

# Region 2 Planning Commission



## MEMORANDUM #1

To: Joint Oversight Committee  
Joint Recreation Plan & Operations Study

From: Grant E. Bauman, AICP  
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Date: September 29, 2009

Subject: **General Benefits Attributed to the Provision of Parks**

Staff was directed to list potential benefits of a metropolitan park system which can be used to generate public support of such a system. In order to accomplish that task, it is important to identify the general benefits attributed to the provision of parks. The American Planning Association's City Parks Forum has catalogued a number of those benefits attributed to park systems.<sup>1</sup> Those benefits are listed below, along with local examples where appropriate:

### ■ Community revitalization

- "Parks that serve as central walking, resting, and meeting places can revive failing or threatened commercial areas."

*The establishment of Bucky Harris Park on a vacant lot in the middle of Downtown and the inclusion of Downtown Riverfront Park as an extension of the new Consumers Energy Campus have aided the revitalization of Downtown Jackson.*

- "Renewal takes leadership, vision, and time; with these three ingredients, revitalization tends to attract ever more investment."
- "Community residents and the city, working together on a neighborhood park project, can turn around a distressed residential area."

*The development of Partnership Park is an important component of the revitalization of the Partnership Park Neighborhood.*

- "Parks don't automatically lead to neighborhood revival; before investing, the city should make sure the relation of a park to its surrounding neighborhood will allow revitalization."

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<sup>1</sup> Briefing papers, which go into greater detail on each of the benefits, are available on the American Planning Association website: [www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/index.htm](http://www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/index.htm)

■ **Community engagement**

- “Parks are one of the quickest and most effective ways to build a sense of community and improve quality of life.”
- “Parks provide places for people to connect and interact in a shared environment.”
- “Parks channel positive community participation by getting diverse people to work together toward a shared vision.”
- *The master plan for Sparks Foundation County Park is the result of successful community participation.*

■ **Economic development**

- “Real property values are positively affected.”  
*The juxtaposition of Ella Sharp Park, Sparks Foundation County Park, and other nearby recreation facilities play an important part in making the neighborhoods of the southwest quadrant of the City the most desirable places to live in the municipality. The surrounding neighborhoods in Summit Township also benefit.*
- “Municipal revenues are increased.”
- “Affluent retirees are attracted and retained.”
- “Knowledge workers and talent are attracted to live and work.”
- “Homebuyers are attracted to purchase homes.”

■ **Create safer neighborhoods**

- “Time spent in nature immediately adjacent to home helps people to relieve mental fatigue, reducing aggression.”
- “Green residential spaces are gathering places where neighbors form social ties that produce stronger, safer neighborhoods.”
- “Barren spaces are more frightening to people and are more crime prone than parks landscaped with greenery and open vistas.”
- In order to make the best use of greenery and open space, it must be positively incorporated into a community’s design.”

■ **Green infrastructure**

- “Creating an interconnected system of parks and open space is manifestly more beneficial than creating parks in isolation.”

*The close juxtaposition of City parks and their connection by sidewalks as well as streets create an interconnected system. The close proximity of Ella Sharp Park to Sparks Foundation County Park and Vandercook Lake County Park extends the coverage of that system into Summit Township.*

*The Falling Waters Trail is an extension of the Intercity Trail, forming the backbone for a proposed trail network. The trails also provide direct access to the Martin Luther King Center, Elnora Moorman Plaza, and New Leaf Park within the City and Lime Lake County Park. Betsy Butterfield and Ella Sharp Parks in the City and Sparks Foundation County Park are also located close to the trails.*

- “Cities can use parks to help preserve essential ecological functions and to protect biodiversity.”
- “When planned as part of a system of green infrastructure, parks can help shape urban form and buffer incompatible uses.”
- “Cities can use parks to reduce public costs for stormwater management, flood control, transportation and other forms of built infrastructure.”

#### ■ **Help children learn**

- “City parks offer children the daily benefits of direct experience with nature—the motivation to explore, discover, and learn about their world and to engage in health-promoting, physical activity.”

*The location of the Hurst Planetarium (Jackson Public Schools) and the Ella Sharp Museum of Art and History (an independent nonprofit institution) in Ella Sharp Park and the Cascades in Sparks Foundation County Park augment the ability of the park systems to educate children.*

- “City parks offer children a sense of place, self-identity, and belonging as an antidote to social alienation, vandalism, and violence.”

*The recreation programs provided by the City and the playgrounds and sports facilities provided by the City and County provide positive experiences for youth.*

- “City parks engage children in an informal, experiential learning through play and shared experience with peers, laying the foundation for effective formal education.”

*The playgrounds and sports facilities found in many City and County parks and the City’s recreation programs supplement the formal educational experiences of Jackson County youth.*

- “City parks provide a valuable resource for closing the educational achievement gap in communities.”
- “City parks offer a vehicle for children’s participation in community development, citizenship, and democratic processes.”

*The fireworks displays and the civil war muster hosted each summer in Sparks Foundation County Park, the educational programs provided by the Ella Sharp Museum of Art and History and the Hurst Planetarium (which are located in Ella Sharp park), and the recreational programs available through the City provide experiences which highlight the importance of community and create local pride.*

■ **Improve public health**

- “Parks provide people with contact with nature, known to confer certain health benefits and enhance well-being.”

*Both systems provide access to natural/undeveloped areas.*

- “Physical activity opportunities in parks help to increase fitness and reduce obesity.”

*The development of the Intercity Trail, the Falling Waters Trail, and other trails; the City’s recreation centers; and various playgrounds and sports facilities provide opportunities for exercise throughout Jackson County.*

- “Cities need to provide all types of parks to provide their various citizen groups with a range of health benefits.”

*The City and County systems provide a variety of urban, suburban, and rural park settings and park types (e.g., mini, neighborhood, community, and regional).*

■ **Arts and cultural programs**

- “Cities today use parks for a wide range of artistic events and activities.”

*The Ella Sharp Museum of Art and History (an independent nonprofit institution) is located in Ella Sharp Park. Various sculptures are also located in various City parks and on other public lands throughout the City*

- “Parks can provide a setting for in-depth and long-term partnerships between communities and artists.”

- “Arts activity can play an integral role in the revitalization of a park.”

- “Arts and cultural programs in parks can help arts organizations develop new audiences and can provide suitable rehearsal and performance space.”

■ **Promote tourism**

- “Parks provide sites for special events and festivals that attract tourists.”

*Sparks Foundation County Park hosts several fireworks displays throughout the summer (i.e., Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day) and the annual civil war muster. The City’s Bucky Harris Park and the Downtown Riverfront Park host musical events throughout the summer. Weddings and fundraising walks (i.e., breast cancer and lupus) are held in Ella Sharp Park and the Sparks Foundation County Park. The City’s eastside and southside neighborhood reunions are also held in parks.*

- “Parks provide sites for sports tournaments, which can be a major source of tourism and economic benefits, especially for smaller cities.”

*Grass Lake County Park hosts an annual regional event of the Michigan Hydroplane Racing Association and hosted the Stock Outboard National Champion-*

*ships in 2009. Sparks Foundation County Park and Ella Sharp Park provide premier golf courses which attract golfers countywide and beyond.*

- “Large urban parks with zoos, memorials, museums, cultural and heritage artifacts, and historical sites can attract tourists.”

*The Cascades and the Ella Sharp Museum of Art and History attract patrons from around the county and beyond. Both of those facilities are located in parks.*

- “Parks with landscape planting and design that are recognized as “living works of art” can be tourist attractions.”

- **Smart growth**

- “Parks have voter support to direct public funds toward growth management strategies.”
- “Parks enhance mixed development and redevelopment strategies, offsetting higher density concerns with accessibility to greenspace.”
- “Parks can both strengthen the urban core and protect the fringe from overdevelopment.”

- **Climate change management**

- “Parks moderate artificially higher temperatures from the urban heat island effect through shading and evapotranspiration.”
- “Parks enhance local wind patterns in cities through the park breeze (cooler air over parks replaces warmer air in adjacent city neighborhoods).”
- “Parks mitigate local precipitation anomalies amplified by the urban heat island effect.”
- “Parks sequester carbon and other pollutants trapped by the urban heat island that may otherwise alter local and global atmospheric composition.”