

Chapter 3: PUBLIC INPUT

Public participation in Pittsfield Township is always sought and welcomed. Needs and priority issues were identified at two community forums conducted as part of the planning process for the 2004-2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. In addition, an extensive public involvement process addressing parks and recreation concerns was conducted as part of the 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan for the Township. A public opinion survey soliciting comments about growth and development in the Township was also conducted in 2002.

COMMUNITY FORUMS

Community forums targeting parks and recreation issues were held at the Township Administrative Offices on June 19, 2004 and at the Township Community Center on June 23, 2004. The purpose of the forums was to seek input from residents and establish priorities for enhancement of recreation and park opportunities.

Participants in the forums were divided into groups of approximately six people. A facilitator in each group recorded thoughts and statements and generated and guided discussion. Discussion topics included:

- ◆ Park acquisition
- ◆ Park development
- ◆ Potential community recreation center
- ◆ Potential nature center
- ◆ Bike paths and greenways
- ◆ Partnerships with schools and other recreation providers.

Each group generated ideas and vision statements regarding facilities and programs. The groups then prioritized their ideas using a group consensus method. Following this, the participants reconvened and each group presented its priority issues. The consensus of the participants focused on the following recreation improvements:

- ◆ Development of a new Community Center
- ◆ Development of a Comprehensive Master Plan for the Pittsfield Preserve
- ◆ Securing additional parkland in underserved areas

The participants also discussed a wide variety of issues including accessibility to parks, ideas for future park development, partnerships and collaborations with local recreation providers, development of a nature center, incorporating the Greenways Initiative into the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, maintaining the historic heritage of the Township and developing more active recreational facilities.

Other priorities suggested in the forum include:

- ◆ Maintain natural heritage
- ◆ Conceptual plan for the Preserve
- ◆ Development of additional active recreation areas
- ◆ Preservation of open space and farmland
- ◆ Development of winter recreation facilities
- ◆ Collaboration with adjacent communities
- ◆ Development of a Sutherland-Wilson Farm Historic Park
- ◆ Development of a Township History Park/Program
- ◆ Upgrade parks to meet ADA requirements
- ◆ Create special programs for parks including Braille trails, skate parks and spray parks
- ◆ Development of a nature observatory
- ◆ Installation of ADA boardwalks

Appendix A includes a list of all the statements generated at the workshop.

2002 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A six month public involvement process was an essential component in the development of the 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan. This process included five focus group meetings, three open houses, a public hearing and a public opinion survey. Although the public involvement was a part of the comprehensive plan process, the Township emphasized parks and recreation issues due the recent acquisition of the Pittsfield Preserve. As such, a separate station was provided at the open house to discuss natural features, greenways, and recreation issues. Refer to Appendix B for a summary of survey results.

Emphasizing parks and recreation ensured the public had an opportunity to express their ideas about future parks and recreation efforts. The following general comments were expressed.

- ◆ There is a need for more community and recreational facilities such as parks, athletic fields, pathways and senior and teen programs.
- ◆ Maintain the rural character of the Township.
- ◆ Maintain a significant amount of open natural space.
- ◆ Develop a pathway and greenway system to provide convenient access to enjoy natural features and to link key destinations within the Township and to surrounding communities.

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY (2002)

In January 2002, the Township distributed a public opinion survey to approximately 9,000 households. The survey was intended to solicit comments about growth and development in the Township. Of the surveys that were sent out, 2,826 were completed and returned (30% response rate). Several questions referred directly to parks, recreation, pathways and natural features protection. Input from this survey assisted in solidifying the Township's efforts to acquire parkland and preserve its rural character. The majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- ◆ Preserve open space
- ◆ Build pathways for walking and biking
- ◆ Protect and improve woodlands
- ◆ Protect natural habitats
- ◆ Provide more parkland per person
- ◆ Use tax dollars to acquire public parks

CITIZEN OPINION SURVEY (1998)

In the spring of 1998, the Township distributed a citizen-opinion survey to approximately 1,500 households. Four groups were targeted; registered voters, new residents, seniors, and current recreation program participants. Refer to Appendix C for a copy of the survey and a summary of the results.

The survey focused on the following issues:

- ◆ Customer service
- ◆ Image, marketing, and promotion of the department
- ◆ Park improvements/future park development
- ◆ Concept of developing a community center
- ◆ Accessibility of programs and facilities

Survey results showed a strong support for the development of playgrounds closer to neighborhoods, the construction of athletic fields and the idea of a new Community Center. The concept of a Teen Activity Center that focused on fitness and wellness, but which all residents could use received broad support from all four groups. Suggested improvements included the proximity of parks to their respective parking lots, wheelchair access to parks (ramps), paved paths, and ensuring that all bathroom facilities are accessible.

OTHER CITIZEN COMMITTEES

Specific brainstorming on recreation and natural resource issues has been conducted by citizen committees in Pittsfield Township. These groups are charged with recommending action strategies and policy changes in order to accomplish their specific objectives. Although these groups discuss Township parks, their latest emphasis has been the Pittsfield Preserve. These groups are described as follows:

Natural Features Commission – With numerous natural resources, this commission is charged with developing policies and strategies for protection as new development occurs. Their mandate is to develop an accurate inventory and assessment of all natural resources in the community. The Commission oversees three committees:

- ♦ Stormflow Committee which ensures compliance with Michigan's Clean Water Act
- ♦ Farmland Protection Committee whose charge is to protect existing farmland and open space
- ♦ Wetlands Committee focuses on wetland protection policy recommendations and implementation strategies.

Greenways Committee – The Greenways Committee is charged with implementation of the Greenways Plan which is described later in this document. Currently, the Greenways Committee is actively involved in the planning and development stages of the Platt Road Greenway ensuring the goals and objectives of the Greenway Plan are realized.