

**DRAFT COPY**  
**2016-2021**  
**Draft Parks & Recreation Plan**



Mona Lake Park

**City of Muskegon Heights, Michigan**  
**Draft Date June 11, 2016**

**City of Muskegon Heights  
Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan  
2016-2021**

**Muskegon Heights City Council**

Mayor Darrell L. Paige  
Dorothy J. Scott, Mayor Pro –Tem.  
Charmaine Green  
Keith L. Guy  
Bonnie M. McGlothin  
Kimberley D. Sims  
William C. Watson

**Muskegon Heights Planning Commission**

Bonnie McGlothin, Chairperson  
Ronald Jenkins, Vice Chairperson  
Darrell L. Paige, Mayor  
Dana Bryant  
Kenneth Kelly  
Reedell Homes  
Josephine House  
Estelita Rankin  
Lori Doody, Interim City Manager

**Community Development Committee**  
(Serves as the Parks & Recreation Board)

Kimberley Sims, Chair person  
Dorothy J. Scott, Mayor Pro Tem  
Bonnie McGlothin

**Recreation Stake Holder Focus Group**

Kimberley D. Sims, Muskegon Heights City Council  
Allen Rankin, Muskegon Heights Public School District  
Estelita Rankin, Chairperson, Muskegon Heights Festival in the Park,  
Reatha A. Anderson, Director of Planning and Community Development  
Robert Wilkinson, Coordinator Muskegon Heights Recreation Department  
Shannon McMaster, Executive Director, Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority

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## **Plan Summary**

### **Muskegon Heights Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan**

The City of Muskegon Heights is a dynamic community with aggressive leadership seeking to improve the quality of life for all its citizens. Addressing the park and recreation needs of the community is one way in which the City seeks to improve the quality of life for Muskegon Heights residents.

The land mass of the City of Muskegon Heights is four square miles and contains 10,796 residents. The two regional parks, four neighborhood parks, one nature center and six public school playground/parks are strategically placed to serve residents within their neighborhoods and reinforce the concept of walkable communities

The purpose of the Muskegon Heights Parks and Recreation Plan is to set forth a guide by which the City may assess and address its cultural and recreational needs. The plan provides an overview of the community and seeks to develop and coordinate a continuum of parks and recreation services.

The 2016-2021 Parks and Recreation Plan is based on the two premises: that each individual has the right to share in the abundance of leisure and recreational opportunities so prevalent in our society and that natural resources and recreational opportunities can be enhanced and used to stimulate the local tourism industry. Further, it is the City's responsibility to provide leadership to ensure that City residents have access to recreational opportunities and tourism based economic opportunities.

The goals of the Muskegon Heights Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan are as follows:

1. Provide recreational facilities and cultural opportunities to support the growth of the tourism industry in Western Michigan, Muskegon County and in the City of Muskegon Heights.
2. Provide City Parks to enhance and contribute to the urban living environment.
3. Provide accessible, enriching recreational opportunities and experiences for the entire community.
4. Provide for a safe environment for park users.
5. Preserve the natural resources of the City for present and future generations.
6. Support and maintain neighborhood parks in order to provide recreation opportunities within a walkable distance.
7. Continue to collaborate with the Muskegon Heights Public School District to upgrade and expand neighborhood school playground / park facilities.

These goals form the basis of the Action Plan.

## **I. Community Description**

### **A. Community Description**

The City of Muskegon Heights is a small community of 4.4 square miles located in Muskegon County near the shore of Lake Michigan, approximately forty (40) miles northwest of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Muskegon Heights is part of the Muskegon Urbanized area, which includes the Cities of Muskegon, Norton Shores, Roosevelt Park, and North Muskegon, and the Townships of Muskegon, Laketon and Fruitport (see Appendix -Map 1). Muskegon Heights has the 5th largest population in the county, with a 2015 census estimate of 10,796 or about 6.2 % of the county total population of 172,790 residents.

The City can be characterized as a mature urban community of predominately single-family homes, significant industrial and commercial development, and a Central Business District which is in the midst of a great transition from a relatively strong retail / commercial district to a cluster of businesses without a distinct focus point or identifiable character. Please see City of Muskegon Heights Zoning Map 2.

Major traffic routes into the City include U.S. 31 and Interstate 96, with the Business Route for both bordering the City to the south and west. The Muskegon County Airport is located to the south of the City in nearby Norton Shores.

### **B. Plan Context**

The City of Muskegon Heights is a dynamic community with aggressive leadership seeking to improve the quality of life for all its citizens. Addressing the park and recreation needs of the community is one way in which the City seeks to improve the quality of life for Muskegon Heights residents.

It is the purpose of the Muskegon Heights Parks and Recreation Plan to set forth a guide by which the City may assess and address its cultural and recreational needs. The Plan provides an overview of the community, and seeks to outline those elements affecting the delivery of the recreation services.

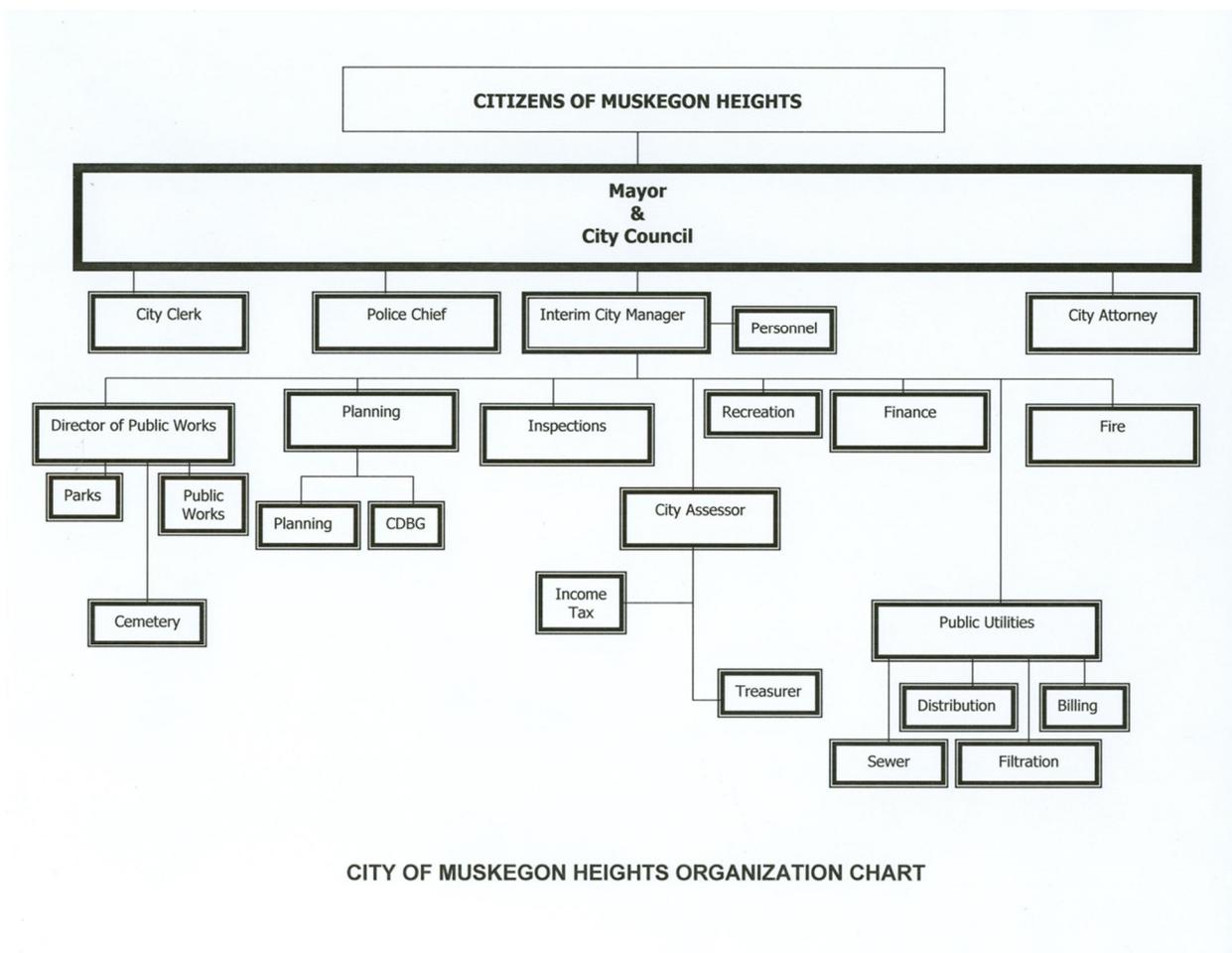
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## II. Administrative Structure

### A. City Operational Structure

The City of Muskegon Heights is operated under a City Manager, City Council form of government. The Mayor presides over the City Council and is the Chief Executive Officer of the City. The City Council is responsible for establishing policies, approving contracts, and approving new rules and regulations.

The City manager is responsible for 12 departments and 65 full time employees. The City manager is responsible to the City Council.



## **1. Parks and Infrastructure Planning**

The goal of the Department of Planning and Community Development is to identify, secure and distribute financial, social and cultural resources to the community in a manner in which all members share in the wealth and experiences equally. The Department of Planning and Community Development provides general administration, executive supervision, goal formulation, research design, and evaluation of data necessary for the orderly development and redevelopment of the City. All services are provided in accordance with the policies, procedures, and programs established by the City Council.

In relationship to parks and recreation services, the Department of Planning and Community Development is responsible for the development of the five-year parks and recreation plan, infrastructure financing and development, grant and construction management. The Department of Planning and Community Development is also staff to the Community Development Committee and the Muskegon Heights Planning Commission.

## **2. Community Development Committee /Recreation Committee**

The Community Development Committee (CDC) is a standing committee of the Muskegon Heights City Council, responsible for the oversight of the Department of Planning and Community Development. The CDC is responsible for the Five Year and Annual Community Development Block Grant Plan. The CDC is also responsible for infrastructure improvements in relationship to parks development and maintenance. In relationship to the Five Year Parks and Recreation plan, this committee also serves as the recreation committee.

## **3. Land Use Planning.**

In accordance to Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, the Muskegon Heights Planning Commission is responsible for land use planning in the City of Muskegon Heights. The Muskegon Heights Planning Commission is responsible for the development of the Long Range Plan, the Land Use Plan and the Zoning Ordinance Update. The Planning Commission will initiate a new Form Based Code district downtown and perform a five-year review of the Master Land Use Plan in 2016. The Parks and Recreation Plan will serve as an integral part of Muskegon Heights future development plans.

## **4. Parks and Recreation Stake Holder Focus Group**

The Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan was developed as a collaborative among the following groups:

- Muskegon Heights City Council

- Muskegon Heights Planning and Community Development Department
- Muskegon Heights Public School District
- Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority
- Muskegon Heights Recreation Department
- Muskegon Heights Festival in the Park
- Local residents

The Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan was reviewed by the Muskegon Heights Citizens Review Committee, the Muskegon Heights Community Development Committee, the Muskegon Heights Planning Commission and the Muskegon Heights City Council. A public review period began July 11, 2016 and ended August 11, 2016.

## **B. Parks and Recreation Program Staffing**

### **1. Parks Department**

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for the preservation, maintenance and conditioning of parklands and facilities for public recreational use as well as public cemeteries. Major activities are administration and clerical support for all maintenance functions such as turf maintenance, building and play apparatus maintenance, leaf, rubbish and litter pickup, shrub and garden planting and care, mechanical equipment maintenance and repair, construction of sidewalk and parking lot snow/ice removal for selected areas.

The current employee level for the Department of Public Works is one (1) full time director, (1) full-time secretary, (2) foreman and (5) full time employee. All employees are paid out the City's general fund.

The Cemetery and Parks Program is under the direction of the Department of Public Works Director. A foreman is in charge is in charge of maintenance for all city owned cemetery and a separate foreman is in charge of all city owned park facilities.

Turf maintenance is a primary task of the Parks & Cemetery Program, which tries to maintain a 10-day cutting cycle. No chemicals or fungicides are used and only high traffic areas are fertilized.

### **2. Recreation Program Staffing**

The purpose of the Recreation Division is to set forth a creative plan of action to promote and provide positive recreational activities within the Muskegon Heights Community. It is the duty of the Recreation Division to seek recreational leadership that will deliver and conduct leisure activities among all age groups within the community. The primary goal is to ensure that each individual is given the opportunity to share in the abundance of available leisure time recreational

activities.

The Recreation Department is headed by a one (1) full-time recreation specialist, who is in charge of programming and administration. One (1) part time college intern is also assigned to this division.

**C. Current Budget.**

**1. Parks & Recreation Programming Annual Budget**

In 2016, \$69,300 was allocated for operation of the Parks & Recreation Department.

**2. Capital Improvement Budget**

The City of Muskegon Heights does not currently have a capital improvement plan or budget, but one will be created in 2017 as part of the Michigan Economic Development Corporations Redevelopment Ready Communities Program requirements. The City is currently applying for certification.

**D. Sources of Funding for Parks and Recreation Budget**

**1. City General Fund**

• **General Fund Allocation**

The Muskegon Heights General Fund is derived from funding from fees, fines, taxes, special assessments, and state grants. The 2016 General Fund allocation is \$6,471,698.

**2. Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority, Tax Increment Financing**

The Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is a committee of city residents and local businesses owners. The DDA has the ability to use Tax Increment Financing to improve public infrastructure within the DDA boundary. Rowan Park is located within the DDA district. TIFA financing could be used to make improvements within the park.

**3. U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG).**

The City of Muskegon Heights is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) Entitlement Community. The City has administered CDBG funds for the last 41 years. The City uses CDBG Funding as a primary source of revenue for park infrastructure improvement as well as recreation program operational funding.

Capital improvements are included in the City's Five -Year Plan and implemented through annual funding grants. All city parks are located in CDBG target areas and are eligible for a limited amount of CDBG funding. It should be noted that CDBG funding is used to leverage funding from federal, state and local organizations.

### **3. State and Federal Grant**

Since 2006, the City has been awarded several State and Federal grants to improve Mona Lake Park. These grants included:

- Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) Cities of Promise grant - \$100,000
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund - \$500,000
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Land and Water Program - \$120,00
- Community Development Block Grant - \$970,000.

The funds were used for several major upgrades to Mona Lake Park, including:

- Construction of a new fishing pier.
- Construction of a boat launch.
- Basketball court improvements.
- Installation of two soccer fields.
- Baseball field improvements, including new scoreboards, bathrooms, dugouts and bleachers.
- Installation of lighting and security cameras.
- Connection of bike trail to the Norton Shores and regional bike trail system.
- Installation of underground sprinkling system.
- Shoreline cleanup and installation of habitat for fish and wildlife.
- Installation of coarse beach sand.

### **E. Volunteer Efforts**

The annual Festival in the Park is a community-wide event that takes place in June of each year. The event is operated by a volunteer committee of approximately sixty individuals. The three-day celebration starts with a parade through the City's Central Business District which ends at Rowan Park.

### **F. Relationship with School Districts and Public Agencies Involved in Recreation**

The Muskegon Heights School District and the City of Muskegon Heights have a long standing partnership in the development and use of school district property as neighborhood parks for the entire community. The Department of Interior has funded the development of these parks under the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) Program. The Muskegon Heights Public School District has 8 public school sites which

provide neighborhood recreation facilities including school gymnasiums, a swimming pool, playgrounds and equipment, and playfields. The school district also transports young residents to City league practice and home games. In the inverse, the City has allowed the use of the West Heights Park as a practice field for the high school football team. It is also anticipated that as a result of grants submitted under this plan, the school will be able to utilize the city parks and playfields for city league, football, basketball, baseball and soccer games.

It also should be noted that the Muskegon Heights Public School District, in conjunction with several other public school districts in West Michigan, use Johnny O. Harris Park as an outdoor science laboratory. Little Black Creek meanders through Johnny O. Harris Park and is used to instruct elementary children in the effects of water pollution on the environment. In 2006, the City received a MDNR Land and Water Grant to build a boardwalk and observation deck along the creek for the benefit of the students.

### **1. Joint Recreation Programs**

In the past, the City and the School District have worked together in combining resources to renovate the Martin Luther King School Park. A majority of the future programs will be a joint venture of both the City and the School District.

### **2. Coordination with Non-Public Groups and Other Jurisdictions**

The following programs were provided by other joint ventures of the City and contracted agencies:

- Mission for Area People, Path Finders Program
- Cooperative Extension Service (4-H) -Nutrition Program
- Muskegon County Health Department -Special Health Subjects
- Temple Cares for People- Farm Program

## **ACTION PLAN AND ASSESSMENT**

### **Goal #1**

**Provide recreational facilities and cultural opportunities to support the growth of the tourism industry in Western Michigan, Muskegon County and in the City of Muskegon Heights.**

The City of Muskegon Heights is easily accessible off of US Business Route 31 and has public access onto Mona Lake. The City also holds many cultural festivals and is also home to the James Jackson Museum of African American History.

### **Action Step I:**

Develop a Marketing Strategy for the City of Muskegon Heights that will focus on the commercial, recreational and cultural offerings available within the City. Use the Marketing Strategy to encourage local residents and outside tourists to utilize the available recreational and cultural institutions in Muskegon Heights.

### **Goal #2**

#### **Provide City Parks to enhance and contribute to the urban living environment.**

Parks can enhance the quality of life in a community by providing quiet places for citizens to relax, socialize and exercise. Parks provide aesthetically pleasing breaks from concrete and buildings. A variety of facilities are needed to meet the diverse needs of the community.

### **Action Step II:**

The City will continue to rehabilitate the existing parks within the community. Rowan Park, Johnny O. Harris Park, Little Black Creek Nature Park and many small parks throughout the City need to replace broken light posts, fences, playground equipment and bathroom facilities. The City will seek all possible grant funding options to pursue the upgrades at these parks.

### **Goal #3**

#### **Provide accessible, enriching recreational opportunities and experiences for the entire community.**

There are limited program offerings for youth, senior citizens and those with disabilities. Facilities must become accessible to the entire community. They must be barrier free and accessible to everyone. Individual programs should be offered within neighborhoods and public transportation should be available to all park facilities.

### **Action Step III:**

The City will continue to work with neighborhood groups and community organizations to find better ways to service people's recreational needs. The City will utilize social media for outreach to the community to determine their recreational desires and transportation needs.

### **Goal #4**

### **Provide for a safe environment for park users.**

Park utilization depends heavily on how safe the users feel. Guests of the parks must feel that they and their vehicles will be safe during their visit.

#### **Action Step IV:**

The City will work with neighborhood groups to evaluate the perceived level of safety in the parks. City Police Officers will be involved in this process so they may incorporate new mechanisms into patrolling the parks.

#### **Action Step V:**

Research the possibility of implementing a buoy system or seasonal life guard for the beach at Mona Lake Park for swimming safety.

### **Goal #5**

#### **Preserve the natural resources of the City for present and future generations.**

The City of Muskegon Heights has an abundance of natural resources. Mona Lake, Little Black Creek and many other streams and wetlands can be found throughout the City. The City should make efforts to preserve these natural treasures through the use of zoning regulations.

#### **Action Step VI:**

All lands within the City that have sensitive environmental characteristics will be identified. Then the appropriate zoning restrictions should be implemented at these properties to preserve the natural environment. The City will create new zoning districts, such as “Environmental Conservation District” and “Natural Recreational District” that will set specific regulations at these properties to ensure the preservation of their natural features.

### **Goal #6**

#### **Support and maintain neighborhood parks in order to provide recreation opportunities within a walkable distance.**

The City has many parks located throughout the different neighborhoods in the community. It is the goal of the City to maintain and improve these parks as to provide recreational opportunities to those with limited transportation options. The City will also explore options to create a new neighborhood park in the north-central area of the City.

#### **Action Step VII:**

The City will seek private foundation financing for improvements to Eighth Street Park. The City will also complete the remaining work on Johnny O. Harris Park identified in the 2002 Park & Recreation Plan. A focus group will be created to identify City-owned property in the north-

central area of the City that may be utilized for a new park.

### **Goal #7**

**Continue to collaborate with the Muskegon Heights Public School District to upgrade and expand neighborhood school playground / park facilities.**

The City of Muskegon Heights and the Muskegon Heights Public School District have an agreement to allow citizens to utilize school parks during after school hours. The City will continue this collaboration to upgrade and expand these parks to provide more recreational opportunities to the neighborhoods.

### **Action Step VIII:**

The City of Muskegon Heights will work with the Muskegon Heights Public School District to provide a Capital Improvements Plan for upgrading the school-park plan.

### **Evaluation and Updating**

The City of Muskegon Heights will make this plan available to the public at the following locations:

1. The City of Muskegon Heights Planning Department.
2. The City of Muskegon Heights Clerks Department.
3. The City of Muskegon Heights Website.
4. Hackley Public Library.

The plan will be monitored and evaluated on a yearly basis, using the following procedures:

1. Department Staff review of the plan to verify project implementation and setbacks.
2. Review by the City Council during annual budget hearings.

## **III. Recreation Inventory**

An inventory of the Parks System is organized according to the categories listed in Table 1. The inventory was collected by a visual inspection by staff members of the Recreation Department.

### **A. Parks and Recreation Area Inventory**

#### **1. Regional Parks**

## ***MONA LAKE PARK***

**Location:** Seaway Drive south to Mona Lake between Hoyt and Green Avenue.

**Size:** 34 Acres

**Description:** Mona Lake Park is the largest park in the Muskegon Heights system. Mona Lake Park is located on Seaway Drive-Business U.S.31, which is the southern border of the City. The City's motel cluster is located directly across the highway from Mona Lake Park. The park includes the northern shoreline of Mona Lake, which is a contributory of and provides access to Lake Michigan. Mona Lake Park is the City's only source of outdoors water recreation for the citizens of Muskegon Heights. Because of the easy, visible access to the highway, the park serves the entire City, in addition it has been long been considered a destination center for African Americans in Western Michigan. The boat launch facility on Mona Lake and is heavily used in the summer. Tourists visit the site during peak recreation periods with heavy use occurring during the spring to fall fishing seasons. The park has seen major improvements over the past decade including the addition of a new fishing pier and major improvements to the baseball, basketball and soccer fields.

**Facilities:** One (1) little league baseball diamond with fence, backstop, dugouts, bleachers, scoreboard and utility shed; one (1) softball diamond with backstop and fence; one (1) boat launching ramp and parking spaces; four (4) basketball courts; four (4) shuffleboard courts; five (5) horseshoe pits; eight (8) benches; a two (2) story brick pavilion (with toilets, concession area, covered picnic decks and a rentable community room); paved parking lot; six (6) lighted tennis courts with a practice wall; one (1) restroom facility; one (1) maintenance building; beach and swimming area; twelve (12) barbecue grills with picnic tables during summer months; two (2) swing sets containing six (6) swings; two (2) slides, (1 large, 1 small); and, two (2) play structures.

**Conditions:** This park has recently received major redevelopment efforts. Continued maintenance is needed because of heavy use. The pavilion on Mona Lake is boarded up and unused. The City will consider putting out a RFequest for Proposal to a private developer to bring the building back into use.

The park contains a wide variety of facilities including large picnic areas, baseball and softball diamonds, basketball courts, tennis courts and 3 baseball field. Non-resident tennis groups often use the tennis courts. The open field areas along Seaway Drive are used by a number of organizations for large rally and exhibit type events.

Mona Lake Park is isolated from the rest of Muskegon Heights by the

heavily traveled Seaway Drive. Pedestrian access across this 4-lane divided highway is hazardous and needs improvement. The City should conduct a traffic study at this intersection and should consider options for better pedestrian access.

## ***ROWAN PARK***

**Location:** Entire block between Broadway Avenue, Columbia Avenue, Maffett and Baker Streets.

**Size:** 1.5 Acres

**Description:** Rowan Park is located in the heart of the City's Central Business District. It is approximately one city block in size. It is the location of the Muskegon Heights Festival in the Park. In the summer, community based organizations use the park for summer concerts, rallies and flea markets. This park is very important to the revitalization of the City's downtown area and could become a cultural destination for the enjoyment of outdoors concerts and ethnic festivals.

The Rowan Park also provides green space for downtown shoppers, local business and residents of the 90 unit, senior citizen's public housing complex. Half the park is occupied by a parking lot for the Central Business District use and elderly housing residents.

**Facilities:** Four (4) benches; parking lot; small plaza with a clock tower and round performance platforms; 2 shuffleboard courts, 2 chess tables, drinking fountain.

**Condition:** The open portion of the park is generally well maintained. Trash receptacles need to be emptied on a regular basis and the plaza and walk areas need to be swept on a very frequent basis. Some of the lighting in the park needs to be replaced. This park is highly visible to downtown patrons and requires constant attention due to heavy use and its high image location. The park size could be expanded and a new permanent stage with necessary equipment could be built in order to support economic development activities in the Central Business District.

## **2. Neighborhood Parks**

### ***JOHNNY O. HARRIS PARK***

**Location:** East of Jarman Street Between Summit Avenue and Broadway Avenue. Near Woodcliffe Subdivision.

**Size:** 10.5 Acres

**Description:** Johnny O. Harris Park is located near the eastern boundary of Muskegon Heights. Little Black Creek runs through the center of the site and two (2) foot bridges along a central path links the park together. It is designed to accommodate large numbers of people for a wide variety of day uses. The park provides for a combination of uses varying from athletic activities with some spectator seating to passive activities including picnicking and adult

games. The baseball field and the basketball courts are located in a floodplain area. Restrooms, maintenance building and parking lot are on high ground adjacent to the park. The picnic area overlooks the baseball field and open areas and a ridge that runs along the western border of the site. This park is valuable to the surrounding residential neighborhood. In addition, it has been used by the City of Muskegon for softball league play.

**Facilities:** Two (2) slides; two (2) swing sets; one (1) spring ride; one (1) horseshoe pit; one (1) shuffleboard court; one (1) monkey bar; two (2) barbecue grills; one (1) lighted softball diamond with backstop and bleachers; one (1) drinking fountain; five (5) picnic tables; four (4) basketball courts; one (1) restroom facility; one (1) equipment building; and a paved parking lot.

**Condition:** This park has gone through a major rehabilitation with the majority of infrastructure improvements substantially completed. Starting in 2000, the City used a combination of funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Block Grant Program, the U.S. Department of Interior, Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program and Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Land and Water Program to upgrade the park. The goal of the park renovation was to make this park accessible to people with physical disabilities. The total cost of the park rehabilitation was approximately \$275,000. The following improvements were made: construction of two (2) picnic shelters, upgrading of the restrooms, new playground equipment, installation of a water sprinkling system, baseball field upgrade, basketball court improvements, bridge improvements and the construction of a walkway and observation booths along Little Black Creek.

Some additional improvements to consider at this would be the construction of a second bathroom on the Southside of the park, connection of walkways in the park with sidewalks around the park to install an exercise endurance track.

### ***WEST HEIGHTS PARK***

**Location:** South from Barney to Hovey and west on Hackley Avenue to Eight Street and the railroad tracks.

**Size:** 4.5 Acres

**Description:** West Heights Park is a large neighborhood park located in the north-western quadrant of Muskegon Heights. It provides a variety of services including athletic fields, children's play equipment and passive picnic areas. The park serves all age groups, but focuses on the 5-39 age group with emphasis on ages 5-18. The park lacks shaded areas and therefore its use is minimal for the elderly residents. However, the large open area does provide space for park patrons to participate in field games such as football, soccer, etc.

**Facilities:** Three (3) basketball courts in great condition; two (2) shuffleboard courts; three (3) barbecue grills; one (1) softball diamond with backstop, once (1) maintenance building with restrooms that needs repairs, five (5) swings that need to be replaced, one (1) sandy play area, various football training equipment.

**Condition:** Some of the facilities are in poor condition. Football goal posts need repair. The maintenance building needs a new roof. Swing sets need to be replaced or removed. The cyclone fence for the baseball diamond is damaged and needs repair or replacement.

### ***POLAR BEAR MEMORIAL PARK***

**Location:** Airline at Leahy Street

**Size:** .75 Acres

**Description:** Polar Bear Park is the smallest park in the City. It's main function is use as a Veteran's Memorial Park and is the site for the city's Veteran's Day Ceremony. It provides limited open space for surrounding residents.

**Facilities:** Five (5) benches, two (2) tables, one (1) grill, and two (2) monuments.

**Condition:** The park is well maintained and the grass is regularly cut. Both Veteran's monuments are in great condition.

### ***POCKET PARK***

**Location:** Broadway Avenue between Peck Street and Baker Street, inserted between two downtown commercial buildings on Broadway Avenue, directly across from the Frank Lockage Memorial Clock Tower in Rowan Park.

**Size:** Less than 1/4 acre.

**Description:** Pocket Park is a small urban space used for seating in the downtown area. It links Broadway Street stores with the Farmer's Market and City Buildings.

**Facilities:** Planting, benches, trash receptacles.

## **3. Green Infrastructure Preservation**

### ***LITTLE BLACK CREEK NATURE PARK***

**Location:** East of Wood Street and south of Summit to Mona View Cemetery near the Woodcliffe Subdivision.

**Size:** 20 Acres

**Description:** This park is located to the south of Johnny O. Harris Park. This Nature Park is a large, passive, natural area with footbridges, observation platforms, a specimen tree and flower area. A large portion of the site is in wetlands contiguous to Little Black Creek.

**Facilities:** Footbridges and observation platforms.

**Condition:** Low areas surrounding this segment of Little Black Creek are gradually being encroached upon by various developments. Some of the observation platforms and footbridges need to have boards replaced.

## **4. SCHOOL PARKS**

### ***LOFTIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL***

**Location:** 2301 Sixth Street

**Size:** 3.9 Acres

**Facilities:** Inside - small gym, Outside - two (2) swing sets containing nine (9) seats; (1) softball diamond with backstop; one (1) small basketball court with two (2) hoops; one (1) field goal post.

**Condition:** The baseball diamond needs to be leveled and filled, all swings need to be replaced and the field needs to be cut more often.

### ***MUSKEGON HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL***

**Location:** 2427 Jefferson Street

**Size:** 8.2 Acres

**Facilities:** Inside - one (1) larger gym, one (1) auditorium with stage, one (1) indoor swimming pool, Outside - one (1) football field with goalpost, scoreboard, speaker system, lights, and grandstand. One (1) rubber surfaced track with pole vault, and long jump runways.

**Condition:** Inside facilities are newer and in great condition.

### ***LINDBERG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL***

**Location:** 160 E. Barney Avenue

**Size:** 7 Acres

**Facilities:** Inside - small gym, Outside – one (1) basketball hoop; one (1) bench; five (5) swings; two (2) climbing structures, one (1) merry-go-round.

**Condition:** Playground equipment is in need of upgrading or removal. Basketball hoop needs a rim. Climbing structures need to be painted.

### ***MUSKEGON HEIGHTS MIDDLE SCHOOL***

**Location:** 55 E. Sherman Blvd.

**Size:** 8 Acres

**Facilities:** Inside - 1 small gym - 1 larger gym, Outside - one (1) softball field with backstop; four (4) tennis courts; one (1) small basketball court; and, two (2) soccer nets, one (1) community garden with raised beds.

**Condition:** Tennis courts area is being used for parking by the Board of Education, court surfaces are becoming weed infested and considerable debris exists throughout. At the Middle School site (directly east), the baseball diamond is used as a practice field. The basketball court needs new rims. One of the soccer nets needs to be replaced.

### ***MARTIN LUTHER KING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL -See Map 4 (Appendix)***

**Location:** 660 East Barney Avenue

**Size:** 8.3 Acre

**Facilities:** Inside - multi-purpose room, Outside - Two (2) swing sets; (2) basketball courts; one (1) baseball diamond with backstop and bleachers; two (2) tables with chairs, four (4) grills; and a picnic area and restroom facility.

**Condition:** Most of the park is open field that needs to be cut more often. One of the basketball hoops needs a backboard and rim. The restroom facility is in very poor condition and should be removed. All of the grills are old and worn out and need to be removed.

## ***EDGEWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL***

**Location:** 3028 Howden Street

**Size:** 3 Acres

**Facilities:** Inside - multi-purpose room; Outside - five (5) swing sets; three (3) slides; three (3) climbing poles; three (3) various size monkey bars; four (4) spring rides; three (3) small basketball courts; (2) play structures for small kids and, one (1) bench.

**Condition:** Half of the park is newer equipment for smaller children. All of this equipment is in great shape. However, half of the park is older, outdated equipment that needs repairs or removal. All of the basketball hoops need new rims. All of the swings on the older side need to be replaced. One of the climbing structures is bent and needs to be removed.

### **Section IV.**

#### **A. Land Acquisition**

1. Additions to Mona Lake Park

Two lots are adjacent to the park on the east side at the Green Street entrance. These lots are privately owned and should be purchased by the City for public parking for the play fields.

2. The City of Muskegon Heights owns a landlocked, undeveloped, 12-acre parcel, which contains substantial wetland ecosystem. The parcel is located approximately one block from Mona Lake Park. The wetlands are part of the Mona Lake Watershed and are at the mouth of Little Black Creek. Approximately, four acres of this parcel are dry lands with the remaining land consisting of cattails, low shrubs, scrub oak and willow trees. The area has a generous number of wildlife species including, deer, raccoons, rabbits, and eagles.

The City recommends that a portion of this property be set aside for conservation activities. A trail easement across one two properties needs to be purchased in order to use this area for passive recreation activities such as bird watching.

### **Section V. Description of Planning and Public Input Process**

## **A. Comparison to Recreation Standards.**

### **1. Recreation Interest of the Community**

Muskegon Heights is a city populated by many children under 10 years old and many adults over 60 years. Public recreation for these two groups span the gamete from outdoors field sports, baseball, football, soccer, track and field, and skating. Indoor recreation such as basketball draws young and old residents. A new activity, swimming, has started to draw youth to the public school's swimming pool.

### **2. Recreation Opportunities in Nearby Communities**

The nearby City of Muskegon offers many passive recreation opportunities such a museums and theaters. The local colleges offer weekend educational opportunities.

### **3. Open Space Needs / Natural Area Preservation**

- a. The City is interested in creating a green belt along Little Black Creek in the Mona Lake Watershed. The north end of the greenbelt would start at Johnny O. Harris Park and connect the Muskegon Heights Nature Park, unnamed wetlands, Mona View Cemetery with Mona Lake Park and an additional wetland on the south adjacent to Mona Lake. This area needs to be defined by survey and dedicated to conservation use by the City Council

## **B. Planning Process**

As part of the budgeting process in 2015, it was determined that City staff would rewrite the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. Staff reviewed the 2008-2013 Parks & Recreation Master Plan and updated it as necessary. A visual inspection of all of the parks and their amenities was conducted by the Recreation Division. The planning process also included public input, which is described below in part C of this chapter. The revised document was then reviewed by department supervisors.

### **2. City Internal Review Process**

Internal plan review analysis included evaluation by the following committees: Citizens Review Committee, Community Development Committee, Muskegon Heights City Council (2), Project site plans displayed for three weeks in lobby of City Hall, article in local newspaper concerning proposed project,

## **C. Public Input Process**

1. Recreation Survey. A recreation survey was created and placed on the City's website on ?. The Muskegon Chronicle published an article promoting the availability of the survey on the City's website and contact information for anyone that did not have access to the internet. The survey was also available to pick up at the Hackley Public Library, Baker College, Muskegon Community College and at City Hall.
2. Neighborhood Associations. The (number) Neighborhood Associations were given copies of the surveys to pass out to residents at their monthly meetings. Brief presentations were given at the monthly meetings regarding the Parks & Recreation Master Plan updating process and residents were encouraged to attend the public input meetings and public hearings.
3. Major Stakeholder Committee

The major stakeholders in the local continuum of recreation services are the following organizations: Muskegon Heights Public Schools, Muskegon Heights Festival in the Park, Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority and the City of Muskegon Heights Recreation Department. All named organization assisted in the identification of recreation needs and possible solutions.

4. Public Hearing and Plan Review

The public hearing review time span was from February 10, 2008 to March 10, 2008. The public hearing was held on March 10, 2008. No written or oral comments were received on the project.

## **I. Goals and Objectives**

### **A. The Impact of Community Demographics on the Goal and Objectives of the Recreation Plan.**

#### **1. Population**

The City's population decreased from 13,176 persons in 1990, to 12,049 persons in 2000. This decline in population represents an 8.5% decrease since the 1990 Census. Muskegon Heights experienced the largest percentage of population change in the Grand Rapids, Muskegon Holland MSA. This population decrease may be attributed to a variety of factors, including a decline in the surrounding region's industrial base, a lack of moderate and upper-income housing opportunities within the City, the general decline in birthrate, and a lack of significant growth throughout the county.

## 2. Income

Muskegon Heights stands out as a lower income community when compared to the communities surrounding it. The City has the lowest median family income within the Grand Rapids-Muskegon Holland Metropolitan Area. Table 1, compares the median household income of Muskegon Heights residents to the City of Muskegon and Muskegon County households.

Table 1: Median Household Income	
UNIT OF GOVERNMENT	2000
Muskegon Heights	\$21,177
City of Muskegon	\$27,929
Muskegon County	\$38,008
Source: U.S. Census, 2000	

The City's low median family income of \$21,177 indicates that approximately 50% of the City's families have incomes under that figure. Moreover, 35% of the City's population has income below poverty levels compared to 15% and 12% for the County and State, respectively.

Persons with low incomes, particularly below or near the poverty level, have little or no money to spend on acquiring costly recreational equipment such as swimming pools, boats and the like. Additionally, these families cannot afford to take advantage of private recreational services and facilities. Low-income individuals rely heavily on the public sector to meet the majority of their recreational needs in terms of facilities, equipment and programs. Those facilities and programs that require a high fee or costly personal equipment use may prohibit participation by a significant portion of this population.

Additionally, members of the community near or below the poverty line are less likely to have means of transportation to distant recreational facilities. Provision of a variety of recreational facilities and activities in proximity to population concentrations can better meet the recreational needs of the community.

Employment opportunities in the region are limited, resulting in a relatively high unemployment rate. The 2001 average unemployment rate for Muskegon Heights was 14.0%, which is significantly higher than the county and state, at 6.4% and 5.7% respectively.

## 3. Race

African Americans, with a population of 24,166, are the largest ethnic group in Muskegon County. Approximately 39% (9,370) of the African Americans in Muskegon County reside in the City of Muskegon Heights. African Americans represent 78% of the population of Muskegon Heights. Caucasians represent 18% (2,131) and Hispanics represent 4% of the city's total population base.

#### 4. Education

The education level of residents of Muskegon Heights is significantly lower than the surrounding area or the State. Of those persons 25 years or older, approximately 36.9% have completed high school (see Table 2).

PERCENT OF POPULATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION (25 years and older)	
UNIT OF GOVERNMENT	% of Total
Muskegon Heights	36.9
City of Muskegon	37.1
Muskegon County	37.1
Source: 2000 U.S. Census	

Level of education, amount of unemployment and level of income are intertwined factors that affect the type and location of recreational facilities and programs provided by the City. Any proposed fee structure for use of these facilities and programs are also affecting factors. As a general rule, communities exhibiting characteristics like those of Muskegon Heights require rather intensive, direct involvement in the recreation process to ensure that residents enjoy a wide range of recreational experiences.

#### 5. AGE

The age distribution of the population is a useful indicator of current and future needs of the community. In Muskegon Heights, as is generally the case throughout Michigan and the United States, the population is getting older. Between 1990 and 2000, the median age rose from 26.2 years to 29 years. The City's median age is younger than that of the County, which stands at 36 years.

Table 3 illustrates age distribution in the City of Muskegon Heights in comparison to the City of Muskegon, Muskegon County and the State.

AGE DISTRIBUTION AS PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION						
UNIT	under 5	6-19	20-34	35-54	55-64	65+

Muskegon Heights	9.75	28.19	20.07	24.53	6.79	10.64
Muskegon	7.63	20.97	25.45	27.15	6.37	12.40
County	6.86	23.36	19.04	29.47	8.39	12.85
State	6.76	22.25	20.18	23.48	8.68	12.26

Source 2000 U.S. Census

Approximately 9.75% of the population is preschool age. As a group, they generally require provision of play lots close to home. These facilities should also address the needs of the adults providing supervision. Approximately 28% of the population falls between the ages of 6 and 19. This school-age group needs the provision of facilities and programs for structured, organized sports and activities. The development of new recreational programs and activities for this age group is valuable for the exposure it gives these children to an expanded range of recreational activities and programs.

The "family forming" segment of the population (20-34 age group) comprises 20% of the population of Muskegon Heights. This group has need for facilities and activities stressing organized sports, and also for more family-oriented activities.

The next segment of the population (35-64) comprises approximately 31 % of the population. This is an older group of adults. Generally, family and community oriented activities become more important with this age group, less important are those recreational activities emphasizing active team sports. At the higher end of this range, individuals will have increasing need for the provision of recreational facilities and activities that stress leisure education and social activities. These activities are particularly important to those in the 65 + age group which comprises approximately 11 % of the population.

## **6. Gender**

Of the 12,049 people that live in Muskegon Heights, 5,452 (45.24 %) are male and 6,597 (54.75%) are female. The source of this information is the 2000 U.S. Census.

## **B. Physical and Environmental Character that Determine Parks and Recreation Goals and Objectives.**

### **1. Overview**

The City of Muskegon Heights is a small community of 4.4 square miles located in Muskegon County near the shore of Lake Michigan. The City is a mature urban community, predominated by single-family homes, significant industrial and

commercial development, and a relatively strong central business district (see Appendix -Map and Map ).

Major traffic routes into the city include U.S. 31 and Interstate 96, with the Business Route for both bordering the City to the south and west. Business 31 the south of the community presents a major obstacle to the use of Mona Lake by young residents of the city who have limited transportation resources.

A significant natural feature of the community is Mona Lake, lying just south of the City, but upon which a small area of the City borders. Mona Lake is a major recreational lake for Muskegon County, providing opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing and other water related activities. Mona Lake feeds directly into Lake Michigan. The city-owned and operated boat launch located on the lake, at Mona Lake Park, is used extensively by local residents and tourist alike.

The densely developed urban setting of the community offers varied and exciting opportunities for development of recreational facilities and programs in close proximity to community residents.

## 2. Land Use

As stated earlier, Muskegon Heights is primarily a single-family residential community. Residential land uses constitute about 34% of the total land area of the City. Table 4 illustrates the types of land uses within the City limits (see Map ).

**TABLE 4:**

<b>GENERAL LAND USE</b>	
<b>USE</b>	<b>%</b>
Residential	33.8
Commercial	5.5
Industrial	6.2
Public, Semi-Public	11.5
Vacant	15.0
Right-of-way	28.0

Two categories deserve clarification. Vacant property includes not only vacant lands but also abandoned buildings, particularly industrial parcels that are not in active use. Therefore, the reuse of large industrial buildings could affect this percentage. Also, because of the grid street pattern around which the City has developed, significant acreage is devoted to right-of-ways. This category also includes alleys and railroad right-of-way.

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active use. Therefore, the reuse of large industrial buildings could affect this percentage. Also, because of the grid street pattern around which the City has developed, significant acreage is devoted to right-of-ways. This category also includes alleys and railroad right-of-way.

The City may be viewed in quadrants divided by the intersection of Broadway Avenue and Peck Street. Development in each quadrant is as follows:

*Northeast:* This area is primarily residential in nature, except for the blocks' bordering Broadway Avenue. Lot sizes, as in most of the City, are small. While there are a few duplex and multiple family dwellings, they are scattered. This quadrant does, however, contain the greatest land area devoted to multiple-family uses. The East Park Manor Public Housing Project is located in the eastern portion of this quadrant. Some scattered commercial uses are also present. There are also significant public and semi-public lands, including City Hall, Lindbergh School, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Muskegon Heights Junior High School, Central Elementary School, and numerous churches.

*Southeast:* This quadrant contains a lesser amount of residential land and a significant amount of public lands, including Mona View Cemetery, the sewage treatment plant, Mona Lake Park, Johnny O. Harris Park, Rowan Park, Little Black Creek Nature Park, Edgewood Elementary School, and the City's Public Service Building. Land utilized for multiple family occupations is also present, with an apartment complex in the northeast portion of the quadrant and an elderly housing project near the central business district. A number of commercial and professional establishments are also located in this quadrant along Seaway Drive.

*Southwest:* Single-family development dominates the land use in this quadrant, although in the blocks near the downtown area are a mixture of duplex, multiple family, commercial and office uses. Public and semi-private lands are relatively limited with Roosevelt and Glendale Elementary Schools comprising the majority of the land use.

*Northwest:* This quadrant has the greatest mixture of land uses of any area. Numerous industrial and commercial uses are present, particularly west of the railroad line. East of the railroad more single-family use is evident with scattered duplex and apartment use.

Large areas of public lands include Muskegon Heights High School, Grace Loftis Elementary School, and West Heights Park.

### **3. Transportation**

Muskegon Heights streets are arranged in a grid pattern (see Map 3). The two major directional streets are Sherman Boulevard, which runs east-west, and Peck Street, which runs north-south. Broadway Avenue, another high volume street, crosses Peck Street at the exact center of the community. The core of the downtown

shopping area is located at the intersection of Peck Street and Broadway Avenue.

Sherman Boulevard, Peck Street, Airline Road, Seaway Drive, and small sections of Hackley Avenue and Sanford Street, serve as principal arterials in the city. Broadway Avenue, Sixth Street, Wood Street, Hackley Avenue, and segments of Peck Street and Sanford Street are minor arterials. There are additional urban collector streets interspersed throughout the City. Seaway Drive, the U.S. 31 Business Route in the Muskegon area, has an average daily traffic count of 29,900 cars within the City.

With the exception of West Heights Park, all parks and elementary schools in Muskegon Heights are located along arterial and collector streets. This provides for easy access to all parks and playgrounds within the City.

## **VII. Project Implementation**

### **A. How You Intend to Implement Projects**

In evaluating the community's recreational facilities, one needs to look at additional factors, which may influence the availability of the facilities. (Beside facility quantity, location and distribution. )

Such factors as the degree of maintenance, attractiveness, the sense of safety in conformance with play standards, and vandalism problems, influence facility availability. Many of these factors are linked to each other, and improvements in one area can raise the level of another area.

Maintenance of sites and equipment is especially critical to quality recreation programs. As previously indicated, a number of parks require some manner of accelerated maintenance due to damaged equipment and poor site design. Maintenance and the budgeting of funds for same should be considered a high priority item for the City and schools. It is recommended that maintenance schedules be developed for all park/school sites. Cost programming for new facilities should also consider maintenance costs with funds budgeted accordingly. It is recommended that between 5% to 10% of the construction /replacement costs of facilities be annually budgeted for maintenance.

Generally, elementary school play equipment is in reasonably good condition and, except for the lack of appealing seating areas for adult supervision and play equipment geared to pre-schoolers, functions fairly well. Ball fields, on the other hand, are in disrepair at a number of schools (Loftis, Middle and Roosevelt) and contribute little to satisfying community needs.

Paved play surfaces at the elementary schools and at the Middle School, are either in some stage of disrepair, or are used as parking lots by surrounding land uses. The Middle and High Schools are without any outdoor facilities (with exception of the fenced track/football field at the High School.) The Middle School facilities

are now utilized as parking lots.

(Refer also to prior sections detailing individual sites for description of maintenance need.

## **B. PHYSICAL ISSUES**

To overcome recreational acreage and facility deficits pursuant to playgrounds and neighborhood parks, one needs to recognize the reality of the densely developed City. Expansion of parklands to supply the required acreage may be obtained by preservation of existing green space, expanding select parks and utilization of green space associated with Mona View Cemetery. The needs of the community can be greatly enhanced by carefully planned multi-use areas at existing parks and school playgrounds. Barrier free issues must be addressed.

Improved access to the Mona Lake community park would begin to compensate for its peripheral location. In addition, placement of special community facilities (i.e. community building, pool, etc.) in a more central location in the future would enhance accessibility to community oriented recreational facilities. Such facilities should be centrally located to provide optimum access for all residents, as well as high visibility to encourage use. Proximity to area schools should also be a factor in site location.

It is recommended that special community facilities, and in particular a community center, be considered for development near the downtown (City Hall) area. A location within near proximity of the Muskegon Heights Central Business District is considered appropriate for the following reason:

- The area is centrally located to the City's population base;
  - The area is linked to adjacent residential areas by sidewalks and street systems;
  - Parking availability is currently in place;
1. The area is located near the Junior High School and is centrally located to the other schools;
  2. The community building could provide "linkage functions" with City government and business events (i.e. conferences, seminars, small conventions, etc.) In addition, recreational facilities provided by the City are supplemented by facilities under the jurisdiction of other governmental agencies beyond City Limits. In particular, those facilities include softball fields, and swimming facilities. Several problems exist with the provision of the supplemental facilities. First, City residents must compete with other population groups for use of the

facilities. Secondly, facilities may not be accessible to lower income families unable to cope with rising fee structures.

### **C. REHABILITATION ISSUES**

#### *Types of Sites Slated for Rehabilitation*

The types of sites and properties slated for rehabilitation in Muskegon Heights include both public school sites and City-owned park lands. The public school properties will be upgraded to the level of "School-Park". The municipal parklands slated for rehabilitation will include urban regional parks, which support the local tourist sector of the economy, and neighborhood parks funding resources oriented toward urban regional parks and maintaining and upgrading neighborhood urban parks. The City would like to complete its community park renovation projects with funding resources appropriate for community parks by 2013.