



2023 Annual Report

Shaping equitable recreation with community partners

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission



Gary R. McGillivray*
Chairman
Executive Committee
Member
Appointed 2011



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 - Oakland County Parks
Appointed 2021



Jim Dunleavy
Manager - Operations
Joined Parks staff in 1990



Melissa Prowse
Manager - Planning & Development
Joined Parks staff in 2006



Aaron Stepp
Manager - Internal Services
Joined Parks staff in 2011

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) was established in 1966 under Public Act 261 of 1965. The 10-member commission is made up of the County Executive or designee; Water Resources Commissioner or designee; Chairperson of the Road Commission for Oakland County or designee; and seven members appointed by the Board of Commissioners (BOC) which include the public and up to three members of the BOC.

The OCPRC 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. They are also responsible for recommending acquisition of new parkland, acceptance of grant funding and entrance into use agreements, all of which require BOC approval.

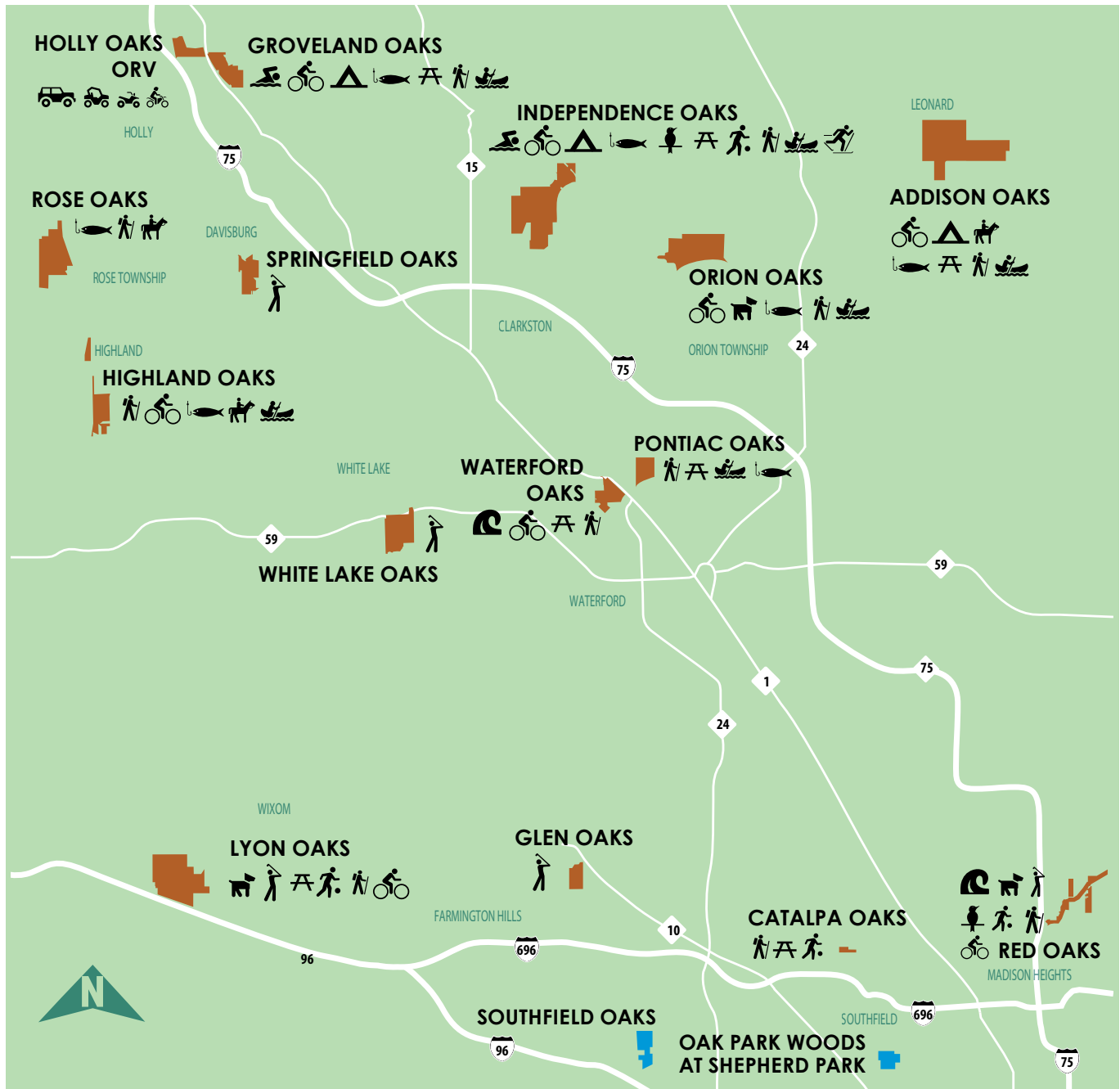


**Gary R. McGillivray was appointed to the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission in 2011 and elected Chairman in 2020. He served in that role until his death in 2023. J. David VanderVeen served as Acting Chair until a new Chair was elected in January, 2024.*

His legacy will live for generations to come. McGillivray was instrumental in facilitation of the allocation of \$15M in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the Healthy Communities Park & Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan. His leadership was also key in the adoption of the Five-Year Recreation Master Plan with a renewed vision and focus on equity and sustainability and transition of Hawthorne Park to Pontiac Oaks, in partnership with the City of Pontiac, making it the 15th Oakland County Park in October 2023.

An inclusive playground and meeting space in the north section of Ambassador Park in Madison Heights will be called "McGillivray Play Garden." Project plans include a restroom, looping pathways, fitness area, accessible water feature, pollinator garden and play and activity hubs.

The Oakland County Parks System



Current Oakland County Parks: 15

- Addison Oaks Campground and County Park • Catalpa Oaks County Park
- Groveland Oaks Campground and County Park • Glen Oaks Golf Course • Highland Oaks County Park
- Holly Oaks ORV Park • Independence Oaks County Park • Lyon Oaks Golf Course and County Park
- Orion Oaks County Park and Dog Park • Pontiac Oaks County Park
- Red Oaks Dog Park, Golf Course, Nature Center and Waterpark • Rose Oaks County park
- Springfield Oaks Golf Course • Waterford Oaks County Park • White Lake Oaks Golf Course

Future Oakland County Parks: 2

- Southfield Oaks, Southfield • Oak Park Woods at Shepherd Park, Oak Park

OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS

BY THE NUMBERS 2023

**NEARLY
2 MILLION**
Annual park guests



80+
Miles of trails



2,848

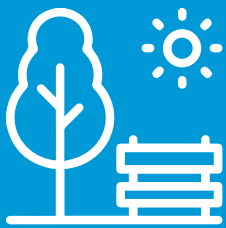
People served via food distribution partnerships with Forgotten Harvest and Oakland County Veterans Services



6,191

Free Annual vehicle permits given to seniors, active military and individuals with disabilities

15 Parks, golf courses, campgrounds and recreation sites



117,983

People served through Recreation Assistance Partnership Program (RAPP)



640

Native plant kits distributed



104

Full-time employees

640

Part-time employees



ARPA Funding and Results

Oakland County Parks moved forward in 2023 with implementation of the Healthy Communities Park and Outdoor Recreation Investment Plan. This plan, approved in 2022 by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, allocated \$15 million in American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) federal pandemic relief assistance, matched by \$5.2 million from Oakland County Parks, to improve park facilities and recreation opportunities in the Oakland County communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accomplishments in 2023 included developing agreements with the communities identified in the plan, conducting public engagement and launching the development of design and engineering plans. In certain parks specific needs had already been identified and improvements were implemented immediately. The design and engineering process will continue through 2024 with construction commencing this year as well as continuing through 2025 and 2026. All projects are required to be completed by the end of 2026.



Construction highlights this past year included a new fishing dock at Pontiac Oaks (formerly Hawthorne Park) in Pontiac and a new play structure at Green Acres Park in Hazel Park.

Public engagement included surveys and open house events in Pontiac, Oak Park, Hazel Park, Southfield, Royal Oak Township and Madison Heights. Through this engagement, Oakland County Parks gained insights into the types of park improvements communities would like to see. It also gave residents an opportunity to share memories and stories and helped staff understand the significance of each park to the local community.

Great things are happening at a park near you...

The City of Pontiac and Oakland County Parks are teaming up to rejuvenate Hawthorne Park with more than \$1.5 million in improvements planned in the next two years. You are invited to participate in upcoming free family fun events at the park!

Están sucediendo cosas geniales en un parque cerca de usted...

La ciudad de Pontiac y los Parques del condado de Oakland se unieron para rejuvenecer el parque Hawthorne con más de \$1.5 millones en mejoras planificadas durante los próximos dos años. Le invitamos a participar en los próximos eventos familiares divertidos gratuitos durante este verano en el parque.

Park Planning Open House
Aug. 26 1-3 p.m.

Wheels & Squeals, Touch-A-Truck
Sept. 29 5-7:30 p.m.

Hawthorne Park
1400 Telegraph Road, Pontiac, MI 48340

Healthy Communities Plan – Communities and Projects

Parks in Oakland County

City of Hazel Park

Replacement of the playground at Green Acres Park with an accessible playground that has sensory features. A pocket park plan will guide the city in improving its many neighborhood parks. A grant to the city will help fund improvements to the Community Center and establish an Oakland County Parks (OCP) South Oakland Office.

City of Madison Heights and Red Oaks County Park

Incorporation of Ambassador Park into Red Oaks. Investments at the Red Oaks Nature Center and former Ambassador Park are focused on intergenerational play and universal accessibility.

Charter Township of Royal Oak

Replacement of the playground at Mack-Rowe Park with an accessible playground with sensory features.

City of Oak Park

Investment in David H. Shepherd Park and transition of the north 17 acres of the park to Oak Park Woods at Shepherd Park under OCP management. Improvements include a new accessible nature playground and improvements to trails, pavilions, and restrooms. A grant to the city will help fund construction of a farmers market.

City of Southfield

Investment focused on establishment of a nature preserve and development of an accessible trail system at the former golf course at Beech Woods Park. The south 39 acres will transition to Southfield Oaks under OCP management. A grant to the city will help fund improvements at Beech Woods Park.



Conceptual rendering of future Southfield Oaks park development



Oakland County Parks Properties

Catalpa Oaks County Park

Investments include forest and native prairie plantings with accessible walking paths, gathering spaces and seating areas.

Lyon Oaks County Park

Investments include a new universally accessible playground, a national demonstration site for inclusive play. Other improvements include universally accessible site improvements, improved trail connectivity and addition of pickle ball courts.



Rendering of playground installation at Lyon Oaks

Pontiac Oaks County Park

Investment in Hawthorne Park and transition to Pontiac Oaks under OCP management. Improvements include replacing outdated buildings, adding amenities and increasing accessibility throughout the park. A grant to the city will help fund improvements at Crystal Lake Park.

Waterford Oaks County Park

Investments include a new universally accessible playground, trail and trailhead improvements, and other recreational facility improvements.

Community Grants invest nearly \$700,000 in county

2023 Community Park and Trail Capital Grant Program

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 program launched its second year in 2023, approving grants to 11 communities for a total of \$658,166.

2022 Community Park and Trail Capital Grant Program

Fourteen grants were awarded in 2022. These grant projects made significant progress in 2023, with the following five projects completed:

- City of Auburn Hills
Hawk Woods Nature Themed Playground
- City of Birmingham
Adams Park Development
- City of Farmington
Shiawassee Park Playscape Fence Replacement
- City of Hazel Park
Bob Welch Baseball Field Modernization Project
- Oxford Charter Township
Development of Oxford Farmer's Market



City of Hazel Park, Bob Welch Baseball Field



Oxford Charter Township, Farmers Market



City of Birmingham, Adams Park



City of Auburn Hills, Hawk Woods Park

2023 Community Park and Trail Capital Grant Program Awardees

Village of Beverly Hills

Beverly Park
Playground Restoration

City of Birmingham

Trail Improvements
Booth Park Section

Commerce Charter Township

Bicentennial Park Renovations

City of Farmington

Dinan Pocket Park

City of Ferndale

Martin Road Park
Revitalization Project

Village of Leonard

Polly Ann Trail
Modernization & Safety
Improvements Design Project

City of Madison Heights

Basketball Court Rehabilitation
at Civic Center Park

Oakland Charter Township

Gallagher Trail Gap

Orion Charter Township

Civic Center Sand Playground
Phase 1

City of Royal Oak

Hamer Finch Wilkins Park

City of Southfield

Lahser Woods Park
Improvement Project
Phase 1: Dog Park



Teens assist in Thread Creek discovery

Native freshwater mussels in the portion of Thread Creek running through Groveland Oaks County Park and Campground was an exciting discovery for Freshwater Program Coordinator Eric Diesing last summer.

“These have been in severe decline globally for a number of years, so finding them in Thread Creek is pretty encouraging,” he said.

Diesing has been establishing long-term baseline data for the parks system’s numerous bodies of water. By developing water sampling protocol and a biological inventory, staff can determine the best strategy for managing its valuable water resources, like the freshwater mussels.

A huge undertaking, Oakland County Parks (OCP) staff is being assisted in its efforts by volunteers and community partners. In June, Micah 6 Community, a service organization based in Pontiac, connected OCP with five teens hired through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Summer Youth Employment Program. They assisted in a biological survey of macroinvertebrates and aquatic plants, collecting water samples in Thread Creek and kayaking on Stewart Lake to learn about fish habitats.



Diesing said he is interested in partnering with more local organizations and volunteers as collecting the water data is a long-term project that will continue well into 2024. His goal is to establish real time water quality monitoring.



Trail rerouted for state's only venomous rattlesnake

After several reports of Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes (EMR) along the most northwest trail in Highland Oaks County Park, the trail was re-routed in early 2023. While this small change made little impact on how guests enjoy the park, it was a significant step to boost the health and welfare of the Eastern Massasauga, a federally protected rattlesnake also listed as a “species of special concern” in Michigan.

“Due to the number of sightings, we suspected this was an overwintering habitat for EMR,” Wildlife Program Coordinator Sean Zera said. “While the snakes spend their winters underground, when they emerge in the early spring, they are still cold and vulnerable. Keeping them safe from potential harm and not disturbing them with trail maintenance activities like mowing is a priority for Oakland County Parks.”

OCP staff manage the overall health of natural communities and use rare, threatened, and endangered species, like EMR, as indicators. Sometimes these indicator species will dictate a specific action, such as moving a trail, but more often suggest large-scale management for entire system. For example, rare orchids found within the parks systems are protected by more comprehensive management techniques, like winter mowing to remove invasive shrubs or prescribed burns.

Overall, the natural resources staff works collaboratively to help steward and restore unique natural communities such as prairie fen, southern shrub-carr or oak barren that support diverse and native plants and animals.

Visit OaklandCountyParks.com/NaturalResources to learn more about the Eastern Massasauga and how Oakland County Parks manages its natural resources and helps rare and protected species thrive.



Expanding access for body and mind benefits

An expanded Free Entry Day program increased access to health and wellness activities at Oakland County Parks.

The 12 Free Entry Days highlighted year-round initiatives, including Restore in the Outdoors held May 6-7.

“Restore in the Outdoors was a fun series of programs that highlighted the health and wellness benefits of our parks,” DEI and Community Engagement Coordinator Zach Zuchowicz said.

“The kayaking event at Pontiac Oaks County Park was my favorite activity, as it was our first program at the park and participants were able to enjoy warm spring weather while taking in beautiful views paddling on Creger Lake.”

In addition to kayaking and paddleboarding, Restore in the Outdoors events included cardio mash up with kickboxing, Zumba and yoga at Independence Oaks County Park and a birdwatching hike and guided meditation at Red Oaks Nature Center. These dates correlated with National Fitness Day and the kickoff of Mental Health Awareness Month.

Free entry was also provided on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Juneteenth and Veterans Day. A special celebration for dogs to mark National Dog Day was held on Aug. 26 and the beauty of the parks were featured during Fall Park Days in September.

In previous years, six Free Entry Days were held. The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission approved doubling the number of days to boost access to park amenities and establish new health and wellness initiatives.

During Free Entry Days, guests have access to trails, dog parks, playgrounds, fishing spots and beaches, in season.



Kayaking at Pontiac Oaks County Park



Yoga by Crooked Lake at Independence Oaks County Park



Hiking trail at Addison Oaks County Park

Welcoming Week embraces all visitors

As part of its free entry series, Oakland County Parks (OCP) participated in Welcoming Week events.

Welcoming Week, an annual campaign celebrating community efforts to foster connections between immigrants and their receiving communities, and to be welcoming and inclusive places for all, was hosted in mid-September. This timing inspired Parks staff to participate in two events highlighting immigrant inclusion in the community.



Healthy Gardening Fair at the Chinese Community Center, Madison Heights

OCP supported this community event – hosted by the Association of Chinese Americans – by providing a stage, helping with the planning and promotion, and having staff on site for public engagement efforts around the new Oakland County Parks/Madison Heights partnership to rejuvenate Ambassador Park and Red Oaks Nature Center. To make the information more accessible, all the public engagements materials were translated into Mandarin.

Hispanic Heritage Celebration at the Oakland County Farmers Market, Waterford

Parks partnered with the Welcoming Oakland and Oakland County executive teams and community service organizations La Casa Amiga and Centro Multicultural La Familia to host this special event, which focused on celebrating and sharing the heritage of the Hispanic community. It featured local Hispanic vendors, tables with representatives from a handful of local service organizations, a cooking demonstration by Gleaners Community Food Bank in English and Spanish – and activities for kids, including a soccer skills demonstration, flag coloring craft and a piñata.

To learn more about Welcoming Week in Oakland County, check out the [Oakland County Blog post](#) on the 2023 celebration.





Outreach program invests \$250,000 in communities

For more than 40 years, Oakland County Parks has provided free recreation opportunities to communities that otherwise wouldn't have access to activities like mobile recreation units, bus transportation and more.

The Recreation Assistance Partnership Program (RAPP), managed by the parks system's Recreation Programs and Services (RPS) unit, had an incredibly successful season in 2023. Of the 62 cities, villages, and townships in Oakland County, 54 participated in RAPP, serving 117,983 participants.

Programs are offered in two-hour no-cost blocks to non-profit organizations and municipal governments on a first come/first served basis application process.

Shawnie Stamper, Recreation Director for the City of Pleasant Ridge, said her department has participated in RAPP for several years.

"We have been able to offer a wider range of recreation opportunities for our residents. Without (RAPP), we wouldn't be able to afford activities and programs for our residents because most of our community programming is free," Stamper said.

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission approved \$250,000 to fund RAPP in 2023 and the same amount for the 2024 season.

"The RPS staff is consistently knowledgeable about the units and the procedures of the county," Stamper added. "Our department is hopeful that RAPP will continue to serve Oakland County residents for years to come."





Free swim lessons increase safety for local youth

To remove financial barriers to swim instruction and increase safe water recreation at Michigan's plentiful beaches, pools, lakes, waterparks, rivers and wave pools, Oakland County Parks once again partnered with Huron-Clinton Metroparks to provide free swim lessons.



During the second season of the Everyone in the Pool Program at Waterford Oaks Wave Pool, 133 Pontiac and Waterford children ages 5-13 years old participated – more than quadruple the number from 2022. This was largely due to expanding from one session in 2022 to four sessions in 2023. Participants enrolled through open registration, Pontiac Parks and Recreation and Oakland County Sheriff PAL programming.



"Our partnership with Huron-Clinton Metroparks provided an opportunity for children to learn basic water safety, swim skills and comfort in the water that may not have been possible for them without the program," Erik Koppin, Chief of Park Operations and Maintenance – South District, said.

Everyone in the Pool is a multi-county initiative that provided free water safety and swim lessons to 1,344 participants in Livingston, Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Washtenaw counties. Waterford Oaks was the only Oakland County location.



"The Metroparks appreciates the continued partnership with Oakland County Parks to drive greater impact in Pontiac and the areas surrounding Waterford Oaks with free swim lessons," Amy McMillan, Director of Huron-Clinton Metroparks, said. "By partnering with community organizations to provide free lessons and expanding lifeguard training programs, we as a community can ensure more people can safely enjoy the water and help prevent families in Michigan from experiencing the often-preventable devastation and tragedy of drowning."

2023 Awards and Accolades



**National Association
of Counties**
Disability Dirt Day
Achievement Award



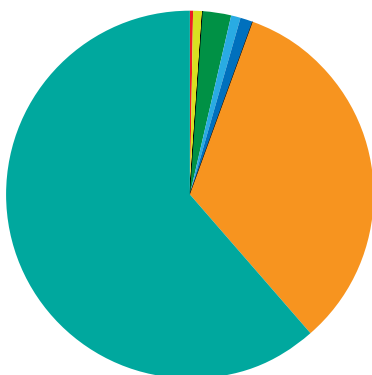
**Michigan Nursery
and Landscape Association**
Community Landscape
Beautification Award
Waterford Oaks
Native Plant Garden



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

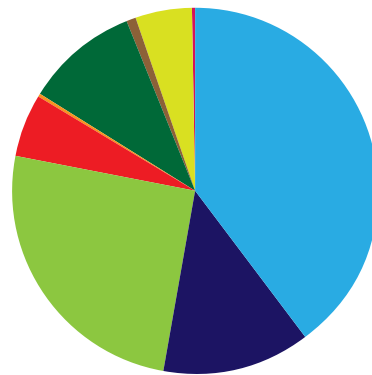
Fiscal Year 2023 Financials

Total Revenue:
\$37,651,393



Taxes: 61.71%
\$23,237,773.51
Charges for Services: 32.90%
\$12,390,020.30
Investment Income: 2.38%
\$898,637.95
Contributions: 0.95%
\$358,611.75
**Intergovernmental General
Reimbursement: 0.90%**
\$342,300.36
Capital Asset Contributions: 0.74%
\$279,260.40
Transfers In: 0.22%
\$83,000
Gain on Sale of Capital: 0.12%
\$48,086
Federal Grants Revenue: 0.02%
\$10,364.40

Total Expenses:
\$32,960,472



Salaries: 40%
\$13,218,318.56
Contractual Services: 25.20%
\$8,308,656.16
Fringe Benefits: 13%
\$4,203,041.82
Depreciation Expense: 9.92%
\$3,271,631.67
Commodities: 5.61%
\$1,850,118.83
Internal Support Expenditures: 5%
\$1,622,029.17
Transfer to Municipalities: 1.07%
\$361,832
Capital Outlay: 0.25%
\$87,436.40
Transfers Out: 0.11%
\$37,408



Our Vision: Everyone in Oakland County has access to a park, public space or recreational opportunity to relax, be active, socialize and connect with nature.

2800 Watkins Lake Road
Waterford, MI 48328
248-858-0906
OaklandCountyParks.com

 **OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS**