions noted above with multiple public notices of the date, time, and location of the hearing as well as an invitation to respond in writing if the hearing could not be attended.
4. **Notification of Availability of Plan for Public Review and Comment** – The plan was on file at City Hall, the Dowagiac Library and on the City's website for review and comment. In addition, a copy of the draft plan was provided to Dowagiac School District administrators and principals for comment.

5. **Final Public Hearing on Park and Open Space Plan** - Prior to final adoption by the Mayor and Council, a Public Hearing was heard for final comment.

Comparisons to Standards/Park Planning

Traditionally, municipal parks are classified as block, neighborhood, and community, based upon ease of access and acreage. This system can be reasonably applied in Dowagiac, considering the availability of park or school sites to the area's neighborhoods. Most sections of the community have access to "close to home" recreation areas (See Table 5, Page 27). While park type or access to a recreation facility is of primary importance, the acreage requirement may vary based upon the availability of land in the particular neighborhood or how that neighborhood has developed. Fortunately, Dowagiac's park system meets most general acreage requirements.

In Dowagiac, the block or mini park requirement is met by both school and park sites due to the positioning of parks or schools within the neighborhoods. In neighborhoods absent of a school site, park sites for the most part still meet the proximity standard of less than a half a mile for a mini-park or one quarter to one half mile for a neighborhood park due to the small comparative size of the neighborhood.

Generally, park areas developed by the City are somewhat larger and have a greater diversity of activity than most school sites and are classified as neighborhood parks. Most parks contain basic facilities such as play fields, play equipment, picnic area and various athletic areas such as baseball, softball, basketball and tennis.

Community parks in Dowagiac have actually been divided between active parks such as Rotary or Russom Park where most sports activities take place and passive parks such as Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge or Heddon where most passive activities take place. While being community parks in scale and service area, these parks also provide for neighborhood park needs. Based upon the standard of one to two-mile service area, the entire community is served by these parks.

A remarkable feature of Dowagiac's park system is that the Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge and Rudolphi Woods (dedicated in 1976 and 1992, respectively) contains a total of 155 acres which is very close to meeting the standard for a regional park (200+ acres). If combined with the contiguous acreage dedicated as open space by

Southwestern Michigan College, the regional park standard is met in that 235 acres of public open space is available. This area contains nearly 8 miles of natural trails complete with wildflower displays, trail signs, and parking areas.

Through the analysis of acreage needs and considering the standards developed by Roger A. Lancaster in 1990 in his publication entitled Recreation Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines, the acreage need per population was applied. As is apparent in the following table, the City of Dowagiac is in good shape when using these standards as a guideline. However, even though the acreage standards in Dowagiac may meet the criteria, facilities by type, location, and local need of special facilities, based upon activity levels, may yet remain. Therefore, judging a parks department based solely on acreage and population does not necessarily indicate the success or failure of that department in the provision of recreation facilities, rather it is a measure of the department's ability to meet standards on a general basis.

A comparison of existing facilities to the projected need for facilities by type, service area, acreage and current population is summarized in Table 4.

Recreation needs Table 4

TYPE OF AREA	SERVICE AREA	STANDARD ACRES/1000 POPULATION	EXISTING ACREAGE	ACREAGE STANDARDS	CURRENT ACREAGE DEFICIT
Mini or Block Park ¹	<1/4 mile	1/4 to 1/2 acres	10.5	3	0
Neighborhood Park ¹	1/4 to 1/2 mile	1 - 2 acres	28.5	12	0
Community Park ¹	1 - 2 mile	5 - 8 acres	90.5	48	0
Regional Park ²	1 hour drive	5.0 - 10 acres	200.0	60	0
Total "close To home"	N/A	6.25 - 10.5 acres/1000	129.5 ³	63	0

¹ College/School sites considered

² Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge and Rudolphi Woods
 Population Estimates: 2000 - 6147 (Southwestern MI Commission)
 2010 - 5879 (2010 Census)

³ Does not include Rudolphi areas.

Service Areas

In addition to standards for acres of park space per unit of population, standards for service radius must also be considered. The map (See Figure 3, Page 14) illustrates how various service area criteria can be applied to Dowagiac, particularly when considering the use of school sites as block parks. As is apparent upon review of the map, the City does meet the general service area criteria given the positioning of parks within the neighborhoods.

National Facility Standards

The use of national standards for facilities is an additional measure by which a community can judge its parks in the provision of park and recreation spaces. Facility standards like service areas and acreage standards are a measure that must be considered when applying these standards in addition to local interest. In some cases, national facility standards could "over provide" or "under provide" for a facility(ies) within a community, consequently one must be aware of their specific community's interests and desires. A comparison of national standards on facility need is contained in Table 5 on the following page.

Discussion

The analysis of recreation needs based upon acreage per population, facility per population, and service areas speak well of Dowagiac's efforts. As in most areas Dowagiac has statistically met or exceeded general standards. However, facility difficulties still exist due to the number of persons involved in various activities simultaneously that overwhelm basic community or neighborhood facilities. Additionally, there is a pressing need to acquire youth sports facilities constructed on private land as well as expand the numbers and types of youth sports facilities available.

National Facilities StandardsTable 5

	Standard per person	Existing Facilities	Current Need	Current Deficit	2010 Need	2010 Deficit
Baseball diamonds- Regulation	1/5,000	4	0	0	3	0
Baseball diamonds- Little League	1/5,000	3	0	0	3	0
Softball diamonds-Little League	1/5,000	8	0	0	3	0
Soccer fields	1/10,000	6	0	0	1.5	0
Tennis courts	1/2,000	8	0	0	7	0
Basketball courts (Outdoor)	1/5,000	5	0	0	3	0
Swimming pools (25 yd)	1/10,000	0	1	1	1	1
Rocket Youth Football	1/20,000	1	0	0	1	0
Trails	1 per region	1	0	0	1	0

Source: MDNR Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans, (Rev.09/3/2014), Appendix C. Suggested Facility Development Standards, Pages 23 - 25

Note: Table includes facilities at the Dowagiac School's APEX sports complex, Southwestern Michigan and Russom boys baseball facility due to the availability and current use of these facilities by the public.

Population Estimates: 5879 (2010 Census)
15,158 (2010 Dowagiac Union School District)

CITY OF DOWAGIAC PARK & OPEN SPACE PLAN DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Plan Development:

The current plan for Park and Open Space is based upon public input, national facility standards, as well as past plans and the remaining goals and objectives contained in them.

A particular advantage of working in a small community such as Dowagiac is the one-to-one relationships developed with a large number of citizens, as such relationships provide invaluable information regarding recreation preferences.


Public involvement and input are nearly continual. Council members actively discuss the City's plans for the future and receive input. In addition to the direct personal input and national standards, the following methods were used for data collection.

1. **Focus Groups** – Meetings were held with all youth sports organizations, the Russom Park Board and the Young Professionals Group.
 - a. **Youth Sports Meetings** – Met with representatives of youth softball, baseball and soccer to discuss issues surrounding the needs of the area's youth sports.

Dowagiac Youth Soccer Organization – Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were provided to members of this group for their input into the plan. City representatives offered to meet with DYSO at a regularly scheduled soccer meeting.

Little League – September 11, 2019 6:00 p.m.
Discussion focused on the Action Plan in the proposed Park and Open Space Plan. Pathways are needed to the Challenger Field to accommodate wheelchairs and elderly spectators with scooters.

Dowagiac Youth Football – Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were provided to members of this group for their input into the plan. City representatives offered to meet with DYFO at a regularly scheduled football meeting.

- b. **Park Board Meeting** – DATE/TIME TBD
 - c. **Russum Park Board Meeting** – October 15, 2019 7:00 p.m.
At the regularly scheduled Russum Park Board at Dowagiac City Hall the draft Dowagiac Park and Open Space Plan was presented.

 - d. **Dowagiac Young Professionals Group** – Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were provided to members of this group for their input into the plan. As demographics of the community change, their input is vital to recreation planning for the future.
 - e. **Dowagiac Union School District** – 10 copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were distributed through the districts buildings and libraries to provide administrators and students the opportunity to review and comment.
 - f. **Southwest Michigan Planning Commission** – Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were provided to the SWMPC along with a notice of the Preliminary Public Hearing on October 14, 2019 at 7:00 PM for their input prior to or during that meeting, as well as a copy of the Final Public Hearing to adopt the plan.
 - g. **Townships Adjacent to City Boundaries** – Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were presented to townships bordering the City.
 - g. **Social Media**
Copies of the draft Park and Open Space Plan were placed on the City’s website, Facebook and other social media sites for public accessibility to the plan.
2. **Preliminary Planning Public Hearing** – October 14, 2019 7:00 p.m.
 3. **Final Public Hearing on Park and Open Space Plan** – TBD
 4. **Other** – Through the course of the plan development, public input, and public hearing;
 5. **Public Comment** – In addition to having plans on file at the Dowagiac City Hall and Dowagiac District Library, 10 plans were distributed through the

Dowagiac school system while additional copies were provided to citizens upon request.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Maintain and improve the physical integrity of the Park System – improve accessibility.

Through continued budgeting for maintenance and regular evaluation of park fixtures, the City will ensure that the parks within the community meet the needs of the citizens. As repairs and upgrades are planned and implemented, improving access for persons with disabilities will be a primary focus.

2. Ensure that parks are available for general and spontaneous use of the neighborhood served.

Neighborhood residents have complained that organized sports often “take over” the neighborhood parks. As future projects are contemplated which have a community-wide service population, the City will continue to seek to locate those projects in areas which do not adversely affect neighborhood use and meet not only the facility needs of the target user groups, but provide adequate support facilities as well.

3. Expand Trail Areas (Elks Trail Development)

In 2014, the City acquired land through a county foreclosure along Dowagiac Creek. In 2017, a MDNR Trust Fund grant was awarded for the development of a trailhead park on this property including an accessible fishing platform on the Dowagiac Creek, built in play equipment, benches and parking. In 2018, MDNR Trust Fund awarded a grant to the City of acquisition of a property easement along the creek that will effectively provide a natural and/or paved trail pathway link from downtown to trails leading to the Southwestern Michigan College trail system and Rudolphi trail system. The Elks Trail development will require additional development assistance through grant funding opportunities. The Elk’s Trail would also address cleanup of the Dowagiac Creek Floodplain.

4. Public Purpose Park/Greenspace/Trailhead Park

The City has established 101 Poplar Street as a location ripe for development. This park will serve as a trailhead for the existing and planned future expansion of the Russom Park Trail and will link Southwestern Michigan College trails to the northwest portion of the City, expanding biking, hiking and running opportunities, as well as a community gathering area.

5. Development of Linear Park – West Side of East Railroad Street

Development of a bike path and establishment of natural landscaping providing greenspace and beautification in a neglected area.

6. Development of Mill Pond Park - 40.0 acres

The Mill Pond Park is located between the Dowagiac Creek and Dowagiac Elks Golf Course and encompasses nearly 35 acres of flood plain of the Dowagiac Creek. This park is totally passive in nature and provides access to the creek. The park serves as an outdoor laboratory for the school system's biology classes. Development of this park will become even more important as the City expands and the value of a large natural area centrally located in the community is realized. Fishing, trail linkages, viewing stations and picnicking areas are planned for this park development.

7. Acquire land/Expand Russom Park

Begin negotiations with private owner of property abutting Russom Park for additional parking and open space area for development. Area youth sports groups have expressed keen interest in the construction of facilities for training, indoor practice, restrooms, a picnic pavilion and wifi capabilities. Indoor practice areas during inclement weather would greatly benefit the overall health and physical activity of area youth and also provide onsite enrollment benefits through wifi capabilities.

8. Acquire land to link trails in Rudolphi Wildlife Refuge (26-01025) to Rudolphi Woods (TF 89-126).

Currently a single parcel of privately owned land stands between these two park areas on the eastern portion of the trail system. Through an informal agreement with the landowner, a trail links these park areas allowing approximately eight (8) miles of loop trail through City and College owned properties. This final acquisition would secure permanent use of this unique community trail system, providing a completely linked circular linear trail system.

9. Expand the Scope of Community Recreation Programming

The City will continue dialogue with the Dowagiac Union School District and adjacent townships with respect to the creation of an area-wide recreation authority.

10. Development of Natural Area in the Northwest

In 1984 the City acquired lands in the northwest to expand the Dowagiac Municipal Airport. Part of the acquisition involved the purchase of an abandoned gravel pit and associated agricultural land. The gravel pit and associated two ponds were cleaned up and over the years native vegetation has reclaimed the site. This undeveloped area of approximately 40 acres could be developed with limited parking to provide bank fishing, a boat launch, picnic areas and other nature related

activities. In anticipation of development the City purchased a 200-foot strip of land to improve access to the area at a future date.

11. Rudy Park Development

Develop safe access to the existing drive-by sculpture park to include parking area with a view of the natural creek area, ADA accessible overlook, landscaping and stairs to a fishing platform on the water.

12. Beckwith Park Redevelopment

Beckwith Park is located in the central business district. It was developed in 1997 through the Downtown Development Authority as a venue for special community events and as a gathering place for community members. The City will consider applications for various grant funding for replacement of the Victorian gazebo, which was removed for safety concerns in 2017, and the addition of various amenities in compliance with ADA requirements to continue to utilize this park as a central gathering point for the community.

13. Splash Park

As the demographic of the community change, community members have expressed interest in a splash park to provide activities for children of all ages. The City will look at appropriate locations for siting of this park.

14. Dowagiac Creek Floodplain Access and Cleanup

This effort will require right-of-way access, easement or purchase of property along the Dowagiac Creek from Cass Avenue to M-51 South.

15. Construct a Community Center, Swimming Pool and Ice Rink

This effort could be considered the first step in the development of a community center complex. Given the capital and maintenance costs of such facilities, the most realistic way to accomplish this goal would be through the creation of an area-wide recreation authority.

ACTION PLAN

Over the past five to ten years the City has successfully met several of the previous park and open space goals, while others have been met by the efforts of the Dowagiac Union School District:

- The City has completely renovated Walter Ward Park in the southwest section of the City including construction of four new basketball courts and a new play area. All renovations have met ADA standards.
- The City has completed the development of a skateboard/bike facility and renovated the playground at Rotary Park in the southwest section of the City.
- Through inter-governmental cooperation, the City and Silver Creek Township acquired adjacent properties for the expansion of youth sports and development of walking/biking pathways. The City property purchase contained a developed youth baseball and softball park built by their organizations on private land, and now includes the addition of the youth football program. The Township property purchase has been developed to serve youth soccer. Both properties contain landscaping, adequate parking, signage and paved walking/biking paths.
- Creation of two new neighborhood parks through closing of two elementary schools with playground property being transferred to City ownership.
- Establishment of a Trailhead Park with fishing platform, built-in playground equipment, rain garden, benches and parking.

The priorities established below will, if accomplished, significantly meet the most pressing park and open space goals brought forth through the public input process.

1) Protect Existing Parks ADA Compliance

Continue to ensure the physical integrity of and A.D.A. compliant access to existing City parks through an ongoing program of regular maintenance and rehabilitation as well as redevelopment of the play area and basketball courts at Water Tower Park as well as closer handicap parking and paved access for seniors and disabled at Russom Park.

2) Elks Trail Development

Establish a trail on the natural area along the creek that would link existing trail systems. This action would eliminate the safety issue of pedestrian and bike traffic on the roadways that currently exists. In 2019, the City acquired a property easement along the Dowagiac Creek from the Dowagiac Elks Lodge #889. The acquired property easement is ideal for a trail that will effectively provide a natural trail or wooden/paved pathway link along the creek from downtown to trails leading to the Southwestern Michigan College trail system and Rudolphi trail system. The Elk's Trail would also address cleanup of the Dowagiac Creek Floodplain. This project will be accomplished by seeking grant assistance from various entities.

3) Public Purpose Park/Greenspace/Trailhead Park

This park will serve as a trailhead for the existing and planned future expansion of the Russom Park Trail and will link Southwestern Michigan College trails to the northwest portion of the City, expanding biking, hiking and running opportunities, as well as a community gathering area.

4) Development of Mill Pond Park - 40.0 acres

The Mill Pond Park is located between the Dowagiac Creek and Dowagiac Elks Golf Course and encompasses nearly 35 acres of flood plain of the Dowagiac Creek. This park is totally passive in nature and provides access to the creek. The park serves as an outdoor laboratory for the school system's biology classes. Development of this park will become even more important as the City expands and the value of a large natural area centrally located in the community is realized. Fishing, trail linkages, viewing stations and picnicking areas are planned for this park development.

5) Development of Linear Park – West Side of East Railroad Street

Development of a bike path and establishment of natural landscaping providing greenspace and beautification in a neglected area. The park will bring a recreational amenity to an underserved neighborhood.

6) Acquire Land/Expand Russom Park

Begin negotiations with private owner of property abutting Russom Park for additional parking and open space area for development. Based upon the acreage available for sale and the required price per acre, the City will determine if a grant application is in order or if the project can be funded locally.

The City will also consider a grant fund application for the construction of facilities for training, indoor practice, restrooms, a picnic pavilion and wifi capabilities. Indoor practice areas during inclement weather would greatly benefit the overall health and physical activity of area youth and also provide onsite enrollment benefits through wifi capabilities.

7) Create Area-Wide Recreation Authority

Work with the Dowagiac Union School District and adjoining townships in an effort to create an area-wide recreation authority. A consolidated approach is likely the best way to meet the diverse programming and major facility needs of the area. Given the scope of this process, it is very likely that several years will be required for all government entities to develop an authority, outline methods of funding, and coordinate and determine the scope of services and responsibilities of the authority.

8) Rudy Park Development

The City will consider a trust fund application for the development of an existing drive-by sculpture park to include parking area with a view of the natural creek area, ADA accessible overlook, landscaping and stairs to a fishing platform on the water.

9) Beckwith Park Redevelopment

Beckwith Park is located in the central business district. It was developed in 1997 through the Downtown Development Authority as a venue for special community events and as a gathering place for community members. The City will consider applications for various grant funding for replacement of the Victorian gazebo, which was removed for safety concerns in 2017, and the addition of various amenities in compliance with ADA requirements to continue to utilize this park as a central gathering point for the community.

