



# 2022 Annual Report

Protecting our natural resources  
and building healthier communities



# Oakland County Parks Commission

*We create and operate accessible, welcoming and sustainable parks and public spaces, provide recreational and educational programs and opportunities, preserve open space and steward the environment to help all people be healthier and to build resilient, connected communities in Oakland County.*



**Gary R. McGillivray**  
Chairman  
Executive Committee Member  
Appointed 2010



**J. David VanderVeen**  
Vice Chairman  
Executive Committee Member  
Appointed 1998



**Ebony Bagley**  
Secretary  
Executive Committee Member  
Appointed 2019



**Christine Long**  
Executive Committee Member  
Appointed 2009



**Amanda Herzog**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2020



**Andrea LaFontaine**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2018



**Jim Nash**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2013



**Nancy L. Quarles**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2019



**Yolanda Smith Charles**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2021



**E. Lance Stokes**  
Commissioner  
Appointed 2021



**Chris Ward**  
Director - Parks & Recreation  
Appointed 2021



**Jim Dunleavy**  
Manager - Parks & Recreation Operations  
Joined Parks 1990



**Melissa Prowse**  
Manager-Planning & Development  
ADA Coordinator  
Joined Parks 2006

The Parks Commission was established in 1966 under Public Act 261 of 1965. The 10-member Parks Commission is made up of six elected officials and four members of the public: Oakland County Executive or designee; Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner or designee; one member of the Road Commission for Oakland County; three members of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners; and four members of the public appointed by the BOC. The Parks Commission is responsible for planning, developing and operating parks and recreation facilities; making rules and regulations for the parks system; establishing a fee structure; and approving budget expenditures. The Parks Commission is also responsible for recommending acquisition of new parkland, acceptance of grant funding and entrance into use agreements, all of which require BOC approval.

# Message from the County Executive



People consider many factors when deciding where to live: the quality of the schools, the proximity to work, the safety of neighborhoods.

Oakland County rises to the top in those categories, but there is another less tangible reason that draws people here: the quality of life within the 907 square miles of Oakland County.

The Oakland County Parks system is a primary factor in boosting the quality of life here. With 80 miles of trails, five golf courses, campgrounds, an ORV park, a farmers market and plenty of water features, both natural and man-made, our parks system is the crown jewel of Oakland County.

I love these parks and so do the 1.8 million people who visit them each year. These oases give our residents both respite and recreation, places to exercise and places to play. We saw during COVID that people flocked to the parks to get out of the house, get some fresh air and attend outdoor, socially distanced gatherings with family and friends – underlining the importance of our parks to peoples' physical and mental wellbeing.

I'm so excited that, in collaboration with the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, we are able to expand and improve the footprint of the parks system in Oakland County, especially the southern half of the county, through a \$15 million infusion of federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act and \$5.2 million from Oakland County Parks.

Once these projects are underway, people from Madison Heights to Lyon Township and Pontiac to Southfield will have access to the same type of recreational opportunities as those who live in the northern half of the county.

Many thanks to the dedicated people who work tirelessly to ensure our parks are first class and to the residents of Oakland County for your continued support of the parks.

*Oakland County Executive*  
*David Coulter*

A handwritten signature of David Coulter in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.



# County Approves \$20 Million Healthy Communities Park and Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan

**Funding targeted to improve health and well-being of individuals hardest hit by pandemic.**

County Executive David Coulter, Oakland County Commissioners, the Oakland County Parks Commission and local government leaders gathered together on Nov. 2, 2022 to celebrate the approval of the Healthy Communities Park and Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan. Under this plan, \$15 million in federal pandemic relief assistance received by Oakland County will be matched with a \$5.2 million commitment from Oakland County Parks to make historic investments in improving park facilities and recreation opportunities. This goal is to improve the health and well-being of residents hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Beech Woods Park in Southfield was the site for announcement of historic park funding.  
Standing: J. David VanderVeen, Chris Ward, David Coulter and Gary R. McGillivray.  
Seated: E. Lance Stokes, Yolanda Smith Charles, Nancy Quarles, Andrea LaFontaine, Amanda Herzog and Jim Nash.*

## Program Goals

- Revitalize and enhance parks located in or servicing residents of communities most impacted by the pandemic.
- Improve physical and mental health, social connectivity and quality of life of residents.
- Address barriers to equitable access and use of quality park and recreation opportunities for all communities, ages and abilities.
- Leverage funding through partnerships with local governments.
- Sustain and build on investment through agreements to transition management of urban parks to Oakland County Parks.



## Long-term Partnerships and Expansion of Oakland County Parks system

- Hawthorne Park, Pontiac
- Shepherd Park, Oak Park
- Beech Woods Park, Southfield
- Ambassador Park, Madison Heights
- Hazel Park Community Center, Hazel Park



## Planned Improvements

- Walking and hiking trails
- Universally accessible playgrounds
- Outdoor exercise and fitness equipment
- Athletic fields and courts
- Water and winter recreation facilities
- Natural resource restoration and preservation
- Family and group gathering spaces



## Park Improvement Capital Grants

- \$500,000 to Pontiac for local park and recreation priorities
- \$500,000 to Oak Park for investments in Shepherd Park
- \$500,000 to Southfield for a splash pad at Beech Woods Park
- \$400,000 to Hazel Park for improvements at Green Acres Park
- \$300,000 to Royal Oak Township for improvements to Mack-Rowe Park



## Investments in Existing Oakland County Parks

- Catalpa Oaks, Southfield
- Lyon Oaks, Lyon Township
- Red Oaks, Madison Heights
- Waterford Oaks, Waterford Township





# Message from the Chairman



Interest in parks across Oakland County has grown exponentially in recent years. You have increasingly turned to outdoor spaces and recreation activities to boost physical health, emotional wellbeing and social connectivity. When searching for a quiet moment or change of scenery to escape the busyness and stress of our modern lives, our amazing parks can provide the perfect space to relax and regroup. Summer attendance levels demonstrate that your enthusiasm for the restorative benefits of recreation is continuing to grow as we all move into a post-pandemic reality and highlights the critical role that parks play in creating healthy, resilient people and communities.

With this insight, Oakland County Parks made a major push to secure federal pandemic relief funds – provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – to improve parks and recreation facilities across Oakland County.

This funding represents a unique opportunity to extend the footprint of our excellent Oakland County Parks system and to make outdoor recreation spaces and programming better and more accessible for all Oakland County residents.

Another exciting accomplishment this year was the development of the new 5-Year (2023-2027) Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The plan will guide staff and the Parks Commission in our efforts to provide high-quality recreational opportunities to the residents of Oakland County over the next five years. It updates OCP's strategic plan "Vision" and "Mission," and adds four "Core Values" that will help to build an equitable, sustainable and resilient future for OCP: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; Health & Wellness; Environmental Sustainability & Natural Resources Stewardship; Fiscal Responsibility & Organizational Excellence.

It is a busy and exciting time. The Healthy Communities and Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan and the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plan will have a profound impact in the coming years. The development of both these important and ambitious initiatives would not have been possible without the innovative vision and leadership of our Director, Chris Ward, and the incredible hard work of OCP staff. Additionally, the growing popularity of our golf courses, campgrounds and other parks and facilities is a testament to the passion and effort that our staff – at all levels – bring to their work every day. We have an incredible team here at Parks and it is an honor to work with them to provide high quality parks and recreation opportunities to the Oakland County residents we serve.

I am looking forward to what 2023 will bring and will see you in the parks.

Gary R. McGillivray  
Parks Commission Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary R. McGillivray". The signature is fluid and cursive, matching the printed name to its left.



# Community Partnerships

**OCP is committed to finding innovative ways to partner with local cities, villages and townships (CVTs) to provide improved parks and recreation spaces, experiences and services to Oakland County residents.**

**The Invasive Species Community Projects initiative, forestry mower service and Community Grant Program are three examples of these partnership efforts:**



## **Invasive Species Community Projects – Village of Beverly Hills Invasive Buckthorn**

In 2022, a portion of the annual Oakland County Parks Commission budget was set aside for high priority invasive species projects. Invasive species are organisms non-native to Michigan that damage the local environment, wildlife, infrastructure, economy or even human health. Through the Invasive Species Community Projects initiative, the Village of Beverly Hills secured funding for a project focused on tackling invasive buckthorn. Buckthorn is a woody species that spreads quickly, crowds out native shrubs and understory plants and can even be a host for viruses and crown fungus. By combining OCP funding with matching village funds, Beverly Hills was able to continue and expand its buckthorn eradication efforts in Beverly Park and Riverside Park, where before the species had been spreading unmanaged for nearly four decades.

“We’re thankful for our collaboration with Oakland County Parks,” Kristin Rutkowski, Village Clerk and Assistant Village Manager, said. “We look forward to continuing invasive species removal and native understory restoration to help maintain a healthy ecosystem in our community.”



## **Forestry Mower Service – Farmington Hills Woodland Hills Nature Park**

To help CVTs better manage woody invasive species in their communities, OCP purchased a forestry mulcher capable of mowing larger diameter trees and shrubs. The equipment, well-suited for first-time mowing, leaves only a fine mulch behind, which quickly decomposes. The City of Farmington Hills partnered with OCP to use the forestry mulcher to clear invasive buckthorn in Woodland Hills Nature Park. OCP staff mowed approximately four acres of buckthorn at the front of the park, a first step towards restoring the beech and maple forest that originally populated this area.

“The City of Farmington Hills Parks staff has been working hard to restore the natural habitat to Woodland Hills Nature Park through the removal of invasive species, specifically buckthorn,” Natural Resources Coordinator Alison Shapic said.

“The work we’ve completed so far could not have been done without the seamless communication and helpful insight OCP staff provided from personal experiences with invasive removal. Our hope is that this restoration project will provide a place for native wildlife to thrive and the community to enjoy.”



## Community Grant Program – Oxford Farmers Market

When the Parks millage renewal and increase passed in November 2020, OCP sought ways to leverage these funds not only to improve and expand existing county parks, but also to support local community recreation.

The Community Grant Program was created to financially assist local municipalities with planning, preliminary engineering/design and construction costs directly related to park improvement and trail projects in Oakland County.

The Charter Township of Oxford successfully submitted a proposal to create a local farmers market. By the end of 2022, a new 40 ft. x 100 ft. open-air pavilion was erected near the entrance of Seymour Lake Township Park, Oxford's most popular park with approximately 80,000 visitors each year. With a focus on accessibility, the project included adding a concrete Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant walkways and four new accessible parking spaces and installing a semi-circular driveway adjacent to the pavilion for safe, easy pickups and drop offs. The farmers market will help make fresh, nutritious food more accessible, foster a sense of community, promote and strengthen local farms, aid people struggling with food insecurity and provide a platform for educating people about healthy living. When the market is not operating, the space can be used for community events, recreation programs and private gatherings, or as an outdoor classroom or performance space.

"A farmers market is something that Oxford Township has been wanting and needing for many years," Oxford Township Communications and Grants Manager C.J. Carnacchio said. "This will enhance our community and the surrounding area on so many levels. Farmers markets are vibrant places brimming with life and bustling with activity – they represent the very best that a community has to offer. It was great to collaborate with Oakland County Parks to help make this project a reality."





# Congressional Delegation Secures \$2.2 Million in Federal Funds to Expand Oakland County Farmers Market



With the passage of the FY 2023 Omnibus Appropriations bill, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow and U.S. Representatives Brenda Lawrence, Elissa Slotkin and Haley Stevens successfully secured \$9 million in federal funding for community projects in Oakland County. This included \$2.26 million, requested by Stabenow and Stevens, for expanding the Oakland County Farmers Market to increase capacity, improve accessibility, create community spaces and develop a commercial kitchen. Additionally, the funds will be used to improve the overall site with stormwater management and demonstration gardens. The Farmers Market serves all of Oakland County and has up to 200,000 visitors a year, meaning this funding will have a widespread, significant and lasting positive impact.

“The Oakland County Farmers Market is one of the oldest producer-only markets in Michigan,” Oakland County Parks Commission Chairman Gary R. McGillivray said. “We’re thrilled to have this funding to renovate and modernize this facility so we can provide even more nutrition, health and wellness activities for our residents and local farmers.”

The Farmers Market is a favorite spot for many Oakland County residents and improves the lives, health and wellbeing of people across the county and in surrounding communities. In addition to promoting and providing access to healthy, nutritious food, and facilitating more than \$50,000 a year in food assistance benefits, it also supports local farmers and artisans across the region.



# Master Planning for the Next Five Years

The Oakland County Parks (OCP) 5-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plan will guide staff and the Parks Commission in their efforts to provide high-quality recreational opportunities to the residents of Oakland County over the next five years. The plan follows the Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans provided by the Grants Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the previous plan which expired at the end of 2022.

The plan updates the park system's strategic plan "Vision", "Mission," and adds "Core Values" to help build an equitable, sustainable and resilient future for OCP:



## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Health & Wellness

### **The Healthy Communities Park and Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan:**

The plan, approved by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, allocates \$15 million in county American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for improving park and outdoor recreational spaces in areas disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. OCP committed another \$5.2 million. Funds will dramatically improve OCP's ability to reach and serve a wider, more diverse population.

### **Oakland County Farmers Market Modernization and Improvement Project:**

OCP submitted a community project funding request to fund major improvements to the Oakland County Farmers Market.

**Water Access:** OCP will continue expanding public access by improving its beaches, shorelines, docks and fishing piers; offering kayak and canoe rentals; and creating programs that get people out on the water.



## Environmental Sustainability & Natural Resources Stewardship

### **Nature Preserves:**

Natural resources preservation has long been a priority for the Parks Commission. OCP will designate its most precious natural parks as Nature Preserves and develop standards and protocols for management and access. This includes the planned acquisition of the 70-acre Turtle Woods property in Troy.

### **Environmental Sustainability:**

In 2022, OCP created a Chief of Environmental Sustainability and Natural Resources role and established a Sustainability Committee, comprised of Commissioners and staff, to meet today's recreation needs without compromising the future. Additionally, Park Action Plans have a sustainability component and all future projects will have a sustainability review early in the planning process.



## Fiscal Responsibility & Organizational Excellence

### **Clubhouses and Conference Centers:**

OCP has several buildings that are costly to maintain and have limited or no usage by the public. OCP will review these facilities and examine alternatives to determine how to eliminate subsidy of private events and increase public access, use and awareness of these assets.

### **Aquatic Facilities:**

Red Oaks Waterpark and Waterford Oaks Wave Pool are well-loved destinations in need of significant investment or a more modest investment coupled with an adjustment in focus and operation. OCP will review detailed facility condition assessments for both and examine alternatives to determine how to meet public need and be fiscally sustainable.

# 2022 Accomplishments & Upcoming Park Improvements

## **New playgrounds at three parks sparked imagination and updated outdated structures.**

Just ahead of the Fourth of July holiday, new playgrounds opened at Addison Oaks day-use parking lot, Groveland Oaks Pines and the Independence Oaks Moraine Knoll Shelter.

The new structures are the result of careful consideration of the location, programming, special events, rental and public user needs of each park. Additionally, they meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and were designed to provide opportunities for inclusive play and universal access.

All Oakland County Parks playgrounds are inspected annually by a certified playground safety inspector and the resulting reports help with prioritizing, budgeting and forecasting plans for playground replacement.

## **Addison Oaks Campground Group Areas 3 and 4 Conversion**

The existing Addison Oaks Campground Group Areas 3 and 4 are being converted to 10 individual camping sites in an underutilized section of the campground. Four of the 10 new sites will meet ADA guidelines, which will put Addison Oaks Campground into overall campsite ADA compliance per campground operating license.

The project involves removal/replacement of existing water lines, individual site spigots and electrical pedestals, plus installation of a 20' x 20' gravel parking space for each site and construction of a sidewalk connecting to the bathhouse. The new sites will be open for the 2023 camping season.

## **Docks on Crooked Lake in Independence Oaks**

With more than 12 access points around Crooked Lake, eight have been identified as the highest priority for repair and replacement. All work will be completed by OCP staff and floating dock sections will be installed early spring 2023.

## **New Playground at Independence Oaks**

The existing Pine Grove Playground at Independence Oaks will be removed and replaced with a new, larger playground. Construction to begin in spring 2023.





# Outreach Delivers Services to Communities

After Oakland County residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of OCP's 2020 millage increase and renewal, staff has made investing in community outreach a top priority. By offering unique recreation packages to communities, Oakland County Parks has been able to reach 910 square miles of the county and provide residents with opportunities to try new activities and make lasting memories with family and friends.

## **Recreation Assistance Partnership Program (RAPP)**

- 140 visits to 41 cities, villages and townships
- 68,815 participants

## **Memorial - Labor Day 2022**

- 114 visits
- 53,592 participants

## **Community Nature Hikes**

Naturalist-led programs to help establish connection between communities and their parks

## **Summer Concerts in the Parks**

Series of free outdoor concerts hosted in local communities

## **Ready, Set Play!**

Multi station, indoor programs for all ages

## **Movie Nights**

Series of free outdoor movies hosted in local communities

## **Expedition Adventure**

Event and camp packages for local communities

## **Blizzard Blast Series**

Traveling winter program with outdoor activity stations

## **Pet Wellness Clinics**

Vaccination and licensing events held in local communities



# Awards & Accolades



**2022 NACPRO Outstanding  
Public Official**

J. David VanderVeen  
Parks Commissioner



**GDUSA  
American In-house  
Design Award 2022**  
Garrett Ebbeling  
2021 Annual Report



**Michigan Association  
for Environmental and  
Outdoor Education  
Rising Star Award**  
Griffin Bray



**mParks Park  
Leadership Award**  
Park Supervisor  
Mike Boyd



**mParks Community  
Service Awards**

Greg and Michelle Petrosky  
Volunteers

Nathaniel Smith,  
Boy Scout Troop 185

Citizens for Oakland County  
Parks and Recreation



**Silver International  
Aquatic Safety Award**  
Red Oaks and Waterford Oaks  
Waterparks  
Ellis & Associates, Inc.



**Detroit Free Press  
Named to Top 10 Public  
Courses Metro Detroit 2022**  
Lyon Oaks Golf Course



**Contact Oakland County Parks:**  
OaklandCountyParks.com  
OcParks@oakgov.com  
1-888-OCPARKS