

Whitehall Township



Community Recreation Plan

2023-2028

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I. INTRODUCTION

This document, the Whitehall Township Recreation Plan, is intended to guide present and future recreational resource development within the township including parkland, parks facilities, recreation programs, and public open space.

This plan, in addition to serving as a guide for recreation facility and program development, is prepared to satisfy the requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Recreation plans are required by the MDNR for state and federal grant eligibility to encourage communities to take a long-term view of their parks and recreation futures. Plans must not be older than five years and must be on file with the MDNR. For this reason, it is recommended that this plan be revisited in five years to review priorities, keep pace with changing conditions, and maintain grant funding eligibility.

A. Overview of the Planning Process

In January 2007, the Whitehall Township Board assigned its Blue Ribbon Committee the task of developing a Community Recreation Plan. In August 2022 the Whitehall Township Board assigned the Parks & Recreation Committee the task of updating the Community Recreation Plan. Every effort has been made to present information that is current and accurate. The Whitehall Township Board and the Parks & Recreation Committee shall not be held liable for any errors or omissions related to this Plan. This Plan is a general planning document. Therefore, a thorough investigation with original research materials should be undertaken before proceeding with any specific implementation decisions.

Citizen input is very important in addressing recreation-related issues facing township residents as a whole. The planning process is most effective when all sectors of the citizenry provide input into the future of their community. The

opportunity for input was provided through a mail survey, town meeting, Township Board Meetings, and public hearings. Notices of these meetings were published in the White Lake Beacon, a general circulation newspaper in Whitehall Township along with additional forms of promoting the meetings including posting meeting notices throughout the township.

B. Function of the Plan

This particular plan is intended to serve as a guide for future township decisions and actions related to recreation. It should be used by the decision-makers of Whitehall Township based on the desire of the general public and the availability of resources.

The following are specific objectives of this plan:

- To provide a means for township residents to participate in determining the future of their community, thereby promoting the interests of the entire community.
- To establish long-range goals and objectives to be used as a guide for future decisions regarding public recreation and open space.
- To outline implementation strategies that can ensure that future development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the township.
- To provide a detailed inventory of recreation facilities and assist decision-makers with development decisions related to those facilities.

To designate suitable areas for future recreation development while encouraging the preservation and conservation of natural resources.

To provide means by which grant funding can be secured for recreation related development projects.

To prepare a plan that is consistent with Michigan Public Act 156 of 1917, as amended.

C. Legal Basis and Development

This plan is enabled by Michigan law, but does not carry the power of statutory law or ordinance. Its principles are derived from Public Act 156 of 1917, an act authorizing townships to operate systems of public recreation and playgrounds which states, in part that:

Sec. 1 (2-4). Townships may acquire, equip, and maintain land, buildings, or other recreation facilities. Townships may employ a superintendent of recreation and assistants. Townships may vote and expend funds for the operation of such a system.

Sec. 3 (1-4). Townships may operate a system of public recreation and playgrounds independently, or cooperate with any other city, village, county, township or school district in its conduct in any manner in which they may mutually agree, or delegate the operation of this system to a Recreation Board created by any or all of them, and appropriate money, voted for this purpose, to such board.

II. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The following information provides detailed descriptions of the geographical and historical characteristics as well as, social, economic, physical, and natural characteristics of Whitehall Township. It is important that this information be analyzed in order to provide a foundation on which to build the goals and objectives, and be used as background data when making recreation-related decisions.

A. Geographic Context

Whitehall Township is located in the northwestern portion of Muskegon County, Michigan. The township is nearly half way between the Michigan-Indiana border and the Grand Traverse Bay. Whitehall Township is bordered by Montague Township, Blue Lake Township, Fruitland Township, and the City of Whitehall. Whitehall Township lies within Township 11-12 North, Range 17 West according to the Federal system for land surveying in the United States.

B. Community Information

Whitehall Township is governed by a five person township board consisting of a Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer, and two Trustees. Each member is elected to serve in four-year terms. The Township Board meets every fourth Monday of the month at 4:30 p.m. in the Township Hall located at 7644 Durham Road, Whitehall, Michigan 49461.

C. Community History

The following historical summary was taken directly from the June 1997 Whitehall Township Comprehensive Development Plan.

The greater White Lake area saw its first permanent European settler in approximately 1790. About that time, a permanent trading post was set up at Duck Lake by the Astor Fur Trading Company. The trading post was abandoned in 1834, but the permanent settlement of the White Lake area by Europeans had begun in earnest.

In 1874, Whitehall Township was organized out of Oceana Township and was comprised of 13 sections. Today the township is comprised of approximately 9.75 sections, sections 13, 14, fractional 22, 23 – 26, fractional 27 and 34, and 35 – 36. The first township meeting occurred shortly thereafter on April 10, 1874. The neighboring community of Whitehall had already incorporated as a Village seven years earlier. It later became a City in 1942.

Lumbering was the initial driving force of development in the White Lake region and remained the most important industry for the area's first fifty years of development. Beginning in 1837, saw mills were built by enterprising businessmen on all the area's major streams. Small company-owned or dominated communities sprang up around each mill. In the White

Lake area, there were the small mill-centered communities of Whitehall, Mason's Landing, Long Point, and The Mouth (at the mouth of the White Lake itself). A diverse mix of immigrants were lured by the jobs created for cutting and processing the 75, 100, and 150 foot tall White Pine trees. The demand for West Michigan lumber was greatly increased after the Chicago fire in 1871. "Lumber from Western Michigan largely rebuilt the huge city, and the process of supplying the demand made fortunes for the shrewd, the lucky, and the unscrupulous" (100 Years: Whitehall, Michigan 1860 – 1960 3). At the peak of the lumbering era in 1882, a million feet of logs per year were being cut and processed. Most of the lumbermen were out of business three years later because the seemingly endless timber supply had been completely depleted.

Around the turn of the century as the lumbering era was ending, farmers around White Lake began to put emphasis on attracting summer visitors by establishing "camps" for family and friends. In the years that followed, summer resorts developed in the area. At that time, there were only two practical ways to reach White Lake' by steamer or rail. Trains traveled from Chicago to the White Lake area six times a day. Due to the difficulty of travel, families would stay all summer for vacation. This of course was a benefit to local merchants and resort keepers alike.

Another summer development was the establishment of summer camps for boys and girls. The Chicago Boy

Scout Council developed its first camp on Crystal Lake in the Southeast corner of the township in 1910. The camp housed forty boys on thirty acres of land. The years following saw the development and expansion of numerous children's camps in the area. The resorts and children's camps established the White Lake area as a prime location for outdoor recreation. Tourism continues to be an important industry to the White Lake area.

D. Social and Physical Characteristics

Unlike in the past, it is not required that the community description include a reporting of the social and physical characteristics of the community. However, Whitehall Township's Parks & Recreation Committee and Township Board feel that some of these characteristics are important to review because of their relevance to our particular goals and objectives.

Two factors related to population that are relevant to our goals and objectives are the age and gender of our residents. Three physical characteristics that are important to setting our goals and objectives are the climate and the availability and potential use of the townships' water resources and forest lands.

1. Age and Population

Figure 1

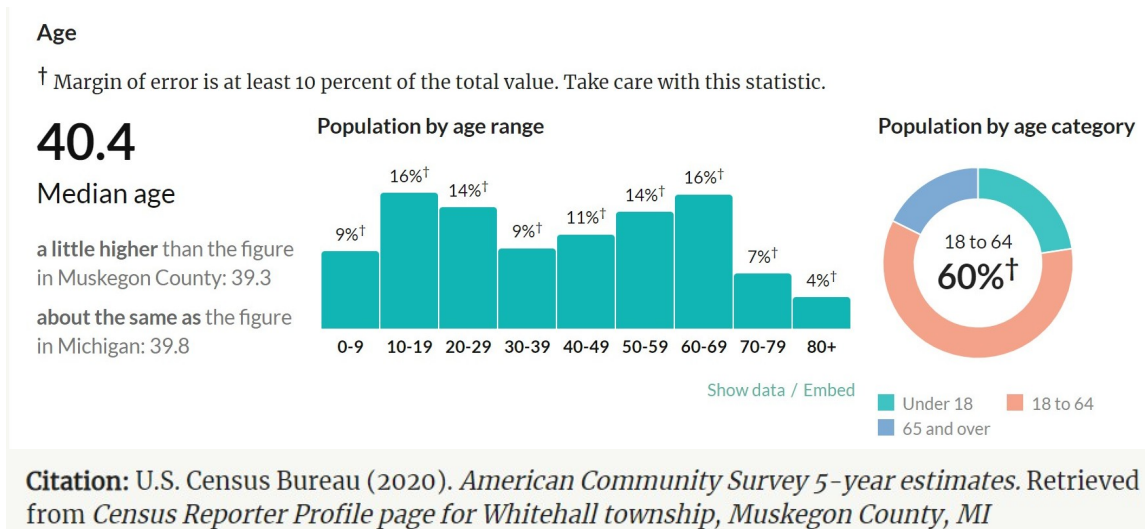


Figure 1 depicts the age distribution of Whitehall Township in 2020. The largest age groups are the 10-29 and 50-69 categories. When combined, this age group represents 60% of the township population. Another large age category in the township are children. When totaled, the children ages 0 – 19 total 25% of Whitehall Township’s population. This indicates that future recreational initiatives of the township should be geared towards these two distinct age groups.

2. Gender

Table 1

Gender	Number of Persons
Male	(47%)
Female	(53%)
Total Population	1,787

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020
(*American Community Survey 5-year estimates*)

The gender distribution in Whitehall Township is evenly dispersed among residents with 49.2% male and 50.8% female. This also indicates a healthy population with no one gender having dominance over the other.

3. Water Resources and Fish Wildlife

The main water resource for Whitehall Township is the White River located in the northern portion of the township. An additional water resource is Crystal Lake located in the southeast corner of the township and is boarded on the east by Blue Lake Township. However, in recent years the lake level has dropped significantly. In addition, Crystal Lake has no public access.

The habitat for wildlife in Whitehall Township includes heavily wooded areas, streams, and wetlands

that support diverse populations of wildlife and fish. The White River provides habitat for a variety of fish wildlife including salmon, walleye, brown trout, rainbow trout, brook trout, steelhead, suckers, and northern pike.

4. Climate

Muskegon County has a quasimarine or continental climate depending upon the direction of the wind. Because of the prevailing westerlies, the influence of Lake Michigan is strong. Winters are milder, summers are cooler, and snowfall is greater than they would be if the lake were not there. According to the Soil Survey of Muskegon County, Michigan, the following data on temperature and precipitation was recorded in Montague located in Muskegon County just northwest of Whitehall Township. The average temperature is 46.7 degrees, and the average annual precipitation is 33.55 inches, while the average annual snowfall is 89.6 inches. Another interesting fact noted in the Soil Survey was that the sun shines 62% of the time in the summer and only 30% of the time in the winter.

5. Forest Land

The common forestland cover for Whitehall Township includes the following: white pine, red pine, jack pine, white oak, black oak, white ash, red maple, basswood, sycamore, cottonwood, and elm.

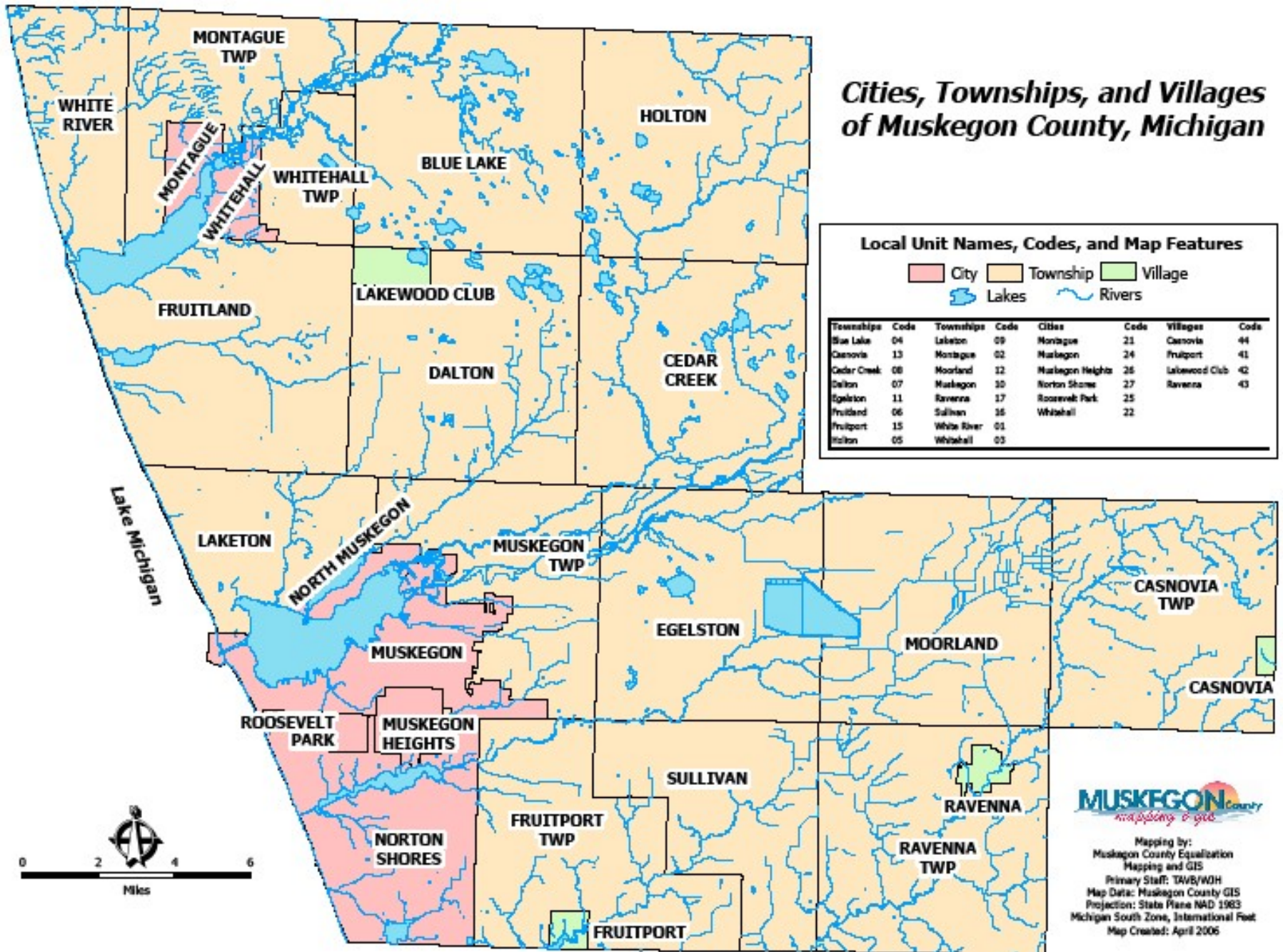
Cities, Townships, and Villages of Muskegon County, Michigan

Local Unit Names, Codes, and Map Features

City
 Township
 Village

Lakes
 Rivers

Townships	Code	Townships	Code	Cities	Code	Villages	Code
Blue Lake	04	Laketon	09	Montague	21	Casnovia	44
Casnovia	13	Montague	02	Muskegon	24	Fruitport	41
Cedar Creek	08	Moorland	12	Muskegon Heights	26	Lakewood Club	42
Dalton	07	Muskegon	10	Norton Stone	27	Ravenna	43
Egelston	11	Ravenna	17	Roosevelt Park	25		
Fruitland	06	Sullivan	16	Whitehall	22		
Fruitport	15	White River	01				
Holton	05	Whitehall	03				



Mapping by:
 Muskegon County Equalization
 Mapping and GIS
 Primary Staff: TAVB/WQH
 Map Data: Muskegon County GIS
 Projection: State Plane NAD 1983
 Michigan South Zone, International Foot
 Map Created: April 2006

Whitehall Township

Recreation Facilities
and Public Property
2008



III COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

A. Operating Budget

Over the past several years, Whitehall Township budgeted money for recreation has fluctuated dramatically. During the fiscal year 2022 - 2023, the Township has budgeted \$23,571 for recreational improvements.

Table 2

Whitehall Township Expenditures and Recreation Budget

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Expenditures	\$473,734	\$435,924	\$613,879
Recreation	\$7,400	\$17,600	\$23,571

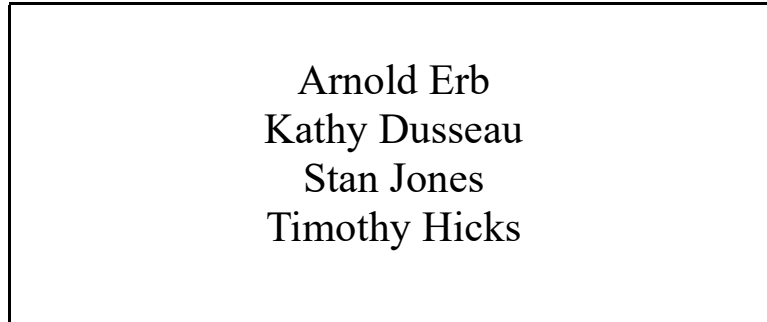
B. Organizational Chart

Figure 2

Whitehall Township Board

Arnold Erb, Supervisor
Sarah Sylvester, Clerk
Madge Kraai, Treasurer
Chuck Schmitigal, Trustee
Dennis Kroll, Trustee

Figure 3
Parks and Recreation Committee



C. Standard Operation Procedures

The Whitehall Township Board is responsible for making all decisions regarding recreational programs and facilities within the township. They have final authority for policy decisions, equipment purchases, and funding. In 2022, the Township Board created the Parks and Recreation Committee made up of four (4) appointed persons (see figure 3). The committee is responsible for addressing recreational issues within the township and making recommendations to the Township Board.

D. Relationship(s) with Other Agencies

The Township lies within the Whitehall School District. The school sometimes uses the township parks for activities and Hilt's Landing for field trips and to observe and study nature.

E. Staff Description

Whitehall Township employs a part-time zoning administrator and a part-time assessor. In addition, the elected and appointed officials take care of the daily functions of the township.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Plan Development Process

In June 2022 the Parks and Recreation Committee began reviewing the previous Recreational Plan and the recent public survey. In August 2022 the Whitehall Township Board assigned the Parks & Recreation Committee the task of updating the Community Recreation Plan; they began the process of updating the Recreational Plan immediately.

Persons Involved in Process

The Whitehall Township Board and Parks and Recreation Committee have both been highly involved in the process of completing the Community Recreation Plan.

Public Involvement Process

Whitehall Township is interested in providing ample opportunity for recreation to its township residents. In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to involve the township residents in the planning process of the Community Recreation Plan. In June 2020, the township mailed a community survey to 650 residences. The township received a total of 98 completed surveys. This equaled a 15.1% response rate. Two Public Meetings were then scheduled for Wednesday, October 19 at 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. at the Township Hall. A total of 7 people attended both meetings. In order to inform all residents, the township announced the meeting in the White Lake Beacon, the local newspaper. In addition, the meeting was also announced on the Township Website.

The community survey (with results) and meeting notice, can be found in the Appendix .

When the Draft Plan was completed, copies were given to the Township Board and Parks and Recreation Committee. In addition, a copy was also placed on display at the Township Hall and the White Lake Community Library for residents to review. Next, a Public Hearing was held to receive comments from residents regarding the completed Draft Plan. The Public Hearing was also advertised through the newspaper, as well as additional forms of notification within the township. When completed, the Whitehall Township Community Recreation Plan was presented to the Planning Commission and the Township Board for its final approval and adoption. It was then forwarded to West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Corporation and the County of Muskegon. Finally, the Plan was submitted to the Grants Section of the DNR.

V. RECREATION INVENTORY

Recreation Standards

The following table indicates recreation standards set forth by the National Recreation and Park Association. An indirect deficient ranking indicates Whitehall Township is under the required population figures for a particular recreation category, therefore making the standard not applicable.

Table 3

	Number of Units per Population	Number in Whitehall Township	Deficient
Badminton	1 per 5,000	0	Indirect
Youth Basketball	1 per 5,000	0	Indirect
High School Basketball	1 per 5,000	0	Indirect
Outdoor Basketball	1 per 5,000	2	No
Ice Hockey	1 facility per 100,000	0	Indirect
Tennis	1 court per 2,000	6	No
Volleyball	1 court per 5,000	1	No
Baseball	1 per 5,000 1 lighted per 30,000	0	Indirect
Football	1 per 20,000	0	Indirect
Soccer	1 per 10,000	0	Indirect
Golf Driving Range	1 per 50,000	0	Indirect
Running Track	1 per 20,000	0	Indirect
Softball	1 per 5,000	0	Indirect
Trails	1 system per region	1	No
18 Hole Golf Course	1 per 50,000	2	No
Swimming Pool	1 per 20,000	0	Indirect

Source: Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines from the National Recreation and Park Association.

A. Recreational Opportunities within the Political Boundaries of Whitehall Township

1. Public Properties/Facilities

Township Park	There are four public parks within Whitehall Township. Hilt's Landing, one located next to the Township Hall, a Disc Golf park, and Johnson Bi-Centennial Park.
Other Property in the Township	The Conservation District has 3 parcels, 240 acres total, that are adjacent to Township property available for recreational activities.
County Parks	There are no County Parks located within the township.
National Parks	There are no National Parks located within the township.

2. School Properties/Facilities

Currently, there is no school properties/facilities located within the borders of the township. However, the Whitehall School District's new High School is located on the border of Whitehall Township and the City of Whitehall. More specifically, the high school is located between White Lake Drive and Benston Road. The high school provides many recreational amenities to students, as well as the surrounding community. The new high school was completed in the fall of 2004.

3. Private Properties/Facilities

Whitehall Township has one privately owned public golf course within its boundaries. Hickory Knoll Golf Course is a 36-hole course located in the southwest corner of the township.

B. Recreational Opportunities outside the Political Boundaries of Whitehall Township

There are several recreational facilities and opportunities located outside the boundaries of Whitehall Township specifically in Muskegon County. There are four state parks including Muskegon, Duck Lake, and Hoffmaster State Parks all located on Lake Michigan south and west of the Township. The three parks offer nature areas, swimming and camping. The fourth state park is the Hart-Montague Bike Trail located northwest of the township.

There are also several county parks located near Whitehall Township including Deremo County Park on Big Blue Lake, as well as Meinert and Pioneer County Parks both located on Lake Michigan. White Lake also offers an array of recreational activities for township residents. In addition, there are 11 public and two private golf courses within the county, as well as numerous other parks located throughout the county.

C. Recreational Accomplishments since 2002

The following projects were goals in our last Recreational Plan as amended.

1. Purchased a 232 acre piece of property called Hilt's Landing, a wooded piece of property on the White River. (Grant from the Hilt's Foundation of \$200,000 and Township cost of \$100,000.)
2. A community built new playground. (Township cost of \$56,351.86)
3. A community built pavilion. (Township cost of \$11,615.12)
4. Renovated and built an addition on the Township Hall so it could be rented by residents. (Township cost of \$192,484.24)
5. Built two new tennis courts. (Grant from White Lake Excavating of \$2,500.00 and Township cost \$9,989.75)
6. Volunteer built disc golf course. (Township cost \$17,049.05)
7. Built a sand volleyball court. (Township cost \$5,215.69)
8. Volunteer built horse shoe pits. (Township cost \$644.90)

9. Built dirt walking trail when building new tennis courts. (Township cost \$0.)
10. Purchased land to connect Township property in 2012.
11. Built 6 new Pickle Ball Courts in 2017.
12. Built Johnson Bi-Centennial Park on donated land.
13. Added 9 more holes to the Disc Golf Park and built a small pavilion.

D. Whitehall Township's Barrier-Free Compliance Status

Whitehall Township is sensitive to accommodating persons with disabilities and desires its facilities to be readily accessible to all individuals. Whitehall Township has carefully undertaken an evaluation of all new park and recreation facilities for compliance with current Barrier-Free regulations. The township is not aware of any new facilities that are not completely barrier-free compliant. The township makes an effort to accommodate persons with disabilities when the need arises.

VI. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The identification of key issues is a critical part of any planning process. It is through the identification of these issues that goals and objectives are developed, thereby clarifying, organizing, and prioritizing the present and future tasks to be accomplished. The Blue Ribbon Committee established the following goals and objectives based on Community input. The Parks and Recreation Committee has reviewed and updated these goals and objectives. Township residents feel very strong about preserving the rural atmosphere of the community.

The following are goals that were established to address the major issues presented by the Public.

A. General Goals:

- Maintain the rural atmosphere of the community.
- Maintain and improve the existing recreational facility to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for township residents.
- Provide additional quality recreational facilities for the benefit and enjoyment of township residents.

B. Specific Goals:

- Improve and update existing recreational facilities including the: playground, tennis courts, disc golf course, sand volleyball court, pickle ball courts, and horseshoe pits.

- Create nature trails for walking, hiking and cross - country skiing.
- Continue the forestry project on Township owned property.
- Preserve Hilt's Landing in its natural state by:
 - Improving the access road, blocking the extra two tracks, and building a parking lot,
 - Developing a picnic area,
 - Developing a walking Native American/Logging History Trail,
 - Protecting its environment (stabilizing its bank, planting grasses, etc.) ,
 - Building a caretaker residence,
 - Providing overnight camping,
 - Developing a Mountain Bike Trail,
 - Building a fishing deck,
 - Building toilet and well facilities, and
 - Providing handicap access to the river.
 - (see Hilt's Landing Master Plan).
- Purchase property to connect the two pieces of Township property on Durham Road.
- Build a connector bike trail along Whitehall Rd. and Benston Rd. to connect the residential areas to the business district and the high school and the Hart-Montague State Park Bike Trail. (Appendix A).

- Enhance basketball courts.
- Build a shuffle board court.
- Provide water at the disc golf course
- Build a dog park.

VII. ACTION PROGRAM

The Whitehall Township Board has decided and has been following a policy of adding Recreational Facilities without using tax money.

Vacant property is at a premium in the township and through previous surveys the public has made clear they do not want the Township Board to develop or dispose of wooded property, it owns, that is outside the Industrial Park. The Board has decided to not develop an additional Industrial Park. Through an Act 425 Agreement with the City of Whitehall, added tax revenue, for the township. will be generated when the Cities Act 425 Industrial Park is developed. Therefore, the Township Board has decided to pay for adding Recreational Facilities through money realized from the sale of Industrial Park Land.

Whitehall Township will continue to seek private and public funds as a means to secure additional recreational facilities.

Some other general fund money will be used to improve and update existing recreational facilities. These expenditures will be in a range of approximately \$25,000 to \$50,000 depending on other needs.

VIII. CONCLUSION

When properly used, the Whitehall Township Recreational Plan will assist Whitehall Township in properly managing future recreation development. The Plan is a guide for decisions, and should be consulted regularly. Public input is an essential facet of this process and should be utilized when recreation facility decisions are made.

The Plan should be updated as the local situation warrants, or every five years as required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to allow the township to remain eligible for grant considerations.

