

# Kent County, Michigan

## Multi-Jurisdictional Parks Study



**Presentation to the  
Kent County Board of Commissioners  
September 27, 2012**

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# Purpose of Study

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1. Summarize existing parks and recreation services in Kent County.
  - Agencies
  - Programs
  - Assets
  - Budgets
  - Funding mechanisms
2. Identify and evaluate models of collaboration, operational efficiency and funding.
3. Make recommendations for strategies for participating P&R agencies to consider.

# Findings

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- 28 specific findings that, taken together, describe the current state of parks and recreation in Kent County
- Summary of parks and recreation collaboration in Michigan
- An in-depth look at four nationally recognized parks and recreation systems

# Finding 1: Parks and recreation spending by municipalities in Kent County declined 5.9% between 2009 and 2011

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<b>Municipality</b>	<b>% Change</b>
– Kent County	- 10.2%
– Grand Rapids City	- 18.4%
– Lowell Township	- 23.9%
– Walker	- 9.0%
– Wyoming	0.3%

## Finding 2: Per capita spending on parks and recreation varies substantially among communities in Kent County

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<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Per capital spending</b>
– East Grand Rapids	\$155.45
– Walker	\$65.11
– Wyoming	\$60.78
– Kentwood	\$36.86
– Grand Rapids	\$35.88
– Ada Township	\$24.37
– Kent County	\$6.41
– 12 Townships	>\$5.00

## Finding 3: Per capita parks and recreation spending in Kent County is lower than averages reported by the NRPA

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Jurisdiction Type	Kent County	NRPA Average
All	\$37.28	\$63.00
County	\$6.41	\$12.00
Township	\$7.52	\$27.00
City (>200,000 pop.)	\$45.48	\$69.00

## Finding 4: Spending for parks and recreation in Kent County is lower per capita than in comparable Michigan Counties

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Countywide Spending	2011 P&R Expenditures	2010 Population	\$/person	Change 2009-2011
Kent County	\$22,468,717	602,622	\$37.28	-5.9%
Washtenaw County	\$29,041,174	344,791	\$84.23	-13.7%
Oakland County	\$85,671,449	1,202,362	\$71.25	-10.0%
Macomb County	\$22,103,181	840,978	\$26.28	-5.3%
Ottawa County	\$9,708,424	263,801	\$36.80	-15.9%
Average of comparables	\$36,631,057	662,983	\$55.25	-11.2%

## Finding 6: Acres of parkland (all types) per 1000 population in Kent County exceeds the national average

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**Kent County:** 19 acres/1000

**National Average:** 16 acres/1000 (NRPA PRORAGIS reporting agencies – 2011)

**Urban Parkland Average:** 39 acres/1000 (Trust for Public Lands – 2010)



# Findings: Collaboration

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- Finding 7: Most jurisdictions in Kent County are involved in some form of inter-agency cooperation or service sharing
- Finding 8: Budget challenges make obvious the need for increased collaboration between jurisdictions but have the effect of reducing the capacity for collaboration
- Finding 17: Kent County multi-jurisdictional relationships, particularly those involving schools, tend to be informal and not clearly defined

## Finding 18: There is little independent park and recreation governance authority in Kent County

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- Strong park systems have strong, independent governance authority and dedicated funding.
- A parks board or commission is empowered to make decisions, allocate resources and advocate on behalf of parks and recreation.
- Parks and recreation tend to be the first cut and the last restored in difficult economic times.

# Findings: Opportunities for Collaboration

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- Finding 20: Needs assessment
- Finding 21: Planning
- Finding 22: Marketing and promotion
- Finding 23: Technology
- Finding 27: Special needs programming

# Conclusions

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1. Parks and recreation in Kent County is best described as good, not great.
2. There is a broadly shared view that parks and recreation are key to the quality of life in Kent County, but different agencies have different priorities and there is currently no shared vision for a common approach across jurisdictions.

# Conclusions

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3. Parks and recreation agencies throughout have faced significant budget reductions. In some jurisdictions, continued economic challenges and associated declines in parks and recreation spending threaten the quality of parks and access to recreation opportunities. At the same time, some communities with dedicated funding sources continue to maintain services in these challenging times.

# Conclusions

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- 4. Kent County parks and recreation agencies are relatively efficient.
- 5. There are strong examples of parks and recreation collaboration in Kent County.
- 6. In the absence of a collaborative governance structure and new funding sources, consolidation of parks and recreation agencies may yield improvements in recreation programming and some back office operations, but will not yield significant operational efficiencies or cost savings.

# A Strategy For Multijurisdictional Parks And Recreation Collaboration

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- A new infrastructure for county-wide parks and recreation intergovernmental cooperation that can continue to grow based on experience and need
  - Benefits all participating communities and can achieve results that could not be achieved by existing agencies working independently
  - A mechanism to pursue, accept and distribute public grant monies and private philanthropic support
  - Independent governance structure – overlay, not consolidation
  - Millage remains an option
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# Recommendations

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1. Create a Kent Communities Park and Recreation Authority under PA 321.
2. Implement specific, high-value projects, that benefit multiple (all) parks and recreation jurisdictions in Kent County.
  1. Shared parks and recreation web platform
  2. Multi-jurisdictional planning
  3. Common metrics and reporting
  4. Common hiring system for recreation program staff
  5. Joint marketing
  6. Joint programming (especially for special needs populations)



# Recommendations

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- Support the formation of additional multi-jurisdictional authorities where there is a strong case and community support for collaboration.

# Next Steps

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## 1.0 Presentation & Discussion of Parks Study Recommendations

- 1.1 Presentation to Kent County Board of Commissioners and invitations to funders and local units of government to attend presentation. (September, 2012)
- 1.2 Host meetings with local units of government including the Township Supervisors Association and the Urban Mayors and Managers group to present findings of Parks Study. (November, 2012)
- 1.3 Seek feedback and input from local units of government regarding interest in participating in the development of the Authority. (December, 2012)
- 1.4 Create work group of representatives of interested communities appointed by local communities to create framework for Authority (March, 2013)

# Next Steps

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- 2.0 Coordinate Work Group to draft working documents for the formation of the Authority
    - 2.1 Identify jurisdiction of proposed Authority, required staff and consulting support (May, 2013)
    - 2.2 Assess community support and define priorities (June, 2013)
    - 2.3 Draft authority board composition/representation (July 2013)
    - 2.4 Draft bylaws and necessary governance documents (August, 2013)
    - 2.5 Present draft bylaws to local units for review and discussion (September, 2013)
    - 2.6 Request community decision to participate in Authority pending approval of the bylaws by each local unit of government. (October, 2013)
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# Next Steps

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## 3.0 Establish Authority

- 3.1 Begin authority operation and set meeting calendar (December, 2013)
- 3.2 Identify initial project(s) and develop work plan(s) (February, 2014)
- 3.3 Establish initial project(s) budget(s) (March, 2014)
- 3.4 Secure initial funding (May, 2014)
- 3.5 Begin implementation of initial project(s) (December, 2014)

## 4.0 Develop long-range strategic plan (June, 2014)

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