

THE RECREATION PLANNING PROCESS

Introduction

Few communities of any size are privileged to have the number and caliber of recreational opportunities available in the City of Midland. Through the vision of the City founders, elected officials, and generous contributions of individuals and corporate benefactors, the City boasts a diverse range of indoor and outdoor facilities to satisfy most recreational needs.

Even though Midland has a tremendous community resource in its parks and recreational system, there is the potential for improvement and the need for expansion due to changing needs and community growth. Growth will require additional infrastructure such as sewers, water lines, streets and parks. Development will impact resources such as wetlands, streams, woodlands, and agricultural lands. Lands suitable for parks and open space should be available for enjoyment by all. In addition, protection of the riverfront from erosion and adverse development will important as the community continues to grow.

The community's interest in maintaining and improving resources is evident by the development of a specialized parks and recreation staff. The expertise of the staff and the commitment of individuals and groups allow the community to continue providing quality parks and recreation. To that end, the community was directly involved in the development of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

In October of 2003, a Community Survey was mailed to 1,000 randomly selected City households. The survey posed 19 questions to respondents and over 425 surveys were eventually returned. A copy of the survey with complete results is attached to this report as Appendix B.

The second round of community input included a four-hour long Community Input Session and Open House held at City Hall in November of 2003. The public was invited to view informational materials on City parks and to interact directly with Commission members, City staff, and planning consultants. All comments from the session were noted and are attached to this report as Appendix C.

The integration of these components into one discrete policy document is the primary purpose of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Further, it will guide the actions of the Parks and Recreation Commission through fiscal year 2009 regarding the future development of recreational resources. It is also to be used by the Department of Public Services and the City as a whole for guiding decisions

concerning recreation, parks, and public open space. Finally, this Master Plan is also intended to meet the requirements of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) *Community Recreation Plan Guidelines*, and should be updated every five years to meet eligibility guidelines set forth by the MDNR for obtaining State and Federal grants.

Plan Development

The *City of Midland Parks and Recreation Master Plan* was prepared by the planning consultants at Spicer Group, Inc., under the direction of the Department of Public Services and the Parks and Recreation Commission. Work on the Master Plan was completed in the spring of 2004. The plan was completed in stages and presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission at a series of public meetings. Major steps in the development of this plan were:

1. Initial meeting between the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Spicer Group planners.
2. Site visits and inventory of all parks by Spicer.
3. Meeting with Parks and Recreation Commission to review parks inventory, review draft of community survey, and determine format of community input session.
4. Community survey mailed to City of Midland residents.
5. Community Input Session and Open House held at City Hall.
6. Assessment of community survey results and comments received from the Community Input Session by Spicer. Draft of recreation goals developed.
7. Meeting with Parks and Recreation Commission to review survey results and the comments from the Community Input Session. Draft of recreation goals also reviewed.
8. Spicer refines draft of recreation goals.
9. Meeting with Parks and Recreation Commission to review and prioritize revised recreation goals.
10. Spicer Group edits recreation goals and develops a draft capital improvements schedule.
11. Meeting with Parks and Recreation Commission to review edited recreation goals and to discuss the draft capital improvements schedule.
12. Meeting with Parks and Recreation Commission to finalize capital improvements schedule.
13. Initial draft of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan presented and discussed at a meeting with the Parks and Recreation Commission.
14. Final draft of the Parks and Recreation Plan completed based upon additional comments from the Parks and Recreation Commission. Then, another opportunity for additional public comments prior to the public hearing. The plan was presented at an advertised public hearing

for review and comment. Master Plan adopted and effective through 2009. Future amendments to Master Plan always a possibility.

Survey

To establish its effectiveness, a Parks and Recreation Master Plan should evaluate and incorporate input from the local population. By basing the plan on the goals and objectives of its residents, parks and recreation management decisions become politically feasible and represent the intents and vision of the community. Further, because the City of Midland has over 80 parks and recreational facilities, many issues needed to be addressed. Survey questions aimed to identify how often residents used the City parks, why they visited the parks, which facilities City parks needed, and to determine the needs of the disabled population. Fifteen survey questions were posed in a multiple-choice format, one was a ranking-type question, and three were open-ended where the respondents could write individual thoughts and opinions. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

The survey was mailed in October of 2003 to 1,000 randomly selected Midland households. 428 of the surveys were returned, representing a 42.8% return rate. A typical mailed survey receives a return rate of 12%. A response level that exceeds this industry standard should be considered a reliable snapshot of community sentiment regarding the questions asked on the survey. However, to have a statistically significant response rate, the desired magnitude of the survey return rate is dependent upon the size of the community's population. Using the Census 2000 population figure of 41,685 residents, in order to achieve a statistically significant survey response rate with a 5% sampling error level, 374 surveys would have to be returned. Since 428 surveys were returned, the results of the Midland community input survey are statistically significant with just a 4.7% sampling error level.

Questions #1 through #4 generated a profile of the survey respondents. Almost 77% of the respondents have lived in the City of Midland for over 10 years. About 10% have lived in the City for 5 to 10 years, and another 11% have been here for 1 to 4 years. Only 2% of the respondents have lived in Midland for less than a year. Most respondents (56%) live in households with either two or three people. Single householders comprise 15% of the total responses, the remaining 27% have four or more people at home. Only 35% have children under the age of 18 at home. Given the responses, the average age of these children would be 9.2 years. Regarding the age of respondents, the largest segment was the 65 and older group, with 23% of the responses. The 55 to 64 age group had 20% of the responses, and the 45 to 54 group also had 20%. Those aged between 35 and 44 gave 22% of the responses, and those

between 18 and 24 were at 3%. Those under the age of 18 only had 0.2% of the responses. Comparing the response levels for each group to the actual breakdown of Midland's population based on age (Figure 3), it is clear that a considerable proportion of the survey responses came from those over the age 44. Since the survey was mailed to households, the survey responses represent an influence of opinion on the part of homeowners. Input was also sought at a public open house and input session. Details of the input received at this forum is discussed later in this section.

Data in the following charts may not always add up to 100%. Not every respondent answered every question. The level of non-response is recorded alongside each question in Appendix A.

Survey questions #5, #6, and #7 indicate a high visitation rate for Midland's parks - nearly 59% of survey respondents say they use the parks more than two times a month during the summer months - it is clear that winter usage is low. As Figure 22 illustrates, one-third of respondents do not visit City parks at all during the winter months.

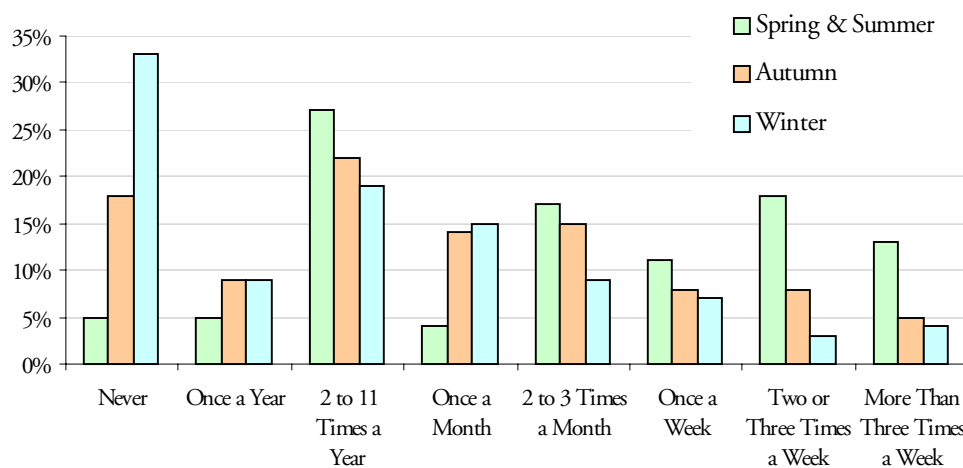


Figure 22 - Seasonal Park Usage Respondents' frequency of use and seasonal preferences for visiting Midland City Parks. (Data: Questions #5, #6, and #7, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Results from question #8 - *Why do you and/or your family visit the City of Midland Parks?* - indicate that residents enjoy activities that get them outside of the house and active. Responses shows that two of the top three reasons for visiting City parks involve walking and bicycling. As Figure 23 shows, walking is the number one stated reason stated for visiting City parks, and at 43%, using children's playground equipment is the second reason. Bicycling and picnicking come in close, too, at 42% and 41% respectively.

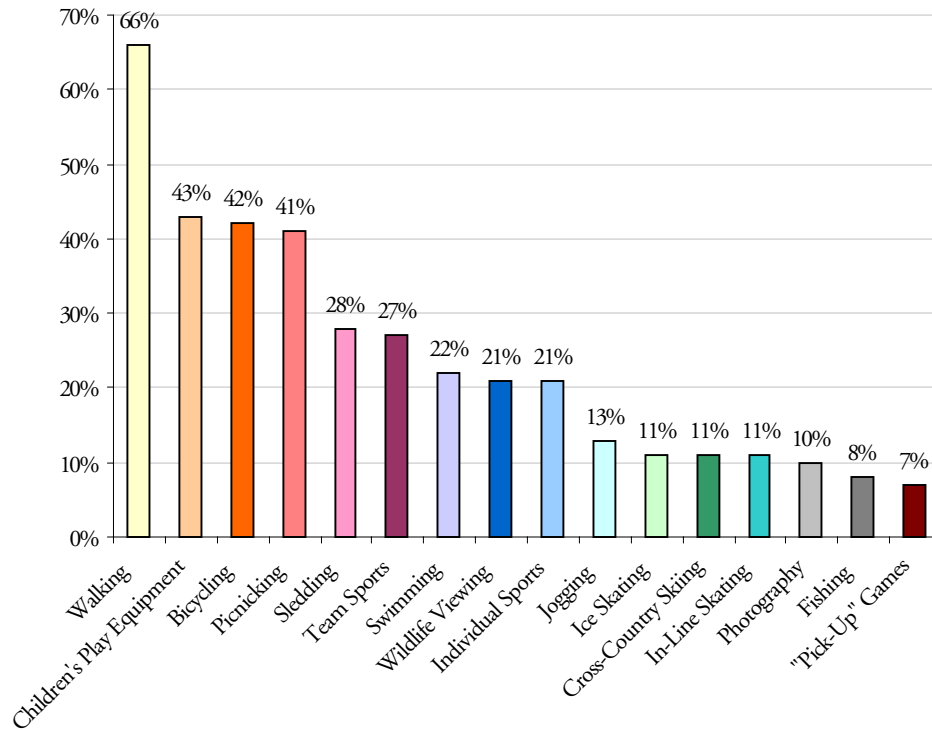


Figure 23 - Reasons for Visiting City Parks Respondents' reasons for visiting Midland City Parks. (Data: Question #8, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Regarding the status of particular parks in Midland, questions #9 and #10 asked respondents to check which parks they visited over the past year. The top-ranking parks were Emerson and Plymouth Parks, each having been visited by 70% of the respondents. The Rail-Trail was visited by 69% of respondents, City Forest by 41%, Stratford Woods by 29%, Chippewassee Park by 28%, Barstow woods by 19%, and Central Park by 15%. Other parks visited by respondents over the past year include Thrune Park (9%), Currie Golf Course (9%), the Gerstacker Riverfront System (8%), the Gerstacker Spray Park (8%), schools with children's playground equipment (6%), and St. Charles Park (5%). Actual park usage may be higher since many have facilities that attract people from outside the primary recreation service area. For instance, the civic arena at Central Park is host to events and trade shows that have wide-ranging appeal throughout the mid-Michigan region. The individuals who attended these events were not able to provide feedback via the Community Survey.

Figure 24 illustrates the responses to question #11 - *Which of the following is the biggest factor impacting your decision to visit City parks?* Most respondents said they liked the convenient location of the parks. Others liked the maintenance and upkeep (31%), the excellent facilities (31%), and the sense of safety (26%) at City parks. 18% liked a specific facility or park element, such as the Rail-Trail, the Fun Zone,

softball diamonds, golf, playgrounds, and the Gerstacker Spray Park. Respondents who didn't visit City parks were given a chance to explain their decision not to visit in question #12. The main reason given was that they were not interested in parks. However, question #12 was answered by only 46% of the respondents, and of those who did respond, 36% said that they do indeed use and visit City Parks.

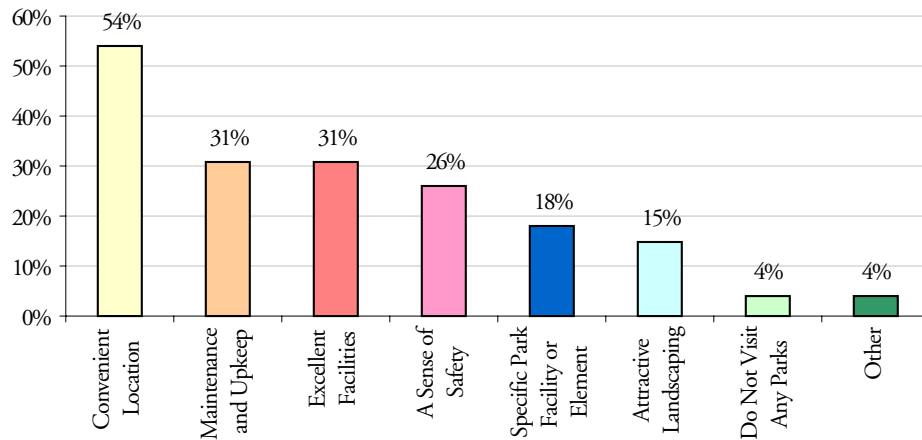


Figure 24 - Factors Impacting Decision to Visit Factors influencing respondents' decisions to visit Midland City Parks. (Data: Question #11, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

The results of question #13 show that respondents feel it is a priority for City parks to focus on the maintenance of existing parks for the next five years. Respondents also felt it was important to upgrade the current parks facilities. Figure 25 illustrates how the community would prioritize City parks and recreation operations over the next five years.

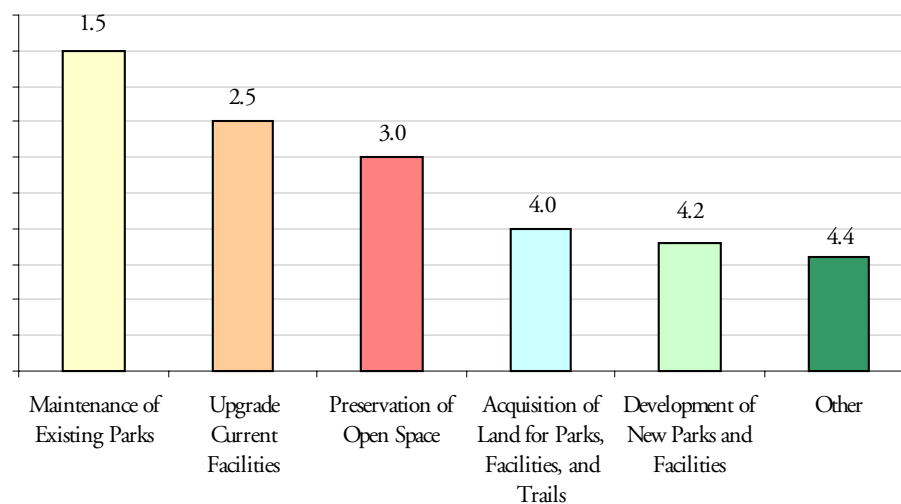


Figure 25 - Priorities for the Next Five Years Respondents ranked priorities for Midland City Parks for the next five years. A rank of "1" was most important and "6" was least important. (Data: Question #13, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Question #14 asked, *What are the three most-needed recreation facilities or activities in the City of Midland?*

Figure 26 shows that a new ice arena was the top choice at 12.9%. Second was a swimming pool (12.4%), and in third were new bike trails and paths (5.9%). 5.3% of the respondents like golf.

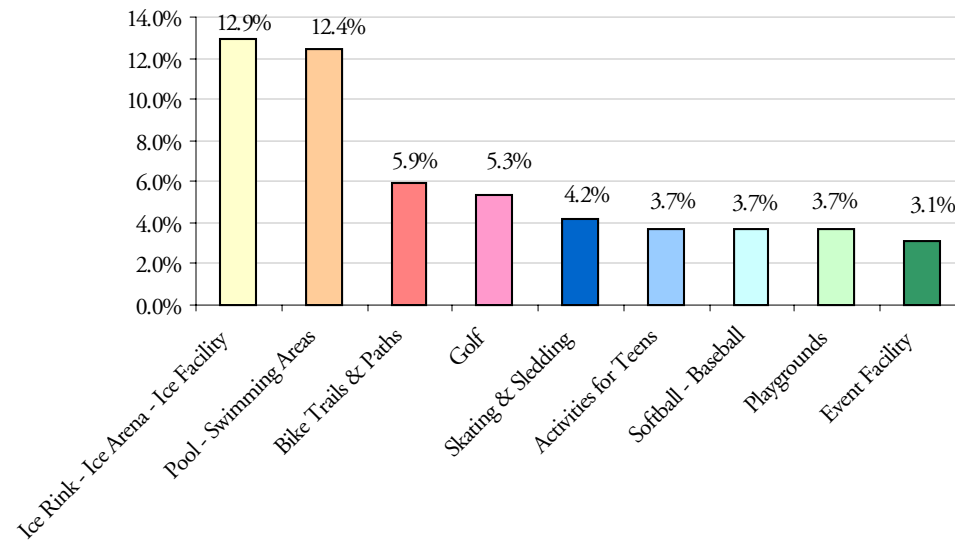


Figure 26 - Most-Needed Recreation Facilities Respondents' preferences for new recreation facilities at Midland City Parks. (Data: Question #14, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Question #15 from the survey addressed ways to make the City park system more user-friendly for the disabled (Figure 27). Only 10% of the respondents indicated that they were either disabled or had someone who lived with them that was disabled. Of greatest concern for these respondents were needs for accessible restrooms, accessible parking, paved trails, and flatter or easier grades.

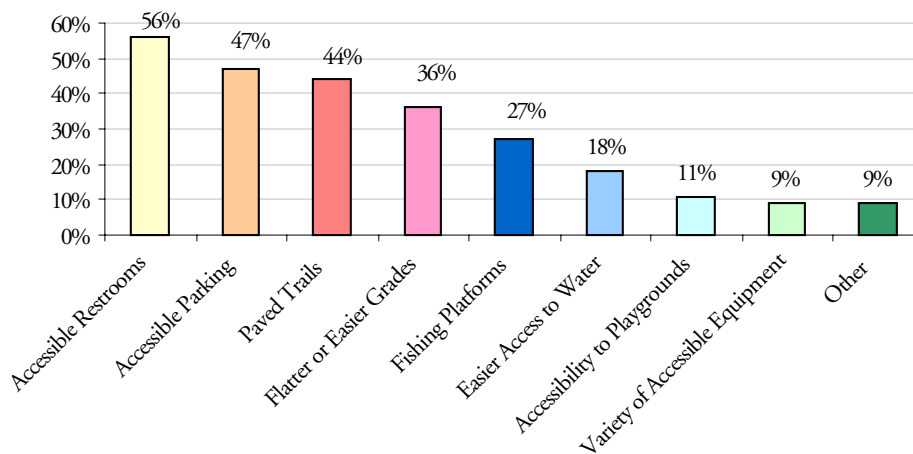


Figure 27 - Barrier-Free Improvements Respondents' needs in terms of making Midland City Parks more user-friendly for the disabled. (Data: Question #15, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Respondents were also asked to write down what they liked best about City parks in question #16. They could also mention what they liked least in question #17. Question #19 also provided an opportunity to share any other comments. A summary of the responses to these three open-ended questions can be found in Appendix A. In a specific way, question #18 - *Overall, what is your opinion of City of Midland Parks System?* - summarized these comments by showing that 84% of survey respondents said they are either satisfied or very satisfied with City parks. Figure 28 shows the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction by park users.

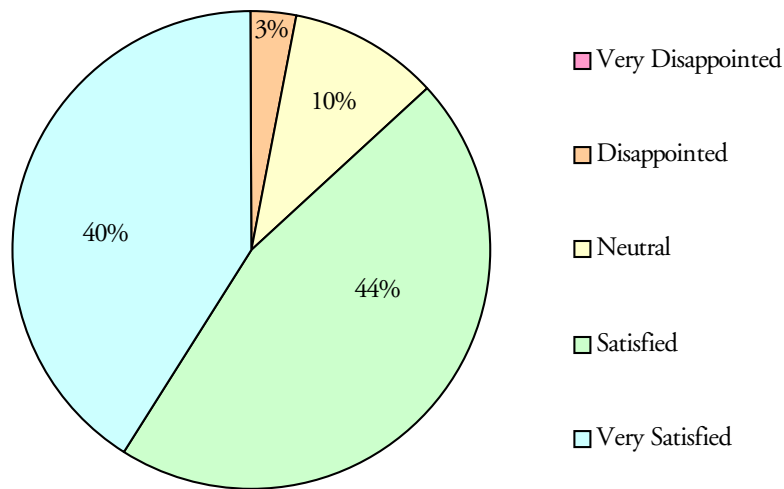


Figure 28 - Overall Satisfaction Respondents' overall opinion of Midland City Parks. (Data: Question #18, City of Midland Community Survey, October 2003)

Community Input Session

To further strengthen and diversify the type of input incorporated into this Master Plan, a four-hour long Community Input Session and Open House was held at City Hall in November of 2003. The public was invited to view informational materials on City parks and to interact directly with Commission members, City staff, and planning consultants. About 40 local residents attended the session. Though not an inclusive list of comments, the following summary is intended to show representative comments and suggestions shared by the participants.

Residents showed a strong desire to have a park system that continues to be improved and enhanced. For instance, in terms of existing trails, they indicated an appreciation for the opportunities they afforded, however some thought they could be more inviting and welcoming. One participant noted

there was a lack of rest areas along the Rail-Trail. Another individual thought it would be a good idea to have additional grilling and picnicking areas in places where trails meet water. One citizen shared his vision and plan for paved non-automotive connections between the Rail-Trail, the downtown business district, work centers such as Dow Chemical, the Midland Mall, and City Forest. The plan showed preliminary concept maps depicting proposed routes between these major activity centers.

The need for more trashcans at some of the more popular parks was identified. Some participants also pointed out that some parks lack adequate protection from the sun and suggested more shade trees, benches, and picnic tables. Comments also mentioned the lack of outdoor swimming facilities and deficiencies in terms maintenance at existing swimming facilities. There was also a comment about the need to have more interesting playground equipment for children. One individual also provided specific thoughts on signs. This person noted there needs to be more directional signage to lead people to the parks. On this point, at least three other individuals at the session independently commented that they did not know the City of Midland had so many parks.

Participants also talked about diversifying the range of available recreation activities in the City. Some people were interested in the possibility of a professional croquet course that conformed to the specifications of the United States Croquet Association. Individuals representing an Ultimate Frisbee organization said that their playing fields are only 50 by 100 yards in size, flat, and low maintenance. Other individuals expressed an interest in a new swimming pool, paintball, and a BMX track. There was some discussion on the potential need to designate certain places as dog-run-only areas. This would allow dog owners to give their pets exercise and opportunities for socialization. Ideas for a new ice arena were extensive and elaborate. Attendees also mentioned the need for more wintertime-related activities.

Individuals concerned about disability and accessibility issues also attended the session. They mentioned playgrounds should be universally accessible and that ball fields and basketball areas should be usable by the disabled. They identified a need for more paved nature trails. Future improvements to signage could include Braille and symbols. Some said more parking areas need paved connections from the lot to park amenities. Other comments addressed the design of new facilities. They considered it important to cluster amenities together to ensure, for example, that distances between pavilions, restrooms, and parking lots are not too great.

An organization concerned about greenways and open space presented ideas for beautifying the City while balancing the needs of passive and active outdoor recreation activities. Another individual stressed the need to develop the rivers that run through town as a natural resource that everyone can enjoy. Green space was also a concern, specifically to find ways to preserve it while dealing with the impacts of development.

All comments from the session were noted and are attached to this report as Appendix C.

Comparison to Standards

One of the ways to determine the parks and recreation needs within the City of Midland is to examine existing facilities in the City in comparison to recognized standards. The MDNR has adopted a set of standards to assist in determining the needs for recreational land and facilities based on the population of the community. At a minimum, a park system should be comprised of core Close-To-

	State Standards: Recommended Acres Per 1,000 Population	Existing Acreage	Recommended for the City of Midland	
			Population 41,685	Deficiency
Close-to-Home Space	6.25 to 10.5	445	349	none
Community Parks	5 to 8	234		
District Parks	1 to 2	145		
Block Parks	0.25 to 0.5	66		
Acres available per 1,000 residents	10.7			
	<i>surplus</i>	<i>+ 0.02 acres</i>	<i>+ 96 acres</i>	
Regional Space	15 to 20	1,892	729	none
Regional/Metropolitan Parks	5 to 10	1,094		
Other Space	variable	798		
Acres available per 1,000 residents	45.4			
	<i>surplus</i>	<i>+ 25.4 acres</i>	<i>+ 1,163 acres</i>	

Figure 29 - Comparison of Existing Park Space to Adopted Standards
Analysis of Midland Parks based on the MDNR recommended standards for park space per unit of population.

Home Space that includes community parks, neighborhood park/playgrounds, and mini-parks. The core system should provide a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population. Midland's core system of local Close-To-Home Space is comprised of equivalent Community, District, and Block Parks. Other parks fall outside the core system of Close-To-Home Space. These parks are organized under Regional Space. This expanded recreation system should provide 15 to 20 acres of developed or undeveloped open space per 1,000 population. The Regional Space in Midland tends to serve both the Primary and Secondary Service Areas identified in Figure 13. Figure 29 shows the total acreage of parks at both levels and compares them to the adopted standards.

Based on the 2000 Census population of 41,685 and 445 acres of developed Close-to-Home Space, Midland is providing close to 10.7 acres of developed open space per 1,000 residents. The recommended high is 10.5 acres. When considering Regional Space, Midland provides 729 acres, more than 45.4 developed or undeveloped open space per 1,000 residents. The recommended high is 20 acres. Figure 30 shows the type and quantity of park facilities recommended for the City of Midland. The only deficiency is one archery range, which has a recommendation of one per 50,000 residents.

	State Recommended Standards	Existing Facilities	Recommended for the City of Midland	
			Population 41,685	Deficiency
Archery Range	1 per 50,000	0	1	1
Basketball Courts	1 per 5,000	19	8	none
Golf - 9 Holes	1 per 25,000	3	2	none
Play/Football Fields	1 per 20,000	5	2	none
Playground	1 per 3,000	43	14	none
Soccer	1 per 10,000	9	4	none
Softball/Baseball Fields	1 per 5,000	30	8	none
Tennis	1 per 2,000	52	21	none
Volleyball	1 per 5,000	9	8	none
Indoor Ice Rink	1 per 100,000	2	0.42	none
Outdoor Ice Rink	1 per 20,000	7	2	none
Running Track	1 per 20,000	4	2	none
Swimming Pool	1 per 20,000	4	2	none
Trails	1 system per region	8	1	none

Figure 30 - Comparison of Existing Park Facilities to Adopted Standards Analysis of existing Midland park facilities based MDNR recommendations.

Service Areas

Service areas for open space facilities is another method for evaluating whether appropriate amounts of park land are being provided in the community. The service area standards, based upon recommended criteria for Community, District (neighborhood park/playgrounds), and Block (mini-parks) Parks, are: Community Parks - 1 to 2 mile radius, District Parks - 0.25 to 0.5 mile radius, Block Parks - less than 0.25 mile radius. Figure 31 illustrates the service areas for each type of developed facility. Regional Space is also included and has been assigned the same service area radius as Community Parks. The MDNR doesn't have an applicable spatial standard for Regional Space, but does recommend a one-hour driving time for the service area. Because parks in the Regional Space category are centrally located in town and get frequent use by Midland residents, they are treated as Community Parks in this analysis.

These service area radii are shown as the in their respective colors and the City limits are indicated by the red outline. Areas north of US-10 near the Midland Mall, Eastman Road, Jefferson Avenue, and Waldo Road are under-served. In addition, neighborhoods west of Dublin Avenue and south of North Saginaw Road are not served. However, the Rail-Trail bisects this area and could easily be considered a park that serves these residents were it not for its linear nature. Amenities such as restrooms are not close by, however, parking is available off Dublin Road.

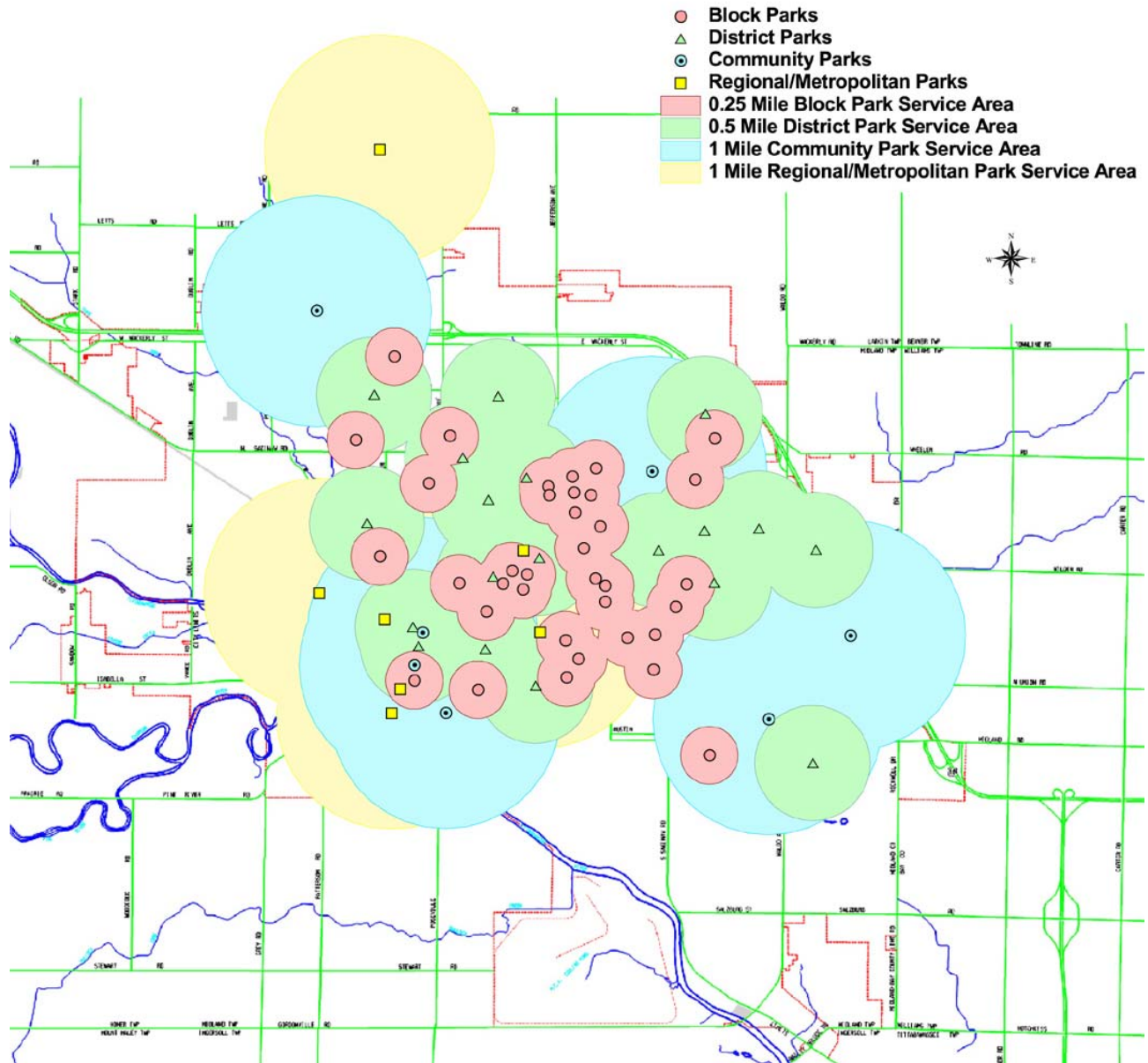


Figure 31 - Service Area Coverage Map Analysis of the extent of coverage of the recreation service areas for each park type in the City of Midland.