

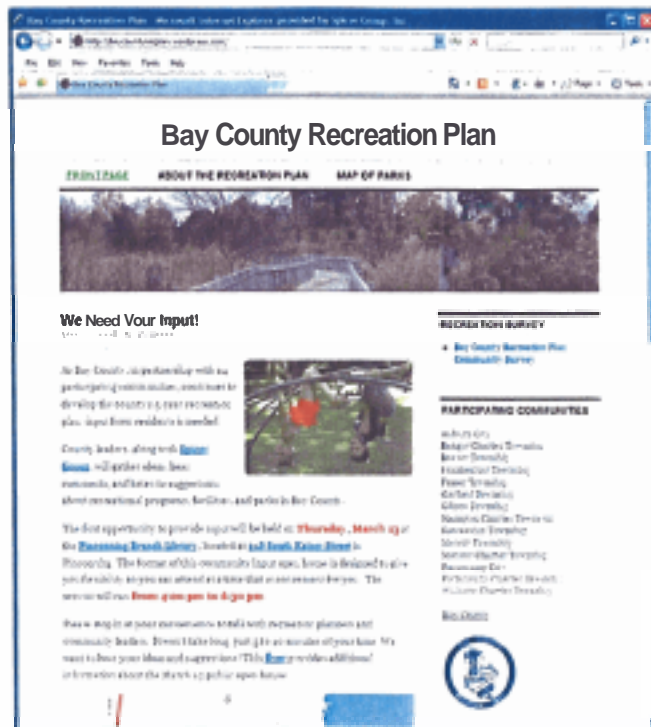
V. Public Input

Bay County used several methods to gather public input regarding the recreation plan. Shortly after the planning process began, a web site was developed for the recreation plan. It described the process, provided a **map** locating the parks and it offered the opportunity for input. The web site was located at <http://baycountyreplan.wordpress.com>. Further, the web site provided information about the **community** input sessions and it provided a link to the on-line survey. On March 12, 2008 Bay County Commissioner Don Tilley, Michael K. Gray, and Brent Goik were part of a program on local public access Bay 3 TV that described the recreation plan process and the upcoming community input open house forums.

Community input open house forums

To allow for input **from** residents across the county, four public community input open house forums were held in various locations across the county in March and April of 2008:

- Pinconning Branch Library (March 13, 3:30 – 6:30 pm)
- Auburn Area Branch Library (March 19, 3:30 – 6:30 pm)
- **Essexville** Garber High School (March 24, 3:30 – 6:30 pm)
- Bay City Mall (April 3, 4 – 6 pm)



A web site was developed to share information and collect input regarding the recreation plan.

A press release announced the **meetings** and stories appeared in the Bay City Times. The forums were **run** by the Spicer Group consultants. At the forums, residents could stop by for a few **moments** to learn about Bay County Parks and offer suggestions for improvements. They were also given cards that directed them to the on-line survey.

Attendance at each forum varied from approximately 8 people to 25 people. Comments received were widely varied. Many focused on the need to take advantage of the available natural resources such as the Saginaw River and the Saginaw Bay. Many of these mentioned a need for better access to the bay and cleaned-up beaches. Other comments focused on the need for more pathways and trails. Still other comments were regarding improvements for specific parks, facilities, and programs; some wanted to see more school facilities used for recreation. A summary of the input received at each forum is contained in the Appendix.

Disability Focus Group

A focus group was held on May 29, 2008 at the Bay County Golf Course to discuss the new recreation plan and solicit their input on needed improvements. Groups invited included:

- Disability Services Resource Center

- Michigan Sports Unlimited
- Disability Network of Mid-Michigan
- New Dimensions
- Do-All, Inc.
- V.O.I.C.E. Services for Hearing Impaired

The issue of inaccessible portable outdoor toilets at local parks and recreation facilities was one concern identified at the focus group. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that 5% of these portable outdoor toilets, not less than one, be handicapped accessible. In many cases there is only one at a facility, which must by law be the handicapped accessible. This has been noted at some local parks and events, e.g. the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Bay City. It is most likely that this occurs due to a lack of awareness. It is county policy to comply with the ADA 5% requirement at all county facilities by placing the appropriate number of accessible outdoor portable toilet units.

On-line survey

Bay County offered an on-line survey that was accessed through the County web site and the Recreation Plan web site. It was also publicized through an e-mail sent to all County staffers and with business cards that advertised the link. These cards were distributed at the April 19 Beach Wellness Run held at the Bay City State Recreation Area as well as at other events. The survey was available from March 1 through May 12. Three hundred fifty-two responses were received to the 21 question survey. A complete summary of the responses to the on-line survey is contained in the Appendix. Significant results are discussed in the paragraphs below.

About the respondents

More than 80% of the respondents had lived in Bay County for 20 years or more. Geographically, each city or township in the County was represented by at least one respondent except Pinconning Township. The largest percentage of respondents was from Bay City (38.5%) followed by **Bangor** Township (20.1%) and Monitor Township (9.9%). Forty-six percent of the respondents had children age 17 or younger living in their household. More than 60% of the respondents were between the ages of 40 and 64.

Visiting the parks

Nearly 85% of the respondents had visited a county-owned park in the past year. The Fairgrounds was the most popular park; 52% of the respondents said they had visited it in the past 12 months. The Civic Arena was the second most popular with 44% of the respondents having visited it in the past year. Respondents said the facilities that they most often used at the parks were nature trails and paved pathways (71% each), playgrounds (52%) and picnic pavilions (48%). When asked why they visited parks in Bay County, respondents most often replied they were used for casual or **informal** use (90.1%). Seventy-four percent visited the parks to **enjoy** nature.

Respondents were generally quite positive about various qualities of parks in Bay County. Question 14 asked them to rate the following five aspects of the parks as very good, good, neutral, poor or vary poor:

- Quality of programs
- **Quality/friendliness** of staff
- Variety of **facilities/amenities**
- Maintenance and appearance
- Safety and security

All aspects were rated very good or good by at least 55% of the respondents. No individual item received more than 10% being scored as poor or very poor.

Improvements needed

In Question 12, respondents were asked to indicate which of 16 different facilities or amenities they would like to see added to parks in Bay County. Sixty-two percent wanted to see a wooded nature area. Fifty-one percent wanted to see paved pathways and 45% wanted to see a splash park. All responses are shown in the Figure 4 on the following page.

Question 13 was open ended and asked respondents to fill in any other facilities or amenities that they wished to have added to the parks. One hundred thirteen respondents offered suggestions. Some of the more common answers were more restrooms, an indoor recreational facility, and **bike/walking/nature** paths.

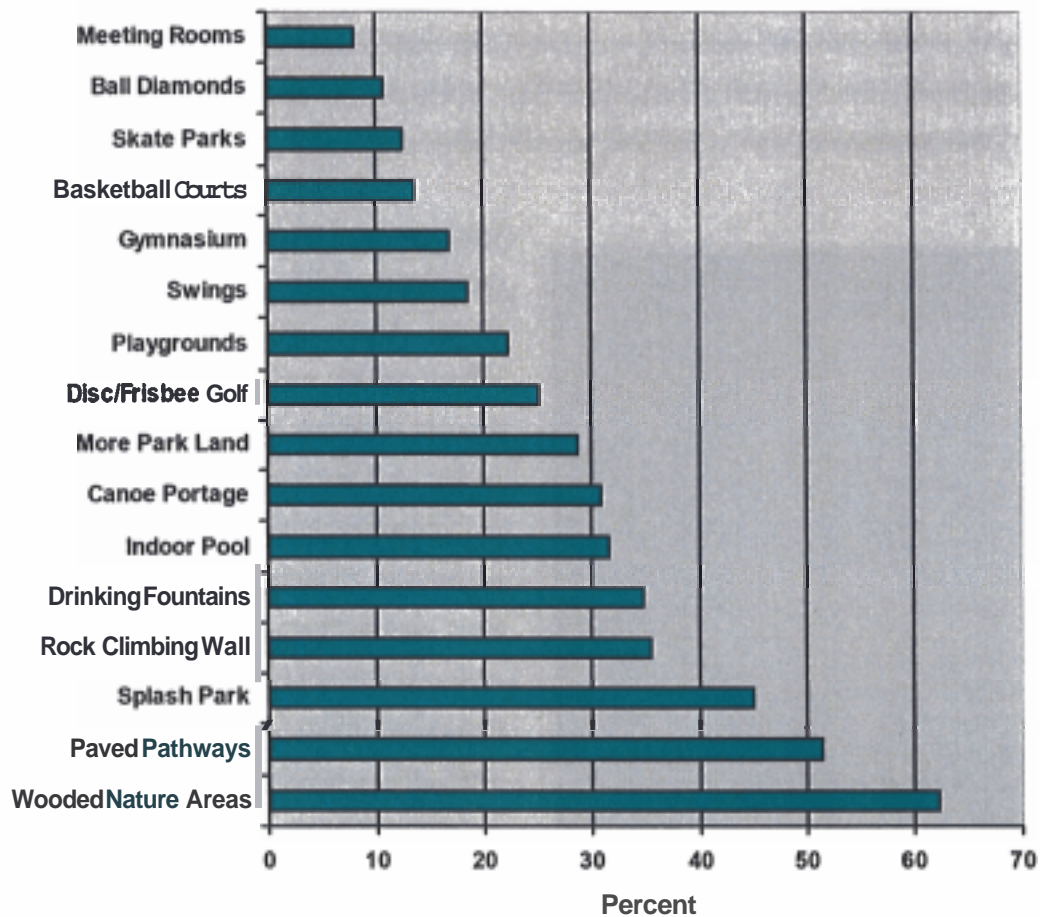


Figure 4 - Question 12 asked respondents what additional facilities or amenities they wanted to see added to the parks in Bay County.

Disabilities

Ten percent of the respondents indicated that there was a person with disabilities in their family. Those people were then asked to check any of six improvements that would make the parks and facilities more user friendly for them and their disabled family member. **Seventy-nine** percent checked paved trails. Sixty-four percent wanted to see accessible restrooms. Fifty-four percent wanted accessible parks. Fifty percent wanted **barrier-free** access to **river/lakes** and 50% wanted **flatter/easier** grades.

Open ended questions

Questions 18 through 21 allowed respondents to type in open ended responses to questions about parks and recreation in Bay County. Question 18 asked for suggestions for recreational activities that respondents would like to see offered in Bay County. Seventy-four respon-

dents offered a wide variety of programs. Some of the more common responses were disc golf, indoor volleyball, and more swimming/water based recreation. Question 19 asked respondents what they liked about parks in Bay County and 145 of the respondents replied. Common responses were cleanliness, natural beauty, and variety.

A sampling of suggestions & responses from the open ended questions...

I think the disc golf thing is a really cool idea.

Beach boardwalk would be very nice.

Grounds are nicely kept.

Parks are clean and accessible.

Allow hunting in some areas of Pinconning Park.

A lot more monies for the outlying areas such as Kawkawlin Twp. My family assisted with the setup and installation of the present new playground area at Kawkawlin and we are very happy when we see families use the playground and ball fields.

Build a facility like Hangtime Sports of Midland or Center Courts of Saginaw.

I would really like to see mile markers along the rail trail.

More bathroom facilities other than portajohns.

More options needed for cold weather months for people that are older.

We need to clean up the water and beaches – we have a beautiful natural resource we can't use.

I'd like to see a self defense program offered a few times a year for teens.

Give women's sports adequate time and gym availability.

Question 20 asked respondents what they would do to improve parks and recreation in Bay County. One hundred forty-four respondents offered specific suggestions. Many were very detailed. Common responses were cleaner beaches and better maintenance, expanding the rail trail/adding more trails and updating playground equipment. Question 21 asked if there were any recreational educational programs they would like to see offered. Sixty-four respondents offered suggestions that included youth golf programs, boater and hunter safety, and fishing clinics.

Other public input

Two presentations were made to the Human Services Committee of the Bay County Board of Commissioners, held on April 15, 2008 and May 20, 2008. These sessions were instrumental in formulating goals, objectives and actions plans for Bay County.

The final opportunity for public input occurred at the public meeting held on December 16 at 4:00 p.m. at the County Building. This public meeting was advertised in the Bay City Times, the Democrat Legal, and the Pinconning Journal.