



*We will enhance community and quality of life through people, parks and programs.*

Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Commission  
Future of Parks and Recreation Ad Hoc Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, March 13, 2018, 4:30 p.m.  
Governmental Center, Room 300  
400 Boardman Avenue  
Traverse City, Michigan 49684

## **AGENDA**

**Members:** David Grams, Rod Kivell, Steve Largent (Vice Chair), John Roth (Chair), Whitney Waara

**Objective:** To research and make a recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Commission about how to structure and fund County Parks and Recreation in the future.

**General Meeting Policies:** Please turn off all cell phones or switch them to silent mode. Any person may make a video, audio, or other record of this meeting. Standing equipment, cords, or portable microphones must be located so as not to block audience view. If you need auxiliary assistance, call 231-922-4780 or TDD 231-922-4412.

**A. Call to Order**

**B. Roll Call**

**C. First Public Comment**

Any person shall be permitted to address the Parks and Recreation Commission, which is required to be open to the public under the provision of the Michigan Open Meetings Act, as amended (MCLA 15.261, et.seq.). Public comment shall be carried out in accordance with the following rules and procedures:

1. Any person wishing to address the Commission shall state his or her name and address.
2. No person shall be allowed to speak more than once on the same matter, excluding commissioners' questions. The chairperson shall control the amount of time each person shall be allowed to speak, which shall not exceed three (3) minutes. The chairperson may, at his or her discretion, extend the amount of time any person is allowed to speak.

**D. Approval of Agenda**

**E. Approval of Minutes from February 22, 2018 Meeting**

**F. Continue to Discuss Options for the Future of Parks and Recreation (Discussion)**

**G. Second Public Comment**

Please refer to rules and procedures under C. First Public Comment, above.

**H. Notices and Commissioner Comments**

**I. Adjournment**



*We will enhance community and quality of life through people, parks and programs.*

Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Commission  
Future of Parks and Recreation Ad Hoc Committee Meeting  
Thursday, February 22, 2018, 5:30 p.m.

Governmental Center, Room 300  
400 Boardman Avenue  
Traverse City, Michigan 49684

**MINUTES**

**Objective:** To research and make a recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Commission about how to structure and fund County Parks and Recreation in the future.

**A. Call to Order**

Meeting called to order at 5:35 p.m.

**B. Roll Call**

**Members Present:** David Grams, Rod Kivell, Steve Largent (Vice Chair), John Roth (Chair), Whitney Waara

**Others Present:** Chris Forsyth, Grand Traverse County Deputy Civil Counsel; Harry Burkholder, AICP, Executive Director, Land Information Access Association; Marsha Barber Clark, Marsha Barber Clark, Executive Director, Grand Traverse Conservation District; Kristine Erickson, Director, Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation

**C. First Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**D. Approval of Agenda**

MOTION by Grams, second by Waara, to approve agenda, as presented.

**E. Where to Begin? Options for the Future of Parks and Recreation** (Orientation and Discussion; Harry Burkholder, AICP, Executive Director, Land Information Access Association; "Partnering for Parks" and "Wins and Loses of Millage Campaigns" Attached for Reference)

Attendees discussed options to consider for future of County Parks and Recreation.

**F. Next Steps; Research Assignments; Meeting Schedule** (Director)

Envision what County Parks and Recreation will look like 10 and 20 years from now; review Ingham and Sinclair Counties for operations models; determine how much total funding County Parks and Recreation would require to operate independently (including Facilities Management costs and cleaning and mowing subcontracting costs). Future meetings: March 13 and 20, 2018, 4:30 p.m., Governmental Center.

**G. Second Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**F. Notices and Commissioner Comments**

There were no notices or comments.

**G. Adjournment**

# Michigan Residents **Vote Yes** on Parks:

# Top Strategies from Successful Millage Communities

**"What matters is how we are providing the essential services that make people visit us today and vote for us tomorrow."**

— Dan Stencil,  
Oakland County Parks

By Desiree Stanfield, Communications Supervisor, Oakland County Parks and Recreation

*[Editor's Note: At press time, a millage expected to collect \$2.91 million in 2011 for Ingham County Parks' Potter Park Zoo passed by a margin of 68.94% during the November 2010 election. This success marks yet another victory at the ballot box for Michigan park and recreation services. Congratulations to Ingham County Parks, as well as the five departments in this article who achieved millage success during the August 2010 primary election.]*

Despite Michigan's downturned economy, voters spoke volumes when they approved millages for five parks and recreation agencies in the August 2010 primary election.

"People realize parks provide value not only for themselves, but also for the community as a whole," MRPA President **Linda Walter** said. "We enhance neighborhood stability, generate economic impact with facilities, create connections through programs and make communities a more desirable place to live, work and play."

The City of Lansing, Oakland County, Saginaw County, Springfield Township and St. Clair County parks and recreation departments each received resounding support at the ballot box in August. Read on to learn more about each organization's best practices and top five overall successes within their own millage campaigns.

Photo courtesy of Springfield Township Parks and Recreation

## Best Practices for Millages at the 2011 MRPA Conference & Trade Show

Join MRPA at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa February 8-11 to learn crucial tactics for making your parks and recreation millage a success.

The Directors of Oakland, Saginaw and St. Clair County, the City of Lansing and Springfield Township Park and Recreation Departments will participate in a panel session providing key strategies and best practices for executing millage campaigns.

Visit [www.mrpaconference.com](http://www.mrpaconference.com) to learn more and register online.

## City of Lansing

[www.lansingmi.gov/parks](http://www.lansingmi.gov/parks)

Murdock Jemerson, CPRP, Director

**Population:** 113,712

**Facilities:** 114 parks (includes three cemeteries, one municipal golf course, four community centers, two outdoor/one indoor swimming pools, artificial ice rink, nature center and Turner Dodge historic home)

**Staff:** 19 full-time and 66 part-time

**Annual budget:** \$7,644,145

**Annual cost:** \$50 for a home with a market value of \$100,000 (.1 mil)



The **Lansing Department of Parks and Recreation** has been in existence since the purchase of the city cemetery in what is now called Oak Park in 1852. The first park millage was approved in 1990 and received five renewals. According to Director **Murdock Jemerson**, the 2010 millage vote had the largest margin with a 73% approval.

"We started our communication efforts with a mailing to all absentee voters in early July. Getting absentee voters has been the key to the success of our park millage campaigns," Jemerson said. "We always have a letter endorsing the millage signed by one or two very influential senior citizens because seniors vote."

Awareness efforts were coordinated by a separate citizens group called "The Committee to Save Lansing Parks," who raised approximately \$4,000 through friends groups, fundraisers and private donations. The funds were used to purchase campaign yard signs, two postcard mailers and campaign literature.

"The parks millage brings in \$2.3 million annually," said Jemerson. "Approximately half of that goes to general fund operations and the other half goes to capital improvements for the parks system."

### Top 5 Successes

- 1) Developed a postcard mailing to absentee and primary voters.
- 2) Communicated to youth and adult sports program participants.
- 3) Delivered literature door-to-door.
- 4) Installed yard signs to create awareness.
- 5) Encouraged senior citizens to write support letters.

The committee focused on educating citizens that the millage was a renewal of an existing tax.

"We had two other millage proposals on this ballot for the library and bus system, so we wanted to make sure everyone knew the one for parks wasn't an increase," he said. "The two other millages also passed, but the parks millage had the highest margin."

## Oakland County Parks and Recreation

[DestinationOakland.com](http://DestinationOakland.com)

Daniel J. Stencil, CPRP, Executive Officer

**Population:** 1.2 million

**Facilities:** 13 parks and golf courses with 7,000 acres; 68 miles of trails, day-use parks, campgrounds, waterparks, nature centers and golf courses

**Staff:** 73 full-time and 600 part-time

**Annual budget:** \$25 million

**Annual cost:** \$21 for a home with a market value of \$175,000 (.245 mil)

**Oakland County Parks and Recreation** began welcoming guests in 1966 with the acquisition of a former family farm/summer home of wealthy Detroiters. The 269-acre parcel was named Addison Oaks County Park and repurposed as a day-use park, campground and banquet center.

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The following year a five-year .25 millage was established to operate, maintain, improve and acquire parks and recreation areas. In 1980, the renewal was extended to a 10-year .25 millage. Due to economic concerns facing the area, the parks commission recommended renewal of the existing reduced .2415 millage in 2010.

In August 2010, voters cast their ballots in support with a 76.46% approval rating, the highest ever in parks history.

"The millage accounts for nearly 60 percent of our operating monies. For the 2011 budget of \$25 million, approximately \$12.8 million will come from millage revenues and the rest from charges for services, planned use of balance, investments and other income," Director **Dan Stencil** said.

The millage awareness effort started 18 months prior to the vote. The department's millage team including staff from operations, planning, recreation programs and services, communications and marketing. The group met monthly, then weekly six months prior to the primary. An e-newsletter sent weekly to all full-time and part-time staff included a count-down clock plus calls to action such as gathering names and addresses for mailings and locations for yard signs.

## Top 5 Successes

1. Conducted face-to-face visits with nearly all of the county's 62 cities, villages and townships over a three-month period.
2. Engaged staff to educate park users, special interest groups and volunteers starting six months before the vote.
3. Created "What you Value" communication pieces that explained the renewal and distributed to staff, park users, local businesses and absentee voters.
4. Used emails to park users and social media efforts including Facebook and Twitter.
5. Received support from Citizens for Oakland County Parks and Recreation, a group that formed an honorary committee with political leaders, placed newspaper ads and bought its own yard signs.

"Customer service and operations standards are of upmost importance every single day. That's what keeps visitors returning and using word of mouth to share their experiences," Stencil said. "If the grass isn't cut or the bathrooms aren't clean, you can bet what your guests are saying isn't favorable. You should have the mindset that every day is millage day."



## Springfield Township

[www.springfield-twp.us/pr.htm](http://www.springfield-twp.us/pr.htm)

Jennifer Tucker, CPRP, Director

**Population:** 13,338

**Facilities:** The township owns four parks with a total acreage of approximately 589 acres. Amenities include a community center, outdoor tennis/basketball/sand volleyball/shuffleboard courts, playground equipment, a beach, accessible fishing pier, pavilions, mowed walking trails and a wildlife preserve.

**Staff:** Five full-time and five part-time

**Annual budget:** \$532,873

**Annual cost:** \$75 for a home with a market value of \$200,000 (.75 mills)

The **Springfield Township Parks and Recreation Commission** was formed by petition of residents in 1953. The department has been funded by the township's general fund, program fees, grants and donations throughout its existence.

According to Director **Jennifer Tucker**, parks and recreation had never charged a park entrance fee to residents. But the state's declining property tax revenue, projected to last for some years to come, necessitated the "ask" for the inaugural millage in 2010.

"We knew the timing was not ideal, but we saw the millage as the way to provide a reliable, dedicated funding source to maintain, develop and operate the township's parks and recreation facilities," Tucker said. "Competition for grants is stiffer and many grants require a financial contribution from the recipient. Without the millage, we were headed for closing down facilities. Now we're on track for the next four years."

The 2010 millage, which passed by 53.61%, is for budget years 2010-2013. It will generate approximately \$428,000 in its first year. Funding will allow Tucker's staff to protect valuable park properties and natural areas; support active-adult groups plus repair and maintain existing facilities and improve trail systems.

## Top 5 Successes

- 1) Installed yard signs at strategic locations.
- 2) Printed a mailing to absentee voters.
- 3) Made 400 personal phone calls to primary voters and park patrons.
- 4) Hosted informal presentations to community groups and other boards.
- 5) Enlisted the help of a friends group to spread the vote message.

The Friends of the Springfield Township Parks led the charge for the millage in 2010. The group started the awareness campaign two years prior.

"Real active involvement was about nine months out," Tucker said. "They had about \$2,000 to work with plus a tremendous amount of blood, sweat and tears. The staff was very appreciative of their dedication to making parks and recreation a priority service to residents."



## St. Clair County Parks

[stclaircountyparks.org](http://stclaircountyparks.org)

Mark Brochu, CPRP, Director

**Population:** 164,235

**Facilities:** Six parks comprising 805 acres with county fair facilities, a historic village, splashpad, pavilions, beach, trails and Fort Gratiot Light Station, the oldest lighthouse in Michigan

**Staff:** 9 full-time and 24 part-time

**Annual budget:** \$3,274,000

**Annual cost:** \$25 for a home with a market value of \$100,000 (0.4954 mil)

St. Clair County Parks has seen increased support for its millage over the years. In 1994, it passed at 52%. In August 2010, the millage was renewed for six additional years with an approval rating of 71.49%.

Staff started preparing for the vote in December 2009. A newsletter was mailed to 72,000 addresses and posted on the system's website and Facebook.

"Our mid-July issue focused on how the parks system invested millage funds the previous six years," said Director **Mark Brochu**. "We also told voters what projects listed in the master recreation plan would be pursued if the millage renewal passed."

These projects included paved mountain biking and equestrian trails, canoe and kayak launches, building maintenance and parking improvements.

Another approach focused on the tourism impact of county parks on the local community. According to the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, visitors coming into



St. Clair County spend an average of \$116.03 per day and \$366.46 per person for overnight stays.

"One of our strongest selling points is our program that distributes 25% of the millage funds collected each year to all of the local units of government on a per capita basis. Literally every park in St. Clair County has been improved by the county parks millage," Brochu said. "We demonstrated to our residents not only the significant impact we make in their quality of life but also the value we provide to the local economy."

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## Top 5 Successes

- 1) Strategic yard sign placement: quality locations over a quantity of signs.
- 2) Ordered car window clings, provided by a “People for Parks” group that ran a “Vote Yes” campaign. The group also paid for the yard signs, radio ads and parade entry fees.
- 3) Aired radio ads the week prior to the election on two stations. The message was that every community in St. Clair County benefits from the county parks millage.
- 4) Participated in the two largest summer parades – the Port Huron Rotary Parade and the Yale Bologna Festival Parade.
- 5) Encouraged citizens to write support letters to local newspapers.

Previously funds were used to purchase newspaper ads. Since the daily and weekly papers supported the renewal, staff decided to forgo spending money on ad space.

“We believe that due to the poor economy, many of our supporters truly believed that our millage might not be renewed and that the county board, which does not contribute to the parks and recreation budget, could not give any money to parks. Those supporters made extra efforts to make sure that they voted,” Brochu said.

## Saginaw County Parks and Recreation

[saginawcounty.com/parks](http://saginawcounty.com/parks)

John Schmude, CPRP, Director

**Population:** 210,000

**Facilities:** Six parks with 683 acres featuring a lake, two nature preserves, one rail trail and two passive recreation parks (pavilions, fishing, etc.)

**Staff:** 5 full-time and 35 seasonal employees

**Annual budget:** \$901,869

**Annual cost:** \$8 for a home with a market value of \$100,000 (.1615 mil)



The **Saginaw County Parks and Recreation Commission** was formed in 1969 and currently manages six regional parks including the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail. The system has had a millage in place since 1990; it has passed three times – November 1990, August 2000, and August 2010.

It failed once in August 1990, when it was placed on the ballot as a combined millage including the Parks and Recreation Commission; Hartley Outdoor Education Center; Historical Society of Saginaw County; and Saginaw Community Enrichment Commission. According to Director **John Schmude**, voters were confused on what exactly they were voting for and how much money would be going to each of the entities.

In August 2010, voters approved the millage renewal by 68%. The system's 2010 budget is projected at \$901,869 of which \$813,547 is millage funded.

Schmude said there was no friends group in place, but there was a nominating committee with a budget of \$1,775. The group included parks commission members and individuals from the public. The group started meeting biweekly in May.

“The millage campaign committee put the majority of funds into yard signs and 4' x 8' signs,” Schmude said. “The most creative idea was forming an impromptu Moms for Parks press conference which generated coverage from a local TV station and a few local newspapers.”

## Top 5 Successes

- 1) Erected campaign signage, including yard signs and 4-by-8-foot signs.
- 2) Held a “Moms for Parks” press conference two days before the election.
- 3) Encouraged a letter-writing campaign to the local newspaper.
- 4) Made presentations to service clubs.
- 5) Created a website to promote awareness of the campaign.

“The next time around we'll seek endorsements from the chamber of commerce, local unions and other groups. We learned a lesson that we need to reach people where they are active, not only in our parks, but in other places as well,” Schmude said.

Whether an agency's next millage renewal is five or 10 years away, park leaders say that the most important take-away from the 2010 victories is that elections are not won or lost within the course of an election cycle.

At Oakland County Parks and Recreation, “we're fond of saying ‘every day is millage day’,” Executive Officer Dan Stencil said. “What matters is how we are providing the essential services that make people visit us today and vote for us tomorrow.”

Desiree Stanfield is the Communications Supervisor within the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Department. She can be reached at [stanfield@oakgov.com](mailto:stanfield@oakgov.com).