

MEMORANDUM

To: Van Buren County Recreation Plan Steering Committee
From: Elizabeth Luther, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Date: 05.11.2010
Re: Public Input Meeting - Results

Overview

This memorandum offers a brief summary of results from the 05/03/2010 public visioning session. At the session, attendees' provided input through an interactive presentation (using TurningPoint technology), and written surveys; this memo addresses feedback from both formats. Thirty (30) members of the public, including some steering committee members, attended the session.

Below are brief summaries of survey responses broken down into five categories: (1) Recreation Habits; (2) Programming; (3) Improvements to Current Facilities; (4) New Facilities; and (5) The County's Role (Marketing/Administration/Initiatives).

Following the 'Summary' section is a 'Detailed Responses' section, which addresses attendees' responses question-by-question & category-by-category.

Summary

(1) Attendees' Recreation Habits

Public input session attendees are largely trail users (both water/land), who frequent neighborhood parks, beaches, and like to use trails for bicycling and hiking. The large majority of attendees use recreation facilities approximately 3-4 times per month or less. Further trends:

- Approximately half (46.4%) of attendees use recreational facilities in Van Buren County 3-4 times a month; the majority of the rest (42.8%) use them less frequently.

- The type of park attendees use most frequently (28.6%) is a **small, neighborhood park**, followed by conservation easements and beaches/river access.
- Attendees use sports fields/larger community parks least frequently.
- **Biking and hiking** are the most frequent activities for attendees on **public land trails**.
- On lakes and rivers, the majorities of attendees (34.6%) primarily swim, while the least boat or sail (3.8% & 0.0%, respectively).

(2) Programming

Recreation programming attendees most use is **cultural/historical programming** (34.6%) and **fitness/nutrition education** (26.9%). Few attendees participate in sports programming. Attendees would most like to see programming that:

- Provides information about recreation amenities throughout the county to residents and visitors;
- Encourages conservation awareness;
- Encourages safety (i.e. bicycle safety and water safety).

(3) Improvements to Current Facilities

In general, attendees want to see improvements to facilities that:

- encourage year-round use;
- have a low impact on the environment and surrounding land uses (though respondents want more automobile parking at almost every facility);
- encourage connectivity between facilities;
- provide clear, uniform instructions and directions (i.e. county-wide signage standards); and
- Encourage access (through clearing, paving, increased parking, more bathrooms, etc.).

(4) New Facilities

Attendees are interested in a wide range of new facilities. Over half (55.2%) are interested in seeing a [new] **nature preserve** near their home; the next most desired facility is a **paved trail** (13.8%). Other frequently mentioned facilities include:

- facilities (both on-road and off-road) that connect current trails in the county to each-other and to trails outside the county;
- a water trail on the Paw Paw river;
- more access to Lake Michigan and rivers;
- more open space/preservation areas.

(5) The County’s Role (Marketing/Administration/Initiatives)

Some attendees suggest that the County’s role in recreation planning may include:

- being more creative/proactive about funding to obtain recreation and conservation land.
- some sort of uniformization of recreation facilities throughout the county, (i.e. signage guidelines);
- creating a map that provides information about recreational facilities throughout the county;
- more general promotion/marketing of facilities; and

Details Responses

The questions below provide detailed summaries of attendees responses to TurningPoint questions and written survey questions.

1. How often do you use outdoor parks and recreation facilities in Van Buren County?

Response	%
3 = 3-4 times a month	46.4%
4 = 3-4 times a year	32.1%
1 = every day	10.7%
2 = 3-4 times a week	10.7%
5 = never	0.0%

2. Which type of park/recreation facility do you use the most?

Response	%
1 = small neighborhood park	28.6%
3 = conservation area	21.4%
4 = beach/river access	21.4%
5 = hiking, walking, biking trail	17.9%
2 = larger, community park w/ sports fields	3.6%
6 = none of the above	7.1%

3. If you use public trails,¹ which activity do you use them for most?

Response	%
5 = road bicycling	22.2%
9 = other	22.2%
1 = hiking	18.5%
3 = dog-walking	14.80%
6 = mountain biking	14.80%
4 = running	3.70%
8 = snowmobiling	3.70%
2 = birding	0.00%
7 = horseback riding	0.00%

4. If you use recreation facilities that provide lake or river access, what do you use them for?

Response	%
1 = swimming	34.6%
3 = kayaking/canoeing	26.9%
7 = n/a	19.2%
2 = fishing	11.5%
5 = recreational boating	3.8%
6 = other	3.8%
4 = sailing	0.0%

¹ Attendees suggested this question was misleading, as it did not include activities on water trails. Many of the “other” responses may refer to water trail uses.

5. Which type of recreation programming do you use most?

Response	%
1 = cultural/historical	34.6%
3 = fitness/nutrition education	26.9%
7 = activities for seniors	19.2%
8 = other	17.2%
2 = outdoor music	11.5%
5 = adult sports	3.8%
6 = youth sports	3.8%
4 = outdoor/nature education	0.0%

6. Which type of park or recreation facility would you most like to see near your home?

Response	%
7 = nature preserve	55.2%
5 = paved trail	13.8%
8 = other	13.8%
6 = unpaved trail	6.9%
1 = small park	3.4%
3 = public beach	3.4%
9 = n/a	3.4%
2 = sports facilities/courts	0.0%
4 = lake/river access	0.0%

7. Do parks, trails and open spaces throughout Van Buren County enhance residents' quality of life?

Response	%
Yes	96.3%
No	0.00%
Not sure	3.7%

8. Do parks, trails and open spaces throughout Van Buren county attract visitors and tourists and create a positive economic impact?

Response	%
Yes	77.3%
No	9.1%
Not sure	13.6%

9. Should Van Buren County's approach to park & recreation planning differ from the way cities, villages and townships plan for parks and recreation? (1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = not sure)

Response	%
Yes	55.6%
No	22.2%
Not sure	22.2%

10. The County's approach to park & recreation planning should focus on

• From TurningPoint:

Response	%
2 = open space preservation	31.0%
3 = coordinating local planning efforts	17.2%
4 = promoting the county's parks and recreation amenities	17.2%
6 = other	13.8%
7 = no opinion	13.8%
1 = trails	6.9%
5 = ensuring equity in the recreation planning process	0.0%

- From written survey:

How important is it to you that Van Buren County focus on the following?	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
1. Operating and maintaining trails that span the county.	4.8	5	0.4
2. Preserving open spaces.	4.7	5	0.7
6. Providing a framework of goals and objectives that local municipalities can use for their rec. plans.	4.0	4	1.0
4. Promoting/marketing (to residents and visitors) the county's park, recreation and natural amenities	4.0	4	0.9
3. Coordinating local park and recreation planning processes.	3.9	4	0.8
7. Providing educational and programming opportunities to residents.	3.7	4	1.1

11. The County has neither a department nor a board focused solely on parks & recreation. Would it benefit from forming one?

Response	%
Yes	73.1%
No	7.7%
Not sure	19.2%

12. Over half of the 29 municipalities do not have a park & recreation plan; should the County's plan include goals and objectives that municipalities can adopt?

Response	%
Yes	84.6%
No	7.7%
Not sure	7.7%

13. Which Kal-Haven trail improvement is more important to you?

Improvement	Rank	Total Votes
Resurfacing	1	45
Amenities to improve intersection safety	2	42
Automobile parking near trailheads	3	35
Improved signage along the trail	4	25

14. Which Van Buren trail improvement is more important to you?

Improvement	Rank	Total Votes
Surfacing (gravel)	1	59
Amenities to improve intersection safety	2	35
Surfacing (pavement)	3	31
Improved signage along the trail	4	20

15. Please list three suggestions for improving existing county recreation facilities, noting in the check-box on the right-hand side of the table which facility you're referencing:

Campgrounds

- Eagle Point: Canoe/Kayak Launch site adjacent to campground (middle branch black river)
- Goddess Grove: Parking Areas

County Fairgrounds

- Increase Year-Round use of the facility
- Identify opportunities to use facilities for winter-time activities and events

North Point Conservation Area

- Improve easement language to make sure nothing is ever built.
- Post it

- Like it just the way it is
- No improvement; leave natural
- More parking
- Keep in natural state/no park development
- More parking and better signage
- Better signage and educational labeling, etc.
- Promote existence and possible recreational uses

Kal-Haven Trail

- Resurfacing and connecting to other trails
- Pave Kal-Haven trail, impervious pavers are best but more expensive
- Pave all or portion of trail with asphalt
- Trail maintenance improvements and access
- Better signage, more direction to real opportunities (& food, etc.)
- Close to motorized vehicles including snowmobiles
- More picnic areas & toilets
- More interpretive signage along the Kal-Haven trail
- Expand trail to connect to future trail loop in Antwerp Township
- Extend/connect to other trails
- Work w/ local land owners to obtain easements along Kal-Haven so development does not abut it in future.
- More parking, restrooms

Van Buren Trail

- Gravel surface would be nice
- South Haven Township Park Access off M-140 to Van Buren trail - talk to Ross Stein, township supervisor about tree cutting
- Improve surface and mow grass
- Surface paving
- Surface trail
- Resurfacing and connecting to other trails
- Trail maintenance improvements and access
- Improved signage
- Improved signage
- Camping & parking lots
- Clear trail more regularly

- Creating a link between the Van Buren and Kal-Haven trails
- Close to motorized vehicles including snowmobiles
- Parking Areas
- putting a surface on the van buren trail (the question was confusing as gravel was not offered until slide 4)

16. Please list 3 recreation activities or programs you feel are MOST needed in Van Buren County.

Programming

- Actively promote "visit" your trail/park day (free)
- Bicycle safety and education
- Conservation Awareness
- Conservation education, indoor
- Conservation education, outdoor
- Cross-country skiing
- Educate Van Buren residents on available activities & recreation
- Information about trails, location, and parks in Van Buren County
- Promotion of conservation easement potential for landowners
- Water safety
- Wetland education and management programs for private landowners

County Administration – Initiatives and Funding

- Funding
- Work on parks and recreation millage
- Create tangible tasks that a partnership of non-profit public and private entities can undertake to acquire more land for conservation and passive recreation.
- bike, pedestrian, etc. access on roads. I would like an emphasis on non-motorized trails on as many public roads as possible -- i.e. bike paths and crosswalks.

Promotion/Marketing

- Encourage tourists to use recreation areas
- Promotion of winter sports (recreation) - Winter Recreation Haven

- Promoting/marketing
- Public map that identifies recreational activities

Land Use

- Conservation of natural areas to protect land along rivers
- Open space preservation
- Non-public use preserves (wildlife)

Facility Improvements & Additions

- A good road-biking trail connecting Kalamazoo to Lakeshore; Kal-Haven is not ideal for road bikes
- Community-sized county or state park.
- Connected network of multi-use trails
- Dog park
- Enhance county park beach access on Lake Michigan.
- Focus on trail use enhancements, access, maintenance
- Ice Rinks
- Linking Kal-haven and Van Buren trails
- More natural areas like North Points
- More public access to Lake Michigan
- Need a Paw Paw River paddle trail similar to BSHHWTA
- Need more canoe/kayak access sites on Paw Paw & Black Rivers
- Need to Incorporate the Development of the Paw Paw River Recreational Water Trail into a long range recreation plan
- Need to participate in the development of the Lake Michigan Water Trail
- Need to recognize the Black River Water Trail as a Recreational Trail
- Not perhaps the most needed, but disc golf is a growing activity with low impact for natural areas.
- Open Paw Paw River to canoes and kayaks
- Soccer Fields
- Uniform widely present directional signs to trails/parks, along byways, etc.
- Walking and biking connectivity to safe modes of travel to city center and recreation amenities

- Conservation easement - Almena woods with low impact recreation activity - walking, hiking with stream access for fishing - possibly canoe
- Canoe access/improvements