

Preface

Purpose of the Plan

The Newaygo Community encompasses some of the most abundant and diverse natural resources in West Michigan. The many lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, forests, and prairies that make up the landscape provide area residents with a unique natural environment and various outdoor recreation opportunities. The Newaygo Community also possesses several parks that provide opportunities for picnicking, relaxing, and individual and organized recreation. However, some park grounds and equipment are in poor condition and several parks lack sufficient playing areas for several sporting activities. In addition, access to outdoor/nature based recreation opportunities remains limited and existing facilities lack connectivity with the surrounding community and appear to be unfamiliar to many area residents and therefore underutilized.

To address these and other shortcomings, the people and local governments of the Newaygo Community will need to work cooperatively and consistently over a period of years. This master plan is intended to serve as a comprehensive guide for the Newaygo Community Recreation Authority in planning for the future of recreation in the Newaygo Community. As later described in Chapter Five, this plan will focus on the development of funding sources, park improvements and maintenance, new parks and trails and education and sports programs.

In compliance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Guidelines, the implementation strategies expressed in this plan are identified for the next five years, at which time the plan will be updated. However, this plan is a *working* document and requires appropriate adjustments as conditions change and funding opportunities arise.

The subject matter and process used in developing this plan incorporate the minimum standard requirements of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for a community recreation plan with sections devoted to:

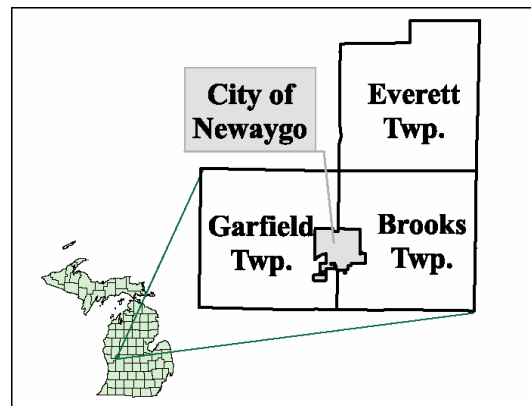
- Community Description
- Administrative Structure
- Recreation Inventory
- Resource Inventory
- Description of the Planning and Public Input Process
- Goals and Objectives
- Action Program

The Newaygo Community

As used throughout this document, the “Newaygo Community” refers to all areas within the City of Newaygo, Brooks Township, and Garfield Township. These three jurisdictions, including the Winter Sports Park in Everett Township constitute the area of the Newaygo Community Recreation Authority.

The Newaygo Community is located in southern Newaygo County, in the mid-western portion of the state. The City of Newaygo is surrounded by Garfield Township to the west and Brooks Township to the east. The Newaygo Community is approximately 125 miles south of Traverse City, 36 miles north of Grand Rapids, 203 miles northwest of Detroit, 96 miles southwest of Saginaw, and 69 miles southeast of Ludington.

The Newaygo Community is bordered by Everett Township to the north, Big Prairie Township and Croton Township to the east, Ensley Township, Grant Township, Ashland Township, and Bridgeton Township to the south, and Sheridan Township, the City of Fremont, and Sherman Township to the west.



Description of the Planning Process

A formal agreement to develop a joint “community” recreation and natural resources conservation plan was established in the fall of 2004 after all three local governments adopted resolutions articulating a strong, clear commitment to the cooperative development of the plan. (Copies of the resolutions are provided in *Appendix A*.) The *Newaygo Community Recreation and Natural Resources Conservation Plan* was developed as a cooperative effort involving four local governments over five planning phases.

Phase 1 - Inventory and Assessment

Phase One involved reviewing the relevant documents of each jurisdiction, including each Master Plan, the Brooks Township Recreation Plan, the Brooks Township Land Use Vision Report, the Brooks Township Natural Newaygo Report, and 2000 Census data. In addition, the Core Working Group (CWG), composed of appointed representatives from each jurisdiction, provided a review and assessment of existing recreational and natural resources. A barrier-free compliance assessment was also completed.

Phase 2 - Public Forums

During Phase Two, four community-wide public meetings were conducted inviting extensive public participation and comment. The first public meeting provided an informative introduction to the resources of the Newaygo Area, detailed information describing the planning process and provided an interactive public comment period. Subsequent public meetings included activities that helped establish the planning vision, goals and objectives, and priorities for recreation and natural resources in the Newaygo Community. Participants included representatives from the township boards, city council, planning commissions, governmental staff, community organizations, and many interested citizens. In addition, project leaders provided presentations to community

organizations, interviews and focus groups were conducted, and a written survey instrument was administered. The survey was administered to participants at the second community-wide public meeting, community organizations, Newaygo Chamber of Commerce members, and Newaygo Middle School and High School students.

Phase 3 - Draft Plan

During Phase Three, a compilation of the assessment and information amassed in Phases One and Two was assembled in the development of a draft plan. The Action Program within the plan includes both specific recommendations and a five-year improvement schedule. The draft plan was presented to the CWG and general public for review and comment. In addition, the draft Plan was presented to the MDNR Grants Management Office for review and comment.

Phase 4 - Administration Development

During Phase Four, official representatives from the four jurisdictions met to discuss the creation of an intergovernmental body capable of both raising the necessary funds and providing for the construction, operation and maintenance of the new and existing recreation facilities outlined in Phase Three. After carefully considering several options, representatives from each jurisdiction determined to establish a Recreation Authority under Public Act 321 of 2000 (MCL 123.1131 *et seq.*). After a lengthy development process that included legal council and a public hearing, the four jurisdictions adopted the Articles of Incorporation, thereby establishing the *Newaygo Community Recreation Authority*.

Phase 5 - Plan Adoption

During Phase Five, copies of the draft plan were placed at each municipal office and at the Newaygo Public Library for public review and comment. In addition, a public meeting was held to receive general public comment. The draft plan was presented to the Newaygo Community Recreation Authority Board for further revisions, comments and suggestions. After further revision of the plan, a *Final Plan* was adopted by the Newaygo Community Recreation Authority Board on September 14, 2006. A copy of the Plan was provided to each jurisdiction, the County Planning Agency and the Regional Planning Agency. The Plan was then forwarded to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for acceptance and approval.

Recreation Plan Amendments

Phase 1 - Public Forums

During Phase One of the plan amendment process, the Recreation Authority conducted a large community-wide public meeting. The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to learn more about the recent achievements of the Recreation Authority, including grant awards and facility improvements. The meeting also included an interactive discussion and public comment period on a number of proposed initiatives. Participants included representatives from the township boards, city council, planning commissions, governmental staff, community organizations, interested citizens and approximately 20 skateboard enthusiasts.

Phase 2 - Draft Plan Amendments

During Phase Two of the plan amendment process, a compilation of the existing plan and future initiatives were assembled in the development of an amended draft plan. The Action Program within the plan includes both specific recommendations and a five-year improvement schedule. A number of the new recommendations outlined in the Plan are based upon the current and future initiatives launched by the Authority. The draft plan was presented to the Recreation Authority Board and general public for review and comment.

Phase 3 - Plan Adoption

During Phase Three of the plan amendment process, copies of the draft amended plan were placed at each municipal office and at the Newaygo Public Library for public review and comment. In addition, a public meeting was held to receive general public comment. After further revisions, a *Final Amended Plan* was adopted by the Newaygo Community Recreation Authority Board on December 12, 2007. A copy of the Plan was provided to each jurisdiction, the County Planning Agency and the Regional Planning Agency. The Plan was then forwarded to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for acceptance and approval.