

# Van Buren County, Michigan

## COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND GREENWAY PLAN 2026 — 2030



Recommended by the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission - November 13, 2025  
Adopted by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners January 27, 2026



*The Van Buren Parks and Recreation Commission prepared this plan with assistance from the  
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*



# Table of Contents

<b>Section 1. Plan Overview.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Mission .....	1
Vision.....	1
<b>Section 2. Community Description.....</b>	<b>2</b>
People - Demographics and Population Growth.....	4
<b>Section 3. Administrative Structure .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Organizational Charts, Legal Authority and Board Membership .....	10
Current Funding Sources & Budgets .....	11
Volunteers & Other Organizations.....	13
<b>Section 4. Inventories .....</b>	<b>17</b>
County Owned Properties.....	17
County (Courtyard) Park.....	18
Van Buren County Fairgrounds .....	18
Van Buren County Historical Museum .....	18
Syndicate Park Dunes .....	18
Veterans Therapy Gardens.....	20
Hartford Kayak Launch.....	21
Other Major Recreational Assets .....	21
Van Buren State Park .....	21
Paw Paw River Water Trail.....	22
Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail .....	22
Lake Michigan Water Trail .....	22
Pure Michigan Trail Town – South Haven .....	22
Porter Dunes Legacy Trail.....	23
Other Resources in Van Buren County.....	23
Non-Motorized Inventory .....	25
Natural Resource Inventory .....	31
MDNR Grant Inventory .....	37
<b>Section 5. The Planning Process.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Public Input .....	40
Plan Adoption Process .....	41
Next Steps .....	42
<b>Section 6. Action Plan .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Goals & Objectives .....	43
Goal 1   Preserve, maintain and enhance.....	44
Goal 2   Leverage resources and relationships.....	44
Goal 3   Encourage and invest in providing universal access .....	45
Goal 4   Consider creation of a parks and recreation management position or department.....	46
Goal 5   Maintain and promote a comprehensive inventory of the countywide parks .....	46
Goal 6   Provide structured support for individual municipalities' recreation planning efforts .....	46
Recreation Capital Improvements .....	48
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Appendix Text B - Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965, Section 46.351.....	55
Appendix Text C- Press release for online survey .....	57
Appendix Text D – Detailed Survey Results .....	58
Appendix Text E - ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Recreation Facilities – Summary.....	84
Appendix Text F - The Principles of Universal Design .....	85

Appendix G – Approval Documents .....	88
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## List of Tables and Figures

### Tables

Table 1. Population Change by Municipality Type, Van Buren County   2000 – 2010 .....	4
Table 2. County Owned Properties, Van Buren County .....	17
Table 3. Miles of Trail and Road Facilities in Southwest Michigan (2020) .....	25
Table 4. Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grants Awarded in Van Buren County   1976-2023 .....	37
Table 5. Michigan Department of Natural Resources Park Classification.....	52

### Figures

Figure 1 (Map) Area of Plan, Van Buren County .....	3
Figure 2 (Map) Population Density, Van Buren County .....	9
Figure 3 (Chart) Administrative Structure, Van Buren County.....	10
Figure 4 (Chart) Potential Future Administrative Structure, Van Buren County .....	11
Figure 5 (Map) Syndicate Park County-Owned Parcels.....	19
Figure 6 (Map) Recreational Resources, Van Buren County .....	24
Figure 7 (Map) Existing and Planned Non-Motorized Facilities .....	30
Figure 8 (Map) Watersheds, Van Buren County .....	32
Figure 9 (Map) Potential Conservation Areas in Van Buren County (2007) .....	34
Figure 10 (Map) Critical Dunes, Van Buren County.....	35
Figure 11 (Map) Wetlands, Van Buren County .....	36
Figure 12 (Chart) Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Universal Access Brochure .....	54

## Section 1. Plan Overview

This is an update to Van Buren County's 2021-2025 plan for parks and recreation resources at the county level. It will guide the County's approach to parks and recreation planning through 2030.

Parks and recreational facilities in Van Buren County add real value to their surrounding communities and improve the quality of life for residents of all backgrounds and abilities by promoting healthy lifestyles, encouraging social interaction and providing access to natural areas.

“Public attention tends to focus on recreation, because we want exercise, or on parks, because we need a place to get it. Some citizens may visit a park monthly, or weekly -- the most active among us, even daily. However, every day, every one of us benefits from the effect of open space and greenways. They contribute dramatically to our property values, community character, and personal wellbeing.

“Visiting a park for recreation may create evidence in our calendars, our memories, our selfies, or even our laundry. Benefits from open space and greenways accrue elsewhere, in the smell of the air, the clarity of the water, the stability of the community -- even whether we see wild birds from our kitchen window.” Gary Stock, Van Buren County resident

### **Mission**

Through this plan, Van Buren County seeks to provide quality recreational resources to its residents and visitors. The County recognizes the importance of recreational amenities – including parks, natural areas, open spaces, land and water trails, lake and river access points and recreational programming – as they contribute to places where people want to live, spend their leisure time and do business. The County strives to develop its parks and recreation amenities with these benefits in mind and with particular emphasis on stewardship of historically significant assets, natural features, fragile lands, water quality and green infrastructure.

### **Vision**

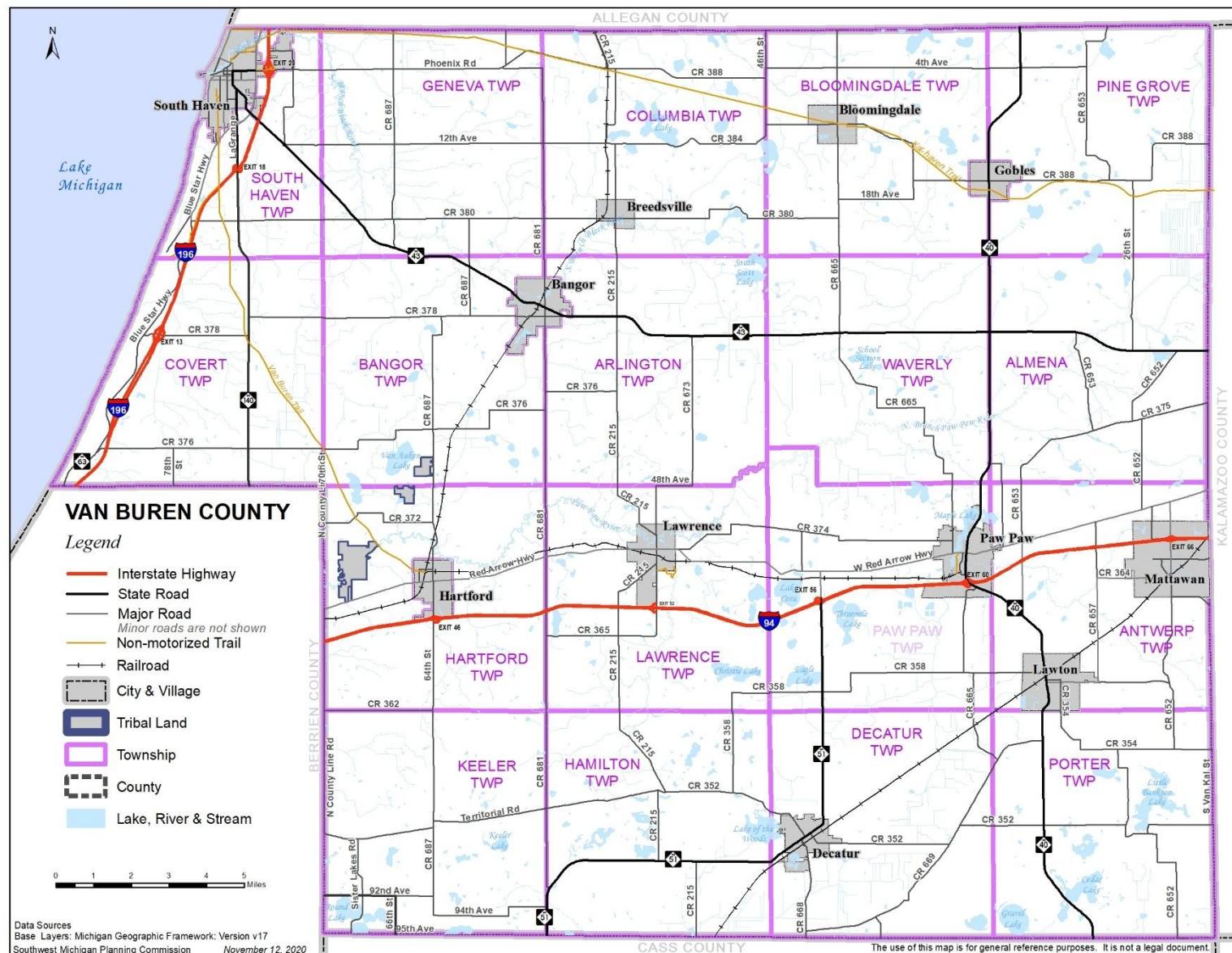
Van Buren County will enhance the quality of life for *all* current and future generations through its recreational resources.

## Section 2. Community Description

Van Buren County is located in southwest Michigan and covers 611 square miles. The population has experienced a slight decline over the past two decades, decreasing from 76,258 in 2000 to 75,587 in 2020. Its residents are dispersed across four cities (Bangor, Gobles, Hartford and South Haven), seven incorporated villages (Bloomingdale, Breedsville, Decatur, Lawrence, Lawton, Mattawan and Paw Paw) and eighteen townships (see Table 8 in the Appendix for a full list.). The County spans small urban, suburban and rural settings and is home to one community college branch (Lake Michigan College South Haven), dozens of lakes (129 larger than ten acres) and two major rivers (the Paw Paw and Black Rivers). Van Buren County has 14 miles of Lake Michigan coastline with beautiful beaches. Further, the sand dunes along Van Buren County's shoreline are part of the largest collection of freshwater dunes in the world. For more information on Van Buren County, visit the Van Buren County's website at [www.vbco.org](http://www.vbco.org).



**Figure 1 (Map) Area of Plan, Van Buren County**



## People - Demographics and Population Growth

Table 1. Population Change by Municipality Type, Van Buren County | 2000 – 2010

Jurisdiction	2000 Population	2010 Population	2020 Population	% Change 2000-2020
<b>Van Buren County</b>	76,263	76,258	75,587	-0.89%
<i>Townships</i>				
Almena Township	4,226	4,992	5,308	25.60%
Antwerp Township	10,813	12,182	13,425	24.16%
Arlington Township	2,075	2,073	1,958	-5.64%
Bangor Township	2,121	2,147	1,939	-8.58%
Bloomingdale Township	3,364	3,103	2,930	-12.90%
Columbia Township	2,714	2,588	2,546	-6.19%
Covert Township	3,141	2,888	2,510	-20.09%
Decatur Township	3,916	3,726	3,575	-8.71%
Geneva Township	3,975	3,573	3,416	-14.06%
Hamilton Township	1,797	1,489	1,370	-23.76%
Hartford Township	3,159	3,274	3,021	-4.37%
Keeler Township	2,601	2,169	1,968	-24.34%
Lawrence Township	3,341	3,259	3,289	-1.56%
Paw Paw Township	7,091	7,041	6,881	-2.96%
Pine Grove Township	2,773	2,949	2,994	7.97%
Porter Township	2,406	2,466	2,568	6.73%
South Haven Township	4,046	3,983	4,041	-0.12%
Waverly Township	2,467	2,554	2,506	1.58%
<b>Subtotal</b>	66,026	66,456	66,245	0.33%
<i>Cities</i>				
City of Bangor	1,933	1,885	2,016	4.29%
City of Gobles	815	829	851	4.42%
City of Hartford	2,476	2,688	2,515	1.58%
City of South Haven	5,013	4,400	3,960	-21.01%
<b>Subtotal</b>	10,237	9,802	9,342	-8.74%
<i>Census population figures for the following villages have been included in the figures (above) for the townships in which they are located.</i>				
<i>Villages</i>				
Bloomingdale	528	454	513	-2.84%
Breedsville	235	199	202	-14.04%
Decatur	1,838	1,819	1,651	-10.17%
Lawrence	1,059	996	964	-8.97%
Lawton	1,859	1,900	1,850	-0.48%
Mattawan	2,536	1,997	2,550	0.55%
Paw Paw	3,363	3,534	3,362	-0.03%
<b>Subtotal</b>	11,183	10,700	10,890	-2.62%

## **Population Trends in Van Buren County (2000–2020)**

Between 2000 and 2020, Van Buren County experienced a slight overall population decline, though the picture becomes more complex when broken down by township, city, and village. The townships remained relatively stable, with slight overall growth. Some, like Almena and Antwerp, saw clear gains—likely due to their appeal as residential communities near job centers. Others, especially more rural areas like Keeler, Hamilton, and Covert, experienced notable declines. These shifts may reflect aging populations, limited job opportunities, or younger residents relocating for education and employment.

The county's cities tell a different story. South Haven saw a significant population drop, potentially tied to the number of second homes/short term rentals. In contrast, Bangor, Gobles, and Hartford saw modest growth, suggesting some urban areas remain resilient or are benefiting from local investments.

The villages saw a slight decline overall. While Mattawan showed signs of recovery, other villages like Decatur and Lawrence continued to lose residents. These changes reinforce a broader trend of population concentration around more accessible or economically active areas.

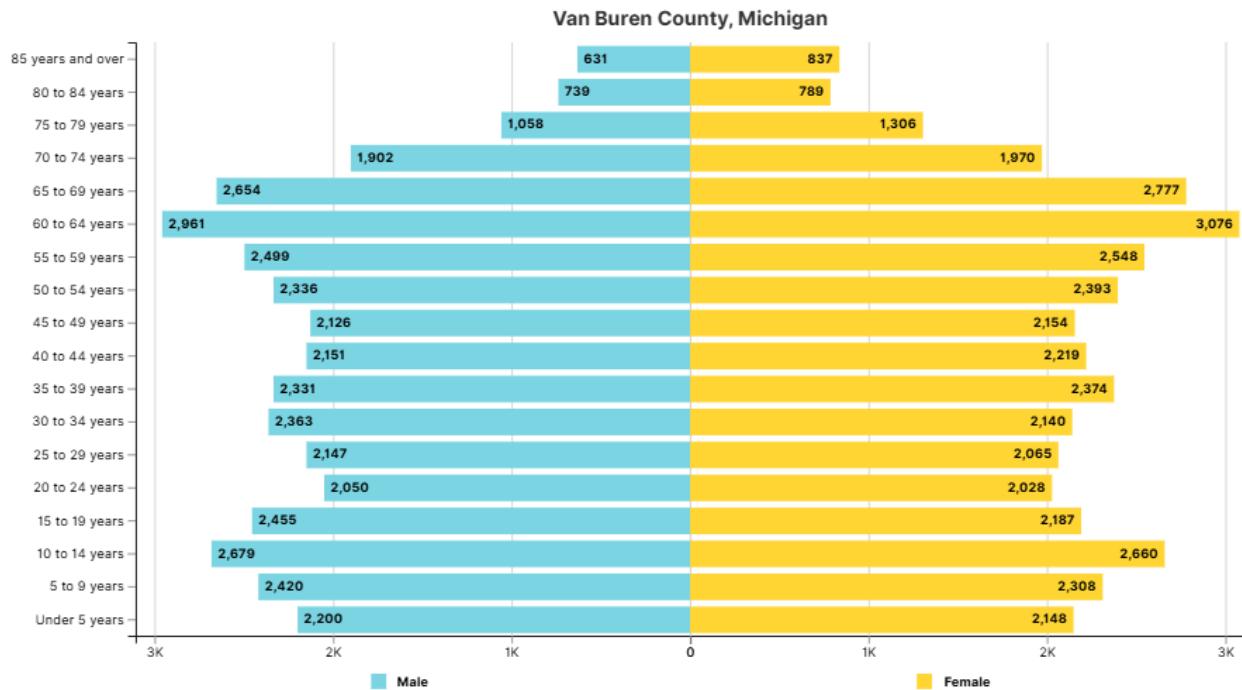
Overall, the county's population trends reveal a pattern of growth near economic hubs and corridors and decline in more remote or economically challenged communities.

## **Age Distribution**

Van Buren County's population is both youthful and aging. Children and teens make up a significant share – about 23.3% of residents are under 19 (nearly one-quarter), slightly above the Michigan statewide figure (21.0%). At the same time, seniors (65 and older) comprise roughly 20% of the county's population, a proportion higher than Michigan's 19% average. The median age in Van Buren is 42.8 years, which exceeds the state median (40.5 years). This reflects a trend of an aging population— over the past decade, the number of older adults has grown while youth and younger working-age groups declined.

A large youth population (nearly one in four residents) means continued demand for children's play areas, youth sports, and teen programs. At the same time, the high and growing share of seniors (one in five and rising) points to increasing need for older-adult recreation opportunities – such as low-impact fitness, walking trails, and social programs for seniors. The median age being higher than the state average underscores the importance of multigenerational facilities and activities. In short, Van Buren County will need to balance amenities for young families (e.g. playgrounds, sports fields) with accessible, age-friendly infrastructure (like benches, smooth pathways, and programming for seniors). An aging populace may also mean more volunteers and retirees available for community activities, but also greater demand for passive recreation and ADA-compliant design in parks. Ensuring that both ends of the age spectrum – youth and elders – are served will be a key priority.

### Population Pyramid: Population by Age and Sex in Van Buren County, Michigan



Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates

### Household Income and Economic Characteristics

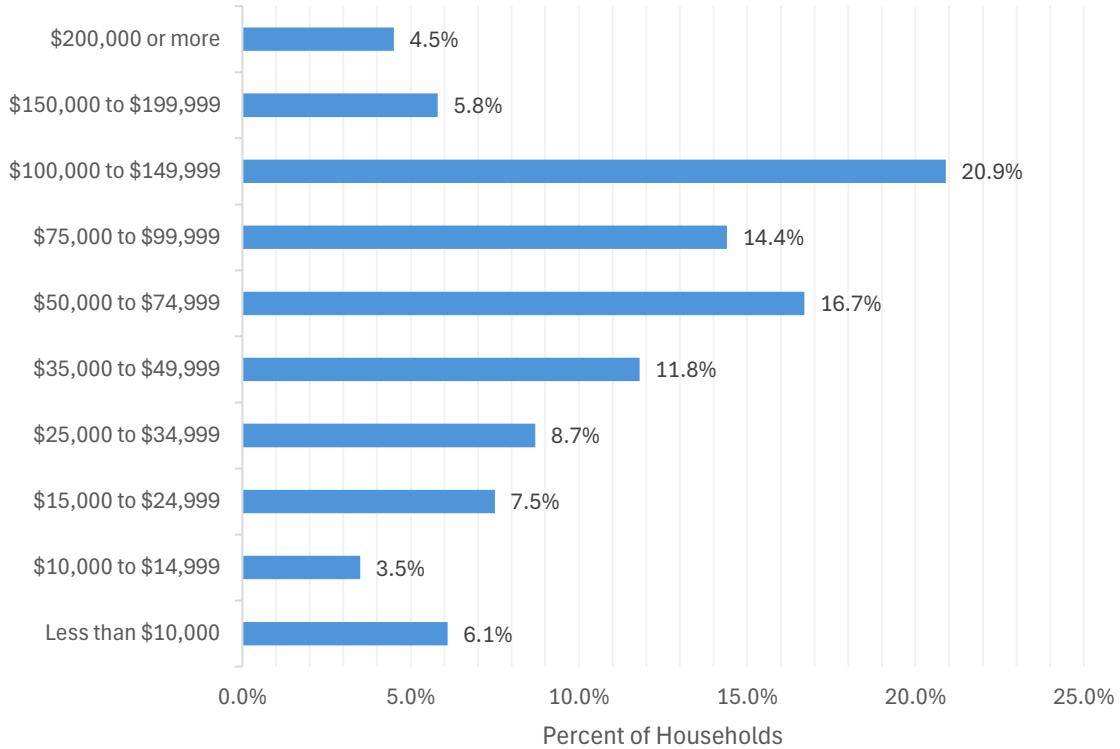
Van Buren County's economic profile shows moderate incomes on average, with notable income stratification that could affect recreation access. The median household income is about \$66,400 per year, which is slightly below the Michigan median (\$69,100). A significant segment of the community is of modest means: roughly 38% of households have incomes under \$50,000, and in total about two-thirds earn below \$100,000.

By contrast, upper-income households are relatively few – only around 5% of households have incomes above \$200,000. The county's poverty rate (individuals below the poverty line) is approximately 15.6%, a bit higher than Michigan's overall 13.5%. Taken together, these figures suggest a community with many working-class families and a smaller affluent tier. Notably, Van Buren's per capita income is about 80% of the state average, highlighting lower income levels and potential affordability challenges for some residents.

Household income levels influence how residents can participate in recreation. Van Buren's slightly lower-than-average incomes and higher poverty signal that affordability is crucial in planning programs and facilities. Many families may be cost-sensitive, so user fees, equipment costs, or travel expenses could be barriers to participation. The fact that over one-third of households earn under \$50,000 suggests a need for low-cost or free recreational opportunities – for example, public parks, playgrounds, trails, and scholarship-supported youth sports leagues.

Keeping entry fees minimal and offering tiered pricing or resident discounts can help ensure access for lower-income residents. Additionally, transportation can be a financial barrier; planning should consider distributed local facilities (so residents need not travel far) or partnerships to provide transit from poorer rural areas to recreation sites.

### Household Income Distribution in Van Buren County, Michigan



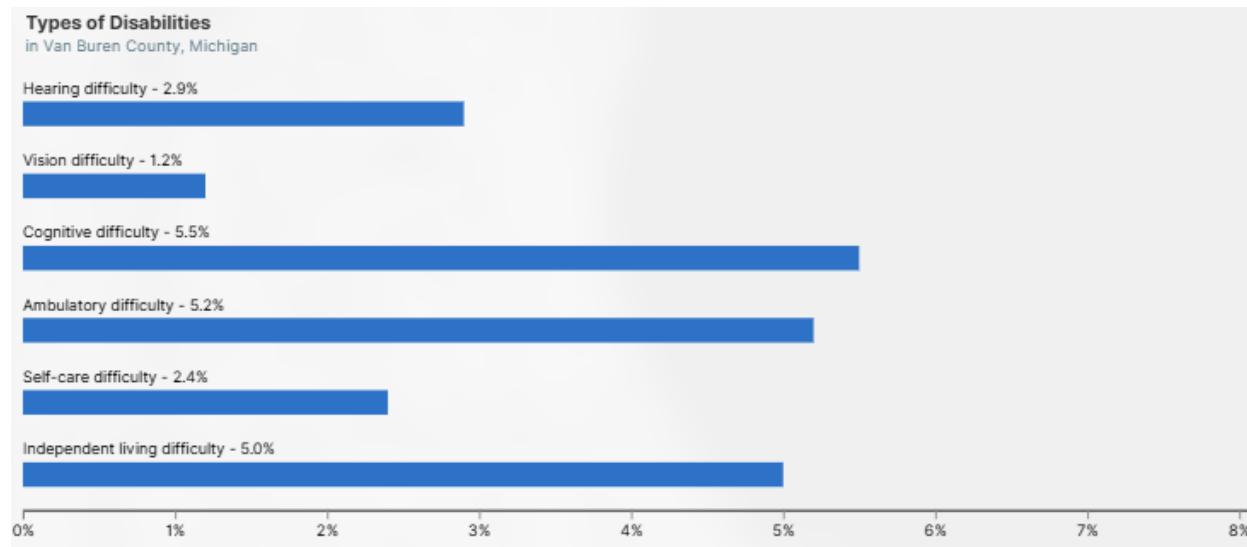
### Disability Status and Accessibility

According to the American Community Survey, 11.8% of residents in Van Buren County live with a disability, compared to 14.7% statewide. While the county's overall rate is slightly lower than Michigan's, it still represents a significant portion of the population—more than one in ten residents.

Disability rates tend to rise sharply with age. While only a small share of children report a disability, the proportion increases notably among older adults. Nationally, about one in three adults over age 65 lives with some form of disability, and Van Buren County's aging population suggests its overall disability rate is likely to increase in the coming years. This trend underscores the importance of designing recreation spaces that are not only compliant with ADA standards but also intentionally inclusive.

Accessible features—such as wheelchair-friendly pathways, ramps, and restrooms—are crucial across all facilities. Inclusive playground equipment, sensory-friendly programming, and

adaptive recreation options (like accessible kayaking or guided walks for the visually impaired) help ensure everyone can participate fully. Given the higher share of older adults, amenities like benches along trails, smooth walking surfaces, and clear signage with large print will make parks more navigable for those with mobility or sensory limitations.



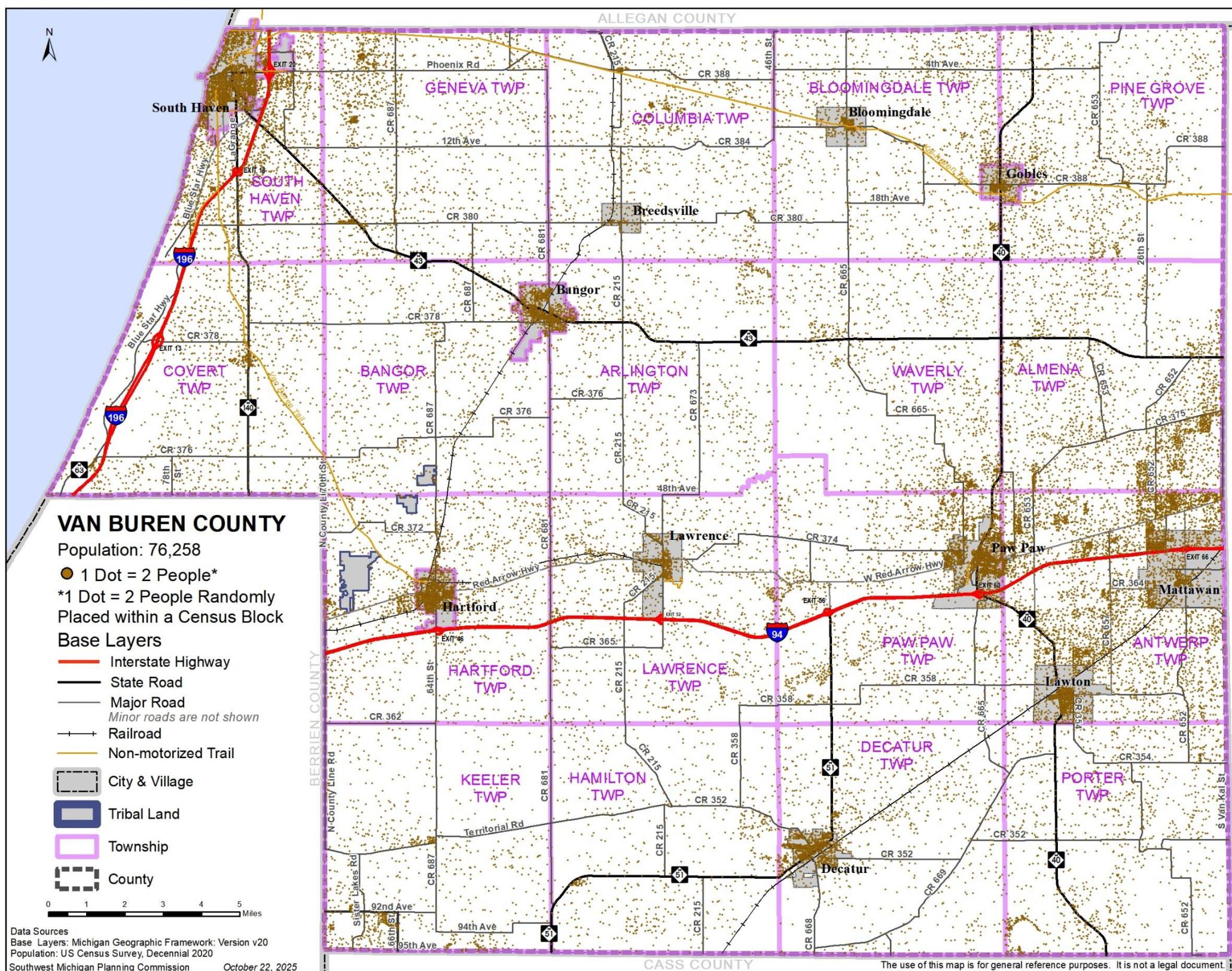
### Urban vs. Rural Distribution

Van Buren County is a largely rural area, with most of its residents living outside incorporated cities or towns. According to census classifications, only about 29% of the county's population lives in "urban" areas, while fully 71% live in rural areas. (The county's total population of 75,587, spread across 607.8 square miles of land, giving a modest density of 125 people per sq. mile.) In contrast, Michigan's population overall is mostly urban (roughly 75% urban vs. 25% rural), thanks to big metropolitan centers like Detroit and Grand Rapids.

Van Buren has no large cities – the largest are South Haven and Paw Paw which have only a few thousand residents – much of the population resides in villages, unincorporated communities, or farm country. This settlement pattern means many residents live miles from major commercial centers or parks, often on country roads or in small subdivisions. The rural character is one of the county's strengths, offering abundant open space and a strong agricultural tradition, but it also poses challenges for recreation planning.

The predominantly rural makeup of Van Buren County means that siting recreational facilities and providing outreach require special consideration. With residents dispersed across townships and countryside, accessibility becomes a key issue – people may have to drive longer distances to reach a county park or recreation program. To serve rural families, it will be important to geographically distribute recreation amenities as much as feasible. This could involve maintaining smaller community parks or playgrounds in outlying villages, developing trail networks (e.g. rail-trails or greenways) that link rural neighborhoods to town centers, or using school facilities in various townships for evening/weekend recreation programs.

Figure 2 (Map) Population Density, Van Buren County



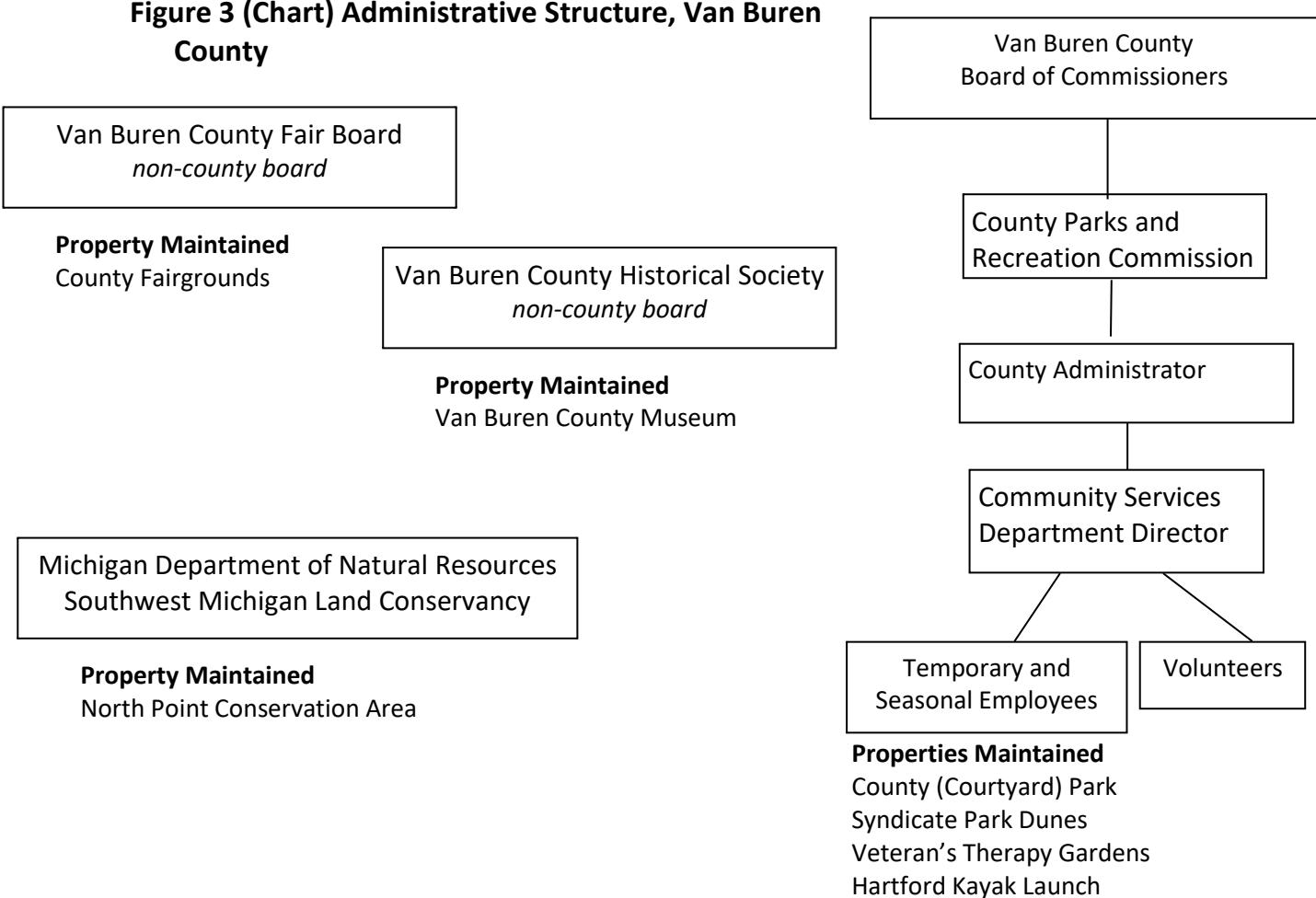
## Section 3. Administrative Structure

### Organizational Charts, Legal Authority and Board Membership

The Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission was established in 2022 by the Van Buren County Commissioners under Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965. The seven properties addressed in this plan's recreation inventory fall under the purview of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

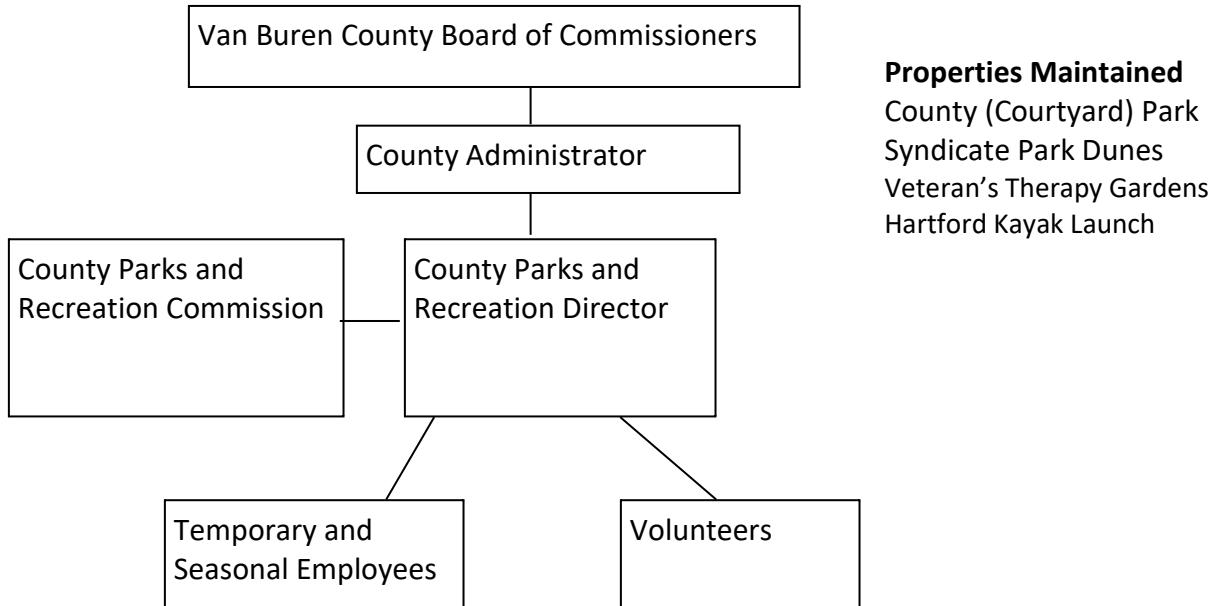
The current administrative structure for the county's recreation system is shown in Figure 3. The basic operations and maintenance functions affecting Van Buren County's recreation inventory are the responsibilities of one staff position within the County Buildings and Grounds Department. At the time of this plan's adoption, Van Buren County has no department dedicated explicitly to maintaining the County's recreation resources. The North Point Conservation Area is leased to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) who is responsible for maintenance and operations. The County Fairgrounds are leased from the County and maintained/operated by a non-governmental board. The Van Buren Youth Fair Association, a 501(c)3 corporation, leases approximately 85 acres from Van Buren County. The Van Buren County Museum is leased to the Van Buren County Historical Society, but the grounds and building are maintained by the County.

**Figure 3 (Chart) Administrative Structure, Van Buren County**



An opportunity exists to create a Parks and Recreation Department and hire a director for the department to oversee temporary and seasonal employees. This would increase the County's capacity for maintaining existing parks.

**Figure 4 (Chart) Potential Future Administrative Structure, Van Buren County**



## Current Funding Sources & Budgets

Michigan counties can levy a millage to fund parks, recreation and land preservation. In 2024, voters approved a 0.25 mill County Parks and Recreation. This millage is estimated to generate approximately \$750,000 a year. Since the passing of the millage, the Parks and Recreation Commission has been tasked with preparing an annual budget. The 2025-26 budget is shown below.

ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	2025-26 AMENDED BUDGET
Fund 208.0 - PARKS & RECREATION FUND		
<b>Revenues</b>		
Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT		
402.000	CURRENT PROPERTY TAXES	430,000.00
539.000	STATE GRANT	283,700.00
665.000	INTEREST	2,500.00
Total Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT		716,200.00
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>		<b>716,200.00</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT		
752.005	SUPPLIES	5,000.00
801.000	CONTRACT SERVICES	201,500.00
801.700	DISBURSEMENTS	400,000.00
999.101	TRF TO GENERAL FUND #101	44,000.00
Total Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT		650,500.00
Dept 804.00 - MUSEUM		
930.913	LAND & BUILDING REPAIRS - HIST. MUSEUM	25,000.00
931.913	EQUIPMENT REPAIRS - MUSEUM	15,000.00
Total Dept 804.00 - MUSEUM		40,000.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>690,500.00</b>
<b>NET OF REVENUES &amp; EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>25,700.00</b>

There are several grants available for parks and recreation improvements and projects. Below is a list of some opportunities and sources for more information.

- The [Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund \(MNRTF\)](#), established in 1976, funds capital improvements and land acquisitions for local/state parks through a granting process. The MNRTF accepts applications annually. See Table 4 for an inventory of local projects in Van Buren County funded via the MNRTF since 1976.
- The [Land and Water Conservation Fund \(LWCF\)](#) funds land acquisitions and the development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The grant is available to any unit of government,

as well as schools, and requires 50% match and a DNR-approved 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan.

- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources MDNR's Recreation Passport Program replaces the Motor Vehicle Permit system that has funded state parks in Michigan since 1961. Through the program, motorists can pay a state-park access fee (\$12 annually) when renewing license plates. The program will primarily fund the maintenance and operations of MDNR properties; the MDNR will use a percentage for local park improvements as well.
- The Michigan Parks and Recreation Association's foundation provides "financial support to people and programs that work to enrich the health and well-being of all Michigan citizens through increased access to recreation and outdoor experiences," <https://www.mparksfoundation.org/>.
- The Trust for Public Land has resources for federal-level funding options - <http://www.tpl.org/>.
- The National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/partnerships/>
- The National Recreation and Park Association listing of grant opportunities, <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>
- Michigan Department of Transportation, Transportation Alternatives Program, <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/programs/grant-programs/transportation-alternatives>

## Volunteers & Other Organizations

Volunteers in Van Buren County contribute an immense amount of time and effort to improve parks and recreation resources for Van Buren County's residents and visitors. This section briefly describes and lists contact information for organizations and coalitions in Van Buren County, southwest Michigan and around the State, that contribute to maintaining, promoting and developing recreation resources throughout the county.

- The **Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail ("the Friends")** is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization that works in cooperation with Van Buren County to expand and enhance the facilities of the Kal-Haven and Van Buren Trails, promotes the use of the trails through sponsored events and other promotional activities and performs other acts consistent with and complementary to the maintenance and operations of the trails.
  - **Website:** <https://kalhaven.org/>
- **Friends of Blue Star Trail** - In 2009, a group of stakeholders from Allegan and Van Buren counties came together to discuss the possibility of creating a non-motorized connection from South Haven to Saugatuck. The group included municipal representatives from the City of South Haven, South Haven Charter Township, City of Saugatuck, Village of Douglas, Ganges Township, Casco Township, and Saugatuck Township. The group has recently formed a Friends group and has established themselves as a non-profit organization. The Friends group is now seeking contributions for their project and is working with the Allegan County Road Commission in developing their vision of a non-motorized off-road shared use path along the roadway known as Blue Star Highway.
  - **Website:** <http://www.fotbst.org/>
- The **Southwest MI Extension Master Gardeners** are a group working to offer community education on sustainable gardening, assist with public-landscaping and conservation projects, and

contribute hands-on service to improve local green spaces and food-security. They maintain the Veteran's Therapy Gardens in Van Buren County.

- **Website:** <https://www.canr.msu.edu/kalamazoo/master-gardener/>

• The **Two Rivers Coalition** is a citizen-based group working to protect the health of the Black- and Paw Paw-River watersheds (See Figure 8 for a map of Van Buren County's watersheds.) through conservation, education and advocacy.

- **Website:** <http://tworiverscoalition.org/>

• **Boy Scout Troops** have completed Eagle Scout Projects on the North Point property – i.e. planting hundreds of trees, maintaining trails and installing erosion control measures.

• The **Van Buren County Conservation District (Van Buren CD)** “is a local agency established to coordinate and implement conservation and natural resource programs, in partnership with [local, state and federal] entities to provide valuable technical assistance, financial assistance and educational opportunities to the people of Van Buren County, Michigan.” Van Buren CD also serves as staff for the Van Buren County Land Preservation Board.

- **Website:** <http://vanburencd.org/>

### **Organizations Beyond County Borders**

Trails, greenways and protected lands provide many opportunities for cross-jurisdictional collaborations. The following organizations represent trail, greenway and conservation planning and organizational efforts at the regional and state levels that affect parks and recreational amenities in Van Buren County.

• The **Friends of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail** partner with the Parks Foundation of Kalamazoo County and the Kalamazoo County Parks Department to provide programming to maximize the benefits of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail, a planned 35-mile paved-asphalt trail throughout Kalamazoo County, connected to the Kal-Haven Trail.

- **Website:** [www.kalcounty.com/parks/krvt/](http://www.kalcounty.com/parks/krvt/)

• The **West Michigan Trails**, formed in 2000, is a non-profit group of donors, organizations and volunteers dedicated to developing non-motorized trails and greenways into a linked system that connects wilderness areas, parks, historic landmarks and cultural sites throughout west Michigan.

- **Website:** [www.wmtrails.org/](http://www.wmtrails.org/)

• The **Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance** is a non-profit organization that fosters and facilitates the creation of an interconnected statewide system of trails and greenways for recreation, health, transportation, economic development and environmental/cultural preservation purposes.

- **Website:** [www.michigantrails.org](http://www.michigantrails.org)

• Created in 1991 by area residents, the **Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC)** seeks to permanently protect the natural, historic and scenic landscapes to ensure the health and quality of life for the people of southwest Michigan through gifts, conservation easements, education,

outreach, research, recreation and volunteer opportunities. As of October 2025, SWMLC owns 13 preserves encompassing 1,235 acres (it was 1,058 acres in 2020) and holds conservation easements totaling 1,330 acres (It was 924 acres in 2020) in Van Buren County. It also plays a direct role in the preservation of Van Buren County's natural resources, entering into an agreement with the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners to hold and enforce the conservation easement on the North Point property in December 2009. The SWMLC has a partial interest in and must approve any management or use proposal for the North Point property.

- **Website:** [www.swmlc.org](http://www.swmlc.org)

- The **Nature Conservancy** is an international organization which preserves the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting lands and waters they need to survive. The Nature Conservancy owns three preserves in Van Buren County (Ross Coastal Plain Marsh in Covert Township, East Branch Prairie Preserve and the Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve both in Antwerp Township) totaling 2,556 acres. The Nature Conservancy also holds three conservation easements in Van Buren County totaling 166 acres.

- **Website:** [www.nature.org/](http://www.nature.org/)

- The **Michigan Nature Association (MNA)** is a non-profit, conservation organization dedicated to protecting Michigan's exceptional natural habitats and extraordinary endangered plants and animals. The MNA has six preserves in Van Buren County with only two being open to the public (Bavicks Sand Dunes Nature Sanctuary (40 acres in Covert Township) and the Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary (79 acres in Hamilton Township)).

- **Website:** [www.michigannature.org/](http://www.michigannature.org/)

- The **Michigan Audubon Society** "connects birds and people for the benefit of both through conservation, education and research efforts in the state of Michigan."

- **Website:** [www.michiganaudubon.org/](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/)

### **School Districts, Public Agencies, Cross-Jurisdictional Coalitions and Private Entities**

Resource-sharing and cross-border collaboration help provide a full set of recreation resources and programming to Van Buren County residents and visitors. In some neighborhoods and communities, school facilities (mapped in Figure 6) may serve as a primary recreation resource. The following include cross-jurisdictional planning coalitions and other efforts with significance for Van Buren County's recreation resources.

- As of 2010, the **South Haven Area Recreational Authority (SHARA)** is a collaboration between the City of South Haven, South Haven Charter Township, and South Haven School District in Van Buren County and Casco Township in Allegan County. The SHARA was initially established to provide the acquisition, construction, operation, maintenance and improvement of the land and facilities that may now or subsequently comprise the South Haven Area Recreational Park (SHARP). The SHARA is also established to acquire, construct, operate, maintain and improve public parks and other purposes as may from time to time be authorized by Act 321 all within a specified jurisdictional limits of the cities, townships and villages that may be part of the SHARA.

- The **Van Buren Intermediate School District (Van Buren ISD) – Wildlife Habitat Project** is an educational initiative based around creating an outdoor learning environment to “enhance education, wellness and stewardship.” Educators, volunteers and students use a half-mile boardwalk in Lawrence Township on the Van Buren ISD Campus (open to the public year-round) as a learning site.
- The **Van Buren District Library** is a system of libraries that provide equitable access to a world of resources, reading, and lifelong learning. Within this district, there are seven libraries, including: Antwerp Sunshine Library, Bangor Branch Library, Bloomingdale Branch Library, Covert Branch Library, Gobles Branch Library, Lawrence Branch Library, and Webster Memorial Branch Library. These libraries are available to residents living within the VBDL service area.
- Other libraries within Van Buren County include:
  - South Haven Memorial Library
  - Vanderlyn Community Center and Hartford Public Library
  - Lawton Public Library
  - Paw Paw District Library

## Section 4. Inventories

Van Buren County residents rely on a variety of recreational facilities throughout the county. These include parks, land and water trails, open spaces, golf courses, campgrounds, lake/river access points, etc. that are owned and maintained by cities, villages and townships, Van Buren County, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and private entities, i.e. conservation/land trust organizations, "Friends" groups and private landowners.

### County Owned Properties

Table 2 lists four recreational facilities that comprise the recreation amenities currently available at the County level. This plan uses the local and regional recreation and open space classification system that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) suggests (See Table 5 in the Appendix for an overview.). This classification system is widely used throughout the state and country.

**Table 2. County Owned Properties, Van Buren County**

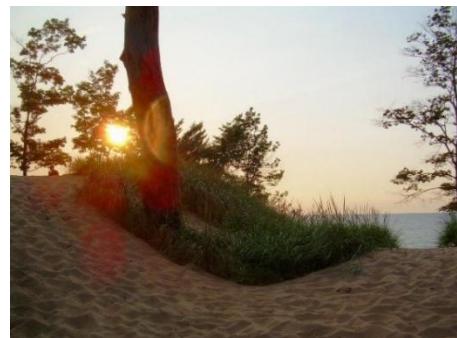
Park Name	Acres	Type	Accessibility Rating*	Fee
North Point Conservation Area	16.5	Natural Resource Area	1	No
County (Courtyard) Park	0.70	Mini-Park	3	No
Van Buren County Fairgrounds	85	Special Use	3	Yes
Van Buren County Historical Museum	5	Special Use	2	No
Syndicate Park Dunes	26.9	Natural Resource Area	1	No
Veteran's Therapy Gardens	1	Special Use	2	No
Hartford Kayak Launch	1	Access Site - Paw Paw River Water Trail	4	No

*\*Accessibility Rating - The Michigan DNR provides the following measure of parks' and recreational facilities' accessibility:*

- 1 = *none of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines*
- 2 = *some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines*
- 3 = *most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines*
- 4 = *the entire park meets accessibility guidelines*

### North Point Conservation Area

North Point Conservation Area is a County-owned, 16.5-acre parcel on Lake Michigan that includes approximately 330 feet of Lake Michigan beach, forested critical dunes and wetlands. It is adjacent to Van Buren State Park. Residents often refer to it as the "old Boy Scout Camp," because Boy Scouts have used and maintained the property for generations. Several Boy Scouts have completed Eagle Scout Projects on the site – i.e. planting hundreds of trees, maintaining trails and installing erosion control measures.



In 2020, this property was leased to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for 20 years and is now considered part of Van Buren State Park and is accessed through the State Park. Since December 2009, this property also has a conservation easement on it held by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.



## County (Courtyard) Park

The County Park is a 0.7-acre mini-park in downtown Paw Paw adjacent to the Van Buren County courthouse. Features include an eight-foot-wide sidewalk, markers denoting the four corners of the original 1840 county courthouse, a gazebo and four benches. Its most frequent users are Village of Paw Paw residents and visitors and downtown employees.

## Van Buren County Fairgrounds

The Van Buren County Fair Board (Fair Board), a 501(c)3 corporation, leases approximately 85 acres from Van Buren County and has for the past 50 plus years. The Fair Board operates the Van Buren County Youth Fair on these grounds.

The Fair Board and volunteers have contributed to the development of a campground and buildings to supplement a "natural amphitheater" with hillside seating. In 2005, the fair board paved surfaces throughout the grounds to increase accessibility. Additional information on the Van Buren County Youth Fair can be found at: [www.vanburen>youthfair.com/](http://www.vanburen>youthfair.com/)



## Van Buren County Historical Museum

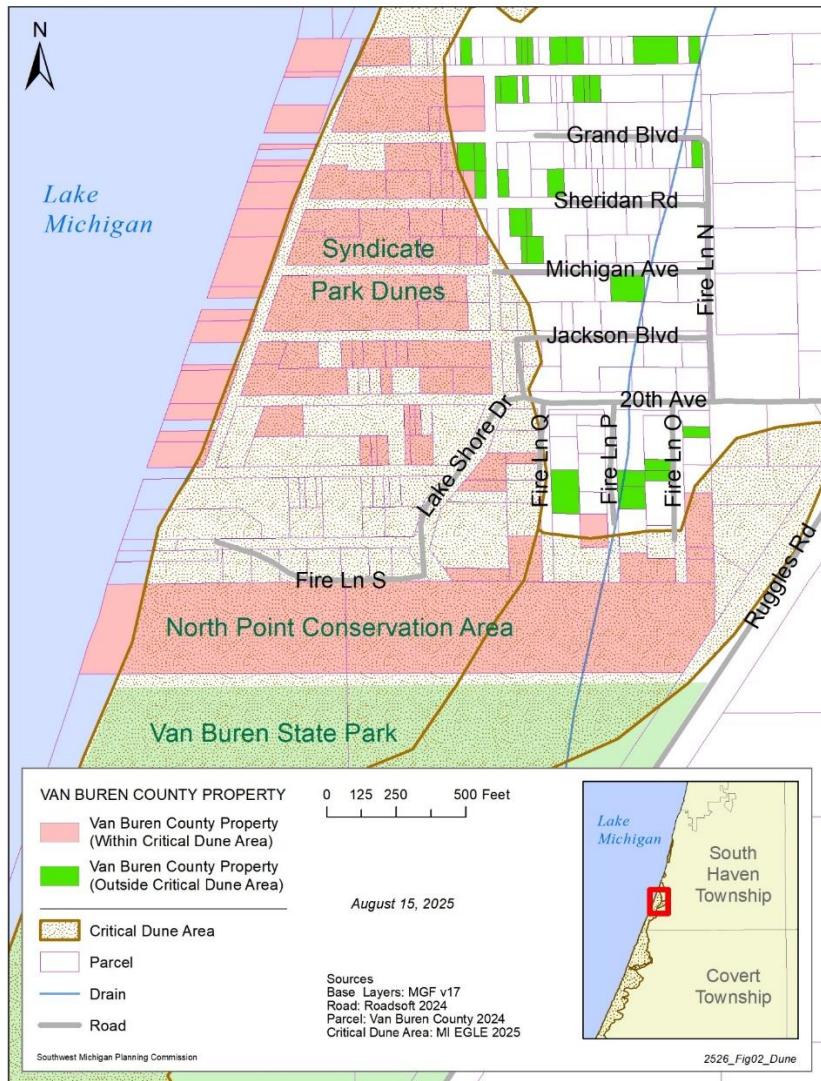
The Van Buren County Historical Society leases a 5-acre section of the County Fairgrounds, where the museum is located in a forty-four room brick and stone building that was known as the Van Buren County Poorhouse. It was built in the 1880's and is now listed on the State Historical Register. The Society manages operations and programming for the museum, and the County takes care of maintaining the grounds. The museum provides over 44 rooms of displays as well as a blacksmith shop, log cabin, and other outdoor treasures.

## Syndicate Park Dunes

Van Buren County owns more than 26.9 acres of land along Lake Michigan in South Haven Township, within a subdivision known as Syndicate Park. Of this property, approximately 23 acres lie within a designated critical dune area. Most of this property was obtained through tax foreclosures. In 2017, due to erosion, Van Buren County worked with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to secure a grant to restore the dune ecosystem. The grant was used to stabilize and slow down the advancing dune that was threatening neighboring residences, improve access to the beach while supporting protection of the restored dune and provide education on dune ecosystems. For more information visit <https://www.swmpc.org/syndicatepark.asp>. The map below shows the county-owned properties that comprise Syndicate Dunes, both inside and outside the critical dunes area.



**Figure 5 (Map) Syndicate Park County-Owned Parcels**



## Veterans Therapy Gardens

The Veterans Therapy Gardens is a one-acre park in the heart of downtown Paw Paw. It provides self-guided learning opportunities and access to community gardens. The MSU Extension Master Gardeners of Southwest Michigan provides program support and helps maintain the gardens.



## Hartford Kayak Launch

The Hartford Kayak Launch is the county's newest park in Hartford Township along County Road 681. It will be a one-acre park that provides access to the Paw Paw River Water Trail. The park will be completed in 2026 and includes a parking area, an accessible pathway, canoe/kayak launch and a dock for fishing. The improvements were funded by the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and local matching funds from Hartford Township and Van Buren County.

## Other Major Recreational Assets

### Van Buren State Park

Van Buren State Park is comprised of 400 acres of land located along the Lake Michigan shoreline in northern Van Buren County. The focal points of the park are its high dune formations and one mile of sandy beach. Van Buren became a state park in May of 1965 when the original 167-acre plot was purchased from the Harry LaBar Drake family. Since then, two other land purchases have been made

to form the current park. The campground has 220 modern campsites, located approximately 400 yards from Lake Michigan.

### **Paw Paw River Water Trail**

The 68-mile-long Paw Paw River Water Trail begins in the Village of Paw Paw in Van Buren County. There are two impoundments (Briggs Pond and Maple Lake) in the village above the dam which can be paddled. The river portion of the water trail begins immediately below the Maple Lake Dam. The Paw Paw River then winds its way 66 miles through a large, wildlife rich floodplain forest corridor through Van Buren and Berrien Counties. Along the way, the river runs through or skirts the edge of the communities of Lawrence, Hartford, Watervliet, Coloma, and Riverside. Ultimately, the Paw Paw River joins the St. Joseph River in Benton Harbor, approximately one-half mile from Lake Michigan. For more information visit [www.pawpawriverwatertrail.org](http://www.pawpawriverwatertrail.org).

### **Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail**

This water trail is one of nine designated heritage water trails in Michigan, offering 15 interpretive signs along the Black River. There are two "family-friendly" sections on the water trail. The first is the upper three miles from Lions Park in Bangor downstream to County Road 687. The other is an eight-mile section from the Basic Family Access Site (County Road 384) to South Haven. The section between County Road 687 and the Basic Family Access (CR 384) is called the "wilderness section," and paddlers can expect obstacles, major ones. For more information visit <http://www.bangorsouthhavenwatertrail.org>

### **Lake Michigan Water Trail**

The southwest portion of the Lake Michigan Water Trail is from the Michigan/Indiana state line to Holland, Michigan. You will paddle along spectacular sand dunes, wilderness areas and quaint beach towns providing many opportunities to eat, shop, play and rest. Beach towns include New Buffalo, Bridgman, St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, South Haven, Saugatuck/Douglas and Holland. Visit <https://www.michiganwatertrails.org/trail.asp?ait=ctv&ctid=40> for more information.

### **Pure Michigan Trail Town – South Haven**

In May of 2019, South Haven was one of the first four communities to be awarded the designation as a Pure Michigan Trail Town. The City of South Haven, the South Haven/Van Buren County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Van Buren County, the State Department of Natural Resources, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and many other community groups, various trail friends' groups and organizations have developed and promoted a vast network of trails in and surrounding the City of South Haven. In fact, South Haven serves as the confluence for fourteen formal trails, including the Kal-Haven Trail Sesquicentennial State Park, the Van Buren Trail State Park, the Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail, the Maritime District Harborwalk Trail, U.S. Bicycle Route 35, Lake Michigan Water Trail Southwest, the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail, and several others. In addition to this Trail Town designation, the Kal-Haven Trail was awarded the designation of Pure Michigan Trail in February 2020. Many projects including trail development, signage and wayfinding, collateral material development and trail events have been executed over the past several years. The community has committed to a long-term plan to continue to grow these trail assets, and to develop a cohesive marketing strategy to promote trails. The plan also involved coordination with the

community school system to develop educational components for local area children with on trail appreciation and stewardship experiences.

### **Porter Dunes Legacy Trail**

The Porter Dunes Legacy Trail is in a 48-acre lakeshore property managed by SWMLC that offers a recently completed half-mile loop trail that winds through the woods with a boardwalk and leads to a dune-top overlook with views of Lake Michigan. The park trail was completed in Fall of 2025 and connects to the existing trail network in the adjacent SWMLC property, Pilgrim Haven. Future plans for the **Legacy Dune Trail** include a 3-mile hiking trail that will connect Pilgrim Haven, Porter Legacy Dunes, Syndicate Park Dunes, North Point Conservation Area and Van Buren State Park. Public input and conceptual designs have already been completed for this trail.

### **Other Resources in Van Buren County**

In Van Buren County, there are many state and local inland lake public accesses

[https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119\\_79144\\_80285---,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119_79144_80285---,00.html)

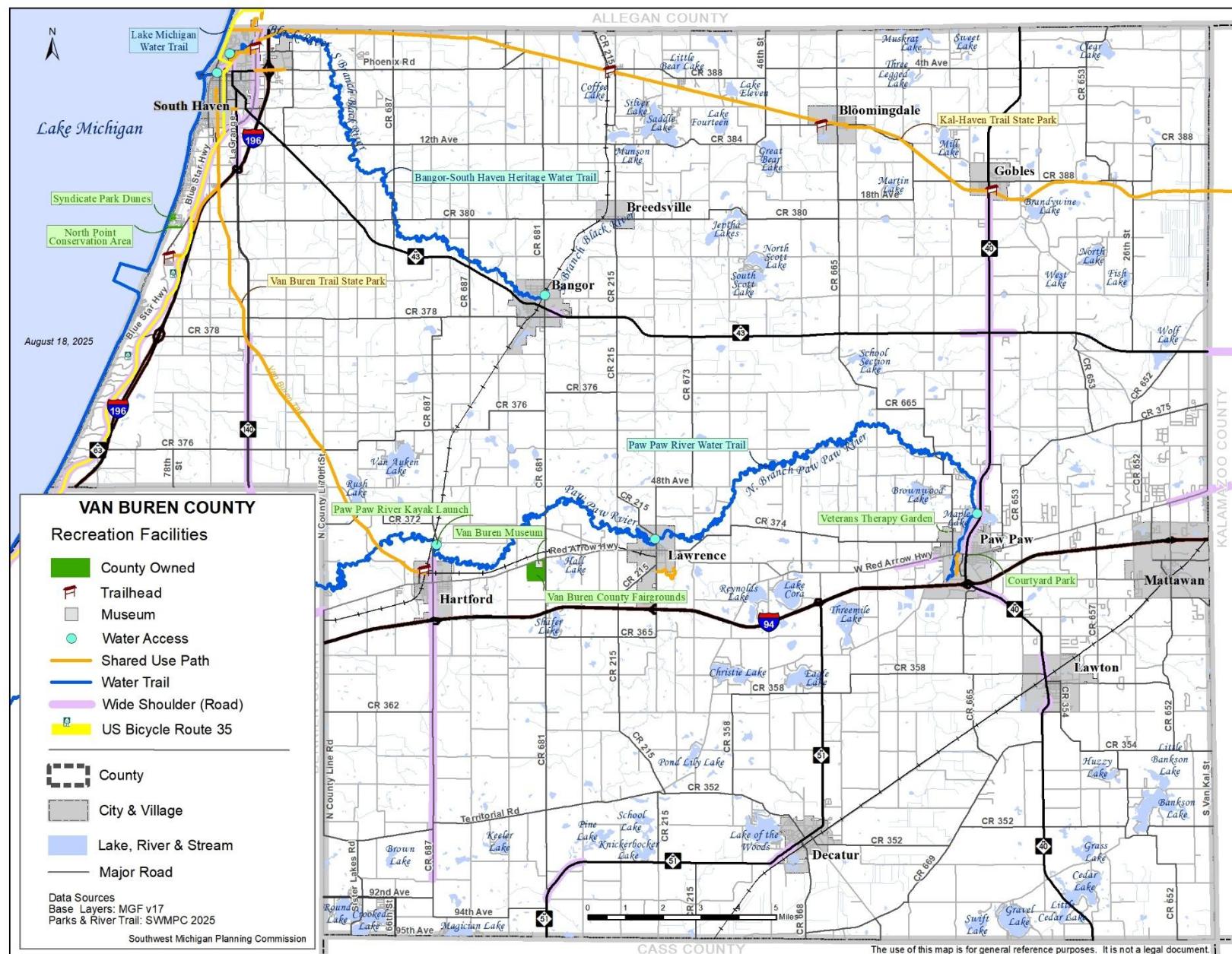
There are snowmobiling trails in Van Buren County (map found here

[https://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-29907\\_29953\\_30000-31074--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-29907_29953_30000-31074--,00.html)).

The MDNR has a Hunting Access Program for private lands in Michigan ( a list of properties by county can be found here [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/DNR\\_HAP\\_lands\\_list\\_439893\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/DNR_HAP_lands_list_439893_7.pdf)), but currently there are no properties in Van Buren County enrolled in the program.

There are also many local recreation resources provided by cities, villages, townships and school districts available in Van Buren County.

**Figure 6 (Map) Recreational Resources, Van Buren County**



## Non-Motorized Inventory

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission completed a non-motorized plan for southwest Michigan which includes Van Buren and six other counties in Michigan Department of Transportation's southwest region. For this plan, on-road facilities are defined as paved shoulders with a minimum width of four feet and bike lanes with a minimum width of five feet. There are just over 568 miles of roads with non-motorized facilities (paved shoulders and bicycle lanes) in southwest Michigan. Often on-road facilities are easier to construct than off-road facilities because the road agency usually has all or most of the required right-of-way and would not need to purchase property, which can be a major expense.

A significant on-road non-motorized facility in the region is Blue Star Highway and M-63 which follows Lake Michigan in Allegan, Berrien, and Van Buren counties. There is an on-road four-foot paved shoulder along this route and it connects to the Kal-Haven and Van Buren Trails in South Haven. As Blue Star Highway travels south into Berrien County, it becomes M-63 (a state highway) which connects to the Lakeshore Trail at Whirlpool's Headquarters at Monte Road.

There is also a paved shoulder from Paw Paw to Gobles on M-40. This facility connects Paw Paw with the Kal-Haven Trail. If the Fruitbelt Trail should ever come to be, there would be a "circular" trail throughout the County.

In addition, many of the roads in southwest Michigan, where traffic is low (less than 2,500 average daily traffic count) and where sight distances are not problematic, offer important connections, especially in rural areas. In the seven-county region of southwest Michigan, there are over 2,260 miles of paved roads with average daily traffic (ADT) counts of fewer than 2,500 vehicles per day (364 miles in Van Buren County). This figure does not include many roads for which traffic counts are not available, so the number of miles is quite higher than reflected, especially in rural areas. These roads provide experienced bicyclists with many miles of biking opportunities in a shared-use configuration.

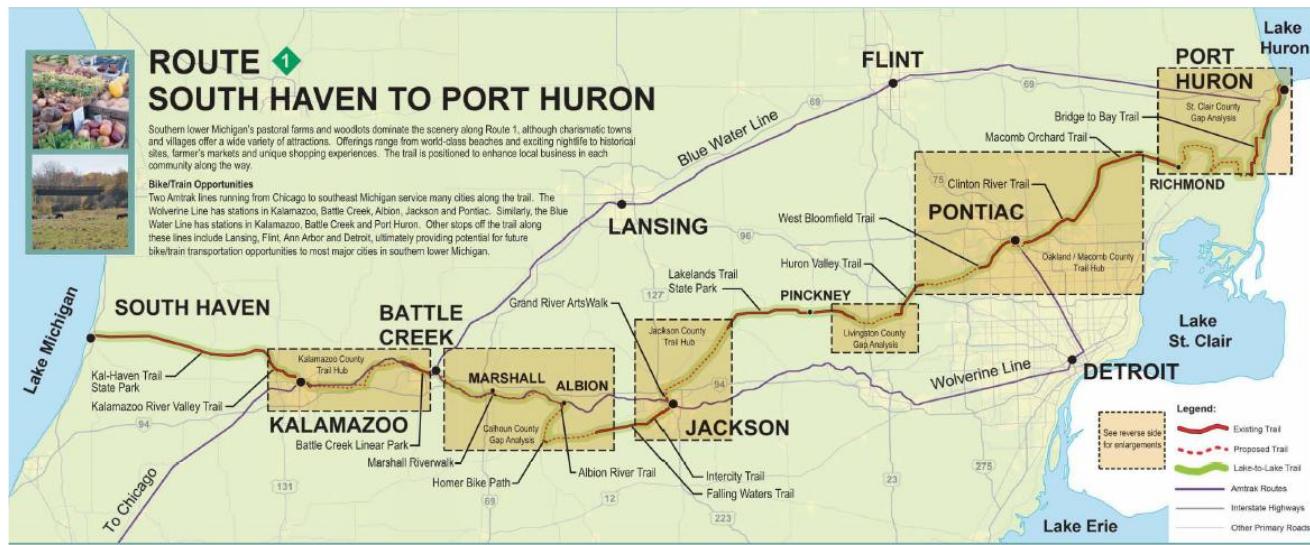
**Table 3. Miles of Trail and Road Facilities in Southwest Michigan (2020)**

County	On Road Facilities (paved shoulders/ bike lanes) (miles)	State Roads Average Daily Traffic less than 2,500 (miles)	Other Roads Average Daily Traffic Less than 2,500 (miles)	Off Road Improved Shared Use Paths (miles)
Berrien	90	10	446	17
Branch	29	13	269	5
Calhoun	107	14	277	40
Cass	54	9	324	2
Kalamazoo	201	0.3	180	75
St. Joseph	40	7	347	2
Van Buren	47	0	364	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>2,207</b>	<b>176</b>

There are 176 miles of improved off-road and 29 miles of unimproved non-motorized facilities in the region. Van Buren has 13 miles of unimproved trail (Van Buren Trail State Park) and 35 miles of

improved (Kal-Haven Trail). Kalamazoo County is the leader in the region with 75 miles of off-road improved facilities.

**Great Lake to Lake Trail Route #1** - Formerly known as the Airline Trail, this trail system will be 270 miles and go through 34 towns, 42 townships and nine counties from South Haven to Port Huron. The trail utilizes 16 existing trail systems. In the Southwest Region it utilizes the Kal-Haven Trail State Park, Kalamazoo River Valley Trail, Battle Creek Linear Park, Calhoun County Trailway and the Albion River Trail. For more information visit <https://greatlaketolaketrails.org/>.



### Kal-Haven Trail State Park

The Kal-Haven Trail, which opened in 1991, is a 33.5-mile linear multi-use greenway that links Kalamazoo, with over 70,000 residents, to South Haven, the largest city in Van Buren County with a population of 4,403 according to 2010 U.S. Census.

The trail is built on the abandoned Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad route. The MDNR purchased the right-of-way to the route in 1987 and eventually converted the railroad bed to a trail with a limestone/slag surface. Non-motorized bicyclists and hikers regularly use the trail, as do snowmobilers (Snowmobiling is permitted on the trail when there is a 4" snow base. The Kal-Haven Trail is the first leg of the Great Lake to Lake Trails system in Michigan and is considered Route #1 connecting South Haven to Port Huron.

For several years, Van Buren County assisted the MDNR with trail maintenance. That is no longer the case. In the past, user fees had funded a substantial portion of maintenance and operations for the trail (along with the Van Buren Trail). As of the MDNR's 2011 fiscal year, however, there will be no fee for trail use. Parking is available in South Haven (94 spaces), Kalamazoo (89 spaces) and along the trail at 6<sup>th</sup> street (20 spaces), near the City of Gobles (15 spaces) and near the Village of Bloomingdale (20 spaces). More information on the Kal-Haven is available online here:

<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ParksandTrails/Details.aspx?id=353&type=SPTR>.

## Van Buren Trail State Park

The Van Buren Trail is a 14-mile, linear, multi-use trail that links two cities in Van Buren county: South Haven (3,964 residents according to the 2020 U.S. Census) and Hartford (2,515 residents according to the 2020 U.S. Census). The trail's width varies from 10 to 18 feet and its surface is undeveloped ranging from rough ballast stones to long sections of sand, to a grassy two-track. Many mountain



bikers and equestrian riders use the trail. It runs through open farmland, blueberry fields, dense brush and wooded areas, and crosses the Paw Paw River north of Hartford. The MDNR is currently conducting a feasibility study to improve the surface of the Van Buren Trail State Park. Parking is available in Hartford (an unpaved grass lot contains space for an estimated 30 cars.) and in South Haven (a wide, unpaved area off of the trail at Lovejoy Avenue contains space for approximately 15 cars.) More information on the Van Buren Trail can be found at

<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ParksandTrails/Details.aspx?id=354&type=SPTR>.

Van Buren County has a portion of **US Bicycle Route 35**. The U.S. Bicycle Route System is a national network of regionally and nationally significant bicycling routes spanning multiple states. The purpose of the US Bicycle Route numbering system is to facilitate travel between states on routes identified as suitable for long-distance cycling and for those comfortable riding with traffic. US Bicycle Routes can include a variety of conditions and traverse various facility types including shared use trails, paved shoulders, no paved shoulders, etc. **US Bicycle Route 35** is a 500-mile route that runs from Indiana through Michigan to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, generally following the Lake Michigan shoreline and through the eastern Upper Peninsula. While some portions of US Bicycle Route 35 are signed, users should not rely solely on signs for navigating the route.

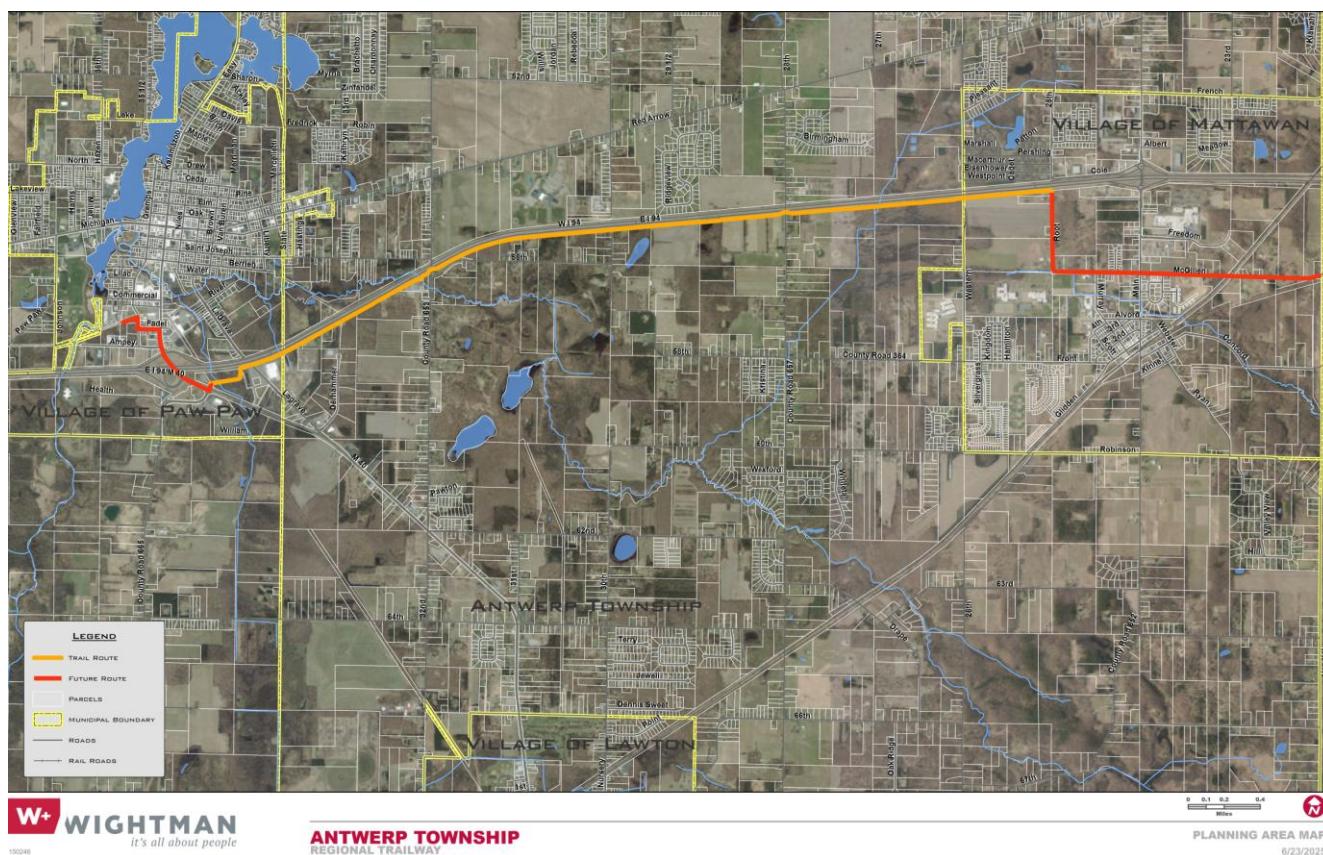


<https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/travel/safety/road-users/bicycling/us-bicycle-routes>

The following non-motorized network gaps were identified for Van Buren County in the 2020 MDOT Southwest Region plan. This is a list of local/regional efforts to expand non-motorized opportunities in the county. The list of on-road (shoulders/bike lanes) and off-road network priorities were identified through public input and from local planning efforts. These are not listed in any order.

**Blue Star Trail** - In 2009, a group of stakeholders from Allegan and Van Buren counties came together to discuss the possibility of creating a non-motorized connection from South Haven to Saugatuck. The Friends group is seeking contributions for their project and is working with the Van Buren and Allegan County Road Commissions in developing their vision of a non-motorized off-road shared use path along Blue Star Highway. Information can be found by visiting their website at

**Antwerp Township Regional Trail** – This route along I-94 between Paw Paw and Mattawan is an important east-west connection. The 10-foot paved trail will be roughly 5 miles long and will utilize the I-94 right of way and power line easements. The trail begins at the MDOT Park n Ride on the north side of M-40 and traverses east, primarily along the south side of I-94 right of way, to its eastern terminus at Root Road. The trail will cross beneath CR 653 and CR 657. In addition, where the trail crosses the Paw Paw River and wetland areas, culverts and boardwalks will be utilized. The trail will include a 10-foot paved width with 2-foot clear space on either side of the trail. At proposed boardwalk locations, a 14-foot clear width will be maintained. Fencing is proposed on both sides of the trail for safety of users and security for adjacent property owners. The proposed trail will have zero road crossings and is planned to be constructed in a single phase, with trailheads located at the MDOT Park n Ride and Root Road. Construction is currently planned for 2027.



**Lakeshore Trail** - The Lakeshore Trail will be a shared-use path that will ultimately connect the Red Arrow Linear Park in Berrien County to the Van Buren State Park Trail. The trail will follow the Lake Michigan shoreline. The first phase was completed in 2025 and includes a 2.5-mile shared-use trail from Higman Park Road in Benton Harbor, along M-63 to the Lakeview Mountain Bike Trail trailhead located on Monte Road (Whirlpool Headquarters). This project connects several parks and beaches along Lake Michigan to downtown Benton Harbor and St. Joseph and also connects to 12 miles of [Harbor Shores](#) public walking trails and the 7-mile Lakeview Mountain Bike Trail, inclusive of a shared trailhead and bathroom facilities. Stakeholders have been meeting to connect the Lakeshore Trail in Berrien County to the Van Buren State Park Trail (spur trail) along M-63 and Blue Star Highway.

Stakeholders include Van Buren County Road Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission, Berrien County Road Department, MDOT, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Covert Township, South Haven Area Recreation Authority, Van Buren State Park, Hagar Township, Harbor Shores, Cornerstone Alliance and Friends of Berrien County Trails. More information can be found <https://www.berrientrails.org/lakeshoretrail.asp>.

**M-40 Corridor** – There are three sections along M-40, in the Village of Lawton and Paw Paw, and heading north out of the Village of Lawton, needing a facility.

**Fruitbelt Trail** - This proposed route follows a railroad corridor from Hartford to Paw Paw making an important east – west connection.

**On-Road Network Priorities:**

- 95<sup>th</sup> to CR 690 – Sister Lakes Trail Head
- CR 690 from 95<sup>th</sup> to M-152
- M-152 (92<sup>nd</sup> Ave.) from CR 690 to CR 687
- CR 687 from 92<sup>nd</sup> Ave to 90<sup>th</sup> Ave
- CR 681 – Kal-Haven Trail to Bangor
- M-43 – South Haven to Bangor
- M-40 – Lawton to Paw Paw
- M-51 – Decatur to I-94

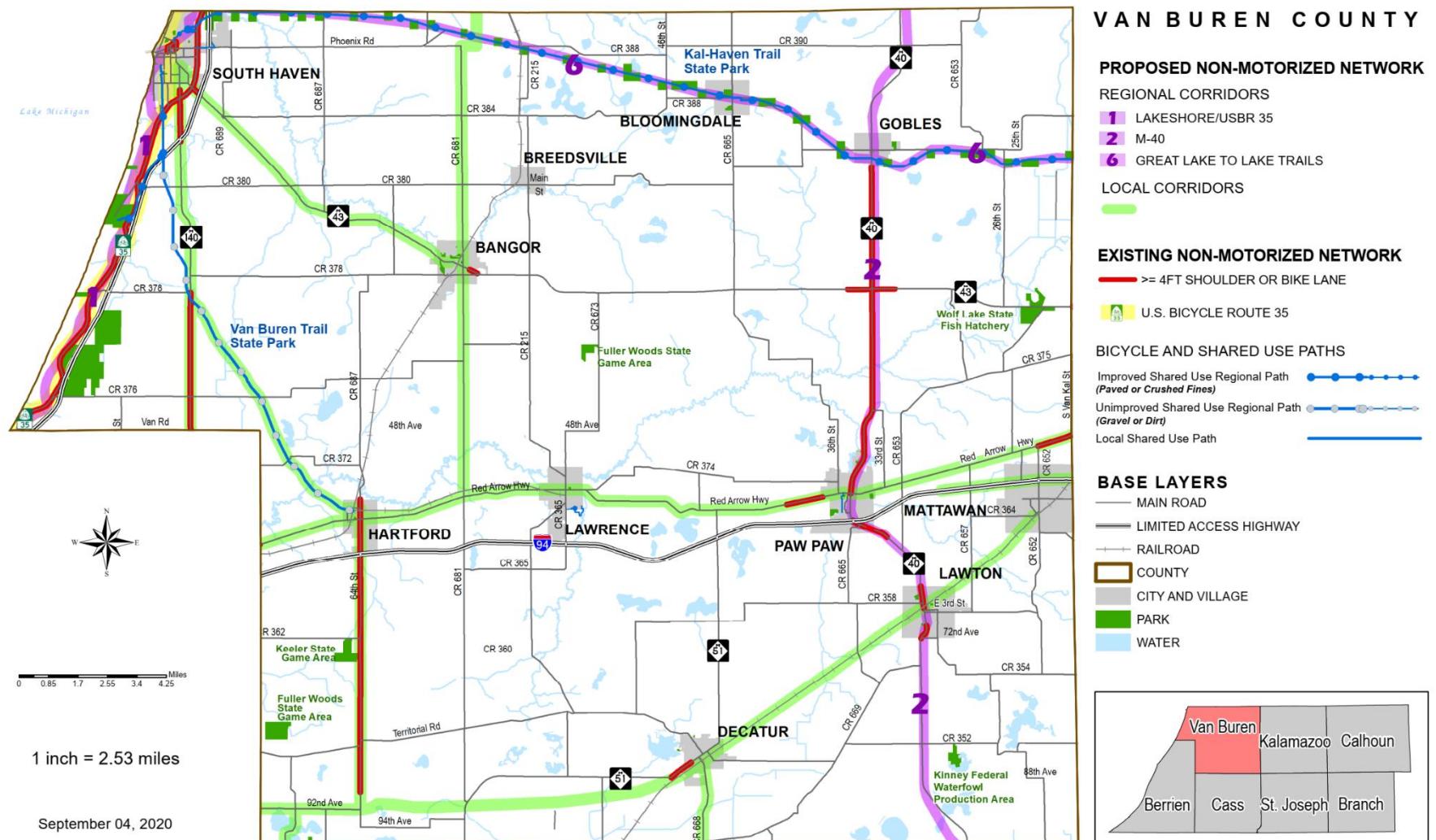
**Off-Road Network Priorities:**

- Fruitbelt Trail – Hartford to Paw Paw
- Lakeshore Trail connecting to Berrien County along Blue Star
- N. Van Kal Street
- Pave the Van Buren Trail – Van Buren State Park to Hartford
- Blue Star Trail (north of South Haven to Saugatuck along Blue Star Highway)

**Other Priorities:**

- Single track at Van Buren Street Park
- M-40 – Lawton to Gobles – the rumble strips make the paved shoulders too narrow

**Figure 7 (Map) Existing and Planned Non-Motorized**



## **Natural Resource Inventory**

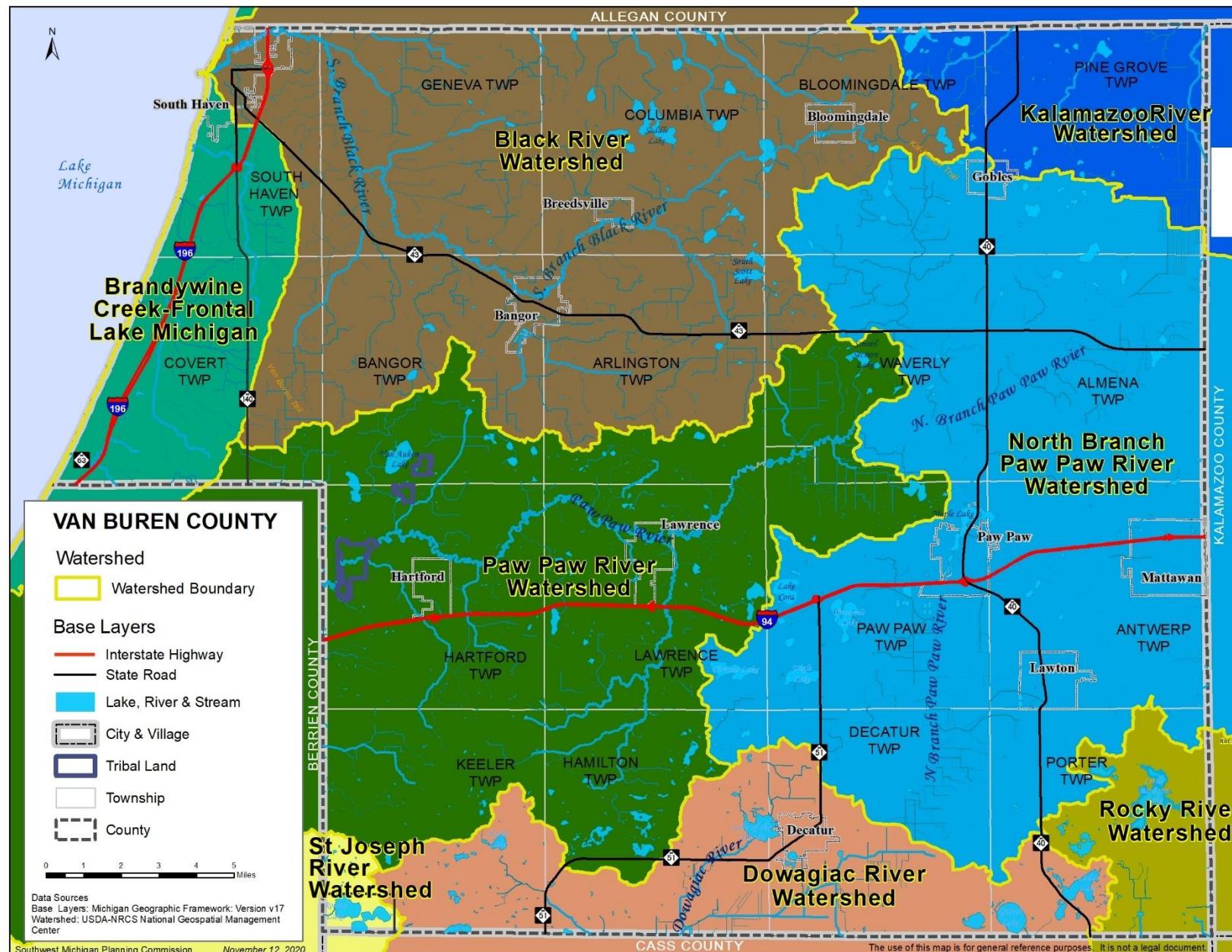
As a county within the Great Lakes basin, Van Buren County's natural environment was largely formed by glaciers thousands of years ago. Its soils, topography and especially its hydrology influence the ways in which residents and visitors recreate and use land throughout the county.

**Soils.** A variety of soils in the county (dry & wet, well-draining and poorly draining) are well-suited for agricultural production. The last soil survey in Van Buren County was published in 1986; see <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/survey/> for more information.

**Topography.** Van Buren County's highest elevation (1,060 feet above sea level) is in Antwerp Township. Much of the County's topography ranges from knobby ridges and basin-like depressions (from three glacial moraines -- Kalamazoo, Valparaiso and Lake Border), to gentle slopes and flat bottomland near river flood plains.

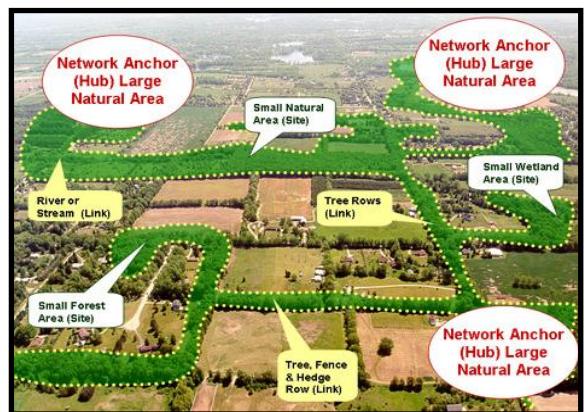
**Hydrology.** The entire county is within the Lake Michigan basin. The Van Buren County hydrologic system mostly falls within three major watersheds -- the Paw Paw River, which drains almost two-thirds of the county; the Dowagiac River, flowing southwesterly into Cass County; and the Black River, which drains the northwestern portion of the county. A very small area in the northeast corner of the county drains to the Kalamazoo River Watershed. Both the Paw Paw and Dowagiac Rivers are tributaries of the larger St. Joseph River Watershed which empties into Lake Michigan in St. Joseph, MI. Groundwater, surface water features (lakes, rivers, streams and ponds) and wetlands comprise these watersheds. The county's largest water feature is the 14 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, which borders its western edge.

## Figure 8 (Map) Watersheds, Van Buren County



Van Buren County is blessed with many natural features including sand dunes, beaches, forests, wetlands, and endangered species habitat. The county also enjoys the benefits of an extremely diverse local agricultural economy. Figure 9 is a map of potential conservation areas in Van Buren County. This map was developed by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory and shows areas in the County which are dominated by natural vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. More information on the model used to develop this map can be found at [www.swmpc.org/swmi.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/swmi.asp).

The following maps show critical dunes in Van Buren County as designated by the State of Michigan and wetlands. Sand dunes and wetlands are extremely important for animal and plant diversity. These resources are also important for protecting the shoreline and water quality.



Green infrastructure is an interconnected network of public, private, and working lands with assets such as large natural areas called hubs (vineyards, orchards, farmlands, wetlands, forests, parks, beaches) connected by rivers corridors, tree lines and trails.

Figure 9 (Map) Potential Conservation Areas in Van Buren County (2007)

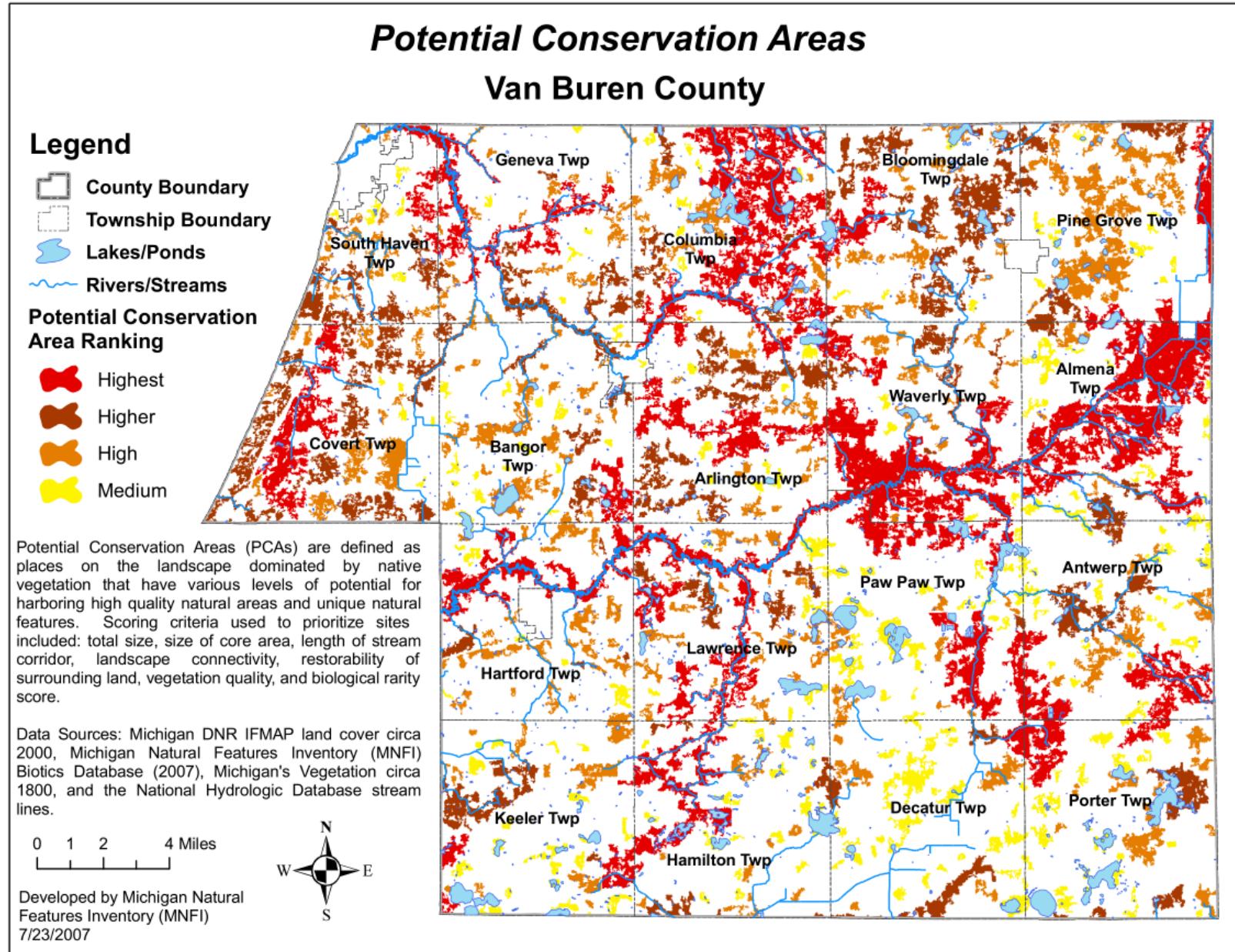


Figure 10 (Map) Critical Dunes, Van Buren County

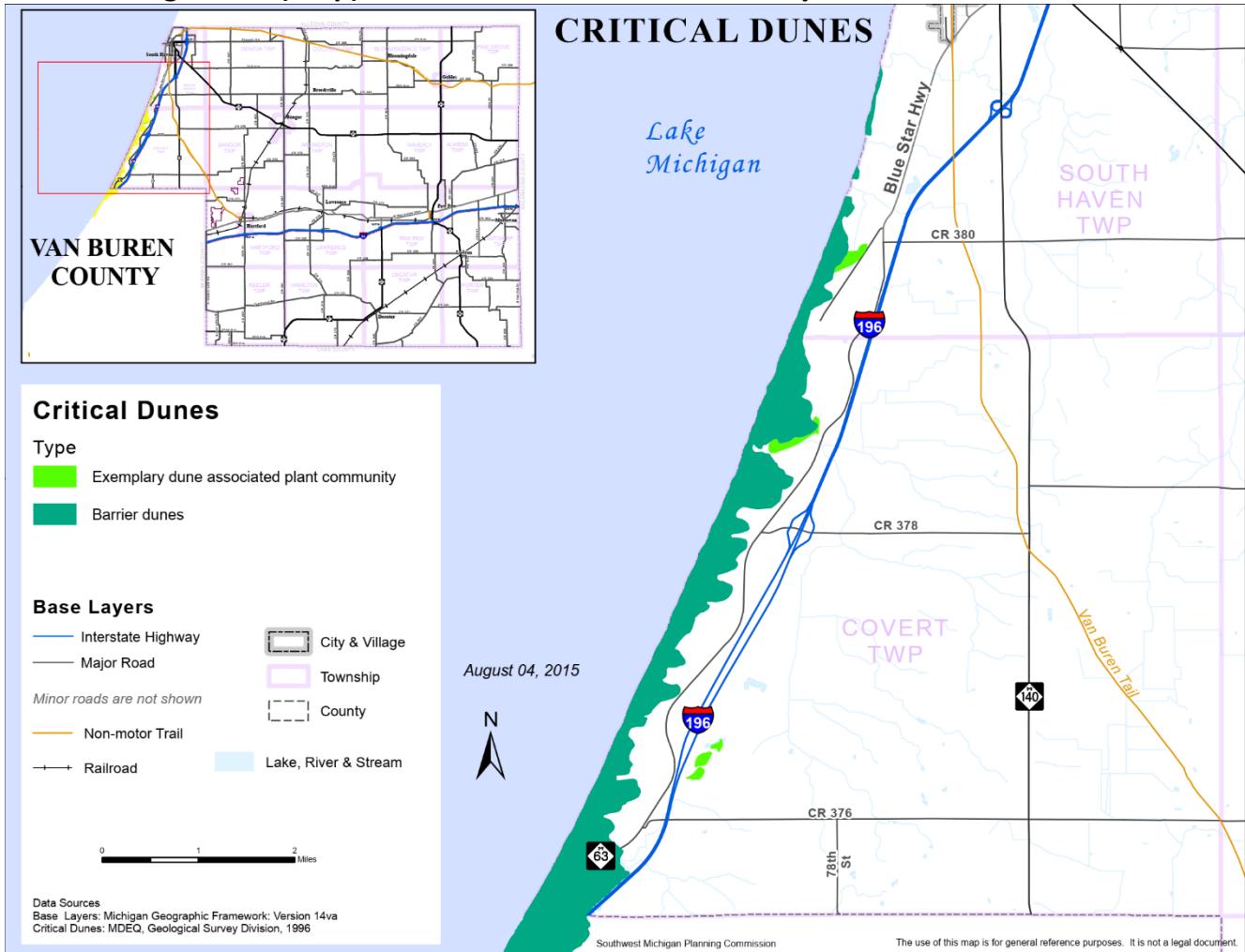
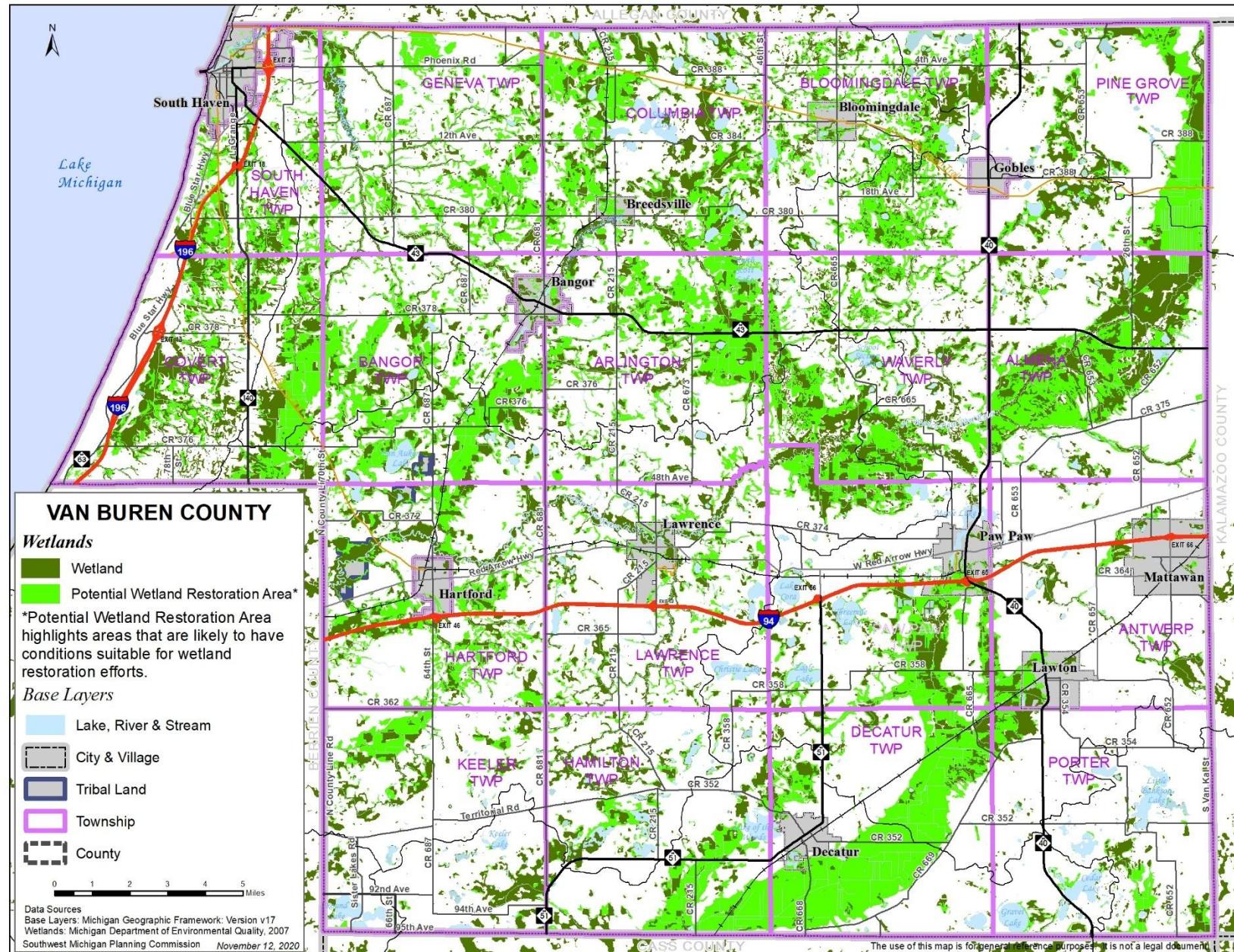


Figure 11 (Map) Wetlands, Van Buren County



## MDNR Grant Inventory

IN 2023, Van Buren County received its first Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant for the kayak launch in Hartford on the Paw Paw River. Since the Trust Fund's establishment in 1976, Van Buren County and its communities have received a total of \$17,220,500 to fund acquisitions and developments projects. Table 4 provides an overview of these projects.

**Table 4. Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grants Awarded in Van Buren County | 1976-2023**

Grantee	Project #	Project	Grant Amount	Project Type	Public Act
City of South Haven	887	South Shore Recreation Area	600,000	Acquisition	PA 105 of 1985
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	972	Covert ORV Use Area	300,000	Acquisition	PA 197 of 1986
City of Bangor	86-146	Bangor Park	61,500	Acquisition	PA 108 of 1987
DNR - Wildlife Division	86-097	Lane Lake Acquisition	340,000	Acquisition	PA 108 of 1987
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	90-175	Amicus Corp.-Van Buren SP	2,200,000	Acquisition	PA 32 of 1991
DNR - Wildlife Division	91-845	Mentha State Game Area	2,500,000	Acquisition	PA 85 of 1992
Village of Paw Paw	94-157	Community Park Development	169,900	Development	PA 152 of 1995
City of South Haven	95-093	Dyckman and Packard Beach	84,000	Development	PA 353 of 1996
City of Bangor	04-170	Black River Heritage Trail and Boardwalk Project	252,800	Development	PA 11 of 2005
South Haven Township	06-210	Deerlick Creek Park Acquisition	1,000,000	Acquisition	PA 59 of 2007
City of Bangor	08-102	Veterans Park and Kiwanis Park Additions	37,800	Acquisition	PA 23 of 2009
City of South Haven	10-097	South Beach Improvements	250,000	Development	PA 16 of 2011
City of Hartford	10-024	Ely Park Improvement	29,600	Development	PA 16 of 2011
City of South Haven	11-144	Elkenburg Park Improvements	254,800	Development	PA 283 of 2012
City of South Haven	12-096	South Beach Park Extension Acquisition	665,000	Acquisition	PA 9 of 2013
City of South Haven	12-114	Van Buren Trail Connection Development	217,400	Development	PA 9 of 2013

Grantee	Project #	Project	Grant Amount	Project Type	Public Act
DNR - Wildlife Division	13-128	Porter Township SGA Land Initiative	1,800,000	Acquisition	PA 114 of 2014
DNR - Fisheries Division	13-127	Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery Development	295,000	Development	PA 114 of 2014
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	14-0189	Paw Paw to Hartford Multi-use Trail Partnership	750,000	Acquisition	PA 7 of 2015
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	14-0211	Pilgrim Haven Development Project	50,000	Development	PA 7 of 2015
City of South Haven	15-0072	North Beach Park Improvements	300,000	Development	PA 61 of 2016
City of South Haven	15-0058	Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement	37,500	Development	PA 61 of 2016
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	16-0140	14th Avenue Parcel Acquisition	300,000	Acquisition	PA 93 of 2017
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	16-0204	Pilgrim Haven Development Project Phase II	100,000	Development	PA 93 of 2017
DNR - Michigan Historical Center	16-0069	Kal-Haven Trail Interpretation Project	46,300	Development	PA 93 of 2017
City of South Haven	17-0032	Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement	37,500	Development	PA 165 of 2018
City of South Haven	17-0034	South Haven Splash Pad	300,000	Development	PA 165 of 2018
DNR - Wildlife Division	18-0156	Cornish SGA Acquisition	534,600	Acquisition	PA 12 of 2019
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	19-0201	Pilgrim Haven Natural Area - Royle Addition	2,262,000	Acquisition	PA 145 of 2020
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	20-0111	Deerlick Creek Park Development	15,000	Development	PA 9 of 2021
Village of Paw Paw	21-0130	Maple Island Boardwalk and Fishing Platform	300,000	Development	PA 151 of 2022
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	21-0109	Phoenix Avenue Kayak Launch Development	229,800	Development	PA 151 of 2022
DNR - Wildlife Division	22-0194	Paw Paw River Land Acquisition	900,000	Acquisition	PA 119 of 2023

Grantee	Project #	Project	Grant Amount	Project Type	Public Act
Covert Township	23-0034	Development of Covert Park Beach	300,000	Development	PA 135 of 2024
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	23-0090	Porter Legacy Dunes Park Development	300,000	Development	PA 135 of 2024
Van Buren County	23-0178	Development of Paw Paw River Water Trail Access	283,700	Development	PA 135 of 2024

## Section 5. The Planning Process

The planning process for the Van Buren County Parks & Recreation Plan began in the summer of 2025. It consisted of establishing a scope of work for the plan, an analysis (data-gathering) and assessment (public input and opportunity exploration) phase.

A profile of the County's assets (its natural and physical features and the characteristics of its residents), the County's administrative structure and other elements that are unique to Van Buren County were compiled. Preceding sections illustrate these findings.

The assessment phase began in late summer 2025. The current recreational assets in Van Buren County were researched and summarized.

### Public Input

Van Buren County residents and other interested parties informed this plan through an online survey offered from August 18, 2025 to September 21, 2025. Below is a summary of survey results and detailed survey results can be viewed in the Appendix.

#### Key Stats

Total Responses	322
Full-time Residents	87%
Main Age Group	41–60 years
Positive Impact on Quality of Life	79%
Believe Parks Boost Economy	72%

### Usage & Needs

- Most visited: Fairgrounds & Courtyard Park
- Most used trail: Kal-Haven Trail
- Needs: More multi-use trails, hiking, water trails, nature preserves
- Amenities: Playgrounds, picnic areas, campgrounds, pickleball, dog parks

### Site-Specific Priorities

- Courtyard Park: Farmers' market, playground, benches, picnic area
- Fairgrounds: Events/concerts, bathrooms, parking, lighting
- Museum: Promotion, accessibility, hours, maintenance
- Dunes: 57% favor nature area w/ public access; some prefer conservation only

### Funding Priorities

1. Maintain and improve existing parks
2. Support improvements of locally owned parks
3. Expand non-motorized trail system

### Community Comments

Strong interest in expanding recreation while protecting sensitive natural areas. Emphasis on cost-effective spending, environmental protection, and keeping taxes low.

- 327 responses to the survey.
- 86% respondents were full time residents; 8% second homeowners and 6% lived outside the county (most lived in neighboring counties or worked in Van Buren County).
- Responses were received from 27 of the county's 29 municipalities.
- Most respondents were 41-60 years of age (49%); 26% were 19-40 years of age and 21% were over 61.
- 79% of respondents think recreational opportunities attract residents and tourists for a positive economic impact and 72% think it enhances quality of life in Van Buren County.
- The recreational opportunities that are most needed are multi-use non-motorized trails, hiking trails, nature preserve/conservation areas, playgrounds, Lake Michigan beaches/access, dark sky parks, and water trails.
- The recreational activities that are not currently offered in Van Buren County and respondents would like to see are trails; sports facilities; gardens/green spaces/nature preserves; community events and festivals; skateparks.
- Over 55% of respondents support using County park millage funds to help improve the Van Buren Trail from South Haven to Hartford to leverage grants.
- For County Park in Paw Paw, desired improvements include a playground, more benches/covered seating, more picnic areas, lighting, an ice rink, and using the space for a farmers market. To make the park more accessible, the desired improvements include paved walkways, and ADA play equipment.
- For the County Fairgrounds, more events/concerts was the most desired improvement. Other improvements include bathrooms, parking, hiking trails, and more paved pathways. To make the fairgrounds more accessible, over 70% of respondents would like to see more paved walkways.
- For the Van Buren Museum, desired improvements include increased advertising and promotion of the existence of the museum, expanded hours of operation, improved ADA accessibility, and paved walkways.
- For Syndicate Park Dunes, most respondents want the County to manage it as a natural area but maintain public access.
- Over 65% of respondents support the development of a trail to connect the Van Buren Trail from Hartford, Lawrence, Paw Paw, and Mattawan. 62% of respondents support connecting the Kal-Haven Trail to Paw Paw.
- Most respondents believe the County should use park millage funds for maintaining and improving existing parks (64%); improving locally owned parks (47%); expanding multi-use, non-motorized trails in the County (35%); and promoting the County and local parks (21%).
- The majority of respondents support maintaining and enhancing parks in the County. Many respondents desire to preserve natural areas and expand trails.

The input from these efforts were utilized to update the goals and action plan.

## Plan Adoption Process

After recommendation for approval from the County Parks and Recreation Board on November 13, 2025, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners set a 30-day public comment period from December 9 through January 13, 2026 and held a public hearing on January 13, 2026. During the

comment period, the draft plan was available on the Van Buren County ([www.vbco.org](http://www.vbco.org)) website and available at the County Administration Building. This plan was adopted on January 27, 2026 by the County Board of Commissioners. Adoption related documentation can be found in the Appendix.

## **Next Steps**

Parks and recreation planning in Van Buren County is a developing process. This plan performs two functions:

- Provides guidance for capital improvements for county-owned parks & recreation facilities in Van Buren County; and
- Provides background information on parks and recreation maintenance, operations and planning to develop baseline knowledge about:
  - the County's current recreation resources and assets;
  - municipalities' recreation resources, assets, planning and priorities; and
  - County residents' priorities for parks and recreational facilities in Van Buren County.

## Section 6. Action Plan

The following pages present a twofold strategic plan for developing Van Buren County's recreation and open space resources. This twofold approach grew out of the planning process, during which it became clear that while the County sought to improve its recreation offerings through capital improvements, it also needed to develop an internal strategy to help shape a unified county-level approach to parks and recreation.

### Goals & Objectives

This sub-section lays out prioritized objectives that fall under the following six goals. Objectives under each of the goals are prioritized based on input from both the public and county staff and elected officials. The following six goals fall loosely in order from highest to lowest priority.

1. Preserve, maintain and enhance the recreational facilities Van Buren County currently owns, leases and maintains.
2. Leverage resources and relationships between partners to develop existing parks, recreation areas and open spaces and acquire new land for parks and recreation areas where there are deficiencies or strategic opportunities.
3. Encourage and invest in providing universal access at both County- and municipal-owned park and recreation facilities.
4. Consider the creation of a county parks and recreation management position or department to manage the County's recreation facilities and future programming and manage/implement this plan.
5. Maintain and promote a comprehensive inventory of the countywide park and recreation system — including parks, preserves and recreation facilities owned and operated by Van Buren County, its 29 municipalities, the State of Michigan and private entities.
6. Provide structured support for individual municipalities' recreation planning efforts, encouraging collaboration both within Van Buren County and beyond its borders.

This plan prioritizes suggested improvements for the County's recreation properties based on public input. Future amendments to this plan may choose to further prioritize and add to these suggested capital improvements. Individual improvements fall under the following prioritizations:

- Three Stars (\*\*\*) → higher priority
- Two stars (\*\*) → mid-level priority
- One star (\*) → less-immediate priority

**Goal 1 | Preserve, maintain and enhance** the recreational facilities Van Buren County currently owns, leases and maintains.

Objective	Priority
Adequately maintain and operate the County's recreational facilities	***
Maintain properties' low impact on the environment and surrounding land uses	***
Encourage connectivity between recreation assets and communities with non-motorized facilities	***
Encourage year-round use of the County's recreation facilities	**

Under this goal, the three top priorities represent basic functions of a county parks and recreation system:

(1) Adequately maintain and operate the County's recreational facilities. This is perhaps the most basic goal of the County in terms of parks and recreation planning. Through adequately maintaining and operating its current recreational facilities, the County can establish its role as a recreation resource provider. **The county should develop, budget for and implement maintenance plans for each park property.**

(2) Maintain properties' low impact on the environment and surrounding land uses. Public sentiment in Van Buren County leans heavily toward identifying and preserving the County's natural features. This importance placed on existing natural infrastructure and its benefit to residents' quality of life should factor into the way the County preserves and enhances its current recreational facilities. This might include engaging in low-impact maintenance and operations practices or consulting surrounding land owners when considering significant changes on County property.

(3) Encourage connectivity between recreation assets and communities with non-motorized facilities. There is support for improving and expanding the non-motorized system in Van Buren County.

**Goal 2 | Leverage resources and relationships** between partners to develop existing parks, recreation areas and open spaces and acquire new land for parks and recreation areas where there are deficiencies or strategic opportunities.

Objective	Priority
Inventory all County-owned property and designate appropriate properties as "priority" recreation properties based on recreational needs and desires of the community and the natural resource inventory	***
Annually inventory all tax-foreclosed properties adjacent to current County-owned/operated and locally owned/operated parkland, preservation land and recreational facilities; explore the feasibility of acquiring land for recreation purposes	***
Partner with non-profits, libraries, municipalities and others to develop programming, improve recreational assets and secure land for recreational opportunities.	***
Explore grant and private funding for land acquisition, development and maintenance of recreational areas	***

Several private and/or non-profit organizations along with the County's Land Preservation Board currently work to preserve open space and farmland in Van Buren County. These include the Van Buren County Conservation District, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, the Michigan Nature Association and The Nature Conservancy. Many private landowners preserve open space in Van Buren County through conservation easements, purchase of development rights (PDR) programs and Michigan's Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act (P.A. 116).

Further, public input in the recreation planning process in Van Buren County indicates county residents' strong desire to integrate land-use planning and open-space preservation with the County's recreation planning to ensure the protection of high-quality natural features. Municipalities can direct new development to existing village and city centers and preserve the surrounding natural features and farmlands in the county. The maps in the natural resources inventory section can be used as a guide to understand where the most important remaining natural lands are located.

**Goal 3 | Encourage and invest in providing universal access** at both County- and municipal-owned park and recreation facilities.

Objective	Priority
Provide for universal access at county-owned properties	***
Encourage cities, villages and townships to incorporate universal design standards in their recreation plans and provide universal access to recreational amenities	**
Explore options for adopting and implementing countywide signage guidelines for (a) wayfinding and (b) marketing points of interest that meet ADA requirements	*

Ensuring that all Van Buren County residents can access park and recreation resources is part of a healthy parks and recreation system. Many local and state parks and recreation departments are moving toward developing and updating facilities with universal access. Additionally, "Universal Access" is one of the Michigan State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan's (SCORP's) priorities. West Michigan Trails has developed trail wayfinding signage guidance for trail facilities that could be used to have uniform signage in the county and beyond. The guidance can be found here [https://wmtrails.org//wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WayfindingSignagePlan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://wmtrails.org//wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WayfindingSignagePlan_FINAL.pdf).

**Universal design** refers to broad-spectrum ideas meant to produce buildings, products and environments that are inherently accessible to both people without disabilities and people with disabilities. The term "Universal design" describes the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.

Per a 2006 Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) article, the term Universal Access refers to "more than just making a facility wheelchair-friendly . . . [it] goes beyond just mobility issues and associated features to incorporate technology, materials and design considerations that provide for all people in any case of a mobility, sight, hearing or mental disability." Some useful resources for considering accessibility in parks and recreation planning:

- The National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/hfc/>

- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Universal Access Program, <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/universal-access-program>
- The National Center on Accessibility, [www.ncaonline.org](http://www.ncaonline.org)
- The Principles of Universal Design from the Center for Universal Design, see Appendices, [www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciplestext.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm)

**Goal 4 | Consider creation of a parks and recreation management position or department** to manage the County's parks and recreation facilities and future programming and manage/implement this recreation plan.

Objective	Priority
Determine the needs for a designated staff person or department to manage county parks and recreation facilities, operations, marketing and programming	***

Goal 4 of this plan supports the potential creation of a staff person or the formation of a parks and recreation department to consolidate County-level parks and recreation efforts, including the implementation of this plan.

**Goal 5 | Maintain and promote a comprehensive inventory of the countywide parks and recreation system** — including parks, preserves and recreation facilities owned and operated by Van Buren County, its 29 municipalities, the State of Michigan and private entities.

Objective	Priority
Present an annual report detailing changes with recreation amenities in Van Buren County to Board of Commissioners	***
Work with the Van Buren County Visitors and Convention Bureau to comprehensively promote all recreation facilities throughout the County	***
Create a database of the current recreation facilities/resources inventory and perform a survey of changes, plans and updates at the local level. Include spatial data with these updates for GIS analysis	***

The county could facilitate a collaborative approach to planning, managing and marketing recreation facilities and programming by maintaining a comprehensive inventory of all public and private recreation assets in the county. This could be in collaboration with the Van Buren County Visitors and Convention Bureau and cities, villages and townships. A base inventory of local recreational assets was included in the 2011 plan, but not in this update.

**Goal 6 | Provide structured support for individual municipalities' recreation planning efforts**, encouraging collaboration both within Van Buren County and beyond its borders.

Objective	Priority
Provide municipalities with baseline asset information to inform their recreation planning processes	***

Encourage local municipalities to engage with the County during the County's recreation plan update process	***
Participate in efforts to collaborate on non-motorized projects to connect communities and recreation facilities in the county and beyond	***

The objectives under this goal speak to the need for outreach/coordination at the county level.

- (1) Provide municipalities with baseline asset information to inform their recreation planning processes. The Parks and Recreation Commission can suggest that cities, villages and townships review (a) the county-wide park inventory from the County's 2011 Recreation Plan, (b) a county-wide inventory of "plentiful prime natural areas" (see natural resource inventory for maps of Van Buren County's key potential conservation areas) (c) a measure of how recreation resource standards measure against current provisions (i.e. "acres per capita" measures) and other information as part of the information-gathering stage of their own recreation planning processes.
- (2) Encourage local municipalities to engage with the County during the County's recreation plan update process. Van Buren County's 29 municipalities are currently required to submit completed recreation plans to the County. The county could take a more proactive approach and notify the 29 municipalities about updates to the County Plan and ask for municipalities to notify the county about their plan development or updates.
- 3) Participate in efforts to collaborate on non-motorized projects to connect communities and recreation facilities in the county and beyond. Many of the non-motorized efforts are regional and require the County to be involved in efforts within and with adjacent counties/municipalities to advance connectivity of the non-motorized system. Currently the Count Parks and Recreation Department and the Van Buren County Road Department is involved in advancing the Lakeshore Route along Lake Michigan connecting to Berrien and Allegan Counties.

## Recreation Capital Improvements

The following capital improvements serve as guidelines for the facilities that are currently operated and managed by Van Buren County as parks & recreation properties.

### County (Courtyard) Park

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Add more benches and covered seating	\$8,000	**
Add picnic areas with phone charging stations	\$10,000	**
Add paved pathways	\$20,000	**
Provide lighting	\$15,000	*
Add ADA play equipment (playground, swings)	\$80,000	*

- Other ideas included an ice rink and using the space for a farmers market.

### Syndicate Park Dunes

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Determine if providing parking areas is feasible	TBD	**
Ensure signage about the unique natural resources are maintained.	\$5,000	**

Syndicate Park Dunes are currently just a collection of county owned properties. There are some unique challenges with access to the properties. The County needs to seek legal counsel for park designation, boundaries, and title cleanup.

Even though the **County Fairgrounds**, **Van Buren Historic Museum** and **North Point Conservation Area** are managed by other entities, the survey respondents desired the following improvements to these facilities.

- **County Fairgrounds** – paved pathways and more events/concerts were the most desired improvements. Other improvements include bathrooms, parking and hiking/skiing trails.

- **Van Buren Historic Museum** - increased advertising and promotion of the existence of the museum, expanded hours of operation, improved ADA accessibility, and paved walkways.
- **North Point Conservation Area** - trail markers, historical signage and bathrooms.

## **General Capital Improvements (Not Necessarily Tied to a Specific Property)**

There is an increased awareness that coordination and cooperation is needed to provide exceptional recreational opportunities in Van Buren County. Also, many recreational resources such as land and water trails traverse through several local municipalities requiring a coordinated effort to provide and develop these resources. With this county-wide recreation plan, the County will be in a position to partner with local municipalities and other entities to purchase property and develop additional recreational opportunities for county residents and visitors.

There is a strong desire for more non-motorized opportunities. Currently, groups are working on these major connections:

**Lakeshore Trail** connecting to Benton Harbor/St Joseph in Berrien County and beyond to Chicago, IL.

**Blue Star Trail** connecting South Haven (Van Buren and Kal Haven Trails) to Allegan County (Saugatuck) to the north and beyond.

**Antwerp Township Regional Trail** connecting Mattawan to Paw Paw.

**Fruitbelt Trail** connecting Hartford to Paw Paw.

There are also several roads that could be improved with 4 foot shoulders or bike lanes to make important connections for walking and biking throughout the county. See a list of priority roads in the non-motorized inventory section.

There are several efforts to develop/improve access and promote the Paw Paw River Water Tail, the Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail (Black River) and the Lake Michigan Water Trail.

There is also a strong desire for more nature preserves/conservation areas in the county, especially with hiking trails.

There is also an effort to create a dune nature trail that would connect SWMLC properties, Pilgrim Haven and Porter Legacy Dunes, south through Syndicate Park (on County owned parcels or easements) and to Northpoint/Van Buren State Park.

There is also a desire for more youth and senior activities in the county. Programs through senior services, schools, libraries and other organizations should be expanded and promoted. There is currently only one community pool in the county in South Haven so another community pool would be beneficial.

The following table lists several potential projects by priority. Estimated costs do not include the cost of property acquisition and will also depend on all of the amenities provided.

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Acquire and improve water trail access and facilities along the Paw Paw River Water Trail and Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail.	TBD	***
Create more Lake Michigan access points and provide more wheelchair accessible accesses to beach/lake.	TBD	***
Expand non-motorized network of shared use paths and paved shoulders (see non-motorized section for priority routes such as the Lakeshore Trail, Blue Star Trail, Fruitbelt Trail and the Antwerp Township Regional Trail connecting Mattawan to Paw Paw).	Paved shoulders - \$40,000/mile. Shared use Path - \$1 million/mile.	***
Allocate more County-owned land or purchase new land for recreation use/conservation areas.	TBD	***
Develop a single track/mountain biking trail.	TBD	***
Create more inland lake boating access points and beaches.	TBD	**
Implement public art projects on recreation properties throughout Van Buren County.	TBD	**
Develop a dog park.	\$20,000	*
Develop pickle ball courts	\$40,000	*
Develop recreation resources for equestrian users.	TBD	*
Develop an ice rink.	\$30,000	*
Develop a disc golf course.	\$25,000	*
Develop a facility for off-road vehicles.	TBD	*

## Appendices

**Table 5. Michigan Department of Natural Resources Park Classification**

Classification	General Description	Location Criteria	Size Criteria
Mini-Park	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs.	Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile distance in residential setting.	Between 2,500 sq. ft. and one acre in size.
Neighborhood Park	Neighborhood park remains the basic unit of the park system and serves as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Focus is on informal active and passive recreation.	$\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers.	5 acres is considered minimum size. 5 to 10 acres is optimal.
School Park	Depending on circumstances, combining parks with school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classes of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex and special use.	Determined by location of school district property.	Variable-depends on function.
Community Park	Serves broader purpose than neighborhood park. Focus is on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves two or more neighborhoods and $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 mile distance.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually between 30 and 50 acres.
Large Urban Park	Large urban parks serve a broader purpose than community parks and are used when community and neighborhood parks are not adequate to serve the needs of the community. Focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves the entire community.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually a minimum of 50 acres, with 75 or more acres being optimal.
Natural Resource Area	Lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetics/buffering.	Resource availability and opportunity.	Variable.
Greenway	Effectively tie park system components together to form a continuous park environment.	Resource availability and opportunity.	Variable.

Classification	General Description	Location Criteria	Size Criteria
Sports Complex	Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities to larger and fewer sites strategically located throughout the community.	Strategically located community-wide facilities.	Determined by projected demand. Usually a minimum of 25 acres, with 40 to 80 acres being optimal.
Special Use	Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single- purpose use.	Variable-dependent on specific use.	Variable.
Private Park / Recreational Facility	Parks and recreation facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park and recreation system.	Variable-dependent on specific use.	Variable.
Park Trail	Multipurpose trails located within greenways, parks and natural resource areas. Focus is on recreational value and harmony with natural environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists / in-line skaters.</li> <li>• Type II: Multipurpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians and bicyclists/in-line skaters.</li> <li>• Type III: Unimproved multipurpose trails for pedestrians, mountain bikes and horses.</li> </ul>	
Connector Trail	Multipurpose trails that emphasize safe travel for pedestrians to and from parks and around the community. Focus is as much on transportation as it is on recreation.	Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists / in-line skaters located in independent r.o.w. (e.g., old railroad r.o.w.). • Type II: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skaters. Typically located within road r.o.w.	
On-Street Bikeway	Paved segments of roadways that serve as a means to safely separate bicyclists from vehicular traffic.	Bike Route: Designated portions of the roadway for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists. Bike Lane: Shared portions of the roadway that provide separation between motor vehicles and bicyclists, such as paved shoulders.	
All-Terrain Bike Trail	Off-road trail for all-terrain (mountain) bikes.	Single-purpose loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.	
Cross-County Ski Trail	Trails developed for traditional and skate-style cross-country skiing.	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.	
Equestrian Trail	Trails developed for horseback riding.	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas. Sometimes developed as multipurpose with hiking and all-terrain biking where conflicts can be controlled.	

**Figure 12 (Chart) Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Universal Access Brochure**  
[www.mass.gov/dcr/universal\\_access/docs/accessbroch.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/universal_access/docs/accessbroch.pdf)

## Selected Parks – Places to Go on Your Own

### CHART CODES

- Accessible: Meets all codes and guidelines for accessibility.
- Fair Accessibility: Meets many of the ADA standards with few barriers. Some visitors with disabilities may require assistance.
- Minimal Accessibility: Does not meet ADA standards and has significant barriers. Many/most visitors with disabilities will need assistance.

NA Not available or not applicable.

This chart highlights a selection of most recommended parks for accessible visitation. Each offers accessible attractions though not all park features may be accessible. If you have any questions or hesitation prior to visiting, call the park in advance to verify conditions.



Beach wheelchairs are now available at more DCR facilities than shown in the chart at right. Please visit

[www.mass.gov/universal\\_access](http://www.mass.gov/universal_access) for more

locations. Call in advance to reserve beach wheelchairs (to ensure one will be available for your visit.)



Many of the Boston area parks can be reached by public transportation.

For information on public transportation to the sites listed, check with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority website at

[www.mbta.gov](http://www.mbta.gov)

### WESTERN

Ashuelot Rail Trail, Adams to Lanesborough, 413-442-8928

D.A.R. State Forest, Rte. 112, Goshen, 413-268-7098

Mt. Greylock State Reservation, 30 Rockwell Rd., Lanesborough, 413-499-4262

Pittsfield State Forest, 1041 Cascade Street, Pittsfield, 413-442-8992

Savoy Mountain State Forest, 260 Central Shaft Road, Florida, 413-663-8469

Restrooms	Visitors Center /Contact Station	Interpretive Program	Trail Opportunity	Picnicking	Swimming	BeachChair #
●	●	NA	●	●	NA	NA
●	●	●	●	●	○	1
●	●	●	●	●	NA	NA
●	NA	●	●	●	NA	NA
●	NA	●	●	●	●	NA

### CENTRAL

Blackstone River State Park, 287 Oak Street, Uxbridge, 508-278-7604

Dunn State Park, 289 Pearl St., Rte. 101, Gardner, 978-632-7897

Erving State Forest, 200 East Main Street, Erving, 978-544-3939

Lake Wyola State Park, 94 Lakeview Road, Shutesbury, 413-367-0317

Mt. Tom State Reservation, 125 Reservation Road, Holyoke, 413-534-1186

Norwottuck Rail Trail, Amherst – Northampton, 413-586-8706

Robinson State Park, North Street, Agawam, 413-786-2877

### NORTHEAST

Great Brook Farm State Park, 84 Lowell Road, Carlisle, 978-369-6312

Hallibut Point State Park, Gott Avenue, Rockport, 978-546-2997

Harold Parker State Forest, 1951 Turnpike Road, N. Andover, 978-686-3391

Hopkinton State Park, 71 Cedar St., Hopkinton, 508-435-4303

Nahant Beach & Lynn Shore Reservation, Lynn, Nahant, 781-485-2303

Salisbury Beach State Reservation, Reservation Road, Salisbury, 978-462-4481

Restrooms	Visitors Center /Contact Station	Interpretive Program	Trail Opportunity	Picnicking	Swimming	BeachChair #
●	●	●	●	●	NA	NA
●	●	●	●	●	●	1
●	NA	●	○	●	●	1
●	●	NA	NA	●	●	1
●	NA	●	●	NA	NA	NA
●	NA	NA	●	●	●	NA

## **Appendix Text B - Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965, Section 46.351**

Source: <https://legislature.mi.gov/%28S%28z1q5rrcnkvgomijmqab5eqt%29%29/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectName=mcl-46-351>

### **46.351 County parks and recreation commission; creation; membership; terms; vacancy; commission as county agency; rules and regulations; compensation.**

Sec. 1.

(1) The county board of commissioners of a county, by resolution adopted by a 2/3 vote of all its members, may create a county parks and recreation commission, which shall be under the general control of the board of commissioners.

(2) The county parks and recreation commission shall consist of the following members:

(a) The chairperson of the county road commission or another road commissioner designated by the board of county road commissioners.

(b) The county drain commissioner or an employee of the drain commissioner's office designated in writing by the drain commissioner.

(c) One of the following:

(i) In a county that elects a county executive under section 9 of 1973 PA 139, MCL 45.559, the county executive or a designee of the county executive.

(ii) In a county with a population of 1,000,000 or less, the chairperson of the county planning commission or another member of the county planning commission designated by the county planning commission. In a county that does not have a county planning commission, the chairperson of the regional planning commission shall serve on the county parks and recreation commission if that person is a resident of that county. If the chairperson of the regional planning commission is not a resident of that county, then the board shall, by a 2/3 vote, appoint a member of the regional planning commission who is a resident of that county to serve on the county parks and recreation commission.

(d) Seven members appointed by the county board of commissioners, not less than 1 and not more than 3 of whom shall be members of the board of commissioners.

(e) For counties with a population greater than 750,000 but less than 1,000,000, the county board of commissioners shall appoint a neighborhood representative. The appointee under this subdivision shall be an officer of the homeowners or property owners association that represents the largest area geographically that is located totally or partially within 1,000 feet of the property boundary of the most frequently used county park who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. If a homeowners or property owners association is not located within 1,000 feet of that park or no officer is willing to serve, then the appointee shall be a resident who lives within 1/2 mile of that park and who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. If no resident lives within 1/2 mile of that park or no resident is willing to serve, then the appointee shall be a resident of the city, village, or township in which that park is located who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. The first appointment under this subdivision shall be made not more than 60 days from October 17, 2003 or not more than 60 days from the date a county qualifies for an appointment under this subdivision.

(3) Of the members first appointed by the county board of commissioners, 2 shall be appointed for a term ending 1 year from the following January 1, 2 for a term ending 2 years from the following January

1 and 3 for a term ending 3 years from the following January 1. The first member appointed by a qualifying county under subsection (2)(e) shall be appointed for a term ending 2 years from the following January 1. From then on, each appointed member shall be appointed for a term of 3 years and until his or her successor is appointed and qualified. Each term shall expire at noon on January 1. A vacancy shall be filled by the county board of commissioners for the unexpired term.

(4) The county parks and recreation commission is an agency of the county. The county board of commissioners may make rules and regulations with respect to the county parks and recreation commission as the board of commissioners considers advisable. The members of the county parks and recreation commission are not full-time officers. The county board of commissioners shall fix the compensation of the members.

**History:** 1965, Act 261, Imd. Eff. July 21, 1965 ;-- Am. 1981, Act 223, Eff. Mar. 31, 1982 ;-- Am. 1986, Act 99, Imd. Eff. May 14, 1986 ;-- Am. 1990, Act 84, Imd. Eff. May 25, 1990 ;-- Am. 2000, Act 496, Imd. Eff. Jan. 11, 2001 ;-- Am. 2003, Act 187, Imd. Eff. Oct. 17, 2003 ;-- Am. 2006, Act 588, Imd. Eff. Jan. 3, 2007

## **Appendix Text C- Press release for online survey**

### **For Immediate Release - August 21, 2025**

Van Buren County is updating its parks and recreation plan. A county parks and recreation plan provides a five-year framework for decisions regarding the establishment, development, and maintenance of recreational programs and facilities. Having the plan is also necessary to be eligible for certain state and federal grants.

Parks and recreation improve the quality of life for residents, help maintain and attract residents and businesses, promote healthy lifestyles, provide opportunities for social connections, protect natural features and the environment and improve property values.

As part of the planning process, the County is gathering public input. There is a survey available for residents and business owners to take. The survey asks what types of improvements you would like to see, what recreational opportunities are most important, what parks you visit most, and more.

You can take the survey online by visiting [www.surveymonkey.com/r/VanBurenParks](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VanBurenParks). The survey will close on September 21, 2025.

If you have any questions, you can contact Marcy Hamilton with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at 269-925-1137 x1525 or at [hamiltonm@swmpc.org](mailto:hamiltonm@swmpc.org). The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is assisting the County with the development of the plan.

###

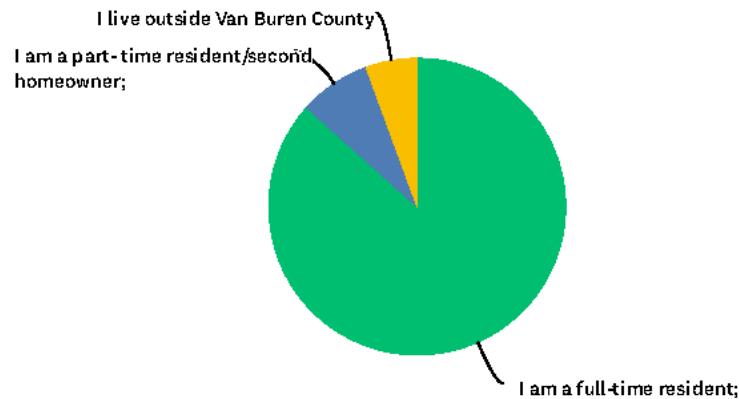
Contact:  
Marcy Hamilton  
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission  
269-925-1137 x1525  
[hamiltonm@swmpc.org](mailto:hamiltonm@swmpc.org)

## Appendix Text D – Detailed Survey Results

### Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

#### Q1 Do you live in Van Buren County?

Answered: 322    Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I am a full-time resident;	86.6%	279
I am a part-time resident/second homeowner;	7.8%	25
I live outside Van Buren County	5.6%	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>322</b>	

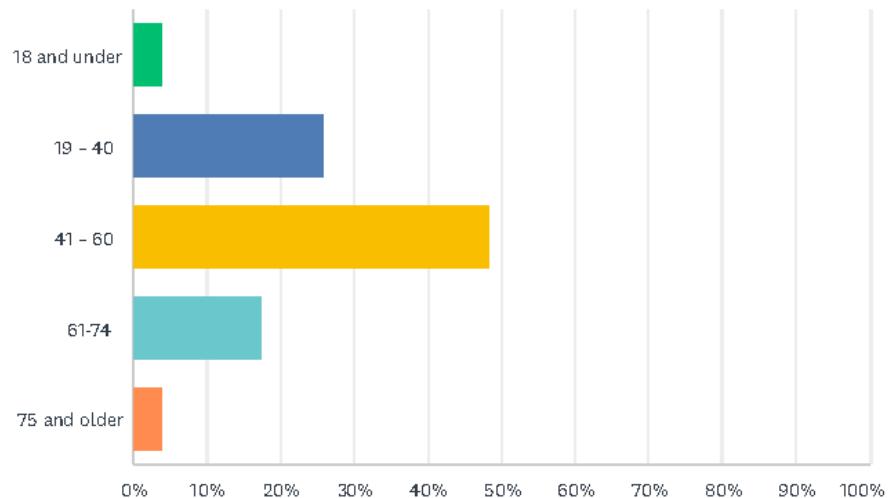
Q2 If you reside (full or part-time) in Van Buren County, which City, Village or Township is your residence located in?

Antwerp Township City Lawrence Pine Grove Mattawan Columbia Antwerp Hamilton  
Almena Decatur Township Twp Paw Paw Village  
South Haven Bloomingdale Waverly Geneva Hartford City South Haven Gobles  
Arlington Bangor Lawton

Location	Number of Mentions
Almena Township	18
Antwerp Township	24
Arlington Township	3
Bangor	7
Benton township	1
Berrien County	1
Bloomingdale	5
Cass County	1
Columbia Township	5
Covert Township	2
Decatur	5
Geneva Township	5
Gobles	13
Hamilton Township	7
Hartford	8
Lawrence	9
Lawton	9
Mattawan	14
Paw Paw	48
Pine Grove Township	6
Porter Township	2
South Haven	25
Waverly Township	14

### Q3 In which age category are you?

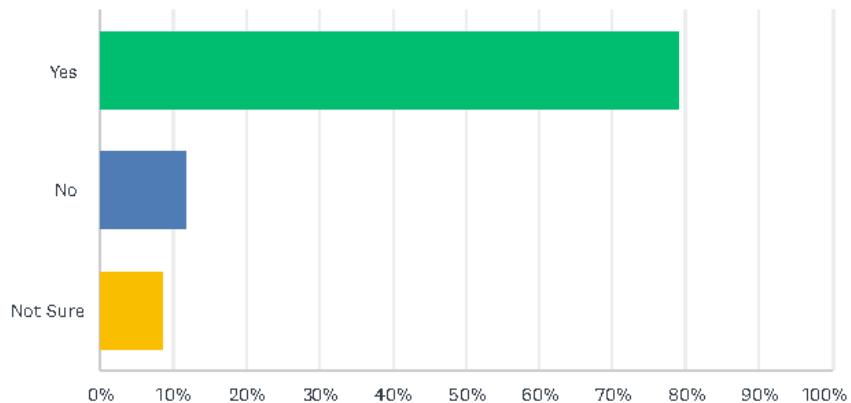
Answered: 320 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18 and under	4.1%	13
19 - 40	25.9%	83
41 - 60	48.4%	155
61-74	17.5%	56
75 and older	4.1%	13
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>320</b>

#### Q4 Do Van Buren County parks, trails and open spaces positively impact your quality of life?

Answered: 319    Skipped: 6

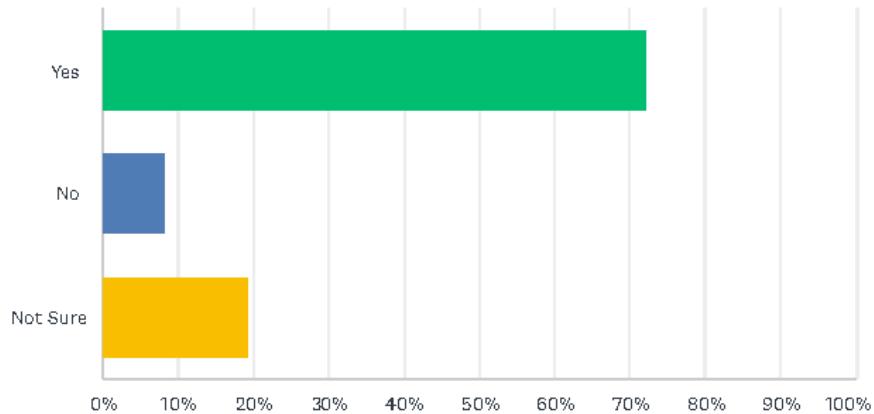


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	79.3%
No	11.9%
Not Sure	8.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>319</b>



**Q5 Do parks, trails, and open spaces throughout Van Buren County attract visitors and tourists to create a positive economic impact?**

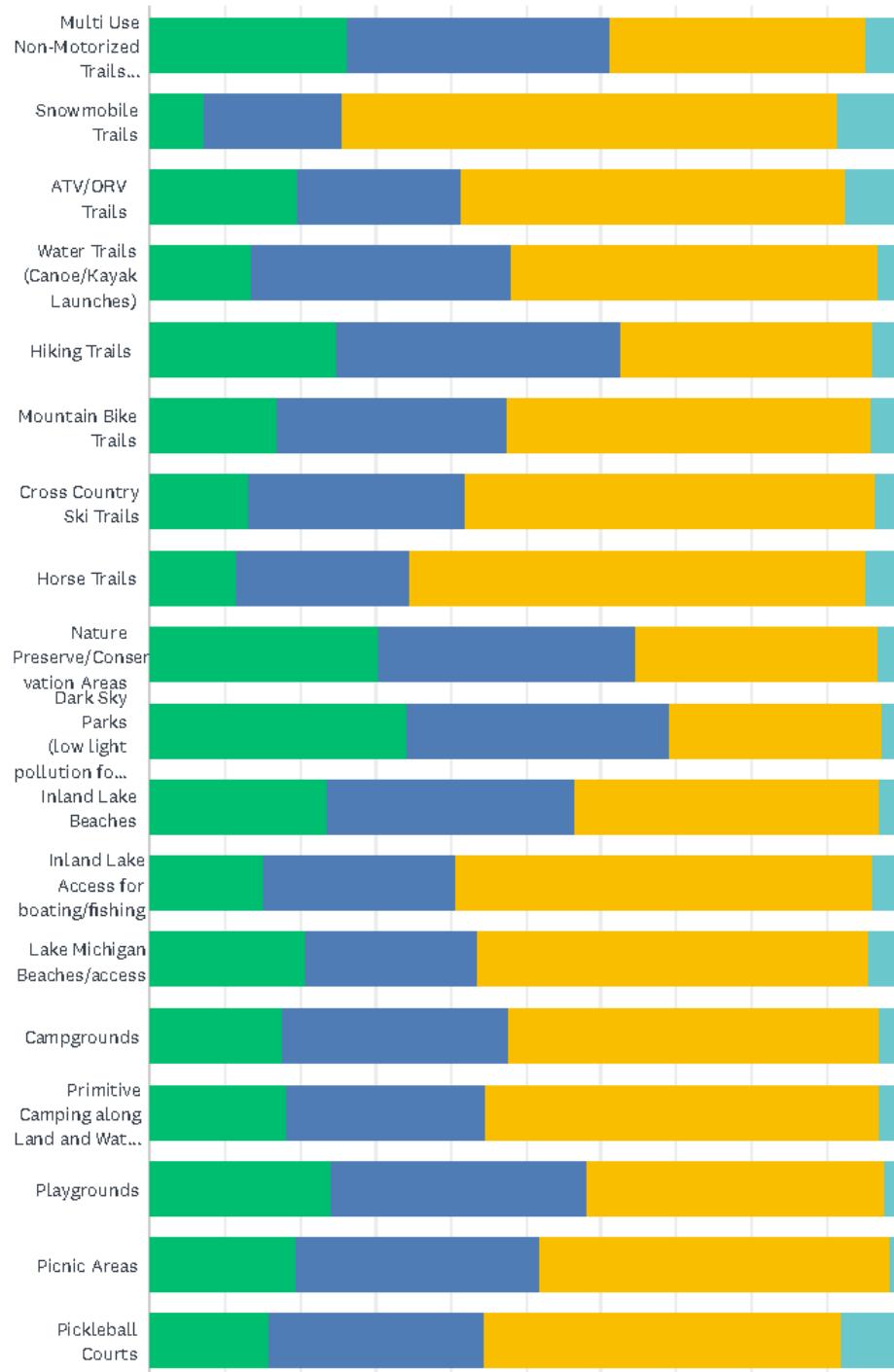
Answered: 321    Skipped: 4



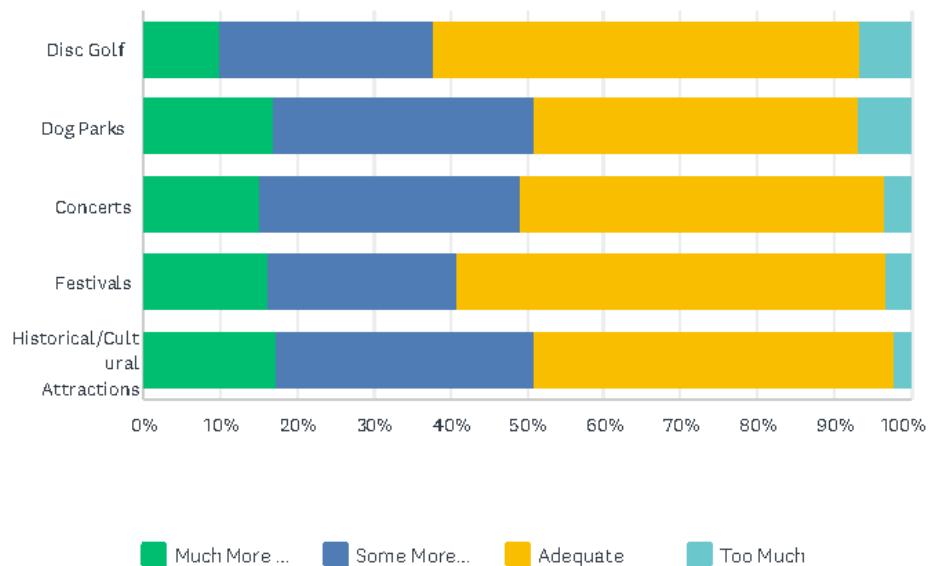
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	72.3%	232
No	8.4%	27
Not Sure	19.3%	62
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>321</b>

**Q8 How would you rate the amount of the following recreation resources/activities offered in Van Buren County?**

Answered: 317    Skipped: 8



### Van Buren County Parks Public Survey



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

	MUCH MORE NEEDED	SOME MORE NEEDED	ADEQUATE	TOO MUCH	TOTAL
Multi Use Non-Motorized Trails (paved/crushed limestone for biking, walking, jogging, etc)	26.2% 81	35.0% 108	34.0% 105	4.9% 15	309
Snowmobile Trails	7.1% 21	18.4% 54	66.0% 194	8.5% 25	294
ATV/ORV Trails	19.7% 59	21.7% 65	51.0% 153	7.7% 23	300
Water Trails (Canoe/Kayak Launches)	13.6% 41	34.4% 104	48.7% 147	3.3% 10	302
Hiking Trails	24.8% 76	37.8% 116	33.6% 103	3.9% 12	307
Mountain Bike Trails	17.1% 51	30.4% 91	48.5% 145	4.0% 12	299
Cross Country Ski Trails	13.2% 39	28.7% 85	54.4% 161	3.7% 11	296
Horse Trails	11.4% 33	23.1% 67	60.7% 176	4.8% 14	290
Nature Preserve/Conservation Areas	30.4% 93	34.3% 105	32.0% 98	3.3% 10	306
Dark Sky Parks (low light pollution for sky viewing)	34.2% 104	34.9% 106	28.3% 86	2.6% 8	304
Inland Lake Beaches	23.5% 70	32.9% 98	40.6% 121	3.0% 9	298
Inland Lake Access for boating/fishing	15.2% 45	25.6% 76	55.2% 164	4.0% 12	297
Lake Michigan Beaches/access	20.7% 63	23.0% 70	51.8% 158	4.6% 14	305
Campgrounds	17.6% 52	30.1% 89	49.3% 146	3.0% 9	296
Primitive Camping along Land and Water Trails	18.1% 54	26.5% 79	52.3% 156	3.0% 9	298
Playgrounds	24.2% 74	34.0% 104	39.5% 121	2.3% 7	306
Picnic Areas	19.3% 58	32.3% 97	46.7% 140	1.7% 5	300
Pickleball Courts	15.8% 47	28.5% 85	47.7% 142	8.1% 24	298
Disc Golf	9.8% 29	28.0% 83	55.4% 164	6.8% 20	296
Dog Parks	17.1% 51	33.8% 101	42.1% 126	7.0% 21	299
Concerts	15.2% 45	33.8% 100	47.6% 141	3.4% 10	296
Festivals	16.1% 48	24.7% 74	55.9% 167	3.3% 10	299
Historical/Cultural Attractions	17.2% 52	33.8% 102	46.7% 141	2.3% 7	302

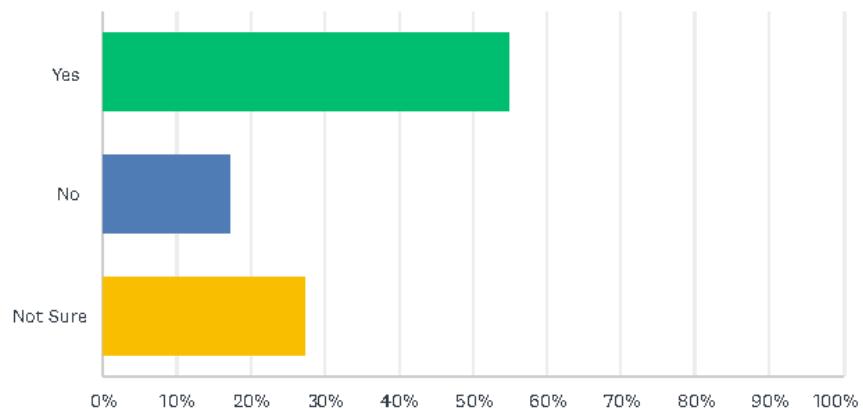
Q9 Are there any recreational opportunities or activities not listed above that you would like to see in Van Buren County?

etc path None Skate park areas splash pads think love county sports NA kids trails walking parks small n see activities around Paw Paw People gardens community bike

Category	Mentions
Walking/Biking/Trails	13
Sports Facilities (courts, fields, rinks, training)	8
Gardens / Green Spaces / Nature Preserves	7
Festivals & Community Events	6
Skate Parks / Skateboarding	6
Splash Pads	6
Creative / Novel Ideas (yoga, axe throwing, drone racing, etc.)	5
Education / Conservation Programs	5
Community Pools (indoor/outdoor)	4
Affordable / Free Activities	3
Dog Parks	3
Music / Amphitheater / Concerts	3
Playgrounds / Kids Spaces	3
Water Recreation (canoe/kayak/rafting)	3
Fairgrounds / County-wide Use	2
Other / Not sure	2
Winter Activities (sledding, skating, etc.)	2

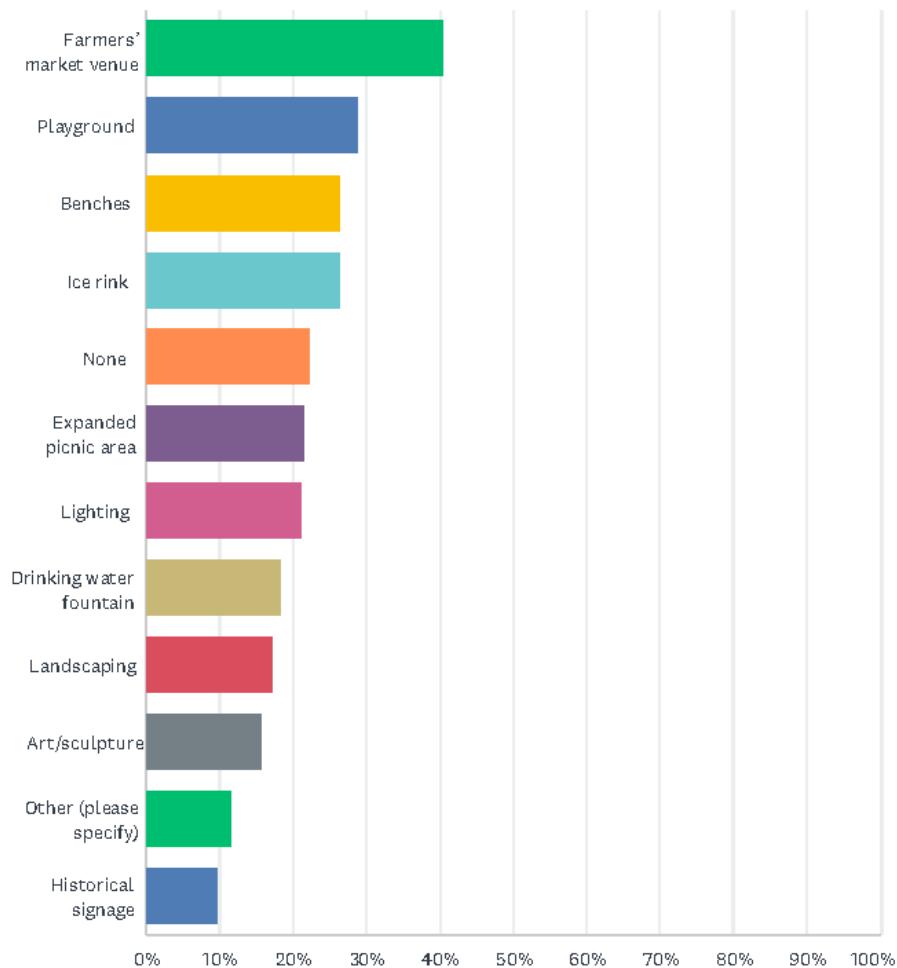
**Q10 Would you support using County park millage funds to help improve the Van Buren Trail (State-owned) from South Haven to Hartford if doing so increased the County's likelihood of obtaining grants?**

Answered: 323 Skipped: 2



**Q11 What would be the priority improvements you would like to see at the County Courtyard Park (Paw Paw Village)? Please select up to five answers.**

Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



**Van Buren County Parks Public Survey**

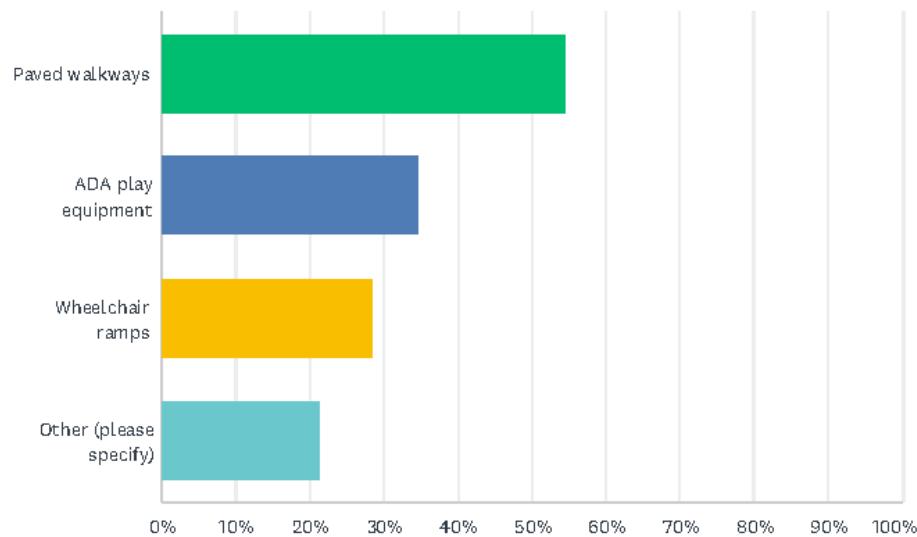
<b>ANSWER CHOICES</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
Farmers' market venue	40.6% 132
Playground	28.9% 94
Benches	26.5% 86
Ice rink	26.5% 86
None	22.5% 73
Expanded picnic area	21.8% 71
Lighting	21.2% 69
Drinking water fountain	18.5% 60
Landscaping	17.2% 56
Art/sculpture	15.7% 51
Other (please specify)	11.7% 38
Historical signage	9.8% 32
Total Respondents: 325	

**"Other (please specify)" responses:**

<b>Priority / Theme</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
"Don't know / don't use / unsure"	9
Parking	4
Restrooms (accessible, clean, open)	3
Dog park	2
Walking / Nature trails	2
Sheltered pavilion / shaded seating (trees, picnic tables)	2
Play spaces for kids/teens (pickleball, skate park, playground)	2
Naturalized / native green spaces / gardens	2
General refresh / modernization	1
Amphitheater upgrades (Maple Lake)	1
Splash pad	1
Better maintenance (garbage cans, upkeep)	1
Modeled after South Haven's park	1

**Q12 Are there any improvements you would like to see at County Courtyard Park to make it more accessible to all? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 242    Skipped: 83



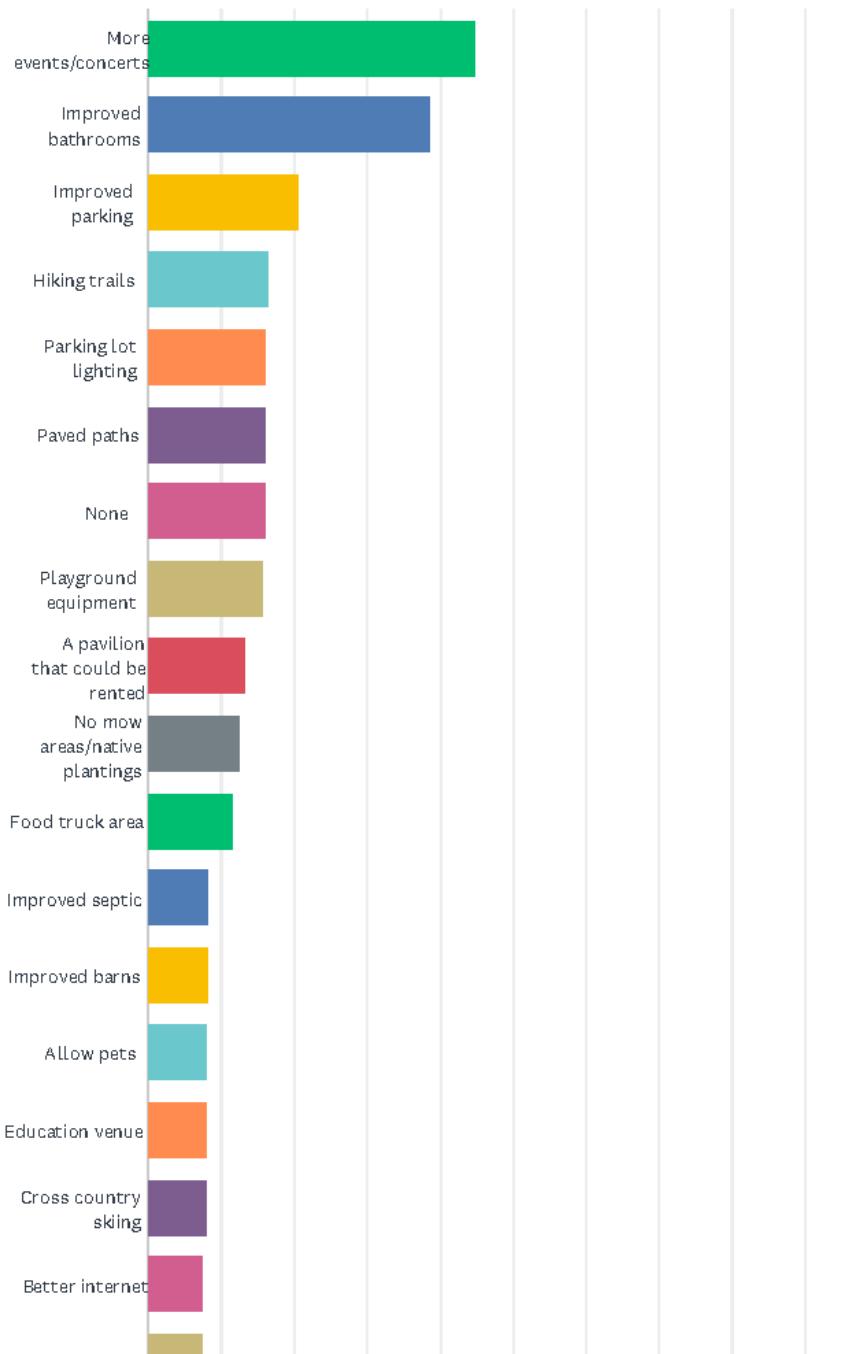
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Paved walkways	54.5% 132
ADA play equipment	34.7% 84
Wheelchair ramps	28.5% 69
Other (please specify)	21.5% 52
Total Respondents: 242	

**Other Responses:**

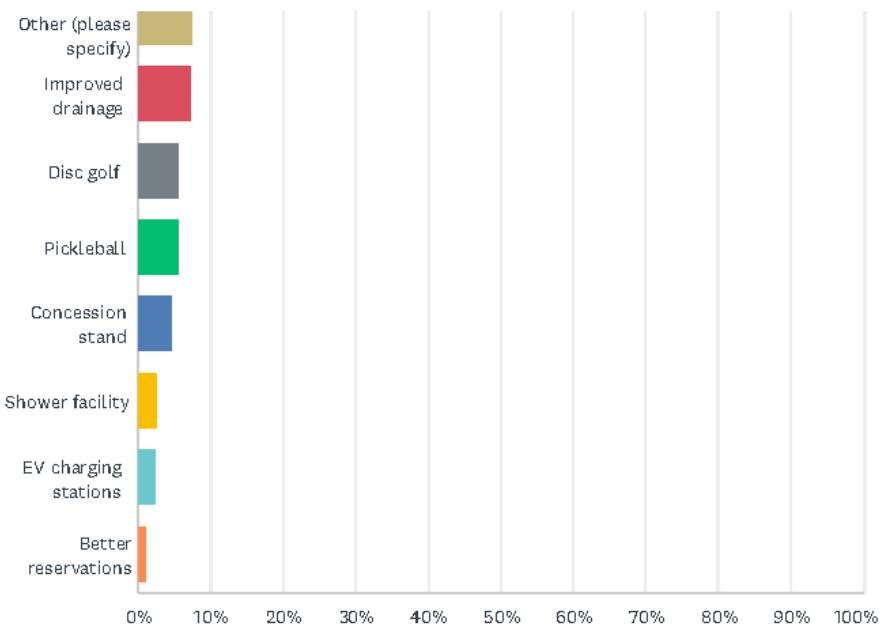
Category	Count
No improvements / satisfied / N/A / none	26
Unfamiliar / unsure / never been / don't know	10
Accessibility / ADA / wheelchair	3
Play equipment / seating / recreational areas	3
Parking	2
Maintenance / cleanliness	2

Q13 What would be the priority improvements you would like to see at the Van Buren County Fairgrounds (Hartford Township)? Please select up to five answers.

Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



### Van Buren County Parks Public Survey



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

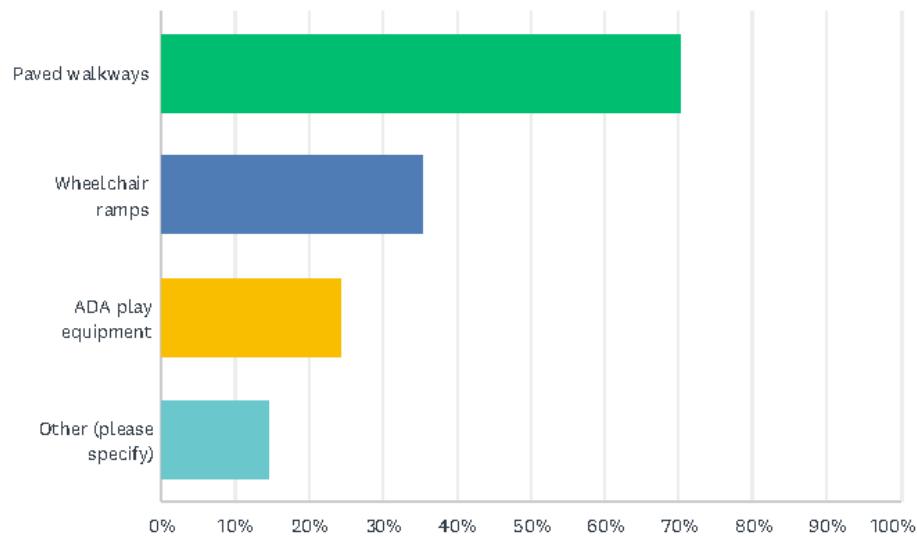
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
More events/concerts	44.9% 146
Improved bathrooms	38.8% 126
Improved parking	20.6% 67
Hiking trails	16.6% 54
Parking lot lighting	16.3% 53
Paved paths	16.3% 53
None	16.3% 53
Playground equipment	15.7% 51
A pavilion that could be rented	13.5% 44
No mow areas/native plantings	12.6% 41
Food truck area	11.7% 38
Improved septic	8.3% 27
Improved barns	8.3% 27
Allow pets	8.0% 26
Education venue	8.0% 26
Cross country skiing	8.0% 26
Better internet	7.7% 25
Other (please specify)	7.7% 25
Improved drainage	7.4% 24
Disc golf	5.8% 19
Pickleball	5.8% 19
Concession stand	4.6% 15
Shower facility	2.8% 9
EV charging stations	2.5% 8
Better reservations	1.2% 4
Total Respondents: 325	

Other Responses:

Category	Count
No improvements / satisfied / N/A / none / unsure	6
Unfamiliar / never been / don't know	6
Increased usage / more events / multi-season use	5
Seating / grandstand improvements	4
Shade / trees / visual improvements	3
Recreational amenities / fishing / rentals / biking	3
Camping / fairground facilities	2
Pricing / accessibility	1

**Q14 Are there any improvements you would like to see at County Fairgrounds to make it more accessible to all? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 253    Skipped: 72



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Paved walkways	70.4%
Wheelchair ramps	35.6%
ADA play equipment	24.5%
Other (please specify)	14.6%
Total Respondents: 253	

Category	Number of Mentions
No improvements/Unsure/Never been	33
Improved campground/Multi-use access	2
Overall updates to the fairgrounds	1

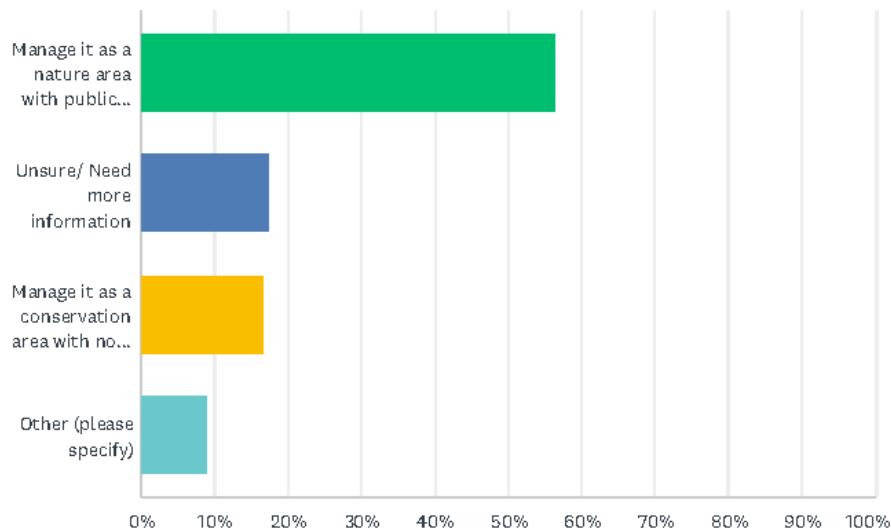
**Q15 What would be the priority improvements you would like the Van Buren Museum Committee to consider for the Van Buren Museum located at 58471 Red Arrow Highway, Hartford?**

Answered: 167    Skipped: 158

Most respondents either have never visited the museum or are unsure of what improvements are needed, with many indicating "none," "N/A," or similar. Among the suggestions provided, the most common themes include increasing advertising and promotion so more people know the museum exists, expanding hours of operation, improving accessibility for people with disabilities, and enhancing the building and grounds, including paved walkways, benches, landscaping, and building maintenance. A few respondents suggested hosting more events, linking the museum with the fairgrounds or other historical sites, and updating exhibits or adding more historical items.

**Q16 Van Buren County owns 40 acres of critical dunes in South Haven Township along Lake Michigan. What would you like the county to do with this property?**

Answered: 320 Skipped: 5

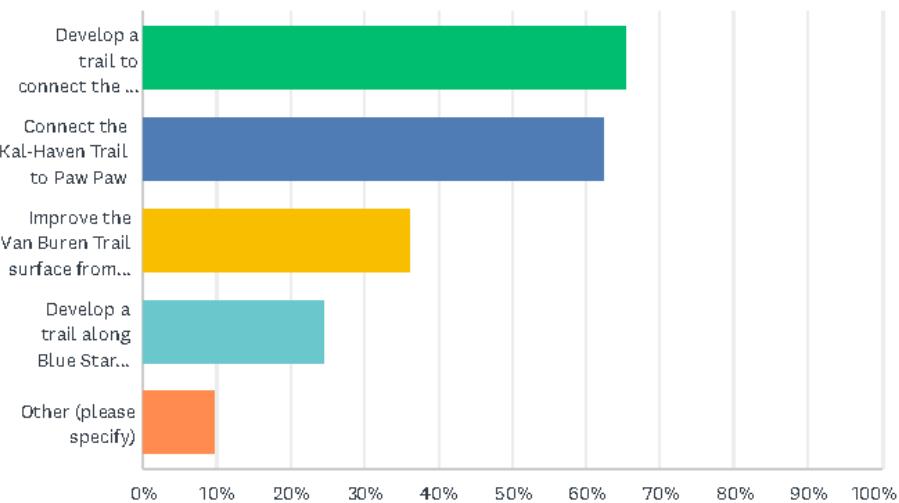


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Manage it as a nature area with public access	56.6%	181
Unsure/ Need more information	17.5%	56
Manage it as a conservation area with no public access	16.9%	54
Other (please specify)	9.1%	29
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>320</b>

Response / Category	Number of Mentions
Keep as is / no public access	20
Manage as nature/conservation area with limited public access	6
Public access with amenities (bathrooms, paved walkways, trails)	2
Allow recreational use (trails, sand dunes, festivals, off-road/ATV)	2

**Q17 Which of the following multi-use, non-motorized trails (for activities such as biking, walking, jogging, etc.) do you support developing? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 298    Skipped: 27

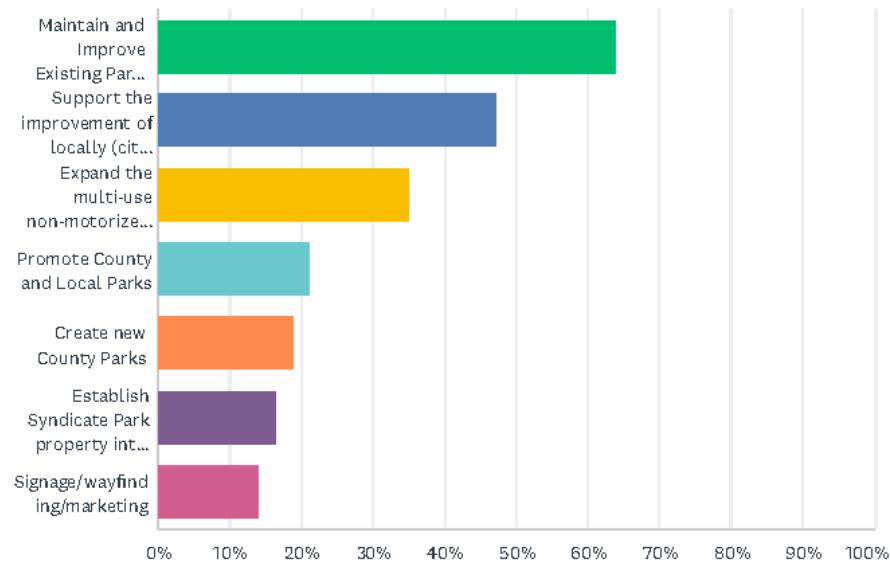


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Develop a trail to connect the Van Buren Trail from Hartford, Lawrence, Paw Paw and Mattawan	65.4%	195
Connect the Kal-Haven Trail to Paw Paw	62.4%	186
Improve the Van Buren Trail surface from South Haven to Hartford	36.2%	108
Develop a trail along Blue Star Highway linking to trails in Berrien and Allegan Counties	24.8%	74
Other (please specify)	9.7%	29
Total Respondents: 298		

The "Other (please specify)" responses indicate that a portion of respondents prefer to keep the current trail system as it is, with many expressing satisfaction with existing trails or stating that they do not have enough information to make a judgment. Eleven responses explicitly indicated "none," "keep as is," or similar sentiments. A few individual suggestions for specific trail expansions or improvements were mentioned, such as connecting local towns or adding paved shoulders.

**Q18 Overall what do you think should be the priority order for the county to use park millage funds for? Select your top three priorities.**

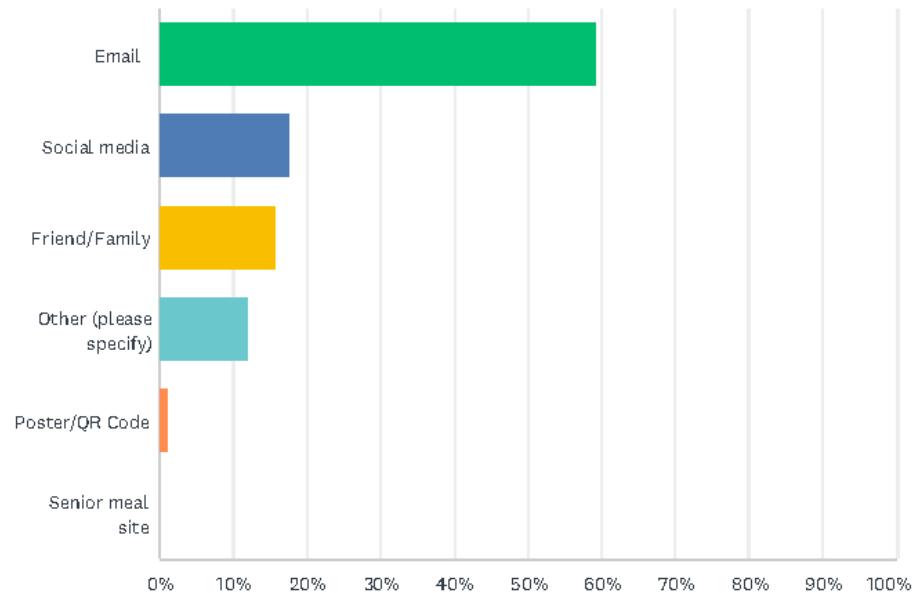
Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Maintain and Improve Existing Parks (County Courtyard, Fairgrounds)	64.0%	208
Support the improvement of locally (city, village and township) owned parks	47.4%	154
Expand the multi-use non-motorized trail system in the county	35.1%	114
Promote County and Local Parks	21.2%	69
Create new County Parks	19.1%	62
Establish Syndicate Park property into the Syndicate Park Dunes Preserve/County Park	16.6%	54
Signage/wayfinding/marketing	14.2%	46
Total Respondents: 325		

## Q19 How did you hear about this survey? Select all that apply.

Answered: 322 Skipped: 3



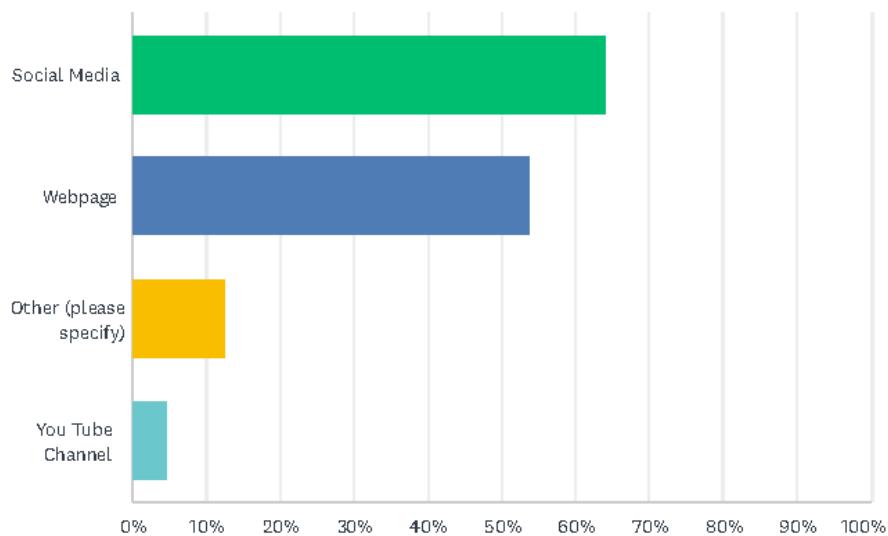
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Email	59.3%
Social media	17.7%
Friend/Family	15.8%
Other (please specify)	12.1%
Poster/QR Code	1.2%
Senior meal site	0.0%
Total Respondents: 322	

Other (please specify) responses:

Method	Number of Mentions
Work / Employer / From my employer	3
School / School district / Paw Paw Public Schools / School email	16
News article / WSJM / Newspaper Flashes	6

**Q20 How would you like to get information about parks? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 304 Skipped: 21



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Social Media	64.1% 195
Webpage	53.9% 164
Other (please specify)	12.5% 38
You Tube Channel	4.6% 14
Total Respondents: 304	

Method	Number of Mentions
Email / Email alerts / E mail / Direct email	16
Mail / Mass mail / Mail flyer	4
Newsletter / Email newsletter	3
Newspaper / News release	3
School flyers	1
Van Buren Website	1
App	1
None / Don't / NA / "I would not like to get information"	4

**Q21 Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding Parks and Recreation Facilities or Opportunities in Van Buren County?**

Answered: 157    Skipped: 168

The community responses show a mix of strong support for maintaining and enhancing parks and recreation in Van Buren County, coupled with caution about new development and public access in sensitive areas. Many respondents emphasized preserving natural areas, including dunes, forests, wetlands, and lakes, while maintaining existing facilities such as trails, playgrounds, and boat launches. Popular suggestions included expanding walking, biking, ATV, UTV, and horse trails, improving trail connections and amenities, adding shade, seating, and ADA access, and supporting multi-use facilities and family-friendly spaces. Several comments highlighted the value of partnerships with local organizations to enhance recreational opportunities and maintain natural areas. Conversely, a significant number of respondents expressed opposition to opening private or sensitive areas, such as Syndicate Park dunes, to public access due to concerns about safety, privacy, environmental damage, and irresponsible public use. Others prioritized practical improvements, including playground upkeep, parking, public boat launch access, and cost-effective use of funding without raising taxes. Overall, the responses reflect a community that values both accessibility and conservation, with strong interest in expanding recreational opportunities while protecting sensitive natural resources.



## **Appendix Text E - ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Recreation Facilities – Summary**

[www.access-board.gov/recreation/final.htm#SUMMARY](http://www.access-board.gov/recreation/final.htm#SUMMARY)

**AGENCY:** Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board.

**ACTION:** Final rule.

**SUMMARY:** The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) is issuing final accessibility guidelines to serve as the basis for standards to be adopted by the Department of Justice for new construction and alterations of recreation facilities covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The guidelines include scoping and technical provisions for amusement rides, boating facilities, fishing piers and platforms, golf courses, miniature golf, sports facilities and swimming pools and spas. The guidelines will ensure that newly constructed and altered recreation facilities meet the requirements of the ADA and are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

**DATES:** The guidelines are effective October 3, 2002. The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the guidelines is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of October 3, 2002.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Peggy Greenwell, Office of Technical and Information Services, Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, 1331 F Street, NW, suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004-1111. Telephone number (202) 272-0017 (Voice); (202) 272-0082 (TTY). E-mail address: [greenwell@access-board.gov](mailto:greenwell@access-board.gov).

### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

#### **Availability of Copies and Electronic Access**

Single copies of this publication may be obtained at no cost by calling the Access Board's automated publications order line (202) 272-0080, by pressing 2 on the telephone keypad, then 1 and requesting publication S-43 (Recreation Facilities Final Rule). Persons using a TTY should call (202) 272-0082. Please record a name, address, telephone number and request publication S-43. This document is available in alternate formats upon request. Persons who want a copy in an alternate format should specify the type of format (cassette tape, Braille, large print, or ASCII disk).

## **Appendix Text F - The Principles of Universal Design**

[www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciplestext.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm)

*Version 2.0 - 4/1/97* Compiled by advocates of universal design, listed in alphabetical order: Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story and Gregg Vanderheiden. Major funding provided by: The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education

**UNIVERSAL DESIGN:** The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The authors, a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, collaborated to establish the following Principles of Universal Design to guide a wide range of design disciplines including environments, products and communications. These seven principles may be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments.

The Principles of Universal Design are presented here, in the following format: name of the principle, intended to be a concise and easily remembered statement of the key concept embodied in the principle; definition of the principle, a brief description of the principle's primary directive for design; and guidelines, a list of the key elements that should be present in a design which adheres to the principle. (Note: all guidelines may not be relevant to all designs.)

**PRINCIPLE ONE: Equitable Use** | The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

**Guidelines:**

- 1a.** Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- 1b.** Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- 1c.** Provisions for privacy, security and safety should be equally available to all users.
- 1d.** Make the design appealing to all users.

**PRINCIPLE TWO: Flexibility in Use** | The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

**Guidelines:**

- 2a.** Provide choice in methods of use.
- 2b.** Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- 2c.** Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- 2d.** Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

**PRINCIPLE THREE: Simple and Intuitive Use** | Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

**Guidelines:**

- 3a.** Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- 3b.** Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.

- 3c.** Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- 3d.** Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- 3e.** Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR: Perceptible Information** | The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

**Guidelines:**

- 4a.** Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- 4b.** Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- 4c.** Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- 4d.** Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- 4e.** Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

**PRINCIPLE FIVE: Tolerance for Error** | The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

**Guidelines:**

- 5a.** Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- 5b.** Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- 5c.** Provide fail safe features.
- 5d.** Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

**PRINCIPLE SIX: Low Physical Effort** | The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

**Guidelines:**

- 6a.** Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- 6b.** Use reasonable operating forces.
- 6c.** Minimize repetitive actions.
- 6d.** Minimize sustained physical effort.

**PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Size and Space for Approach and Use** | Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

**Guidelines:**

- 7a.** Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- 7b.** Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- 7c.** Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- 7d.** Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Please note that the Principles of Universal Design address only universally usable design, while the practice of design involves more than consideration for usability. Designers must also

incorporate other considerations such as economic, engineering, cultural, gender and environmental concerns in their design processes. These Principles offer designers guidance to better integrate features that meet the needs of as many users as possible.

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## **Appendix G – Approval Documents**

- Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission Resolution Recommending Approval
- Copies of Public Notice for public comment period and public hearing
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners– Committee of the Whole - Minutes of Public Hearing
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners Resolution to Adopt Plan
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners – Minutes Regular Board Meeting
- Copy of Transmittal Letter to County Planning Department  
Copy of Transmittal to Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
- Copy of Transmittal to Michigan Department of Natural Resources

**VAN BUREN COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING ADOPTION OF THE  
VAN BUREN COUNTY COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE  
AND GREENWAY PLAN: 2026–2030**

**WHEREAS**, the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission is responsible for planning, advising, and making recommendations regarding parks, recreation, open space, and greenway matters within Van Buren County; and

**WHEREAS**, the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission, with the assistance of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, has overseen the development of the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026–2030, consistent with guidelines established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the planning process included multiple opportunities for public participation, including Parks and Recreation Commission meetings, a countywide survey, a public comment period, and a public hearing; and

**WHEREAS**, the Parks and Recreation Commission has reviewed the final draft of the Plan and finds that it reflects the recreational needs, priorities, and long-term vision of Van Buren County residents; and

**WHEREAS**, adoption of an approved five-year Parks and Recreation Plan is required to maintain eligibility for state and federal recreation grant programs administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission hereby recommends adoption of the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026–2030 by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners.

**Yea**s: Chappell, Small, Nelson, Doroh, Parman, Grabemeyer, Garrod and Cook

**Nay**s: None

**Absent**: Patterson - Gladney and Hickmott

**Abstain**: None.

**RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED**

Date: January 27, 2026

AFFP  
NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

**Affidavit of Publication**

STATE OF MI } SS  
COUNTY OF BERRIEN }

NOTICE OF PUBLIC  
COMMENT PERIOD AND  
PUBLIC HEARING

Danielle Pumfrey, being duly sworn, says:

That she is Accounting Clerk of the Herald Palladium, a daily newspaper of general circulation, printed and published in St. Joseph, Berrien County, MI; that the publication, a copy of which is attached hereto, was published in the said newspaper on the following dates:

December 10, 2025

Van Buren County, Michigan will hold a Public Comment Period for the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan ending with a Public Hearing on January 13, 2026 at 12:50 p.m. at the Van Buren County Administration Building at 219 E. Paw Paw Street, Paw Paw, MI 49079.

The purpose of the comment period and public hearing is to invite and hear comments on the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan. At the hearing, all interested parties will have the opportunity to be heard and ask questions regarding the plan. All interested parties are urged to attend.

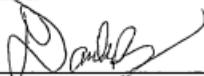
If you are unable to attend the public hearing, written comments can be submitted by email to [ransler@vanburencountymi.gov](mailto:ransler@vanburencountymi.gov) or by mail to 219 E. Paw Paw Street, Paw Paw, MI 49079 and must be received by January 13, 2025.

The proposed plan will be available for review during business hours at the Van Buren County Administration Building at 219 E. Paw Paw Street, Paw Paw, MI 49079, which is open Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. The plan is also available for review on the Internet at [https://www.swmpc.org/vb\\_rplans.asp](https://www.swmpc.org/vb_rplans.asp)

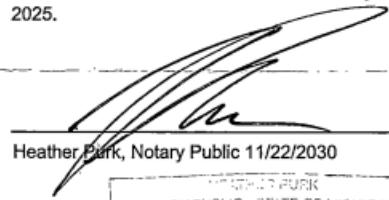
Publication Fees: \$ 184.50

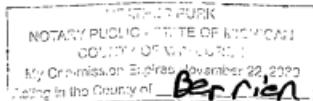
That said newspaper was regularly issued and circulated on those dates.

SIGNED:



Subscribed to and sworn to me this 10th day of December 2025.

  
Heather Park, Notary Public 11/22/2030



70031187 71376003

Emani Tunstall  
Van Buren County Administration  
219 E. Paw Paw St  
Paw Paw, MI 49079

MLive Media Group  
169 Monroe Ave NW Suite 200  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503



## Kalamazoo Gazette

VAN BUREN COUNTY COMMUNITY SERVICES  
219 E PAW PAW ST STE 302  
PAW PAW, MI 49079

AD#: 0011051997

Sales Rep: Joseph Rosa  
Account Number: 1000999792  
AD#: 0011051997

Remit Payment to:  
MLive Media Group  
Dept 77571  
P.O. Box 77000  
Detroit, MI 48277-0571

Page 1 of 2

Date	Position	Description	P.O. Number	Ad Size	Costs
12/09/2025	Public Notices MI	NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND PUBLIC HEARING	Hearing on January 13, 2026 at 12:50 p.m.	1 x 57 L	
			Affidavit Notary Fee - 12/09/2025		\$15.00
			Basic Ad Charge - 12/09/2025		\$96.78
			Total		\$111.78

FOR QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS AFFIDAVIT. PLEASE CALL 616-254-2030 or 877-222-5423



**MINUTES**  
Board of Commissioners Chambers  
219 East Paw Paw Street

**Commissioners**  
Gail Patterson-Gladney, District 1  
Mike Chappell, District 2  
Kurt Doroh, District 3  
David DiStefano, District 4  
Randall Peat, District 5  
Tina Leary, District 6  
Paul Schincariol, District 7

January 13, 2026

**Committee of the Whole Meeting**

**1. Call to Order**

The Public Hearing for the Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan was called to order at 12:50 PM by Kurt Doroh, Chairman of the Board. Present: Gail Patterson-Gladney, Mike Chappell, Kurt Doroh, David DiStefano, Randall Peat, Tina Leary, Paul Schincariol.

**2. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda**

**3. Approval of Agenda**

Motion to approve the agenda as presented.  
Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**5. Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030**

**A. \*\*Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026 - 2030**

Community Services Director Lisa Ransler gave an overview of the plan.

**6. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**7. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn.  
Motion by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Second by Mike Chappell, Carried

The meeting was adjourned at 12:56 AM.

A handwritten signature of Suzie Roehm in black ink.

**Suzie Roehm, County Clerk**

I certify this is a correct copy of the whole  
of such original on file in my office.

A handwritten signature of Suzie Roehm in black ink, followed by the date "1/29/2026".

Suzie Roehm, Van Buren County Clerk

A4/1-27-2020



## VAN BUREN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

### ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS

---

#### COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAY PLAN: 2026-2030

#### RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION

HONORABLE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

**WHEREAS**, Van Buren County is required to maintain a current five-year Parks and Recreation Plan approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in order to remain eligible for grant funding through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other related programs; and,

**WHEREAS**, Van Buren County, with assistance from the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, has undertaken a planning process to determine the recreation and natural resource conservation needs and desires of its residents during a five-year period covering the years 2026 through 2030, consistent with the most recent guidelines developed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources; and,

**WHEREAS**, residents of Van Buren County were provided with a well-advertised opportunity during the development of the draft Plan to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan; and,

**WHEREAS**, the draft Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030 was made available for a minimum 30-day public review period, with appropriate public notice and reasonable accommodations for public access and comment; and,

**WHEREAS**, a public hearing on the proposed Plan was held on January 13, 2026, to provide an opportunity for all residents to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Plan; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the Plan and recommended adoption by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Plan serves as a policy and planning guide for improving recreation opportunities and enhancing natural resource conservation within Van Buren County, and adoption of the Plan is necessary to maintain eligibility for state and federal recreation grant programs administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030 as the official five-year Parks and Recreation Plan for Van Buren County; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Board of Commissioners authorizes submission of the adopted Plan and this Resolution to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for approval and grant eligibility purposes.

Signed:

Randall Peat

Burt Doan

Paul Dill

Paul Schincariol

Date: January 27, 2026

MOTION BY: Chappell  
SECONDED BY: Schincariol

FOR CLERK'S USE ONLY

CARRIED   
NOT CARRIED

BOC-0001 (7/8/21)  
21-22-0252

I certify this is a correct copy of the whole  
of such original on file in my office.

Page 1 of 1

Suzie Roehm 1/29/2026  
Suzie Roehm, Van Buren County Clerk



**MINUTES  
Board of Commissioners Chambers  
219 East Paw Paw Street**

**January 27, 2026**

**Commissioners**  
Gail Patterson-Gladney, District 1  
Mike Chappell, District 2  
Kurt Doroh, District 3  
David DiStefano, District 4  
Randall Peat, District 5  
Tina Leary, District 6  
Paul Schincariol, District 7

**Board of Commissioners Meeting**

**1. Call to Order**

On the above date the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 02:12 PM by Kurt Doroh, Chairman of the Board.

**2. Recital of the Pledge of Allegiance / Prayer**

Invocation by Commissioner Doroh.

**3. Roll Call**

The roll was called by County Clerk Suzie Roehm with the following commissioners answering to their name and district: Mike Chappell, Kurt Doroh, David DiStefano, Randall Peat, Paul Schincariol. Commissioners Gail Patterson-Gladney and Tina Leary absent and excused.

**4. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda**

Add Item 11.B. - PTO Policy Update

**5. Approval of Agenda**

All items on the agenda marked with '\*\*' are part of the consent agenda. Commissioners or the public can request that items be removed from the consent agenda.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**6. Approval of Minutes**

**A. \*\*January 13, 2026 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**7. Public Comment**

**8. Administrative Affairs**

**A. \*\*Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026 - 2030**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A4/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Van Buren County is required to maintain a current five-year Parks and Recreation Plan approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in order to remain eligible for grant funding through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other related programs; and, WHEREAS, Van Buren County, with assistance from the Southwest Michigan Planning

Commission, has undertaken a planning process to determine the recreation and natural resource conservation needs and desires of its residents during a five-year period covering the years 2026 through 2030, consistent with the most recent guidelines developed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources; and,

WHEREAS, residents of Van Buren County were provided with a well-advertised opportunity during the development of the draft Plan to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan; and,

WHEREAS, the draft Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026–2030 was made available for a minimum 30-day public review period, with appropriate public notice and reasonable accommodations for public access and comment; and,

WHEREAS, a public hearing on the proposed Plan was held on January 13, 2026, to provide an opportunity for all residents to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Plan; and,

WHEREAS, the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the Plan and recommended adoption by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners; and,

WHEREAS, the Plan serves as a policy and planning guide for improving recreation opportunities and enhancing natural resource conservation within Van Buren County, and adoption of the Plan is necessary to maintain eligibility for state and federal recreation grant programs administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026–2030 as the official five-year Parks and Recreation Plan for Van Buren County; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners authorizes submission of the adopted Plan and this Resolution to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for approval and grant eligibility purposes.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

B. **\*\*Proclamation - Rodney Dragicevich, Economic Development Corporation  
ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A5/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Mr. Rodney Dragicevich has been an outstanding and dedicated member of the Economic Development Corporation of Van Buren County since 1983, serving seven terms and positively impacting countless businesses throughout the county; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure as a member of the Board of Directors, one of Mr. Dragicevich's key achievements was helping to bring the discount department store chain Fisher's Big Wheel to the Village of Paw Paw, a location now occupied by Family Fare Supermarket; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Dragicevich faithfully guided the use of the County Revolving Loan Fund, overseeing the lending of millions of dollars to multiple businesses and communities to support growth and long-term sustainability, creating jobs, encouraging significant capital investment, and helping to stabilize the county tax base; and

WHEREAS, in response to the economic challenges of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Dragicevich played a key role in authorizing twelve \$20,000 loans at a 2% interest rate over five years, with interest-only payments during the first year, providing critical assistance to small businesses impacted by the pandemic;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners hereby recognizes and extends its sincere appreciation to Mr. Rodney Dragicevich for his exceptional service, leadership, and dedication to the economic vitality of Van Buren County; and

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED, that the Board honors Mr. Dragicevich for his longstanding commitment to the community and its businesses and extends best wishes to him for continued success in all future endeavors.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

C. **\*\*Update 911 Plan Appendix #3**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A6/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, the request is to approve the revised Appendix #3 to the Van Buren County 911 plan; and,

WHEREAS, the list of public safety agencies dispatched in Appendix #3 of the Van Buren County 911 plan needs to be reviewed annually for any changes; and,

WHEREAS, there is no financial impact to the County; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the revised Appendix #3 to the Van Buren County 911 Plan.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

D. **\*\*Medication for Opioid Use Disorder - Sheriff's Office Grant Application**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A7/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, the Jail is requesting approval to accept a \$25,000 grant from the MOUD Program designed for inmates who are battling substance use disorder (SUD), especially opioids; and,

WHEREAS, inmates with SUD face a greater risk of medical complications while incarcerated. The funds will be used to purchase medications for inmates who qualify for the program and have a valid prescription for Methadone and/or Suboxone; and,

WHEREAS, there are no matching requirements. The grant is \$25,000; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the recommendation to accept the grant from the Medication for Opioid Use Disorder Program (MOUD).

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

E. **\*\*Van Buren County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority \$500,000 EPA Grant Application**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A8/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, the Van Buren County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (VBCBRA) is being encouraged by both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Michigan Department of the Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) to apply for this grant; and,

WHEREAS, this \$500,000 community-wide Brownfield Assessment Grant would enable the VBCBRA to conduct environmental investigations and foster economic development at various brownfield sites in the county; and,

WHEREAS, if the grant is awarded, the VBCBRA will manage the grant, ensuring all eligible costs are covered; and,

WHEREAS, the last EPA grant awarded to the VBCBRA was \$400,000 and expired in 2021. The current application is being prepared in collaboration with the Fishbeck consulting firm, with a submission deadline of January 28, 2026; and,

WHEREAS, if awarded, the grant will cover 100% of the eligible costs for environmental remediation and other related expenses. Administrative costs will be covered through the VBCBRA Fund; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Van Buren County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to apply for a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and for the Board of Commissioners Chairperson to sign the required application materials, including a letter of support.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

F. \*\*Reappointments - Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) - Kiley, K and Engle, R.

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A9/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Kimberly Kiley and Roger Engle have terms that have expired on the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission as of December 31, 2025; and, WHEREAS, Ms. Kiley's background includes service as the Lawrence Township Treasurer, providing four years of governmental experience, in addition to a 20-year career as a private duty nurse, reflecting a long-standing commitment to public service and community caregiving; and, WHEREAS, Mr. Engle currently serves on the SWMPC. He is a retired corporate executive and holds an MBA from the University of Notre Dame and a Bachelor of Science from Wayne State University; and, WHEREAS, both are seeking re-appointment for two-year terms to expire December 31, 2027; and, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the re-appointments of Kimberly Kiley and Roger Engle to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission for a two-year term to expire December 31, 2027.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

G. \*\*Appointment - Van Buren Cass Community Health Department, Anne Wendling

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A10/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Van Buren County continually accepts applications from residents interested in serving on local and regional boards, commissions, and advisory committees, and reviews such applications as vacancies arise or term near expiration; and, WHEREAS, there is a vacancy on the VBCCHD Board. Former Commissioner Hanson decided not to request a re-appointment; and, WHEREAS, Ms. Wendling, RN, is the Chief Nursing Officer and Vice President of Patient Care Services, Bronson LakeView and Bronson South Haven Hospitals; and, WHEREAS, The VBCCHD Board has reviewed her application and recommends her appointment; and, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the appointment of Anne Wendling to the Van Buren Cass Community Health Department Board for a three-year term to expire January 1, 2029.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

H. \*\*Appointment - Deputy Medical Examiner, Dr. Anna Tart, MD

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A11/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Van Buren County is presently under contract with WMU Med to provide the required legal medical examiner services for Van Buren County; and, WHEREAS, The Van Buren County Medical Examiner's Office has hired Dr. Anna Tart, MD. Pursuant to MCL Section 52.201a, before Dr. Tart may begin serving as a Deputy Medical Examiner, she must be appointed by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners; and, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the appointment of Dr. Anna Tart, MD, as a Deputy Medical Examiner in Van Buren County.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

I. Out of State Travel - Sheriff's Office EXPEDITED

**ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION A12/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, there has been a request for out of state travel approval for Detective Chris

Orr to attend the Digital Video Recording (DVR) Training in Hoover, Alabama, from February 8, 2026, through February 13, 2026; and,  
WHEREAS, this is a one-week course designed for examiners/investigators to learn methodologies and techniques used to recover and analyze video evidence from Digital Video Recorders (DVR) and other sources; and,  
WHEREAS, students will develop knowledge of digital video data structures, how digital video is created, proper playback, creating demonstrative exhibits and reporting of findings; and,  
WHEREAS, the training and associated travel expenses are fully funded through USSS; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, hereby approves the request for out of state travel for Detective Chris Orr to attend the Digital Video Recording (DVR) Training in Hoover, Alabama, from February 8, 2026, through February 13, 2026.

Motion by Randall Peat, Second by David DiStefano, Carried

## 9. Buildings and Grounds

### A. \*\*Use of County Property - MOU Battle Creek VA

#### **BUILDINGS & GROUNDS RESOLUTION B1/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Veteran Affairs employee, Ms. Karen Wallace, has requested permission to use the employee parking lot for personal and government owned vehicles while conducting business in the County; and,  
WHEREAS, it makes it more convenient and is more cost effective for them to have a centralized parking location; and,  
WHEREAS, The Sheriff's Office, Veteran Services and Building & Grounds are aware and approve; and,  
WHEREAS, this is a renewal of a previous MOU; and,  
WHEREAS, there is no financial impact. The County is not liable for any damage to the vehicles; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the agreement with Ms. Karen Wallace with the Battle Creek VA to use the employee parking lot for personal and government-owned vehicles while conducting business in the County.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

## 10. Finance

### A. \*\*Claims

#### **CLAIMS RESOLUTION C2/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, claims in the amount of \$2,021,305.80 were submitted and reviewed; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners approve of the total claims in the amount of \$2,021,305.80 for the month of December 2025.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

### B. \*\*Court Appointed Special Advocate Contract FY26

#### **FINANCE RESOLUTION F1/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Court Appointed Special Advocacy (CASA) is a nationally recognized program utilized in many Michigan counties as a way to give a voice to children involved in the child protective system; and,

WHEREAS, Safe Harbor CAC actively recruits and trains volunteers for Van Buren County's CASA program; and,  
WHEREAS, there are currently five volunteers and the feedback from contract attorneys is positive; and,  
WHEREAS, the contracted amount continues to be \$80,000 for FY26; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued partnership with Safe Harbor Children's Advocacy Center for CASA services.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**C. \*\*Student Advocacy Michigan Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F2/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Parents and court-involved students at times need assistance in setting up Individualized Educational Plans and a guide to ensure follow-through; and,  
WHEREAS, Students with behavior problems face suspension or expulsion, multiplying their future problems because of a lack of education; and,  
WHEREAS, Youth who score high risk on the Youth Level Service (YLS) Assessment in the education domain may be screened to determine if they would benefit from an advocate who could provide assistance obtaining and/or improving an existing IEP or 504 plan; and,  
WHEREAS, the educational advocate works closely with the court's probation officer and works to increase the youth's time spent in school or in alternative education, and decrease the risk of out-of-home placement in detention for delinquent youth, with educational intervention promoting the youth's stay in his or her own home; and,  
WHEREAS, the non-attorney advocate is very familiar with special education law to ensure children's needs are met by attending virtual school meetings with parents or on their behalf. The advocate does not provide legal advice but shares resources, explains evaluations, accommodation options, effective goals, and educates parents about services available; and,  
WHEREAS, the amount of the contract is \$10,000 and is subject to 75% child care fund reimbursement. GL 292.0-662.10-801.000; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract with Student Advocacy Michigan to allow the Court's continued partnership for educational advocacy services in FY 26.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**D. \*\*Allegan County Secure Detention Bed Rental Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F3/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The Allegan County Juvenile Center is a reliable partner in the juvenile justice needs of Van Buren County's youth; and,  
WHEREAS, they assist with stabilization and safety, monitoring and education, medication management, and are quick to respond to emergency requests for lodging; and,  
WHEREAS, the financial impact depends on the number of youth lodged; and,  
WHEREAS, In FY25, the financial impact was \$202,401.20 for 915 days of out-of-home care; and,  
WHEREAS, this program receives 50% reimbursement from the child care fund; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued use of the Allegan County Juvenile Center for lodging youth when there is a need for youth and/or community safety.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

E. **\*\*Petersen Research Consultants Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F4/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, Courts are required by child care fund requirements to employ a quality assurance specialist to support the county with implementing and maintaining research-based practices related to juvenile justice reform (JJR); and,  
WHEREAS, Dr. Petersen has a long-standing relationship with Van Buren County and has been intensely involved with JJR since its beginning; and,  
WHEREAS, over this past year, she has begun compiling and analyzing recidivism data and training for consistent risk needs assessment; and,  
WHEREAS, the contract is in the amount of \$19,150.00 and the GL is 292.0-662.13-801.000; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract with Petersen Research Consultants that will continue the Court's relationship with Dr. Jodi Petersen as our Quality Assurance Specialist.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

F. **\*\*MST Associates Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F5/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, MST Associates provides MST Program support and training that allows VBCMH to offer the Multisystemic Therapy model for Van Buren County youth; and,  
WHEREAS, this is an intensive in-home evidence-based therapy; and,  
WHEREAS, the contract with MST Associates is \$52,000 and the GL is 292.0-662.03-801.000., and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued agreement with MST associates.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

G. **\*\*VBCCMH Family Advocate Services Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F6/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The VBCMH employs an individual who has extensive knowledge of the child protective system and community resources; and,  
WHEREAS, Ms. Cecily Hodder serves as a bridge for clients and supports them; and,  
WHEREAS, this innovative service is often enough to allow children to stay in their homes before a case has to come to court; and,  
WHEREAS, the parent navigator has also been a turning point in long-standing complex court cases where parents no longer had trust in the system; and,  
WHEREAS, Ms. Hodder's knowledge and expertise are a priceless service to the families of our community; and,  
WHEREAS, the contract is in the amount of \$117,000, representing a \$20,000 increase over the prior contract. This increase is offset by decreased spending in the CMH-MST contract for FY26 (therefore, no bottom-line change for the juvenile court budget this year). CMH experienced a budget shortfall due to a required change in its fringe benefit allocation methodology. As a result, this contract amount will need to be revisited for FY27.; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued partnership with the VBCMH for our parent navigator.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

H. **\*\*VBCCMH New Outlook Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F7/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The VBCMH provides wraparound services with therapists and other support

staff to youth and their families; and,  
WHEREAS, these services initially may be frequent as the family is in crisis, with services decreasing as stabilization occurs, and transitioning to other community support; and,  
WHEREAS, New Outlook staff assist clients with life and parenting skills, transportation to appointments, medication reviews, and are in frequent contact with juvenile court probation officers; and,  
WHEREAS, the amount of the contract is \$126,500.00 and the GL is 292.0-662.05-801.000; and,  
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued partnership with the VBCM for the New Outlook wraparound program.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**I.     \*\*VBCCMH Multi-Systemic Therapy Contract FY26**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F8/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The VBCM employs up to two therapists and a supervisor who administer the Multisystemic Therapy/MST-Problematic Sexual Behavior model, which is an intensive in-home evidence-based program.; and,  
WHEREAS, the contract is in the amount of \$260,000.00 and the GL is 292.0-662.03-801.000.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Board Chair to sign the contract authorizing the Court's continued partnership with the VBCM for the MST/MST-PSB program.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**J.     \*\*Out-of-State Travel Request - Circuit Court & Family Division**

**FINANCE RESOLUTION F9/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The National Association of Court Management (NACM) hosts an annual and mid-year conference. The mid-year conference for 2026 will be March 15-18 in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and,  
WHEREAS, NACM boasts more than 1,800 members from all levels and types of courts throughout the United States. NACM provides opportunities to increase court management proficiency while networking with colleagues to promote the common goal of improving the administration of justice; and,  
WHEREAS, this year's theme is "America 250: Preserving the Rule of Law and Judicial Independence." This is an educational opportunity that is uniquely designed for court professionals for skill development to enhance local courts; and,  
WHEREAS, 101.0-283.00-957.000 - \$551.52

(hotel taxes not included on travel form) plus \$475.00

101.0-283.00-861.001 - \$513.36

215.0-290.00-957.000 - \$551.52 (hotel taxes not included on travel form)

101.0-284.00-957.000 - \$475.00

215.0-290.00-861.001 - \$443.46; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the request for Ryan Smith, Trial Court Administrator, and Veronica Stillson, Family Division Administrator, to attend the 2026 National Association of Court Management Mid-Year Conference March 15-18, 2026 in Albuquerque, NM.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**11. Labor, Negotiations, and Contracts**

**A.     AFSCME Union Agreement - EXPEDITED**

**LABOR RESOLUTION L4/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, the County has concluded negotiations with AFSCME, resulting in a Tentative Agreement for the Public Transit bargaining unit for the 2026–2028 contract period; and, WHEREAS, the Tentative Agreement has been reviewed, finalized, and ratified by the union and reflects mutually agreed-upon modifications that align with County operational priorities, current labor market conditions, and internal comparability objectives; and, WHEREAS, the Agreement includes annual wage increases of 3% for each year from 2026 through 2028, with such increases to take effect upon the date of ratification, January 14, 2026, and with no retroactive wage adjustments provided; and, WHEREAS, the Agreement includes clarification of contract language and other adjustments intended to enhance contract consistency, equity, and administration; and, WHEREAS, the financial impact of these changes has been reviewed by Administration and incorporated into the County's long-term budget planning; and, WHEREAS, costs associated with the Tentative Agreement will be funded through Public Transit operating revenues, grants, and other applicable funding sources; and, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the Tentative Agreement between the County and AFSCME for the Public Transit bargaining unit for the term of January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2028, with wage increases effective January 14, 2026.

Motion by Paul Schincariol, Second by David DiStefano, Carried

**B. PTO Policy Update Expedited**

**LABOR RESOLUTION L5/1-27-2026**

WHEREAS, The Paid Time Off (PTO) Policy is being updated to clarify how and when PTO may be used and paid out, and; WHEREAS, one update clarifies that PTO may not be used on a holiday for the purpose of receiving additional pay beyond the holiday benefit. This change helps ensure PTO and holiday pay are applied as intended and prevents monetizing PTO on top of holiday time, WHEREAS, additionally, the County received a request from the Specialty Courts program to revise PTO payout provisions due to grant funding limitations; and, WHEREAS, Current policy allows for an annual PTO payout in October as well as payout at separation; and, WHEREAS, Specialty Courts' grant funding can no longer support ongoing PTO payouts beyond separation; and, WHEREAS, The proposed revisions address this funding limitation while maintaining consistency in PTO use and ensuring compliance with program funding requirements; and, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, approve the proposed changes to the Paid Time Off policy.

Motion by David DiStefano, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

**12. Public Transit**

**13. Veterans Services**

**14. Commissioner's Roundtable**

- Market One

**15. Chairman's Update**

**16. Board Correspondence**

- A. Genesee County Resolution - MLK Day
- B. Genesee County Resolution - Day of Healing

17. Closed Session

18. Public Comment

19. Adjournment  
Motion to adjourn.  
Motion by Randall Peat, Second by David DiStefano, Carried

The meeting was adjourned at 02:23 PM.

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**Kurt Doroh, Chairperson**

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**Suzie Roehm, County Clerk**



## Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 30, 2026

Van Buren County Planning Commission  
219 Paw Paw Street  
Paw Paw, MI 49079

Dear Van Buren County Planning Commission:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,  
*Marcy Hamilton*  
Marcy Hamilton  
Senior Planner

376 West Main Street, Suite 130 • Benton Harbor, MI 49022-3651

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• 269.925.1137 • 269.925.0288 • [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org) • [swmpc@swmpc.org](mailto:swmpc@swmpc.org)



## Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 30, 2026

Mr. K. John Egelhaaf, Director  
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission  
376 W. Main Street, Ste 130  
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Mr. Egelhaaf:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

*Marcy Hamilton*

Marcy Hamilton  
Senior Planner

376 West Main Street, Suite 130 • Benton Harbor, MI 49022-3651

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## Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 30, 2026

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Grant Management  
Lansing, MI

To Whom It May Concern,

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2026-2030 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

*Marcy Hamilton*

Marcy Hamilton  
Senior Planner

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