

D. Description of the Planning Process

1. *Plan Development Process*

The Parks & Recreation Commission decided in 2005 to conduct the planning process and write the resulting recreation plan in-house, using Commission personnel to conduct fieldwork and analyses of the various public opinion surveys. To this end, the Commission obtained assistance from the Village staff, and partnered with the Harbor Commission in carrying out various aspects of the process.

The process comprised:

1. Setting Goals and Objectives
2. Analyzing the 2005 Village Master Plan Opinion Survey
3. Conducting the Elementary School Survey
4. Conducting the High School focus group
5. Creating a preliminary list of potential recreation improvements and projects
6. Conducting a Public Input Session to prioritize these potential projects

The Parks & Recreation Commission then used the results of this process to create an action plan and a proposed capital improvement projects timetable for approval by the Village Council. See Figure D-1 for a flowchart that sequences these steps.

2. *Plan Development Staff*

The Parks & Recreation Commission was responsible for the planning, design, and implementation of the planning process. The current members of the Commission are: Ms. Kathy Peterson, chair; Mr. Don Marker, Village Council representative; Mr. Robert Bassett; Ms. Jan DiGiovanni (recording secretary); Mr. David Lein; Ms. Linda Pillsbury; Mr. Gordon Wilson; and Mr. Howard Yamaguchi. Mr. Robert Peterson, Village Manager, attends meetings, provides technical support, and serves as staff liaison to the Village office. Ms. Marcia Price, Village Clerk, and Ms. Pamela Krogh, Village Treasurer, provided technical and logistical support in the preparation of the plan documents. Mr. Steve Ravezzani, Village Zoning Administrator, distributed drafts of the plan document sections to the Planning Commission for comment.

Ms. Cheryl Werth, Elk Rapids Village Harbormaster, represented the Harbor Commission at various Parks & Recreation Commission meetings, and provided invaluable input during the planning process. She also participated as a presenter in the public input session. Mr. Peter Garwood, Antrim County Coordinator-Planner, and Mr. Stan Moore, Antrim County MSU Extension Director, both participated in the public input session as co-facilitators, as well as providing valuable supplementary information and insights to the participants.

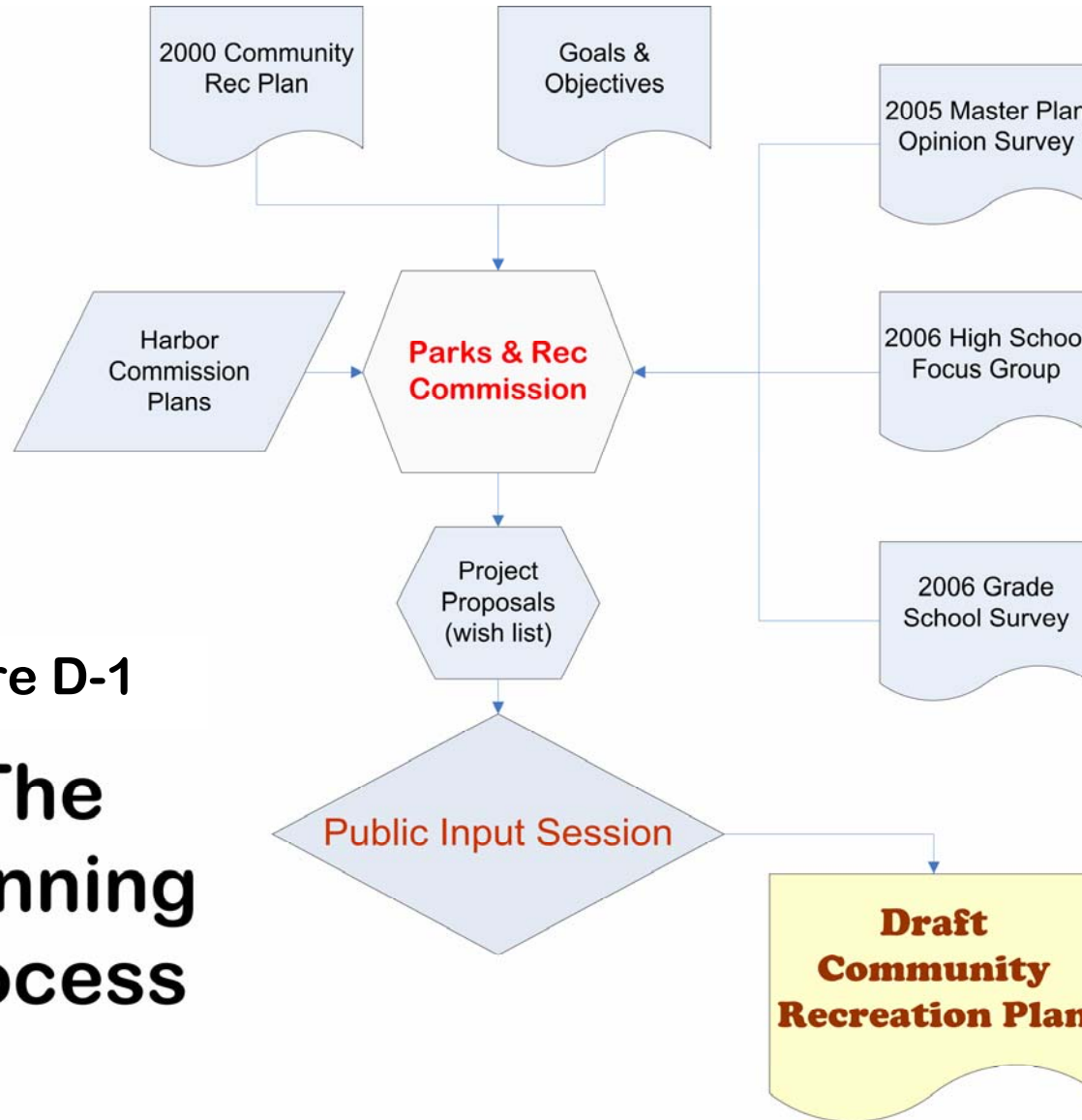


Figure D-1
The Planning Process

3. **Public Input Process and Results**

a) **Elk Rapids Master Plan Opinion Survey**

The Master Plan Opinion Survey was conducted in the Spring of 2005 by the Elk Rapids Planning Commission for their Master Plan update process. The survey comprised 199 questions in eleven sections covering a comprehensive set of subjects of interest to residents of the Village. 997 survey questionnaires were mailed to Village landowners, with additional copies made available at the Village office for other Village residents (renters) to fill. 500 forms were returned (51% return rate). (See also Section A, subsection 16, of this Recreation Plan for a summary of environmental issues of interest to the residents of the Village.)

The complete results of the survey can be viewed and/or downloaded by following the appropriate links at: <http://www.antrimcounty.org/ervillage.asp>

A special compilation of the survey questions (and the responses) that were related in some way to the subject of parks and recreation can be downloaded from:
<http://www.antrimcounty.org/downloads/ParksRecQuestions.pdf>

A further breakdown of the recreation results by age group was compiled in a separate study in late 2005. The results are available for download at:
<http://www.antrimcounty.org/downloads/ParksAndRecByAge.pdf>.

For the most part, responses by age group do not appear to differ significantly from the overall survey response. Where there were discernible age differences, they were most apparent in the choice of certain athletic facilities for potential development, such as preference for a skateboard park over other facilities.

Most of the questions in this compilation, while related to recreation, are issues that are within the jurisdiction of the Village Council, the Harbor Commission, and the Planning Commission rather than the Parks & Recreation Commission. However, together with those questions specifically under the Parks & Rec purview, the compilation gives a comprehensive view of the feelings of the Village residents and landowners towards various issues related to recreation, tourism, and the environment.

Questions 126 through 141 (Section VI.D) of the Master Plan Opinion Survey were questions specifically directed at parks and recreation. **Appendix B** summarizes the results of the questions, the various write-in comments to each of the questions, and the general comments to this section of the Opinion Survey. Overall, most respondents were in favor of the various facilities proposed in the survey, with the exception of a skateboard park and snowmobile trails. Other facilities, such as bathrooms for the Veterans Memorial Park and a music performance facility, registered approval from the majority of respondents, but with a number of strongly represented caveats.

One weakness of the Master Plan Opinion Survey was that most of the respondents belonged to higher age brackets. Two-thirds of the respondents were aged 55 or above, while the 2000 census indicates that two-thirds of the population of Village of Elk Rapids are aged under 54. See Figure AppC1 in Appendix C. This skew in the respondents' age groups reflects the age distribution of property owners in the Village.

To obtain input from the age groups not represented by the Opinion Survey respondents, the Parks and Recreation Commission further commissioned a (1) Youth (Elementary School) Survey and (2) a High School Focus Group study.

b) Youth (Elementary School) Survey

The Youth survey was a one-page survey on elementary school families' usage habits for area parks. The questionnaire was distributed to the families of elementary school children in the two Elk Rapids Area Elementary Schools, namely Lakeland (Elk Rapids) and Mill Creek (Williamsburg). Parents were encouraged to work together with their children in filling out this questionnaire. Of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 96 were returned for a somewhat disappointing response rate of 26.7%.

The survey consisted of four questions. The first queried respondents on the frequency of area park usage by their families. The second asked them which parks they used more often. The third question asked respondents to choose from a list of activities in which they participate at the parks. The final question asked respondents to list additional programs, facilities, equipment, activities they would like to see offered at the area parks.

The responses to the questionnaires are tabulated in detail in **Appendix C**. The results are summarized below.

The first question (frequency of park usage) revealed that nearly 70% of families use the area parks at least once a week, while nearly a fifth of the families use the parks daily. Clearly the area parks play a major role in the life of young families in the Elk Rapids School District.

The second question (which parks?) revealed that overall, the Veterans Memorial Park was the overwhelming favorite (87%) of the respondents. This was followed by the Dam Beach (49%), formed behind the Elk Rapids Harbor breakwater to the north of Elk River and the Power Dam. The popularity of these two parks can readily be corroborated by visual observation during the warm season.

The elementary school playgrounds and the township parks of Whitewater, Milton, and Torch Lake Townships each scored between 21% and 30% overall, underscoring the importance of these playgrounds and parks to local residents with young families. The lesser known but beautiful County Day Park (Elk Rapids) was claimed as a destination by 18% of the respondents. These were trailed by the lesser-known and used parks at the Rotary Club Park and the Palmer/Shah/Wilcox Natural Area.

The third question (activities at the park) responses showed that water activities and use of playground equipment were the park activities cited by an overwhelming majority of respondents (91% and 82%, respectively). Picnicking and sunbathing were the next most popular activities. Sports activities using the facilities available at the parks (tennis, basketball, and others) comprise the bulk of the rest of the responses.

These activities emphasize the importance of the area's lakes and water resources in the recreational activities of young families in the elementary schools.

The final question requested respondents to list amenities and facilities that they would like to see at the parks they frequent. Keep in mind that these requests extend not only to parks within the Village of Elk Rapids, but also to County and Township Parks cited by respondents as frequently patronized by their families.

The largest vote getter (33%) for this write-in question was bathrooms. Indeed, the quality of bathrooms at the two most popular parks cited (Veterans Park and the Power Dam Beach) has been a subject of controversy in the past, continuing through the present.

Playground equipment for children was the next (18%), followed by a large variety of equipment and activities requested.

c) High School Focus Group

To round out the recreation-related survey of Elk Rapids’ younger population, the Parks & Recreation Commission conducted a focus group study with a class of 11th and 12th graders. The focus group was administered by Bob Peterson, Elk Rapids Village Manager, at 12:30 PM for 45 minutes on May 5, 2006, in Mr. Gregorski’s Elk Rapids High School government class of 16 students.

The focus group administrator reviewed with members present the process of creating a Recreation Master Plan. He then presented and reviewed a copy of Act No. 265, Public Acts of 2001, also known as the Coordinated Planning Act. Also presented was a cover sheet of the Master Plan Survey 2005 of the Village of Elk Rapids and the students were encouraged to review the results of the survey on their computer. The administrator reviewed with students the process and authority for the development of a Recreation Master Plan.

He then informed the students that they were to be part of the recreation master plan development by participating in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to identify facilities and programs that could be considered in the master plan draft. The students were informed that although this was to be a village master plan, their ideas did not necessarily need to take place in the village and that private enterprise could be responsible for facility and program development.

The students identified five topics of interest and each topic was supported or not supported through comment. The topics of interest were written on a large piece of paper and at the end of the discussion on each topic the paper was taped to the wall. After discussion on the topics was complete, students were issued six stickers and asked to place the stickers on the paper that they thought was the best recreation development or activity. The students could use their stickers all on one topic or they could split topics.

The results are as follows, showing the percent of votes and comments for each facility:

- Outdoor Family Fun Park**.....30%
Batting cage, arcade, putt-putt golf, go-carts, good for tourism, family fun, creates jobs and would be close to Elk Rapids.
- Bathrooms at Veterans Memorial Park**.....23%
Pay people to clean, build into hill, cleaner bay water, do not block view.
- Outdoor Skating Rink**20%
Cedar street parking lot, harbor lot, soccer field, village office (by police station), good for exercise, family activity and popular.
- Rifle Range outside Village**16%
Outdoors fun, safety, support 2nd amendment rights, hire attendants, family activity, hunter safety classes and hunter clubs.
- Lights on Basketball Court at Veterans Park**11%
Exercise, keep kids from doing drugs, use motion sensed lights, safety and increase security.

The students’ projects and the comments show a remarkable degree of sophistication and maturity. The comments on bathrooms at Memorial Park, for example, mirror those of the older respondents in the Master Plan Opinion Survey.

d) Public Input Session

Using the results of the (a), (b), and (c) above, the Parks & Recreation Commission compiled a list of potential projects for inclusion in the Community Recreation Plan. Parks & Rec then announced, via local newspapers and by e-mail solicitations, a public input session to be held on June 14, 2006. The general public, including residents of neighboring townships, was invited. Ms. Cheryl Werth, Village Harbormaster, also participated to brief attendees of Harbor Commission plans for Upper Harbor docking facilities.

This meeting was to brief the public on the Community Recreation Plan process, informed the attendees of the results of the surveys above, and presented the list of potential projects. The attendees were then asked, through a facilitated process, to rank these projects in order of priority. In the process, the attendees were invited to add their own projects to the list. Facilitators for the process were Mr. Pete Garwood, Antrim County Coordinator/Planner, and Mr. Stan Moore, Antrim County MSU Extension Director.

A total of 23 members of the public responded to the invitation and attended this meeting. In the prioritization phase of the meeting, each participant was given six (6) stickers and asked to rank the projects listed on flip charts. Voting results were as follows:

Project	No. Votes	%
Bathroom at Vet Park	17	16%
Biking/walking/jogging paths	11	10%
Less asphalt-intensive parking facilities	9	9%
Vlg to acquire Beck property and Marina for general rec.	8	8%
Plan and develop restrooms at the Dam Beach/park	6	6%
Upper Harbor improvements	6	6%
Connect and improve N and S Bayshore for biking and walking	5	5%
2-stall bathroom in Veterans Park	5	5%
Upper Harbor pumpout station	3	3%
Walking/fitness trail with mile markers	3	3%
Better stroller/pedestrian/wheelchair access to downtown from residential areas	3	3%
Designated X-country skiing areas coordinated with walking/biking areas	3	3%
Move swan to Vet Park to use as playground	2	2%
Restroom in Rotary Park for bikers and trails	2	2%
Lighted tennis courts in addition to lighted basketball courts	2	2%
Link Rotary Park to the boardwalks	2	2%
More playground equip at Veterans Mem Park	2	2%
Sand retention barriers in spring/fall (River St., Mem Park, etc.)	2	2%
Parks & Rec coordinator w/other units of government	2	2%
Fishing (Dam) park improvements	2	2%
Additional playground equip	2	2%
Make Veterans Mem Park more acceptable for multiple, more defined uses	1	1%
Disc (frisbee) golf area	1	1%
Better signage for Cedar St restrooms	1	1%
Indoor sports dome (inflatable) for winter use	1	1%
More garbage cans and benches in public areas	1	1%
Skateboard area	1	1%
Improve Rotary Park boat launch	1	1%
Band shell/covered pavilion	1	1%

A total of 105 votes were cast by the participants. Other project ideas that failed to attract any votes were as follows:

- Additional Boat Access to Bay
- Shuffleboard Court in Rotary Park
- Keep Antrim County Day Park as is
- Indoor swimming pool
- Portable band shell
- Help improve Joe's movie theatre
- Yuchasz walkway restroom
- Coordination by rec entities: vlg, schools, etc.
- Dog Park
- Handicapped accessibility - modify existing parks
- Other Bathrooms/porta-potty
- Ice Rink

4. *Planning Results*

The planning process outlined in Sections 1 through 4 above has resulted in two deliverables:

- a. Approved Action Program detailing Village recreation priorities for the next five years.
- b. Approved Capital Improvements Schedule listing planning improvements and priorities over the next five years. These two deliverables will be detailed in Section F.

The Parks & Recreation Commission approved the draft Community Recreation Plan for public display and comment at a special meeting on November 16, 2006. They approved the issue of a press release (to be drafted by Commission members) and a formal notice in the local newspaper of record notifying the public of the availability of the Plan, both in paper and electronically, for comment and review during the 30-day period.

At the meeting of January 4, 2007, the Parks & Recreation Commission considered the public comments gathered during the 30-day period, and incorporated suggested changes, where appropriate, into the draft document. Formal written comments received are shown Appendix D. They also adopted a resolution urging the Elk Rapids Village Council to hold a public hearing on the amended draft Plan and to subsequently adopt the Plan.

Prior to the adoption of the Community Recreation Plan, the Elk Rapids Village Council held a public hearing on the draft Plan at their meeting of February 20, 2007. The minutes of the hearing, as well as other documents pertaining to notifying the public of the availability of the document for review, are in Appendix E.

The Elk Rapids Village Council formally adopted the Elk Rapids Community Recreation Plan at their meeting of February 20, 2007.