

Merrillville Parks and Recreation Master Plan



Town of Merrillville, Indiana

Department of Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation Community Center Committee

Shawn Pettit -----	Chairman
Shauna Haynes-Edwards -----	Member
Margaret Uzelac -----	Member
Keesha M. Hardaway -----	Member

Michael Griffin, **Town Manager**
Jerry McCartney, **Parks and Recreation Director**

Merrillville Town Council

Rhonda Neal -----	Ward 1
Shauna Haynes-Edwards -----	Ward 2
Leona Chandler -----	Ward 3
Margaret Uzelac -----	Ward 4
Rick Bella -----	Ward 5
Shawn Pettit -----	Ward 6
Keesha M. Hardaway -----	Ward 7

Consultant
The Arsh Group
Planners, Landscape Architects
Development Consultants
Merrillville, Indiana
www.arshgroup.com

April 2025

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Town of Merrillville
7820 Broadway
Merrillville, Indiana 46410
(219) 769-5711 • Fax (219) 756-6170

April 15, 2025

Mr. Greg Beilfuss, Chief Planner
IDNR-State Parks, Community Grants and Trails
402 W. Washington, Room W271
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2782

RE: MERRILLVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN 2025

Dear Mr. Beilfuss:

I am pleased to submit the final Merrillville Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2025 for your review and approval. The Plan reflects the state's requirements for the Parks master plans. It also includes the required certifications and resolutions.

The Merrillville Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2025, continues the Town's efforts to meet the residents' needs, expand recreational opportunities, and address citizens' concerns, including those related to ADA compliance. The process to prepare the master plan started this last year. Public input was gathered through a community wide survey, interviews with various Town stakeholders and two public meetings. This represents the highest level of public outreach and participation ever conducted for a parks plan in Merrillville. The comments we received during the outreach efforts have played a significant role in identifying needs, formulating goals, and setting priorities for facility expansion and program development.

I look forward to working with you and other agencies as we implement different parts of our Plan over the next five years. Should you need additional information, please feel free to contact Mr. Jerry McCartney, Parks Director or Mr. Taghi Arshami, from The Arsh Group Inc. which prepared the Plan.

Michael Griffin
Town Manager

Attachment(s)

cc: Shawn Pettit, Chair, Parks and Recreation Committee
Jerry McCartney, Parks Director
Taghi Arshami, The Arsh Group Inc.
File

Resolutions

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE PARK AUTHORITY

RESOLUTION 25-20 TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE acting as the MUNICIPAL PARK AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA

2025-2029 Parks and Recreation Master Plan

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville Park Authority is aware of the park and recreation needs of the residents of the Town of Merrillville; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville Park Authority is desirous of providing aesthetic and functional park and recreation facilities and programs to the residents of the Town of Merrillville to meet their physical, social, psychological and communal needs; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville Park Authority realizes the importance of sound planning in order to meet the needs of its residents; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville Park Authority is continually aware of the value and importance of leisure opportunities, recreational programs, and facilities for the future of the Town of Merrillville Park Authority and its programs, and to the residents of the Town of Merrillville; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville Park Authority has retained The Arsh Group Inc. to prepare the final updated said Master Plan, which is all in the following words and figures attached;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE TOWN COUNCIL ACTING THE MUNICIPAL PARK AUTHORITY,

Section 1. That the Town of Merrillville does adopt the Merrillville Park and Recreation Master Plan 2025 - 2029 as its official plan for growth and development of parks and recreation opportunities in Merrillville, Indiana, over the next five years.

Section 2. That the Town of Merrillville Park Authority is committed to an annual review and update of the goals and objectives of this Master Plan.

Adopted and signed the 8th day of April, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE PARK AUTHORITY

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA



Rick Bella, President

Attest:


Eric O. January, CPA
Clerk-Treasurer


**ASSURANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE WITH:
ARCHITECTURAL BARRIERS ACT of 1968 (As Amended);
SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (As
Amended);
AND TITLE II OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT
OF 1990 (As Amended)**

The Town of Merrillville Park Authority (Applicant) has read the guidelines for compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (As Amended); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (As Amended); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (As Amended) and will comply with the applicable requirements of these Acts.

SIGNATURE 
APPLICANT PRESIDENT

Rick Bella President

Attest:

SIGNATURE 

Eric O. January, C.P.A.
Clerk-Treasurer

DATE 4/8/25

REQUEST FOR ELIGIBILITY

Land and Water Conservation Fund

We hereby request eligibility to participate in the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Program administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE PARK AUTHORITY

7820 Broadway
Merrillville, Indiana 46410
Telephone: (219) 980-5911
FAX: (219) 980-0928

The Town of Merrillville Park Authority was established under the provisions of Section 201, Chapter 311, Article II of the Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana for 1965. In 1986, the Merrillville Parks and Recreation Department was re-established under the current provisions of Indiana Code 36-10. This Act empowers the Board to plan, construct, operate, and maintain recreation and park facilities.

By virtue of the powers vested in our Board by the Indiana General Assembly we agree, if approved, to abide by all applicable State and Federal Laws and the provisions outlined in the Guidelines for Local Agencies participating in the Land and Water Conservation Program.


Adopted and signed the 8th day of April, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE PARK AUTHORITY

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA


Rick Bella, President

Attest:


Eric O. January, CPA
Clerk-Treasurer

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
ASSURANCE OF COMPLIANCE
(TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964)

The Town of Merrillville Park Authority, hereinafter called the "Applicant-Recipient" HEREBY AGREES THAT IT will comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-352) and all requirements imposed by or pursuant to the Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR 17) issued pursuant to that title, to the end that, in accordance with Title VI of that Act and the Regulation, no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity for which the Applicant-Recipient receives financial assistance from the National Park Service and hereby gives assurance that it will immediately take any measure to effectuate this agreement.

If any real property or structure thereon is provided or improved with the aid of Federal financial assistance extended to the Applicant-Recipient by the National Park Service, this assurance obligates the Applicant-Recipient, or in the case of any transfer of such property, any transferee for the period during which the real property or structure is used for a purpose involving the provisions of similar services or benefits. If any personal property is so provided, this assurance obligates the Applicant-Recipient for the period during which it retains ownership or possession of the property. In all other cases, this assurance obligates the Applicant-Recipient for the period during which the Federal financial assistance is extended to it by the National Park Service.

THIS ASSURANCE is given in consideration of and for the purpose of obtaining any and all Federal grants, loans, contracts, property discounts, or other Federal financial assistance extended after the date hereof to the Applicant-Recipient by the bureau or office, including installment payments after such date on account of arrangements for Federal financial assistance which were approved before such date. The Applicant-Recipient recognizes and agrees that such Federal financial assistance will be extended in reliance on the representations and agreements made in this assurance, and that the United States shall reserve the right to seek judicial enforcement of this assurance. This assurance is binding on the Applicant-Recipient, its successor, transferees, and assignees, and the person or persons whose signatures appear below are authorized to sign this assurance on behalf on the Applicant-Recipient.

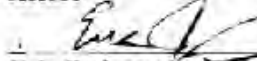
THE APPLICANT-RECIPIENT ALSO AGREES to comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and all requirements imposed by or pursuant to the Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR 17) issued pursuant to these titles, to the end that, no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of age or handicap be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity for which the Applicant-Recipient receives financial assistance from the National Park Service and hereby gives assurance that it will immediately take any measures to effectuate this agreement.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE PARK AUTHORITY

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA


Rick Bella, President

Attest:


Eric O. January, CPA
Clerk/Treasurer



Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Background

The first Parks Master Plan for the Town of Merrillville was prepared in 2005. This plan established a new course for the parks and recreation service for the Town. Since the first parks plan was completed Merrillville has continued to grow. It is anticipated that the town will continue to experience moderate growth over the next couple of decades. During this period existing parks and recreation conditions have varied significantly since the adoption of subsequent Parks Master Plans. Funding impacts most communities and the Town of Merrillville has struggled with limited funding and staffing challenges for several years. Nonetheless, the park grounds and amenities continue to be well maintained. However, some parks have reduced recreation equipment as a means to off-set required maintenance. .

The recent addition of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center has added substantial recreational amenities and programming activities for the community and non-residents. The Community center features considerable fitness and cardio equipment, an elevated walking path, 3 court gymnasium and other activity space. There is also outdoor area activities which includes an outdoor football court, recreation areas and a concession stand. The facility is a great opportunity for the community to experience daily activities and programs in a safe gathering place for children and adults of all ages.

Parks and open spaces continue to be viewed as important community assets. However, over time, the role and function of parks have changed, largely impacted by evolving social norms and technology. The interest for social gatherings in the parks for family reunions, corporate employee event parties, mini concerts, and other activities have declined and moved indoors. Many of these functions are now taking place in expanded church venues and banquet halls. Family and community social activities have moved inside, while outdoor sports activity has declined.

The neighborhood park continues as the mainstay for the community offering activities for children and small family gatherings. Children playing on the playgrounds, adults enjoying a book on a bench, and the family dog running free are common activities. Emerging trends challenge traditional park uses to attract a wider range of users, beyond the sports field, children's play areas, picnic tables and trails. Larger community parks could draw a wider range of uses and users, and would benefit by expanding amenities to include enhanced natural features; flower gardens, robust landscaping, and water elements. Mental health and well-being awareness has continued to rise since the pandemic, offering quiet places for meditation and reflection throughout the parks may appeal to other users. Sustainable parks have also become more of a necessity as the demand for resources increases.

Senior citizens require amenities for year-round activities to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle. The disabled and special needs population, who were more home bound in the past, have greater mobility now due to modern technology. Parks departments today are required to provide them with a full range of facilities and programs for a quality experience and meaningful lifestyle. Families and working adults have become more health conscious, considering regular exercise as essential for good health and require a variety of daily exercise and program needs. Today's family may be comprised of both young and school age children and elderly parents. Elderly care-giving responsibilities have been increasing over the years due to the our aging population. Park and Recreation departments can offer a variety of amenities and programs that are not typically available through national exercise and fitness providers. For this group, the Parks Department will need to provide facilities and programs that operate beyond the weekend hours. Their needs often require parks department to stay open later in the evening and start earlier in the morning.

Recreation programs trends in 2024 include family engagement nights, holiday karaoke, "eldertainment", games and activities for "kidults," and partnerships libraries. Other trends for older adults and persons with physical disabilities are robot dogs. Animatronic dogs and cats are gaining popularity. These pets are designed to look like and behave like real animals and are popular among seniors. They provide the comfort without the care and cost of living animals. You may soon encounter older adults in their micromobility motorized four-wheelers taking their robot dogs out for a walk on your trails. Other park trends include drone delivered pizza, and candle light dinners enjoyed in the park, either dining alone, in groups, or enjoying a concert. It may not be far in the future. Providing safe, clean and sanitary restrooms for public use has always been a huge challenge for public parks, particularly in urban and isolated areas without staff supervision. One of the first Self-cleaning public restrooms in the United States is located in Heartside Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan and show cased as public art All-weather, self-cleaning toilets of varying types have been used in Europe and Asia for many years. With the cost of these facilities ranging from \$100k to \$500k, it will be some time before widespread use will be feasible in most communities.

A changing society, emerging trends and the market conditions present challenges for the forward-looking parks department. Parks departments will need to adapt and become more innovative to retain current users and attract new clients while meeting a variety of needs.

2. Plan Update Objective and Process

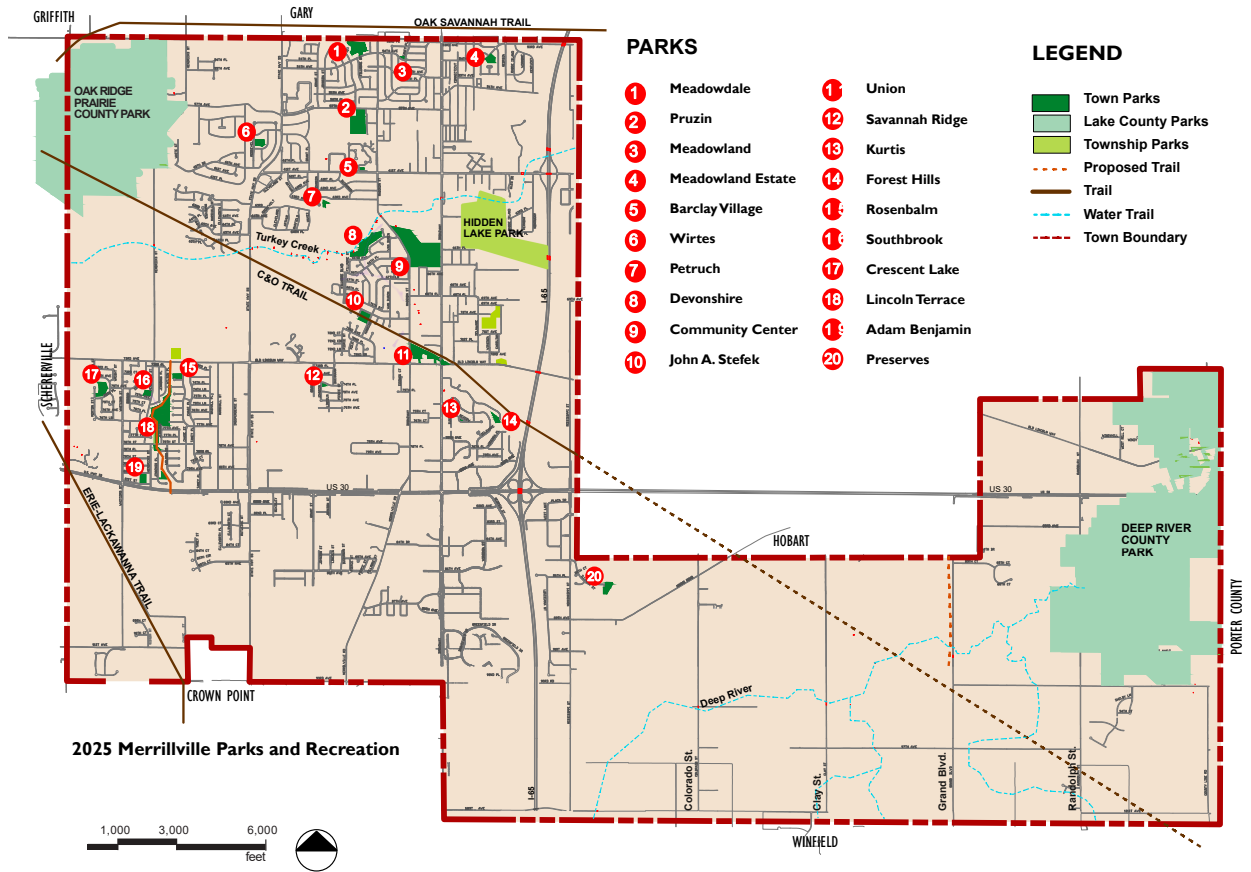
Parks and Recreation Master Plans are comprised using elements of "IDNR Planning Guidelines Parks and Recreation Master Plans" as a basis to develop local plans. Every five years the previous year plan is reviewed and updated to reflect improvements made to the park system and programs, including additional land, facilities and operations. The 2025-2029 Parks and Recreation Master Plan is Merrillville's official policy guide for parks and recreation activities and development for the next five years.



The Town of Merrillville retained the services of The Arsh Group, Inc., local planners and consultants for the preparation of the Master Plan. The plan development process was open and participatory. It included community meetings for citizen input, discussions with program participants, and input from various town officials and stakeholders. The Merrillville Parks and Recreation Department also played a major role in advising during the Plan development process. The Plan development process consisted of current demographic analysis, focus group discussion with residents, resident survey, recreation program analysis, community/stakeholder needs, discussions with key leadership and Park Board, and public meetings.

3. Planning Area

The planning area for the master plan is the corporate boundaries of the Town of Merrillville. Because of the Town's development pattern, additional focus was made on the western half of the Town (generally, using Mississippi Street as the eastern boundary), as most of the current population of the Town resides in this area. The Parks Department is governed by a Parks Authority according to an ordinance approved by the Town Council. This ordinance sets the jurisdictional authority of the Authority as the corporate boundary of the town. Adjacent communities' plans were also reviewed and considered in development of this master plan. Exhibit 1 shows the planning area.



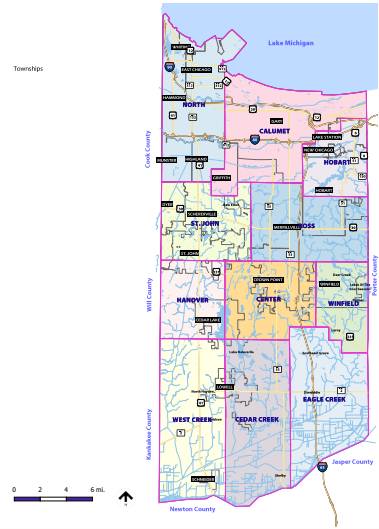


Chapter 2

Community Profile

1. Location

The Town of Merrillville is located in the northwest corner of Indiana in Lake County (Exhibit 2). The town's boundaries generally stretch from 53rd Avenue in the North to 101st Avenue in the South, and from Clark Road in the West to County Line Road to the East. Merrillville covers over 33 square miles of land. The area is characterized by gentle rolling topography of well drained fertile soil that is well suited for farming. Merrillville also has a series of tributaries that drain into Turkey Creek and Deep River. The town shares borders with several municipalities, including Schererville, Gary, Griffith, Crown Point, Winfield, and Hobart. Merrillville lies 30 miles to the southeast of Chicago and 140 miles northwest of Indianapolis. Interstate 65 traverses the Town in a north-south direction and connects Merrillville with Indianapolis to the south and the I-80/94 corridor to the north. US 30, Lincoln Highway, crosses the Town in an east-west direction and connects the town to adjoining communities and beyond.



2. History

The Town of Merrillville was once a populated and heavily forested area inhabited by the native people of the Potawatomie Tribe. The Potawatomie were long-term residents of the land and were hunters and fishermen. Before 1837, the area known as Lake County belonged to 19 Potawatomie chiefs and ten white men. Early settlers found the northern part of Lake County to be dunes, marshland, and brush. They found the southern part of the county to be river marshes and prairie suitable for farming. Other settlers came into the region by way of 16 trails to an area called Wiggins' Point. The major trail was the Sauk Trail, where development started on the edge of that trail. Portions of this trail still exist, like today's 73rd Avenue.



01- GREAT SAUK TRAIL

Merrillville is located in Ross Township, named after one of its early settlers, William Ross. Ross was one of the first settlers who made a home in the Deep River area in 1833. Since this area was near the center of the 16 trails, residents suggested the name of Centerville for the town developing there, but it wasn't officially called Centerville until the first post office opened in 1844. Two of the settlers who came to the area shortly after Wiggins' death were the Merrill brothers, Dudley and William. They farmed the area next to the Wiggins' property, which was then owned by the Saxton family. The first commercial building in town was a hotel for travelers. Dudley Merrill became the proprietor of the hotel years later. Other buildings, including a general store and a blacksmith's shop, were soon built near the hotel.



02- GENERAL STORE-1930

Merrillville officially became a town in 1971 by incorporating most of Ross Township. Parts of Ross Township, however, remain the neighboring cities of Hobart and Crown Point.

The area today has been shaped by its geography and the environment. Merrillville's location, along the Great Sauk Trail, significantly contributed to its role as a gathering place and commercial hub of the region. This cultural landscape, both from its earlier history and today, has been shaped by the many different groups of people that have inhabited the place and continues today.



03- 73RD AVE.

The town has continued to grow rapidly since its first settlement over 180 years ago to become the town we see today. In 1980, Merrillville's population was 27,677, nine years after officially becoming a town. The 2022 Census reported the population at 36,214, which has remained stable in recent years. The town has evolved into a diverse and cultural community with large business districts that support both residents and regional shoppers. Merrillville's primary transportation routes include U.S. 30 and I-65, which run through most of the town, and effectively divide the town into four distinct quadrants. State Road 53 (Broadway) is another major north-south thoroughfare connecting the Town to Gary and Crown Point.

The pattern of development, remains intact today as it was originally platted by the Town's founders. The land use, consisting of a mix of commercial and residential uses, centered around a mill and a tributary branch of a river along a traditional trail, and later supported by rail and other transportation influences, includes many remnants of earlier influences. This pattern of development, mixing residential and commercial uses, has been very important throughout the history of the town. It has resulted in creating blocks of buildings and structures that, still today, retain historical and architectural integrity and give a traditional sense of community to the neighborhood.

3. Natural Features

The air, land and water resources within the town define the basis upon which all man-made activities occur. The general climate of the area, the composition of local soils, the predominant vegetation, and the quality and expanse of both surface and groundwater all determine the ability of the town to sustain development.

Several natural features contributed to the area's popularity during the settlement period. Area climate, soil composition, vegetation, and the quality and expanse of both surface and groundwater were all primary factors influencing the growth and development of the town. The following sections describe different natural elements in the Town of Merrillville.

A. Vegetation

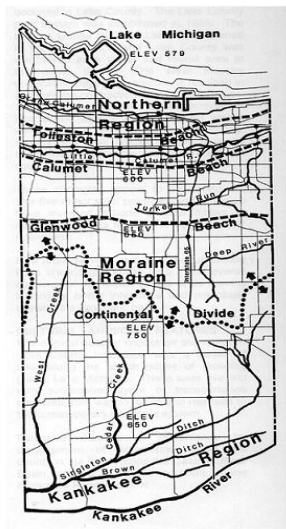
The Town of Merrillville is located where upland and lowland areas of Lake County meet. These areas are typified by prairie and forest in the uplands and extensive wetlands in the lowlands. Various species of hardwoods such as several types of oak, butternut, and maple exist throughout the area.

Since first being detected in 2004, much of Northwest Indiana's ash tree population has been devastated by the invasion of the emerald ash borer (EAB.) This insect eats away at the tissue between the bark and sapwood of ash trees, disrupting the transport of water and nutrients, eventually killing the entire tree. The most obvious visual symptom of an EAB-infected ash tree is canopy dieback, with several epicormic shoots forming around the roots, major crotches, and trunk of the tree. Infected ash trees may also feature two types of holes: small holes from woodpeckers that feed on EAB, and D-shaped holes from beetles that emerge from the tree. While healthy ash trees can be treated to protect them from EAB with regular systemic insecticide treatments, dead or severely infected ash trees must be removed to prevent future damages and keep EAB from spreading. As the transport of wood is the primary way for EAB to spread, this removal process includes burning the removed tree to kill any EAB larvae still living within the wood to prevent future contamination.

B. Soils

Soils are the building blocks that define the types of activities that can be sustained on the land. Soils determine the types of vegetation and drainage that occur naturally. They also delineate the types of crops that can be planted and the location and density of buildings, roads and other man-made structures.

There are five different soil associations within the town. Each of these associations has its own unique characteristics, including limitations on development, recreation and agriculture. Map # and Map # show areas in the town where soil and topography may impact development. This impact comes from a variety of sources, such as the presence of wetlands, poor permeability of soils, and improper engineering for building development. These classifications are intended for general planning purposes only. Decisions on the uses of specific tracts of land should refer to the original source material: Soil Survey of Lake County, Indiana, Soil Conservation Service, 1972.



Soil classifications (made up of a mixture of basic soil types) have been identified and mapped by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in the Soil Survey of Lake County, Indiana. There are five different soil associations within the town. Each of these associations has its own unique characteristics, including limitations on development, recreation, and agriculture. Three of these are:

- In the North, there is the Alida-Del Ray-Whitaker Association
- In the East and again in the West, there is the Morley-Blount-Pewamo association
- In the Center, there is the Elliott-Markham-Pewamo association

These soils are best used for crops of corn and soybeans, pasture land, and trees. The seasonally high-water table and ponding in the level soils makes drainage a problem and limits engineering development for roads and business districts.

Sensitive Sites - The number of undisturbed natural areas across the entire state is dwindling quickly. The 1993 Master Plan Update of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has created a list of sensitive. The Merrillville areas on this list include: Deep River Marsh, Deep River Woods, and Oak Ridge Prairie West.

Wetlands/Water Resources

Merrillville is located in the Little Calumet River Watershed. Two major waterways are found within the town: Turkey Creek and Deep River. Turkey Creek is approximately 11 miles long and flows generally eastward, emptying into Deep River. Deep River is a tributary of the Little Calumet River. It begins west of Crown Point and travels northeastward through Merrillville and Hobart, forming Lake George in Hobart, and eventually emptying into Lake Michigan.

Wetlands are found throughout the town, but are particularly concentrated around the area's rivers and streams. The largest wetland complex occurs in the lowland areas in the northwest corner of the town. The eastern "panhandle" area also has a significant wetland presence. The wetland areas support a variety of flora and fauna and contribute significantly to the preservation of water quality and the reduction of floods.

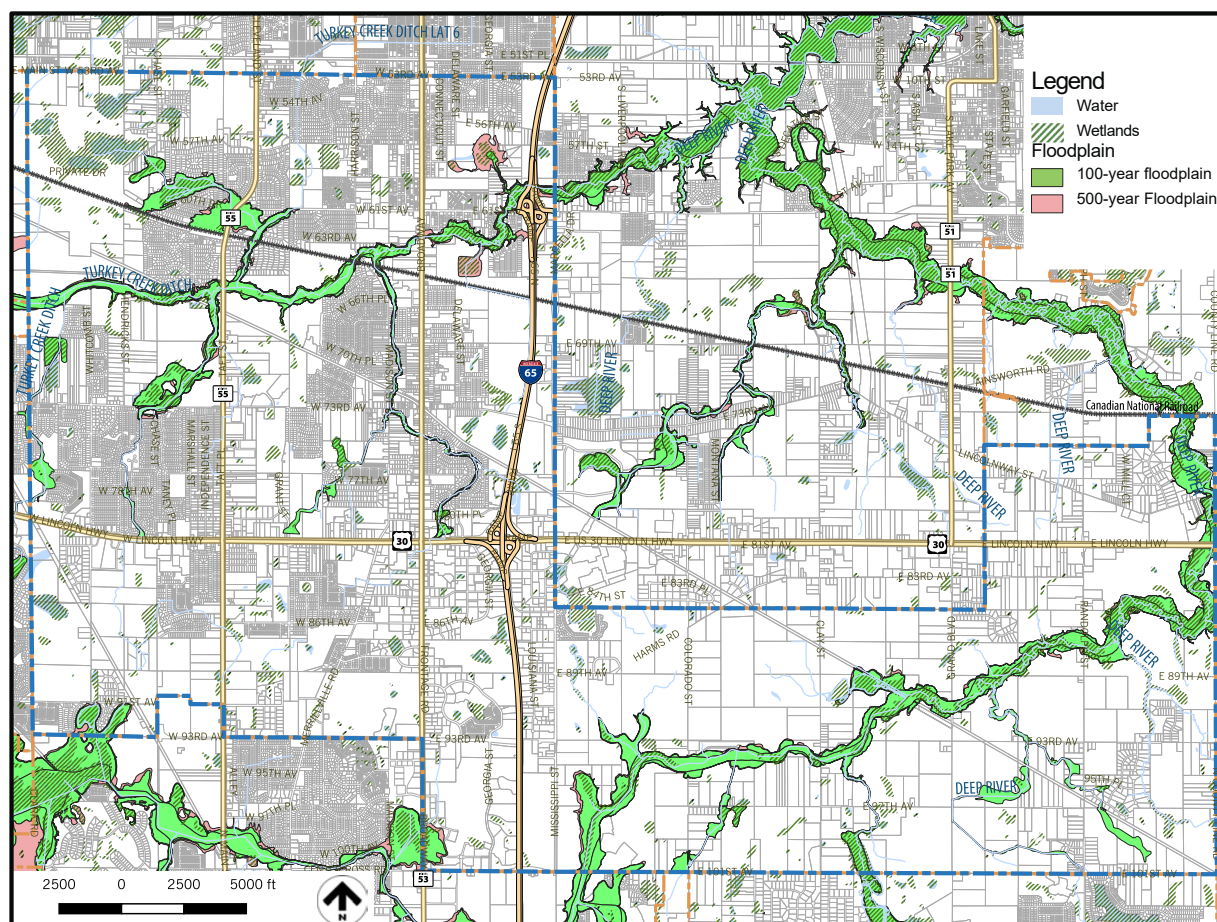


EXHIBIT 4 - WATER FEATURES

4. Land Use and Trends

The Town of Merrillville has an area of approximately 21,299 acres, or approximately 33.3 square miles. The land use pattern in the town ranges from agricultural, single-family residential homes, and open space areas, to commercial and office uses. Agriculture remains one of the dominant land uses in Merrillville, which is concentrated primarily in the “panhandle” area east of I-65, with other agricultural areas located in the far northwest and southwest parts of town.

The majority of Merrillville’s current development lies west of I-65. Much of this land is residential in nature. Over the past decade, new residential developments have begun developing south of US 30. Newer residential developments in the town often include duplex homes or other multi-unit buildings, though these types of uses have become somewhat less prevalent in recent years. After a slowdown in new residential development at the beginning of the decade, new neighborhoods are being planned throughout the town, including some infill-type developments. Among these are an expansion of the Savannah Ridge neighborhood, which would include completing the connection of Grant Street between 73rd Avenue and US 30, and the West Foxmoor neighborhood on the site of the former Broadmoor Golf

Course. These neighborhoods are planned to include space for future parks and open space dedication. Savannah Cove at (West 73rd Avenue) is a new housing development located north of the Savannah Ridge neighborhood. This development includes 72 lots of duplexes and single-family homes. Other planned neighborhoods in the Town include Phases 2 and 3 of Hunter's Glen (86th Avenue and Merrillville Road) and Heritage North (near Taney Street and US 30.) Neither of these developments, however, are expected to include park space. Currently are under construction or completed are; Liberty Estates PUD (Whitcomb and 84th Place), consisting of 633 residential homes and duplexes, and Creekwood Crossing (73rd, Clark and Willams Street) Phase 3, consisting of 23 single-family homes. Brookstone North, Phase 2 condominiums located on Taft Street, south of 73rd Avenue are under construction, with some units completed. Formerly the Broadfield PUD (E. 93rd and Georgia Street), now known as NOVO Flats, is a multifamily development consisting of 270 units, which are under construction or completed.



Commercial uses are primarily located along the major arterials of US 30 and Broadway. The area around this intersection has become the de facto center of Merrillville's commercial core. While dense and bustling, at least two major redevelopment opportunities exist in this area. Century Plaza, around the southeast corner of US 30 and Broadway, is the site of the former Century Mall. While most of the US 30 and Broadway frontage has been redeveloped, several parcels of land in the interior of the site remain vacant. The Radisson/Star



Plaza complex at the intersection of US 30 and Broadway, is the site of the former Century Mall. While most of the US 30 and Broadway frontage has been redeveloped, several parcels of land in the interior of the site remain vacant. The Radisson/Star Plaza complex at the intersection of US 30 and I-65, including the Twin Towers office development, was demolished in 2018. Several proposals and ideas have been floated for these sites, including higher-end mixed-use developments and a potential conference center. However, no concrete plans for either location have been determined. One other prominent facility in the town is Purdue Research Park, located at the corner of Broadway and 101st Avenue. Other smaller commercial and modern office uses can be found along minor arterials near the Broadway and US 30 corridors, particularly along Taft Street and South Mississippi Street. Smaller industrial parks can also be found in the southern stretches of Mississippi and Whitcomb streets.

Much of the land east of I-65 in Merrillville remains undeveloped, generally consisting of various scattered uses surrounded by vacant and agricultural land, open space, or forested areas. The areas between I-65 and Grand Boulevard are currently zoned for a mix of agriculture and limited industrial uses. East of Grand Boulevard, most of the land outside the US 30 corridor is zoned for single-family residential. Because of its shared border with Gary, Merrillville benefits from bus transit service provided by Gary Public Transit Corporation (GPTC.) In 2018, GPTC launched its Broadway Metro



Express service along the Broadway corridor. Running from Gary's South Shore Station to Methodist Hospital – Southlake Campus in Merrillville, this rapid bus transit service provides easier access to services and points of interest in Merrillville and Gary. Designated stops in Merrillville include the C&O Greenway, Century Plaza, Town Hall, Merrillville High School, and Andrean High School. GPTC also runs two other routes in Merrillville, both connecting to the Broadway Metro Express service. A US 30 shuttle bus route provides access to the major shopping centers along that corridor. The general Merrillville route services various commercial and residential developments in the northern part of the town. Ross Township also provides a variety of services to all of Merrillville, as well as parts of Crown Point and Hobart. Township services include emergency financial assistance and subsidized bus service for elderly and disabled residents through South Lake County Community Action Agency.

Currently, the town has nearly 196 acres of park land, with parks ranging in size from 1/4 acre to 30 acres. The vast majority of this parkland is found in the northwest part of the Town (west of I-65 and north of US 30.) There are also several other recreation facilities throughout the Town that offer a variety of facilities and programs in Merrillville. These include three parks owned and operated by the Lake County Parks Department and four facilities run by Ross Township. Other recreational facilities in Merrillville are owned by private organizations, with access available via membership or league participation. These facilities are described in more detail in Chapter 3. The Dean and Barbara Community Center is a recent addition to the town's park assets. Built in 2021, the 22-million-dollar community center, although a long time in the

making, the completed facility did not disappoint. The new facility includes a 35' rock/boulder climbing wall, cardio fitness which includes free weights, three basketball courts, six volleyball courts, an elevated walking track, among the other amenities. For outdoor activities, there are athletic fields for football, soccer, lacrosse and other sports. A concession stand was recently built for refreshments with outside seating.

Development of the Community Center has allowed the Parks Department to expand programming. Yoga, Pilates, ballroom dancing, senior fitness and activities, self-defense classes are just a few of the offerings. The facility offers the opportunity to provide space for basketball, volleyball and pickle ball leagues as well as table tennis and Xbox tournaments.

2. Community Profile

A. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

From 2000-2010, Merrillville experienced rapid population growth, growing over 15% during the decade, at a much higher growth than the County at 2.36% during the same period. Since the last decade 2010-2020, population experienced a slight decline of 1%, but rebounded in 2022, showing an increase of 3.9%. The post-COVID-19 pandemic economy of 2021 realigned many communities, either by population decline or increase. North-West Indiana has experienced an influx of Illinois residents as a result of our lower cost of living. Some of those residents relocated to Merrillville. Merrillville has been able to average annual population growth of over 1% since 1990.

	Merrillville		Lake County	
	Total	% Change	Total	% Change
1990	27,257	-1.52%	475,594	-9.06%
2000	30,560	12.12%	484,564	1.89%
2010	35,246	15.33%	496,005	2.36%
2020	34,871	-1.06%	485,983	-2.02%
2022	36,214	3.85%	497,682	2.41%

Table 1 – Population Comparison (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

During the last decade, Lake County's overall population has declined. Between 2010-2020, the area lost over 10k County population. Lake County's population experienced a rebound during the years 2020-2022 with an increase above 2010 population. Population estimates predict Lake County will continue to experience a population increase into the future with a modest annual growth rate of 0.1% into 2025. By contrast, Merrillville is projected to see its population grow at a slightly higher rate of 1.03% in 2025

Location	1990	2000	2010	2020	2022	2025	% Change	
							1990-2022	Annual
Merrillville	27,257	30,560	35,246	34,871	36,214	37,128	32.9%	1.03%
Lake County	475,594	484,564	496,005	485,983	497,682	498,932	4.6%	0.1%

Table 2 – Population Change (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Merrillville's growth has increased over the last several years due to an increase in newly built single-family homes, duplexes and multifamily homes. When compared to other surrounding communities, the town's growth is less than many of its Southern neighbors, but outpaces its Northern neighbors. Chart XX shows population growth in Merrillville beyond 2025, with annual increases over the next decade.

Population	Year				Projection			
	2000	2010	2020	2022	2025	2030	2035	2040
	30,560	35,246	34,871	36,214	37,128	38,689	40,316	42,011

Table 3 – Population Projection, Linear Method (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Merrillville's growth is projected to continue moderate increases over the next ten to fifteen years. The annual growth rate is estimated to be 0.84%. This growth rate would add an average of 310 people per year. Over each five-year period, it is anticipated that the town will gain between 1,500 to 1,695 new residents.

Over three decades ago, in 1990, the Town of Merrillville was predominately one race. The White population in 1990 was over 90%, but declined to 70% a decade later in 2000. Racial characteristics of the town experienced a large increase in the number of the African-American population of nearly 23% in 2000. A decade later in 2010, the African-American and White population were split at 46.4% and 44.5% respectively. African-Americans are the largest ethnic group in the town today. The Hispanic population has also experienced a modest increase since 1990, and doubled in size by 2010, from 6.9% to 12.9%. By contrast, the White population in Merrillville has dipped every decade since 1990. According to the 2020 Census report, the White population is 29.7%, African-Americans are half of the town's population and the Hispanic population has risen to a high of 14.7%.

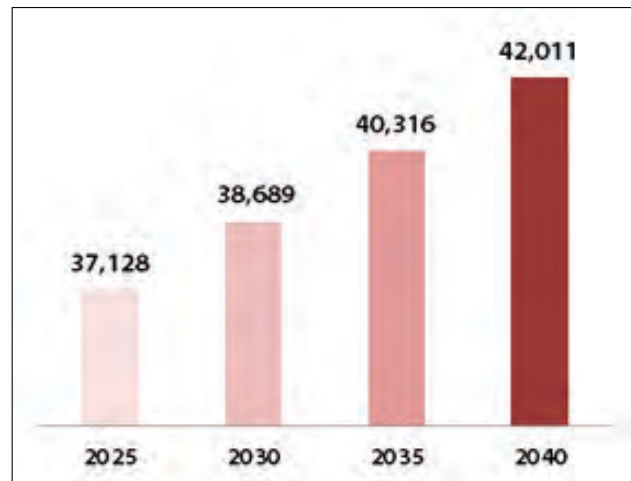


Chart 1 – Merrillville Population Projection Estimate (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community, Arsh Group)

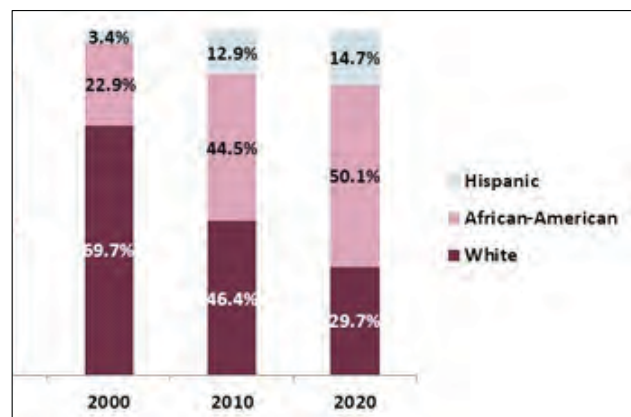


Chart 2 – Population by Race and Ethnicity (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community)

B. HOUSEHOLDS

Family households in Merrillville experienced the largest increase during the decade 2000-2010. During this period, the overall number of family households in Merrillville increased by 11%. Similarly, non-family and female-headed households increased significantly, 31.5% and 67.1% respectively. The elderly population from 2000-2010 dropped by nearly half. The following decade, 2010-2020, recorded a reversal of the elderly population with an increase of 39.8%. Family and female-headed households declined during this period and non-family households increased by nearly 26%. Overall, since 2000, the number of non-family households has continued to increase, outpacing all other family models. The current decennial Census 2020, and the 2022 ACS, 5 yr estimate record continuing family household decline, and increase in non-family, elderly households. During the same period, female heads of households fell by just over 19% in 2020, but increased by 16.2% in 2022. Altogether, however, the town saw a rise of nearly 11% in the number of households.

Households	Families	% Change	Non-Family	% Change	Female Head	% Change	Elderly	% Change	Total
2000	8,125	X	3,558	X	1,469	X	2,907	X	11,683
2010	9,016	11.0%	4,680	31.5%	2,454	67.1%	1,580	-45.6%	13,696
2020	8,640	-4.2%	5,893	25.9%	1,978	-19.4%	2,209	39.8%	14,533
2022	8,374	-3.1%	6,802	15.4%	2,299	16.2%	2,974	34.6%	15,176
Change 2010 to 2022	-7.1%		45.3%		-6.3%		88.2%		10.8%

Table 4 – Households (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

The average family size and household size has decreased over many decades, since the 1960s, when the average size was 3.7 and 3.3 respectively. These trends are common for most communities throughout the US. Merrillville household and family size has experienced minimal increase and decrease over the last thirty plus years. The average household in 1990 was 2.72 and has continued to decline each decade from (0.03 to 0.17). At the same time, family size has ranged between (3.12 to 3.16). However, the 2020-2022 family size increased slightly to 3.27, indicating the continued presence of children in family households

Household Type	2000	2010	2020	2022
Average household size	2.57	2.54	2.37	2.35
Average family size	3.12	3.16	3.12	3.27

Table 5 – Household Change (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

C. INCOME

Merrillville's median family and household income in 2020 was notably higher than Lake County. In comparison, the County family income in 2020 was \$71,632 and Merrillville's was \$76,217. The gap in household income between the County and Merrillville was ever larger: \$57,530 and \$63,381 respectively, a difference of \$5,851. Within two years, the median-family income in Merrillville continued to increase. The Median-Family Income increased by 11.09% from \$76,217 in 2020 to \$84,667 in 2022. Lake County median-income increased over the same time period to close the gap in both family and household income from (\$71,632 in 2020 to \$82,936) in 2022, and (\$57,530 in 2020 to \$66,375) in 2022. Lake County median household income increased by 15.37% between 2020 and 2022, surpassing Merrillville, which decreased by 1.83%. Table ## compares income changes for Merrillville and Lake County during the reported period.

Area	Family			Household		
	2020	2022	% Change 2020-2022	2020	2022	% Change 2020-2022
Merrillville	\$76,217	\$84,667	11.09%	\$63,381	\$62,221	-1.83%
Lake County	\$71,632	\$82,936	15.78%	\$57,530	\$66,375	15.37%

Table 6 – Median Income (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

D. AGE

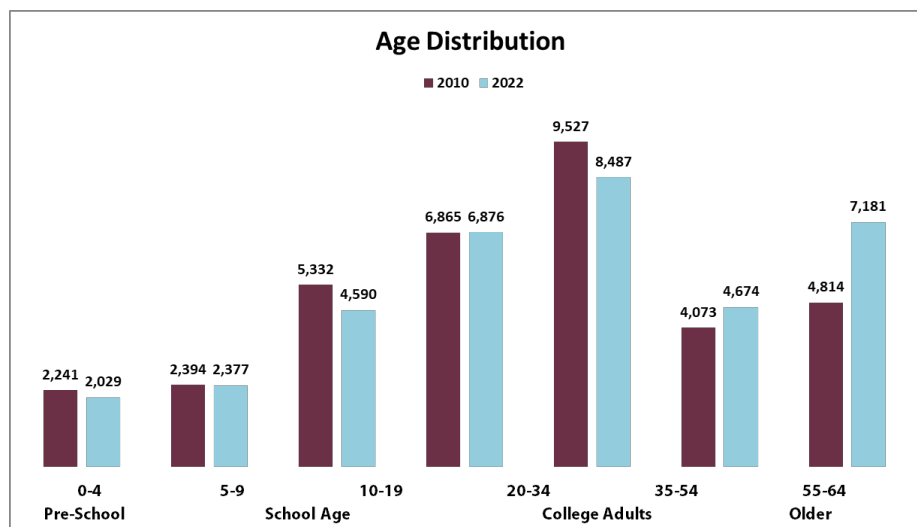


Chart 3– Age Distribution by Group (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

The Census reports a population increase since 2000, dating back to Merrillville's incorporation in 1971. Multiple shifts in the age distribution in the town have occurred over the last 22 years. In conjunction with the town's population growth, most age groups experienced some level of population increase.

Since 2010, however, there have been fluctuations. Notable is the increase among pre-school and seniors. Traditionally, adults aged (35-54) have been the largest population group in the town, and this trend has continued as reported in 2022. While that remains the case, this age group population fell 8.4% within two years from 2020-2022. During the same time-period, school-age (10-19) experienced a minor decline of less than 1%. Pre-school (0-4) declined significantly (2010-2020), but this cohort increased 23.1% as reported, 2020-2022. Seniors 65 and over represent the most stable cohort in Merrillville with a year-over-year increase. Covering a span of 12 years, seniors over the age of 65 increased by 56%. Overall, within the last two years (2020-2022), school-age (5-9) and college-adults (20-34) increased slightly, seniors over 65 increased by 18.6%, and pre-school (0-4) had the largest increase. While the large rise in older adults may signal an aging population for Merrillville, the jump in population among (0-4) year-olds may indicate migration of families into the community. During the same time-period, adults (35-54) dropped by 8.4%.

Year	Pre-School	School Age			College-Adults		Older Adults	Seniors	Total
	0-4	5-9	10-19	20 - 34	35 - 54	55 - 64	65 >		
2000	2,021	2,006	4,347	6,006	8,979	2,597	4,604	30,560	
2010	2,241	2,394	5,332	6,865	9,527	4,073	4,814	35,246	
2020	1,648	2,315	4,630	6,570	9,261	4,392	6,055	34,871	
2022	2,029	2,377	4,590	6,876	8,487	4,674	7,181	36,214	
Change 2020-2022	23.1%	2.7%	-0.9%	4.7%	-8.4%	6.4%	18.6%	2.7%	

Table 7 – Age Distribution Change (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

E. SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Table 7 shows student characteristics at Merrillville schools since 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic which began in November 2019 continues to impact education as a result of the shut-down. In September 2020 the majority of schools in Indiana reopened post Covid-19 pandemic. Overall enrollment increased post Covid-19 in the Town until 2023, however enrollment declined between (2023-2024) by 2.9%. All groups listed showed some decrease, mingled with some increase in the years (2022-2023). By and large declines were recorded for all cohorts in 2020 and 2024, except pre-k. The most prominent among intermediate 216 fewer students and elementary 107 fewer students a 21.9% and 7.3% decrease respectively. Conversation with the School District however indicates that the enrollment for 2024-2025 school year is showing a positive growth for prior years.

Year	Pre-K	Kindergarten	Elementary	Intermediate	Middle	High School	Total Enrollment
2020	151	438	2,318	985	963	2,070	5,986
2021	106	372	2,105	915	982	2,022	6,024
2022	124	385	2,150	898	1,003	2,004	6,055
2023	216	355	2188	855	919	2042	6004
2024	171	376	2,148	769	899	2,051	5,867

Table 8 – School Enrollment Characteristics (Source: Source: Indiana Data Center and Reports)

F. EMPLOYMENT

During the decade 2010-2020 Merrillville saw and increase in unemployment as a result of the Great Recession, a global economic downturn which began in 2008 and continued into 2013. In 2020, Merrillville’s unemployment rate increased by 14.3%. Lake County’s employment fared somewhat better with a marginal decrease in unemployment by 2.8%. State and National rates improved significantly by 2020. The State of Indiana dropped from 10.4% to 7.3%, a 29.8% reduction. The national unemployment rate was also reduced, at somewhat lower rate than the state, falling by 15.6%. Since 2023 unemployment in Merrillville has greatly improved, even in light of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2019. Merrillville’s unemployment rate is more than of half what it was in 2020 at 5.5%, representing a 54.2% reduction. However, the current unemployment rate of 5.5% is significantly higher than state and national averages, and slightly worse than seen in Lake County as a whole.

Area	Year		
	2010	2020	2023
Merrillville	10.5	12.0	5.5
Lake County	10.8	10.5	5.0
Indiana	10.4	7.3	3.3
U.S.	9.6	8.1	3.6

Table 9 – Employment Change (Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development)

Table 8 shows Merrillville's employment position in more detail. This table shows Merrillville added 249 workers to the labor force in the years (2020-2023). The number of workers increased by 5.4%, and those unemployed dropped by 562. Although the unemployment rate has remained high, the number of workers added to the workforce in Merrillville is encouraging, as the number of those out of work has also declined over the last several years.

Year	Town of Merrillville			
	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
2010	16,613	14,867	1,746	10.51%
2020	16,624	15,133	1,491	9.0%
2023	16,873	15,944	929	9.6%
Change 2020-2023	249	811	-562	0.6%

Table 10 – Employment Comparison and Labor Force (Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development)

With two major national highways running through it –Interstate 65 and US 30 – Merrillville offers easy access to jobs for both its residents and commuters coming to town for work. Table XX shows the change in Merrillville's workforce since 2020, the post-Covid-19 pandemic. The lasting effects of the pandemic continue to impact a considerable number of professions. Institutional mandated shutdowns that lead to remote work and learning have caused a shift in how we view work. Some industries have adapted to a point where remote work has become the norm. The service industry, particularly the commerce juggernauts such as Amazon, Temu, Walmart and other providers have benefited from the shift in how we work. Rises in the cost of goods have caused consumers to cut back on spending beyond necessities, which has reduced production. Merrillville's job sector has also been impacted by this trend. Professional occupations fell by 8%, and production, transportation, and material moving occupations dropped 13.7%. Overall, service occupations saw the highest number of new jobs with 475. Natural resources, construction, and maintenance sectors gained jobs by 6.3%.

Professional occupations:			
Service occupations:	2,677	3,152	17.7%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	1,855	1,972	6.3%

Table 11 – Merrillville Occupation (Source: 2020 and 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

G. DISABILITY

The 2022 ACS reported 5,130 people with some type of long-lasting condition or disability, representing approximately 14.3% of the total population who were aged 5 and older in the civilian non-institutionalized population. Within this population, the ACS found:

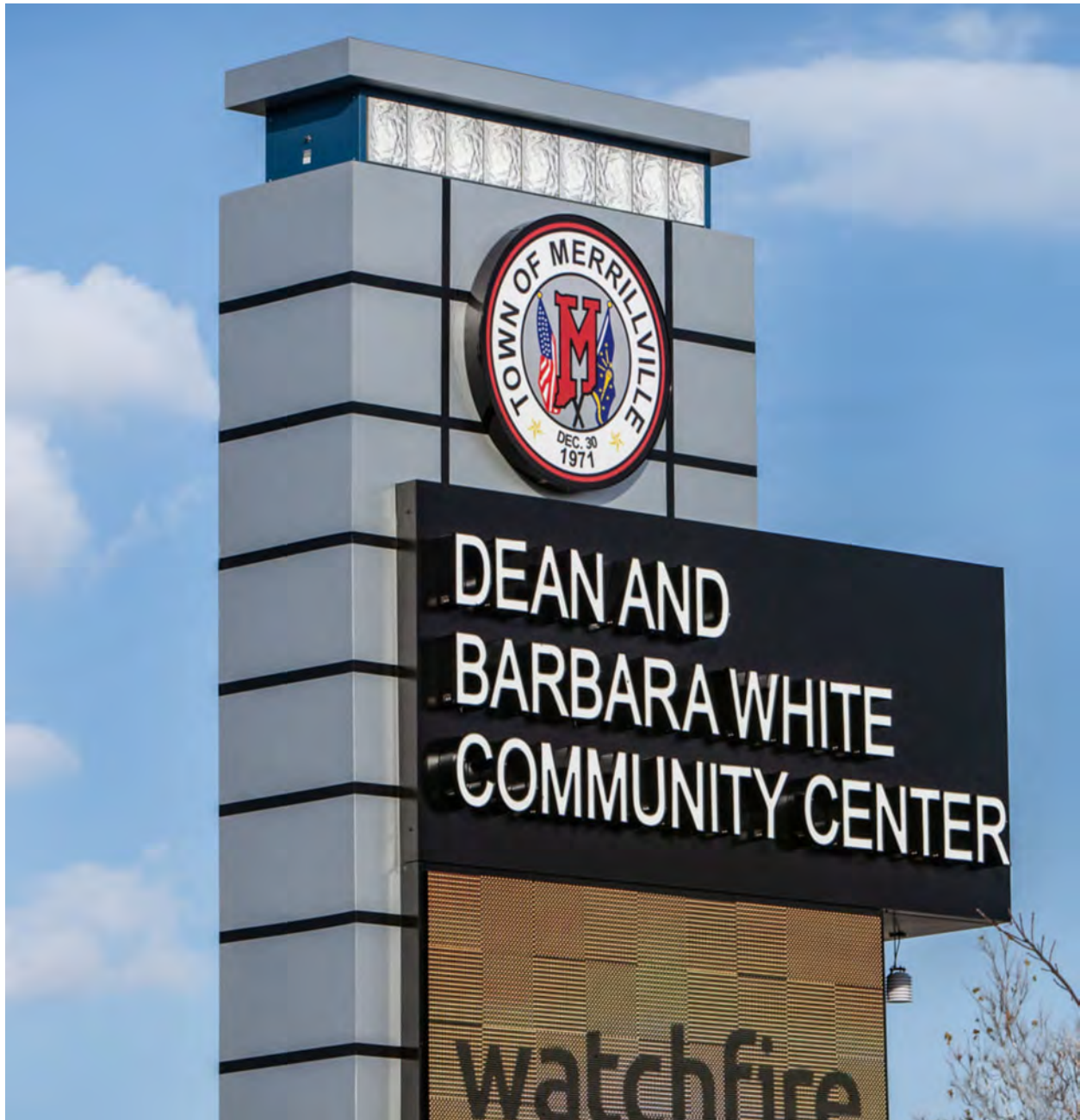
- About 8.3% of the young population, or about 564 individuals, had some type of disability
- Among the population 18-64 years old, about 9.7% had some type of disability.
- The largest segment with disability is the population group 65 years and over with approximately 44.1% having some type of disability.

Population 5 to 17 years	6,800	564	8.3%
Population 34 to 64 years	6,800	434	6.4%
With an ambulatory difficulty	x	2,613	7.9%

Table 12 - Disability Status Source: ACS 2022, 5 yr

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARKS PLANNING

- Merrillville's overall population continues modest growth and is projected to gain an average of 65 residents annually for the next 15 years. With this pace of growth, and national park trends, the town can assess current park deficiencies. Other considerations are park usage and the age and appropriateness of amenities.
- New subdivisions are either under construction and/or in the planning phases for construction. These new residential developments are sure to increase additional park needs. Part of new residential development may include park land donation.
- Recent construction of the Dean and Barbara Community Center added needed amenities at one facility to the park system. The facility offers indoor and outdoor fitness opportunities and needed activity programs.
- Partnerships with schools can be an excellent resource for programming and facilities. Underutilized swimming pools could be used intermittently outside of regular school use. Use of school assets and programming for all age groups could supplement deficiencies in the Park Department due to staffing and other challenges.
- Post pandemic, economic conditions were mixed for family and household income within the last two years (2020-2022). Family income increased substantially, while households saw a minor reduction. Additional disposable income could result in increased spending on recreational use. The Parks Department should, in turn, ensure they are able to handle this potential demand.
- The pre-school, older adult and seniors over 65 cohorts has increased since the last Parks Master Plan was updated. In addition to changes in age, ethnic diversity is on the rise, and an influx of transplants from neighboring communities, particularly the State of Illinois are relocating to Merrillville. The Parks Department may need to adjust to these conditions, requiring them to offer additional facilities and programming to meet the changing needs of the town.
- The natural features of Merrillville are a subtle, but important, and a resource that differentiates one area from another. Care should be taken to preserve and protect the features that contribute to a community's identity.
- The large amounts of natural resources in the town could suggest locations for future parks and open space preservation activities.
- New residential construction, both single-family and multifamily housing, is primarily under construction or proposed closer to the Southern section of Merrillville. A higher concentration of larger lots are located in this area. Conservation efforts must be initiated to protect the important and natural land in the future parks planning process.
- Waterways and wetland areas can be useful as trail routes and connectors, and should be considered for these purposes.



Chapter 3

Existing Conditions

Management System

The management of Merrillville parks and recreation activities and facilities is the responsibility of the Town of Schererville Parks and Recreation Department. The Parks and Recreation Department was organized on April 8, 1986, as a separate department within the Town of Merrillville. The Ordinance outlines procedures and tasks unique to the town and incorporates State Code requirements by reference to Indiana Code (IC 36-10-5-2b-1).

1. Park Authority

The Merrillville Town Council members serve as the Park Authority. The Town Council/Park Authority is responsible for budgeting, hiring, and security of all the park facilities. This body as a whole serve as the Park Authority. However, the Council has established a Parks, Recreation Committee. Indiana Codes establishes this authority according to:

- A. IC 36-10-5-2 Designation and powers and duties of park authority in certain municipalities; powers of municipality; tax levy; borrowing and issuance of bonds; deposit of funds
- B. Each second-class city that: (IC 36-4-1-1), cities of 34,000 to 599,999 (*second class cities*)

As used in this section, "park authority" means, the municipal legislative body; or

2. Committee Composition

The addition of the Dean and Barbara Community Center parks asset caused a name change to include the new center. This committee oversees parks and recreation activities on a regular basis. According to policy, the members of the Park Committee are appointed on an annual basis. The current membership is comprised of the following persons:

Parks, Recreation, & Community Center Committee

Shawn Pettit (Chair)

Shauna Haynes-Edwards

Margaret Uzelac

Keesha Hardaway

3. Park Authority Powers & Duties

Powers and duties as enacted by legislation under Section 10 of the state statute (IC 36-10-5-2), as amended to guide local authorities with the procedural processes. These guidelines outline the authority's composition, duties and responsibilities as follows:

- I. The Park Authority shall manage all public parks, including approaches that belong to the municipality.
- II. If a municipality decides, by ordinance, to establish, lay out, or improve a public park or grounds, or to make an extension of a park or grounds, it may locate the park or grounds, including appurtenances, and it may lay out and open the public ways necessary for the improvement. If it is necessary to acquire land, water rights, or easements, or a pool, lake, or natural stream of water, the Park Authority may condemn that property and take possession of it, if it is located within five (5) miles of the municipality.

The Park Authority shall manage all public parks, including approaches that belong to the municipality.

III. If a municipality decides, by ordinance, to establish, lay out, or improve a public park or grounds, or to make an extension of a park or grounds, it may locate the park or grounds, including appurtenances, and it may lay out and open the public ways necessary for the improvement. If it is necessary to acquire land, water rights, or easements, or a pool, lake, or natural stream of water, the Park Authority may condemn that property and take possession of it, if it is located within five (5) miles of the municipality. Before the Park Authority condemns the property, it shall assess the damages to the owners of the property at a meeting of the authority. Additional condemnation proceedings are the same as those provided for the taking of property to open streets. III. The Park Authority may adopt rules concerning the laying out, improvement, preservation, ornamentation, and management of parks. The Park Authority shall allow monuments or buildings for libraries, works of art, or historical collections to be erected in a park, as long as they are under the control of the persons in charge of the park, and no enclosure separates them from the rest of the park.

IV. The legislative body of the municipality may also levy a tax on all taxable property in the municipality to pay for park property and for its improvement. The legislative body may also borrow money and issue the bonds of the municipality at any rate of interest payable annually or semiannually and may sell them for at least par value. The money derived from the sale of bonds may be used only for the purchase or improvement of parks. The legislative body shall annually levy a tax sufficient to pay the interest on the debt on all taxable property in the municipality to create a sinking fund for the liquidation of the principal of the debt.

V. If the Park Authority of a city decides to lease any buildings or grounds belonging to the city and located in a public park when they are not required for public use, the proceeds shall be deposited with the city fiscal officer to the credit of park funds and devoted to the improvement of public parks.

VI. Any non-reverting fund that was created under IC 19-7-6 (before its repeal on September 1, 1981) continues until abolished by ordinance of the municipal legislative body. The legislative body may include, in the Park Authority's annual budget, an item and an appropriation for the specific purposes of a non-reverting capital fund. Money put in the fund may not be withdrawn except for the purposes for which the fund was created, unless the legislative body repeals the ordinance creating the fund. The repeal may not be made under suspension of the rules. Money procured from fees shall be deposited at least once each month with the municipal fiscal officer. The fiscal officer shall deposit the money either in a special non-reverting operating fund or in the non-reverting capital fund as directed by the park authority. The legislative body may provide, by ordinance, that expenditures may be made from the special non-reverting operating fund without appropriation. Money from fees procured from golf courses, swimming pools, skating rinks, or other similar facilities requiring major expenditures for management and maintenance, may not be deposited in this fund. Money from either fund shall be disbursed only on approved claims that are allowed and signed in the same manner as other claims of the municipality are allowed and signed.

As added by Acts 1981, P.L.309, SEC.112. Amended by Acts 1981, P.L.320, SEC.19; P.L.3-1990, SEC.142.

It should be noted the Park Authority, as the Town Council, will continue to have functions and duties as it has been provided by the State Code for the Town Council. As such, the Parks Department reports directly to the Merrillville Town Council through the Parks Committee and the Parks Authority. Due to Merrillville's increasing and projected population the Town may find it more beneficial to create a Park Board.

The Town of Merrillville, Ordinance 86-04, outlines additional processes and procedures to address local needs as follows:

Sec. 13.5-1. Park authority.

- (a) Pursuant to Indiana Code 36-10-5-2(b) the board of trustees of the town are hereby established as the "park authority".
- (b) The park authority shall manage all public parks, including approaches, that belong to the town.
- (c) The park authority may recommend to the board of trustees and the trustees thereby by ordinance may establish, lay out, or improve public parks or grounds, or make extensions of parks or grounds. If it is necessary to acquire land, water rights or easements, or a pool, lake or natural stream of water, the park authority may condemn that property and take possession of it if within five (5) miles of the town. However, before the park authority condemns the property, it shall assess the damages to the owners of the property at a meeting of the authority. Additional condemnation proceedings are the same as those provided for the taking of property to open streets.
- (d) The park authority may adopt rules concerning the laying out, improvement, preservation, ornamentation, and management of the park. The park authority shall allow monuments or buildings for libraries, works of art, or historical collections to be erected in a park, as long as they are under the control of the persons in charge of the park and no enclosure separates them from the rest of the park.
- (e) The board of trustees of the town may levy a tax on all taxable property in the municipality to pay for park property and for its improvement. The board of trustees may also borrow money and issue bonds of the town at any rate of interest payable annually or semiannually and may sell them for at least par value. The money derived from the sale of bonds may be used only for the purchase or improvement of the parks. The board of trustees shall annually levy a tax sufficient to pay the interest on the debt on all taxable property in the town to create a sinking fund for the liquidation of the principal of the debt.
- (f) The park authority may employ such workmen and purchase or contract for material as it may deem necessary with the approval of the board of trustees; provided that in no case shall the amount paid for workmen or the amount to be paid for such purchase of contracts exceed the amount of money appropriated for that purpose.
- (g) The park authority may employ a competent person as the director of parks and recreation for the town and define his duties; the appointment of said director and his salary shall be approved by the town board of trustees. (Ord. No. 86-4, § 1, 4-8-86)

The State code also outlines the duties and responsibilities of the Park Superintendent as described in "IC 36-10-3-14". Under this section, the superintendent reports to the Park Board and is responsible for operations which include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Propose annually a plan for the operation of the department;
- 2) Administer the plan as approved by the board;
- 3) Supervise the general administration of the department;
- 4) Keep the records of the department and preserve all papers and documents of the department;
- 5) Recommend persons for appointment as assistants if the board determines there is a need;
- 6) Appoint the employees of the department, subject to the approval of the board, according to the standards and qualifications fixed by the board and without regard to political affiliation;
- 7) Prepare and present to the board an annual report; and
- 8) Perform other duties that the board directs.

The administrative composition of a Town's parks and recreation department is linked to park asset conservation and expansion. The State has provided standard guidelines to ensure that all communities maintain certain standards of operations. Not all cities and towns have adopted a staffing structure which includes a parks superintendent as described by the State.

2. Parks and Recreation Department

Parks and recreation departments are a vital part of a community. Providing residents and visitors alike places to enjoy comprised of green space, gardens, lakes and more. The department also offers recreation, fitness, cultural and educational programs.

The Merrillville Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the development and upkeep of the Merrillville parks, trails, and approaches. The Department currently is responsible for 20 parks, 2 trails, and one community facility. The Department also offers a select number of recreational programs for the residents.

A. Mission Statement

"The Town of Merrillville Parks & Recreation Department is dedicated to fostering a vibrant community by providing healthy lifestyle opportunities for all residents. We champion inclusion and diversity, ensuring that every individual feels welcome and valued. With unwavering integrity, we strive to build a strong sense of community and promote continuous growth through innovative programs and services."

B. Accomplishments

The town's Park's Department has been working diligently since the 2019 Parks Master Plan. With the support of the Parks, Recreation, & Community Center Committee, and community partners, a number of goals have been accomplished. Most notably is the completed construction and opening of the Community Center.

Dean and Barbara White Community Center

In March of 2021, the new community recreation center was completed and opened. The efforts to plan, fund and execute all aspects of was nothing short of conglomeration of a multitude of organizations coming together for the community. The former Y&W Theater site has been transformed to over 80,000 sf, including the mezzanine of athletic and programming choices, all located in one venue. The 22-million-dollar community center includes; 35' rock/boulder climbing wall, cardio fitness, free weights, three basketball courts, six volleyball courts, and an elevated walking track. Outdoor amenities are also available and a concession stand.

Trails

Phase 3 of the C&O Greenway extension was completed in 2023. This project included the construction of 533 linear feet of trail, located slightly west of the C & O trail head at Innsbrook Country Club, and Taft Street. The work was primarily funded through grants and other town funds.

Tree Planting

A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USFS) regional grant in 2024 added apple orchards to two park assets. The grant totaling 30K provided plantings for Pruzin and Rosebalm parks.

Other improvements have been made over time. In spite of a limited parks budget the department has continued to meet goals and recommendations. On an ongoing basis, the parks department has focused on upgrading park equipment and facilities, as well as correcting various ADA-related issues.

Amenity and program improvements, upgrades to older play equipment and expansions continue to be made to town parks with limited resources and grant assistance. These activities are summarized below.

	Park	Improvements	Cost	Year
	Adam Benjamin			
	-	Installed new play equipment, safety surfacing, accessible route.	\$ 94,642	2018
	Barclay Village	Undeveloped		
	C & O Trail			
	-	533 LF asphalt /C & O trail head at Innsbrook CC & Taft St.	\$1,207,000	2023
	-	Phase 2, Rd 53	\$ 900,000	2016
	Devonshire			
	-	Undeveloped		
	Erie-Ladawanna Trail			
-	Re-surfaced 1.567 miles & parking lot off of Whitcomb St.	\$ 142,173	2018	
-	Installed bench with solar charging station on trail.	\$ 13,000	2018	
-	Installed bollards to protect trail from adjacent street.	\$ 14,590	2018	
	Forest Hills			
	-	Bridge repair for visit ability/accessibility	\$ 20,800	2023
	-	Resurfacing	\$ 29,000	2016
-	Installed new play equipment, safety surfacing, accessible route.	\$ 76,063	2015	
	Lincoln Terrace			
	-	Undeveloped		
	Meadowdale			
-	Undeveloped			
	Meadowland			
	-	Installed swings, safety surfacing and accessible route.	\$ 13,390	2016
	Meadowland Estates			
-	Undeveloped			
	Old Mill			
	-	Undeveloped		
	Preserves			
-	undeveloped			
	Pruzin			
	-	Heavy duty poly coated picnic benches (5) for outdoor activities.	\$ 4,885	2019
	-	Installed accessible route from parking lot to playground.	\$ 1,800	2017
-	Installed upland forest and butterfly garden.			
	Savannah Ridge			
	-	Installed new play equipment, safety surfacing, accessible route.	\$ 62,285	2019
	Southbrook			
-	Installed new play equipment, safety surfacing, accessible route.	\$ 78,374	2016	
	Stefek			
	-	Installed swings, safety surfacing and accessible route.	\$ 3,638	2016
	Union			
-	Undeveloped			
	Wirtes			
	-	Installed new play equipment, safety surfacing, accessible route.	\$ 72,000	2015
	OTHER IMPROVEMENTS			
	Playground Equipment - Wirtes		\$ 31,881	2013
	Playground Equipment - Forest Hills		\$ 28,529	2013
	Playground Equipment - Southbrook		\$ 28,539	2013
	Rubberized Surface - Crescent Lake		\$ 15,114	2015
	Rubberized Surface - Meadowdale		\$ 21,649	2015
	Site Prep & Rubberized Surface - Pruzin		\$ 37,690	2015
	Playground Equipment - Rosenbalm		\$ 29,274	2012

3. Recreation Programs

Dating back to the initial Master Plan 2005 the parks department has worked diligently to maintain and expand recreation programs choices. Merrillville's programming aims to continue to offer a variety of options for the youth, elderly and everyone in between. According to 2024 (NRPA) report the three most popular offerings by agencies are themed special events (89 percent), social recreation events (88 percent), and team sports (86 percent). The targeted programs are for Children, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities. The breakdown of these programs are; Eighty-three percent-summer camp, Seventy-eight percent, older adult, and two-thirds, specific teens and people with disabilities.

Indoor Recreation Programs were previously hosted at Pruzin Center. The Pruzin Center is no longer part of parks and recreation department assets. In 2022, the Pruzin Center became the Police Training Facility. As a result of the transfer of the Pruzin Center asset, the department was without an adequate facility to host recreation programs. This void resulted in the temporary reduction of programs for the community. Merrillville's recreation program offerings have varied over the years. During peak programming Ballroom Dancing, Senior Pinochle, and Yoga were consistently well attended. Staff has begun robust efforts to re-establishing programs. The recent addition of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center has provided opportunity to add other programs and activities. The 80,000 sf facility includes ample fitness equipment and the walking track in the mezzanine, and offers indoor exercise opportunity for all ages, in a safe and climate controlled environment.

Increasing recreation programming after Pruzin Park was no longer available had not been pursued were since completion of the 2020 Parks Master Plan. The department's priority was primarily focused on the design and construction of the community center. In addition, the transfer of the Pruzin Center reduced staff's ability to maintain programs due to the shift in priorities. As a result, current program offerings have been reduced to Pinochle for seniors and Lucky Charms Bracelet Making Class for Youth. Robust efforts to re-establish recreation programs, now located at the D & B White Community Center increased to include the following. Programs offerings have been separated into NRPA categories and groups.

Park Programs: Social Recreation

Children, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities, Seniors

Adult Fitness

- Dance - Adult - Freelance, Sessions (1-3) just move/learn a combo (14-99 yrs)
- Dance - Adult - Intro, Sessions (1-3) ballet, jazz and lyrical (14-99 yrs)
- Dance - Adult - Relaxation, Sessions (1-3) just move your body, relax, stretch (14-99 yrs)
- Adult Yoga – Session (1-3) (18-99 yrs)

Youth Enrichment

- Cookies Canvas (mixed media hedgehog painting) (5-8 yrs)
- Cookies Canvas (mixed media turtle painting) (9-13 yrs)
- Dance - Youth - Creative Movement, Sessions (1-3) (2-5 yrs)
- Dance (Intro) Youth Blazing Stars Sessions (1-3) (5-8 yrs)
- Dance (Intro) Youth Shooting Stars Sessions (1-3) (9-12 yrs)
- Painting Class (Youth Ceramics) (5-8 yrs)
- Painting Class (Pre-Teen Ceramics) (9-13 yrs)

Park Programs: Themed Special Events

Children, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities, Seniors

- Independence Day Parade

Park Programs: Team Sports

Children, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities, Seniors

Youth Enrichment

- Youth Yoga – Session (1-3) (18-99 yrs)

Adult Sports

- Adult Co-ed (indoor volleyball league) (18-99) yrs

Youth Sports

- Youth Basketball League (High School Div) (14-17) yrs
- Youth Basketball League (Junior Div) (8-10) yrs
- Youth Basketball League (Senior Div) (11-13) yrs
- NFL Flag Football League (High School Div) (14-17) yrs
- NFL Flag Football League (Junior Div) (8-10) yrs
- NFL Flag Football League (Senior Div) (11-13) yrs

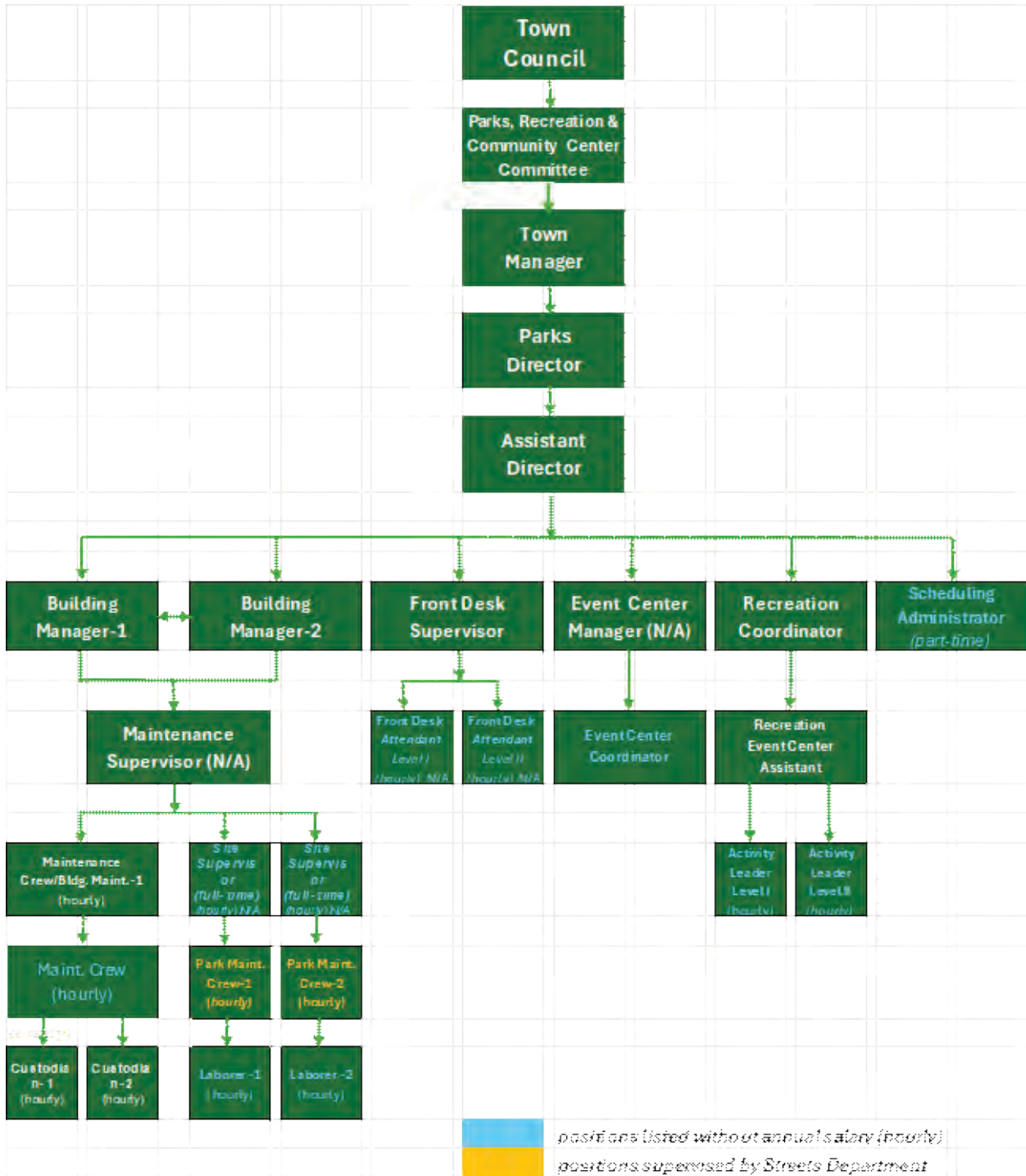
4. Park Staffing

Full-Time Equivalent Employees (FTE) refers to optimal staffing according to 2024 NRPA. The FTE should increase as an agencies jurisdiction population increases. The median FTEs per 10,000 residents 8.9. Parks and Recreation staffing expenditures typically include is operations, maintenance (46 percent), and programming (31 percent). The conservative equivalent for parks and recreation for the town would be 26.7. Due to budget constraints, recommended for Merrillville's Parks and Recreation department is 14 staff, comprised of full-time, part-time, and contract workers.

The Town of Merrillville's operational structure is comprised of a Parks and Recreation Committee that reports to the Town Council. Town of Merrillville Parks and Recreation's proposed operational structure is outlined in Exhibit 5. The Director of Parks and Recreation is responsible for a number of recreation activities and facility maintenance. Parks maintenance is supervised by the Streets Department.

New positions have been added to support operations at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. A number of positions of the parks and recreation department administrative duties are assigned to the community center. Two maintenance staff duties are supervised by the Streets Department, and other maintenance employees may work with the Public Works Department. Department staffing levels prior to the construction of the D & B Community Center was seven employees (3 full-time, management and support staff), (4 part-time support), and program instructors. Proposed staffing levels reflect a significant increase as a result of the new community center, from seven to between 24-27 (22 full-time, management), (2 part-time), and a number of program instructors that vary in number. The proposed organizational structure provides sufficient staff for both the community center, and parks and recreation activities. Recreation programming has increased after the construction of the community center. Proposed department staff is comprised of a Director, Assistant Director, Building Manager (2 positions), Maintenance Supervisor, two park maintenance crew, site supervisors (2), (full-time) and (part-time), and laborer(s) (hourly). The recreation arm of the Parks Department staff are: Recreation Coordinator, Recreation Event Center Assistant, Activity Leader, Level I and II. Staff dedicated to the community center include the Building Manager, Maintenance Crew/Bldg. maintenance, custodian (2), and maintenance Crew (hourly).

**Exhibit 5
Town of Merrillville Organizational Chart**



5. Maintenance

The maintenance department under the proposed structure would be comprised of a building manager, maintenance supervisor, two park maintenance crew, site supervisors (2), (full-time) and (part-time), and laborer(s) (hourly). Despite the part-time status, however, all maintenance workers generally have 40 hour/week schedules. The number of hourly laborers varies based on need. Park maintenance crew members may also be supervised by the Street Department. The maintenance supervisor and aforementioned staff members are responsible for the maintenance of all the parks and trails in the Town. Other minor Town facilities and amenities are maintained by the Parks maintenance staff, such as the Town's entry gateway signs. The proposed maintenance staffing is closer to national averages. NRPA recommends 46% of staff dedicated to operations and maintenance. Proposed staff levels for operations and maintenance is 40%, which is slightly below the NRPA recommendation.

The D & B White Community Center building has dedicated staff to oversee operations at the facility. Proposed staffing includes the Building Manager who oversees the maintenance crew, building maintenance crew, and custodians. Other coordinated activities with maintenance at the community center involve the recreation activities. Proposed recreation staff in the department include the Recreation Coordinator, recreation event center assistance, activity leader level -I, and activity leader level -II. The Community Center also includes proposed support staff for coordinating operations which include the front desk supervisor oversees a part-time scheduling administrator, front desk attendant level-I, and front desk attendant level-II.

Below is a list of general tasks the maintenance department performs. Unless otherwise noted, these tasks are regularly performed throughout the year.

Mow grass & weed eat.

- Spray weeds
- Repair playground equipment
- Trim trees in parks and on walking trails
- Maintain trails weekly, mow, trim, empty garbage, check benches for graffiti, vandalism
- Garbage pick-up at all parks
- Paint equipment
- Remove any graffiti
- Maintain all six Merrillville Gateway signs
- Set up and break down special events
- Maintenance and Repair of Equipment
- Maintenance and repair to park building
- Plant trees, bushes, flowers, mulch, fertilize & water
- Plant grass seed

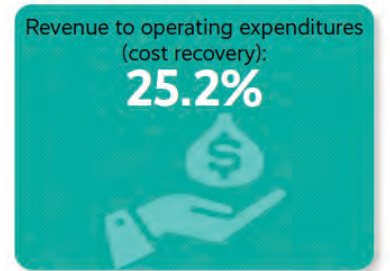
- Maintain park vehicles and equipment.
- Plow snow and shovel sidewalks in winter months

6. Budget

The 2024 NRPA reports typical park and recreation annual operating budget at 6.45 million, with annual operating expenses of \$99.47 per capita. An overall parks and recreation budget expenditures include: (Park and Non-Park site, \$8,260 per acre), and Per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employee, \$110,912 annual operating). Personnel services account for more than half of the operating expenditures at 54%. On average, total operating expenditures for parks and recreation agencies are: 39% parks, 39%, and 17% administration.



Agency funding sources are received from a variety of sources. NRPA reports the “General Fund” as the most common source, generating \$22.58 annually per resident. Five-Year Capital Budget, which increases as population increases. Capital Improvement, target amount 88%, split between renovations (67%), and new development (33%). Improvement dollars are also allocated by park improvement at 70% , and building 30%. Merrillville Parks and Recreation funding sources include: Cumulative Capitol Development (CCD), Grants, Other, Grant Match, Other Town Funds, Impact Fees, Public Works and D & B White Foundation. Table XX presents the potential funding sources. The parks and recreation department budget for the next five years represents a significant increase from previous years. Factors impacting potential funding sources include the D & B White Foundation, an increase in Park impact fees, and proposed new housing construction. The Department’s budget in 2019 was \$397,240, or about \$11.29 park expenditures per resident



Historically, the Merrillville Parks and Recreation Department has had a much lower than average expenditure in parks and recreation programming based on National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and other communities. The majority of the annual department expenditures are budgeted for operations. There are very limited amount of funds available for capital improvements. This lack of funding make the Department severely undercapitalized to carry out park improvements, programming, overall upkeep, and maintenance. The Town does have a park impact fee that can be used for various park improvements. Park Impact fee has recently been updated and reflects and increase 10.3% for larger single-family home, duplex and townhouse, and a 16.3% increase for smaller townhouse, duplex, and condo. Revenues are anticipated to be higher and should help lessen the impact of previous under funding for park maintenance and upkeep.

Table 12 - Merrillville Parks Budget History

Fund	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
General Funds (101)	\$ 129,420	\$ 291,100	\$ 300,840	\$ 300,840	\$ 300,840
Park Donation, Grants (283)	\$ 100	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Park Capital Funds (CCD)	\$ 75,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
Sub-Total	\$ 129,420	\$ 291,100	\$ 300,840	\$ 300,840	\$ 300,840
Impact Fees (224)	\$ 56,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000
Non Reverting (215)	\$ 31,600	\$ 36,400	\$ 36,400	\$ 36,400	\$ 36,400
Sub-Total	\$ 87,600	\$ 96,400	\$ 96,400	\$ 96,400	\$ 96,400
Total	\$ 217,020	\$ 387,500	\$ 397,240	\$ 397,240	\$ 397,240

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES - 2025-2029						
Source	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Commulative Capital Develop. (CCD)	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$ 80,000	\$80,000	\$400,000
Grants (Federal and State)						
CDBG		\$40,000		\$40,000		\$80,000
DNR *	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$250,000
Other	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$100,000
Grants (Town Match)	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$250,000
Other Town Funds (Food & Beverage)	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$500,000
Park Impact Fee	\$302,000	\$108,000	\$108,000	\$108,000	\$108,000	\$734,000
Town Public Works	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$80,000
D&B White Foundation	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000	\$7,000,000
Annual Total	\$2,018,000	\$1,864,000	\$1,824,000	\$1,864,000	\$1,824,000	
Total (5 years)						\$9,394,000

Table 13 – Merrillville Park Budget

Source: Town of Merrillville

Note: * one time grant

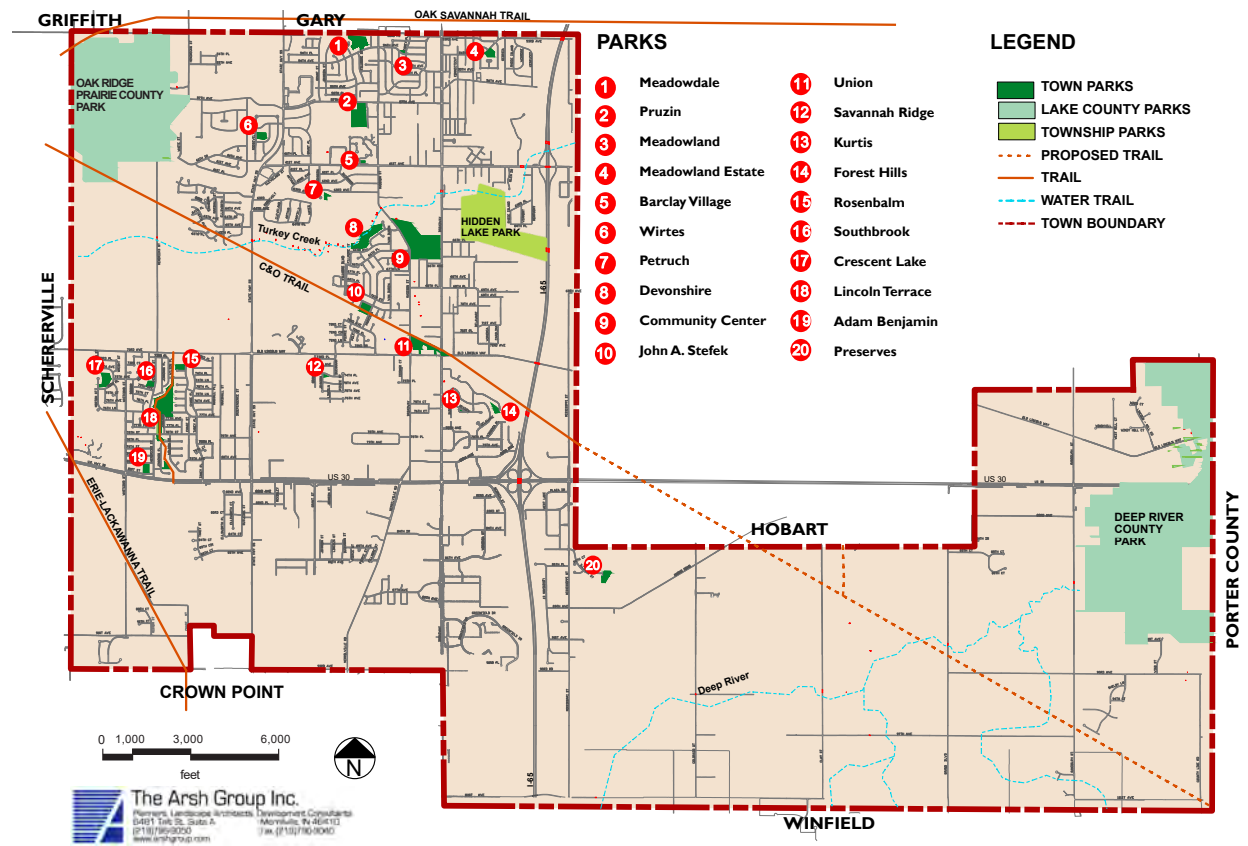
7. Park Facilities

Merrillville parks assets are comprised of 20 parks, 2 trails, and one community center. Current park offerings include 196.6 acres. The addition of the new Dean and Barbara White Community Center added additional indoor square footage to allow for additional amenities in a temperature controlled environment. Thereby adding space and opportunity to accommodate a variety of activities for residents of all ages.

The 2024 NRPA recommendations for park facilities lists one park for every 2,386 residents. Merrillville's Parks and Recreation Department has one park for every 1,811 residents per park, based on the 2022 Census population of 36,214, which exceeds the NRPA recommendation. Standard acres of parkland per resident is 10.6 per 1,000 residents. In this case the Parks Department has 5.44 acres per 1,000 residents. Additional park acres are may be added as the result of new residential development, where the developers will be donating parks lands to the community. Liberty Estates development would add 20-25 acres of new park land. Other potential new park land sites is estimated to add between 74 to 147 additional acres.



Existing Parks



8. Community Parks

Community parks offer opportunities for a wide variety of active and passive recreational uses, such as athletic complexes, walking trails, picnic areas, and nature viewing areas. They are typically larger than 20 acres in size, but can be smaller based on their overall usage and function within the Town. Merrillville currently has two parks that are classified as community parks, including the newly acquired community center site.

Community Parks

1. Community Center
2. Pruzin

Community Center

6700 Broadway

CHARACTER

A 27.8 acre Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The new recreation center has frontage on Broadway. The western portion features a wooded floodplain area along Kaiser Ditch. Access to the site from the west (Harrison Street) is planned via a new roundabout. The new facility offers a number of recreational and other uses.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Community Center building/Park Dept. Offices
- Concessions Building/Stand
- Elevated Walking Track
- Fitness Area with free weights
- Flag Pole
- Football/ Soccer field
- Multi-function Event Space
- Parking lot
- Permanent bench (3)
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path
- Volleyball Court

OPPORTUNITIES

- Expansion of the Facility for additional programs
- Reprogramming of the currently occupied Boys and Girls Club rooms
- Establishment of arts and craft and special events.



Pruzin

5750 Tyler Street

CHARACTER

A 23.1-acre community park, with several acres of wetland & lowlands in the center. The park also utilizes land owned by Merrillville Intermediate School, which is not reflected here. The nearby public works and E.M.S. facilities to the southeast are no longer considered part of the park. The park has a butterfly garden. An Apple Orchard was planted on the north side of the park in 2024.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Flag Pole
- Gazebo (decorative wood)
- Parking Lot
- Picnic table (2) (newer)
- Playground (newer)
- Shelter / Pavillion (newer)
- Swing Set (older) (toddler & older children)
- Walking path & Boardwalk (newer)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Community Garden
- Disc Golf Basket
- Drinking Fountain
- Multi-purpose tennis/pickle ball/ basketball Ct.
- Restroom/Concessions Building/Stand
- Ball fields



Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks offer active and passive recreational facilities for all age groups. They are generally located within walking distance to neighborhood residents. Neighborhood parks are typically more than five acres in size, but can be smaller based on their overall usage. Neighborhood parks typically include field games, court games, shelters, and playgrounds. The Town of Merrillville currently has seven parks that are classified as neighborhood parks, three of which are currently undeveloped.

Neighborhood Parks

1. Devonshire
2. Old Mill
3. Rosenbalm
4. Southbrook
5. Stefek
6. Union
7. Wirtes

Devonshire

6500 Harrison Drive

CHARACTER

A 9.9-acre neighborhood park located along Turkey Creek. The park lies within the Turkey Creek floodplain and is predominantly undeveloped. In recent years, most of the lowland south and east of Turkey Creek has been devoted to native plantings. A small wooded island is located on the park's west side.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Walking path & bridge

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Master Plan
- Park Sign
- Playground (small)
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)
- Trails



Old Mill

6700 Broadway

CHARACTER

A 1.6-acre parcel within Merrillville's Historic District. A Turkey Creek tributary runs through much of the site and along where the Old Mill building used to stand. Most of the site is within a floodplain, sloping sharply away from 73rd Avenue.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Parking lot

OPPORTUNITIES

- Master Plan
- Park Sign
- Outdoor plaza



Rosenbalm

7402 Chase Street

CHARACTER

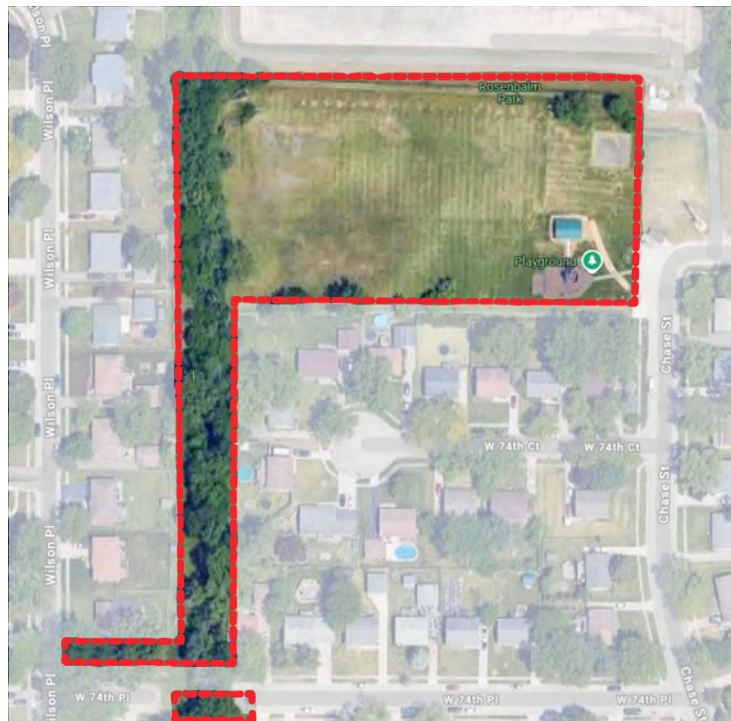
A 3.5-acre neighborhood park. Kaiser Ditch runs along the west edge of the park. The remainder of the park is generally open grassland in character. The play area was recently replaced, though older uses in the park, including the abandoned basketball court, still remain.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Ballfield
- Bench (3) (newer)
- Parking Lot
- Picnic table (newer)
- Playground (newer)
- Shelter / Pavilion (newer)
- Swing Set

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Community Garden



Southbrook

7448 Hendricks Street

CHARACTER

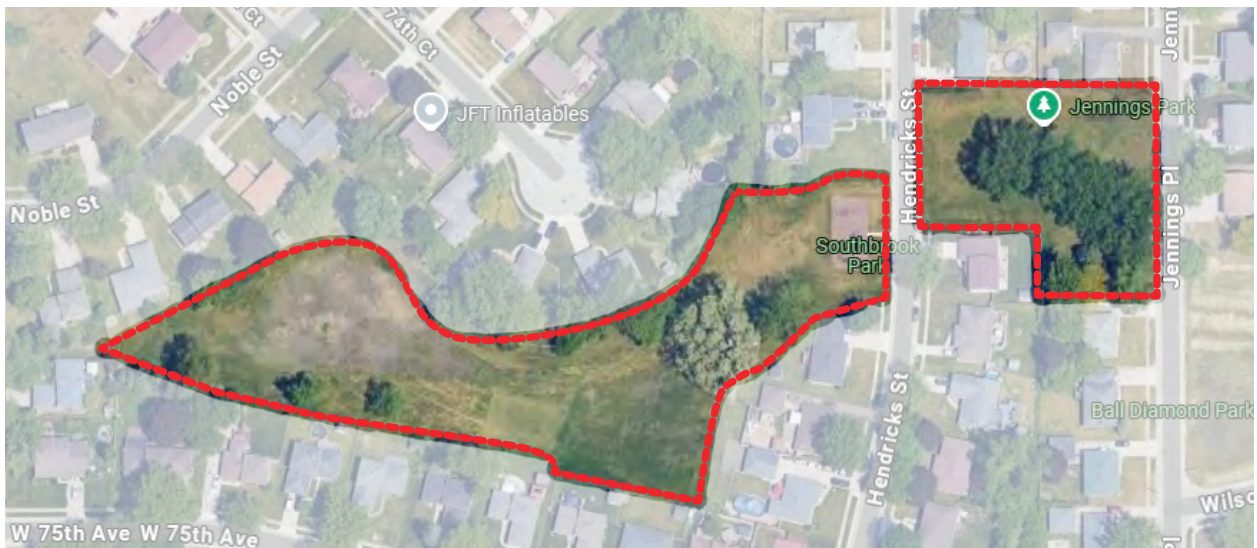
A 4.0-acre neighborhood park divided by Hendricks Street. Only the western area is currently developed. The eastern parcel of the parkland is a mixture of open space and shade trees. Much of the acreage is surrounded by residential homes. A third parcel (east of Jennings Place) was sold to a private entity.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Playground
- Swing Set
- Trash container-portable

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Shelter



CHARACTER

A 3.0-acre neighborhood park. Recent renovations have created a C&O Greenway trailhead, with new play equipment, shelter, benches, bicycle racks, and a second parking lot being installed in the park's southeast corner. This renovation, however, has negatively impacted the ballfield by infringing on the outfield playing area. The tennis and basketball courts in the northwest corner have had all equipment and fencing removed, but the pavement remains intact.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Bench (4) (newer)
- Bike Rack - Single Bay (4) (older)
- Bike Rack - Multi Bay (1) (newer)
- Parking Lot (2)
- Picnic Table (2) (newer)
- Playground (newer)
- Shelter / Pavillion (newer)
- Swing Set (older) (toddler & older children)



OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Disc Golf Basket
- Drinking Fountain
- Multi-purpose tennis/pickle ball/basketball Ct.
- Restrooms
- Additional landscaping



CHARACTER

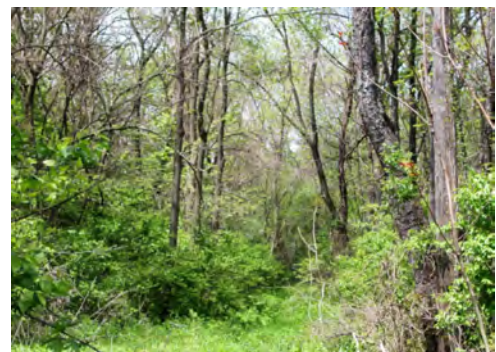
A 2.5-acre undeveloped neighborhood park. The eastern half of the park is predominantly open, whereas the west half of the park is heavily wooded. The C&O Greenway borders the park to the south.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Parking Lot

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Drinking Fountain
- Dog Park
- Park Sign
- Landscaping/Tree Planting
- Master Plan



Wirtes

5860 Roosevelt Place

A 2.3-acre neighborhood park. There are several areas in the park that are low-lying and hold water after significant rainfall. Most of the east side of the park is unused, with only the remnants of a basketball court still remaining. Eastern park access is potentially available from Roosevelt Street, but is not currently provided.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Bench (3) (newer)
- Parking Lot
- Playground (newer)
- Shelter / Pavillion (older)
- Swing Set (older) (toddler & older children)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera



Mini Parks

Mini-parks are small, protected areas and spaces in residential areas for young children, families, and the elderly. These parks can be variable in size – anywhere from a single lot to over two acres – and are equipped with playgrounds, picnic areas, and shelters, with other facilities as space and need dictates. The Town of Merrillville has nine mini parks, two of which are currently undeveloped.

Mini Parks

1. Barclay Village
2. Adam Benjamin
3. Crescent Lake
4. Forest Hills
5. Kurtis
6. Meadowland
7. Meadowland Estates
8. Preserves
9. Savannah Ridge



Barclay Village

1016 61st Avenue

CHARACTER

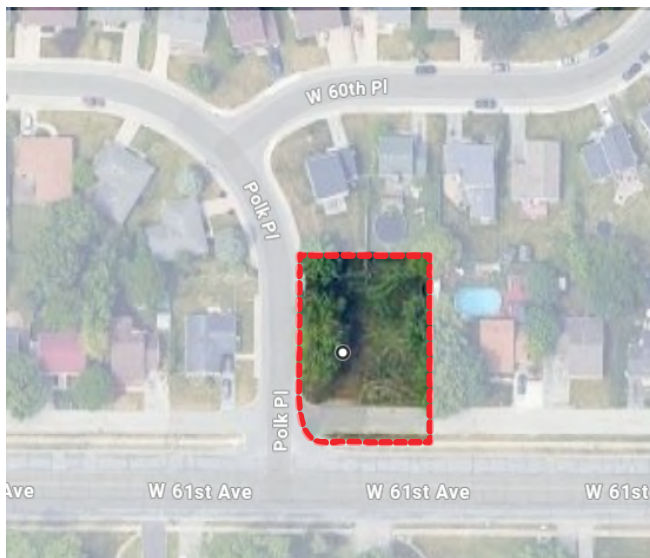
A 0.2-acre vacant mini-park. The park sits at the entrance of the Barclay Village subdivision, with a frontage road acting as a buffer from 61st Avenue traffic. A narrow sidewalk sits along part of the west side of the park.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- None

OPPORTUNITIES

- Park Sign
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)
- Playground, neighborhood plaza



Adam Benjamin

3694 W 80th Lane

CHARACTER

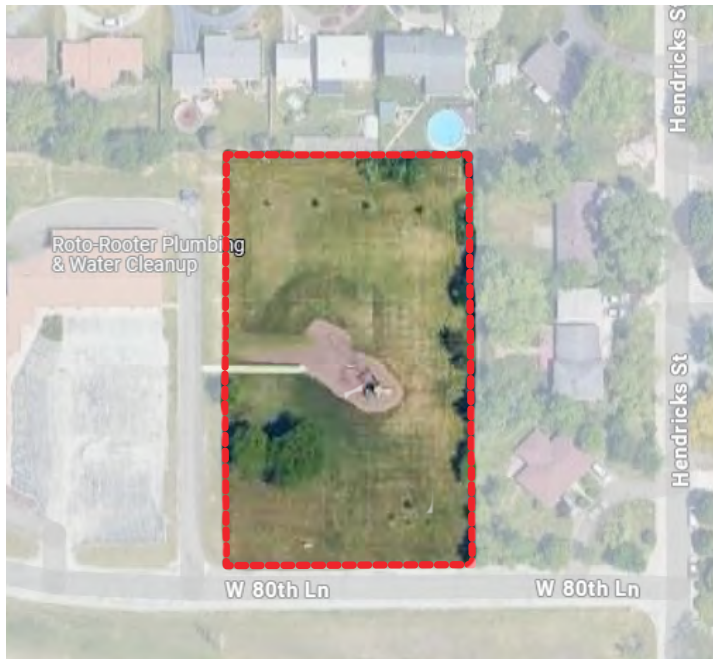
A 1.2-acre park, separated from US 30 by a frontage road. Formerly known as Hendricks Park, this is one of the most recently updated park in Merrillville. The activities along the street were removed, and a new playground was built in the center of the park. The park is bordered by single-family homes to the north and east, and a strip mall to the west. A new ADA sidewalk connects to the strip mall access road.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- - Bench
 - Picnic table (newer)
 - Playground (new)
 - Swing Set (new) (toddler & older children)

OPPORTUNITIES

- - Call Box/Camera
 - Pop-up Tent/farmers market
 - Parking Lot (western edge)
 - Sidewalks on the west side
 - Landscaping/Tree Planting
 - Master Plan



Forest Hills

78 Indian Trail

CHARACTER

A 3.8-acre park located between two creeks. Bridges are provided at the northwest and northeast sections of the park. With the Phase 2 development of the C&O Greenway, the park has been redesigned to function as a trailhead. With this, plus the availability of open land to acquire, Forest Hills has the opportunity to be reclassified as a neighborhood park.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Bike Racks
- C&O Greenway Trailhead
- Parking Lot
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Shelter / Pavillion (newer)
- Swing Set

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Drinking Fountain



Kurtis

9 1/2 Meadow Lane

CHARACTER

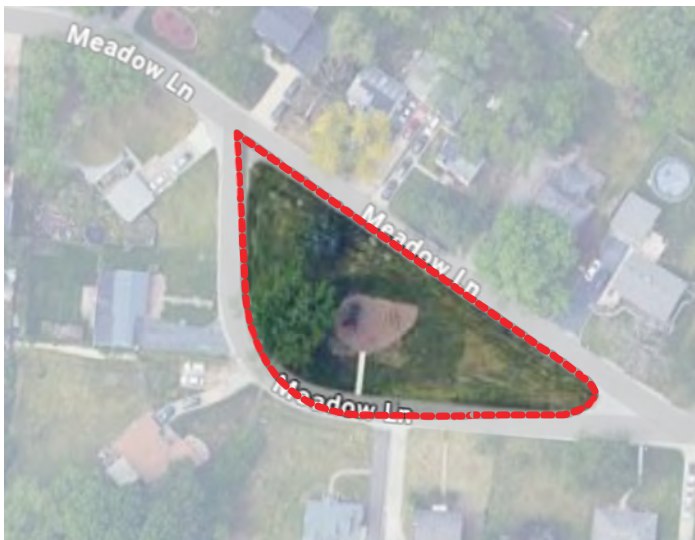
A 0.3-acre island park in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Several large street trees are found along the park's perimeter, providing ample shade.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Bench
- Playground
- Swing Set

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera



Meadowland

54th Avenue & Madison Street

CHARACTER

A 2.0-acre corner park in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Recent park upgrades have made the park a more attractive place to visit. Remnants of the mulch walking trail (in the form of depressed channels) still remain. The modern-style picnic/ shade structure is unique to the park system.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Bench
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Shade Shelter
- Walking Path

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)



Meadowland Estate

601 E 54th Avenue

CHARACTER

A 2.0-acre park fronting 54th Avenue. While a ballfield backstop is located at the southeast corner of the park, an overgrown & low-lying section of the park makes it essentially unusable. A pedestrian easement exists on the east side of the park from Carolina Street. The park is essentially wide-open and slopes away from 54th Avenue.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- None

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Park Sign
- Playground (large)
- Shelter
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)



Preserves

2081 E 87th Avenue

CHARACTER

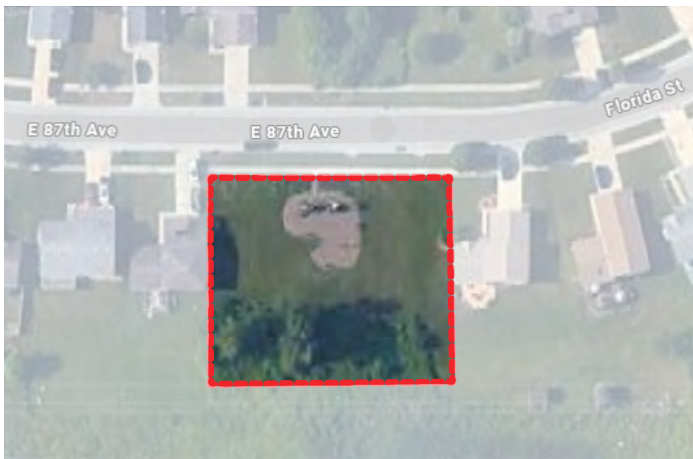
A 0.4-acre park in the middle of a residential neighborhood. The park overlooks a wetland area across 87th Avenue. A NIPSCO high-line is located immediately south of the park. There is no landscaping in the park.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Benches
- Bike Rack
- Picnic Tables
- Playground
- Walking Path

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Future expansion as a neighborhood park
- Botanic garden
- Camp ground
- Trails



Savannah Ridge

1457 W 74th Place

CHARACTER

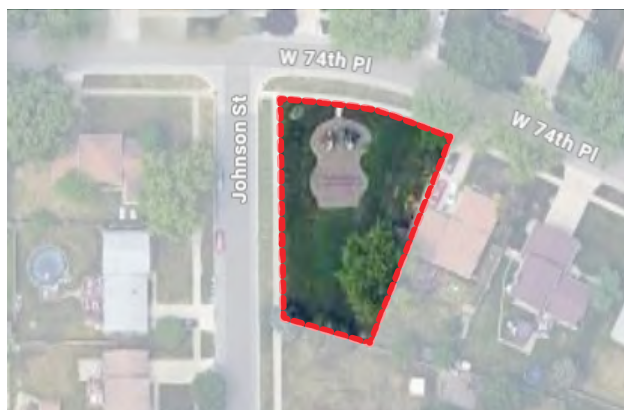
A 0.3-acre corner park in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Though only the size of 1 residential lot, Savannah Ridge manages to pack multiple facilities in its small space. The playground area is currently being renovated with a new, ADA compliant design. There is little landscaping or buffering from the neighboring homes.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Playground
- Shelter

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Shelter

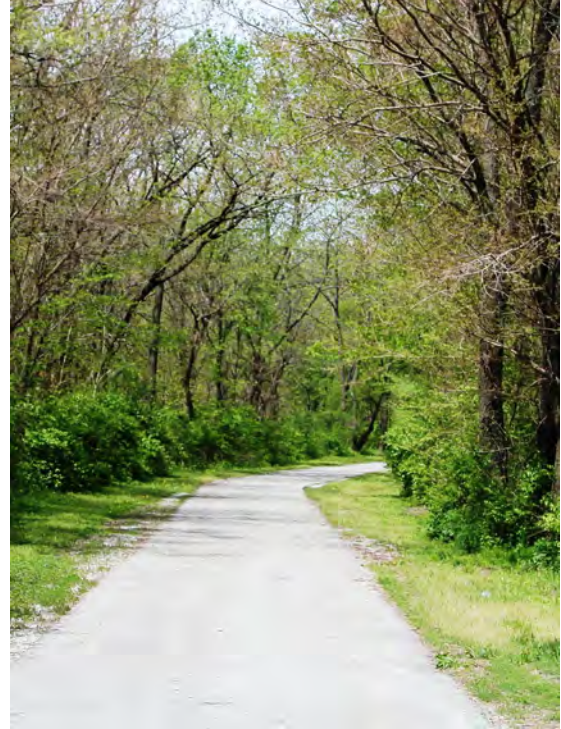


Linear Parks/Trails

Linear Parks and trails serve the entire community by providing walking, biking, and other non-motorized recreational opportunities. Trails often provide access to sensitive environmental areas. They also facilitate linkages between parks and neighborhoods across town. Linear Parks may have paved or unpaved trails and include support facilities such as trailheads, parking lots, restrooms, bridges, visitor orientation, interpretive signage, and resting areas. A recent trend is for linear parks to also provide additional recreational opportunities throughout the trail corridor. Merrillville is home to two trails.

Linear Parks /Trails

1. C&O Greenway
2. Erie-Lackawanna Trail



C&O Greenway

CHARACTER

This trail occupies the former Chesapeake & Ohio rail corridor. Phase 1 of Merrillville's portion of the C&O Greenway from Broadway west nearly to Taft Street (just east of Innsbrook County Club's golf course and driving range) was completed in 2009. Phase 2 of the trail, which extended the trail eastward to Mississippi Street, was completed in 2017. The C&O Greenway is directly accessible via trailheads at Stefek Park, Forest Hills Park, and Mississippi Street. The undeveloped Union Park also borders the trail to the north. While Merrillville is currently the only town to have developed a trail on this corridor, the Phase 2 work has brought the trail to the border with Hobart, allowing for a potential connection to Hobart's Silverstone trail loop. Future plans for Merrillville call for the trail to be expanded westward from its current terminus to Hendricks Street. From there, the trail could eventually be further extended west to connect to Oak Ridge Prairie and the Erie-Lackawanna Trail in downtown Griffith.

TRAILHEAD LOCATIONS

- Trail Head – Stefek Park
- Trail Head – Forest Park
- Trail Head – Forest Hills Park
- Trail Head – Mississippi Street

OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera



Erie-Lackawanna Trail

CHARACTER

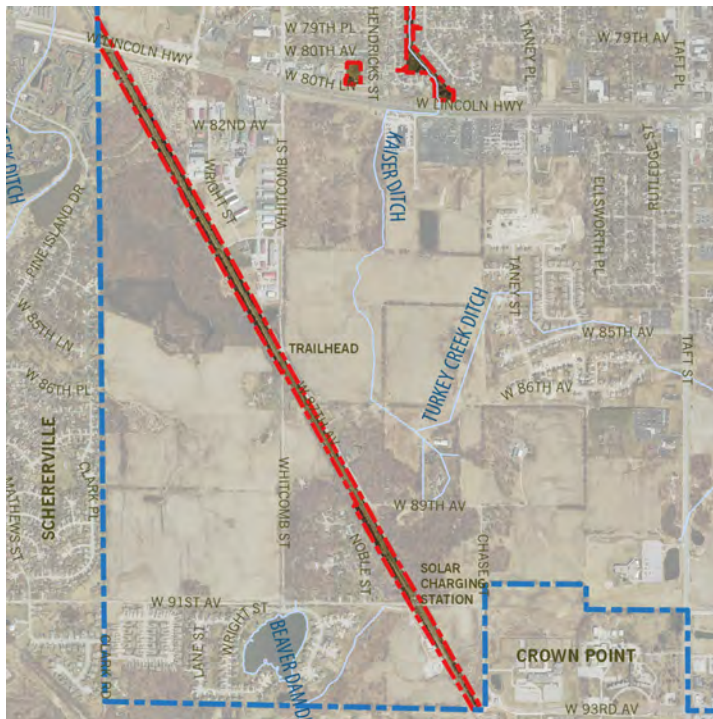
This trail occupies the former Erie-Lackawanna rail corridor. Merrillville's section of the trail covers approximately 1.89-miles, beginning at US 30 to the north and proceeding southeast to 93rd Avenue to the south. The trail provides access to Crown Point to the south, and Schererville, Griffith, Highland, and Hammond to the north. The trail is not directly accessible from any parks. A trailhead with paved parking lot is available at Whitcomb Street. A shelter with a solar charging station for mobile devices is located at the 91st Avenue crossing.

TRAILHEAD LOCATION

- Whitcomb Street

OTHER AMENITIES

- Solar Charging Station with seating - 91st Avenue



Open Space

Open space is typically designated for the preservation or protection of sensitive lands. These areas are primarily undeveloped, but may include passive recreational uses such as walking paths, observation areas, and minor infrastructure (parking, restrooms, etc.) Merrillville has three parks that are currently designated as open space, though none of them currently have any facilities.

Open Space Parks

1. Lincoln Terrace
2. Meadowdale
3. Petruch



Lincoln Terrace

3528 78th Ave.

CHARACTER

A 23.6-acre open space area generally running along Kaiser Ditch. This area includes the former Jennings Park facility. Much of the area has large shade trees along the creek bed. While most of the area is creek bed, approximately 10 acres of land near 76th Lane and Jennings Street is upland where permanent park facilities could be developed. Direct connections to Rosenbalm Park are potentially available.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- None



OPPORTUNITIES

- Call Box/Camera
- Landscaping
- Park Sign
- Playground (large)
- Shelter
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)



Meadowdale

1030 W 54th Avenue

CHARACTER

A 9.8-acre park at the northern boundary of the Town. The park has two distinct characters. The eastern half is low-lying, and is covered with brush and prairie plants. The western half has a more distinct parkland character with mature trees, but is smaller, narrower, and more fragmented. The main access point is off of 54th Avenue. However, a secondary pedestrian easement is available to the west off of Pierce Street.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- None



OPPORTUNITIES

- Park Sign
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)



Petruch

1403 W 63rd Avenue

CHARACTER

A 1.7-acre park, bordered on the south by the Grand Trunk Railroad and the east by Turkey Creek Golf Course. A pedestrian easement on 63rd Avenue is provided for park access. Formerly housing a playground, the facilities were removed due to the inability to provide ADA access. The park is heavily wooded, giving it a very secluded feel.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- None

OPPORTUNITIES

- Park Sign
- Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)



Old Mill

6700 Broadway

CHARACTER

A 1.6-acre parcel within Merrillville's Historic District. A Turkey Creek tributary runs through much of the site and along where the Old Mill building used to stand. Most of the site is within a floodplain, sloping sharply away from 73rd Avenue.

EXISTING FACILITIES

- Parking Lot

OPPORTUNITIES

- Master Plan
- Park Sign
- Outdoor Plaza



The Town of Merrillville enjoys several other open spaces in the Town, including several Ross Township parks and Lake County parks. These parks vary greatly in size and amenities, with many of them serving as regional facilities, offering a much wider variety of amenities. While these parks are open to the public, many of them charge parking or access fees for using these facilities.

Schools

Open space is also available in the Town to Merrillville through the Merrillville Community School Corporation. The Merrillville Community School Corporation provides indoor and outdoor recreational facilities primarily for use by the enrolled students. However, some facilities, such as the high school fieldhouse, are available for resident use in the mornings before school hours. Many other school facilities are available for use by other organized groups or the general public on an arranged basis.

There are also two parochial schools and one charter school in the Town that have indoor & outdoor recreational facilities. These schools are:

- Aquinas Catholic Community School
- Andean High School
- Higher Institute of Arts and Technology (Phalen Leadership Academy Network School)

Ross Township

Ross Township has four active park facilities in the Town of Merrillville.

Hidden Lake Park - 107 Acres

This Township-owned regional park offers a wide range of recreational activities, with seasonal events that make the park appealing year-round. Existing facilities include:

- Lake with beach, fishing, paddle boat rentals, and a skating pond in winter
- Sport facilities (soccer, baseball, sand volleyball)
- Playground
- Fitness trail
- Disc-golf course
- Sledding hill
- Gazebo
- Social Center
- Numerous picnic facilities
- Parking

Other Open Spaces

Ross Township Cemetery Park/Merrillville Cemetery - 2.5 Acres

Merrillville Cemetery is the final resting place for several deceased residents from the nineteenth century, including multiple Civil War veterans. Immediately to the west of the cemetery is Ross Township Cemetery Park, which is home to the Merrillville Veterans Memorial.



Ross Township Merrillville Veterans' Memorial

Skinner Park - 10.2 Acres

This park is named after pioneer land developer Olind Skinner. Ross Township took over maintenance of the park in 1978. Skinner Park offers:

- A 2.5-acre pond
- Picnic shelter
- Playground
- Parking

Independence Park - 9.6 Acres

Originally known as Independence Park Sports men's Club, this park was acquired by Ross Township in 1976. It offers:

- A 5-acre lake
- Fishing
- Picnicking
- Playground
- Concession stand (open in the summer)
- Parking



Deep River County Park

Lake County Parks

The Lake County Parks Department owns and operates several regional park facilities across Lake County. Most of these parks focus on passive recreation uses and programs. The Department has been proactive in expanding its parks to better preserve these areas. The County operates three facilities in Merrillville.

Deep River County Park - 1,217 Acres

This large regional park spans parts of Merrillville and Hobart and is a popular destination. Deep River Water Park, a well-known summertime attraction, is one of the park's most visible features. The park is also a favored location for wedding ceremonies and receptions. The Deep River Grinders, a vintage baseball club, play games at fields within the park. Many other clubs and seasonal events are hosted here.

<p>Attractions Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing area • Canoe launch • Numerous play fields • Playground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Programs • Working sawmill & gristmill • General Store • Wedding Gazebo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hayrides • Picnic shelters • Walking & equestrian trails
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Oak Ridge Prairie - 735 Acres

This county park spans parts of Merrillville and Griffith, with plans to expand to over 1,000 acres in the future. The park is largely open and natural. Oak Ridge Prairie serves as the western starting point for the Oak Savannah Trail, which runs through Griffith, Merrillville, Gary, and Hobart, eventually connecting to the Prairie Duneland Trail.

The park offers:

- Playground
- Picnic facilities
- Fishing pond
- Walking trails, which are used for cross-country skiing in the winter
- Extensive prairie areas
- Sledding hill
- Volley Ball Standards

Turkey Creek Golf Course - 148 Acres

Turkey Creek Golf Course is a popular 18-hole golf facility, with several holes crossing its namesake waterway.

The course also includes:

- Pro shop
- Snack bar
- Dining/banquet facilities



Turkey Creek Golf Course

Private Facilities

A variety of private facilities are available in Merrillville. Most of these require membership to use their amenities, but some may allow limited public or guest access.

Glen Park Izaak Walton League - 21 Acres

The Izaak Walton League of America is the United States' oldest conservation league, with multiple chapters and facilities across the region, including one in Merrillville at 5700 Mississippi Street. While many of the facilities at this location are membership-only, the outdoor range is open to the public. The overall facility offers:

- Outdoor trap shooting range
- Indoor pistol shooting range
- Indoor archery range
- Clubhouse/Lounge

Innsbrook Country Club - 735 Acres

Innsbrook Country Club is a private facility available only to its members. The amenities include:

- An 18-hole golf course
- Driving Range
- Water slide and pool



Innsbrook Country Club

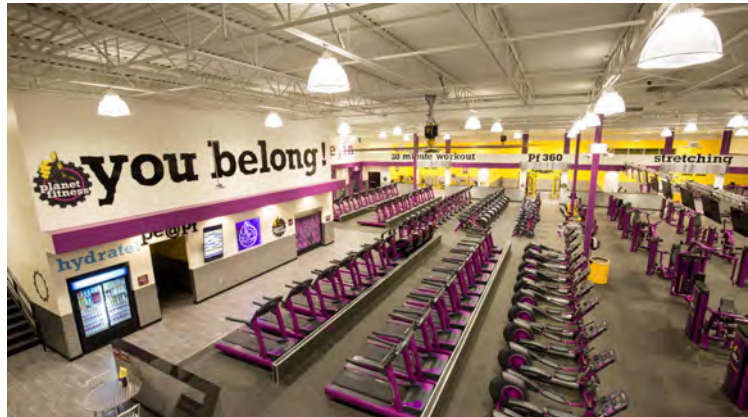
Merrillville Little League/Babe Ruth - 16 Acres

In the south side of the Town, Merrillville Little League/Babe Ruth owns and operates a dedicated facility south of 93rd Avenue, near Mississippi Street. With six maintained ballfields, this facility is the home for Little League competition for various levels of play. A seventh field has been temporarily abandoned, due to ownership questions of the parcel where it is located.

Exercise and Physical Fitness Facilities

The Town of Merrillville also has five private fitness centers: Planet Fitness, Charter Fitness, BodyMax Fitness, Anytime Fitness, and UFC Boxing Gym. These facilities offer a variety of exercise programs that include:

- Weight training
- Cardio training
- Nutrition programs
- Aerobics



Planet Fitness - Merrillville



Chapter 4

Citizen Participation

The community input process was developed through a series of individual stakeholder meetings, public forums and a Town-wide household survey. The process was to include both qualitative and quantitative data to determine key issues the Department must address, establish what is un-met park facility and program needs in the community and how to address the management and financing of the Parks and Recreation Department in the future. The following is a summary of process and activities to engage citizens.

1. HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

Community engagement is a critical component of the development of the Parks Master Plan. To achieve the broadest responses an on-line survey was created to seek community input for park services and required programs. . This on-line survey was made available to all residents, with responses being allowed from February 18 through March 20. The survey was promoted via the town news list and park department websites, social media pages, resident email and Facebook page. The survey was also advertised at the February 20 public meeting. Hard copies of the full survey were also made available at D & B Community Center for program attendees.

total of 169 surveys were completed. The following sections summarize the findings from the survey.

GENERAL RESPONSE

Quality of Life

81% believe that parks and recreational opportunities play a role in the town's quality of life.

Do you or anyone in your family have a disability?

- Yes 30%
- No 69%

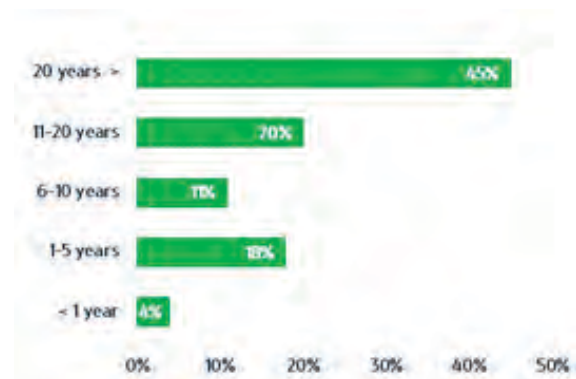
If you answered "Yes" above, do you feel Parks Department facilities or programs meet your disability / accessibility needs?

- Yes 40%
- No 59%

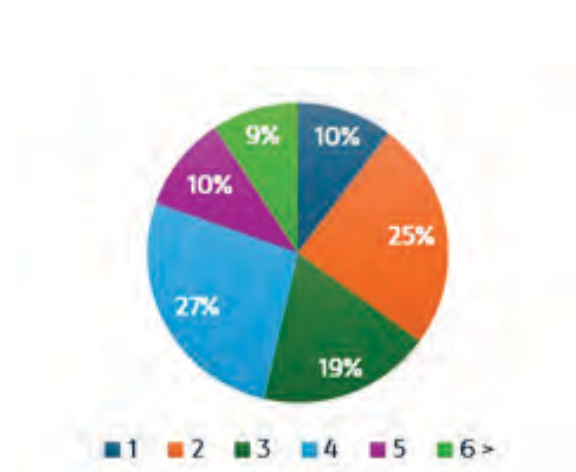
What population groups need more parks and recreational facilities and/or programs?

- Pre-schoolers (3-5 yr.) 44%
- Elementary students (6-10) 52%
- Middle School Students (11-14) 49%

Time of Residency



Number of people in your household



Maintenance

How do you generally rate maintenance services provided by the Parks Department?

- Excellent 15%
- Good 34%
- Adequate 36%
- More needed 13%

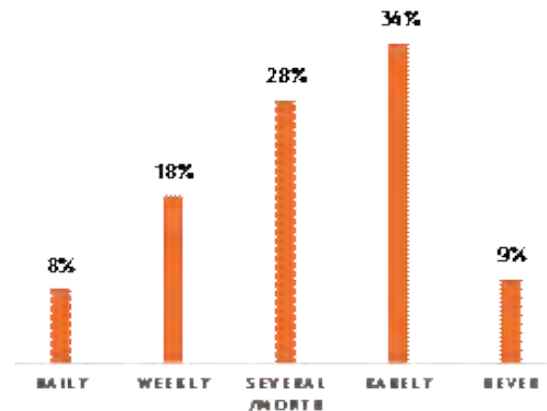
Which of the following does the Parks Department do a good job maintaining?

- Turf/landscaped areas 30%
- Trash pickup 41%
- Restrooms 14%
- Parking areas 36%
- Playgrounds 14%
- Soccer fields 4%
- Sport courts 5%
- Ball fields 8%
- Soccer fields 4%
- Snow removal 31%
- Picnic areas 20%
- Trails/Walking paths 30%
- Graffiti Removal 17%

Parks

Top 3 Areas residents would like the Parks Department to focus on.

- Neighborhood Parks 47%
- Neighborhood Playgrounds 45%
- Recreational Trails 42%



Frequency of Park Use

Most Common Frequency: 34% of respondents visit parks rarely, and 28% visit several times a month.

High Engagement: Only 8% visit daily, with 18% visiting weekly.



Community Member Tenure

45% have lived in Merrillville for more than 20 years.

73% have been residents for over 5 years

Program Participation

41% of respondents do not participate in any recreational programs

62 % hear about Merrillville Parks and Recreation programs through Social Media

30 % of families have a family member with a disability but 59% of families feel like the Park Department facilities don't meet disability needs.

Quality of Life

81% believe that parks and recreational opportunities play a role in the town's quality of life.

Parks and Facilities Needs

82% of respondents indicate the need for improved or additional restroom facilities in parks.

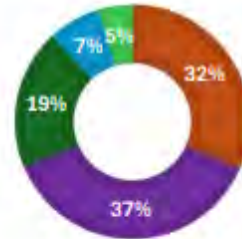
Union

Preferred Activities:

Playgrounds: 56.21% of respondents.

Trails/Walking Paths: 66% of respondents.

Sports Fields & Courts: 34% of respondents.



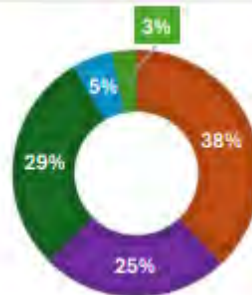
Meadowland Estate

Preferred Activities:

Playgrounds: 63% of respondents.

Trails/Walking Paths: 41% of respondents.

Sports Fields & Courts: 49% of respondents.



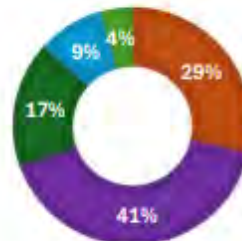
Lincoln Terrace

Preferred Activities:

Playgrounds: 47% of respondents.

Trails/Walking Paths: 67% of respondents.

Sports Fields & Courts: 28% of respondents.



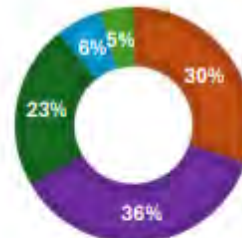
Devonshire

Preferred Activities:

Playgrounds: 51% of respondents.

Trails/Walking Paths: 62% of respondents.

Sports Fields & Courts: 38% of respondents.



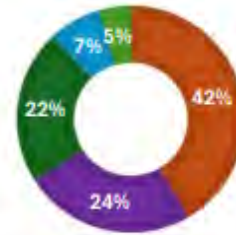
Barclay Village

Preferred Activities:

Playgrounds: 66% of respondents.

Trails/Walking Paths: 38% of respondents.

Sports Fields & Courts: 35% of respondents.



Preferred Activities

Walking/Trails: Dominates with 77% of respondents ranking it as one of their top five activities.

Bicycle/Trails: 49% also value trails for cycling, reinforcing the need for more biking infrastructure

Playgrounds (53%) and **Swimming (49%)** are also highly valued, showing the need for more

Community Center Programming Needs

Most requested programs: Exercise/Aerobics (59%), Health/Wellness Classes (49%), and **Programming spaces:** The Arts & Crafts Room (60%) and Multi-Purpose Room (44%) are favored for programming spaces.

Maintenance of Park Facilities

Trash Pickup: (41%)

Parking Areas: (36%)

Snow removal (31%)



Community Events and Special Interests

Farmer's Market: (75%)

Carnivals/Festivals: (58%)

Concerts:

(53%)



Top Needs for the Parks and Community Center:

Parks:

- Improved walking trails (77%)
- Cycling infrastructure (49%)
- Expansion of playgrounds (53%)
- Swimming facilities (49%)



Community Center:

- Fitness programs (59%)
- Youth programs (49%) and senior programs (42%).
- Larger community events, including concerts (53%) and farmer's markets (75%).

2. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INPUT

A series of interviews were conducted with a group of stakeholders and agencies in Merrillville. Among those interviewed were leadership individuals including department heads within the town government, various town officials, and other entities. These interviews were held over a period of time between February 13 and April 8; specific individuals and dates are listed in the box below. The following is a summary of their input.

Interview Subjects

- Michael Griffin (Merrillville Town Manager) - February 13, March 4
- Jerry McCartney (Merrillville Parks and Recreation Director) - February 13, March 4
- Matt Lake (Merrillville Stormwater Management Director) - February 21
- Dexter Suggs (Merrillville Schools Superintendent) - February 24
- D & B Community Center and Parks and Rec Committee - February 27
- Shawn Pettit (Merrillville Town Council & Chair Parks and Recreation Committee
- Lisa Roberts (Merrillville Parks and Recreation Assistant Director) - March 4
- Mike Neal (Merrillville Parks and Recreation Superintendent) - March 4
- Chris Geiger (Merrillville Parks and Recreation Coordinator) - March 4
- Chas Reilly (Merrillville Content Manager-Social Media)- March 4



3. COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Two public meetings were held for the Master Plan, both of which were advertised on the Town website, and Merrillville Parks Facebook page. Both meetings were held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The first meeting was held on February 20. This meeting provided information that covered the process and steps involved with submitting the official plan. Background information that included preliminary demographic and parkland data was also presented. The second public meeting was held on April 3. At this meeting, the results of the resident survey were presented, as well as an introduction to the proposed elements and improvements in the draft master plan.

Both meetings provided opportunities for residents to provide input and ask questions about the plan. A short questionnaire was also provided at both meetings to gather additional input.

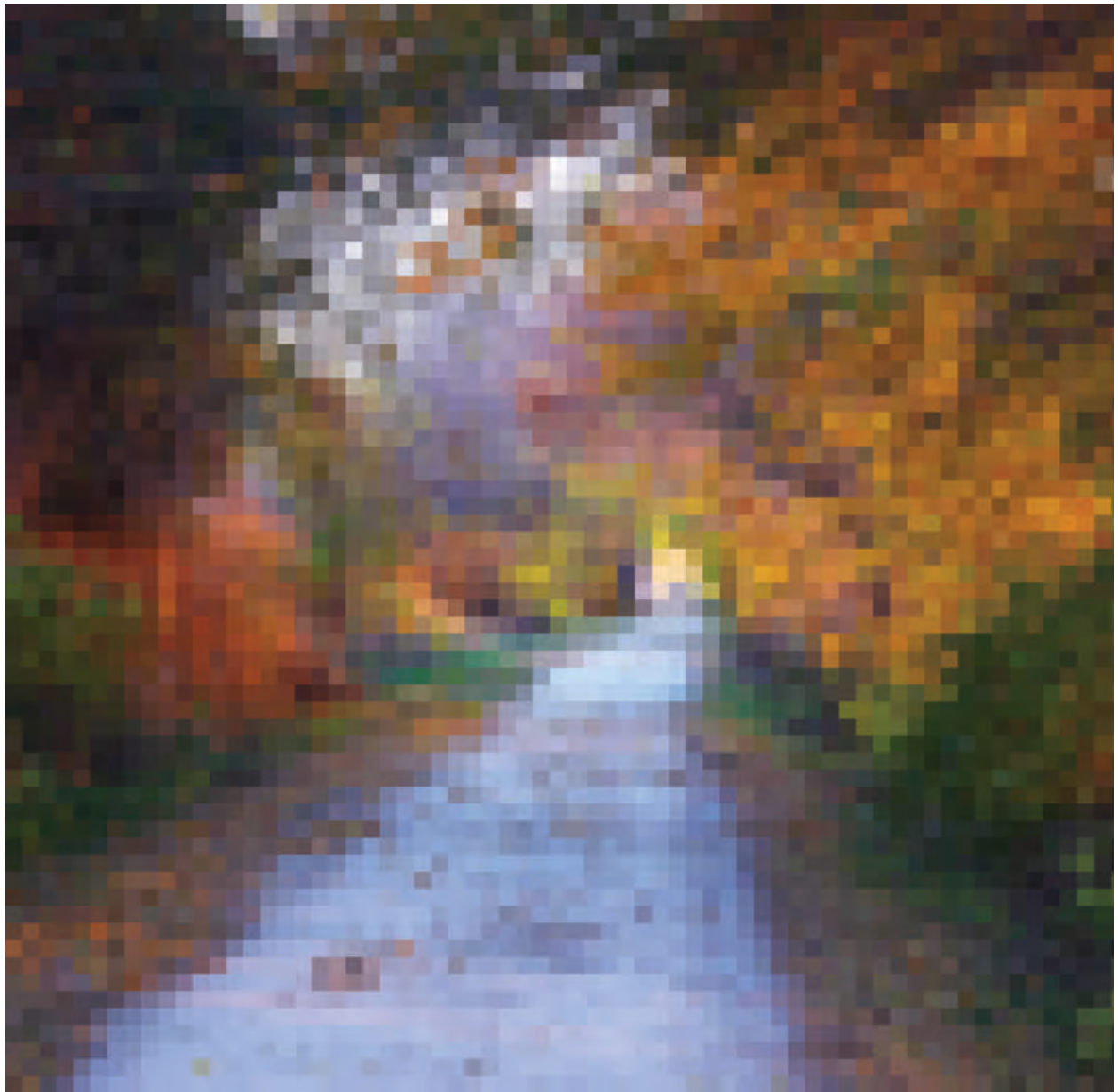


MEETING #1 – February 20, 2025

ATTENDANCE – Park Staff, and members of the public.

MEETING #2 – April 3, 2025

ATTENDANCE – Park Staff, plus 25 members of the public



Chapter 5

Analysis

The following analysis presents an assessment of the needs for park and recreation facilities in the Town of Merrillville. This assessment is based on a set of standards used for this plan to evaluate and set up benchmarks for recreational facilities and programs in the Town. These standards are generally expressed in terms of facility or program unit of measure, relative to a given service population. In the development of this analysis, the Town of Merrillville has used the following sources to evaluate the residents' needs and desires for park and recreation services:

- Demographics analysis
- Household needs survey
- Conversations with stakeholders
- Focus Groups
- Public meetings
- Review of national standards
- Review of local, state, and national trends

The key findings of these efforts are described and summarized in this chapter. These findings have played an important role in formulating the approach and strategies to address the needs of Merrillville residents. The above notwithstanding, recreational needs are also influenced by the location, distribution, and access to facilities by residents. For these reasons, trends, standards, and community sentiments should all be considered in assessment of the needs and setting planning goals for the Town.

I. Trends

A. National and Global Trends

As the national population continues to rise, so too will the demographic makeup of the country shift and evolve. By 2050, the United States will have the highest percentages of people over age 70 and under age 5 — a statistic that has never occurred before. At the same time, this change in population is projected to have a major impact on urbanized areas. By 2050, up to 80% of the US population is predicted to live in urban areas. Climate change and resource scarcity, already important topics in the national consciousness, will take on a new importance. “Sustainable,” “responsible,” “eco-friendly,” and “green” have already become common buzzwords, and all signs point to them becoming more critical in the future.

Understanding the shifts and changing trends is critical for parks departments, as they will need to be cognizant of what their users value and need in the present and future. As important as parks are as a measure of a town and city’s quality of life, they will continue to play a role in shaping the future of their community. Parks are no longer seen solely as recreational uses. Rather, parks are becoming an important element of urban life helping preserve the environment, reduce the heat island effect, and act as civic gathering places. At the same time, changing demographics will require parks departments to adjust to meet the needs of a more diverse and multi-generational user base.

B. State Trends in Recreation

According to the 2021-2025 Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreational Plan (SCORP), the top five outdoor recreation activities that respondents wanted to do in the future were:

1. Walking/Hiking/Jogging/Running (pedestrian activities)
2. Camping/RV Camping
3. Hiking/backpacking
4. Fishing
5. Boating/wake boarding/Water Skiing/Sailing

Similarly, the top five outdoor recreation activities participated in more than once per week by the survey respondent and/or by others in the household were:

1. Walking/Hiking/Jogging/Running
2. Relaxation/Spiritual Renewal
3. Gardening/Landscaping
4. Bird/Wildlife Watching
5. Health-Related Activities (Exercise, Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, etc.)

With respect to participation of residents in recreational activities, SCORP reports the top three reasons for participation as:

1. To be with family and friends (38%)
2. Physical health (37%)
3. Mental health (34%)

For trail users, SCORP reports that the top 3 trail activities are:

1. Walking
2. Using trails for alternative transportation routes
3. Bicycle touring (Casual, tour, or both)

3. Local Trends in Recreation

The following represents some of the local findings based on the household survey, analysis of data and assessment of regional trends.

- Following decades of rapid population growth, Merrillville's overall population growth has stabilized, with modest projected growth in the future.
- The demographic makeup of the Town has changed in the past decade. Of note, non-family households increased while senior families have substantially increased reaching a total of 19%.
- The median family income of residents in the Town has increased by more than 11% during the last few years, exceeding the average increase in Lake County.
- Merrillville's unemployment rate remains higher than state and national rates, and is now slightly behind Lake County's average rate.
- School enrollment has dropped by approximately 3.6% in the last five years however student population is reversing trends in 2025.
- Residential development has slowed in recent years. But growth is expected projected to occur in the southwestern areas of the Town. A lack of utilities and services is currently preventing significant development in the panhandle and far eastern parts of Merrillville.
- Commercial and retail growth is expected to continue along the major arterial roads, particularly along Broadway, Mississippi and US 30.
- Modern commercial developments require access to alternative transportation for new employees. The services by Gary Public Transit Corporation, particularly the Broadway Express service, have the potential to better connect residents to these developments.
- Connection of employment centers to parks, schools and neighborhoods is a required element of smart growth principals. It also adds to the quality of life of the community.
- Merrillville's parks are generally lacking in amenities. Few developed parks offer any facilities beyond a playground or shelter.
- Sport and athletic clubs have diminished their participation in recent years, owing mainly to decreasing interest, a lack of support from residents, and insufficient facilities in the Town.
- The southern part of the Town is generally underserved by park facilities. It will become increasingly important for the Town to acquire suitable parkland in this area before it is lost to future developments.

According to the household survey, the top needs and desires expressed by the residents are as follows:

2. Facility Demands

Table ## shows the overall park acreage available in the Town. Included in this table is a comparison of the national standards with current and future level of service, using population estimates for 2024 and beyond. Recent park acquisition activities have helped close the park acreage gap since the previous plan. In particular, the purchase of the White community center site has brought the Town closer to the line with the recommended standards for community parks. However, gaps for most other categories still remain. Overall, the Town has an acreage deficit of over 165 acres. Based on modest future growth, the deficit is projected to surpass 200 acres by 2035 if no new parks are added in the interim.

The level of service analysis is perhaps most critical when the distribution of facilities is assessed. As shown on Table 13, there are significant deficits in most of the southern and eastern part of the Town for different types of parks. This is particularly critical, as newer developments have begun to emerge south of US 30 where there are no parks. Although some of these areas remain undeveloped, planning principles and best management practices dictate that the Town must plan for facility acquisition without delay before available parkland is lost to development and future facility expansion costs become prohibitive.

Table 13 - Merrillville Parks Level of Service by Park Type

Park Type	2024 Inventory	Deficit/Surplus 2024	Deficit/Surplus 2030	Deficit/Surplus 2035
Mini Park	14.6	-39.8	-43.5	-45.9
Neighborhood Park	27.0	-27.4	-31.1	-53.7
Community Park	51.0	-3.4	-7.1	-10
Trail/Linear Park	69.2	65.6	65.4	65.2
Open Space	34.9	-19.5	-23.2	-25.6
Total Parks LOS	196.6	-165.6	-190.3	-206.6
Civic Park	0	-43.5	-46.4	-48.4
Trail/ Linear Park (miles)	6.04	2.4	2.2	2.0
Regional Parks	600	596.4	596.1	596.0

For indoor facilities, while the recent construction of White Community Center addresses many needs, demand continues to exceed the available facilities. This facility currently is also being shared with Boys and Girls Club. The Club, however is expected to move out to their newly constructed facility freeing up four additional rooms. These new vacated spaces can further address the needs and perhaps offer opportunity for additional programs.

Table 14 lists the overall deficit for different outdoor facilities. With the exception of paved trails, the Town is deficient in most all major recreational categories. Some of these deficits are mitigated by other County, Township, and private facilities in Merrillville. Still, there are several facility gaps that the Town should work to minimize and correct on their own. It should be observed that not all facility types are deemed important by Merrillville residents, and these figures should be interpreted with that in mind. Similar to parks distribution, the outdoor amenities provided in the Town must be distributed based on population needs and wants to ensure the resident's needs are met.

Table 14 - Merrillville Parks Level of Service by Park Facilities

Facility	Existing	Recommended Standard		Deficit/Excess 2024	Deficit/Excess 2025	Deficit/Excess 2035
		Per/1000 Population	Service Radius			
Baseball (Official)	0	0.20	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(7)	(7)	(8)
Softball Fields (lighted)*	0	0.20	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(7)	(7)	(8)
Baseball Fields (lighted)*	0	0.033	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(1)	(1)	(1)
Softball Fields (lighted)*	0	0.033	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(1)	(1)	(1)
Basketball Court	4	0.20	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(3)	(3)	(4)
Outdoor Ice Rink	0	0.01	15-30 minutes	(0)	(0)	(0)
Volleyball Court (Includes sand)	4	0.20	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(3)	(3)	(4)
Soccer Field	1	0.10	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(3)	(3)	(3)
Tennis Court	0	0.5	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(18)	(19)	(19)
Multiple Courts	0	0.1	1-2 miles	(4)	(4)	(4)
Field Hockey	0	0.05	15-30 minutes	(2)	(2)	(2)
Football*	1	0.05	15-30 minutes	(1)	(1)	(1)
Running Track	1	0.05	15-30 minutes	(1)	(1)	(1)
Indoor Pool	0	0.05	15-30 minutes	(2)	(2)	(2)
Outdoor Pool	0	0.05	30 minutes	(2)	(2)	(2)
Golf	1	0.04	30 minutes	(0)	(0)	(1)
Recreation Center	1	0.05	15-30 minutes	(1)	(1)	(1)
Paved Trail	6.04	0.1	20 minutes	2	2	2
Playground	1	0.5	1/4 - 1/2 mile	(17)	(18)	(18)
Dog Park	0	0.033	15-30 minutes	(1)	(1)	(1)
Skateboard Park	0	0.033	15-30 minutes	(1)	(1)	(1)

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the Town should pursue a comprehensive strategy of acquiring new parkland while expanding services and activities in existing facilities. The following guidelines should be considered when planning for these enhancements.

A. Community Parks

As mentioned earlier, the recent acquisition of a community center site has brought the Town within the recommended acreage for community parks. The location of the site – along Broadway frontage – has also closed some of the community park service gaps in the northeastern part of Town. However, significant service gaps still exist in the northwestern part of Town, particularly west of Taft Street. As Merrillville continues to grow, the Parks Department should be proactive in identifying suitable community park sites south of US 30. This acquisition of new parkland should be focused in a way that will insure equitable distribution of facilities. Property acquired through dedication by developers and others could supplement such acquisition for park development. Ideally, community parks should be designed with a variety of facilities to meet the needs of a variety of users. The new community center site should be designed with this in mind. Pruzin Park, the Town's other community park, is currently underutilized in terms of facilities. While it has the largest variety of uses compared to other Town parks, there are still several acres of upland where additional facilities can be provided. The Town, therefore, should look at Pruzin as a venue for significant facility expansion. Because Pruzin is immediately adjacent to Merrillville Intermediate School (MIS), the Town must also develop relationships with MIS to expand facility usage by the students.

B. Neighborhood Parks

The Town currently has 7 parks that are classified as Neighborhood Parks. However, only 4 of them are developed with any facilities. These parks are all located in the northern part of the Town. The four developed parks all have very minimal facilities. While all have playgrounds, only 3 shelters and 2 ball fields are to be found among these facilities. All of these parks have sufficient open land to add additional facilities. In particular, Stefek, as a trail head location, has the capacity to develop into a more intensely programmed and usable park. Two of the undeveloped neighborhood parks – Old Mill and Union – are located in the Town's historic district. These sites, then, should be looked at as more of a gathering place, with complimentary facilities developed to attract both families and children. As with community parks, the Town should be seeking new neighborhood park locations in underserved areas. The Parks Department has begun this action by seeking parkland along Taft Street, south of US 30. This will help with reducing park deficits in existing southern neighborhoods. In locating suitable neighborhood park sites, property acquired through dedication by developers and others present a supplemental option for meeting the service level demand for such parks.

C. Mini (Block) Park

Mini parks are the closest open space facilities accessible to residents and should be within walking distance of the entire neighborhood. While expensive to maintain on a square foot basis, they have value as an opportunity for community gatherings and as readily accessible venues for exercise and socializing. Mini parks can also be used to help protect sensitive or otherwise undeveloped areas. The Town currently has 9 parks that are classified as Mini Parks, 7 of which are developed. All developed mini parks have playgrounds, though few offer any other facilities beyond that. Forest Hills, as a trail head location, offers the potential for more intensive uses which could upgrade the park to Neighborhood Park status. The two undeveloped mini parks do offer the potential to host facilities such as playgrounds and seating areas, and should be looked at for future active usage.

As a general rule, the Town should refrain from actively acquiring new mini-park sites, or other park sites less than 5 acres. However, developers of new subdivisions should be required to reserve areas for mini parks that are easily accessible and can offer a wide range of passive and active recreation. The minimum size of these parks should be three (3) acres. These parks can then be transferred to the Parks

D. Open Space

As society has changed, so has the value of open and green space. Large green space and natural preserves fill a need for such facility type. Natural and open space reserves are highly valued for their passive recreational values and natural and cultural resources or environmental education. Open space serves the entire community by providing walking, biking, nature watching, and other passive recreational and educational opportunities.

Merrillville, being the commercial hub of the region, requires even more open space due to its daily demand by shoppers and visitors to the region. As such, the demand level for open space as a regional hub is higher than a typical demand for a community with over 35,000 population. In this regard, Merrillville is fortunate to have several hundreds of acres preserved by the Lake County Parks Department through Deep River and Oak Ridge Prairie parks. However, other smaller, but still important areas can be utilized for preservation purposes by the Town. Among its current land holdings, the Kaiser Ditch corridor between US 30 and 73rd Avenue represents a prime candidate to develop a neighborhood-level open space connector. This corridor includes land within Rosenbalm Park and the former Jennings Park. The undeveloped Meadowdale land offers a variety of natural ecosystems in its relatively small area, and can be useful as a small-scale nature preserve. A vigorous effort to preserve and develop the corridor along Turkey Creek corridor and other potential green corridors could also add to the open space inventory of the Town. These efforts should be pursued on a long term basis to expand green space in the Town and with continued partnership with other agencies and organization.

E. Civic Park

The Town has recently acquired land for development of a new town hall. This site provides opportunity for development of a civic park as a part of the new town hall complex as the site is centrally located and have excellent access. The creation of a gathering place for special events and to build a sense of place has become a norm in most suburban communities. As such communities mature and residents long for attachment, more and more suburban communities engage in the development of a central place which they can hold special events, resident can stroll and children can freely play. Civic facilities are typically intensely developed public spaces which offer enriching and captivating experiences that draw people together and strengthen the bond for the community. They often serve as the centerpiece of the community. They invite people to gather, connect, recharge and enjoy art, culture and entertainment. Facilities often seen in civic parks include an outdoor stage/amphitheater, splash pad, skate park, plazas, and open space.

Trails

Walking and bicycling were among the top five activities noted in the Town's online survey. Additionally, trails were among the most requested improvements by the residents.

The Town currently has two regional trails: the C & O Greenway and Erie-Lackawanna Trail. The Erie-Lackawanna appears to be the more heavily used, likely due to its connections to neighboring communities. Recent extension of the C&O trail and connection to the Lake County's

segment of the trail, has made this trail relatively active, as it has become a part of the regional trail system.. This linkage, combined with the trail's more central location in the Town, makes the C&O Greenway potentially easier for residents to access than the Erie-Lackawanna Trail. . In planning for new trails, natural waterways and utility right-of-ways can be useful corridors for new trail development. One such corridor is the Turkey Creek Blue Way, which has connections to Hobart and Schererville. these regional trails are popular, there are few other Town parks that offer trails as a part of their internal design. Outside of Stefek and Forest Hills and Union park, whose trails only serve as connections to the C&O Greenway, only Pruzin Park features any sort of recreational walking path for people to use. Many of Merrillville's parks are large enough to accommodate a trail loop within their boundaries, and should be looked at as a recreational use in the future.

In the long term, as more trails and parks are developed, the Town should be proactive in better linking these different facilities so residents in all parts of the Town, as well as the Region, can access them. The establishment of an east west trail, utilizing the Plymouth Road and walking path along the Keizer Ditch should be considered as potential option to expand connectivity in the Town.

3. Recreation Programs

With the construction of the new community center the Town has an opportunity to provide a variety of program and activities for the residents. The recent community survey, indicated that services for the seniors, families and the youths are in most demand.

Recommendations

While the community center can provide ample space and resources for recreational programming, lack of staff and use of several room by Boys and Girls Club, prevents the Department to institute a full-service program. Based on the community and stakeholder input, programming for seniors, youths, and families remain as highly desired items. While new recreational programming for the entire Town must be considered, these population groups may require additional attention. In addition other programs such as events and arts and craft activities are very much desired by the community and must be incorporated into the overall programming for Merrillville.

4. Finance

The efforts of the Town in implementing this Master Plan cannot be fully realized without adequate resources and staff. In the past, the Parks Department has suffered from a lack of operational funds and low staffing. With new ambitions to expand its park services, including the proposed community center, the Town has moved to make parks and recreation services a higher priority than it has shown in the past. However, if left unchanged, the current staffing and budget model will be woefully insufficient to keep the Parks Department operating at an acceptable level.

Recommendations

With the renewed focus on parks and recreational amenities, the funding for the Parks Department needs to be reassessed to ensure that the Master Plan recommendations are able to be carried out. There are two major areas to consider when determining the funding allocation for the Parks Department.

A. Community Center

The costs to keep the community center running in the future should be planned well in advance. Allocating adequate funds to staff and ensure the center's sustainability must be a priority. Funding for future expansion of the center must be also secured in order to fully meet the needs of the community.

B. Operational Budget

The overarching purpose of the community center is to expanded recreational programming and services for the Town. This will require a substantial increase in staffing, both for permanent park staff and instructors for the new programs. At minimum, the Parks Department should hire one additional full-time staff person to focus on youth programming. This should be in addition to the qualified program instructors that will be needed to facilitate the expanded programming that the center will host.

The operations budget for the Parks Department should also take into account the current and future needs of the parks. As parkland and park facilities increase in the Town, an additional staff person to help oversee the parks should strongly be considered. The overall maintenance staff will also need to increase to handle the general upkeep of the parks and the new community center. While the Department has generally been working with mostly seasonal workers, adding new full-time, permanent staff will improve the quality of existing parks and help the Department meet its future maintenance needs.

5. Accessibility and Disability

A. ADA Status And Recommendations

The Town's update to the ADA Compliance Report provides current compliance data for the parks after these renovations. The report looked at ADA compliance for playground equipment and accessible pathways. One measure of accessibility that the ADA Compliance Report did not consider was "visitability". Visitability of a park is judged by having adequate access from sidewalks or off-street pathways for disabled persons from outside the park's boundaries. The Arsh Group investigated visitability for 21 parks. Of these parks, twelve of them are compliant, one is mostly compliant and eight of them are undeveloped. Several of the undeveloped parks are proposed for future development within the next five years. Included in future plans is for all parks to be accessible. These include the following parks:

- Barclay Village No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped.
- Devonshire No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped.
- Lincoln Terrace, No sidewalk in the neighborhood
- Meadowdale No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
- Meadowland Estate: No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped.
- Old Mill Site No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped.
- Petruch No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped.
- Wirtes: Mostly Compliant, No sidewalk to shelter, no sidewalks on east side.

Table XX shows a summary of ADA level of compliance in the Town's parks. In general, the newly updated parks are now fully ADA complaint, although some are still missing accessible pathways to certain facilities. Older parks generally lack ADA-compliant equipment and access. The Town's trails were not included in the ADA Compliance Report. However, The Arsh Group did not note any significant accessibility deficiencies of the trails in its own review. It should further be noted that four of above parks are in neighborhoods are areas without any sidewalks.

Table 19 shows a summary of ADA level of compliance in the Town's developed parks. In general, the newly updated parks are now fully ADA compliant in terms of equipment and surfacing, although some are still missing accessible pathways to certain facilities. Older parks generally lack ADA-compliant playground equipment and access. The Town's trails and ballfields were not included in the ADA Compliance Report. However, aside from the visitability issues noted above, The Arsh Group did not note any significant accessibility deficiencies of the trails in its own review.

Recommendations

Populations with special needs are required to be accommodated when planning for parks and leisure facilities. According to the ADA, all facilities designed and constructed after 1992 must be

accessible and physical barriers in existing public facilities must be removed if “reasonably” achievable. ADA policy also addresses the following:

- Policies – compliant with ADA except for Braille copies of documents
- Employment – ADA/Rehabilitation Act compliant
- Programs – ADA compliant
- Facilities – ADA compliant except for ingress/egress to several playgrounds
- Economics – Not covered under ADA, but sliding scales for fees are in place and operating for population with special needs

The majority of this analysis has dealt with the Department’s actions to eliminate physical barriers. However, accessibility concerns are not just physical. Many non-physical and behavioral barriers may exist that may prevent or discourage persons with disabilities from participating in a park activity or visiting a park facility.

These types of barriers include:

- Communication – Includes hard-to-read print and signs without universal symbols or Braille.
- Programs – Staff or volunteers may assume people with disabilities cannot participate in, or will not benefit from, an activity. Staff may also assume that people with disabilities do not have similar desires and interests as people without disabilities.
- Organization – Program staff might not be trained, willing, or able to support participation from persons with disabilities or may require unnecessarily detailed forms to request information or service that would be difficult or impossible to complete because of a disability.
- Attitude – Encompasses things like fear, lack of knowledge about a disability, or uncertainty about communicating with a person with a disability.

Facility	STATUS - 2025	
	● Visitability	Comments
	Equipment	
	● Accessibility	
Adam Benjamin		Compliant new sidewalk from west access road, new surfacing
Barclay Village	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
D & B White Comm. Cntr.		Compliant, new bldg
Crescent Lake		Compliant, sidewalk and new surfacing
Devonshire	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Forest Hills		Compliant new sidewalk and access from C & O trail with trail head
Kurtis		Compliant new sidewalk and new surfacing
Lincoln Terrace	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Meadowdale	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Meadowland		Compliant new sidewalk and new surfacing (West 54th Ave. & Madison St.)
Meadowland Estate	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Old Mill Site	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Petruch	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped
Preserves		Compliant, walk and new surfacing
Pruzin		Compliant new sidewalk to walk path and equipment
Rosenbalm		Compliant paved sidewalk to equipment and shelter, no ballfield.
Savannah Ridge		Compliant, walk and new surfacing
Southbrook		Compliant new sidewalk and play surface
Stefak		Compliant
Union	● ●	No sidewalks or equipment, park land undeveloped. C & O Trail and trail head
Wirtes	●	Mostly Compliant, No sidewalk to shelter, no sidewalks on east side.



Chapter 6

Master Plan

I. Plan Vision

The needs of the community, based on data review and assessment, and the results of the input from the community, played a major role in formulating the overall objectives for the Plan. However, these objectives cannot be fulfilled if they are not part of the broader vision for the Town's future. Thus, the vision for the future as a growing community with strong interest in expansion of its quality of life is a determining factor influencing the Plan. This vision was developed by the Town and sets the overall goals for the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

MISSION

"The Town of Merrillville Parks & Recreation Department is dedicated to fostering a vibrant community by providing healthy lifestyle opportunities for all residents. We champion inclusion and diversity, ensuring that every individual feels welcome and valued. With unwavering integrity, we strive to build a strong sense of community and promote continuous growth through innovative programs and services."

VISION

To transform into a recreation provider that caters to a diverse population group and encourages people to become more active, and acts as a source of pride for its residents.

The Merrillville's vision embodies objectives which include:

- Safe, accessible and diverse activities and programs
- Equitable distribution of facilities and programs
- Physical and environmental health of all residents including those of the young and old
- Meeting the needs of today's residents as well as future residents of Merrillville.

In development of the Merrillville's 2025 Parks and Recreation Plan, the Town has consulted and received input from a variety of sources including service providers, stakeholders and the citizens. The consultation efforts aimed to build a cohesive approach in addressing the recreation needs of the Merrillville community as well as guiding future parks and recreation activities of the Town. Staff members in the Department were also consulted to give them an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas about future practices, needs, projects, and directions. In addition, conversations were held with the Parks Committee to get input and review options. The combined knowledge of the staff and the experience of the Town leadership, the input received from residents through public meetings and the Community Survey, have all informed and produced numerous high-quality ideas to improve offerings and operations at the Parks department and to build a superb park system. These ideas and suggestions have become the backbone of the stated goals and strategies for the 2025 Parks and Recreation Plan. In support of these objectives, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan proposes the following seven strategies. To implement these strategies, several action steps have been proposed or identified.

2- Plan Goals

GOAL 1

Engage citizens to identify needs and promote diversity of programs.

Strategies:

1. Expand community outreach through periodic formal and informal community conversations or social media engagements.
2. Strengthen partnership with local service providers and organized athletic groups to expand recreation and sports programming in the Town.
3. Establish a citizen-based Friends of Parks Group for Merrillville.

GOAL 2

Launch robust and superb operation for the Department.

Strategies:

1. Maintain continuous staff improvement to foster a high performing culture and ensure adequate services and programs.
2. Employ performance management tools and new technologies to identify and expand opportunities for market gains.
3. Expand sense of security in parks and trails by regular police presence and employing modern technology and lighting in strategic areas.
4. Update the organization structure annually to ensure allocation of resources effectively and efficiently.

GOAL 3

Maintain financial sustainability of the Department.

Strategies:

1. Recruit partners to help defray the operating cost of the Community Center.
2. Seek grant funds and use other financing tools (i.e. F&B Tax) for park improvements, acquisition and marketing.
3. Consider the advantages of establishing a Park Board for the Town.
4. Expand revenue generating activities in the parks such as year-round pop-up markets for lease events, i.e. food truck vendors, holiday sale, market, art shows in the park, etc.

GOAL 4

Build minimum level of park facilities in all Town parks to bring people to the parks.

Strategies:

1. Install Park signs in all parks and provide or upgrade playgrounds where such amenities are lacking.
2. Plan for facility expansions at Stefek and Forest Hills Parks, Pruzin and D&B Community Center.
3. Promote outdoor entertainment and festivals in the park facilities i.e. Pruzin Park and D & B White Community Center.
4. Complete new master plans for the Town's undeveloped parks (Old Mill, Union, Barklay Village, Devonshire) and future parks to ensure availability of services in every Town districts.

Goal 5

Ensure all park facilities are connected and accessible.

Strategies:

1. Promote connectivity to parks & civic facilities, schools/education centers, library, commercial centers, etc.
2. Implement a plan to improve visitability and compliance with ADA for all parks.
3. Develop plans for a north south trail connecting 73rd Avenue to US 30 via Southbrook Park.
4. Examine feasibility of an east west trail corridor (Mississippi – Madison) using vacant Plymouth Road right-of-way.

Goal 6

Create affordable recreational and cultural arts programming for all ages and social groups.

Strategies:

1. Support programs which provide arts and other programs for all segments of the population.

2. Expand programming at the community center particularly for families, youths and senior citizens.
1. Recruit organized athletics providers (i.e. Babe Ruth, Pop Warner, etc.) that can effectively utilize available facilities and provide sport activities in Merrillville.
2. Work with the Merrillville School Corporation and Boys and Girls Club to expand educational and recreational programming for the youths in the Town of Merrillville.

Goal 7

Foster preservation of the green space for future park land particularly where deficiency exists.

Strategies:

1. Collaborate with local and regional partners to encourage land dedication and donation for future parks.
2. Create standards for the dedication of quality parkland in new subdivisions. This should include standards for size (min. 3 acres), location, access, land condition, and facilities provided.
3. Identify suitable land proactively for acquisition for future park sites particularly in the southern and eastern part of the Town. Potential sites include:
 - Preserve Neighborhood site (85th and Florida Avenue)
 - Sedona Neighborhood (W. 86th and Lincoln Street)
 - Liberty Estates Site (W. 86th and Whitcomb)
 - Broadwest/Deerfield (W. 87th and Madison)
 - Merrillville East (9009 Clay Street)
 - Old Lincoln Hwy (8675 Lincolnway)
 - Civic Park (Town Hall Complex)

6- Future Park Sites

The new parks proposed in this chapter consider Merrillville's existing boundaries as well as future growth areas to promote the 10-minute walk goal for all residents as the Town expands its development. In addition to future growth areas, new park locations take into account high-priority ecological land. Several of the new park sites identified in the plan are within or directly adjacent to priority ecological corridors or lands. This allows the Town to manage and preserve important natural resources, promotes habitat connectivity, and offers residents opportunities for passive recreation and environmental education. The proximity of new parks to the planned Deep River Greenway, or planned C&O Trail extension and other pedestrian facilities promote regional connectivity.

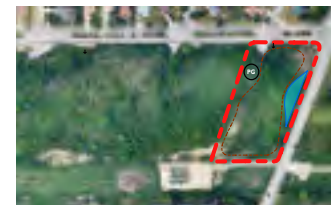
1. Preserve Park Expansion

- Location: 85th and Florida
- Park Classification: Natural Park + Neighborhood Park
- Potential size: 28 + wetland
5-10 acres park
- Character: Wetland, urban



2. Sedona Neighborhood

- Location: W. 86th, Merrillville Road to Lincoln Streets
- Park Classification: Neighborhood Park
- Potential size: 3-10 acres
- Character: Residential, vacant



3. Liberty Estates

- Location: W. 86th and Whitcomb
- Park Classification: Community Park
- Potential size: 20-25 acres
- Character: Farmland



4. Broadwest/Deerfield

- Location: W. 87th and Madison
- Park Classification: Neighborhood Park
- Potential size: Water area 7 acres
Land area 6-7 acres
- Character: Residential, Urban



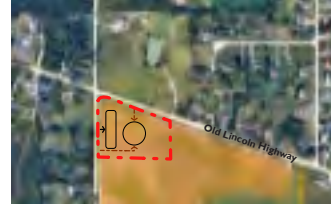
5. Merrillville East

- Location: 9009 Clay Street
- Park Classification: Community Park
- Potential size: 40-80 acres
- Character: Natural, 2 lakes, bordering Erie Trail.



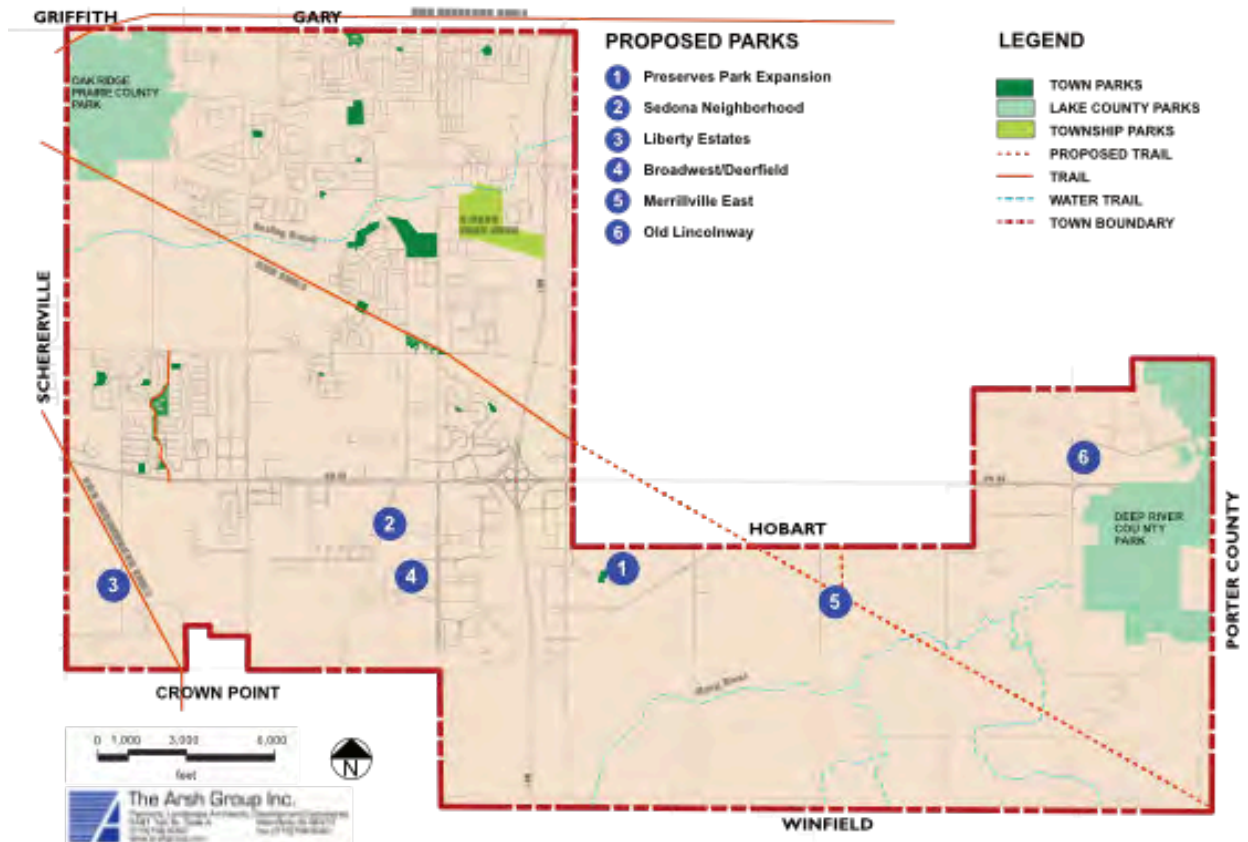
6. Old Lincolnway

- Location: 8675 Old Lincoln HWY
- Park: Community Park
- Potential size: 10-20 acres
- Character: Farmland, residential neighborhood



7. Town Hall Complex

- Location: and WY
- Park Classification: Civic Park
- Potential Size: : 10-20 acres
- Character: Municipal complex, Vacant Land



3. Priority Plan

The 2020 Plan identifies several concerns as critical issues that require closer attention. These concerns range from the need for a fully developed community parks system to additional facilities in certain neighborhoods. Development of amenities and programs for the families and/or older population has also been identified as a major need. Although identified needs and opportunities have played a major role in development of the framework plan, only some of them can be considered on a shorter term for a variety of reason. Others, will need to be considered as long term objectives. The needs and opportunities have been assigned one of three priority levels based on the interest of the citizens, review by the Park Department, and the level of deficiencies. Examples of projects for each level are listed in the sidebar.

Essential projects are those projects that are critically required or needed. These projects should ideally be completed within the first two years of the Plan.

Needed projects are those projects that aim to address other service deficiencies in the parks. They are not as critical as the essential projects, but the Department should still endeavor to complete all needed projects within the lifespan of this Plan.

Desirable projects are those projects which would improve the quality and amenities of the parks, but may not be feasible within the next five years. However, as opportunities may arise and the needs of the Town change, some of these types of improvements may make sense to pursue sooner than anticipated.

Essential Projects

- Upgrading non-ADA playgrounds.
- Extensions of the C&O Greenway.
- Establishing trails along high-priority corridors.
- Phase 1 construction of the new community center.
- Master plans for Old Mill, Union, and other undeveloped parks.
- Upgrading Pruzin, Stefek, and Forest Hills parks.
- Replacing outdated shelters.

Needed Projects

- Land acquisition for new parks and facilities, particularly in the southwest quadrant and other growing areas.
- Development of Devonshire, Old Mill Meadowland Estate, and Union parks.
- New play courts and similar facilities in existing parks.
- New signage with new park development.
- Bike paths/lanes along major arterials.

Desirable Projects

- Land acquisition for new parks and facilities in the panhandle and eastern areas of the town.
- Acquisition or protection of high resource value green space.
- New and expanded walking and biking trails within parks.
- Development of vacant parks not listed above.

Park	Opportunities	<p>● Essential</p> <p>● Needed</p> <p>● Desired</p>
Adam Benjamin		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan.	●
	Promote development of year round pop-up market for lease events; i.e. food truck vendors.	●
	Install landscaping buffer along the north side.	●
	Install lighting.	●
	Construct parallel parking along western edge.	●
	Install additional sidewalks on the west side of lot from newly constructed parking lot (when constructed) for accessibility/visitability.	●
Barclay Village		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Prepare Park Master Plan	●
	Install sidewalks for accessibility/visitability.	●
C&O Greenway		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install security lighting at strategic location.	●
	Install trail heads at areas of interest to improve connectivity.	●
Crescent Lake		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Construct walking trail around open area to the north side of park.	●
	Install park sign.	●
Devonshire		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan.	●
	Construct walking trail around open area of park to Turkey Creek.	●
	Install disc golf basket.	●
	Install drinking fountain.	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Install playground.	●
	Install shade trees.	●
	Construct shelter.	●
Erie-Lackawanna Trail		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install security lighting at southern trail head.	●
	Install shelter at Whitcomb Street trail heads.	●
Forest Hills		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install drinking fountain at trail head.	●

Park	Proposed Improvement	<p>● Essential</p> <p>● Needed</p> <p>● Desired</p>
Kurtis		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install picnic shelter and seating.	●
Lincoln Terrace		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan.	●
	Install landscaping	
	Install park sign.	●
	Install picnic shelter and playground in central location.	●
Meadowdale		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Reconstruct the nature trail around the pond.	●
	Install park sign.	●
Meadowland		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install sidewalks for accessibility/visitability.	●
Meadowland Estate		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Install picnic shelter and playground.	●
	Install sidewalks for accessibility/visitability.	●
Old Mill		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan.	●
	Promote development of year round pop-up market for lease events; i.e. food	●
	Install community plaza with seating, shelter, and other appropriate amenities.	●
	Install drinking fountain.	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Refurbish parking lot.	●
Petruch		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Maintain as natural area.	●
Preserves		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan for expansion of the parkland and amenities.	●
	Install landscaping.	●

Park	Opportunities	<p>● Essential</p> <p>● Needed</p> <p>● Desired</p>
Pruzin		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Construct basketball, multi-purpose tennis/pickle ball court.	●
	Promote development of year round pop-up market for lease events; i.e. food	●
	Promote small events for outdoor uses; i.e. art in the park, jazz/gospel in the park.	●
	Install disc golf basket.	●
Rosenbalm		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install a community garden for the neighborhood.	●
	Install walking path loop around park.	●
	Re-establish baseball field/or convert to pickle ball court.	●
Savannah Ridge		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install shade trees	●
	Install picnic shelter and seating.	●
Southbrook		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install walking path loop around park.	●
	Install picnic shelter and seating.	●
Stefek		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install disc golf basket.	●
	Landscaping: Plant trees at Harrison St. and 70th Pl.	●
	Re-establish baseball field/or convert to pickle ball court.	●
Union		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Develop a master plan.	●
	Consider development of a dog park.	●
	Install park sign.	●
	Re-establish parking lot.	●
Wirtes		
	Call Box/Security Camera	●
	Install disc golf basket.	●
	Install new picnic shelter and seating near playground.	●
	Install walking path that connects to Roosevelt Street.	●
Trail/Bike Path Development		
	Trail from 73rd Ave. at Rosenbalm park to US Hwy 30.	●
	C&O Greenway Phase 4 (Hobart to County Line Rd.)	●
	Trail along Turkey Creek	●
	Trail along 93rd Avenue extension to Grand Blvd.	●
	Plymouth St. Trail: Mississippi St. to Madison St.	●
	Bike Path along Broadway	●
	Trail along Deep River	●
	Bike Path/Lane along Randolph St.	●

GRIFFITH

GARY

OAK SAVANNAH TRAIL

PARKS

LEGEND

- 1 Meadowdale
- 2 Pruzin
- 3 Meadowland
- 4 Meadowland Estate
- 5 Barclay Village
- 6 Wirtes
- 7 Petruch
- 8 Devonshire
- 9 Community Center
- 10 John A. Stefek
- 11 Union
- 12 Savannah Ridge
- 13 Kurtis
- 14 Forest Hills
- 15 Rosenbalm
- 16 Southbrook
- 17 Crescent Lake
- 18 Lincoln Terrace
- 19 Adam Benjamin
- 20 Preserves

- Town Parks
- Lake County Parks
- Township Parks
- Proposed Trail
- Trail
- Water Trail
- Town Boundary

OAK RIDGE PRAIRIE COUNTY PARK

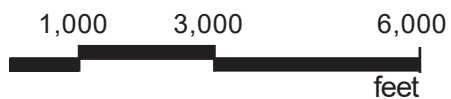
HIDDEN LAKE PARK

DEEP RIVER COUNTY PARK

Turkey Creek

Deep River

2025 Merrillville Parks and Recreation Parks Map



SCHERERVILLE

ERIE-LACKAWANNA TRAIL

CROWN POINT

I-65

HOBART

Colorado St.

Clay St.

Grand Blvd.

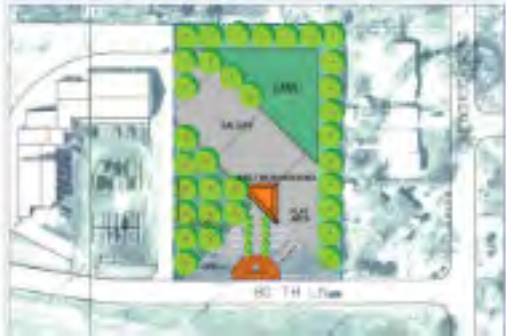
Randolph St.

WINFIELD

PORTER COUNTY

4. Action Plan

The Action Plan is an instrument which will guide and direct the activities of the Parks Department for the next five years. The activities included in the Action Plan are priority items which were determined to be highly desirable or needed items to meet the overall objectives of the Master Plan. The Action Plan is organized according to year, facility, planned improvement, estimated budget, and potential funding sources. The funding source is expected to be fluent, as budgetary policies of the Town may change over time. The costs identified on the Plan are only estimates and should be used for budgeting purposes only. Actual costs may vary as projects are further developed and defined. Due to the Department's current financial limitations, as well as the uncertain nature of future budget levels and funding sources, some priority plan items are currently not budgeted in this plan cycle, but are still included in the action plan for future planning purposes.



Conceptual Plan for Adam Benjamin Park



Conceptual Plan for Meadowland Park



Conceptual Plan for Devonshire Park

PARK IMPROVEMENTS	PARK IMPROVEMENTS																						
	C & O GREENWAY	ERIE-LACKAWANNA TRAIL	ADAM BENJAMIN	BARCLAY VILLAGE	CRESCENT LAKE	D&E COMMUNITY CNTR	DEVONSHIRE	FOREST HILLS	KURTIS	LINCOLN TERRACE	MEADOWDALE	MEADOWLAND	MEADOWLAND ESTATES	OLD MILL SITE	PETRUCH	PRESERVES	PRUZIN	ROSEBALM	SAVANNAH RIDGE	SOUTH BROOK	STEFEK	UNION	WIRTES
PARK FURNISHINGS																							
Park Sign				1			1			1	1		1	1	1								1
Sidewalk/Concrete Path (ADA)				1			1			1	1	1	1		1								
PLAY EQUIPMENT																							
Disc Golf Basket																	5				4		
Playground (small)							1																
Playground (large)										1			1										
PARK STRUCTURES																							
Call Box/Camera	3	2	1	1	1		1	1		1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dog Park																						1	1
Drinking Fountain	1						1										1				1	1	
Multi-purpose tennis/pickle ball/basketball court.																	2				1		
Shelter (tables and concrete concrete pad)			1		1					1			1						1	1			
Pop-up Tent (8)			8																				
PARK IMPROVEMENTS																							
Community Garden																	1	1					
Parking Lot			1																				
Restroom/Concessions Bldg./Stand																	1						
Sidewalks on the west side			1																				
Landscaping/Tree Planting			1							1							1					1	
Master Plan			1				1							1								1	

PROPOSED ITEMIZED BUDGET 2025-2029					
Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Call Box/Camera (22)	\$ 17,000	\$ 17,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Community Garden (2)					
Disc Golf Basket (9)		\$ 6,000	\$ 4,800		
Dog Park (1)					\$ 100,000
Drinking Fountatin (5)	\$ 17,600				\$ 4,400
Land Acquisition (6)			\$250,000		
Planning and Design (New Parks + 2 Trails)			\$50,000		
Park Landscaping/Tree Planting (4)	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000		\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Multi-purpose tennis/pickle ball/basekettball court. (3)		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	
Park Signs (8)	\$ 12,000				
Playground (1 small) (2 large)		\$ 80,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	
Pop-up Tent (up to 8 units)		\$ 30,000			
Parking (Adam Benjamin, western edge). (1)	\$ 12,000				
Shelter (table, concrete,) (6)			\$ 44,000	\$ 44,000	
Sidewalk/Concrete Path (7)	\$ 70,000				
Parking lot. (Union Park) (1)					\$ 21,500
Master Plan (4) + 2 Trails	\$ 25,000				
D&B White Community Center Expansion	\$				7,000,000
Total- Annual	\$ 173,600	\$ 253,000	\$ 273,800	\$ 289,000	\$ 170,900
funds	\$				8,460,300

6- Maintenance

Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance

The Department of Parks and Recreation has a limited number of maintenance vehicles and equipment for its own use. The Department often relies on other Departments for assistance in maintaining its facilities. In order to keep up with the future needs of the Department, and to reduce the reliance on other departments, the Parks Department should develop a schedule for replacing and acquiring new maintenance equipment and vehicles. In preparation for the completion of the community center, this schedule should also include needed maintenance equipment to keep the center operating efficiently. For this reason, this schedule should be arranged based on the finalized program of the community center. Because this program is still in flux at this time, no specific schedule has been developed for this Plan. However, the community center feasibility study that was prepared in 2017 has general guidelines for equipment needs, and can be used as a starting point for planning purposes. As a cost savings measure, the Town should consider lease/purchase agreements, or leasing of larger equipment, as a means of keeping acquisition costs down.

7- Funding Sources

Funding for Action Plan projects and programs will be primarily dependent upon local revenue, grants, bonds, special appropriations, and cost sharing through strategic partnerships. The Park Department or the town can also seek contributions or donations from residents, businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, or philanthropists. Furthermore, the town has been fairly successful in partnering with other organizations. The town can cultivate these relationships on a broader scale and raise more in-kind dollars to develop park facilities. Potential sources of funding for the Action Plan items include:

1. General Revenue

The Town of Merrillville can utilize a variety of funding from within the Town's resources. These resources are appropriated by the Town Council on an annual basis. The Department should pursue funds as necessary to meet its development and operational needs.

2. Bonds

The Town has, in the past, issued special bonds to cover major facility construction and acquisition. The community center is one such project. Loan is typically paid from the proceeds of a tax levied for the use of a specific public project, or with the proceeds of fees charged to those who use the facility that the bonds finance.

3. Park Board

Currently, Merrillville's Park Department is overseen by a Park Authority. Indiana Code 36-10-3 allows for the creation of a Park Board as a vehicle to oversee park operations. One advantage in transitioning to a Park Board structure is the additional ability to raise funds to help pay for park improvements. Some of the powers that a Park Board can utilize include:

- a. Ability to buy/sell park facilities & equipment
- b. Ability to raise funds for park operations
- c. Lease park facilities for supplemental uses, such as:
 - i. Education
 - li. Food service
 - lii. Secondary recreational activities
- d. Incur limited amounts of debt beyond the current capacity of the Town

4. Park Impact Fee

Impact fees are a one-time fee to off-set costs of infrastructure caused by new development. The Town uses these funds for park, open space, and recreation facilities and acquisition and development of park facilities.

5. **Cumulative Capital Improvement Funds** - The Park and Recreation Law (36-10-3-20) allows money to be placed in a fund for the purpose of acquiring land or making specific capital improvements. The Park Department can also make requests to the Council for funds from the general CCI Fund for specific projects. (Note: A CCI Fund cannot be established if a Recreational Impact Fee is in place)

6. **Food and Beverage Tax:** The Town could use its current tax revenues on retail sales to fund capital improvements, as well as for general operations, maintenance, and management of the parks system.

7. **Other Local Funds**

Municipalities often plan for the funding of various improvements through the development of Capital Improvement Programs (CIP). CIPs should include all types of capital improvements (water, sewer, buildings, streets, etc.) which are not limited to single purpose use. This allows a municipality to balance all capital needs among different uses and functions. Typical capital funding mechanisms include the following: capital reserve fund, capital protection ordinances, municipal service district, tax increment financing (TIF), fees, and storm water management funds. Other funding sources that the Town receives and utilizes for various projects include Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and Community Capital Development (CCD) Funds. In the past, the Parks Department has relied on funds such as these for larger park improvements, such as the acquisition of the community center site and the extension of the C&O Greenway. While the Parks Department should work to become more self-sufficient as park revenues increase, where appropriate, these sources could still be considered for other larger projects that are beyond the funding capacity of the Parks Department.

8. **Private Donors/Organizations**

The Department of Parks and Recreation must continue to seek private donations of land, funds, and amenities to aid in the maintenance and improvement of the park system. In addition, local organizations can become an integral part of the park system by organizing fundraisers, park maintenance outings, or by helping sponsor new park features. Corporate and philanthropic contributions and sponsorship may also be available to assist with funding park improvements and providing park & recreation facilities.

9. **Grants**

Several grants are available from the State of Indiana and the Federal Government. The Town of Merrillville should seek these grants on a regular basis. Some private organizations also provide grants for parks and recreation purposes. Most parks and recreation grants are highly competitive and require the receiving agency to provide matching funds to prove that they are capable of undertaking the project. Listed below are some of the potential grants that are available to projects identified in this report. The matching requirements for these grants are identified in the parenthesis.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (50/50)** — The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a federal grant program that is administered at both federal and state levels. The program provides assistance for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation/conservation areas and facilities. The National Park Service administers the federal portion, while the Indiana Department of Natural Resources administers the state portion of the grants. The amount of availing is \$50,000 - \$700,000 per application.
- **Indiana Trails Program (ITP)** – The program is a Federal/(DNR) 80/20 match that can be used for land acquisition and/or development, maintenance, and education of multi-use trail. Funding typically ranges from \$100,000-\$400,000.
- **Creating Places: State (IHCDA) 50/50 Match-** As a place-based crowd-granting program, Creating Places empowers the public - residents, businesses and community organizations to play a role in achieving community improvements and building community pride. Funding typically ranges from \$5,000-\$50,000.
- **AARP Community Challenge** - The AARP Community Challenge provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. Funding limits typically vary from \$2,500-\$50,000.
- **The Indiana Heritage Trust Program** — The Indiana Heritage Trust program offers funding to preserve land in Indiana. Project types eligible for funding under the Indiana Heritage Trust include the acquisition of property for new and existing state parks, state forests, nature preserves, fish and wildlife areas, and outdoor recreation, historic, or archaeological sites. For more information, visit: www.in.gov/dnr/heritage/4420.htm
- **Next Level Connections** — This program will link Hoosiers to broadband, hiking and biking trails, international flights, and roads that will improve connections for all Hoosiers regardless of where they live, work, and play. The program will utilize \$90 million to link communities through more hiking, biking, and riding trails. The state will initiate a grant program that encourages local and regional collaboration to grow the state’s trails system.
- **Bicentennial Nature Trust (BNT)** — The BNT was created to preserve and protect important conservation and recreation areas throughout Indiana by matching donations of land or dollars. Property acquired with this fund will become part of the public trust to ensure that the land is protected for future generations. The BNT requires a \$1:1 match, with a maximum availability of \$300,000 per individual project.
- **Quick Impact Place based Grant (QUIP)** — This program focus on creativity, ingenuity, and collaboration with the end result leaving a lasting impression on communities. The program provides a range of \$2,500 and \$5,000 for each project and requires a local match of 1 to 0.5.
- **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program** — The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) is a National Parks Service (NPS) program providing technical assistance via direct NPS staff involvement to establish and restore greenways, rivers, trails, watersheds, and open space. The RTCA program provides only for planning assistance—there are no implementation funds available. Projects are prioritized for assistance based on criteria including conserving significant community resources, fostering cooperation between agencies, serving a large number of users, encouraging public involvement in planning and implementation, and focusing on lasting

accomplishments. For more information, visit: www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm

- **Recreational Trails Program (80/20)** — The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federally-funded, state administered (Indiana DNR) grant program which is aimed at developing or maintaining motorized or non-motorized recreational trails. Cities, towns, counties, tribal governing bodies, school districts, state agencies, federal agencies, and incorporated organizations are eligible to receive reimbursement for development and maintenance of recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail uses. A minimum of 30% of the overall grant program must be for motorized use; 30% is for non-motorized use, and the remainder is discretionary funds. Eligible sponsors may be reimbursed for up to 50% of the total project costs. The minimum grant amount is \$10,000, with a maximum award of \$200,000.
- **Safe Routes to School (80/20)** — The purpose of Safe Routes to Schools is to promote safe, healthy alternatives to riding the bus or being driven to school. All projects must be within two miles of primary or middle schools (K-8). Eligible projects may include engineering improvements. These physical improvements are designed to reduce potential bicycle and pedestrian conflicts with motor vehicles. Physical improvements may also reduce motor vehicle traffic volumes around schools, establish safer and more accessible crossings, or construct walkways, trails, or bikeways. Eligible projects include sidewalk improvements, traffic calming/speed reduction, pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and secure bicycle parking facilities.
- **Indiana Coastal Grants Program (50/50)** — The Indiana Coastal Grants Program awards monies to projects that protect and restore natural, cultural, and historic resources in Indiana's Lake Michigan coastal region. Natural area restoration, preservation, and management projects are deemed high priority issues and, therefore, receive the highest consideration in awarding grants. However, cultural & historical restoration, preservation, and management projects are also eligible under this grant, as well as improvements to trails, public access connections, and habitat corridors.
- **Indiana Lake and River Enhancement Program (75/25)** — The Indiana Lake and River Enhancement Program was created to help ensure the viability of Indiana's publicly accessible lakes, streams, and reservoirs. The program provides funding for such projects as wetland construction, shoreline/stream bank stabilization, watershed treatment projects, dredging, and various diagnostic and feasibility studies. The program does not provide monies for lake construction, private lake enhancement, or shoreline improvements for recreational purposes.
- **Shooting Range Program (75/25)** — The DNR's Shooting Range Grant Program offers assistance to all units of government and not-for-profit agencies for the development of rifle, handgun, shotgun, and archery facilities available to the public. The intent of this program is to train the public, hunter education, and to provide additional safe places for target practice. The maximum funding is \$100,000.



The Department of Parks and Recreation has a limited number of maintenance vehicles and equipment for its own use. The Department often relies on other Departments for assistance in maintaining its facilities. In order to keep up with the future needs of the Department, and to reduce the reliance on other departments, the Parks Department should develop a schedule for replacing and acquiring new maintenance equipment and vehicles. The D & B community center has procured resources for upkeep and maintenance for the center facilities.

Overall park and recreation asset maintenance will require further evaluation. Because this program is still in flux at this time, no specific schedule has been developed for this Plan. Recent actions by the Town Council has provided for additional financial resources for department staffing. However, allocation of these new resources has not been finalized. Management will need to evaluate needs according to recent asset additions and improvements made in the department and update any required scheduling modifications.