

Section Six:

Public Participation



Public Participation

JCPR invited the public to participate in the planning process in a variety of ways.

First, the public was invited to attend the Park Board monthly meetings. JCPR ran a press release in the local papers in May. The parks web page overviewed the master plan process and schedule, as did the press release.

Each monthly meeting had time set aside for the community to participate. The meetings did not have great outside attendance. This has always been the case (6 plans), it is discouraging.

The NLT grant committee did attend the park board meeting asking for support for their initiative. The trails grant committee did have an open public meeting to overview their proposal. The NLT Grant committee also attended a couple County Council meetings and presented their proposal (detailed Power Point with substantial other displays). These meetings had larger attendance, approximately 50 individuals.

JCPR first published its survey on-line on its web site and on Facebook in July 22. JCPR emailed the local paper with an attached press release, asking the public to participate in their survey, which could be found on their website and online. Survey was republished on Facebook august 2nd, and September 9th, both as a post and as an "event". A letter to the editor was also written. Survey was analysis started in October and was presented to the Board on October 29th. At that point 148 online surveys were filled out, and three hard copies were given. Approximately 25 individuals did not answer the survey completely.

Many stake holders were contacted in a local leadership conference held by the Jennings County Community Foundation. This was a two day event and updates/presentations were delivered by many local service providers. These included the local School Corporation, Municipal Parks and Recreation, County Commissioners, City Councilors, Economic Development, as well as many other supporting private and public agencies.

The NVPR is currently working on their 5 year plan. Both directors plan to shared survey results. NVPR preliminary recommendations are in Appendix.

The Trails Committee (NLT) has meet monthly, and sometimes more often. This group is well represented and includes both Park Director, North Vernon Mayor and assistants, Vernon Mayor, Tripton Park Project manager, the regional Wellness Director, as well as resident engineers and other trail advocates.

The JCPR Director has attended monthly meetings for the Wellness Team

JCPR did communicate with specific key players. City Director, Wellness director, School corporation representatives, and the township trustees were all contacted. The Jennings County Council members have been talked to in a number public meetings and were presented with a rough draft hypothetical Action plan on December 10th. 2019.

Older Plan Overview

Last cycle did not have great survey response, yet each cycle has gained public input. In general there appeared to be strong support for additional parks, trails, greenspace. There was also strong support for proposals relative to Eco Lake Park, a community youth center, the Sand Creek Soccer proposal, and partnership with the Town of Vernon.

Updated playground equipment was the main upgrade suggested relative to JCPR. Bathrooms were also noted. Playgrounds became the main departmental focus for JCPR, and the department was reasonable successful this endeavor. Bathroom issues are being addressed also.

Final presentation of the plan was well received and assisted the department in securing a grant that kick started the playground effort and substantial local donations.

Last cycle had 85 survey responses.

Increased Communication

JCPR representatives have had increasing communication with many elements of the community. As a small department with large day to day work load, historically communication is limited and fractured.

Monthly meetings with the Next Level Trails committee has brought the main administrators together and it is nice to be working on shared interests.

Monthly meetings with the wellness team, "Joining Jennings for Healthy Living", has widened the communication base considerably. The new Wellness Coordinator has proven to be exceptional at reaching out to all related community players.

JCPR also acknowledges the increased communication provided for the newly hired county Human Resource Director. Monthly meetings with Department heads are very positive.

JCPR appreciates the directive currently underway from the JCCF. The leadership seminar in the summer was very productive, and ultimately this group can be a neutral objective central hub for increased communication and community vision.

JCPR contacted the local township trustees. They asked general interviews questions to clarify recreational needs and goals within their jurisdiction. Only two of eleven have any recreational plans.

JCPR has talked to municipal and county council members and TIF representatives.

Other Means to Gauge Public Input

Google Reviews:

Muscatatuck Park has approximately 410 reviews on Google. Many of these reviews are only grades, but often people comment in depth. Rating is 4.6 out of five. JCPR welcomes this feedback, and nearly all reviews are positive. Comments on natural beauty, peacefulness, friendliness, and cleanliness are often mentioned. JCPR plans to respond more to ratings, to interact with the customer.

Facebook Reviews:

Muscatatuck Park gets a 4.5 out of 5 on Facebook reviews. General comments support the natural beauty of the facility, good trail opportunity. Cleanliness and friendliness are also noted. Most negative reviews dealt with things out of JCPR control (local race track is loud for campers), homeless campers, small staff not always easy to locate, and issues that have already been noticed (trail marking) yet had not been completed.

North Vernon Parks and Recreation Survey

The survey results were recently shared as were bullet points of preliminary recommendations. It is interesting to note that in the city survey, 52% of the respondents were county residents, and only 45% were North Vernon city residents.

Historically, NVPR survey results echo general sentiments expressed in the county process. NVPR results will be geared towards softball, baseball, soccer, and swimming.



Mayor Ochs and JC Community Foundation representatives dedicating city gift on county property at Muscatatuck Trail head parking area.

“CNA 2017” Community Needs Assessment

In 2017 Jennings County conducted a local “Community Needs Assessment. The administrative group was a well represented cross section of the community, including local government leaders, Economic Development, School Corporations, as well as local small business and larger corporations.

The CNA had approximately 1000 respondents to their local questionnaire. They also broke the data down to overview general population needs, corporate needs, and even broke down the under 18 involvement. Methodology and final results were exemplary. JCPR appreciates the efforts of this Committee.

The CNA was used to justify the creation of the new city park, Tripton Park.

To a degree the results are common sense, though. Perhaps the generality of the results is adequate to point the community in the right direction. Specific steps to address each needs of each category are not laid out in depth, thus pointing the need for more specific studies like this plan.

The CNA listed the following in terms of local importance:

- Work Force & Jobs
- Education
- Health & Wellness
- Recreation & Entertainment
- Beautification

Guiding themes were presented as were directional Statements. Specific to recreation the plan does support additional outdoor recreational facilities, more walking and biking trails and connectivity between them all. Additional programs and outdoor activities was noted.

Jennings County Youth Foundation

The JCYF has attempted to gauge public interest through out the years and through many initiatives. There group is mainly directed towards the creation of Girls & Boys Club. There is support for this type of facility within their survey as well as JCPR. JCPR survey points out that monetary support is not as high as general support, but the group did have a very successful 2018, and likely their momentum carried out into 2019.

<https://jcyf.in>

‘SCORP’ Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreational Plan 2016-2020

We will generalize some of this studies findings:

- “Recreation Close to home is still a priority.”
- “The Movement to reconnect children with nature is expanding.”
- “Indiana’s obesity Epidemic is worsening”.
- “Many communities are built in ways that make it difficult or unsafe to be physically active.
- “Tourism is the state’s 7th largest industry.
- “Nature based recreation grew about 7.1 percent and the number of activity days grew about 40, in the previous decade (2000-2009)
- “Walking/Jogging/Running” are Hoosiers favorite activity.
- “Mandates for revenue cost recovery may lead to social inequity.”
- “Walkable cities draw millennials, fueling a suburban exodus”.
- “The exodus of disadvantaged populations will be to nearby suburbs.”

National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) Engagement with Parks Report.

Results Summarized by Joe Bush in Recreational Management news letter article , Survey Says: American’s love their Parks.

- 93 % say it is crucial to protect natural resources.
- 88% say local parks provide good opportunity to interact with nature.
- Respondents visit their local park and recreational facilities an average of twice a month, with 1 in 10 visiting weekly if not daily.
- 85 % consider parks and recreation opportunities important factors when choosing a new place to live.

“Parks are a solution to many of the issues people face, especially as it relates to health and the natural environment, “Roth (Kevin Roth, NRPA Vice President of professional development, research and technology) said, “Easy access to park and recreational amenities for all members of the community is essential to the well-being of our cities, towns, and counties.”

Letters to Santa?

JCPR will not declare that the following information is a soundly scientific. We do believe that this informal method of surveying the public does illuminate some interesting information.

Every year around Christmas the local news paper, the North Vernon Plain Dealer & Sun, asks the local youth approximately ages 4 to 8 to ask “Santa” what they would like for Christmas. Each youth simply writes a letter to Santa expressing their most desired present. They also submit a picture.

Assuming that the parents promote this activity somewhat via the submittal process, we generalize local participants read the paper, and support their kids in positive and educational means. In a rural community with very few upper class individuals, participants can be generalized as “rural middle class”. Lower class participation is not as likely.

Results are interesting and local. Out of 214 responses that specified identifiable material object that could be purchased (excluding cures for cancer, world peace, etc.) we broke apart responses relative to outdoor vs indoor recreational pursuits. We then listed more specific outdoor recreational items. Some gray areas exist.

Seventy percent (70%) of respondents listed general non-physical orientated indoor items. Main responses were iPhone, gaming toys, Oz-bots, LOL dolls, drones, RC cars and planes, lap tops, etc.

Of the responses that itemized objects to used outside, 39 percent were Hoverboards. Add in other motorized objects and we are at 47 percent. Seems to be high demand for hoverboards (29 responses) and not so high demands for traditional gifts like bicycles (5 responses).

As we noted, the data is not soundly scientific, yet the trend seems obvious. Likely many of these youth already have bikes, and the Hoverboard would be an specialty toy.

The demand for technological toys has grown over the years and this interpretation seems to fit this local data.

In respect to activity, lack of physical activity, obesity and youth development what a kid desires is a product of marketing and social norms. Two youth (less than 1 percent) asked for Fit-bits. Most did not desire traditional recreational objects that likely were more desired a few generations back (bikes, basketballs, skateboards, etc.)

Perhaps it suggests the challenge we face nationally to grow up healthy?

Final Public Presentation of Plan

Public Presentation of the NLT Grant, and the JCPR rough action plan were presented to the public during Council and Vernon town meetings.

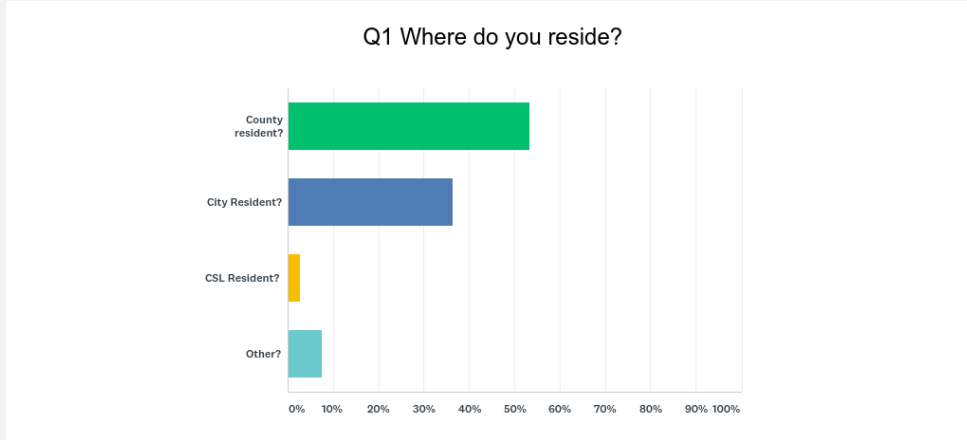
Final presentation of the JCPR Master Plan was on March tenth. The meeting only had about 20 attendees, with all but one councilor there. The presentation was a fast paced power point.

Presented were an overview of the counties demographics with an emphasis on “health outcomes” and related inactivity stats.

Critical areas were overviewed and certain proposals were highlighted. The 100 birthday of Muscatatuck Park was used to remind the councilors of the Park’s importance. They were also challenged to match the recent city quality of life investments. Subsequent Park Board meeting had no follow up, yet this was the day before the Governor’s Corona virus first notification.

Jennings County Parks and Recreation Master Planning Survey 2020-2024

Question #1: Where do you reside?

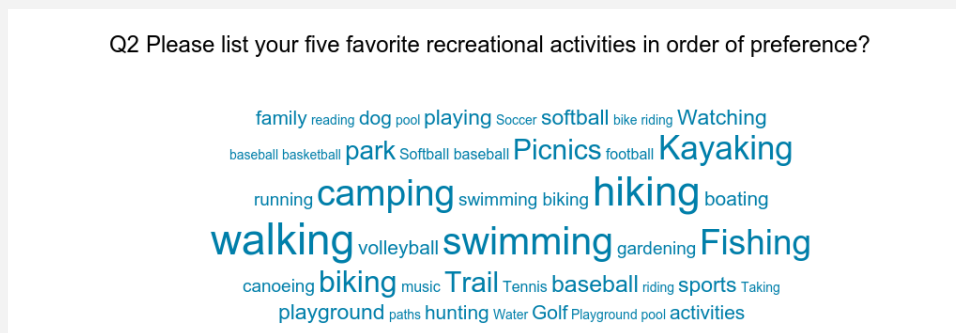


Survey percentage: County was 54%, City 37%. Actual percentage of population: County is 76%, City 24%.

Note: Jennings County population has decreased by 918 between April 2010 and July 2018.

North Vernon population has decreased by 265 individuals over same period.

Question #2: Please list your five favorite recreational activities in order of preference?



First Tier Importance:

Walking/Hiking	73%
Walking	47%
Hiking	46%
Swimming	29%
Camp	25%
Bike	21%
Fish	18%

Second Tier Importance:

Kayak	14%
Softball/BB	14%
Playground	11%
Family Time	8%
Picnic	8%
Experience Nature	7%

Question #3:

Q3: How often do you visit Muscatatuck Park? What is your main reason to visit?

Analysis: Responses can be broken into five general user volumes.

▪ Very Heavy	(over once per week)	12%
▪ Heavy	(over once per month up to once per week)	30%
▪ Medium	(up to once per month)	17%
▪ Low	(couple times a year)	39%
▪ None	(does not visit)	2%

Although the majority of users do not participate more than once a month (12 visits per year), the average number of user visits per year is 33 visits per year, or a bit over once every two weeks.

Note: Data may not reflect the observation that many respondents may generalized usage relative to better weather months. This is not proven either way, but experience tells us that we often do not account accurately for the colder months which generally lower usage considerably.

Why do you visit?

- Hike
- Walk
- Bike
- Run
- Playground
- Fish
- Reunions, parties, picnics
- T3
- Pictures
- Relax
- Pokémon

Question #4

Q4: How often do you visit Eco Lake Park? What is your main reason to visit?

Analysis:

- The majority of respondents (73%) have not recreated at this facility.
- Only 4% recreate here more than once per month.
- Fishing is the main reason to visit this facility.

Question #7:

Q7 Are you or your family a member of a recreational user group? If yes, please list program.

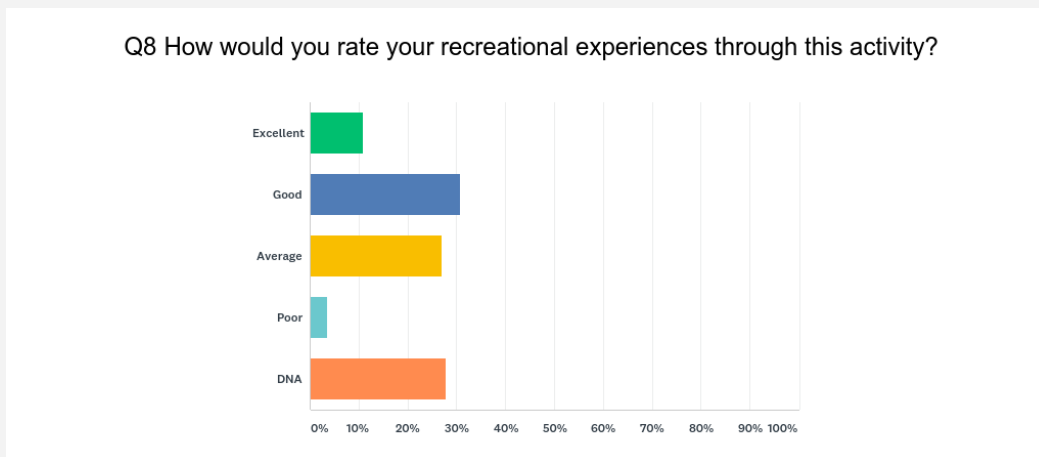
Analysis:

- 56 % of respondents stated that they are not associated with any type of recreational club, group, or recreational league.
- No one user group had more than a 10 percent representation, but sports programs from the municipality were most often cited.

Clubs listed in

- Softball
- Baseball
- Soccer
- T-ball
- Swim
- JCYF
- CERA-land
- JC Run

Question #8: How would you rate your recreational experiences through this activity?



How would you rate your recreational experiences through this activity?

Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Excellent	10.95%	15
Good	30.66%	42
Average	27.01%	37
Poor	3.65%	5
DNA	27.74%	38

Answered 137

Skipped 11

Question #12:

Q12 Do we need additional parks? If yes, what should these parks supply (fields, courts, green space, trails, other)?

Analysis:

- 45% of respondents say “NO” to new and additional parks.
- 65% of respondents said “YES” to new and additional parks.

Again, dog parks is heard again. Fields, courts, and green space, also spoken for. Trails and connectivity are requested. Indoor courts, and swimming noted.

Question #13

Q13 Have you used the paved multi-use Muscatatuck trail?

Analysis:

- 25% of respondents said they have not used the pathway.
- 75% of respondents have used the pathway.

Question #14

Q14 How often do you use this trail?

Analysis:

- **Low volume use:**
 - 23% of respondents listed zero days on pathway.
 - 17% of respondents listed day use less than 6 times per year.
 - Therefore, 40% of respondents use the trail in a limited fashion.
- **High volume use:**
 - High volume users skew usage data significantly. Although 40 percent of respondents seldom or never use the trail, the average days of usage for a respondent is 30 days per year (a bit more than twice a month).
 - Of the roughly 60% of respondent's that stated they use the trail more than once every other month (6 visitor days), they average 46 days a year on the pathway.
 - 11% of users use pathway between 3 and 4 days per week

Note: responded figures may be somewhat inflated due to generalization of usage not incorporating winter months accurately.

Question #15:

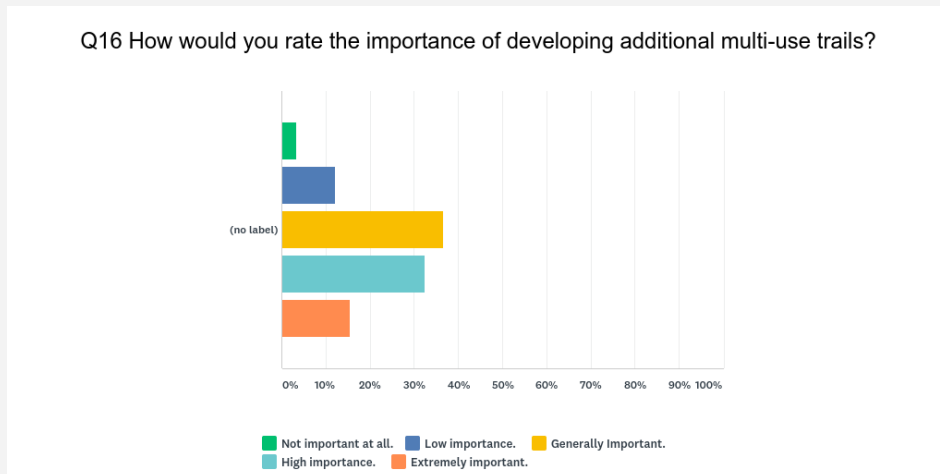
Q15 Local leaders have identified connections in town and a potential to connect the library to CSL. Do you support this?

Analysis:

- 30% of respondents said “NO” to proposed project.
- 70% of respondents said “YES” to proposed project.

People also noted other connections including North Vernon to Library and Vernon. Small number of responses noted negative bias towards CSL.

Question #16: How would you rate the importance of developing additional multi-use trails?



How would you rate the importance of developing additional multi-use trails?

	Not important at all.	Low importance.	Generally Im- portant.	High im- portance.	Extremely important.	Total	Weighted Average
1	3.25 %	12.20 %	36.59 %	32.5 %	15.45 %	123	3.45

Question #17: There is an initiative to build a Girls & Boys Club, do you support this?

Analysis:

- 15% of respondents stated they do not support this initiative
- 85% of respondents state that they do support this initiative.

Q17 There is an initiative to build a Girls & Boys Club, do you support this?

children know needs enough sure club Yes county Absolutely
think support kids program

Question #18: Would you donate to the fund to create this club?

Analysis:

- 47% of respondents stated they would not donate to fund the club.
- 53% of respondents stated that they would donate to fund this club.

Q18 Would you donate to the fund to create the club.

donate something Probably time Possibly able Yes went
Maybe sure money taxes

Question #19: Would you or your family become a member?

Analysis:

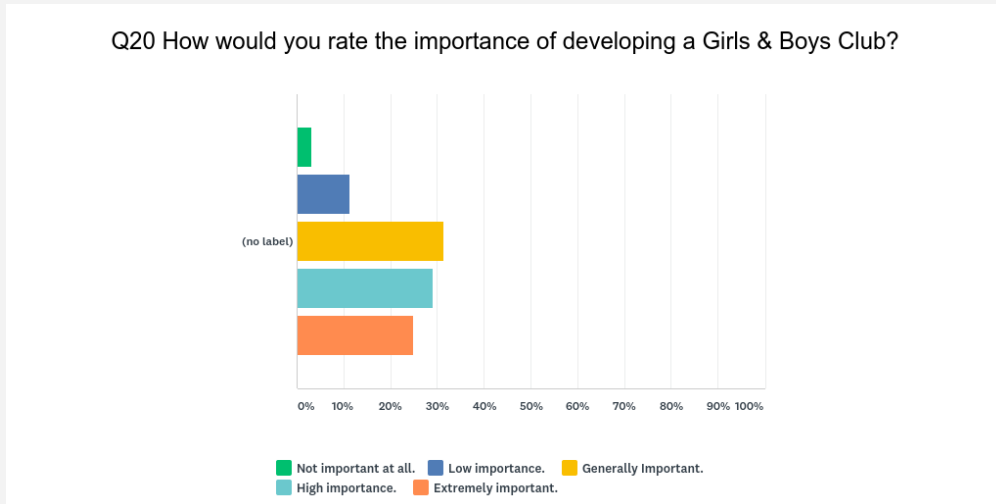
- 46% of respondents stated they would not likely become members of this club.
- 54% of respondents stated that they would likely become members of the club.

Many respondents answered conditionally relative to services provided.

Q19 Would you or your family become a member?

Maybe volunteering Possibly likely Yes Depends
Probably old sure

Question #20: Who would you rate the importance of developing a Girls & Boys Club?

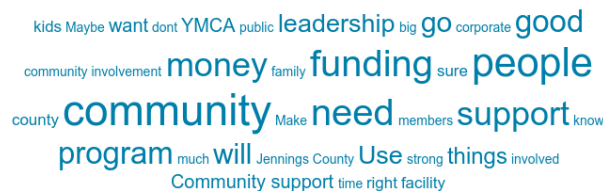


How would you rate the importance of developing a Girls & Boys Club?

	Not im- portant at all.	Low im- portance.	Generally Important.	High im- portance.	Extremely important.	Total	Weighte d Avera ge
1	3.23 %	11.29 %	31.45 %	29.03 %	25.00 %	31 124	3.61

Question #21: Our community tried to create a YMCA (similar to a G & B Club) a couple times in the past (most recently 20 years ago), but was not successful. What do you believe is needed to make this a successful endeavor?

Q21 Our community tried to create a YMCA (similar to G & B club) a couple times in the past (most recently 20 years ago), but was not successful. What do you believe is needed to make this a successful endeavor?



Analysis:

Often it was noted that the city and county would have to add additional support. Trend was that most agreed that increased support from all aspects of the community would be needed to make this a reality.

Many respondents answers noted that a low cost entry fee would be needed for local participation.

Question #22: Eco lake park has plans to develop the campground. Do you support this? Would you support funding this upgrade to come from the County Council?

Analysis:

- 37% of respondents said that they do not support development of the campground.
- 63% of respondents said they did support development of the campground.

Many did support the assistance from the council. One individual noted partial payment, another loans. Many noted grants.

Q22 Eco Lake Park has plans to develop the campground. Do you support this? Would you support funding for this upgrade to come from the County Council?

money s family help campgrounds area used funding county need camp lake
Yes great support want park eco park think go best people know

Question #23: Tripton Park is nearing completion. Do you support the development of the facility and do you plan to use it?

Analysis:

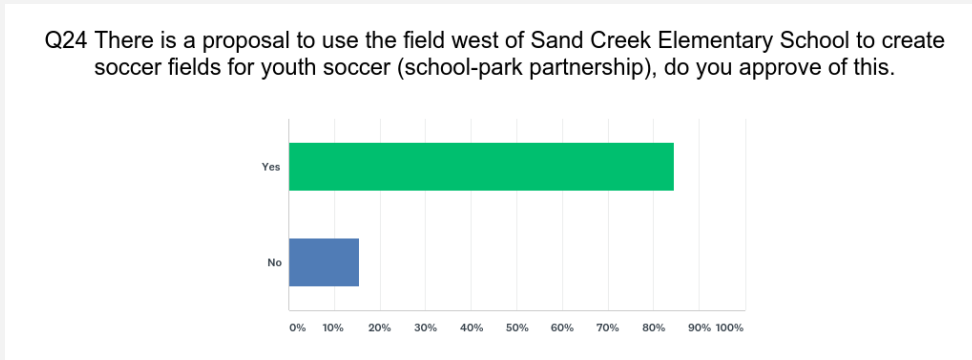
- 15% of respondent's did not support development of this new facility
- 85% of respondents did support the development of this new facility.

There appeared to be general support and optimism that the city had developed their second substantial facility.

Q23 Tripton Park is nearing completion. Do you support the development of this facility and do you plan to use it?

much trail support walk trail will planned use going **Yes** hope
park sure Absolutely walk see excited

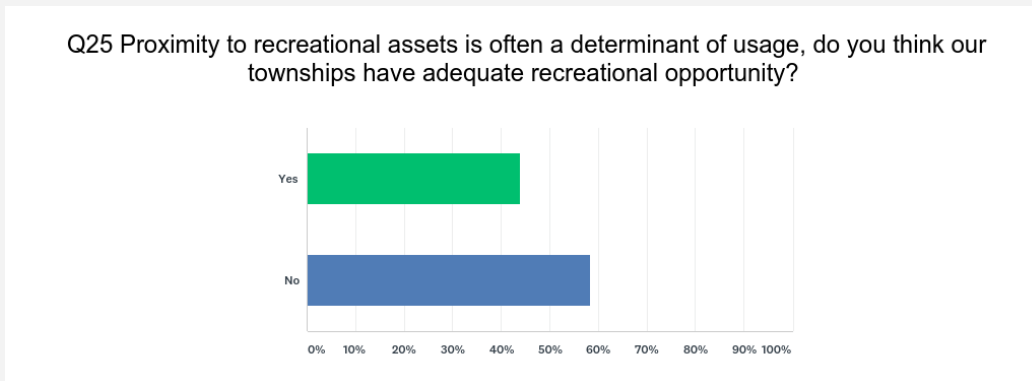
Question #24: There is a proposal to use the field west of the Sand Creek elementary school to create soccer fields for youth soccer (school-park partnership), do you approve of this?



Analysis:

- 16% of respondents said that they do not support development of this initiative.
- 84% of respondents said they did support development of this initiative.

Question #25: Proximity to recreational assets is often a determinant of usage, do you think our townships have adequate recreational opportunity?



Analysis:

- 43% of respondent's believed that townships have enough recreational opportunity
- 57 % of respondents did not believe that townships have enough recreational opportunity.

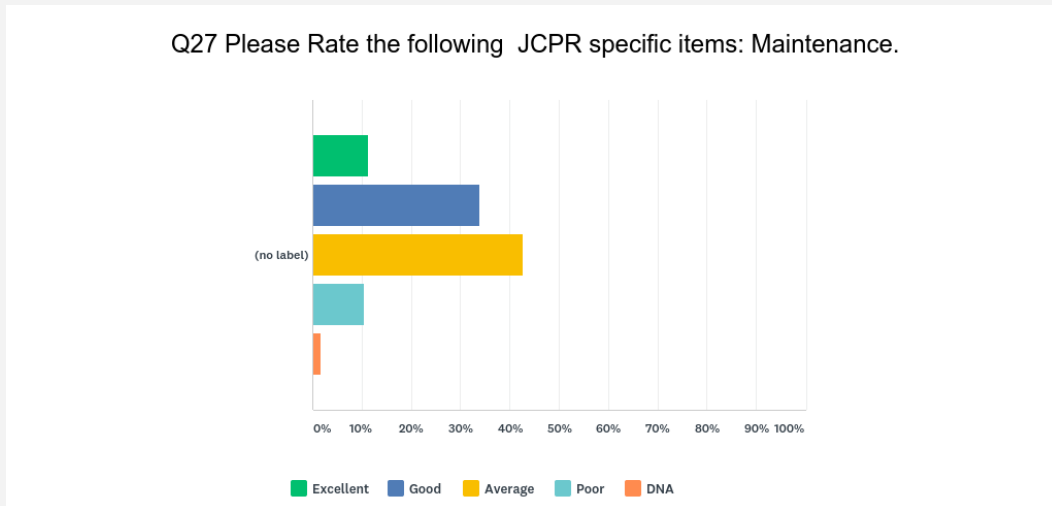
Question #26: In 2017 local leaders participated in a Community Needs Assessment. Are you familiar with this study? If so, do you feel we are making progress on the identified issues?



Analysis:

- 33% of respondent's were familiar with this study.
- 67 % of respondents were not familiar with the CNA study.

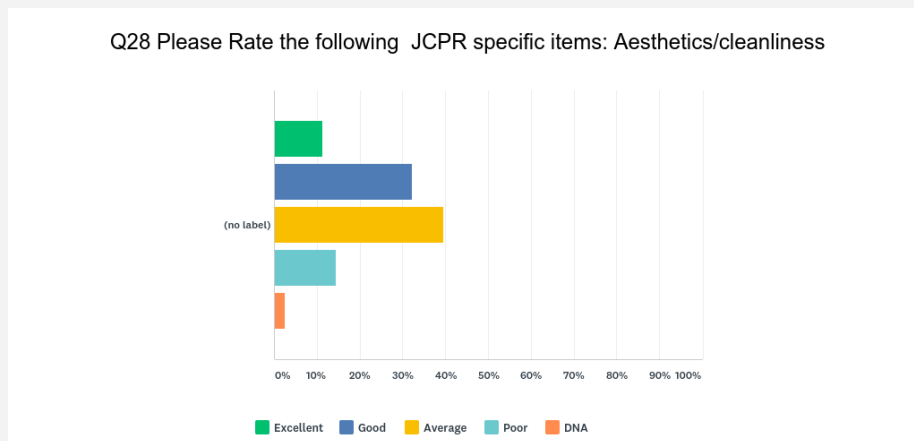
Question #27: Maintenance.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Maintenance.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total	Weighted Average
1	11.2 9%	33.8 14	42.7 42	10.4 4%	1.61 53	124	2.57

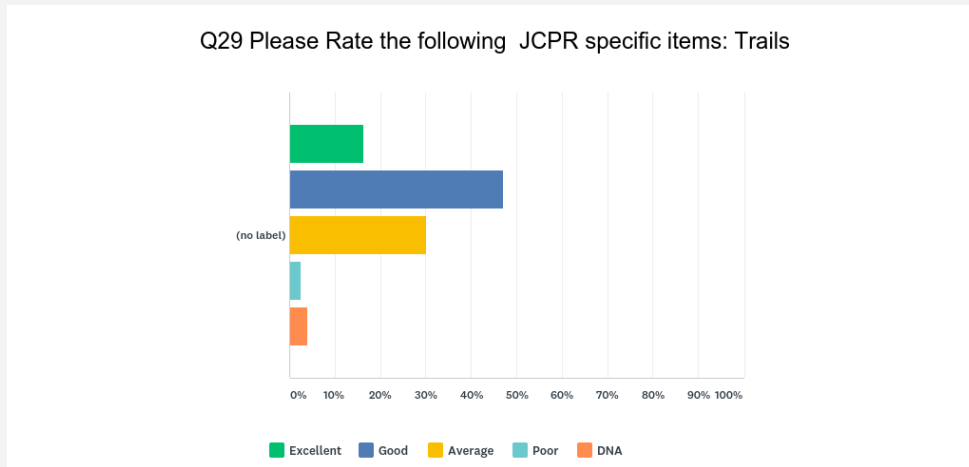
Question #28: Aesthetics/cleanliness.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Aesthetics/cleanliness

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total
1	11.29 %	32.26 %	39.52 %	14.52 %	2.42 %	124

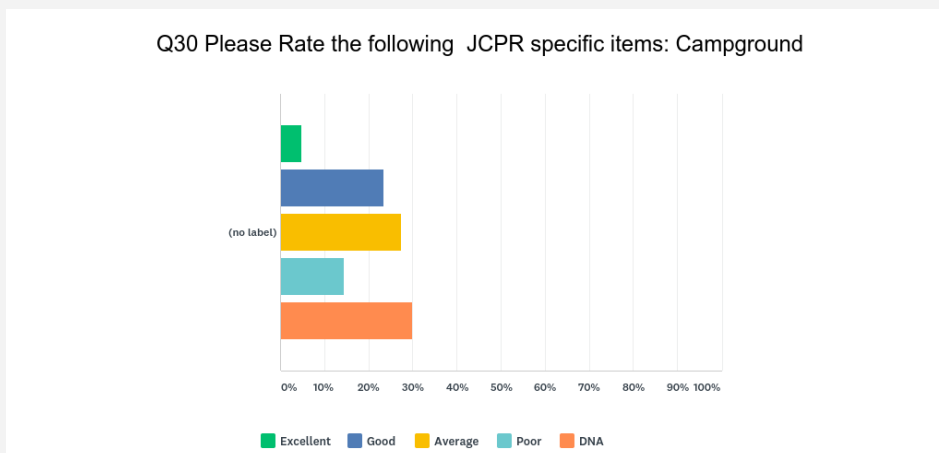
Question #29: Trails.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Trails

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total
1	16.26%	47.15%	30.08%	2.44%	4.07%	5 123

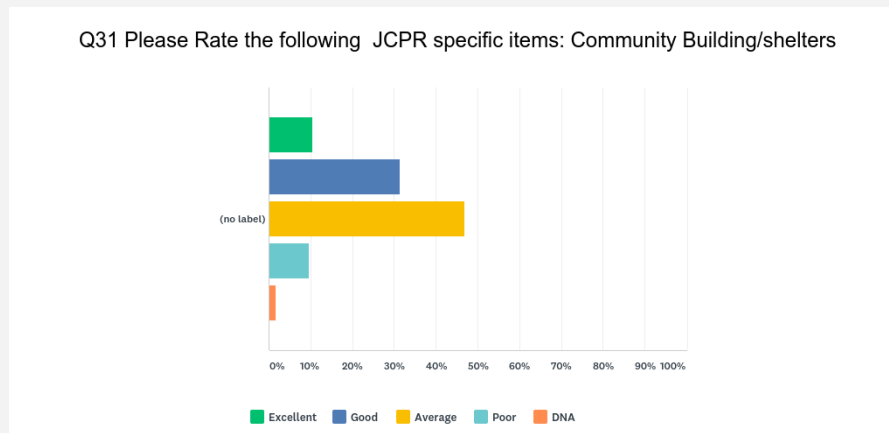
Question #30: Campground.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Campground

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total
1	14.84%	23.39%	27.42%	14.52%	29.84%	37 124

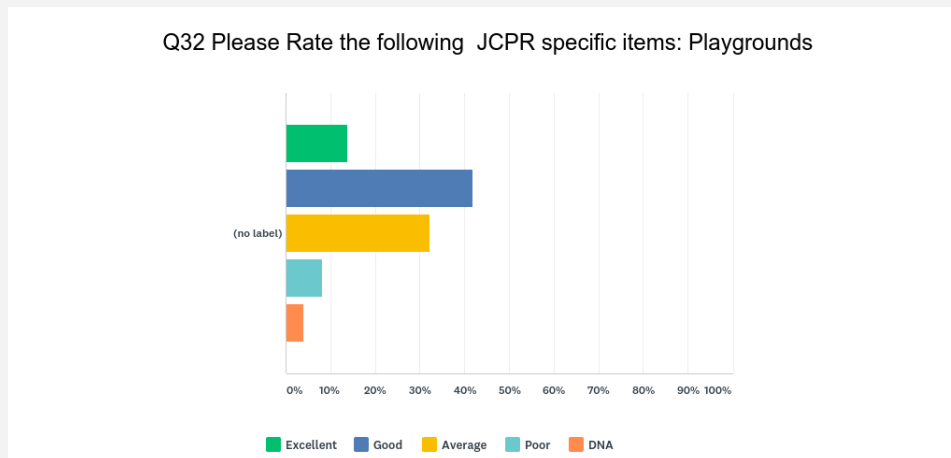
Question #31: Community Building/Shelters.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Community Building/shelters

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total
1	10.48 %	31.45 %	46.77 %	9.68 %	1.61 %	2 124

Question #32 Playgrounds.



Please Rate the following JCPR specific items: Playgrounds

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	DNA	Total
1	13.7 %	41.9 %	32.2 %	8.06 %	4.03 %	5 124



Section Seven:

Issues Identification



Issues Inventory

Needs Analysis

Our needs analysis will be found in the next section. Prior to that we wish to document issues that have been identified by the Park staff, the Park Board, our surveys, and recent studies from our community. This section will try to identify the issues, document elements of the issues, and possible solutions and potential conflicts or hardships in resolving the issues. This section will be the preliminary ground work for the needs analysis. The following section will prioritize the issues and try to place improvement in the context of time.

Issue Analysis will be our primary means to clarify which needs are priorities and also how they can be dealt with in this planning cycle.

We will also look at general standards for specific park elements. Certain design standards that are not meet will be identified.

Level of Service Standards (LOS) will be looked at in a general manner. Since both parks under the jurisdiction of JCPR are being managed as low intensity “District Parks” with significant historical elements as well as large natural resource areas, level of service standards do not directly apply.

We do note here that the Muscatatuck Park does have significant elements of the “Community Park” classification. This element does not appear to have a short term solution and is so excepted that its negative elements are not perceived by many. As North Vernon Parks and Recreation grows and starts to develop other parks, negatives will be controlled further.

North Vernon Parks and Recreation should probably develop their own LOS standards. It does not appear that this is the case in the recent Master Plan. NVPR is currently working on their new five year plan.

The State of Indiana did create LOS Standards for the County, Township, and Municipal level (SCORP 2016-2020). This standard states that each county should have 20 acres of recreational land per 1000 individuals distributed amongst these three county management levels (plus like private areas). With that in mind, Jennings County has a population of 27,611. Applying this standard yields a goal of 552 acres for the Jennings County community. According to the State Jennings County has 694 areas. This figure includes the Calli State Nature preserve we assume, which is owned locally by the JCCF. Jennings has improved over the past decade or so with both the County (127), the City (110), and private (179) owners adding additional recreational land.

The park and recreational Model is another way to look at overall land and determine if recreational elements are diversified and conform with proximity standards.

As stated in the “Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines” manual, “a community should not use a neighborhood park for activities that are intended to be accommodated for in an athletic complex. Granted a neighborhood park may have to be used at a higher than desirable level until appropriate facilities can be built. But this type of use should not be considered acceptable on a long term basis.” This should apply to all classifications. Quality is diminished when one property tries to accommodate more than one classification.

Other aspects of the Model, like proximity, uninterrupted non-residential roads and other physical barriers need to be considered as well.

North Vernon does not have any neighborhood parks. There is one mini-park which is a block Park, and also a smaller classification “pocket park”. The mini-park is close to the neighborhood classification in size and amenities, but since its northern border is a US highway and the eastern section is commercial, its functionality as a neighborhood park is minimal. The main facility in North Vernon is basically a sport complex, but also is used as the city only “Community Park. Tripton, new in 2019, is a nice “Community Park.”

System Wide

Comprehensive Plans:

This section will overview our communities recent Comprehensive studies. Both Jennings County (2012) and North Vernon (2009) Master Plans have expired. North Vernon Parks and Recreation last comprehensive plan (2014-2018), has expired also, yet they are currently working on an upgrade. The survey for the NVPR new master plan has been studied as well as the preliminary recommendations. Although both City and County recreation departments have different missions, there is significant congruence in the studies. Trails are overlapping priorities. The need for soccer fields and an increased staffing for NVPR are noted.

Jennings County’s Comprehensive plan was completed by SDG, Strategic Development Group, Inc. and HWC Engineering. The plan was approved and adopted by the Jennings County Economic Development Commission, the Jennings County Area Plan, the Jennings County Board of Commissioners, North Vernon City Council, as well as Vernon, Town Council. One of the main points stressed throughout the document is the need for adoption and enforcement of stricter design standards applying to various types of development. The document does a very good job of explaining the benefits of adoption and ramifications of non-adoption. It explained also the need for significant “political will” to adopt the higher level standards verses medium level standards.

Jennings County Comprehensive Plan

Relative to recreation the following points were made:

“Green space and multi-use trails contribute to a community’s quality of life, which in turn benefits its economy. More can be done to enhance the county’s natural features.” (page 11, and 56)

“Abundance of managed lands can be a county resource and should be viewed as a potential economic development resource for the local economy. The community should study opportunities to take advantage of these properties.” (page 12 and 113)

“The unique position of the county between two national wildlife refuges, availability of other managed lands for wildlife activities, and proximity to the I-65 corridor uniquely positions {the} county to take advantage of this type of tourism revenue.” (page 12 and 113)

“Initiate a countywide branding campaign to promote Jennings County as a regional destination.” (page 12)

“Provide a county-wide park and recreational master plan, and marketing plan with North Vernon, IDNR, and USFWS to provide a cohesive campaign to highlight natural resource areas.” (page 13, 113, and 140)

“Vernon’s historic character need to be protected.” (page 43)

“The town must do everything in it’s power to protect its assets.” (page 43)

“One of the most unique aspects of Vernon is the historic character of the community.” (page 43)

“There are also a number of important historic sites within Vernon, such as the railroad bridge and the ‘Commons’ which can be showcased for tourism and recreational purposes.” (page 45)

“Vernon does have a trails plan which provides multi-use connectivity to North Vernon and other important Jennings County locations. They have begun trail construction but progress has been limited to date due to the need for additional funding.” (page 45)

“Vernon would like to seek funding opportunities in the future to help with the implementation of its trail master plan.” (page 45)

“The Town of Vernon’s historic buildings and its potential for development as a tourism site must be protected and promoted.” (page 56)

“Improve signage and gateways to improve access to downtowns and historic destinations such as Vernon.” (page 83)

“Protect and promote the county’s identity as a good place to live, work, and play.” (page 83)

“Once North Vernon Stellar projects are completed, initiate a countywide branding campaign to promote Jennings County as a regional destination.” (page 84 and 139)

“There is a potential in Jennings County to capitalize on its significant inventory and quality of managed lands as an additional source of economic development. Providing wildlife related services and amenities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, and biking the county can begin to take advantage of the unique resources available.” (page 104, 111, and 116)

“The potential economic impact to this industry is often overlooked by rural communities but the numbers are staggering.” (page 111)

“The Trails Master Plan presents a comprehensive vision for connecting key Jennings County assets and cultural resources via the development of extensive trail and sidewalk improvements.” (page 111)

“To complete future planning for Jennings County some additional research is needed. These studies are described below: Parks Master Plan: This plan takes a long term look at the outdoor recreational needs of a community.” (page 136)

The study also itemized natural resources, nature preserves, Vernon’s historic elements, as well as the Muscatatuck Park as priorities for protecting, as determined by the steering committee (Appendix 3)

Within the survey for this document 40% of the respondents rated bicycle and pedestrian trails as a serious problem with 32% listing them as a moderate problem.

A slight majority (52%) of respondents listed the amount of green space as not a problem. A larger percentage (60%) listed the need for additional green space as not a problem. 76 % of respondents listed the need for walking and biking trails as a moderate or serious problem.

Response rates to this survey were relatively low compared to the population. (response count = 25)

JCPR specifically looked at this county plan in formulation of their past Master Plan and commitment to the Next Level Trails project. Numerous times Vernon, and the Vernon Commons are noted in the Counties Master Plan, as well as trails and historic preservation.



North Vernon Comprehensive Master Plan

This plan was created by members of the Economic Growth Team, which is a combination of two members of SDG, Strategic Development Group (Scott Burgins and Erin Shane) and two members of HWC Engineering (Cory Whitesell and Lisa Dunaway). These are the two groups that created the Jennings County Comprehensive plan.

North Vernon Comprehensive Plan

Relative to recreation the following points were made:

“Encourage outdoor sitting areas, benches, plantings, and clear, delineated walkways to and from parking areas to provide a welcoming and pleasant atmosphere for pedestrians.”

“Seek and acquire land for new parks, trails, and other recreational facilities (such as a YMCA) when possible, to increase the quality of life amenities desired by existing residents and as a tool to attract new residents.” (page 16 and 23)

“Government facilities, well equipped emergency services, schools, parks and recreation facilities are the basic building blocks of any community. These institutions define the quality of life in most communities by offering public access to education, relaxation and community involvement. It is no wonder that cities and towns are commonly judged and ranked by their school and recreational offerings.” (page 39)

Primary concerns included:

Developing alternative transportation corridors, or secondary thoroughfares, for bicycles and pedestrians with connectivity to the city parks, the county park, civic institutions and other recreational opportunities.” (page 43)

“The city needs a series of bike trails that connect the county park, forest, fish and game areas.” (page 43)

“The city needs a YMCA for the community, especially for youth.” (page 43)

“The city should turn abandoned railways into multi-use trails.” (page 43)

“The city should acquire more land for parks and recreational to expand the current system. New parks should be geographically dispersed to serve the entire community.” (page 43)

“The city is approaching the time to update their master parks plan.” “At a minimum, developing an alternative transportation plan and strategically planning for acquisition of new park land should be priorities for the new master park plan.” (page 43)

Major issues: Commercial Sector They are:

“Branding downtown, creating an image that is easy to communicate and recognize by tourists.” (page 53)

“Launch a branding campaign to create North Vernon as a regional destination.” (page 53)

A large section was created (page81-82) over viewing the need for a alternative transportation plan.

Open space was defined and the report states, “Public open space is also of great value to the community for social, cultural, and economic reasons.” “Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people.” (page 87)

“The public has expressed interest in having additional parks in North Vernon. However, pressure to develop areas for commercial and residential areas often takes precedence over the desire for more public space. A balance should be struck between the need for new development and additional open space” (page87)

“Open spaces are best located in areas easily accessible by foot or bicycle to the largest number of locals. Open spaces can be as simple as a lawn where people can play Frisbee or walk their dog or as elaborate as the city park, and beyond. A variety of open spaces are beneficial to the community, giving residents and visitors many choices.” “As new residential and commercial neighborhoods are developed, open space should be incorporated.” (page87-88)

“Long term land use changes could include a conversion of the existing railroad into a multi-use trail, providing a recreation amenity for the entire public. Such an asset would provide an excellent outlet for residents in the community in addition to bringing users from other parts of town.” (page 105)

The recent upgrades of the “Muscatatuck Trail”, downtown “Stellar Park”, and the soon to be complete Tripton Park, are all supported by this plan and are successful implementations of the Master Plan initiative. This is North Vernon’s first real step at a comprehensive recreational system. They deserve to be complemented on their initiatives.



North Vernon Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Master Plan was prepared by ARA, Administrative Resource Association. The new plan is being done by HWC. Preliminary recommendations will be supplied in the appendix.

The public input process for the last plan stated that the public did not support adding additional facilities. The five year action plan, though, itemized two facilities “To Be Developed” in 2015, a soccer complex and a dog park. The rationale for this was not found, but possible reasons are:

- The city Master Plan does itemize the need for additional park land.
- The city had not developed a new facility in 65 years.
- The public survey noted multiple references to conflicts associated with overlapping use, specifically the hosting of soccer games within the baseball fields.
- The youth soccer league does not have a “home” and this activity has been bouncing back and forth to three different facilities over the past decade.

The North Vernon Parks and Recreation Master Plan did itemize the need for linear parks/greenways as part of a larger alternative transportation plan.

Current upgrades at the city pool and in the development of Tripton Park were not well established in the older NVPR Master Plan, yet generally supported in the cities.

Maintenance issues predominate after the above items.

North Vernon Parks and Recreation

Historically North Vernon Parks and Recreation had primarily managed the North Vernon City Park. The mini-park is managed actively also. Tripton Park is considered a nice yet much needed upgrade. Tripton is designed as a “Community” park.

Neighborhood parks are not represented by North Vernon Parks and Recreation.

The city park is vandalized more than its fair share. Maintenance of the facility is deemed a priority by many. The facility has seen upgrades throughout the past twenty years. It is maintained well, by most standards, yet the impact of heavy use can be seen throughout the facility.

The city park is itemized as a neighborhood park in the NVPR master plan. This is inconsistent with its use. The main usage at this facility is youth baseball and softball. In the words of the director, Chad Speer, “this facility is a sports complex”. In reality, the fa-

cility is “designed” as a sports complex, yet has dual usage as a community park. By most standards the facility is over developed. The park was expected to supply all of the recreational needs of the city. Inclusion of the Tripton Park will hopefully spread use out somewhat.

Aesthetics of the city park are compromised by over development. We point this out for functional, community, and tourism related reasons.

Tripton Park

Tripton park is a nice and well over due addition to the community. Its classification is a “community park”. Good sized at 55 acres, the trails offer a nice biking/walking experience without a congested urban feel. A biker will notice the similarities to a pump track, although this is much larger.

The playgrounds and shelters are contemporary and aesthetically pleasing. The outdoor theater is very nice. Perhaps a tree (evergreen) planting to block the large factory is merited and somewhat initiated.

Only a few issues are seen by this author. Parking is the biggest one. There is minimal parking and the main parking is shared with a restaurant. It is a bit hard to envision a function at the amphitheater being service well currently. Talking to the main developer his thought mirrored mine in that perhaps this would create motivation to remove a large unsightly abandoned (brownfield?) factory between the facility and downtown. We would hope.

Proximity issues relative to the pond and playground have already emerged. Structural material of fishing dock would be an issue at most facilities.

Trails Plan

Vernon, North Vernon, and Jennings County all worked together to create a Trail Master Plan, and they have recently revised this plan. Monthly meetings throughout 2019 have led to multiple ideas on trail improvements.

The creation of the Muscatatuck Trail has seen wide ranging approval. This paved pathway has rave reviews, and is used extensively.

There are four to five other upgrades that the group is working on in the short term. Additional opportunities also exist in regional connections north to Columbus and south to Madison.

Public input through our survey supports this project overwhelmingly as does the North Vernon Master Plan and state and national trends.

It is assumed that subsequent phases for the project will be easier to create after the initial phase is created, used, and understood better by the community.

Plans for this project can be found in our Appendix.

Tourism

The history of Jennings County Tourism can be viewed as very inconsistent and often unprofessional. The decades of misuse and lack of consistency are head scratching.

Although the County's (and City's) Master Plan communicate the need for a strong tourism department it appears that oversight of this group is near non-existent.

Formulation of a new tourism ordinance has been completed (late 2019) by the County Commissioners. The fact that the original ordinance cannot be located sums up the history of this groups endeavors.

JCPR has recognized some much needed improvements from this group. Consistency again becomes an issue.

Specifically the board for this group needs to be staffed with groups or individuals who represent tourism related business.

As noted in the City's and County Master Plans a "Branding" initiative needs to be completed. After this initial step, following products like web pages, and brochures should drive this "Brand" consistently.

Participation in the INDOT Tourism Oriented Directional Sign Program (TODS) should be studied and implemented, potentially subsidizing local attractions participation.

Creating a presence in the Indiana State Visitor Guide is merited. Dropping promotion on this platform creates a void of interest for our community within the largest and most accessible platform available for Indiana tourist sites.

"There is a potential in Jennings County to capitalize on its significant inventory and quality of managed lands as an additional source of economic development. The potential economic impact of this industry is often overlooked by rural communities, but the numbers are staggering."

Jennings County Comprehensive Master Plan

"Initiate a countywide branding campaign to promote Jennings County as a regional destination."

Jennings County Comprehensive Master Plan



"There are also a number of important historic sites within Vernon, such as the railroad bridge and the 'Commons' which can be showcased for tourism and recreational purposes."

Jennings County Comprehensive Master Plan

Overlooks

Jennings County has a varying topography that lends itself to many scenic overlooks. The Vinegar Mill area in the Muscatatuck Park and the trail that parallels the river are very picturesque.

There are many areas in the county that have equal or greater potential to highlight this feature. This is a specific developmental asset for tourism and local use. Two main areas are within a park related format:

- Rock Rest Falls in Calli State Nature Preserve
- Vernon Gym and Park land.

Rock Rest Falls is located less than 100 feet from county road 50 E. There is already a pull off for this area, but it is not maintained, advertised, nor are there any supporting elements.

The overlook at the Vernon Gym Park is exceptional. The Vernon section of the Trail Master Plan was deemed our best option for the Next level Trails Grant after communicating with the grant coordinators. This overlook was added to the grant. The area below the overlook is also an area that should be acquired and granted access to. A continuation of the trail past the proposed Water Street trail head past one property owner gives access to an amazing natural feature. The limestone here protrudes out over the river and is nearly ADA compatible flat for nearly a quarter mile.



Overlook at Muscatatuck Park

A proposed overlook along State Highway 3 & 7 heading south into Vernon could be added by tree removal. This area is above an existing trail that is proposed to be acquired to complete the river trail connecting Muscatatuck Park to Vernon along the river. This overlook would help slow traffic by highlighting the river while driving, creating an atmosphere of unique tourism quality.



Overlook at Rock Rest Falls within Calli SNP

Climbing

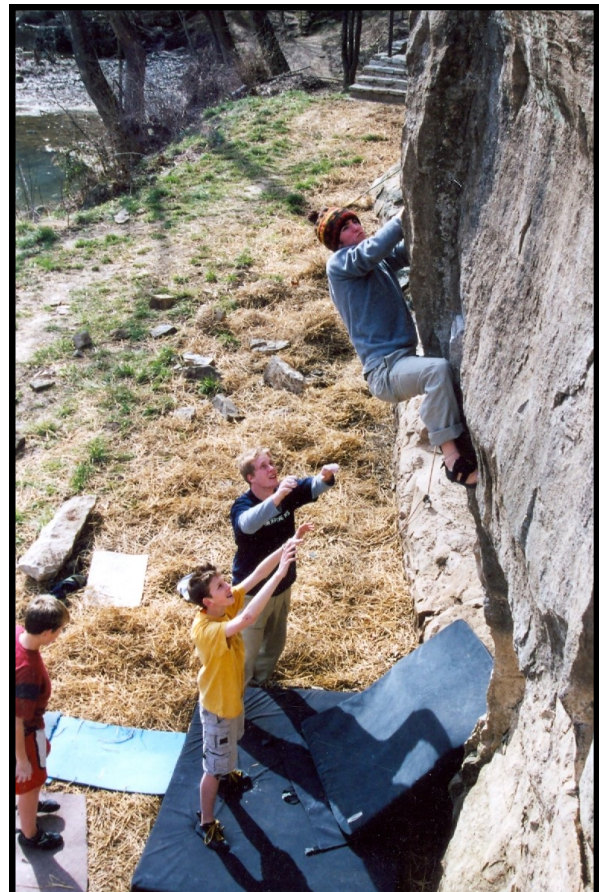
Climbing is a growing sport/activity throughout the country. Indoor gyms are possibly the second largest developmental trend in recreation in our country, next to the linear park/greenway.

Most gyms are considered training for outdoor climbers, although they are an end in themselves, specially for youth.

Indiana does not have much rock that lends itself to quality climbing. Muscatatuck Park is one of the only places in the state that advertises this activity. The State of Indiana prohibits this activity on their property. Red River Gorge in Kentucky has exploded into one of the best climbing areas in the world. With this explosion, local demand has increased significantly.

Jennings County will never compete with this area (RRG), but increased development of areas around Jennings could yield a significant and unique tourist and recreational asset.

Climbing in Jennings is primarily bouldering which is the least expensive and technical form of climbing, enabling just about anyone to get involved with minimal costs. Five main areas that could possibly have access acquired (by various methods) will be highlighted in the needs section.



Bouldering at Muscatatuck Park

Climbers Coalition

The author has been approached by regional climbers to create a Indiana Climbers Coalition. The model for this group is the Red River Gorge Climbers Coalition. Purpose of the group would be to secure access to additional climbing areas. Interested individuals are studying this currently.

Youth Center/Indoor Recreational Facility

There has been a significant movement in Jennings to create an indoor facility that is open to the public. The main vision of this type of a facility would follow the model of a YMCA or a Girls/Boys Club.

For roughly 15 years (1997 to 2012) Jennings County Family YMCA, INC. worked supplying programs in the community. They were physically set on a couple different locations, each having general fitness club associated amenities. There was an ongoing capital improvement drive to create a facility of their own. For various reasons the YMCA folded in 2012.

An earlier incarnation of the YMCA existed from 1980 to 1988. There are little details of this organization.

The Jennings County Youth Foundation was created in 2010. This group is currently working on their own capital improvement drive, specifically targeting the creation of a Boys & Girls Club

It does appear from the JCPR survey, as well as the older NVPR survey, that there is good support for this initiative. The financial requirement for this endeavor is substantial though and may prove to be an issue. Survey analysis points to general support, yet not as committing to financial. The past year (2018 last year documented) was a banner year for fund raising.

This group did make a proposal for partnering with the County Commissioners to apply for a Community Development Block Grant, through the "Facilities Program." The program is geared towards this objective. Competition for this grant is high and award will not complete the proposed Club, yet likely should be studied.

The author notes that in presentation of this proposal to the Commissioners this group stated that they would not need there funds initially (10% match). They stated that they would get the grant and then follow through with a fund raiser to secure match. The Public Facilities Program specifically states that: "A local match of 10% will be required for consideration of funding." Assuming there web site is correct, this group should have this match already.

One County Commissioner has taken up the project, yet is more interested in a local facility, but not necessarily in conjunction with national organization. This was discussed somewhat in the JCCF leader seminar.

Perhaps the best means to have a youth center work in the short run and then evolve into a newer facility would be to either partner with Vernon to gain access to the Vernon gymnasium, or an even better opportunity exists with the National Guard Armory adjacent to the City Park.

A proposal for NVPR to partner with the National Guard was on the table, yet has not materialized.

Most likely, a partnership with NVPR and JCYF could give this initiative stability, continuity, and longevity.

Specialty Parks

There is always a latent demand voiced by individuals for various "specialty" type activities. Often this demand is smaller or the activity hard to accommodate in a traditional park and recreation setting. Often, trends also change. For example, climbing would have been considered a specialty activity 20 years, yet is currently nearing mainstream status. We have heard demand for these types of activities.

- Horse back riding
- ATV and off road parks
- Zip-line parks
- Frisbee golf

Trending Changes

Related to the above issue is the changing trends of various activities. We note that horse shoe pits do not get used often, though they have always been present. A similar activity seems to have taken its place, cornhole. Other newer activities like Pickle ball and bocce ball have become popular. We note here that North Vernon has added these two activities as well as frisbee golf.

Women are increasing their participation in outdoor recreation. Technology in the form of gaming and esports is increasing. Muscatatuck Park is a "Pok-e-man Go" hotspot. Drones are a newer activity increasing.

Most recreation trends would be considered positive, one example are increased demand and supply of multiple types of yoga. Another is increased recycling by properties/departments, though this trend adds a large load to already stretched resources. Increased use of opioids in parks would be a negative trend.

Climate Change

Time for debate on this topic is over, yet significant opposition still exists to incorporating meaningful change.

Effects on parks due to climate change will range from longer growing season, increased likelihood of both flooding and drought, More severe storms and general increased volatility.

Although it is difficult for the average human to detect changes that are spread out over a length of time, local property managers and contractors have witnessed increased volume of rain over short periods. Warmer summers will definitely affect the type and amount of outdoor recreation.

Ultimately this issue is beyond the scope of any one department, but preparing for what we can mitigate will be necessary. Drought resistant trees, irrigation systems, increased use of shade, etc are a few.

North Vernon has been exemplary in Solar Energy utilization. Future upgrades for JCPR should follow this lead.

Covered Bridge Park

There is a parcel of land that is adjacent to the Geneva Township Fire Department and the newly refurbished Scipio covered bridge. Jennings received a subgrantee grant from Historic Preservation to remodel this historic bridge (1936). They also bypassed the bridge with a new bridge, just north. Although this seems redundant, it will ultimately protect the bridge and insure its longevity. The parcel of land could be used for benches and potentially shade. Interpretive information could be added as well.

If the bridge is important enough to preserve it is likely important enough to have amenities that would increase the utility and appreciation of the area.



Hill Crest Property

“Hill Crest” west property is owned by the county. We will study this property and gauge its potential for recreation. It appears to be unsuitable for development due to varying topography and a small stream. It appears to be a nice wooded section that could potentially host a small trail, or urban sanctuary. We note that a city sidewalk ends as the property begins

Township Parks

JCPR is reaching out to Jennings County Township trustees and is asking them on what they perceive as possible township recreational facilities. Geneva has the most developed facilities outside of Center and Vernon central hub.

It is likely beyond JCPR budget to invest significant dollars into any township, yet assistance in the form of grant writing and consultation could be supplied. Itemization of potential recreational developments may lead to increased prioritization and may uncover some otherwise unnoticed opportunity.

Glass Dump?

JCPR has tried for over 20 years to get the flow of dangerous shards of glass from entering the facility from a private landowner via the canyon creek. Ultimately the glass flows into the Muscatatuck River, yet dangerously stock piles in the area which also is the main attraction to the facility and a place noted for families to be wading in the river.

IDEM actually got involved 10 years ago, but their solution was to place a sign at the glass dump site, as the property owner had stated that individuals digging in this area were causing the erosion. Clearly this was an excuse and the erosion is caused by the surface water from a city storm drain.

JCPR will semi-annually clean glass from the creek bed. 130 gallons were removed in 2018 by a volunteer group. This is an aesthetic and potential negligence issue.



Vandalism

Vandalism had been a large issue for JCPR for quite some time. JCPR properties are too large to conveniently video or security personnel monitor.

A bit over five years ago JCPR instituted evening hours. This helped the issue considerably. Increased patrols by local law enforcement helped out significantly also.

100th Birthday!

On May 17th 1921, Governor McCray dedicated the property now know as the Muscatatuck Park, as Indiana's Fourth State Park. The park was gifted to the state. Many changes have happened over the decades and today the Park is an Indiana gem!



Dining room in the William Read Home, known at the time as the Muscatatuck Inn.

CCC/WPA workers creating one of the many upgrades in this era, approximately 1936.



Early days of the Park and Inn.

1962 Governor's picnic at Muscatatuck State Park.



Jennings County's finest!

Special/Critical Areas

Sand Creek School/Park Partnership

The idea of a partnership between North Vernon Parks and Recreation Department and the Jennings County School Department was first proposed by Jennings County Parks and Recreation during their last master plan cycle. The city council was addressed and the pro's and con's of this type of partnership were discussed. At this time the City Council suggested that both the City and the County Director's should make a proposal to the School Board. JCPR did not follow through with this as they do not host or administer the youth soccer league. Their proposal was theoretical and given as an example of a possible solution to the future needs of this group and the community.

JCPR did eventually consult with a Board member for the school corporation and this individual did propose this to the School Board. The County Director has discussed this concept multiple times with the City Director. Chad Speer, the city Director has stated that we has talked this subject over with the physical director for the school corporation, John Howard. Mr. Howards recent replacement, Amber Fields has been approached and seemed receptive to the idea.

Nearly every respondent to the JCPR survey was in favor of this proposal. The concept was published in the local newspaper. The concept may be getting some traction.

The local youth soccer league has bounced back and forth between three facilities over the past 10 years. Finding a home for this league seems justified. Currently the league plays in the baseball diamonds of the City Park. Earlier the league had played at the Muscatatuck Park. Although this was considered a nice area for soccer, it was over crowding that facility to the point that congestion was a very dangerous scenario. It also did not match the passive recreational goals for the facility.

Soccer played at the Sand Creek school area in an existing soccer complex. Scheduling conflicts and then the transfer of the league administration to the NVPR, after the folding of the local YMCA, lead to the league being hosted at the City Park.

Soccer being played at the city park has resulted in conflicts with the baseball/softball/t-ball leagues. The conflicts are primarily in the spring and rainy weather (cancelled games) has compromised the youth soccer leagues activities, as well as baseball leagues.

Noted above, Sand Creek School has an associated soccer complex. This is the home for high school soccer with a lighted main field and a few practice fields in the vicinity. To the west of this school is an unused field that is owned by the school corporation. The proposal is to use this area, basically just enlarging the soccer complex. Cost for this upgrade could be as low as simply mowing the area. Eventually, drainage and sod quality could be improved, yet it is not necessary in the short run.

JCPR has studied a like facility in Columbus Indiana and consider this a perfect model for Jennings. The properties are near mirror images of each other. NVPR had itemized \$100,000 to develop a soccer complex. As noted in the Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, The School/Park concept is an important development and classification within the industry. Cash strapped communities all across the country have adopted this type of partnership to the benefit of the tax payers, recreational providers, and participants.

The following two pages compare Sand Creek School to Blackwell Park/Parkside School in Columbus, Indiana.

“By combining the resources of the two public agencies, the School-Park classification allows for expanding the recreational, social, and educational opportunities available to the community in an efficient and cost effective manner.”

Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines

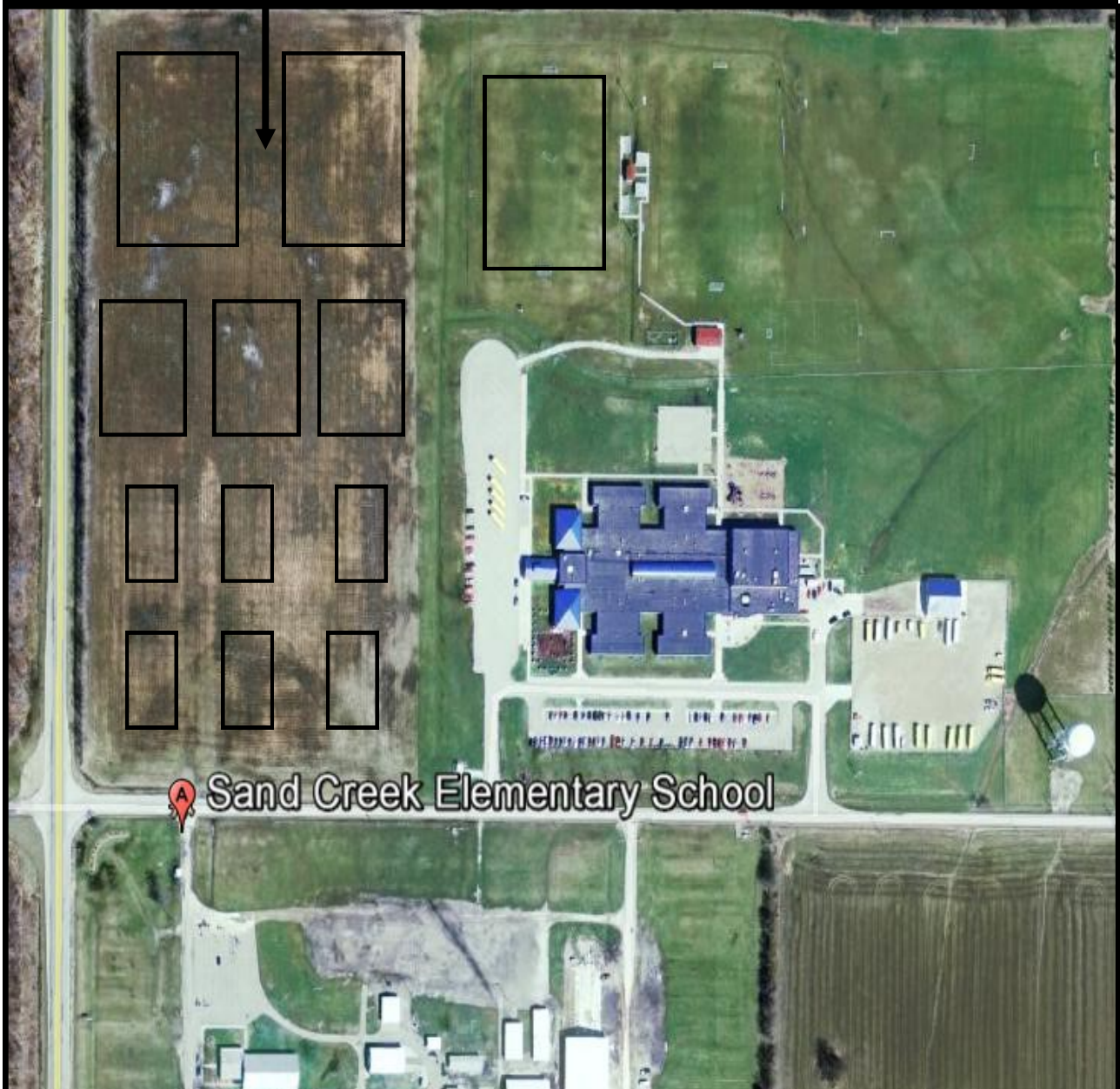
Sand Creek Elementary School

Jennings County, Indiana

Existing Soccer Complex (top right)
shown next to proposed low maintenance additions.

Various field sizes shown as example only.

Undeveloped Field (s)



Blackwell Elementary School

Columbus, Indiana

**Low Maintenance Soccer Complex,
built in conjunction with the elementary school and
the High School fields.**



Special/Critical Areas

Tunnel Mill, Crosley State Fish and Wildlife Area

From The Jennings County Interim Report, Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory, published 1989.

“One of the earliest mills built in the Vernon area was the Tunnel Mill built by Ebenezer Baldwin in 1824. Considered to be an extraordinary feat for that time, a tunnel was excavated through solid rock from the north to the southside of the creek. A dam was constructed to channel the river waters through the 15 feet-wide tunnel and power the large turbine wheel. Later the mill was powered by steam.

Baldwin constructed a road on the ridge of the creek and built a large log dwelling where farmers would wait for their grain to be milled. Patronized by the residents of the community, the mill enjoyed a profitable operation. When the railroad was built through Vernon, the owners expanded their business into a prosperous shipping trade.

For many years the mill prospered and its products were well known throughout southern Indiana. Eventually Tunnel Mill was abandoned as it was unable to compete with mills who employed new and better processes. The elements as well as progress took their toll on Tunnel Mill and in the flood of 1897 much of the stone mill was destroyed. Only a stone wall, a tall brick chimney and the tunnel (40007) remain to mark the site of one of the most remarkable industrial structures of pioneer days.”



“Only a stone wall, a tall brick chimney and the tunnel (40007) remain to mark the site of one of the most remarkable industrial structures of pioneer days.”

Tunnel Mill and our Trail Master Plan

The community-wide trail project has Tunnel Mill as one of its main objectives of connectivity. In 2012, Jennings County Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a \$ 52,000 grant from the Lowe’s Charitable Foundation. This grant was supposed to go towards funding for the Gum Street section of the trail project. Shortly after the award the Gum Street section was added into the Stellar Grant. This funding, roughly \$ 200,000 was then used as a match for an INDOT grant. The project total being nearly 1.2 million.

The grant was reconstructed and funds (\$5,000) were set aside to connect to Tunnel Mill, in Crosley SFWA. There is one property owner between the Muscatatuck Park and Crosley SFWA. An easement to connect the two had already been secured. Some of the grant was used to build trail bridges, and the trail was developed. JCPR had communicated with the Assistant Director of Crosley, Steve Mund. Steve was in favor of the connection trail which was to be a hand cleared single width trail that closely paralleled the county road that connected to a gravel lane that leads to the parking area for the Mill. Tunnel Mill is a short (0.3 miles) on level ground from there.

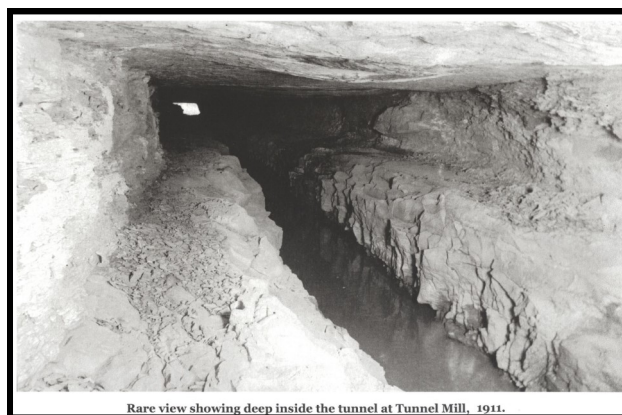
Steve approved our plans, but noted that he should probably check with his supervisor. Steve was technically the assistant director, but the acting Director for about two years at this time. He was not allowed to be promoted due to a State hiring freeze. His supervisor overruled the project, noting that the State FWA could not promote trails.

Due to historical and cultural significance of this site as well as its natural beauty, JCPR and many community leaders feel that this area needs to have access granted to the public in a more proactive fashion. Tunnel Mill is on the northern border of the SFWA. The Tunnel and a north linear section of the ridge down into the flood plain (approximately 10 to 30 acres of the 4,228) is needed to connect to Muscatatuck Park in one direction and Vernon, and the historic Vernon “Commons”, (Indiana’s first public playground, set aside in 1815 within the original plat of Vernon), in the other direction.

JCPR approached Crosley management again in 2019 when the Next Level Trails Grant was first released. The local Trails committee had considered this for the first phase of this grant. The new director was addressed and he checked with his supervisor and the results were the same.

Frustration for lack of progress led JCPR to discuss this with the County Council. Apparently this struck a chord as the President of the council reached out to local representatives, Chip Perfect, Jim Lucas. They appear interested, have asked for a proposal package, and are possibly going to introduce this to the Indiana assembly in 2020

We hope that this plan will assist JCPR and Jennings to eventually secure access to this historic area, for the betterment of all Indiana residents.



Special/Critical Areas

Vernon Commons

Vernon Commons is considered to be the oldest public park in Indiana. Although some cross referencing may need to be done to clarify this statement as absolute, this is quite likely true. You are invited to visit: www.vernonindian.org/commons.php.

Vernon Commons was set aside in 1815 in the original plat of the Town of Vernon. The entire town is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, primarily for its early pioneer architecture. JCPR helped the small town in 2009 by writing the grant application for a State Historical Marker, placed on the courthouse lawn.

The Commons, and Vernon in general, are a main element of desired connectivity relative to our Trails Master Plan. The historic triangle of Vernon and the Commons (1815) to Tunnel Mill (1824) then to Vinegar Mill (1840) is a potential tourist and recreational asset especially significant and unique. To not develop this trail and promote it in a more proactive manner is a disservice to the local community as well as the state.



The Commons is one of the more popular access sites to the Muscatatuck River. The “Friends of the Muscatatuck River” maintain this access and this is the starting location for their annual canoe race. JCPR has partnered with Vernon to plant trees in this location (also throughout the town) and also has supplied picnic tables.

The last cycles JCPR survey supported this partnership. In our last plan we stated that we would hope to be able to assist this facility increasingly in the future. The County’s Master Plan echoed these ideals. Connecting to the trail system was considered a priority and can be done in a couple directions. This information is provided in our appendix.



After JCPR and the Trails Committee approached Crosley and our proposal to them was not adopted we moved onto our other options, now focusing on phase two of the Next Levels Trail Grant. Two options seemed merited, but after consulting with the Next Level Trail Grant coordinators (Phone conference and then actual meeting) they steered us towards the southern or Vernon option. Overview of the grant proposal is supplied in appendix. Our proposal joins the Town of Vernon to the Muscatatuck Park via a natural trail along a significant cliff line. From the Water Street easement heading south a trail head parking area is proposed. Through the historic town we then join up to the Vernon Commons and also the Vernon Gym. Highlights of the proposal are paved trail elements, natural trail elements, public restrooms, a new shelter, a public overlook, and interpretive information to assist the Town of Vernon in marketing their significant.

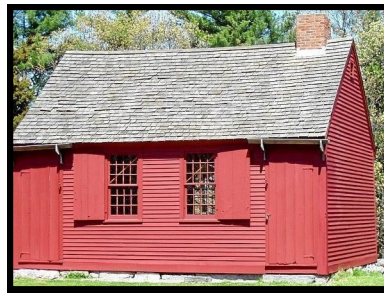
Special/Critical Areas

Next Level Trails



View along trail looking east towards Vernon

Proposed public restroom (we note: only one in town)



Proposed shelter at Vernon Commons

River overlook at Vernon Gym



Special/Critical Areas

Rock Rest Falls and Calli

Rock Rest Falls is one of the most picturesque natural elements in Jennings County. Rock Rest Falls is in the southernmost section of the Calli State Nature Preserve, which is owned by the JCCF. A linear parking lot along county road 75 east has been here for at least 30 years. The nature preserve was formed around the turn of the century. There are two homesteads that break the property up somewhat separating the southern section from the main northern section. A small track of steep banked hill joins the two areas. JCPR had inquired about connecting the two sections via a natural trail. JCCF Board members were also approached about a land swap that would join the homesteads, which are separated by a slender parcel owned by the foundation.

JCPR was then contacted and a potential trail connecting the Falls to the main trail section was studied. The foundation Board members were in favor of this and even approved a proposal for the trail along with enhanced parking, an observation deck overlook, benches, and interpretive information. JCPR and the Next Level Trails Committee were going to propose this along with the Tunnel Mill proposal. Subsequent communication with a city representative (also on trail committee) who had talked to the original donor, Doctor Louise Calli, JR. about connecting the new Tripton Park to the preserve had noted possible restrictive covenants in the transfer of the property.

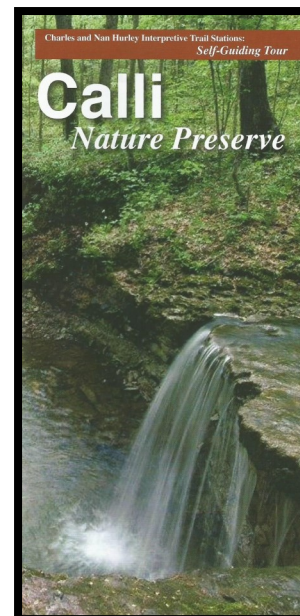
Prior to that JCPR had approval to erect a sign (Foundation was to finance) to help locate this area for visitors, as well as locals. The Director was unaware of that this was in conflict with the deed. The sign was never placed as JCPR was waiting to have the Muscatatuck Trail sign erected as to emulate the same design.

Two covenants were in conflict. One stated that there could be no trail within 200 feet of the Falls, and that the preserve could only have one parking lot. Both of these items were contradicted from day one. Parking has “always” been in the southern section and a shorter trail also exists. JCPR had planned to contact Dr. Calli and communicate their concerns and hopes, yet after studying the “Property Master Plan” which worked as the contract between JCCF Board and the IDNR.

JCPR also notes that they promote the Preserve as well as the Falls often on Facebook (most liked picture in 2016 150 likes), and to visitors to the office. Often people are following a Indiana Waterfall Guide and are asking for directions. The falls were featured on the cover and in article in Outdoor Indiana in 2005. In 2018, the Division of Preserves put the same picture on the cover of the Preserve’s brochure. JCPR is in conflict sending visitors and promoting this feature as it directly leads to a breach of the restrictive contractual covenants. The falls are highlighted in waterfall sites including: <https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-amazing-waterfalls-in-indiana/>

As the area is directly off the road the place is often used as a dump. JCPR had voluntarily cleaned this area a couple times a year over the decade or so. JCPR believes that an upgraded product here would deter this negative behavior.

JCPR also believes that the covenants are not attached to the deed, yet to the contractual agreement and therefore there is a possibility JCCF could rework this agreement with the IDNR. It appears from following hand written notes, that the original donor suggested the restricted of access.



Special/Critical Areas

Trails Master Plan

JCPR, NVPR, and the Town of Vernon, came together in 2007 to create a Trails Master Plan. JCPR incorporates this plan into their Master Plan as do the other entities. In 2019 the Trails Committee met at least once a month to look at and produce a proposal for the Next Level Trails Grant. The group discussed multiple possibilities of connectivity and additional trail. The success of the Muscatatuck Trail was significant and starting with this pathway it made sense to connect as many elements as possible.

Central Section:

Connectivity to Tripton Park and the “City” Park from the Muscatatuck Trail were two items not in the original Master Plan. Use of existing roads would be needed here, but the possibility of creating one way streets to accommodate this is currently being considered. Increased and improved sidewalks were added to the State Street corridor. This is great for walkers, yet not so great for bicycles.

A shorter section from the City Park to the County Library is also being considered and carries importance for these two elements as well as providing access to pedestrian traffic to the Walmart in town.

Southern Section:

The southern section includes the previously discussed Town of Vernon, Muscatatuck Park, Crosley SFWA, and Calli State Nature Preserve. This area had always been the focus of JCPR as it incorporates their main property.

A regional connection to Madison via the Madison Railroad has been pondered. Currently only one business uses this line with any frequency. This was Indiana’s first section of railroad via the historic Incline. Madison has developed the southern most section of this potential longer trail.

Northern Section:

The Northern Section of the Madison Railway has been abandoned for some time. The trail section was itemized in the original Trail Master Plan, yet JCPR had not studied in depth. In late 2018/early 2019 JCPR and the Wellness Coordinator scouted out the line. The line is in superb shape. For most of the length the tracks are still present. Only one area of erosion was significant. JCPR became quite impressed with this section and is firm believer that the trail section would be significantly more important to the community than the Muscatatuck Trail. From the northern section of town, from an already existing parking lot, the rail line heads north. The newly created bypass has an overpass of a smaller creek. Access under the bridge is sufficiently wide to accommodate a paved trail. Continuing north the line ends (yet continues on after road) on County Road 275 W. From here a small section of road leads to State highway #7. Although not a perfect intersection, a short distance north is the main intersection to Country Squire lakes, (CSL) the second largest population area in Jennings with approximately 3500 individuals.

This area does not have a great reputation and is itemized as a critical area for the county. That being the case, connecting North Vernon to CSL via a paved trail would do great things for this underserved population in regards to alternative transportation as well as general recreation. We note that the city owns approximately 60% of the line already.



Special/Critical Areas

Obesity

We have known for awhile now that we are in an Obesity Epidemic. Last cycle we reported that roughly 35% of Indiana residents were overweight and 30% were obese in 2009. In Jennings County adult obesity spiked in 2012 and 2013, saw a small decrease in 2014, and popped back up to 33% in 2015. Indiana registered the same percentage for adult obesity 33%. That is 4 percent higher than the national average. Indiana has made improvements over the last few years compared to the nation. Indiana is currently ranked 39th compared to 41 (past four years). Jennings ranked 71 in the state in this category.

Indiana ranks 13th worst in the nation relative to childhood obesity at 16.6%. Curbing childhood obesity is considered extremely important. There are numerous negative results from childhood obesity, and the problem is increasing. The CDC notes: “obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled for adolescence over the last 30 years. They also note that over one-third of youth have a weight problem.

It well understood that unhealthy eating habits along with physical inactivity are the two main causes of obesity. Socio - economic factors and age also are related. Jennings County does register higher rates of inactivity 32% in 2015, compared to the state (25%) and nation (22%). Indiana is also ranked the 9th worst compared to the nation.

A new study just out (based on a 2012 report, by Trust for America’s Health and the Robert Wood Foundation) noted that by 2030 half of national population will be obese, and over 25 percent will be “severely obese” (current stat is 18%). Although this study is alarming it ruins counter-intuitive to most studies which show some stabilization in adults.

Wellness

Jennings County ranks 89 of 92 in the general category of “Health Outcomes” .Jennings ranks 90 of 92 in length of life. As stated by the our regional Community Wellness Coordinator, Jeff Walker, “The ranking is used often in conversation about public health, but the really important information are the components of the ranking which show things like physical inactivity rates, doctors per capita, diabetes prevalence, water quality violations, premature death, etc.”

We know the problems, so what about the solutions. The above mentioned Wellness Coordinator has created a Wellness task Force. “Joining Jennings for Healthy Lifestyles” was formally named in mid 2019 and formed the group late 2018. Monthly meetings throughout the year have been reasonably attended.

The group assisted the Coordinator in completing his “CHANGE” Tool community analyzation. The group has also identified five main elements of direction. They are currently focusing on:

- Web based central hub of wellness information
- Tree planting
- Adult fitness equipment
- Trails and alternative transportation
- SNAP and/or nutrition oriented objectives



Special/Critical Areas

Country Squire Lakes

Country Squire Lakes (CSL) is Jennings County's second largest community, with approximately 3,500 residents. CSL was a private development managed by Elite Property management Services of Indiana. Jennings County had acquired 950 tax delinquent properties at the end of our last planning cycle. The property is currently in receivership. Jennings has also worked out an agreement to take over the roads of this community. Trash, vandalism and general disrepair are still prevalent, although the area is improving.

The recreational amenities in the community have been in disrepair, as well. The pool has been abandoned, apparently filled in and now a unmanaged overgrown area. The playgrounds have been improved.

Update after review.

We note that roads in this area are not wide and pedestrian travel is not very safe. We also note that the Trails Committee is very optimistic with the potential northern trail section. This area would provide a much needed alternative transportation pathway connecting the two largest population centers of the county together.



“Country Squire Lake’s problems are Jennings County’s problems.”

Jennings County Comprehensive Plan



“ Safety concerns in this area prohibit adequate recreation.”

“No need it would be abused and destroyed.”

“ Changes may be futile until that area is cleaned up as a whole”

As to what is needed: “Everything!! Pools, Basketball courts, playgrounds, sidewalks.”



JCPR survey 2015

Strategic Development in Regards to Departmentally Organization and Facility Development

Joint Departments:

Twice the currently author has proposed joining the county and municipal departments. The issue was brought up again outside of a JCPR initiative. Although this seems very unlikely the pros and cons should always be considered. In 1997 there was support for looking into this from the city council, yet the city took another direction. Likely this proposal was the impetus for the first director for the municipal department. The second proposal was from this author and the second director for the municipal department. Both individuals were working together to study this possibility. Specifically, the then Mayor took offence to the proposal and this was curtailed. Current author has dropped the idea.

Municipal Organizational Development:

With the creation of the Muscatatuck Trail, North Vernon took on the largest new recreational development it has had in approximately 65 years. The Trail is very nice and well maintained. Oddly it is not directly under the umbrella of the Park's Department. It is maintained primarily by the city street department, with the Trail Head parking lot being managed in partnership with the county and the above mentioned street department. On the surface this may not seem like a large issue, yet some issues do arise.

Two other areas of development are related to this, so we will introduce those and then bring in the analysis of the larger picture.

The municipal golf course is a nice facility. Management of this property is also not under the umbrella of the City Parks Department. An additional recreational board was created to oversee a municipal golf Director. Again, at first glance this does not seem that egregious (and is likely not), yet like our above mentioned scenery issues arise and should be analyzed.

Tripton Park has recently been developed. By all standards it is a great upgrade. This facility is under the umbrella of the municipal park's department. Creation of the facility was done primarily by a city appointed project manager and Board member. He did a very professional job. It is assumed that he did work hand in hand with the municipal director. In 2019 the issue was discussed as how to mow the facility? Three options exist: parks department, street department, private sub contract. Apparently the street department will be mowing both the Muscatatuck Trail as well as the new Tripton park

The City Park Director is also the pool director. Quite likely this is a sufficient load for the individual and the above management scenarios have unfolded in conjunction with these constraints.

Conversely though, "economies of scale" may not be being maximized in relation to the Municipal Parks Departments development. With the above noted scenario the parks department has not added significant additional staff. If responsibility for the maintenance was delegated within the recreational department then the department would need to grow. There are various ways to share responsibilities and likely significant modifications would need to be considered and enacted, yet a stronger recreational department can be formidable force.

Strong departments with central administration guarantee professional outcomes in the form of oversight, industry knowledge, specialization, and often stream lined communication.

Additional staff to the Municipal Department would widen and deepen the department itself. As a historically small department, this opportunity was huge. A larger Department could better prepare the organization for future upgrades and additional facilities.

In successful communities the parks departments are a well respected central organizations. Increasing the community presence by enlarging the department responsibilities increases the importance of the organization to the community. Parceling out potential responsibilities can do the opposite.

A larger work force in the department can also assist in larger project completion, and often needed time related tasks. A more robust crew can get jobs done faster, and then move onto the next possibility.

If Jennings is to curtail the tide of the rural exodus the municipal recreational department will need to be a an increasingly proactive and progressive entity. That has started, and they are commended, yet all means to grow the department should be considered in depth.

HWC came to the same conclusions to a degree in their preliminary recommendations. They noted the need for increases in staffing for maintenance, programing and aquatics.

County Organizational Development

Both county facilities are low volume natural resource centric regional/district parks. Camping is not a traditional community park amenity. The likelihood of the county being the main recreational provider is not realistic considering current trends and local recreational support. Both county facilities have nearly been sold and/or transferred to different management. This does not seem to be merited from a 52 year old department.

That issue seems to have subsided, yet hard economical times can bring short sided results. JCPR has improved significantly with a small increases in county funds.

If camping is to open at the Eco Lake Facility, JCPR feels as if the will need at a minimum one additional field employee and likely some additional office staffing. As noted in our municipal discussion, this supports a stronger department which would be better prepared to tackle additional and larger projects.

Creative Financing and Community Responsibility

JCPR commends the municipality for taking the long needed steps to upgrade recreational amenities in our community. Bond issue of approximately 6.5 million dollars was a substantial step in the right direction, yet also one with complicating conditions. This bond is being paid by 6,500 city residents and businesses. (half via the municipal TIF Board). The county residents (as well as those in Vernon) will reap benefits, yet will not be finically responsible.

Clearly the county is a stakeholder also in the future stability of the community population. Increased recreational amenities will be needed increasingly in the future. JCPR feels that an increased commitment to the department is merited both through the general budget and definitely in capital improvement allocations, likely via bond issue.

Specifically the County government had a bond issue in the last planning cycle. Proposals from all departments were requested and studied. Of course there are many far ranging needs for the county and this bond did assist the county in improving many departments and ultimately the tax payers community. JCPR proposed 200,000 to assist in development of the Eco Lake Park campgrounds (phases A, B, C, & E).

This was supported by many county council members, but reportedly not by the commissioners, thusly it was not granted and the upgrade sits idle.

JCPR is a firm believer that the county has responsibility to assist in the progressive development of recreational amenities now and more in the future.

We propose the county do bond issue for a minimum of four initiatives (County TIF should also be involved and perhaps work with the city TIF?):

- Eco Lake Park Campground
- Partnering element of Northern Trail section (library to CLS)
- Muscatatuck Park Shelter upgrades (including MARP)
- Muscatatuck Park parking area and road upgrades

Like the progressive commitment from the city, the upgrade would be deemed substantial. As the county commitment has never been substantial, a one time upgrade would be considered merited by many. If this were to happen, then JCPR would secure additional income and ultimately become a more self sufficient department. Getting over that hill could be a game changer.

JCPR's commitment to the Next Level Trails initiative was not a small commitment. It could be argued that that money should be going towards the above proposed initiatives. Taking advantage of grant opportunities takes commitment and carries risks. Creative and progressive actions will be needed above status quo to change the tide of the rural exodus.

The above mentioned proposal along with the City's four large recreational upgrades combined with a Town Of Vernon Next Level Trail grant, then transfer of Tunnel Mill, would transform a sub-par recreational community into a "model" rural recreational community. Add significant and professional tourism related marketing bringing together our local, state, and national amenities then perhaps a level of sustainability would formulate?

Site Planning JCPR Properties

Muscatatuck Park

Dining Hall/Community Center

This facility is a rented out nearly every weekend often both Saturday and Sundays (85 rentals average last 10 years). Annual maintenance often includes touch up painting, tape removal, etc. Upgrades have been itemized and repairs and modifications to the older section of this building are becoming a priority. Upgrades consist of:

- ADA issues
- New tables and chairs
- Decorations could help
- Mirrors in bathrooms
- Landscaping
- New Furnace/air conditioning

Ertel industry is working on a second year of fundraising dedicated to JCPR. Approximately 4000 is expected and they hope to assist in air conditioning.

Campground

As this is the biggest income for the departments non-reverting funds continued upgrades have followed over the years. The campground is considered nice by most. Issues itemized:

- Need for 50 amp service
- Re-epoxy bathhouse walls
- Tree planting
- Fire rings
- Wi-fi

Without specifically identifying which electric boxes would need to be upgraded, the department should be prepared to replace a couple of these pedestals annually. In 2019 two pedestals were replaced and another has just recently been damaged and will be replaced in 2020.

Quail Barn

The large barn in the center of the facility is in need of exterior repairs. It has been discussed to remodel this structure into an open shelter. The location of the barn relative to two other shelters does not lend itself well to renting of this building as an open shelter. Removing a few support poles was discussed and even adding basketball goals has been proposed.

After the demolition of the building at the parks main entrance storage can only be facilitated in the Barn. If the MARP was to evolve to fruition, this building would likely not be needed.

If JCPR was not focusing on system-wide trails and historical promotion, this project would gain priority

Maintenance Area Relocation Project (MARP)

The first phases of this initiative were incorporated in the past two planning cycles starting on 2004;

- Fence removal.
- Demolition of south barn
- Demolition of open bay storage area (moved there in 1997).
- Remodel of old office to open shelter
- Asphalt removal in front of north barn adding sod and landscaping
- Increased parking lot
- Increased fill to new maintenance location
- Window covering on north Barn
- Cleaning of maintenance yard

After the above items were taken care of it was noted that this was a significant improvement to the facility and having the maintenance area in the middle of the park was not nearly as intrusive as before.

Moving the maintenance to the Gum Street location is still deemed important, but may not be a priority. Likely this would take precedence after Eco lake campground development.

Playground Area (s)

The main playground area was the center of JCPR attention over the last cycle. The main playground is complete and the splash pad area and shade area will be complete early in 2020.

JCPR will be landscaping the area also. Likely at a later date modification of the pump house to incorporate color and/or art seems justified to make the building less generic.

Adult fitness

There is a proposed walking track around the playground complex that incorporates a series of adult fitness stations. The concept is open to additional stations being added in subsequent phase. Likely this would have larger precedence if JCPR was not as committed to the NLT trail initiative. Regardless it appears that it could be realized in a 50/50 matching scenario. The Wellness Team, JJHL, is working on a fundraiser to start this process. Concept is supplied along with general concept plans near end of this document

Basketball court/volleyball

JCPR jokingly acknowledges that they have the worst basketball court in southern Indiana. The court is a single goal square, not rectangle, therefore a 3 point shot from in front of the goal would be in the grass from the baseline. The park has sufficient space in the central playground area for this type of upgrade, along with improved swings and other upgrades.

Bathrooms

An anonymous donor gifted the creation of a substantial bathroom facility to be added in conjunction with the splash pad/playground area. Construction started in 2019 and completion is itemized for spring 2020. JCPR agreed to pay for water and sewer connections as well as concrete flatwork to and from. Gift was approximately 125,000. JCPR portion 30,000.

Shelters

Muscatatuck Park shelters were all created in roughly the same general time frame. We note that maintenance issues are becoming apparent. Assuming future needs, design of the shelters should be considered. Shelters currently are generic pole barn structures. No shelter floor was constructed with control joints so vertical improvements are not on a solid foundation.

Parking Lots

High on the “Wish List”, yet low in probability is the concept of paving the two larger parking lots at the Muscatatuck and smaller shelter lots. We note below road needs. If the lots could be paved this would decrease herbicide use and other maintenance (grading). The aesthetic change would be huge.

Road

The Muscatatuck Park main road was paved 1998, 22 years ago. Engineers estimate life expectancy to be 20 to 25 years. Significant spidering is being witnessed over its length (1 mile approximately). This is the main park road which is a county road registered with the state for assistance funds. The same road has issues along the historical retaining wall (1936) along the canyon rim. Re-stabilization was performed last cycle, yet directly adjacent and nearby the issue is prevalent.

Horseshoe Area

JCPR did upgrades to this area after the local horse club essentially disbanded. The improved area is not an aesthetic liability as before, yet seems to have little or no participation. A modification to corn-hole would not be that difficult, yet this activity in a centralized location is not optimal, when the average user would most likely be near a shelter when participating in this activity and flat ground is sufficient.

Residence Building Demo and Front Entrance Landscaping

This building was raised in 2019. County Highway Department is to remove concrete in 2020. JCPR currently is hiding the concrete under a large flat mulch pile.

Plan here is to revert the area mostly to green space with a small welcoming flagpole plaza with a one or two panel interpretive display. Front entrance aesthetics are important.

JCPR was approached by the local pollinator group which is regionally very successful, about the creation and implementation of a final (larger) project. The concept called for a water feature in association with a pollinator plant garden. An area by the office and one-room school has been approved, yet project is currently on hold due to other commitments.



Eco Lake Park

Campground

Both JCPR and the County Council have large interest in upgrading the facility to host camping. Engineering plans were developed for the water upgrade. Currently the engineers are working on the Bathhouse/septic plans which are currently under review with the State Board of health.

Conceptual Master Plan for the Park and Campground will be supplied.

Playground

JCPR added a new playground complex in 2018, and parking area an ADA ramp/sidewalk in 2019. Upgrades will be more important if camp comes online.

Maintenance Area (and miscellaneous items)

The maintenance area is in the general area of the park entrance. Trees have been planted to hide the facility, but trees grow slow. Additional landscaping will be needed around this structure.

The road to the campground is relatively narrow as well as being gravel. Paving and widening the road will increase in priority when camping is opened.

Trails were created a few years back. Use has low and entire system needs to be revisited. JCPR has markers to install.

JCPR Operational Planning

By-Laws

JCPR created by-laws last cycle. The by-laws were essentially a re-wording of existing Indiana code. The creation was primarily a training and reference guide to assist board members on powers and duties. A few items not covered in the code were relevant.

Tourism

There does not appear to be much discussion relative to moving tourism back to the Muscatatuck Park, although the JCPR office and visitor center is the main stop for visitors. The contradiction is apparent.

Although JCPR has made some improvements in the last year, basic tasks are beyond their capability. Specifically, JCPR sat down with all board members and director five years ago to suggest simple yet important needs from them. Most were not addressed and others made worse.

Asking to correctly state the number of campsites provided at the facility should not be that hard (30 second modification to web page), yet due to belligerence, ineptitude, apathy, and lack of oversight, this simple task has not been performed. JCPR sells 50 sites, yet they advertise us as 26? One example of many.

It is probably the best option for the county to have the Jennings County Visitor Center within the Historic Park building. Likewise, it is probably most beneficial to the objectives of the tourism department to be absorbed into JCPR. Freed funds could then be applied to an Office Manager or part-time labor.

Marketing

JCPR did upgrade its website last cycle. They started the cloud based RMS in 2014. Facebook has been used strategically with decent success. Park director is not a professional photographer, yet is an avid outdoor enthusiast, and if you take enough pictures you are bound to have a few good ones. Presentation of the facilities is well received. Google is used also, yet this primarily customer driven.

JCPR plans to be on Instagram in 2020, and Twitter will likely be incorporated at some point also.

JCPR plans to participate in the State's Tourism Oriented Directional Sign (TODS) Program. They had hoped to partner with tourism to potentially split costs or be fully subsidized. Likely the department will have to pursue on its own, and limit additional marketing avenues.

The State Visitor Guide is used by JCPR, yet they are the only facility in Jennings participating. Muscatatuck Park has a campground and recreational listing. A few additional area listings are merited. To be the only representation sends messages likely not desired.

Staffing

If Eco Lake Park campground opens a few things will need to be done. An additional camp host (s) will need to be hired. Additional staff will need to be added and/or a caretaker will need to be added. On property caretakers are often less than desirable relative to productivity and responsibility.

Where the County Council wishes to get the facility up and running, creating a revenue stream, an initial investment will be needed to create a product viable to produce a return. It is not likely that the council wishes to make this investment, from the general budget, so alternative funding should be studied.

Programming (Park Events)

Historically, JCPR does not create or maintain their own programs. This was one reason JCPR made the proposal to merge with NVPR, to partner and better supply programming and other higher quality amenities to the public.

JCPR is host to many successful special events. This mode of programming is cost effective, yet often events lose continuity as volunteers fatigue and bow out.

JCPR feels as if an increased municipal programming agenda would be best for the community. JCPR properties will still want to remain mostly medium to passive in recreational intensity, but summer camps, ropes courses, and more special events would be welcome.

The National Register of Historic Places

As cash strapped as JCPR is it would likely not be advantageous to try to secure this nomination. Specifically, The William Read Home and Vinegar Mill had been on the application with the Town of Vernon in 1976. Local review suggested that these be removed, and they were. The grotesque cinder piles at the Mill area were likely the cause for exclusion.

This area is cleaned now and it seems as if the area has sufficient historical relevance to be considered. As noted above, restrictions due to classification, may be to large of a burden for the department without additional county support.

Fundraising

Last cycle JCPR raised significantly more funds than in previous years. Having playgrounds as the central focus is to thank in large part. JCPR appreciates the wide ranging and robust assistance from individuals and business alike.

The gift by the anonymous donor moved the needle to the next level. Jennings residence can be proud of their input to the JCPR facilities. JCPR is very thankful.

JCPR also has an endowment that is added to annually. We look forward to additional assistance here and the day when the return can be used for projects.

Grants

JCPR was successful last cycle with grants from the local Community Foundation, local industries, and a large vendor grant. Most of this went towards the playground initiative. Over 100,000 was granted.

Historically, JCPR has been proactive on this front, yet fairly specific in the endeavor. If the ranking criteria is not viable relative to the project it is likely a waste of time to participate. Conversely, when projects do align, JCPR should and has been proactive.

JCPR has assisted other entities in grants also (Town of Vernon, Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society). The width of assistance ranging from IDNR tree planting, IDEM water quality management, to State Historical markers.

The local Community Foundation has proved to be JCPR best friend. Multiple grants have been received over the years, and they were awarded a 10,000 grant for 2020. Lowe's foundation has given two grants in the past decade. Thanks!

JCPR has not participated in IDNR, LWCF or RTP grants. Grading criteria and timing of match security have been the two main issues.

JCPR is participating in the IDNR administered Next level Trails Grant. The Town of Vernon, The County Council, JCPR, along with the Trail Committee which has municipal representation, believe they have a very competitive grant.



JCPR does believe the Community Block Grant relative to a youth facility is a viable option for the county. Matching funds would need to be secured to be considered for this grant. Operational funding and additional capital funds would be needed above and beyond this grant to prove viable.

One the surface the Tourism Destination Grant seems viable for the campground initiative at Eco lake Park. Funding and competition are keen here and seem a long shot, yet funding format has changed over time and should likely be considered.

Grant study is and should be on going.

Climber Coalition

This issue may not be directly related to the Department, yet the author has been contacted by two separate individuals, one recently and a few years back.

JCPR is the only known entity currently promoting this activity in Indiana, and the park Director is the main promoter of the activity through time. The Director also has "discovered" additional areas and has "developed" a few of them.

The main goal of a coalition would be to bring more climbs online, and protect existing resources. There is some concern relative to the NLT trails grant in that the area termed "Strawberry Fields", which holds the best climbs near Muscatatuck Park could be threatened if the land is secured only by easement verses outright purchase.

If that was indeed the case JCPR, has potentially located private funding to secure the area as a recreational preserve to managed via JCPR and retain access. This in turn would point to purchase of the other areas and the "vehicle" of a climber coalition could be borne from this issue.

Climbing in Jennings could double, and if a coalition arises this group could take this original success and look to secure other areas throughout the state.

The Red River Gorge Climber Coalition is a model for this endeavor.

Bouldering Competition

JCPR should follow through with their second bouldering contest and likely make it an annual event.

Local APC was looking into the technicalities associated with the addition of an artificial wall that is suggested to be used to round out the boulder competition.



Long-Term Camping Policy

Twenty years ago JCPR had rules stating that no campers could stay longer than 14 days in the camp, and if the desired they would have to leave for 48 hours before they could repeat this cycle. This was modeled after IDNR policy.

JCPR relaxed this rule over time allowing a few than increased this total up to 5 sites. It is not clear if this includes the camp host or not, but we assume it does not.

Through time JCPR has seen the pros and cons of this type of arrangement. 2019 was a banner year for the department and long term campers have supplied the boost. Often the camper is a traveling contractor, and JCPR considers them their best customers.

Conversely some long term campers are individuals in transition and often the RV's do not look as good as one would hope. Longer term campers clutter their sites and other negatives arise. JCPR rules (and contracts) have been created to keep this in check and likely could be tightened. Enforcement can be an issue as subjectivity is often used to point out issues.

Homelessness

Related to the above issue is the fact that JCPR is seeing increased numbers of homeless individuals often wanting to stay longer term. The above restrictions assist in JCPR policing the camp, yet it has not been seamless. Again, tightening rules and standards might need to be looked at to assist the issue, avoiding discrimination, and negative elements that have historically arisen.

Friend Groups

JCPR does not have an official "Friends of the Muscatatuck Park (or Eco Lake Park). Often these groups can serve as volunteer bases and assist in multiple tasks.

The "Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society" is a local model, yet they focus on the river specifically.

100th Birthday

JCPR has asked the community to assist in the upcoming milestone celebration. Out of the master plan hopefully a committee can be formed to tackle this. JCPR has contacted Indiana artist Justin Vining to create some art to assist in this commemoration. Using this could assist in development of the committee.



JCPR Maintenance Planning

A detailed maintenance inventory is updated annually and is a comprehensive overview of all facilities and maintenance needs. Maintenance issues are a daily/weekly procedure of reporting, prioritizing, and correcting relative to timing and funding. A few larger to medium issues are known to be present and will need to be dealt with within this planning cycle:

- Shelter 3
- Road issue at Mill Area
- Office/Visitor Center Windows
- Visitor Center settling
- Visitor Center gutter
- Shelters
- Campground
- WGSB ceiling
- Vinegar Mill Stairway
- Mower (may need upgrade at end of cycle)

Shelter 3 reroofing has already started and is the 2020 winter focus of the Department.

Shelter two roof is rusting significantly. This issue is currently only an aesthetics issue. Replacing the roof only does not seem justifying with the poor foundational concrete below. Industrial paint may be shorter term fix?

Vinegar mill stair caase is starting to lean. This cantilevered element will need attention sooner than later.

Visor center windows are in need and the WGSB celing needs attention in 2020.

All ADA issues are being studied and consultation with the ADA coordinator will give the department some assistance on timing.

Hauling trailer is in ok shape, but as it is used more often than previous cycles a newer and more substantial one will be needed at some point.

Glass in the creek is not really a maintenance issue, it is a legal issue. JCPR usually annually cleans the area, yet a long term solution is more than justified.



Section Eight:

Needs Analysis



Need Analysis

In Section Seven we identified multiple issues that appear as priorities to Jennings County. We tried to discuss the issues in an objective manner listing pros, cons, possible solutions, and barriers to resolution. Many of the issues in the county are beyond the scope of JCPR and ultimately this study. It is our hope that issues not specifically dealt with by JCPR will continue to be discussed, debated, and then ultimately improved upon.

We will briefly revisit our main issues and where appropriate contrast with public opinion. Many of our issues have been studied in our communities other master plans. This adds importance and clarification to many of our issues. The two main comprehensive plans are very general, but outline important elements that most communities have and have dealt with.

System Wide Needs

Jennings County Parks and Recreation is a county wide department. Although, JCPR primarily manages two specific facilities, their scope and vision is county-wide. JCPR is open to assist various community needs. This can be done in partnership, technical assistance, marketing, and other methods.

Level Of Service Standards (LOS)

The states level of service standards should be strived for. The Indiana Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan gives Jennings County a concrete number to shoot for in developing recreation lands at the county level on down. Their target for Jennings is 552 (was 565 before population decline) acres of managed Park and Recreation land. When we compare this standard with our recreational model we can see what type of facilities should be developed. With the additional of the two additional municipal properties (golf course and Tripton Park), and Calli Nature Preserve Jennings exceeds the standard.

Park and Recreation Model

The general Park and Recreation Model has been used for decades. It is a general outline on what types of facilities should be developed. It is excepted nationally as a starting point of comparison and ultimately development.

One facility may have attributes of two classifications. This should be excepted only in the short run. Long term needs of a community will best be addressed by not undermining excepted standards and models.

Proximity is a very important element that should be studied in relation to our Model. Often this and other barriers will constrict usage even if demand and supply are well represented.

Jennings County Comprehensive Plan

Although the Commissioners have not updated their plan the following information is still relevant.

We pulled out most of the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism related statements in this document and re-stated them on page 73, citing multiple references in many cases. The authors repeated certain elements often. This clarifies their importance. We thank and appreciate their work. Because these authors deal with many communities throughout the state over years of effort in a very competitive environment, we must acknowledge the importance of their advice and wisdom. Their advice is sound and tested, and should be strived for in our community.

Specifically, they see Jennings County's unique assets in natural resources as an economic tool. Many local leaders see this as a means to stop development. Conversely, the comprehensive plan states, "more can be done", "the community should take advantage of these properties", we need to "initiate a county wide branding campaign to promote Jennings County as a regional destination."

Supporting Vernon is a stated priority. JCPR should continue to do this whenever possible.

The trails initiative is well supported by the plan. Tying together Jennings County's many historical and cultural elements in a user friendly trail framework will support not only the citizens, but will create a unique visitor appreciated tourism asset.



Sunrise in Jennings, MNWR

North Vernon Comprehensive Plan

Like the County Comprehensive plan, we acknowledge the importance of this study. This study was conducted in 2009, should be updated, yet is still very relevant.

We note that this plan stated, “The city should acquire more land for parks and recreation to expand the current system. New parks should be geographically dispersed to serve the entire community.” That did materialize, and the city added their first substantial park in 65 years. Geographical distribution and smaller accessible neighborhood parks would help round out the system.

This plan itemizes a low cost alternative, the Sand Creek School/Park partnership. This will be discussed more in-depth under that heading, page 101.

The trail initiative was well supported by this document. This and the Sand Creek Park, along with current upgrades to three main thoroughfares in town, and the Stellar Grant upgrades will start a much needed transformation in the community. We note the importance of the Stellar Grant, in funding the match for the INDOT grant.

As stated in our model discussion and echoed in the North Vernon Comprehensive Plan., “New parks should be geographically dispersed”. This is accomplished by smaller neighborhood parks with service radiuses one-quarter to half a mile. North Vernon Parks and Recreation does not have representative parks in this classification. These parks should be developed concurrently with new residential and commercial developments. They should also be added retroactively to provide access that is within reach of pedestrian travel.

North Vernon Parks and Recreation Master Plan

This master plan specifically itemized two facilities to be developed. One was a soccer complex and the other a dog park. The NV Department budgeted \$100,000 to be applied to the soccer complex in 2015. This amount would not be needed if the Sand Creek Park partnership was created. Initial costs could be as low as simply mowing the area. Drainage upgrades and seeding could be done at a fraction of the costs.

While some believe (45% in our survey) that new parks are not needed in the community. 84 percent of respondents (89% last survey) were in favor of a partnership to create this facility.

We note that the soccer league has moved back and forth to three different facilities. The league currently participates at two different location in the spring season. League games are held in baseball/softball fields. A new facility is needed to give this group a permanent home. The Sand Creek opportunity is a perfect fit for the activity, the community, and the tax payers.

A dog park would not be a hard item to provide.

Most dog parks are only an acre in size or less.

The land that was once set aside for the local YMCA initiative is roughly 8.5 acres and is adjacent to the undeveloped city owned “Green Way Park”. Either of these properties looks good for a dog park, but the older YMCA land looks more clear, yet does not have good access.

The school corporation also owns two parcels along middle school road, one with frontage to US 50. Retaining this as green space would be good for everyone. Partnering with the school corporation with either one of these properties makes good sense. The Early Learning Center property is another option.

The new NVPR Master Plan has just released preliminary recommendations. These will be provided in the appendix.

North Vernon Parks and Recreation

North Vernon Parks and Recreation has grown over the past 20 years, when they hired their first full time Director in 1998.

NVPR is the best means to provide programs to the community. Jennings has seen the YMCA initiative fold twice. The concept of a YMCA/youth center/ Girls and Boys clubs is a popular idea, but for whatever reason it has failed to gain financial traction. NVPR can partner with groups like the JCYF to give them stability and continuity.

We do commend the city on the acquisition and development of the Tripton Park. NVPR should round out their parks department with more parks and less overcrowding of elements. The current “city park” was a “catch all” park. It simply tried to provide everything for the department.

Neighborhood Parks are not represented by NVPR. Proximity is one of the largest factors on determining if someone will recreate or not.

The Sand Creek School/Park partnership proposal is the best means for NVPR to gain additional recreation land. The cost effectiveness of this proposal is a “win-win” scenario and the tax payers would be grateful for this type of management arrangement. Likewise, the ELC property could provide a nice neighborhood park, and/or dog park.

NVPR is significant supporter of the trail initiative. They understand the wide ranging benefits of a trail system. The first step to an alternative transportation network was the Muscatatuck Trail. This trail has had rave reviews and is used daily. Capitalizing on the northern section should be the next step for the city and would prove to be even more important than the Muscatatuck.

NVPR should follow the aesthetics standards applied to Tripton Park, to the “city” park and future upgrades. There are multiple easy steps that can be taken to create cleaner and more aesthetic parks.

Vernon, North Vernon, Muscatatuck Trail Plan

The Muscatatuck Trail was a long awaited installation of the first phase of this project. This was a perfect greenway project, and today supplies recreational access to a large number of the community.

The trails committee has looked at various connectivity projects. All of these projects are merited. The northern section, from the Library to CSL is deemed the most socially significant. This section has significant city ownership already and is in very good condition for this upgrade. Both the city and county have joint responsibility in this endeavor.

Plans for this project can be found in the Appendix.

Main areas to eventually Connect:

- Tunnel Mill
- Vernon Commons (from south)
- Vernon (west side via river trail from Musc. Park)
- Calli SNP-Rock Rest Falls
- Calli trail system (1.7 mile interpretive trail)
- NV City Park
- Public Library
- Selmier
- St. Annes
- JC Fairground
- Sand Creek Elementary
- CSL

“Many businesses state that quality of life factors including parks and recreation opportunities are a primary determinant of where they will relocate or start a new business.”

ISORP 2015

Tourism

Jennings needs this group to improve. Some improvements have occurred, yet these are small and inconsistent. Having tourism housed in the William Read Home should be the goal of the community. Specifically following through as recommended by the County Master Plan with a Branding Initiative should follow. Link in purchased “Indiana State Visitor Guide”, (pg. 106, 2019 & pg. 108, 2020) tells you everything you need to know about this group: jenningscounty.net.

Overlooks

Three overlooks mentioned in the issues section should be managed. Two of the overlooks would take only tree removal for significant improvement. Ultimately the Vernon gym area should have a platform/built overlook with supporting elements. This is proposed in the NLT grant.

Rock Rest Falls just needs to be cleaned and promoted in the short run. A platform and supporting elements would be a long term goal. This area could be a trail head also, connecting to the 1.7 mile existing Calli interpretive trail.

Tree removal above the Muscatatuck River, heading east from the Muscatatuck Park traveling south into Vernon would create a picturesque scenic drive. A pull off could also be created. This simple upgrade could have a dramatic impact on the aesthetics of the community. Installing a decorative guard rail in conjunction with the pull off would also be desirable. Demolition of one of the two abandoned homes on the corner town has occurred and the other should be removed as well.



Climbing

Bouldering is a growing sport. Jennings County has some of the only potential for this activity in the state. Five areas off the Muscatatuck Park have been itemized and partially developed. Securing access to these properties could make Jennings a small destination for this activity. A small portion of the Red River Gorge demand would be a great impact to Jennings. A bouldering festival should be incorporated annually.

Areas to acquire:

- “Strawberry Fields” (adjacent to Muscatatuck Park and part of trail plan)
- “Nine and Three Quarters” area (Dryden)
- “Heizteman” Wall
- “Ripple” Wall (Moran)
- “Commiskey” Wall

The on-line guide needs to be updated and expanded.

Climber Coalition

As the NLT grant initiative unfolds, it may be imperative to look into this potential for liability reasons. It appears that this growing activity will continue it's growing trend and providing access to this recreational is very important. The national organization, the "Access Fund" is a very important resource, as would be the Red River Gorge Climber coalition.

Youth Center

The concept of a Youth Center is well supported in theory but not monetarily. Private fitness clubs, churches, and schools seem to provide a relative equivalent. Access to the National Guard Armory by NVPR would be the most logical short run solution. It is understood that this might be a complicated issue and will be difficult to gain access to, but the potential is significant. Partnering with the JC Youth Foundation could yield their desired goal while giving this group stability and longevity.

Obesity

This issue needs to be attacked at multiple directions and levels. Accessible trails linking parks and schools, while increasing proximity to additional neighborhood parks would be a good first step.

Investing in trails and parks, specially NVPR, would give recreation a higher visibility. Increasing the marketing, programming, and overall image (importance) of NVPR, as well as JCPR, could have a very positive ripple effect on the productivity of our systems and ultimately local health .

Wellness

JCPR is an active participant in the newly formed Wellness Committee. This group has identified at least three elements that seem logical for the JCPR to get involved in. There was an itemized need for a central database of County Recreational opportunity. JCPR has provided funding for the web hosting services.

Adult fitness equipment has been studied and itemized in JCPR conceptual plans.

Tree planting is a goal of the group also, and JCPR will always have opportunity for this endeavor.

JCPR also assisted in a bike cycle training program at CSL.

The local running club is indirectly related to the group and they run at the Muscatatuck park and Muscatatuck Trail on a regular bases.

Likely future opportunities will arise in the future, and JCPR should be an active supporter of this group.

Sand Creek School Soccer Complex & School Park Partnership Proposal

This partnership was proposed 12 years ago, by JCPR. It appears well received, yet no motion has been generated. No other alternative has as many benefits at such a low cost. The North Vernon Master Plan itemized 5 years ago acquisition of new park land. NVPR specifically itemized \$100,00 for a soccer complex to be developed in 2015. Soccer needs a home. Conflicts with soccer and softball are being voiced. The land is owned by the tax payers and already is a soccer complex.

A formal partnership with JCSC and NVPR would open the door for other future cooperative initiatives.



***“Good parks
encourage
economic
development”***

ISORP 2015

Covered Bridge Park

The demand for this upgrade does not seem high, but the area in question would support a nice park adjoining the historic Scipio bridge. Use by the local Fire department seems likely, and with the local DSI (Developmental Services) nearby as well, this group could use it on a regular basis.

Hill Crest Park

This was just recently proposed as an area to consider. Study of the area will be done over the next month or so.

Township Parks

Only two of the eleven local townships have plans for any type of recreational management. Geneva is a well developed facility.

Paris Crossing is currently looking into stabilizing the gym and outdoor elements related to the older Paris Crossing School. JCPR did a site review and this seems a large undertaking.

Assistance in the form of grant writing is one service JCPR has noted the could assist in potentially.

Glass Dump

The County has been aware of this issue for some time, yet with private ownership as the source it is complicated. President of the Commissioners was approached in 2019, and he seemed interested in at least looking into the county doing the project for the property owner.

***“...the tunnel...
one of the most
remarkable
industrial
structures of
Pioneer”***

Jennings County Interim Report

Tunnel Mill

Tunnel Mill has significant local and State significance. If we are to take the IDNR quote at face value:

“.....the tunnel (40007) remain to mark the site of one of the most remarkable industrial structures of pioneer days.”

The area has national significance. The best case scenario would be to acquire the roughly 30 acres of land on the northern fringe of this property. This would enable JCPR to promote the area, join Vinegar Mill to Tunnel Mill then the Tunnel to Vernon and Vernon Commons.

The State Fish and Wildlife area has no mandate to promote historical elements or trails. Crosley SFWA has increased area significantly over the years (adding roughly 300 acres over the past 20 years). Transfer of this property to JCPR would not effect the properties objectives, and could alleviate some maintenance.

Local representatives have been contacted and it appears that this issue may get some floor time in the upcoming general assembly.



Vernon Commons

The “Common’s” is a significant element of the trail initiative. Being Indiana’s first public playground gives it state significance and should be promoted accordingly. It is also a local tourism asset. This is a centerpiece to our NLT grant proposal

Vernon Gym

Incorporating the trail system with this facility would be a great asset. It has a nice field open to many practices and field activities.

The overlook is an exceptional opportunity as well, and will likely be used a great deal more than people would first assume. “Build it and the will come,” rings true for many upgrades and likely this spot will see daily activity being along the trail and a perfect evening sunset viewing location.

Water Street Trail head and parking area

Beyond the NLT grant initiative, the IDNR public access grant should be applied for for this area.

Country Squire Lakes

Recreational amenities to this property are scattered around the main lake. Having playground equipment on both sides of the main lake would be ideal. Upgrades to all equipment is needed. Probably with security equipment installed concurrently.

JCPR did note that many of the cleared lots that are currently vacant could be used for smaller neighborhood parks. Even with budget restrictions these could supply open/greenspace for youth to play.

Additional development seems merited, though.

“Do NOT count public school acres unless there is a current, signed legal joint-use agreement between the local school district and the parks.”

IDNR Planning Guidelines 2016-2020

Neighborhood Parks and School Property

Schools often double for neighborhood parks. In the rural setting there are often the township community park. Although this will be used in this case, IDNR warns us that we should not consider this land the alternative to creating needed park facilities. Specifically, they note: “Do NOT count public school acres unless there is a current, signed legal joint-use agreement between the local school district and the parks.” JCSC does have an older joint-use agreement. Having the track open to the public would be nice. We generally acknowledge that the Middle School and Saint Mary’s (more so) do supply some neighborhood park like use.

Happy Birth Day Muscatatuck Park!

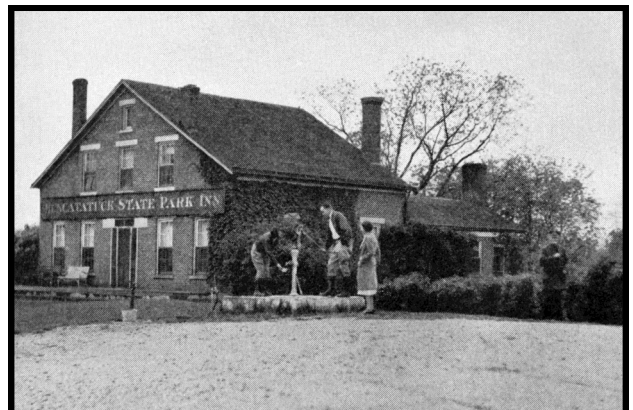
100 years as the centerpiece of Jennings County! It does seem merited that a little extra attention be given to this amazing facility!

JCPR has contacted Indiana artist Justin Vining to do a commemorative “Plein Aire” creation or two for the facility.



“A little extra attention seems merited for this occasion. Perhaps the council and community can step up for this facility which has been centrally prominent for so long?”

JCPR 2020



Site Planning

Muscatatuck Park

Community Center/Dining Hall

- Tables and chairs 2020
- Heating/air 2021

Campground

- Wi-fi should be priced
- Fire rings (five per year)

Playgrounds

- Completion 2020

Adult fitness

- JCPR really likes the concept for this upgrade, yet is spread fairly thin relative to the NLT grant. Likely after another season (towards end of 2020 season), income stream can be reevaluated for project viability. This is also grant/fundraising dependent. Likely a couple years worth of the Tame the Terrain assistance could push this on through?

Basketball court/volleyball

- Wish list

Bathrooms

- Completion 2020

Shelters

- Next cycle large focus

Parking Lots

- Wish list

Road

- Highway Department

Horse Shoe

- Remove 2022?

Front entrance Landscaping

- Complete 2020 Phase 1
- Phase 2 before B-Day 2021

Quail Barn

- Maintenance, not remodel

Trails

- Some bridge maintenance from 2019 flood

Maintenance Area Relocation Project (MARP)

After getting the Eco Lake Park campgrounds up and running and then upgrading playground amenities at both facilities, this project will likely be prioritized. Past work has cleaned up the area significantly, but relocation is still a goal.

Eco Lake Park

Campground

- Council assistance to make this a reality is needed.

Playground

- Complete wood chip distribution early 2020.
- Toddler elements could be added.

Maintenance Area

- General landscaping to replace buffer mortality, with additional level of planting to increase buffer

Trails

- Winter Project 2022, with some work 2021.



New Complex added to ELP 2018!

Operational Planning

By-Laws

Reviewing the Policy and Rules manual will need to be done periodically, but is a good overview of the Department.

Tourism

As stated in a few places in this document, the tourism issues have been long and very unproductive. JCPR would hope that tourism could be located at the Muscatatuck Park, within the William Read Home. Some collaboration would be needed.

The best means to have this work would be for JCPR to absorb the department. JCPR should be asked to counter propose the current tourism proposal.

JCPR is not pleased with Jennings County having limited marketing, specially being absent from the State Visitor Guide.

As Muscatatuck Park is very dependent on the regional marketing reach, an inefficient tourism department is a significant liability. With Eco Lake Park coming online soon, this need will only increase.

As stated in the Jennings County Comprehensive Plan, Jennings natural resources. “uniquely positions the county to take care of this type of tourism revenue”, and Jennings should, “Initiate a county-wide branding campaign to promote Jennings County as a regional destination.”

Tourism needs to upgrade their web presence as well as social media outreach.

Tourism, JCPR, as well other entities need to enact the newer Indiana Tourism orientated Directional Sign program. Specifically, Calli SNP should have signage on US 50.

Marketing

With reasonable success from other social media outlets (Facebook and Google) JCPR should branch out into Instagram and likely Twitter.

The TODS (Tourism Orientated Directional Signage Program), should be looked into and the tourism department should subsidize this upgrade at a minimum.

JCPR should continue to use the Indiana State Visitor Guide. Other county elements like the golf course and Stream Cliff seem merited as well.

Staffing

The proposal to absorb tourism, hire a part-time office staff/visitor receptionist, with the Park Director taking over the marketing budget responsibilities makes sense for Jennings. The Park Director, having worked along side the tourism department for 15 years, makes him probably the most qualified individual to fulfill these tasks.

Spending the tourism budget in a more productive manner would not be a problem for JCPR. JCPR is also more likely to foster tourism developments, many outlined in this document.

If this does not materialize than addressing the need for additional labor with a new campground will need to be done. A camp host will be incorporated, but additional duties will be created and this type of an arrangement does not equal a paid employee.

Programming

JCPR should continue to partner with local agencies to create programs. This method puts much of the labor required for events and programs outside the department. There is a delicate balance here, though. Increased weekend programming would be hard to accomplish with the current demand for shelters and community center usage, often annual reunions.

Week day programming could be increased in the summer. Groups like the JC Youth Foundation do a good job with their summer camp. Longer and more camps, incorporating more diverse elements could be implemented.

Fund raising

JCPR should continue working with Erler Industry, St. Mary's, Decatur Mold and other companies

Grants

With significant commitment to the NLT Grant , JCPR will be spread pretty thing to provide any matching funds, till the end of the cycle

Climber Coalition

During the Boulder competition marketing and if the NLT grant materializes seems to be a good time to address this issue and start the process. An access fund clean up day was created for May 2nd, yet may need to be rescheduled?

Bouldering Competition

Since the first was well received and many have spoken up for this, it appears that demand is there, therefore securing the time slot between the regional other events seems merited.

Long Term Camping

Long term camping has assisted JCPR in increasing their revenue stream. The negative elements to this scenario can be limited by increased standards for RV's and user rules. Increasing this too far should likely not be attempted, as turn around is a good thing for a family orientated campground.

Homelessness

Without creating discriminatory regulations, JCPR should strive to limit this type of customer in-so-far-as the perception is a derogatory marketing element. Limiting tent camping, increased RV model standards should be used and enforced.

Friend Group

JCPR could benefit from this becoming a bit more formal. JCPR has multiple daily/weekly users who are out keeping the parks clean. Thank You!

100 Birth Day!

Hopefully soon the Park Board will consider this item and formulate a committee to work on it. JCPR will be contracting out Justin Vining, hopefully and his work could work as a marketing piece to assist this project.

Maintenance Planning

The following issues are priorities for JCPR:

Muscatatuck Park

- **Road issue at Mill Area** (County Highway Dept.)
- **Road Paving** (same)

Office Visitor Center Windows **Office/Visitor Center Soffit** **Office/Visitor Center settling**

JCPR started replacing the windows in this historic building. This can continue on a schedule that does a few at a time or the complete job can be done. When the first windows were replaced, the Park department was responsible for the building frame wood work/painting. Looking into a preservation grant seems merited.

Shelters

The rusting roof could be painted with a brown rust protecting paint. It does not seem merited to upgrade significantly as the shelters are nearing their expectancy.

Campground

Electric Pedestal upgrades will be needed throughout the cycle, yet this can happen on an as needed basis. Fire rings should start to be replaced, likely 5 per year till they are upgraded 100%

WGSB

With a little luck JCPR may be able to find preservation orientated assistance for this structure. Using the Day of caring volunteers could assist as well

Mower

Likely a new mower should be considered at the tail end of the cycle, or beginning of next.

Quail Barn

Without going to in-depth with remodeling this structure, new board and batten can be replaced at a reasonable cost.

Trail

Flood issue, and replacement demo 2020

Vinegar Mill Stairway

South section is settling

Eco Lake Park

Maintenance Barn

Some additional plantings for this building are merited.

Trails

These trails will need to be marked and certain sections re-cleared upon opening of the campground.

Lake Water Quality

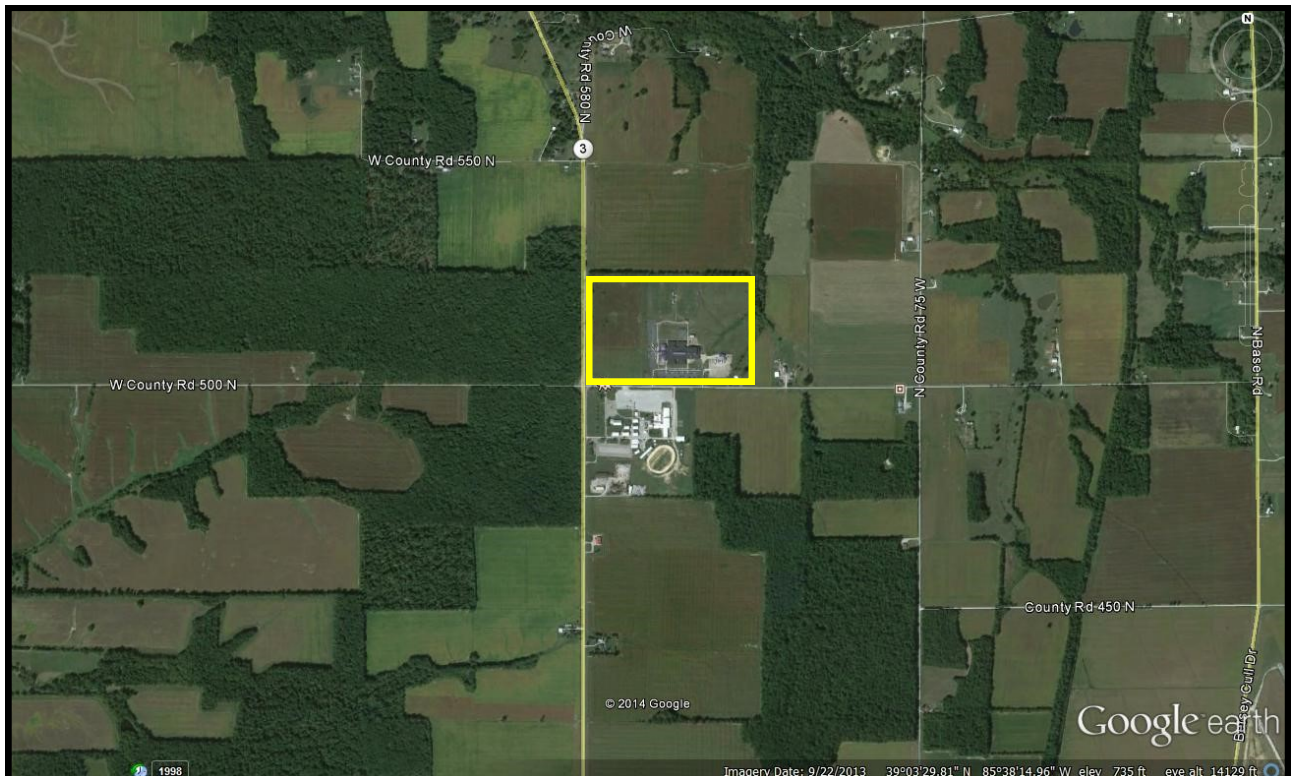
Lake Water Quality will also need to be addressed if the campground opens up. Seasonal algae and vegetation is significant.



Section Nine:

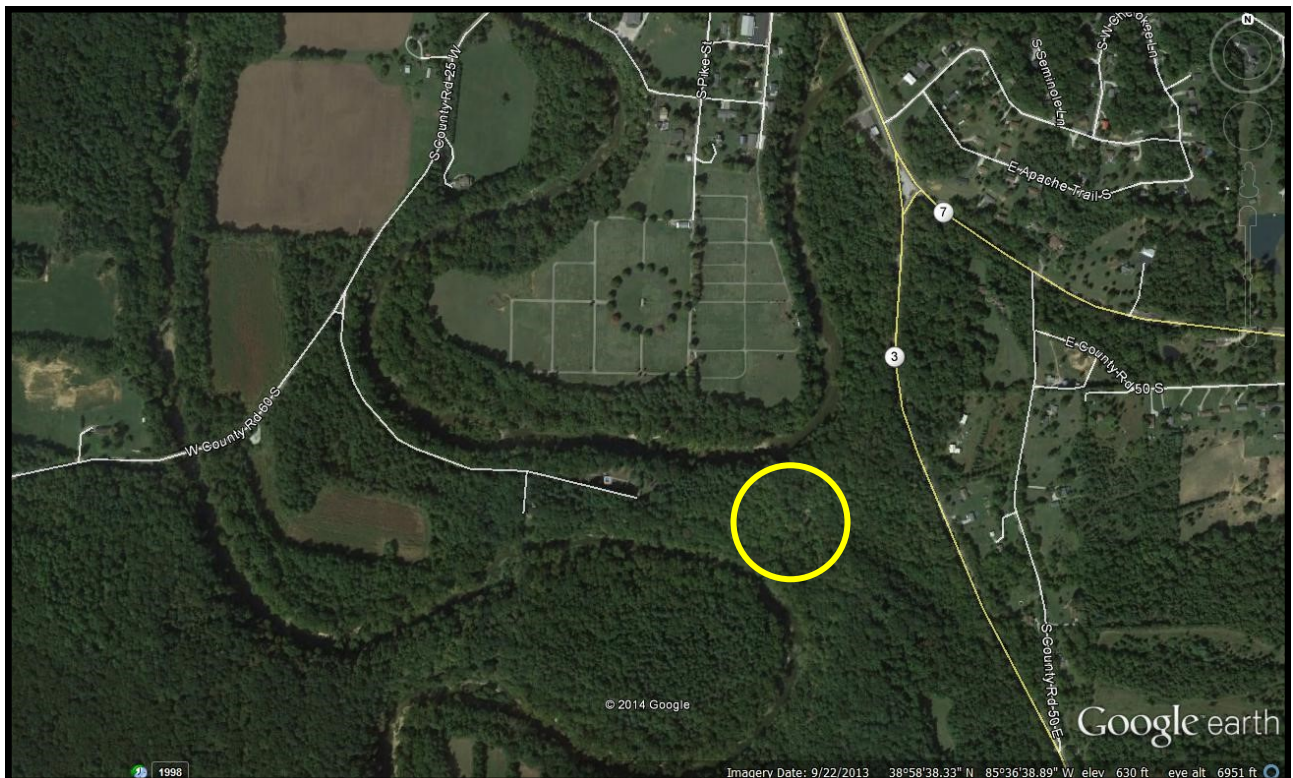
New Facilities Location Map





Sand Creek School and Soccer Complex (highlighted in yellow), accessed from County Road 500 North

Image supplied from Google Earth



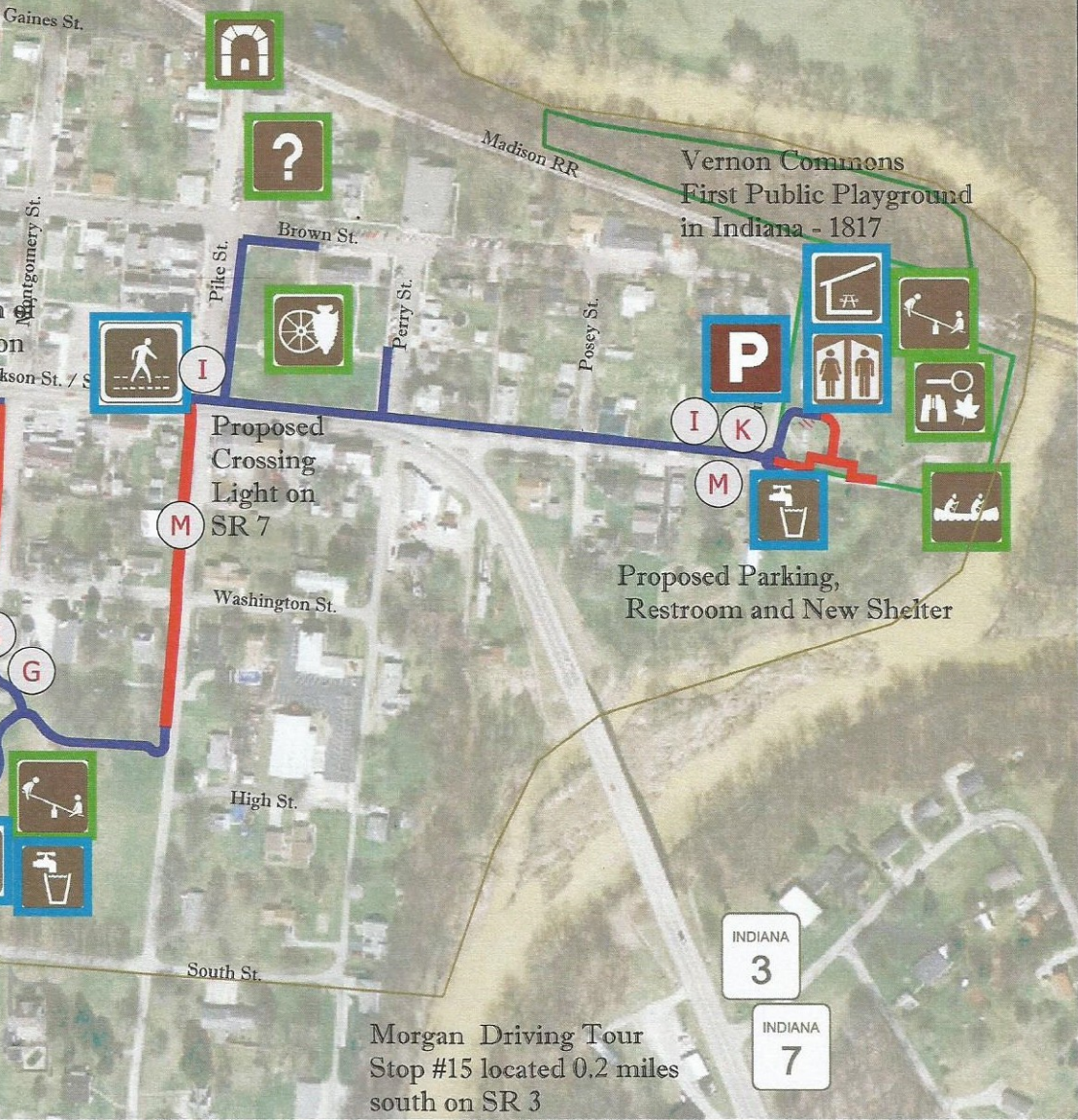
Tunnel Mill, accessed from gravel lane from West County Road 60 S

Image supplied from Google Earth



Trail Facility Index

NOTE: All ADA slopes are subject to confirmation during design and may not exactly match what is anticipated here. Quantities are estimates only and subject to modification during final design.



GENERAL NOTE:
All construction to meet or exceed all state, local, and federal codes & requirements, including but not limited to current INDOT, ISBH, IDEM, OSHA, local requirements & codes. The drawings & specs. that make up the work of this project are interrelated & dependent on every other drawing and spec. section. The contractor shall review all other specs., drawing & addendum (if applicable) to coordinate all work that relates to this project. If an item is drawn or specified on any spec. section or drawing, it shall be as if it were part of this work and shall be provided for in the contract.

FPBH, Inc.
Engineers • Surveyors • Planners • Inspectors
Offices in North Vernon, Seymour, & New Castle

72 Henry Street, PO Box 47
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P: (812) 346-2045 Toll Free: 1-866-ENG-FPBH
www.fpbhinc.com

PRELIMINARY
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

SCALE: 1"=150'
DRAWN BY: SG
CHECKED BY: DW
DATE: 9/5/2019

Revision	Drawn By	Date

FILE NO: 19-11231
CLIENT NAME:
TOWN OF VERNON

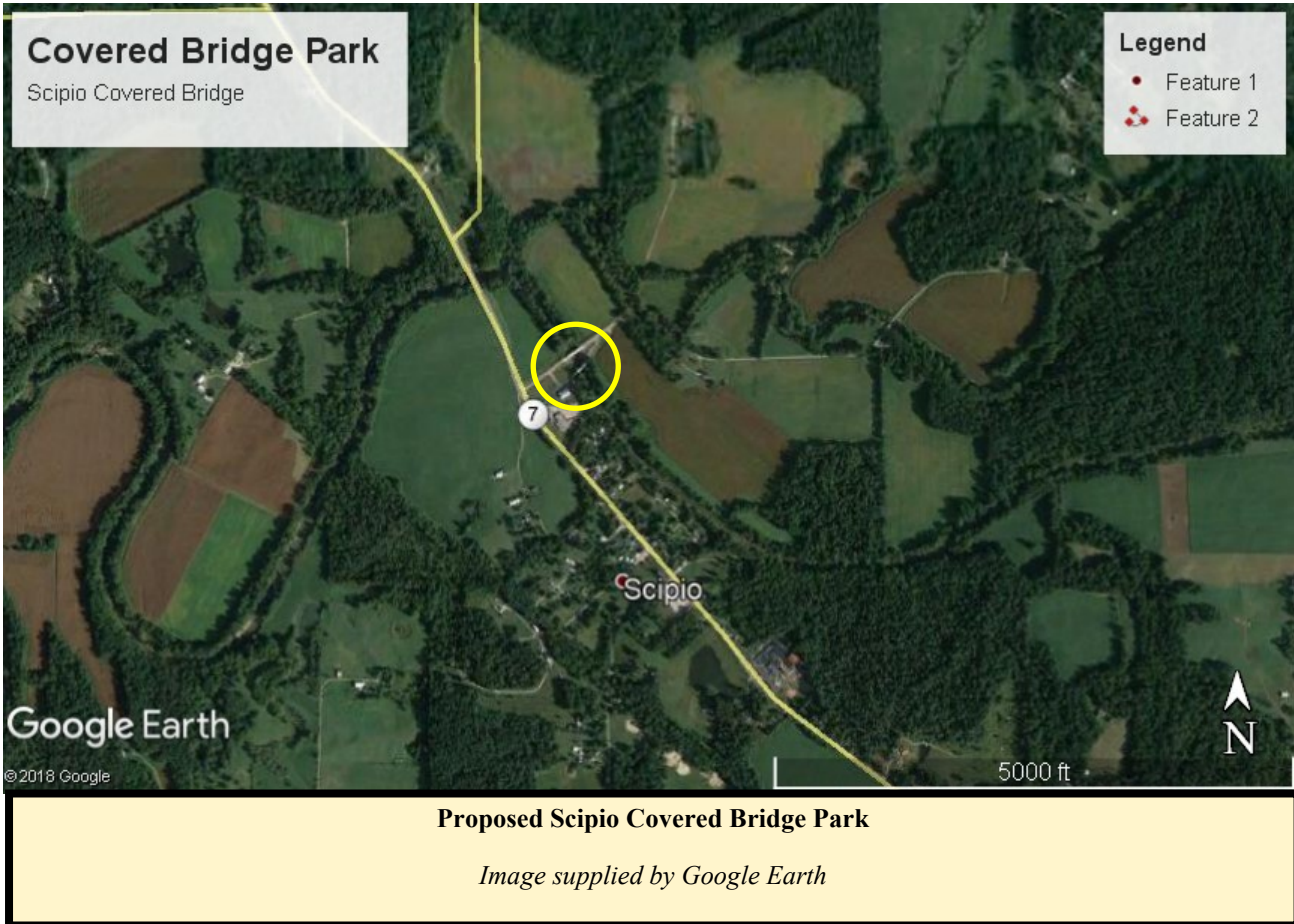
PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
Vernon Park System NLT Grant Application

SHEET TITLE:
Master Trail Plan

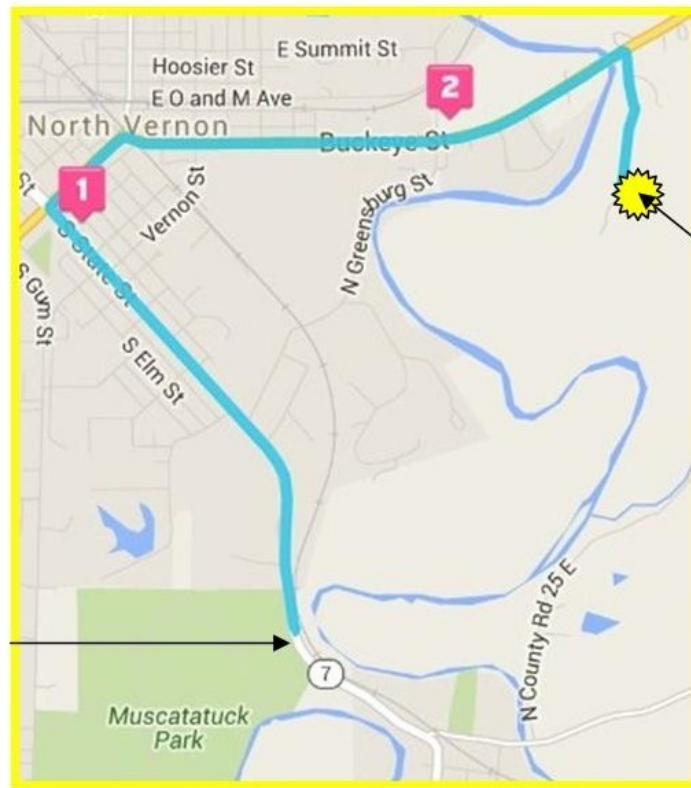
DESIGN PHASE:
Public Involvement

SHEET NUMBER:
2





Calli State Nature Preserve

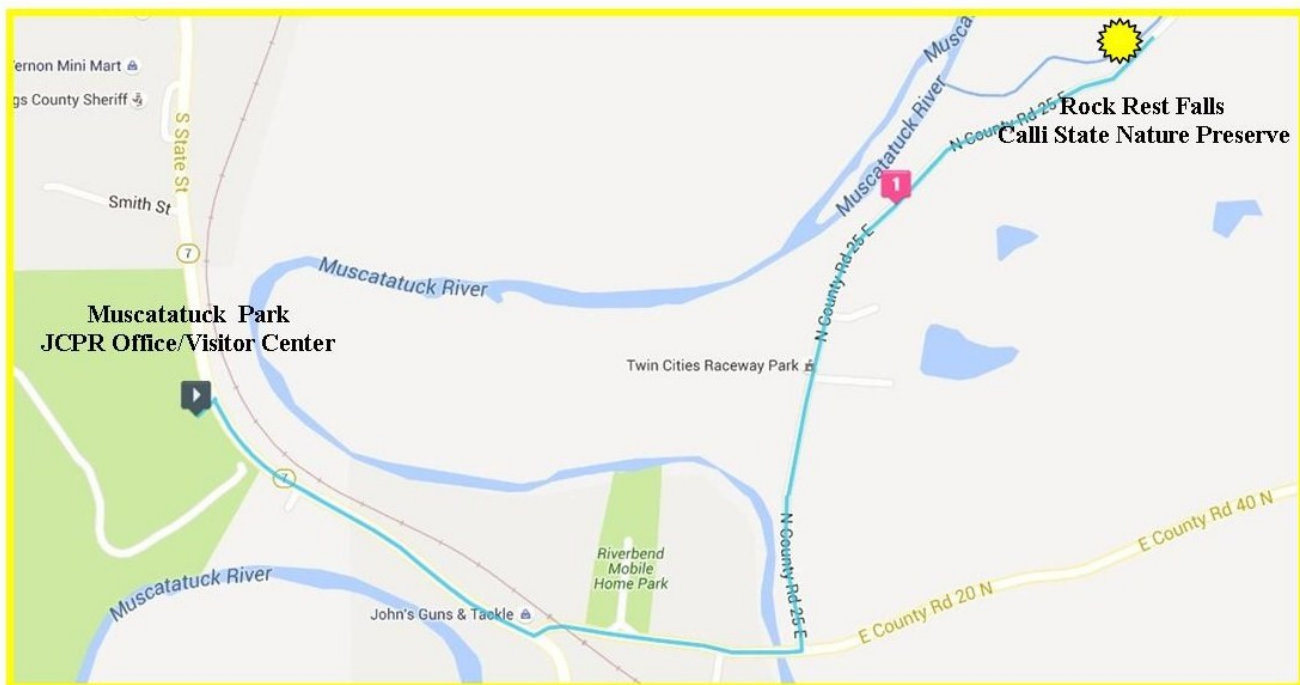


Parking & Trail Head
Calli State Nature Preserve

Muscatatuck Park
JCPR Office/Visitor Center

Rock Rest Falls

Calli State Nature Preserve



Rock Rest Falls
Calli State Nature Preserve

Muscatatuck Park
JCPR Office/Visitor Center

“The city should acquire more land for parks and recreation to expand the current system. New parks should be geographically dispersed to serve the entire community”

North Vernon Comprehensive Plan 2009

“Avoid the tendency to excessively program neighborhood parks as a means to avoid developing a legitimate system capable of meeting the communities long-term needs.”

Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines

“A person’s propensity to use a neighborhood park is greatly reduced if they perceive it to be difficult to access or not within a reasonable walking distance”

Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines



“One of the ideas is to encourage the use of school facilities for recreation.”

“Parks Departments and schools are beginning this process of sharing resources () in a few Indiana cities. But this process needs to be fostered and encouraged to grow.”

“Along with encouraging school use, simply providing more public open space needs to be promoted as well. While it is a good idea to promote the formation of partnership and sharing programs, the simple fact remains that there is an open space deficiency in Indiana. It is desirable and necessary to help promote and strengthen park boards and their formation throughout the state if Indiana’s recreation future is to be insured.”

SCORP 1994-1999

Section Ten:

Priorities and Action Schedule



Priorities

JCPR Priorities

System Wide:

- Trails (create first phase of connectivity then proceed proactively to incorporate full potential)
- New Park Land (ideally in partnership with JCSC, Vernon, Crosley to capitalize on unique opportunities.)
- Tourism (solidify and brand the county and invest in proactive marketing)
- Communicate (increase communication to public and public leaders)
- Educate (increase understanding and importance of quality of life upgrades to leaders and public)

Site Planning:

Muscatatuck Park

- Shelters
- MARP
- Dining Hall accessibility

Eco lake Park

- Campground
- Trails

Operational and Maintenance Planning:

Maintenance is always a JCPR priority, the biggest issues are:

- Main Road and Parking area issues
- Dining Hall/Community Center (tables, chairs, furnace central air)
- Shelters, Quail Barn and MARP
- William Read Home (windows, floor supports)

State Priorities

Within the Indiana Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan 2011-2015, the Division of Outdoor Recreation overviews trends and priorities. The plan discusses effects of the recession on recreation, one example is that people are recreating closer to home. The plan discusses the nation wide goal to reconnect kids (and adults) to nature and outdoor recreation. The importance of this is further illustrated by acknowledgments and discussion of the “obesity epidemic”.

The State Plan goes at lengths to highlight the importance of parks in economic development. Parks are simply more important than ever and cannot be left out of the economic development discussion. The plan also supports conservation and preservation in general and specifies many needs to address.

Priorities of the state are expanded in the plan (we will supply them in the Appendix), but the major themes are:

- “Develop more trails and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.”
- “Protect and enhance Indiana’s natural and outdoor recreation resources.”
- “Encourage and promote outdoor recreation participation.”
- “Provide funding for outdoor recreation.”
- “Continue emphasis on Indian’s aquatic resources, both natural and man-made.”

Priority Action Schedule

Year	Site	Action	Cost Estimate	Source of Funds
2019	Muscatatuck Park	FPBH Eco lake	4,600	1178
		Shelter 3	1,064	1178
		Master Plan	6,000	1178
		Spray/Bathroom	51,125	1178
		Shade	4,000	1178
		Spray Landscape	3,000	1178
		NLT Hold	40,000	1178
2020		NLT Hold	400,00	All 1178
		Maintenance	10,000	
		Front Entrance LC	3000	
		Hall Tables	7000	
2021		NLT Hold	40,000	All 1178
		Maintenance	10,000	
		Adult fitness*	25,000/25,000	1178/grant
		Furnace/air	5,000/5,000	1178/grant
2022		NLT Hold	30,000	All 1178
		Maintenance	10,000	
2023		Eco Lake Hold	40,000	All 1178
		Maintenance	10,000	
2024		Eco Lake Hold	40,000	All 1178
		Maintenance	10,000	

JCPR along with the Jennings County Council are the two main suppliers of match money for the Town of Vernon Next Level Trails Grant Initiative. JCPR committed 150,000 over the next three years assuming the Grant is awarded. The County Council pledged 100,000 over the same time period. To simplify looking at this grant, the park's funding, and the action and priority action schedules, we will separate the two. Above and on page 140 we will show the strategic funding from JCPR only. In between we will show the cost breakdown for the NLT grant specifically, as estimated by FPBH engineering and as submitted to the NLT grant.

* COVID-19 will decrease income for 2020. Currently park income is on par, yet next 2 months look grim.



TOWN OF VERNON NLT Grant Application
Historic Vernon to Muscatatuck Park Vinegar Mill Trail

Paved Trail Width (LFT)	8	
Paved Trail Length (LFT)	3975	
Unfinished Trail Length (LFT)	2650	
Unfinished Trail Width (LFT)	3	
Total Trail (Footage - Mileage)	6600	1.25

	COSTS	MATCH
DESIGN AND ENGINEERING		
Preliminary Planning and Design Concepts , Grant Application Prep	\$ 15,000.00	\$ (15,000.00)
Design Engineering	\$ 91,000.00	
Geotechnical Engineering	\$ 8,000.00	
Environmental Review / Archaeological Investigation	\$ 25,000.00	
Part Time Construction Inspection and Administration	\$ 48,000.00	
Grant Administration	\$ 10,000.00	
LAND		
Easement / Land Acquisition / Appraisal (Appraisal Costs Matched)	\$ 16,000.00	(TBD)
TRAIL CONSTRUCTION		
Contractor Mobilization & Construction Engineering/Staking	\$ 60,000	
Trail Surfaces		
Corridor Clearing along River (w/ Boy Scout Manual Labor Match)	\$ 19,500	\$ (8,000)
Excavation / Compaction for Trail Placement & Grading of River Bike/ Hiking Trail	\$ 23,000	
Earthwork Fill	\$ 7,600	
HMA Trail Pavement	\$ 61,000	
Compacted Aggregate Base No. 53	\$ 31,000	
Compacted Subgrade for HMA portion of Trail	\$ 11,000	
Concrete Trail Section for Alley Crossings in Vernon	\$ 4,000	
Retaining Walls in Vernon Required for Trail Accommodation in Right of Way	\$ 93,000	
Natural Retaining items along River Bike/Hiking Trail for Hillside Cut Sections	\$ 17,000	
New Curbing in Vernon for Pike, Montgomery & Jackson Street Trail Sections to accommodate Trail	\$ 34,000	
Clearing of Right of Way in Vernon to accommodate New Trail Surface	\$ 10,000	
ADA Curb Ramp Connections at Roadways in Vernon	\$ 31,000	
Drainage		
Drainage Surface Grading	\$ 11,000	
Drainage Culverts under trails	\$ 9,000	
Reconstruction of existing curbing and storm systems to accommodate Trail in Vernon	\$ 10,000	
Drainage Storm piping along Trail in Vernon	\$ 32,000	

(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)



TRAIL CONSTRUCTION (Continued)		
Trailheads / Amenities / Signage / Misc / Contingency		
Sidewalk connections at Trailheads to Parking/Amenities/Shelters	\$	5,000
Parking Spaces	\$	13,000
Trailhead Concrete	\$	3,000
Trailhead Sign (1) to be placed at the Commons	\$	8,500
Trailhead Flagpole for 1815 American Flag	\$	1,500.00
Trailhead Information Kiosks (3)	\$	15,000
Trailhead Landscaping	\$	12,000
Trail Markers (at 1/4 Mile marks & Information markers)	\$	2,500
Benches (3)	\$	3,000
Bike Racks (3)	\$	3,000
Trash Receptacle (2)	\$	2,000
Trailhead Parking Barrier Posts	\$	9,000
Trail Reflectorized Bollards adjacent to roadways/ Removable bollards at Roads	\$	36,000
Trail Gates at Vernon Gym Crossings	\$	5,000
Pavement Markings / Crosswalk Striping / Parking Striping	\$	9,000
Roadway Sheet Directional Information Signs & Posts	\$	6,500
State Road Pedestrian Crossing (Flashing Beacon)	\$	22,000
Commons Main Trailhead Shelter (4 Tables)	\$	125,000
Muscatatuck River Overlook Structure	\$	35,000
Overlook / Vernon Gym Trailhead Shelter (1 Table)	\$	29,000
Drinking Fountain w/ Water Service Line at Vernon Gym	\$	17,000
Commons ADA Accessible Restroom	\$	171,000
Seeding/Sodding and Restoration	\$	32,000
Utility Coordination / Relocates	\$	60,000
Maintenance of Traffic	\$	10,000
Contingency (~4%)	\$	56,000
Trail Construction Subtotal	\$	1,368,100
		\$ (23,000)
TOTAL	\$	1,368,100
MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS		
Jennings County Parks and Recreation	*	\$ (100,000)
Jennings County Council		\$ (100,000)
Friends of Historic Vernon 501 (c) 3		(TBD)
Jennings County Community Foundation		(?)
Existing Match Funding		\$ (223,000.00)
20% Match Funds Required	\$	274,000
		\$ 51,000



Income & Cost Estimate Over 5-year Plan

Year	Project	Income	Expense	Balance
	Beginning Balance			\$ 40,000.00
2020	Hold One NLT		\$ 40,000.00	\$ -
	Income	\$ 60,000.00		\$ 60,000.00
	Hold Two NLT		\$ 40,000.00	\$ 20,000.00
	Maintenance		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
	Front Entrance landscape		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 7,000.00
	Dining Hall tables		\$ 7,000.00	\$ -
2021	Income	\$ 90,000.00		\$ 90,000.00
	Hold Three NLT		\$ 40,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
	Adult Fitness	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 25,000.00
	CM/DH furnace/air	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 20,000.00
	Maintenance		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
2022	Income	\$ 90,000.00		\$ 100,000.00
	Hold Four NLT		\$ 30,000.00	\$ 70,000.00
	Maintenance		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 60,000.00
2023	Income	\$ 90,000.00		\$ 150,000.00
	Hold Eco Lake Park		\$ 50,000.00	\$ 100,000.00
	Maintenance		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 90,000.00
2024	Income	\$ 90,000.00		\$ 180,000.00
	Hold Eco Lake Park		\$ 50,000.00	\$ 130,000.00
	Maintenance		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 120,000.00
				\$ 120,000.00

- JCPR plans to hold 40,000 for three years (2019, 2020, 2021) and 30,000 for 2022 to reach their commitment for the NLT Grant.
- Eco Lake Hold will be attempted to work as match money for potential grant or council appropriation.
- Income for JCPR in 2019 was 104,000. JCPR is estimating income at 90,000 to create buffer.
- JCPR would transfer buffer to maintenance issues annually or save.
- At the end of the 5 year cycle JCPR would have funded their portion of the NLT grant assisting the community to secure over a million dollars of outside funding.
- Also at the end of the cycle JCPR would have held funds for ELP (100,000) with a balance in 1178 of 155,000. Assuming some chance of Tunnel Mill Acquisition these funds could be applied towards either ELP or Tunnel Mill?

** This model shows a decrease in revenue of 44,000 from 2019 for 2020. In 2019 JCPR brought in 104,000. We had planned to use 90,000 as a base revenue estimate for a buffer. Due to COVID-19 we will use a decreased income and adjust our expectations accordingly if outlooks get worse. Revenue was actually up, yet cancelations have been prevalent. The adult fitness equipment is the project on the bubble.*

Transition Action Plan

The following buildings and amenities will be reanalyzed annually to gauge the progress at each site. The Dining Hall/Community Building is the most used building for the public other than the simple outdoor shelters. JCPR has recently completed the self inspection. Files along with pictures will be delivered to the ADA director and JCPR will work in coordination with this individual to solidify upgrades.

2020 Bathroom (new)

New bathrooms will greatly assist the Muscatatuck Park in meeting ADA standards. All items (access, amenities, other) will be built at ADA standards or greater.

2021 Dining Hall

An unloading zone with appropriate signage should be installed at the south location. A wider access lane should also be placed. Modification of west entrance to cannot create an acceptable grade. Door handle should be replaced.

Older Bathroom

An unloading zone could be installed. Handle features in back stalls could be improved although complete standard accordance is not possible.

Camp bathhouse and primitive bathrooms

Re-plumbing of the shower units should be done to lower access to below maximum height. An accessible walkway should (could) be added to the primitive bathroom. This may require elimination of one campsite. An unloading zone should (could) be added as well.

Signs

Many signs need upgraded and/or replaced

Shelters

Lights and electric outlets should be repositioned lower.

William Read Home

Office ADA compliance is close, but not quite there. Many of the issues are smaller and infrastructure does lend itself to easy fixes.

Parking Lots

The Office/Visitor Center and Vinegar Mill parking lots should both be re-sealed (prior) and then re-stripped.

www.adachecklist.org

Plan Evaluation

Plan evaluation will be significant in the coming months. Due to JCPR being a three person department managing nearly 350 acres of land, customer service and grounds maintenance is a consuming reality. The off-season is the only period in which improvements (“soft” as well as “bricks and mortar”) can be significantly worked on. This draft is considered a rough draft. Technical review, additional in the field review is planned, as well as increased discussion with the county leaders.

Plan re-evaluation will be specifically needed if the Council decides to proceed with a loan to fund aspects of the Eco Lake Park upgrade. This will be specially true relative to two grants that are currently being pursued.

Annual review is standard procedure. With a small department, unexpected items have a large impact. The last planning cycles did stay very close to original action plans. Having a plan is an important tool and helps us prepare for not only the main objectives, but also unforeseen issues and opportunities.

Conclusion

Many of the priorities in our Master Plan mirror those of the State within the Indiana Statewide Outdoor Master Plan. Trails, historical sites, as well as the addition of new park land are all important. The relevance of our findings is strengthened by two local master plan studies, the Jennings County Comprehensive Plan and the North Vernon Master Plan.

We also propose various partnerships within the community to further the recreational objectives and bring out the potential in Jennings.

Specifically, a partnership with the Jennings County School Corporation to incorporate idle lands into recreational amenities is one of our main proposals. The Sand Creek opportunity is a remarkable option. Other options exist also and could provide a much needed upgrade to the local recreational supply.

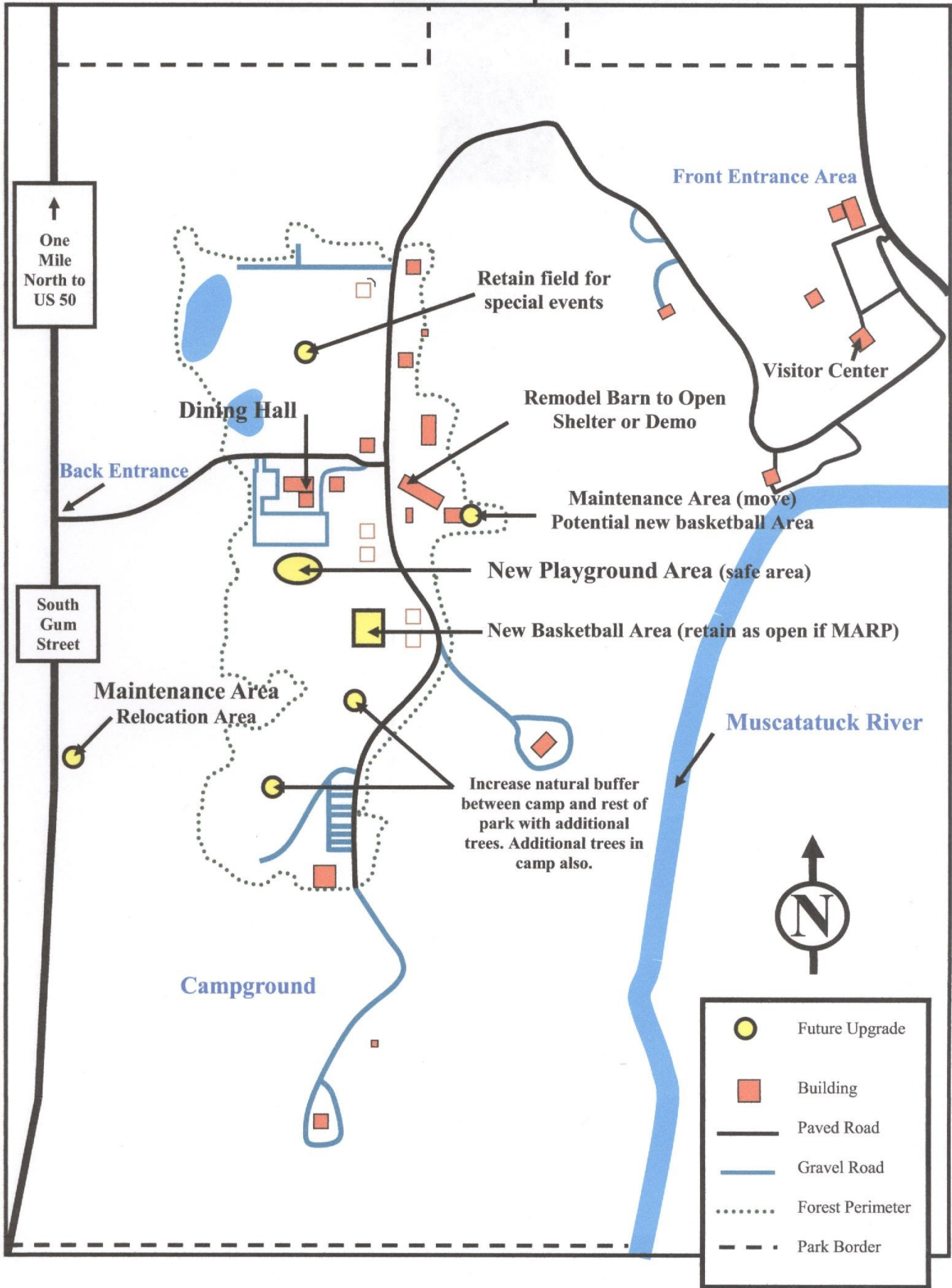
With a few key connector sections, the trails in Jennings could be some of the best in the State. Highlighting the significant historical elements in the community along the trail system would provide a unique and marketable tourism asset, and ultimately a solid economic upgrade. Adding paved bike trails will round out the system and increase accessibility, reduce barriers, while providing a significant quality of life improvement. This in turn will connect people in a wellness activity that we all can share in and be proud of.

The potential in Jennings recreational system is enormous. Simply working together with local agencies and taking advantage of existing amenities could provide extraordinary results with a very small investment. This investment would likely bring a return that is beyond our expectations. Increased health, community interaction, cultural and historical appreciation, tourist assets, are all dividends that our community could realize.

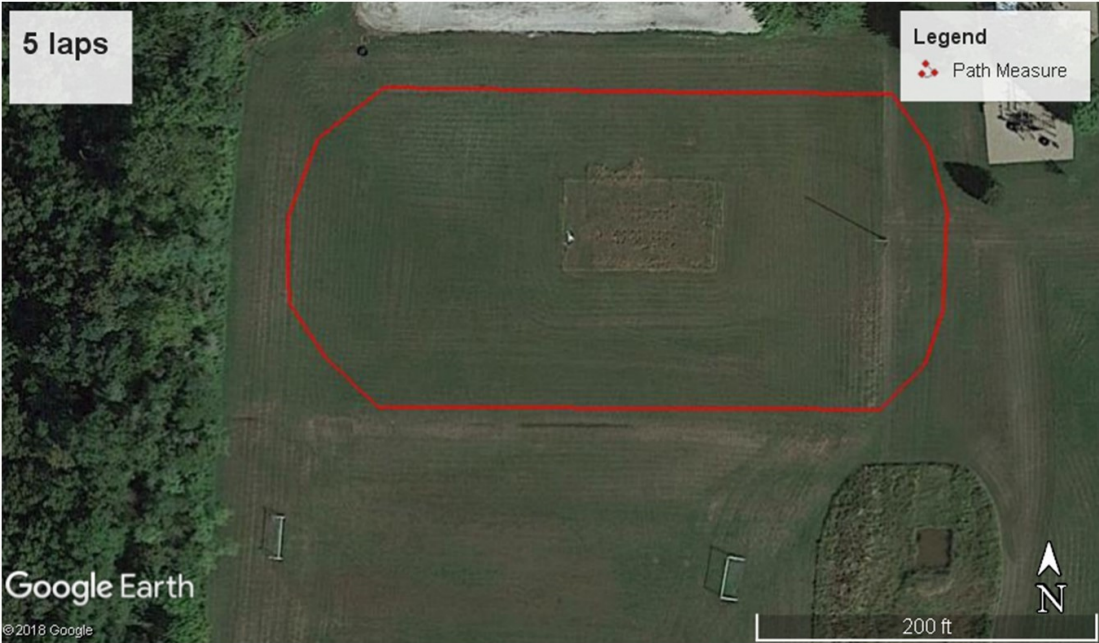
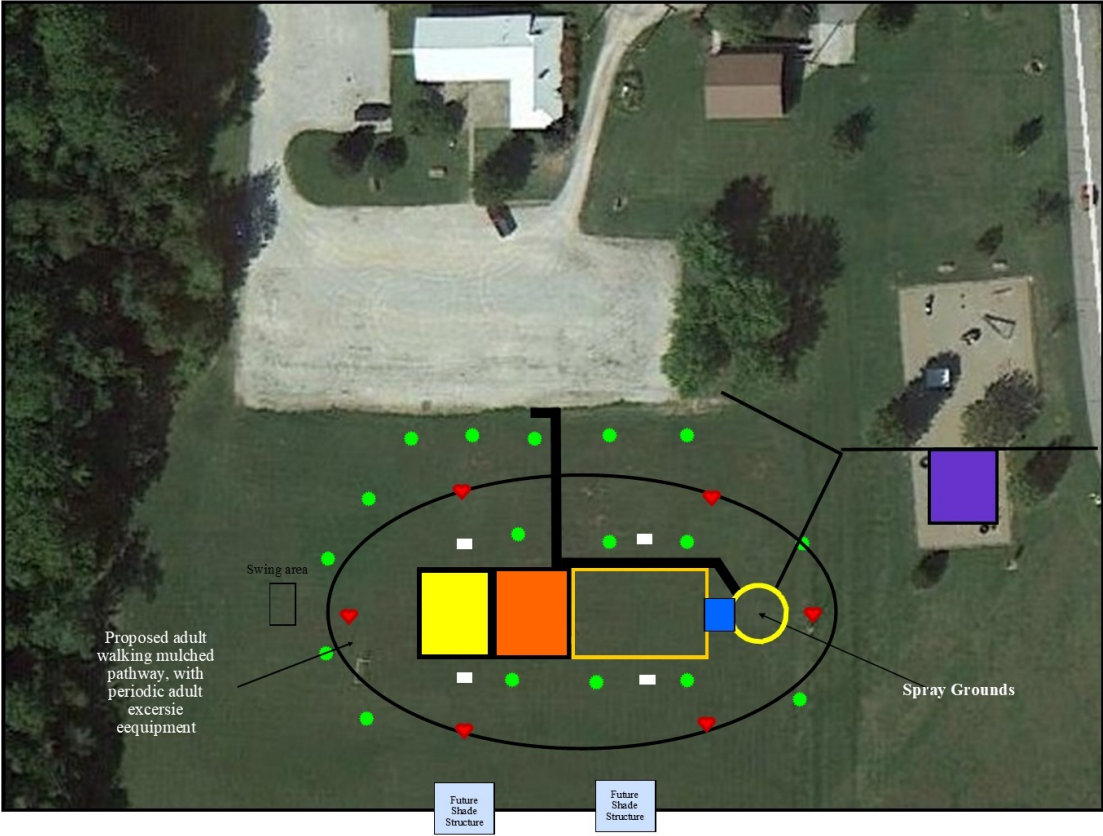
If we envision our recreational potential alongside the recent upgrades to the community, we can see a much brighter future. This is a future that our youth demands, our adults need, and our community will revel in for the years to come.



Muscatatuck Park Conceptual Master Plan



Playground Conceptual Drawing



Pre-engineered estimate for walking track at approximately 1/5 of a mile.

Eco Lake Park Conceptual Plan





Appendix

