



LEADING NORTHFIELD FORWARD

Big, Small or Just Right

The township board is elected to perform the business of the township and make choices that serve the interests of all residents – board members do so by examining all the nuances, liabilities and feasibility of plans and proposals. At times, it makes the job tough when trying to accommodate multiple visions and opinions. Creating a design that encompasses the wishes of the community with practical planning will go a long way in garnering the support of the community to ensure a successful project.

Regarding North Village and the size of the park, there is a lot of premature solutioning and funding speculation that has been generated on Facebook. While the brainstorming comments and active feedback on Facebook are great, it really needs to come down to developing different park designs, figure out how much each of the designs are going to cost, figuring out where the funding is coming from, and then pick the best design that fits the community with minimal burden on the taxpayers. I would encourage those that participated on Facebook to provide the same momentum and participation when the township has design visionary sessions planned – your input is crucial in the documentation of priorities. But the bottom line, it all comes down to dollars and what the township (and residents) can afford. The township board should not base decisions on “what ifs”. Our community needs to be realistic with what the township can and cannot do.

Determining Park Space in Northfield Township

Planners have used the American Society of Planning standards for over 55 years. Architects determine that 12.5% of the total area of a community should be devoted to parks with an allowance of park space for approximately 66 people per acre. Northfield Township encompasses 23,493 acres of land (SEMCOG Land Cover in 2020) with 85% (22,246 acres) being agriculture, open space and water features. Using the calculation of the American Society of Planning standards, the township should be preserving approximately 156 acres for park and nature preserves. Currently, there are 135 acres preserved within the township (Whitmore Lake Preserve – 50 acres, Jennings Road Park – 25 acres, Northfield Woods Preserve – 10 acres, Park Northfield – 12 acres, the future 7 Mile Preserve – approximately 60 acres), excluding private parks. The American Society of Planning standards estimates that for every acre developed, there should be allowance of park space for 66 people per acre, while most municipality use a round-up standard of 100 people per acre for the allowance of park space.

SIZE OF PARK

The recreation standards recommend that 30 to 50 percent of the park or green space should be set aside for active recreation within a given community. Based on the recommended standard of one acre per 100 population, 25% of the total space should be developed for neighborhood park use, with the remaining acreage used for neighborhood development. It is recommended that special attention is given to subdivisions guaranteeing that adequate space is set aside to serve the neighborhood park and recreation needs. Generally, recreation areas are divided into three groups based on the areas that they serve: pocket parks, play lots, playgrounds and neighborhood parks serve a specific neighborhood; play-field and community parks serve several neighborhoods within a community; regional parks and preserves that serve a very large population of the municipality. Because of the vast size of the type of parks, the size of population served, the age groups expected to be served and the locations and type of recreational facilities need to be considered in the design. National standards target 10 acres for every 1,000 in population to determine the size of a park – for Detroit, the area regional planning commission uses 4.1 acres for every 1,000 in population. For a play lot, 1/8 of an acre should be preserved, for pre-school children under 6 (less than 5% of Northfield Township population), for 250 to 700 in population served. For a playground, 10 acre should be preserved, for 5 to 12 years of age (less than 16% of Northfield Township population), for 2,000 of population served in a ¾ mile density area. If the park is within a neighborhood, the American Public Health Association recommends 2.75 acres for 1,000

population served or 6 acres for 5,000 population served. The National Recreation Association recommends that 25 (minimum) to 50 acres is preserved to a community park to serve population from 5,000 to 25,000 within a 1.5 mile service area. Note that Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Classification System for Local and Regional Open Space and Trails identifies a Neighborhood Park with a minimum of 5 acres and optimal as 10 acres. For a community park the recommendation is between 30 and 50 acres.



Resource: City Park Facts - 2017

Visionary Session

Outcomes

The township had several visionary sessions that engaged with the public in 2017. The following is the summary from the Design Workshop Summary on the North Village Master Plan:

- Site design and uses must support existing Downtown amenities and businesses
- The site can be a catalyst for connecting current Township and Downtown assets
- The site can provide parking opportunities for Downtown and events
- Many participants started thinking about public uses but identifying the possibilities are only the beginning.

NORTH VILLAGE VISION

Based on the Northfield Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan, It is important to note that the majority of the township's population resides in the hamlet area; correspondingly, the majority of this Plan's features that call for new parks and recreation assets are sited in this area. It reasoned that residents of the hamlet area have a stronger desire for traditional, physical parks with recreation assets, since for the most part, residents have limited or no yards.

Since the property was acquired in 2016, the goal for North Village is to have the property development complement the surrounding neighborhoods, historic architecture and traditional character of Downtown Whitmore Lake. Part of the property would phase in public amenities with lake views and natural features. The other part of the property would be developed to minimize the fiscal impact on taxpayers and subsidize public amenities by including housing and mixed-use buildings (North Village Master Plan).

The Downtown Strategic Planning Committee conducted interviews with six business owners in the downtown area and two from other communities in the surrounding metro area. Business owners from Whitmore Lake generally said that it is a great community with great people, but the downtown has a lot of potential that has yet to be realized. More commercial or service activity is needed, and there needs to be a draw to get people downtown.



Budgetary and Fiscal Considerations for a Park

Understanding the population needs is crucial as well as understanding the reality to meet those needs through budgetary considerations. Designing a park and outfitting it can be an expensive venture, and the funds to accomplish the park's development must come from somewhere. The funding for a park can come from a variety of means – state, regional agencies, county and/or local funding sources. A budgetary analysis, to address development needs, and a five-year fiscal analysis, to address maintenance needs, will target the required funding amounts and resources for supporting the park.

In regard to operational expenditures only, the National Recreation and Parks Association 2017 Agency Performance Review indicates that the typical park and recreation department with a population less than 20,000 has 60% of their operations expenditures are derived from general fund, 24% from earned revenue, 8% from dedicated levies, 3% from other dedicated taxes, 2% from grants, 1% from sponsorships and 2% from other revenues. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people spends a median of \$8,208 per acre of park and non-park sites – with the lower quartile being \$3,295 per acre per year and with the high quartile being \$21,265 per acre capital per year for operating expenditures.

For a park that is 6 acres, the operating expenditures would be estimated over \$49,000 per year (if using the median per year). For a park that is 23 acres, the operating expenditures would be estimated over \$188,000 per year (if using the median per year). Using the same consideration for a park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people, the operating expenditures by population spend would be a median of \$81.19 per capita per year - with the lower quartile being \$56.34 per capita per year and with the high quartile being \$199.86 per capita per year for operating expenditures. Note, the lower the population, the higher quartile per capita costs per year and vice versa.

ADDRESSING THE FUTURE OF NORTH VILLAGE

The current Northfield Township Board recommends that the new township board schedules other townhall/workshop meetings that incorporates visionary session from the community. A park design is not a solitary process – nor should it be. While the size of the park needs to be taken into consideration based on the population usage, it's critical to bring the community into the park design process. Collective community minds will identify strengths and weaknesses in proposed developing plans that can offer a great design.

When the Downtown Strategic Planning Committee was formed, their sole purpose was to identify needs within the downtown area and to connect the vision of the downtown plan with the North Village plan. I would highly support continuation of the committee's efforts in a citizen advisory capacity to help shape the park by leading the townhall/workshop meetings in creating brainstorm ideas, collecting data through website and distributed surveys – giving an indicator of wants, needs, identifying dislikes and what the community won't support in regard to design.

Scenario for Park Center for Northfield Township



Low Density



Medium Density



High Density

SUMMARY

As the community inquiries stream in more and more on Facebook, it is essential to understand that the township board has not made current decisions on North Village in a vacuum. Some decisions are still pending only due to the progress made to date on North Village.

With past townhall and workshop meetings from the community and following the Master Plan, the township board has and continues to perform the due diligence to have the right size of park needed in our downtown area. The immediate next steps will be to update the Northfield Township Park and Recreation 5-year Master Plan, hire a park planner, identify grant opportunities and timelines for submission, additional townhall and workshop meetings with the community, increase the township communication plans for the park and secure the property for the park.

With all eyes focusing on the park at North Village, it's understandable that the park design is essential for the future of the downtown area.

RESOURCES

NRPA Agency Performance Review, 2017, <https://www.nrpa.org/sitesassets/nrpa-agency-performance-review.pdf>

SEMCOG Community Profiles – Northfield Township, <https://semcog.org/community-profiles/communities/4075#Land>

Northfield Township, North Village Master Plan, 2017, http://www.twp-northfield.org/North_Village_Master_Plan_2017_03_23.pdf

Northfield Township, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, 2015, http://www.twp-northfield.org/PR_Master_Plan_10_23_15_FINAL_DR_AFT.pdf

Town Charts, Northfield Township Michigan, 2020, <https://www.towncharts.com/Michigan/Demographics/Northfield-township-MI-Demographics-data.html>

Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, Classification System for Local and Regional Open Space and Trails, 2020, [10_FINAL_2020-2024_5-YearRecMasterPlan_AppA-RecGuidelines](https://www.washtenawcountyparks.com/10_FINAL_2020-2024_5-YearRecMasterPlan_AppA-RecGuidelines)

Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, Development Standards, 2020, [14_FINAL_2020-2024_5-YearRecMasterPlan_AppE-DevStand](https://www.washtenawcountyparks.com/14_FINAL_2020-2024_5-YearRecMasterPlan_AppE-DevStand)

Kiwanis International Foundation, Children's Fund Grants, 2020, <https://www2.kiwanis.org/childrensfund/impact-and-programs/grant-programs#.X249zGhKg2w>

MORE THAN A VILLAGE

On average, park and recreation agencies derive three-fifths (3/5) of their development costs from general fund tax support according to the National Recreation and Parks Association. It has always been the intentions of the Township Board to minimize the burden on the taxpayers and subsidize the development of the park through the sale of mix-use development. Besides the township subsidizing the cost of the park with mixed-use development, there are several other resources that Northfield Township could take advantage of in developing trails, sidewalks, playground equipment or other amenities: SEMCOG – TIP Grants, DNR – Park and Trail Development

Grants, Washtenaw County Park & Recreation Development Grants and grants through non-profit organizations, such as Kiwanis International or Kaboom.



COLLABORATION AND GRANTS

Through the **Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)** Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan Guidelines, the township steps in the development of a park is to follow the MDNR Guidelines, and filing the adoption of the park plan with the MDNR, which allows for the Township to be eligible to apply for various MDNR administered parks and recreation related grant funds. MDNR has facility development standards for park beaches – the township will need to submit an application for the development of a beach, if that is the direction of the township.

With the **SEMCOG 2020 – 2023 TIP** for Southeast Michigan program, the Township can work now to plan for future and existing pedestrian and bicycle mobility plan for North Village and throughout our township in order to connect and expand the walking and biking infrastructures within our community.

The **Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission** grants greatly supports trails and greenways with their Border to Border Trails program through the Connecting Community grants. The county has facility development standards for parks from badminton courts to hockey fields, from trails to golf ranges and from kayak, canoe, paddleboard rentals to beaches. The county also has an assessment tool that the township could capitalize on to determine amenity needs within the park.

Kiwanis has been a strategic partner in Northfield Township for over 75 years – many of the programs and events support leadership programs for children, school educational programs, scholarships and community events, such as the 4th of July Parade. Kiwanis International has short-term grants that address the unmet needs of children in the following categories: health, education, or youth leadership development. Grant awards equal fifteen percent of a district's total undesignated giving from the previous Kiwanis year. The local Kiwanis Club can grant funding that helps address an unmet need of children through a project that provides long-term benefits sustained by a club. While these grants are not guaranteeing, a Kiwanis grant is an opportunity to support playground equipment or other children amenities – either locally and/or through the district level.