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**PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN**  
**2021 – 2025**

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**ONTWA TOWNSHIP**  
**CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

**ADOPTED JANUARY 2021**

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**ONTWA TOWNSHIP**  
CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF PLAN

Community parks and recreation plans serve a number of purposes. They guide local decision-making regarding recreational opportunities and potential enhancements. A thorough plan for a community's recreational facilities contributes greatly to the vitality of that community. Completion of a recreation plan also establishes five-year eligibility for recreation grants administered through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

In 2002, Ontwa Township initially prepared a Parks and Recreation Master Plan in an effort to:

- Complete their first recreation plan;
- Assess the recreation facilities and programs of the Township, including barrier-free compliance;
- Identify recreation deficiencies for the residents of the Township, surrounding communities and visitors;
- Determine a course of action for the development of a large parcel of land (Kraus Memorial Park) donated to the Township;
- Establish a course of action regarding recreation for the Township Board for the next five years;
- Solicit input from the public and Edwardsburg Public Schools regarding recreation in Ontwa Township; and
- Prioritize recreation improvements and acquisitions and identify potential funding sources.



Ontwa Township has regularly updated its Parks and Recreation Master Plan over the years to maintain eligibility for grants and direct parks and recreation policy in the community. This 2021-2025 Plan is a five-year plan that reflects the desires of the community's residents and stakeholders. The plan update is also intended to meet the requirements and provisions set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for the development of community park, recreation, open space and greenway plans.

Ultimately, the purpose of this Master Plan is to set a direction for parks and recreation programs, facilities and services offered by the Township over the next five years and beyond. This plan will remain valid until December 31, 2025, at which point a new five-year plan will need to be adopted.

## CHAPTER 2 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

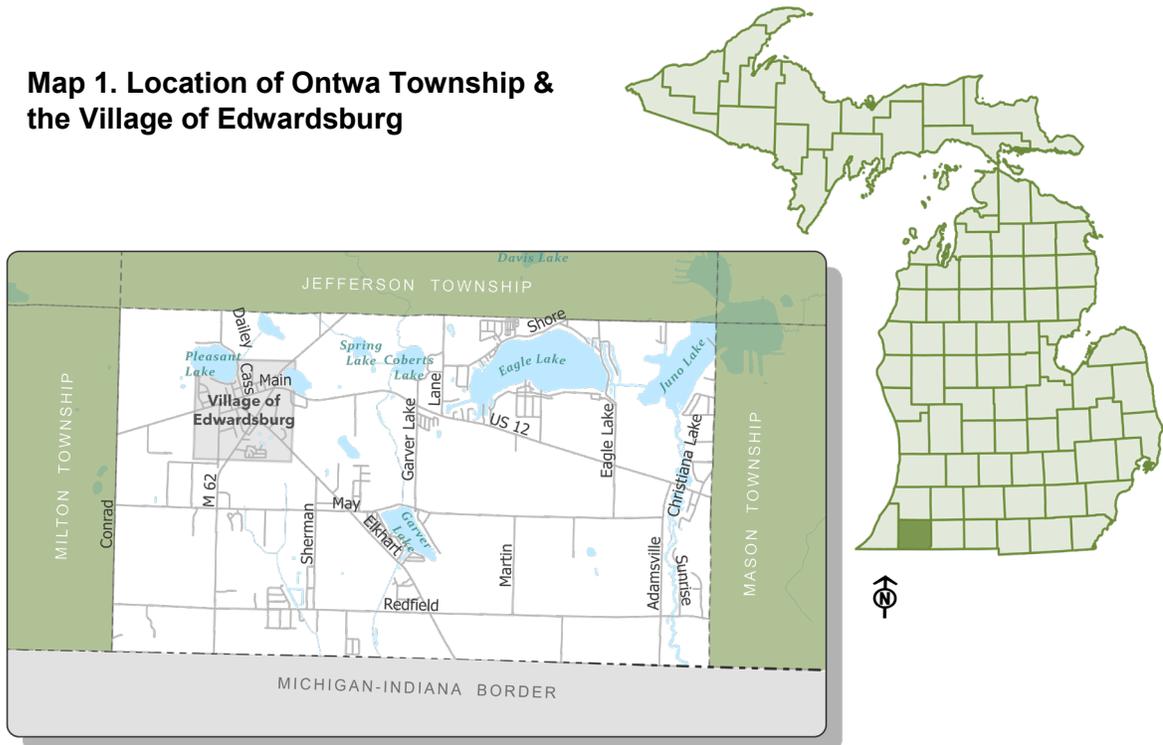
### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

#### *Regional Location*

Ontwa Township, which includes the Village of Edwardsburg, is located in southwest lower Michigan, in southern Cass County. Edwardsburg is located entirely within the boundaries of Ontwa Township. Ontwa Township’s southern border is the Michigan-Indiana state line. The Township and Village are approximately two hours from the Chicago area, while cities such as South Bend, St. Joseph, and Kalamazoo are less than an hour away. The Lake Michigan coastline is also within one hour of the area. The Township encompasses approximately 21 square miles.

Within the Edwardsburg Village limits is a major crossroad in southern Cass County. US-12 is the major east-west route in southern Cass County and passes directly through the center of Edwardsburg and Ontwa Township. Prior to the construction of Interstate 94, US-12 was the only major highway connecting the cities of Detroit and Chicago. According to the Michigan Department of Transportation, an annual average daily volume of 9,433 vehicles passed through the Township and Village on US-12 in 2018. Additionally, M-62 transects the Village and Township. As the major north-south thoroughfare in the area, an average annual daily volume of 9,018 vehicles traveled along M-62 between Edwardsburg and the Indiana border. Because of their close proximity to the urban areas of South Bend, Granger, and Elkhart, Indiana, the Township and Village have attracted many residents.

**Map 1. Location of Ontwa Township & the Village of Edwardsburg**



Sources: MI DNR Open Data, Michigan Open Data Portal

### ***Topography***

Over 10,000 years ago, glaciers advanced southward from Canada and covered Cass County. Because this glaciation was so extensive, the landscape was heavily impacted. There are three major outwash plains within the County, the largest one covering most of the southern townships from Porter to Ontwa. Evidence of this includes the slight variations in relief in the Village and Township as well as surrounding areas. There is a slight gradation downward in elevation from the western edge of the Township (840 feet above sea level) to the eastern edge (820 feet). There is a slightly greater difference in elevation from the northern edge of the Township (830 feet) to the Indiana state line (800 feet).

The numerous lakes that scatter the landscape in Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg Village are a result of the extensive glaciation. These points are the topographic lows of approximately 800 feet above sea level. Among the larger lakes are Pleasant, Spring, Coberts, Eagle, Christiana, and Garver. The Christiana Creek flows directly south out of Christiana Lake into Indiana where it joins the St. Joseph River. Cobus Creek is a natural resource flowing into Garver Lake.

### ***Soils***

Soil types in the region vary widely in texture, permeability, stability, composition and other characteristics throughout the community. Soils are fairly well suited for construction purposes and have the potential for agricultural uses as well.

### ***Climate***

Four full and distinct seasons are present in Cass County. The climate in Ontwa Township is very similar to that of Cass County. The average temperature of the coldest month (January) was 22° Fahrenheit in 2019. In the summer, the average temperature of the warmest month (July) was 73° Fahrenheit. The average annual precipitation was 47.4 inches, while the average annual snowfall was 47.6 inches in 2019.

### ***Water Resources***

Within 10 miles of Edwardsburg there are a number of lakes, including Juno, Eagle, and Christiana. There are more than 200 lakes in Cass County as well as many miles of rivers and streams. This abundance of fresh water serves as a haven for wildlife and is a valuable recreational resource. Wetlands also play a key role in environmental quality and are common throughout the Edwardsburg area. They assist in flood prevention and supply key habitat areas for wildlife to thrive.

### ***Vegetation, Wildlife and Fish***

The wealth and diversity of natural resources found in and around the Edwardsburg area provide excellent opportunities for recreation. Vegetation in the area varies greatly depending on land use. Forested areas

can easily be found with a large variety of different species of hard and softwood trees, including cherry and dogwood. The most dominant associations are oak-hickory and beach-maple. Many factors influence the types of vegetation that are found in an area, including soil types, availability of water, history of land use, logging, and slope.

Wildlife and fish in the region are equally as diverse as the vegetation. White-tailed deer and wild turkeys are frequently seen near Edwardsburg and are a popular game species for many hunters. This area is also a major migratory route for a large variety of songbirds and waterfowl, and is a popular destination for bird watchers. The numerous lakes are popular areas for sport fishermen and boaters.

### ***Zoning/Land Use***

The location of Edwardsburg and Ontwa Township and their natural features have contributed greatly to the way in which the community has evolved and developed. The residential sections of town are located in areas that take advantage of the natural beauty of rivers, streams, and lakes in the area, while the commercial districts, as well as industrial zones, are more strategically positioned on or near the major transportation routes in the township. There is an abundance of agricultural uses throughout the Township, and many of the lakes contain residential development along the waterfront.

### ***Transportation***

Edwardsburg is located in close proximity to many major transportation routes that make for easy access to large urban areas. US-12 is the major roadway that runs east-west through Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg Village, connecting them to White Pigeon, Sturgis, and Coldwater to the east and Niles to the west. In 2018, US-12 had a 24-hour annual average traffic volume of 9,433, according to Michigan Department of Transportation figures. Additionally, M-62 is the major north-south thoroughfare transecting the Village and Township. M-62 connects the Edwardsburg area to Cassopolis and Dowagiac to the north and South Bend, Indiana to the south, with a 24-hour annual average traffic volume just over 9,000 vehicles in 2018.

Detroit is located 200 miles to the east and Chicago is located 110 miles to the west. Both of these cities can be accessed by traveling US-12 or Interstate 80/90. I-80/90 is located approximately 10 miles south of Edwardsburg.

Air travel in the area is most easily accessed at the South Bend International Airport. Other options include airports in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Chicago, and Detroit, which are all within 200 miles of Edwardsburg. Elkhart, Niles, and Benton Harbor each have airports available to non-commercial flights and are easily accessible.

## SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

### *Population*

Since 1980, the Village of Edwardsburg and Ontwa Township have experienced increases in population (Table 1). In 2018, the Township had an estimated population of 6,496 people, while the Village had an estimated population of 1,200 people. Overall, this represents a 5.7% increase in the Village and a 12.3% increase in the Township between 1980 and 2018.

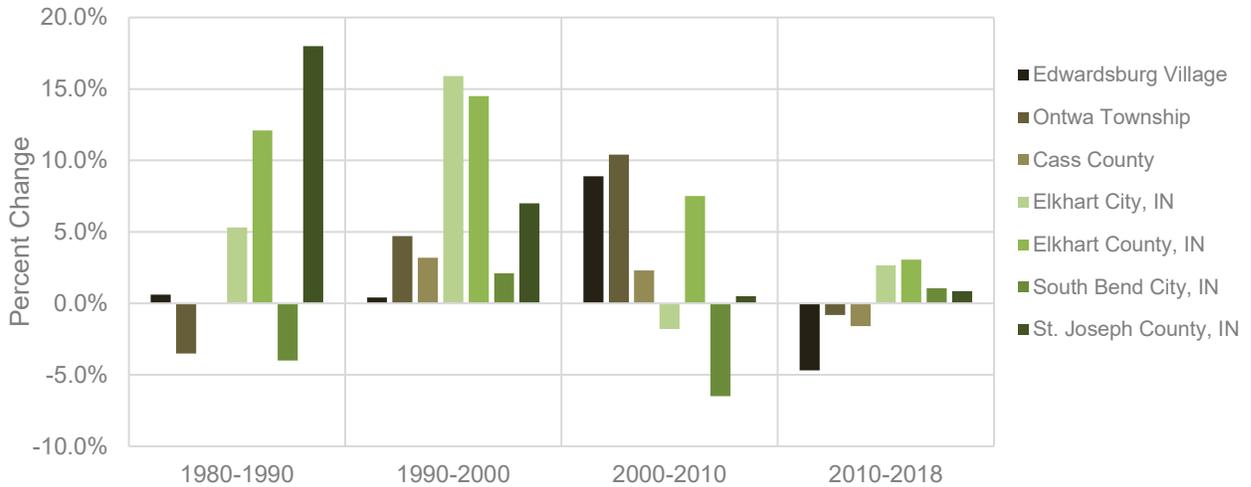
Table 2 and Figure 4 examine the population changes over a 38-year span for the Village of Edwardsburg, Ontwa Township, and the adjacent cities and counties, including South Bend and Elkhart, Indiana, and the counties of Cass (MI), Elkhart (IN) and St. Joseph (IN). Relatively minor changes occurred in the populations of the Village of Edwardsburg and Ontwa Township between 1980 and 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, these municipalities experienced greater growth than surrounding cities and counties. The Village of Edwardsburg grew by 8.9% and Ontwa Township grew by 10.4% during this 10-year time period. After 2010, both the Village and Township were estimated to experience slight declines in population.

**Table 1. Population Totals, 1980-2018**

<b>Community</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2018*</b>
Village of Edwardsburg	1,135	1,142	1,147	1,259	1,200
Ontwa Township	5,787	5,592	5,865	6,549	6,496
Cass County	49,499	49,477	51,104	52,293	51,460
Elkhart City, IN	41,305	43,627	51,874	50,949	52,308
Elkhart County, IN	137,330	156,198	18,2791	197,559	203,604
South Bend City, IN	109,727	105,511	107,789	101,168	102,233
St. Joseph County, IN	202,513	247,052	265,559	266,931	269,240

*\*Estimates from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates  
Source: US Census Bureau*

**Figure 4. Change in Population, 1980-2018**



Source: US Census Bureau; 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

**Table 2. Percentage Change in Population, 1980-2018**

Community	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2018*	1980-2018
Village of Edwardsburg	0.6	0.4	8.9	-4.7	5.7
Ontwa Township	-3.5	4.7	10.4	-0.8	12.3
Cass County	0.0	3.2	2.3	-1.6	4.0
Elkhart City, IN	5.3	15.9	-1.8	2.7	26.6
Elkhart County, IN	12.1	14.5	7.5	3.1	48.3
South Bend City, IN	-4.0	2.1	-6.5	1.1	-6.8
St. Joseph County, IN	18.0	7.0	0.5	0.9	32.9

\*Estimates from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates  
 Source: US Census Bureau

A substantial number of people in the greater Edwardsburg area work and shop in Indiana. In 2018, 68.1% of residents were estimated to work outside Michigan. Historic trends suggest that people were moving out of urban areas of Indiana into more rural areas of southern Michigan, such as Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg Village. However, recent estimates indicate the Township and Village populations may be stabilizing.

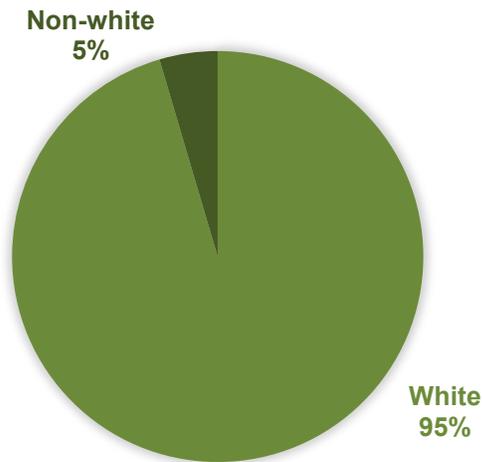
**Persons with Disabilities**

In 2018, there were a total of 1,199 non-institutionalized persons estimated to be disabled in Ontwa Township. This is approximately 18.5% of the Township’s population, which is higher than Cass County (17.9%) and Michigan (14.3%). Of this total in Ontwa Township, 122 persons were less than 17 years, 499 were between the ages of 18-64, and 578 were 65 and older.

**Race and Ethnicity**

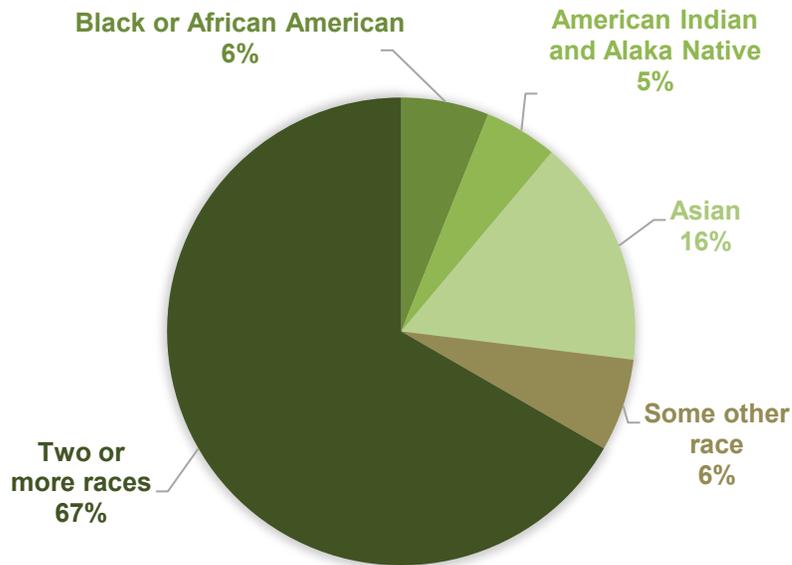
An overwhelming majority (95%) of the population in Ontwa Township, as well as in the surrounding townships, identified themselves as White alone (Figure 5). Those identifying themselves as two or more races make up the next largest segment of the population, which comprise 67% of the non-white population, or 3% of the total population (Figure 6). This group is followed by those identifying themselves as Asian, which comprise 16% of the non-white population. Those identifying themselves as Black or African American alone, American Indian or Alaskan Native alone, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone, or some other race alone each make up less than 1% of the population.

**Figure 5. Total Population by Race for Ontwa Township, 2018**



Source: 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

**Figure 6. Non-White Population by Race for Ontwa Township, 2018**



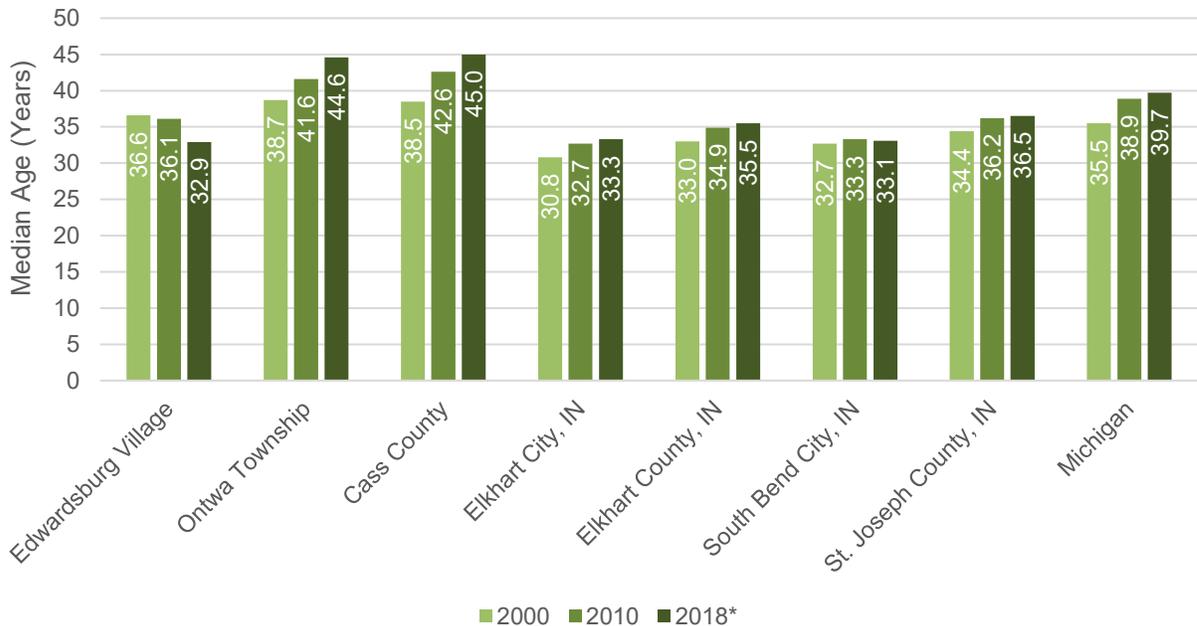
Source: 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

**Age**

The median age of a community provides insight into the types of park and recreation facilities that may be necessary to meet the needs of residents. The Township’s median increased between 2000 and 2018 from 38.7 years to 44.6 years (Figure 7). The trend of an increasing median age is common across Michigan and the nation, reflective of the aging Baby Boomer generation. Although Ontwa Township and Cass County reflect this trend of an aging generation, their median age is about five years older than Michigan. There is an even greater gap between the Township and other cities and townships in Indiana. The Village of Edwardsburg’s median age is comparable to those in Indiana; however, unlike other adjacent communities, it is the only place to consistently experience a decreasing median age between 2000 and 2018.

Parks and recreation facilities in Ontwa Township often meet the needs of residents in the Village of Edwardsburg, and vice versa. The median age gap between these two communities was estimated to be 11.7 years in 2018. This dramatic age gap will impact the recreational needs experienced throughout the communities. A community with a younger median age often requires more active recreation opportunities, such as sports leagues, athletic fields, and bike trails. A growing population will often require more passive recreational opportunities, such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and fishing.

**Figure 7. Median Age, 2000-2018\***



\*Estimates from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates  
 Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 & 2010

**Housing**

There were 2,984 housing units in Ontwa Township according to the 2010 Census, with an occupancy rate of 85.1% for owner-occupied units. In 2018, the American Community Survey estimated 2,987 housing units in the Township, indicating that the Township has experienced few housing changes since 2010. The owner-occupied occupancy rate in 2018 was 86.3%, also similar to the rate in 2010. The average persons per household in Ontwa Township from 2014 to 2018 was 2.5, similar to Cass County with an average of 2.4 persons per household.

**Income**

The median household income in and around Ontwa Township had a wide range in 2013. The median household income was estimated to be \$49,057 for Ontwa Township this year (Table 3). This income level exceeded median household income levels in Cass County and neighboring Elkhart and St. Joseph counties, Indiana. Edwardsburg Village had a significantly lower median household income in 2013 (\$31,094).

In 2018, Ontwa Township continued to have the highest median household income level compared to surrounding counties and Edwardsburg Village. The median household income increased substantially for all neighboring counties, the Township, and Edwardsburg between 2013 and 2018. The greatest increases were experienced in Elkhart County, IN (64.8%) and Edwardsburg Village (62.6%).

**Table 3. Median Household Income, 2013-2018**

<b>Community</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Edwardsburg Village	\$31,094	\$50,563	62.6%
Ontwa Township	\$49,057	\$65,073	32.6%
Cass County	\$43,743	\$53,571	22.5%
Elkhart County, IN	\$33,614	\$55,399	64.8%
St. Joseph County, IN	\$44,582	\$50,938	14.3%

*Source: 2013 and 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates*

As median household income has risen in the Township, the percent of residents below the poverty level has decreased. In 2018 it was estimated that approximately 7.5% of the population in Ontwa Township was under the poverty level, a decrease from 12% in 2010.

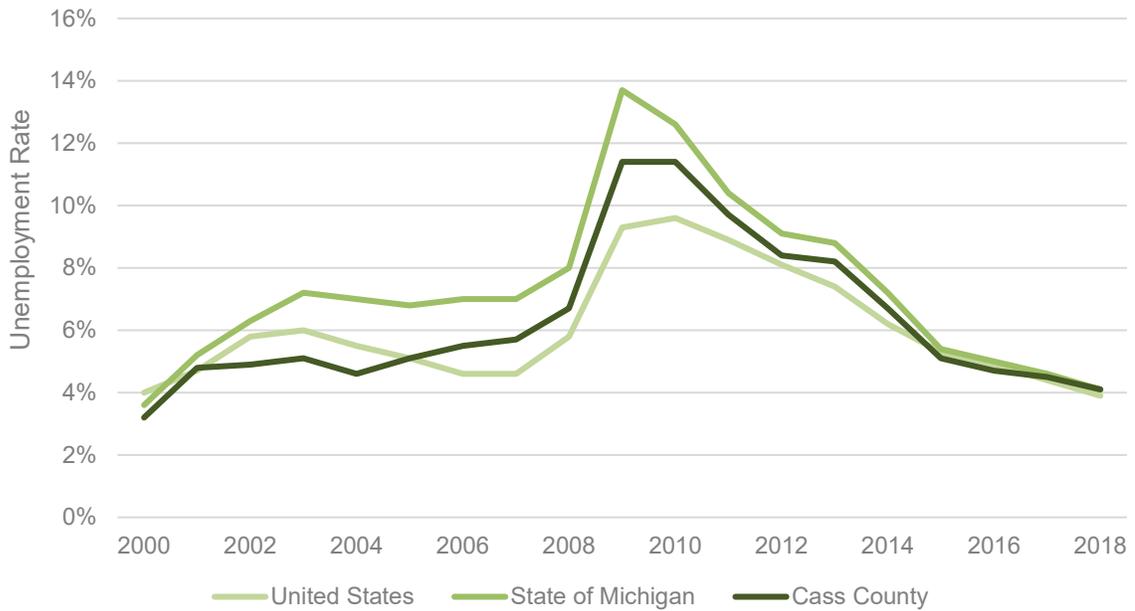
**Employment Trends**

In recent years, unemployment has gradually declined throughout the United States and Michigan, including the Cass County region. Cass County and Michigan unemployment peaked in 2009 as a result of the economic decline in the late 2000s. Cass County’s unemployment remained less than the state during this time, peaking at 11.4% compared to Michigan’s 13.7% (Figure 8). By 2019, unemployment rates had

recovered and were similar to those found in the early 2000s. Cass County's rate was 4.3% in 2019, comparable to Michigan (4.1%) and the nation (3.7%).

Ontwa Township's unemployment trends have been consistent with Cass County, the state, and nation. However, the Township's unemployment rates generally remained lower than Cass County. In 2010, the Township had an estimated unemployment rate of 8.4% and by 2018 this rate was 3.3%, lower than Cass County, Michigan, and the nation.

**Figure 8. Unemployment Rates in Cass County, Michigan, and the U.S.**

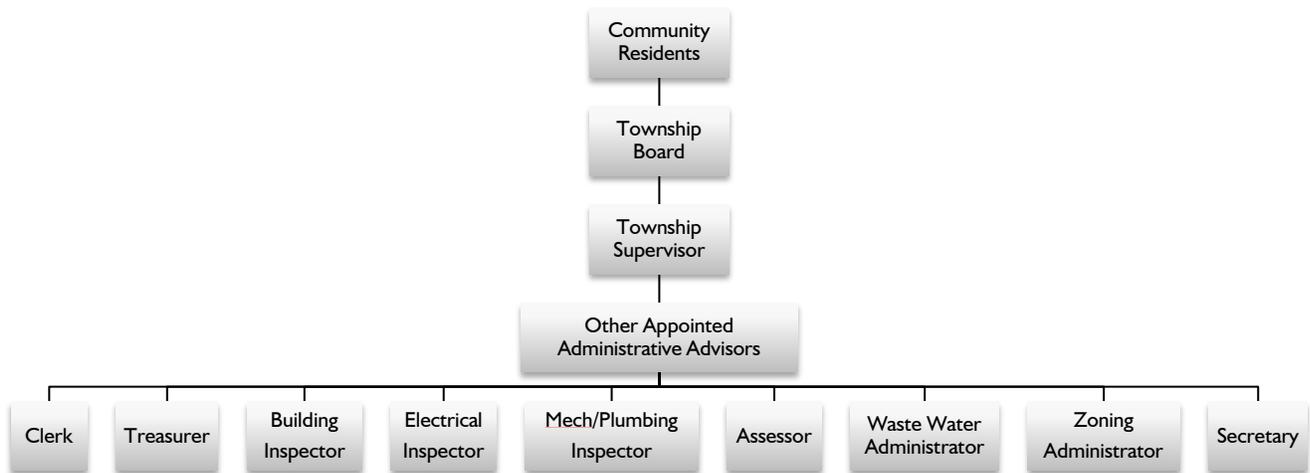


Source: Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget, LAUS

## CHAPTER 3 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Ontwa Township is organized under a general law form of government, and provides a full range of urban services including general government activities, public safety, public works and recreation. The Township Board sets policy and directs the staff to take action in support of those policies. The Township Supervisor is the direct link between the Board and the Township’s operations, and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Township. (See Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Ontwa Township Administrative Structure**



In addition to the Supervisor, the Township employs a clerk, a treasurer, a building inspector, an electrical inspector, a mechanical/plumbing inspector, an assessor, a waste water administrator, a zoning administrator, and a secretary. The Township Board consists of a supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and four trustees.

The Township maintains Township parks and trails. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, \$70,000 was allocated for complete streets investment, which is applicable only to bike and hiking trails. Park maintenance received approximately \$20,000 of the Township’s \$1,084,855 general fund budget. Additionally, \$20,000 was allocated for a sports complex/America in Bloom.

Local residents have volunteered both time and resources to the betterment of parks in the Township. The Township also maintains a relationship with the Edwardsburg Public Schools, which offer recreational facilities and helped promote the recreation survey in support of this Recreation Plan.

Currently, a formal parks commission does not exist within the Township government and the Planning Commission is primarily responsible for decisions related to the Township’s parks and recreation. It is suggested that the Township establish such a

commission in the future in order to more efficiently manage recreation opportunities within the Township. Options for the Township include establishing either an Advisory Board (with no power to take action on its own authority) or a Parks commission that will actually oversee the parks portion of the budget and have sole discretion over parks and recreation activities.

## CHAPTER 4 RECREATION INVENTORY

During the development of any recreation plan, it is imperative to examine recreational facilities and opportunities already in place, both public and private, as well as those facilities located in the greater region. Establishing such an inventory will keep duplication to a minimum while potentially identifying gaps in the provision and delivery of recreation services.

Barrier-free accessibility was assessed by the Township Planning Commission and staff for each park facility within the Township, including the Village of Edwardsburg. Each facility was compared to the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and assigned a ranking from 1 to 5, according to the following:

1. None of the site elements meet 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
2. Some of the site elements meet 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
3. Most of the site elements meet 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
4. All of the site elements meet 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
5. The facility meets the Principals of Universal Design.

### ONTWA TOWNSHIP PARKS & FACILITIES



**Kraus Memorial Park** is the most recent addition to the Ontwa Township Parks System. Located on a 20-acre parcel on the northeast corner of M-62 and May Street, this land was donated by the Kraus family. Open play areas and natural resources (including water and open fields) are available, as well as a picnic shelter. A \$15,000 project was recently completed to renovate the playground area and pavilion, including a new concrete enclosure in the play area, landscaping, new pavilion siding, and other improvements.



*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Open play areas
- ADA-compliant play structure
- 4 picnic tables, 2 of which are ADA compliant
- 1 picnic shelter
- BBQ stations
- Vehicle access
- Paved road access
- Parking
- 4 ADA-compliant park benches

*ADA Rating: 4*

Paved parking spaces and paths are provided, and playground equipment is ADA-compliant

**Gunn Park**, located in the Edwardsburg Village limits, is a 3.2-acre park on the south side of Pleasant Lake, just north of US 12. Open play areas and picnic facilities are available at this site, as are a basketball hoop and playground equipment. The Memorial Day Festival is celebrated annually at this park.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Open play areas
- Sanitation facilities
- BBQ stations
- 4 picnic tables
- 1 basketball hoop
- Vehicle access
- Paved road access
- Parking
- Water available
- Boat launch
- Fishing

*ADA Rating: 3*

Parking spaces are provided and roadways/sidewalks are paved.

**Library Park** is an open space adjacent to the library in Edwardsburg Village located on 0.4 acres, just northwest of M-62. Bike racks are available for the children who utilize the space to play pick-up games of football and soccer.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- 1 bike rack
- Open play areas
- Vehicle access
- Paved road access
- Parking

*ADA Rating: 2*

Paved parking spaces are provided, but there are no amenities located here (other than open space).

**Edwardsburg Sports Complex** is a not-for-profit sports and recreation facility developing just outside of the Edwardsburg village limits. Phase 1 of the development has been completed and Phase 2 is underway. The 102-acre complex is currently home to youth soccer, lacrosse, and high school cross country, but the finished facility will support all kinds of sports and outdoor activities for people of all ages. The Township donated \$10,000 for the complex to add pickleball and basketball courts. The complex is poised to be a significant economic driver with its capacity to host major athletic competitions and other large events. Ultimately serving as a community center, the complex is Ontwa Township’s place for kids, community, and athletics to come together.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Cross country course and walking trail
- 10 multi-use turf fields
- Modern restrooms
- Picnic areas
- Concessions
- ADA-accessible Pavilions
- 4 paved parking lots
- 4 baseball fields

*ADA Rating: 4*

Paved parking lots and paths are provided. Pavilions and restrooms are ADA-compliant.

**Ferndale Park** is located along the south shore of Eagle Lake on approximately 0.5 acres. This park can be accessed from S. Shore Drive and is mostly open space with an opportunity for swimming.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Lake access

*ADA Rating: N/A*

This site is open space and not possible to score.

**Radabaugh Memorial Plant Preserve** is approximately 3.1 acres along the western shore of Eagle Lake. This preserve is owned by the Michigan Nature Association and one of the last remaining natural areas around Eagle Lake. The preserve is mostly wetland, which has been present since the earliest recorded deed in 1836.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Destination point for hiking

*ADA Rating: N/A*

This site is open space and not possible to score.

**Redfield-Bucklen Landing** is a canoe and kayak launch operated by the Michigan DNR in Ontwa Township. This linear open space is approximately 300 feet along Redfield Street. The parking lot can be accessed from Redfield Street and provides access to Christiana Creek, a tributary from the St. Joseph River. This creek eventually empties into Christiana Lake.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Carry down canoe/kayak launch
- Gravel parking lot

*ADA Rating: 1*

This site includes an unpaved parking area. There are no other amenities on the site besides open space.

**Eagle Lake East End Lake Access** offers open space along the eastern shore of Eagle Lake and includes lake access for boats and greenspace as part of the Eagle Lake Road right-of-way.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Lake access
- Boat ramp
- Paved parallel parking along road

*ADA Rating: 1*

This site includes paved parallel parking spots, but these are adjacent to the road and do not provide the appropriate width to comply with ADA standards. The boat ramp is concrete and does not include ADA accessibility. The remaining area is open space.

**Lindbergh Park** is a 0.07-acre linear park within the Village of Edwardsburg located along Pleasant Lake on Cass Street (Dailey Road). It is primarily open space with a beach and lake access for swimming.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

- Lake access
- Portable toilet

*ADA Rating: 1*

Parking is located along the unpaved shoulder of the road. The portable toilet is not ADA-compliant. The rest of the site is open space.

**Brady Road Right-of-Way** extends to the edge of Eagle Lake, offering lake access through a boat ramp at the end of the road. There is no parking at this location.

*Recreation & Support Facilities*

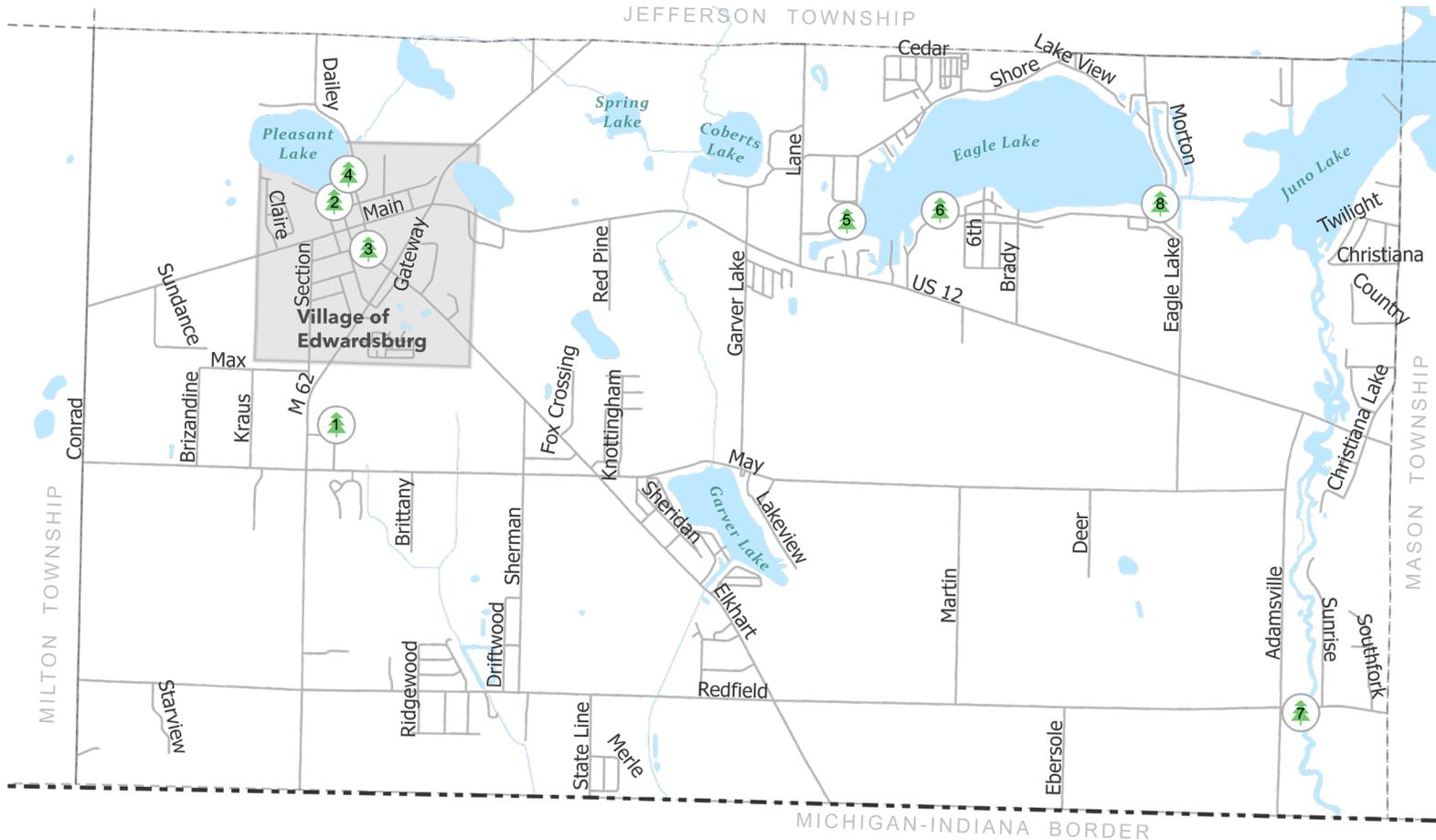
- Boat ramp

*ADA Rating: N/A*

This location is within the Brady Road right-of-way and not possible to score.

**Edwardsburg Public Schools** provide facilities for outdoor recreation and sports events. School facilities include an athletic complex consisting of softball diamonds, baseball diamonds, several large playing fields, several tennis courts, a football stadium, and a rubberized track. All of these facilities are open to the public for community recreation when not in use by the schools.

**Future Opportunities** may improve access to Eagle Lake. While no new parks are currently proposed in the Township, the Michigan DNR has considered construction of a public boat launch along Eagle Lake in the past. However, the viability of this is uncertain and no plans have been approved at this time.



Map 2

# Parks and Open Space



Sources: MI DNR Open Data, Michigan Open Data Portal, Ontwa Township

## Legend

- Kraus Memorial Park
- Radabaugh Memorial Plant Preserve
- Gunn Park
- Ferndale Park
- Library Park
- Redfield-Bucklen Landing
- Lindbergh Park
- Eagle Lake East End Lake Access

## ONTWA TOWNSHIP TRAILS & NATURAL DESIGN



The **Connector Path Project** was a partnership between Ontwa Township, the Cass County Road Commission, and the Edwardsburg Sports Complex to provide a pathway system connecting the Sports Complex with the Edwardsburg Public School system and the Village of Edwardsburg’s walkways. This path offers safe travel for a variety of non-motorized trail users to and from the Village to the Sports Complex.

The trail is a paved, 10-foot wide path designed to accommodate a variety of non-motorized trail users. It was completed in 2019 and extends along the north side of US-12 from an existing pedestrian crosswalk at Claire Street in the Village of Edwardsburg heading west to the Edwardsburg Sports Complex. In 2017, the project received a \$40,000 grant from the Michigan DNR’s Natural Resources Trust Fund to help build the pathway. The project has also received federal grant money through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program, which covered 80

percent of the cost. Further funding was committed from Ontwa Township and the Sports Complex.

**Bike trails** are a priority for Ontwa Township as the concept of complete streets is pursued. The Township is directing efforts to improve non-motorized connectivity throughout the Township and the Village of Edwardsburg. Phase 1 of the Township’s plan for bike trails was developed in 2015 (Map 3). Since this Phase was outlined, the Connector Path Project along US-12 has been completed. Phase 1 also includes a bike path along Elkhart Road between the Village of Edwardsburg boundary and May Street, which would be completed in coordination with the Cass County Road Commission. This has not yet been completed.

Future bike trails are planned throughout the Township by the Cass County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Together, these trails would provide a network for biking to various destinations throughout the Township, including connections between the Village of Edwardsburg, Eagle Lake, Garver Lake, and Pleasant Lake.

**Snowmobile trails** are popular for winter recreation in Ontwa Township. The Michigan DNR provides several off-road snowmobile routes throughout the Township, which are part of LP 12 (Map 3). This trail has multiple loops throughout Ontwa Township and provides connections to other designated snowmobile trails in the broader Cass County region and the state. Local trails are maintained by the

Edwardsburg Snowmobile Club.

**All Aboard** is a landscape plan to greatly enhance land adjacent to the railroad track on M-62, from the crossing on Route 12 to the crossing on Elkhart Road in Edwardsburg. Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg have collaborated on the project and received a \$25,000 grant from the Canadian National Railways, administered by America in Bloom. This is a 100 percent match grant that will require the Village and Township to also provide \$25,000 for the project. The project will involve design, site clean-up, planting of trees and bushes, two perennial flower beds, solar lighting, signage, maintenance, and a watering system. This project will contribute to the Village aesthetic and enhance natural features along M-62.

The **2020 Southwest Michigan Region Nonmotorized Transportation Plan** was developed by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). This plan includes nonmotorized recommendations for Cass County, including areas in Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg. The US-12 corridor through Edwardsburg is considered a priority east-west regional corridor for nonmotorized connections. This corridor was identified as having a four-foot shoulder along much of the road, although more gaps are present east of Edwardsburg. Local corridors were also identified along Elkhart Road and M-62.

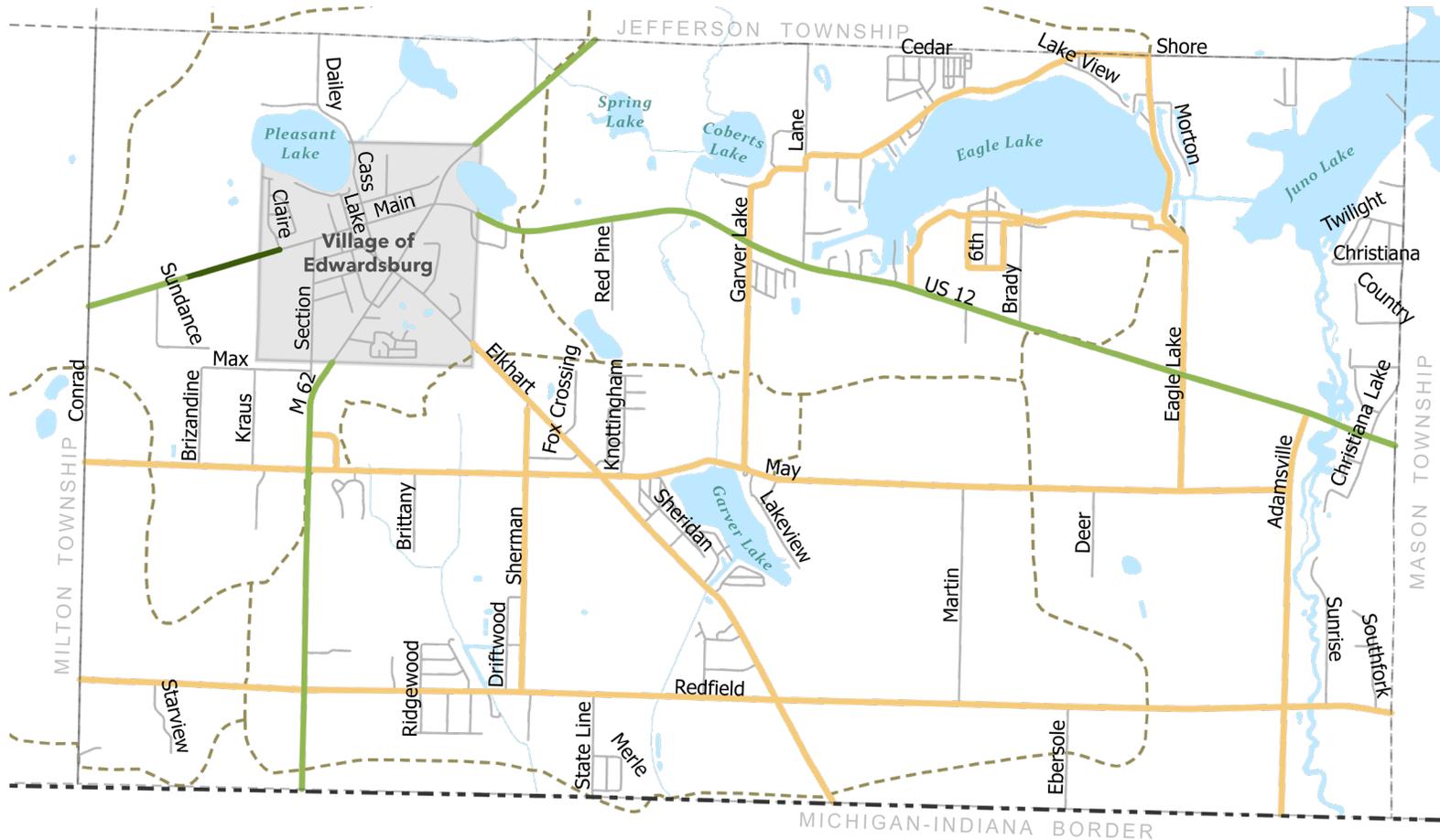
The following roads were prioritized for nonmotorized travel in Ontwa Township:

**On-Road Network Priorities:**

- Redfield Street
- M-62 from Cassopolis to Dowagiac to Edwardsburg
- Dailey Road from Edwardsburg to north of M-60

The Nonmotorized Plan also includes several off-road network priorities for Cass County. Although locations in Ontwa Township are not specifically identified, many priorities are associated with Cassopolis. Considering these off-road priorities, a connection to Cassopolis could eventually provide access to Dowagiac, Jones, Eau Claire, and Niles.

The **Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) Active Transportation Plan** also emphasizes non-motorized transportation connections between Michigan and Indiana, desiring improved connections from existing pathways in areas such as South Bend, Granger, and Elkhart, to areas in Michigan. Both locally and regionally significant bicycle and pedestrian projects are proposed near Ontwa Township in St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties, which would connect to the cities of Granger, South Bend, and Elkhart. Ontwa Township's proximity to these areas provides an opportunity to strengthen non-motorized connections across state boundaries.



Map 3

## Existing and Proposed Trails

### Legend

- Proposed Bike Trails, MDOT
- Proposed Bike Trails, Cass County Road Commission
- Connector Path
- - - Designated Snowmobile Trail, LP 12



Sources: MI DNR Open Data, Michigan Open Data Portal, Ontwa Township

## OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE IN SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

### ***City of Niles***

The city of Niles has a number of recreation opportunities available. Located about 10 miles from Edwardsburg, Niles is the home of Riverfront Park, Plym Park and Golf Course, the Tyler Sports Complex, Fort St. Joseph, and several other city parks. Riverfront Park is located along the banks of the St. Joseph River and contains walking paths, a play area, a dock, and a skate park. Connections to the IN-MI River Valley Trail are also present in the city.

### ***City of Elkhart***

Elkhart, Indiana, just southeast of Ontwa Township, is a city built on rivers. The St. Joseph River and the Elkhart River come together in Elkhart. As a result, numerous river parks have been established in the area. For passive recreation enthusiasts, there are also museums to visit in Elkhart.

### ***City of South Bend***

The city of South Bend, Indiana, is just southwest of Ontwa Township. Home of the University of Notre Dame, sports fans visit the city many weekends out of the year for football and basketball games. East Race Waterway, a white-water kayak route used by many, including some Olympic athletes, is located in South Bend. Potawatomi Park and Zoo, in addition to a number of museums, can also be enjoyed in South Bend. As with Elkhart and Niles, the St. Joseph River is home to many river parks in the area. Several trails are present in the city, with the LaSalle Trail occupying a former interurban railroad corridor and plans for its extension to the city of Niles.

### ***Cass County***

Cass County has a number of parks in the county, the largest being Dr. T. K. Lawless Park at 820 acres. This park has a number of open spaces and is used by many as a place to relax, hike, camp, cross-country ski, and play sports. There are also mountain bike trails which hold various race events. In 2020, this park was designated an International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association, making it one of the two Dark Sky Park locations in Michigan.

Five other parks are managed by Cass County. Arthur Dodd Memorial Park is the second largest at 51 acres, and includes a non-motorized boat launch, fishing area, picnic shelters, a volleyball courts, and open space. Russ Forest County Park (equestrian park) provides a non-motorized boat launch, children's play equipment, equestrian trails, fishing, hiking, and picnic areas. Harmon Park, Henry Sears Park, and Stevens Lakeside Memorial Park are smaller parks that offer swimming areas and/or lake access, along with some open space.

In addition to County parks, there are numerous parks and open space areas maintained by the cities, villages, and townships in Cass County. The Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy also maintains Spirit Springs Sanctuary, a public preserve in the County, along with several limited access preserves.

## **BARRIER-FREE EVALUATION**

Generally, several of the Township's park facilities meet current ADA requirements. The play structure that was erected at Kraus Memorial Park is ADA compliant. Many other parks have paved access and contain primarily open space. Additionally, the Edwardsburg Sports Complex and school recreation areas also are in compliance with ADA standards. Many facilities (beach access, nature preserves) are difficult to rate for ADA accessibility, as those areas are typically viewed as natural, undeveloped open space features. Accessibility is typically more limited at these locations due to their size and function. All future development of Ontwa Township's public recreation facilities will meet ADA requirements and, when applicable, the barrier free design requirement in the state construction code.

## CHAPTER 5 RECREATION INVENTORY ANALYSIS

Numerous tools can be used in order to determine the recreational needs of a community. Among these are comparisons to the recreation classification system and facility development standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association. Conducting a survey can also help determine a community’s needs. Both of these methods are employed in the Ontwa Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The following tables provide a comparison with recreation development standards and classifications systems in order to help inform the planning process:

Mini-Park	
Use	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens.
Service Area	Less than ¼ mile radius
Desirable Size	1 acre or less
Acres per 1,000	0.25 to 0.5 acres per 1,000 population
Desirable Site Characteristics	Within neighborhoods and in close proximity to apartment complexes, townhouse development or housing for the elderly.
Mini-Parks in/near Ontwa Township	Library Park Ferndale Park

Neighborhood Park / Playground	
Use	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, playground apparatus area, skating, picnicking, wading pools, etc.
Service Area	¼ to ½-mile radius to serve a population up to 5,000 (a neighborhood).
Desirable Size	15+ acres
Acres per 1,000	1 to 2 acres per 1,000 population
Desirable Site Characteristics	Suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood population geographically centered with safe walking and bike access. May be developed as a school park facility.
Neighborhood Park/Playgrounds in/near Ontwa Township	Gunn Park

Community Park	
Use	Area of diverse environmental quality. May include areas suited for intense recreational facilities, such as athletic complexes, large swimming pools. May be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation, such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking. May be any combination of the above, depending upon site suitability and community need.
Service Area	Several neighborhoods. 1 to 2 mile radius.
Desirable Size	25+ acres
Acres per 1,000	5 to 8 acres per 1,000 population
Desirable Site Characteristics	May include natural features such as water bodies and areas suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood served.
Community Parks in/near Ontwa Township	Kraus Memorial Park Edwardsburg Sports Complex

Regional / Metropolitan Park	
Use	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses; may include play areas.
Service Area	Several communities. 1 hour driving time.
Desirable Size	200+ acres
Acres per 1,000	5 to 10 acres
Desirable Site Characteristics	Contiguous to or encompassing natural resources.
Regional/Metropolitan Parks in/near Ontwa Township	Russ Forest County Park Arthur Dodd Memorial Park Warren Dunes State Park

Regional Park Preserve	
Use	Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, fishing, boating, camping, and trail uses. May include active play areas. Generally, 80% of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management with less than 20% used for recreation development.
Service Area	Several communities. 1 hour driving time.
Desirable Size	1,000+ acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource to be preserved and managed.
Acres per 1,000	Variable
Desirable Site Characteristics	Diverse or unique natural resources such as lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna, and topography.

Regional Park Preserves in/near Ontwa Township	Sarrett Nature Center Dr. T.K. Lawless Park Cobus Creek
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**Linear Park**

Use	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and pleasure driving. May include active play areas.
Service Area	No applicable standard.
Desirable Size	Sufficient width to protect the resource and provide maximum use.
Acres per 1,000	Variable
Desirable Site Characteristics	Built or natural corridors such as utility rights-of-way, bluff lines, vegetation patterns, and roads that link other components of the recreation system or community facilities such as school, libraries, commercial areas and other park areas.
Linear Parks in/near, Ontwa Township	Extensive snowmobile trail network Russ Forest Trail Radabaugh Nature Preserve Redfield-Bucklen Landing Eagle Lake East End Lake Access Lindbergh Park Brady Road Right-of-Way Boat Ramp

**Special Use**

Use	Areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities such as golf courses, nature centers, marinas, zoos, conservatories, arboreta, display gardens, arenas, outdoor theaters, gun ranges, or downhill ski areas, or areas that preserve, maintain, and interpret buildings, sites, and objects of archeological significance. Also plazas or squares in or near commercial centers, boulevards, parkways.
Service Area	No applicable standard.
Desirable Size	Variable depending on desired size.
Acres per 1,000	Variable
Desirable Site	Within communities.
Special Use Areas in/near Ontwa Township	Edwardsburg Area Historical Collection Edwardsburg Public Library Four Flags Museum, Niles Pioneer Log Cabin Museum and Interpretive Center, Cassopolis Cass County Fairgrounds, Cassopolis Lowe Foundation Council on Aging

**Facility Development Standards**

Facility development standards are based on an area’s population. The population at the time of evaluation determines a community’s need. In this case, Ontwa Township has a population of 6,496; this figure can be rounded to 6,500 for ease of calculation. Once the need has been determined, an inventory of existing facilities is conducted. A community’s deficiency is determined by subtracting existing facilities from needed facilities.

Table 5. Facility Development Standards			
Activity/Facility	Standard	Number recommended per 2018 population estimate	Existing
Badminton	1/5,000	1-2	0
Basketball (Youth)	1/5,000	1-2	1
Handball	1/20,000	Less than 1	-
Ice Hockey	1/100,000	Less than 1	-
Tennis	1/2,000	3	3
Volleyball	1/5,000	1-2	0
Baseball	1/5,000	1-2	>1
Field Hockey	1/20,000	Less than 1	-
Football	1/20,000	Less than 1	1
Soccer	1/10,000	Less than 1	>1
Golf-Driving Range	1/50,000	Less than 1	1
¼-Mile Running Track	1/20,000	Less than 1	1
Softball	1/5,000	1-2	>1
Multiple Recreation Court	1/10,000	Less than 1	1
Trails	1 system	1	1
Archery Range	1/50,000	Less than 1	-
Skeet and Trap Field	1/50,000	Less than 1	-
Golf (18-hole standard)	1/50,000	Less than 1	1
Swimming Pools	1/20,000	Less than 1	-

## CHAPTER 6 DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

A planning and public input process is necessary to assist Ontwa Township in assessing park, recreation, and open space needs. This Recreation Plan is founded upon the ideas, desires, and needs of the local community. The input of the public, stakeholders, and local officials provides a basis upon which goals, objectives, and actions are determined. The planning method for this Recreation Plan involved a comparison to the National Recreation and Park Association standards described in Chapter 5. Further, community outreach efforts were primarily conducted through an online community survey to gain public input on park, recreation, and open space needs.

### SURVEY SUMMARY

An online survey was conducted during the preparation of the plan in November 2020. The survey was conducted using the Survey Monkey website and a series of questions were prepared in an effort to acquire feedback and evaluate the needs of the community, as well as opportunities and constraints to enhancing the parks and recreation network of the community. A total of 424 responses were completed by the November 2, 2020, deadline. A copy of the online community survey and results is provided in the Appendix.

Based on survey results, the following points were recommended for consideration during the update of goals, objectives, and actions in this Recreation Plan:

- The survey provides the Township with a valuable perspective from those who are younger than 18 years of age, as almost half of the respondents were less than 18 years. With a relatively high median age in the Township, this provides the opportunity for the Township to gain valuable insights from a younger generation and incorporate them into the updated Plan.
- Many of the Township's parks receive little visitation. Many respondents indicated they did not know the locations of parks or how to access them; for those 18 years or older, this was the most common reason for not visiting a park. Acquiring additional parks is likely not necessary as "acquiring land for future parks" was considered the least important park and recreation improvement and respondents commented that additional parks were likely not necessary. Rather, the Township may focus on opportunities to improve existing facilities and market them to the community.
- The enjoyment of nature and the outdoors was the clear top benefit of parks and recreation and preservation of natural areas was an important aspect for improvement. Outdoor enjoyment was considered important by all age groups. Yet, the most frequently visited parks were places often used for athletic activities. The Planning Commission may consider ways to encourage access to natural areas through existing park facilities and trails. This may include infrastructure improvements to increase access to existing park facilities and wayfinding signage to orient park visitors.
- Seniors and those with disabilities were identified as groups most underserved by current recreation services and amenities. The Planning Commission may consider improvements related to ADA accessibility, safe

pathways, and universal design standards.

- Walking and biking trails were identified as having primary importance to respondents. A paved, multi-use path received the highest priority of all trail types. The desire for this type of path was also reflected in Questions 14 and 16, in which bike trails and walking paths were identified as most needed in Township parks. Additionally, many comments were received regarding safety when walking or biking along roads. The use of expanded road shoulders or multi-use pathways along road corridors may greatly enhance safety and connectivity along many roads, such as US-12 and Redfield Street.

## **PUBLIC MEETING AND PLAN ADOPTION**

Following preparation of the plan, citizens were provided an adequate opportunity (at least 30 days) to review and comment on the plan prior to official adoption by the Ontwa Township Board.

A draft of the plan was submitted to the Township staff for their review and comments. A notice was published in the local newspaper (The Niles Daily Star) on December 5, 2020 notifying the public of the availability of the plan to provide them the opportunity to review and comment. The plan was available for public review at the Township hall and the Township website. Suggestions received to improve the plan were incorporated into the document, which was then revised and finalized.

A notice of the Township Board public meeting to be held on January 11, 2021 to adopt the plan was also published in the same newspaper on January 2, 2021. The Ontwa Township Planning Co Board adopted the plan on January 11, 2021.

## CHAPTER 7 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

After considering community input and the Township's existing conditions, a series of goals and objectives were developed to form the foundation of this Recreation Plan. The goals are intended to describe a desirable end state or the condition of recreation in Ontwa Township over the life of this plan, but some goals will remain relevant beyond this timeframe. The goal statements are intentionally general but considered attainable through concerted efforts. The objective statements tend to be more specific and may be regarded as milestones in the journey to achieve the larger goal.

**Goal 1: The citizens of Ontwa Township will be served with accessible and plentiful parkland that offers a multitude of recreational opportunities for all ages and abilities.**

Objectives:

1. Retain, and where appropriate acquire, land and facilities for a variety of passive and active recreation uses that accommodate different age groups, primarily locating new facilities in areas lacking parkland and near population concentrations.
2. Encourage or require developers to create pocket parks or natural areas in future residential developments in higher density areas of the Township.
3. At a minimum, design park and recreation facilities in compliance with ADA requirements and strive to achieve universal design.
4. Ensure that existing park facilities are preserved and well-maintained through adequate and appropriate maintenance, and remain suitable for future improvements.
5. Review and amend, as necessary, the Township's zoning ordinance to encourage open space in proposed subdivisions, site condominiums, planned unit developments, and commercial and industrial developments.
6. Install and enhance, where necessary, wayfinding signage in Township parks and along trails to inform, orient, and provide a sense of place for those visiting parks and recreation areas.



**Goal 2: The residents and visitors of Ontwa Township will enjoy a network of non-motorized trails with safe, inviting connections to local and regional natural areas and recreational facilities.**

Objectives:

1. Identify desired trail routes for a variety of different trail users, taking into account likely emerging growth areas, existing regional trails, roads with extended shoulders, natural feature destinations, regional parks, public and quasi-public uses, and cultural venues.
2. Coordinate trail planning with adjoining communities and property owners to achieve a connected regional trail network.
3. Explore funding opportunities or general resource partners, including SWMPC, Village of Edwardsburg, Federal funding (CMAQ, STP, TAP and Safe Routes to School), and Michigan Department of Natural Resources funding.
4. Improve existing widened road shoulders so that they can be used as proper bike lanes, in conjunction with the Cass County Road Commission, SWMPC, and MDOT.
5. Implement “Complete Streets” initiatives to achieve more livable and complete streets for residents in the region by designing, building, and maintaining streets to be convenient for people of all ages and abilities.
6. Review and amend, as necessary the Zoning Ordinance to promote pedestrian connections between neighborhoods and developments, such as requiring the inclusion of pathways and sidewalks throughout new developments.
7. Ensure all paved trail and pathway improvements are ADA-accessible and strive for universal design.

**Goal 3: Ontwa Township will continue collaboration with neighboring communities to improve and expand recreational opportunities for residents of the larger Cass County community.**

Objectives:

1. Explore joint approaches to meet recreational needs of the Township’s aging population and the Village’s younger population.
2. Foster communication with the public regarding efforts to maintain and improve park and recreational facilities, such as through community surveys, recruitment of volunteers, partnerships, and updates via the Township and Village websites.
3. Coordinate parks and recreation planning efforts between the Township,

Village, schools, and the citizens of the Edwardsburg area to ensure all entities play an inclusive role in the parks and recreation planning and prioritization process.

4. Explore programming opportunities for schools to implement recreation programs and boost participation in recreational activities.
5. Explore potential connections to regional trail systems through partnerships with neighboring communities and participation in the non-motorized transportation efforts of regional governments such as the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC).

**Goal 4: Ontwa Township’s parks and natural areas will enhance the Township’s character through the stewardship of water resources, wildlife, and natural features.**

Objectives:

1. Retain and improve sites providing water access and scenic natural views for residents and visitors.
2. Enhance public awareness of the Township’s natural features and park access locations through wayfinding signage, educational material, and digital media.
3. Encourage citizen involvement in efforts to improve surface and ground water quality in the Township’s lakes and streams, such as through water quality monitoring, invasive species removal, and education of household contaminants to the natural environment.
4. Maintain a current 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan to ensure the Township’s recreational system meets the needs of residents and maintains an accurate inventory of natural areas.
5. Pursue funding opportunities for park development, including the Michigan DNR Natural Resources Trust Fund, Passport Recreation Grants Program, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.



## CHAPTER 8 ACTION PROGRAM

The Township's parks and recreation areas provide a variety of opportunities for passive and active outdoor activities. The Township's parks are envisioned as safe and beautiful locations that preserve the community's natural resources and provide space for residents to enjoy the outdoors, connect with others, and maintain health and wellness. To promote the continued viability of parks and recreation areas in the Township, actions and priorities for development should be identified.

The purpose of the action program is to provide a guideline to park and recreation development that will occur over the next five years. These actions are founded on the goals and objectives outlined in Chapter 7. Although a five-year time period will not be sufficient to accomplish all goals and objectives, the action program is intended to prioritize projects that may be achievable within five years. The action program is followed by a capital improvement schedule, which itemizes the most feasible projects. These recommendations are intended to be flexible, as available funds and opportunities may vary throughout the next five years.

### ACTION PROGRAM

The following items include a basis for action based on the community's demographic profile, community input conducted in support of this Plan, and this Plan's goals and objectives. These items are not listed in any particular order.

#### ***Regional Trail System***

Based on community feedback, it is clear that mobility and accessibility is vital to the Township's parks and recreation goals, while providing ample opportunities for Township residents to enjoy nature and the outdoors. Paved, multi-use paths that provide opportunities for walking and biking were highly desired by the public. Safety concerns were also present for walking and biking travel along many local roads.

Based on the strong desire for safe walking and biking pathways, strengthened connections should be considered to existing networks within and near the Township. Thus, one of the primary action items for the Township is to develop and implement a non-motorized path network throughout the Township. This network will enhance accessibility to various parks, schools, and other facilities throughout the Township.

Planning this network may involve several considerations for non-motorized travel. Connections to public schools and along US-12 were identified as top priorities by the public, followed by Redfield Street. Additionally, the 2020 Southwest Michigan Region Nonmotorized Transportation Plan identified US-12 as an important regional corridor for non-motorized travel in Cass County. Therefore, a non-motorized trail adjacent to US-12 is a natural project to undertake. Priority should be given to providing safe connections near higher density areas. Locations for future development may consider extensions from the Connector Trail that was recently developed, developing a route east towards Eagle Lake, or extensions that would contribute to regional connectivity within Cass County and beyond in Indiana.

**Kraus Memorial Park**

The residents of Ontwa Township consider Kraus Memorial park to be a vital asset to the community. The Township recently undertook a \$15,000 project to improve existing infrastructure such as the playground equipment and pavilion. Yet, there remain additional opportunities to enhance this park.



In addition to the trails, picnic shelter, and play structure at Kraus Memorial Park, Weed Lake is a beautiful natural area accessible from Kraus Memorial Park. To take advantage of the opportunities afforded by this natural resource, it is recommended that a boardwalk/nature trail be built around the lake. The community also expressed interest in constructing a restroom facility at the park. It is anticipated Kraus Memorial Park can function as not only an active recreation site, but also as a passive recreation location in the community.

The location of Kraus Memorial Park near the boundary between the Village and Township also affords it with an opportunity to serve as a landmark and gateway between the communities, uniting recreation in both communities. To strengthen this connection between communities, a link to the public school, Village, and Kraus Park is recommended for development.

**Water Features**

The Township’s abundant water features are valued by the community and provide opportunities for scenic views, natural resource protection, and recreation. Community feedback expressed interest in river recreation amenities and outdoor water recreation. The Township maintains access to several water features, including Eagle Lake at Ferndale Park, Lindberg Park, and boat ramps at the East End Lake Access and Brady Road; Christiana Creek and Lake through the Redfield-Bucklen Landing; Pleasant Lake at Gunn Park; and unique wetland features at the Radabaugh Memorial Plant Preserve.

Improved access should be considered at these sites to encourage community enjoyment of a variety of water features. Current access to these sites is limited and could be improved through features such as signage and parking. The Township has the unique opportunity to offer diverse settings for the enjoyment of water features, which should be promoted among the community.

**Marketing and Promotion**

The community survey indicated that many of the Township’s parks receive little visitation, largely because many people do not know park locations or how to access them. Park access and visitation may be greatly improved through marketing of parks, recreation areas, and trails. The Township may enhance access and awareness of parks and recreation through the following:

- Wayfinding signage which identifies park sites and helps orient visitors on trails.
- Informational kiosks at certain park sites to identify relevant park information and provide educational materials, such as natural species on the site or history of a park.

- Digital identification of parks and trails, such as through the Township’s website, social media pages, or newsletters. The Township could also consider adding QR codes so the public can download digital park and trail maps through apps such as Avenza Maps.

**CAPTIAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEDULE**

Following is the five-year capital improvement plan for the Ontwa Township parks system. Each project or proposed action is listed along with a target year for implementation. The rationale for each action or project is based on the action program identified above, along with this Plan’s goals and objectives.

Table 6 Capital Improvement Schedule		
Action	Estimated Costs	Timing
Identify priority corridors for non-motorized trails, specifically considering Phase 1 of the Proposed Trails Plan, the SWMPC Nonmotorized Transportation Plan, and community input	\$10,000	Year 1
Update the Township’s website and use other digital platforms to identify park locations, amenities and facilities, access locations, and trails.	\$5,000	Year 1, ongoing
Install wayfinding signage to identify Township parks and trails	\$30,000	Years 1-3
Support efforts to establish pathways through the Safe Routes to School Program	TBD	Years 1-3
Develop non-motorized pathways along US-12, and other thoroughfares where appropriate, to link regional trail systems and schools/facilities	TBD	Years 3-5, ongoing
Construct ADA-accessible pathway/boardwalk and viewing area at Kraus Park around Weed Lake	TBD	Years 3-5
Connect trail from Kraus Park to existing trail network	TBD	Years 3-5
Develop ADA-compliant trails and viewing areas at other community assets	TBD	Ongoing
Continue to make park and amenity improvements based on community recommendations	TBD	Ongoing

**Potential Funding Sources**

A variety of funding sources may exist to assist with park and recreation projects. It is the intention of the Township Board to match local funds with state, federal, and/or private funds whenever possible. Following are a list of potential sources:

- **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF).** This grant is intended to promote natural resource protection and outdoor recreation, with the majority of funding allocated for land acquisition projects. Grants may range from \$15,000 to \$300,000 for development projects and have no limit for acquisition projects. This grant requires a minimum local match of 25%.

- **Recreation Passport Grants.** This grant is intended to provide funding for the development of public recreation facilities, including new facility development and old facility renovation. Grants may range from \$7,500 to \$150,000. This grant requires a minimum local match of 25%.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund.** This grant is similar to the MNRTF, providing funding for park acquisition and development. It also evaluates a proposal based on Michigan's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, with natural feature preservation often the primary criteria. Grants may range from \$30,000 to \$300,000. This grant requires a minimum local match of 50%.
- **MDOT Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).** This grant uses federal funds to support the development of safe alternative transportation options that enhance a community's intermodal transportation system. This grant requires a minimum local match of 20%.
- **Township General Fund.** The Township's general fund may provide possibilities to help fund the development and improvement of facilities in the Township.
- **Donations and Foundations.** Property owners, residents, businesses, and other organizations may be interested in contributing to causes that will improve the local community, Township's setting, and quality of life for residents. These may come in the form of land donations, volunteers, monetary gifts, or funding of a specific project or facility.