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PARKS & RECREATION MASTER PLANS START PLANNING YOUR FUTURE TODAY

Creating parks and recreational facilities takes time, public involvement, and money. And it requires a five-year parks and recreation master plan. Timing is critical, and depending on the complexity, a master plan can take up to six months to complete.

Parks are an integral part of a community's identity as a place to live, work, and play. The City of Royal Oak recently set its sights on creating three beautiful gathering places for their residents and visitors: Centennial Commons, Franklin Park, and Lawson Park.

"The improvements are important to our community. With the increasing trend for outdoor recreation, providing updated infrastructure and diverse amenities throughout our community offers access to everyone," said John Fedele, superintendent of recreation for the City of Royal Oak.

A good first step toward new recreational developments in Michigan is to adopt a five-year master plan. It is also a prerequisite for many state funding programs.

Engagement is crucial for any park and recreation plan. It can be encouraged through public meetings, online surveys, social media, newspapers, and flyers.

"We like to reach a wide range of demographics, and one of the toughest challenges is finding ways to reach and engage those stakeholders," Fedele said.

MASTER PLAN TIMELINE FOR RECREATION GRANTS

It's never too early to start the park and recreation master plan process. The plan evaluates existing recreation opportunities, encourages public opinion regarding parks and recreation, and offers a five-year plan for implementing proposed park improvements and new initiatives.

The master plan doesn't focus on one park, but instead offers an overview of a community's parks and recreation landscape, both today and in the future. Here's some important deadlines to keep in mind.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR PLANNING	
Create the recreation plan	Now
Draft plan available for public comment	November 2023
Public hearing to adopt plan	January 2024
DNR submittal of adopt rec plan	February 1, 2024
Grant application deadline	April 1, 2024

WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE?

There are many ways to fund your park projects. These include local funds, private donations, and grants with state or federal funds. Major grant sources available to Michigan communities include:



- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) serves as a primary source of financial assistance, offering recreation grant programs to communities to acquire land for parks and open spaces or to develop public recreation facilities. The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) also has the most extensive funds available, with average awards of \$200,000 for development and no limits on costs of land acquisition. Development project minimum/maximum grant amount ranges from \$15,000 to \$300,000 with a minimum 25% local match.
- The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is offered through the National Park Service and allocates up to \$75,000 per project. The minimum grant request amount is \$30,000 and the maximum grant request amount is \$500,000 with a 50% local match requirement for LWCF.
- Recreation Passport Grants also help pay for renovating facilities that have outlived their useful life expectancy. This program offers \$7,500-\$150,000 grants with a minimum 25% local match for indoor and outdoor renovations.

Not all communities pursue grant funding programs. Residents in the City of Royal Oak approved a millage to support its parks, recreation, and senior services.

"The ballot language for this millage needed to be clear and easy for the public to understand how their tax dollars would be spent to improve parks infrastructure and senior activities," Fedele said. "It was challenging. But once passed, the city was able to move forward with updating our infrastructure and improving amenities."

Parks provide space for neighborhood residents to connect with each other and meet new people. They're also great spaces for events and for people to engage in recreational activities, allowing all to develop an increased sense of community.

If you'd like assistance in creating a five-year parks and recreation master plan or applying for funding, contact Rick Stout at 616.942.3606 or via email at rstout@fveng.com.

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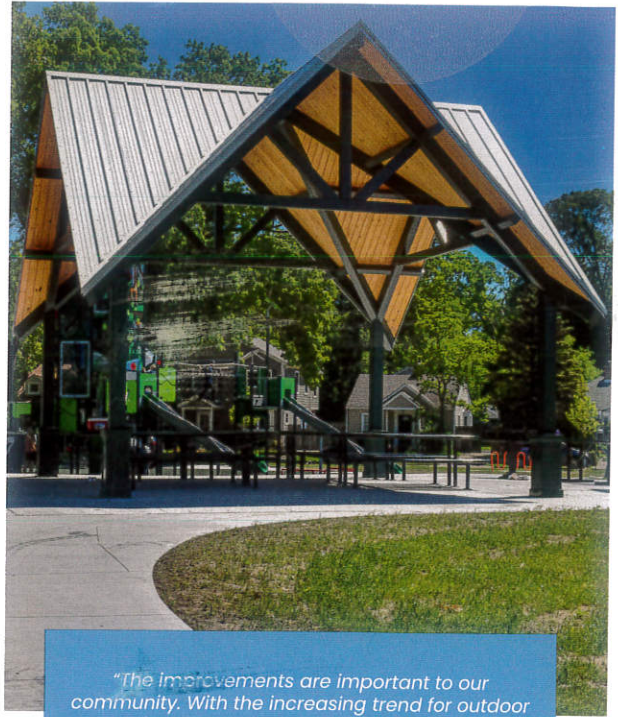
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- John Fedele, superintendent of recreation for the City of Royal Oak

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