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**PARKS AND RECREATION  
MASTER PLAN  
2016 – 2020**

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ONTWA TOWNSHIP  
CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN

March 2016 DRAFT

# **ONTWA TOWNSHIP**

Cass County, Michigan

## **Ontwa Township Board**

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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.

This document is an update to the previous 2002-2007 Ontwa Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan. It 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.

## CHAPTER 2 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

### Physical Characteristics

#### Regional Location

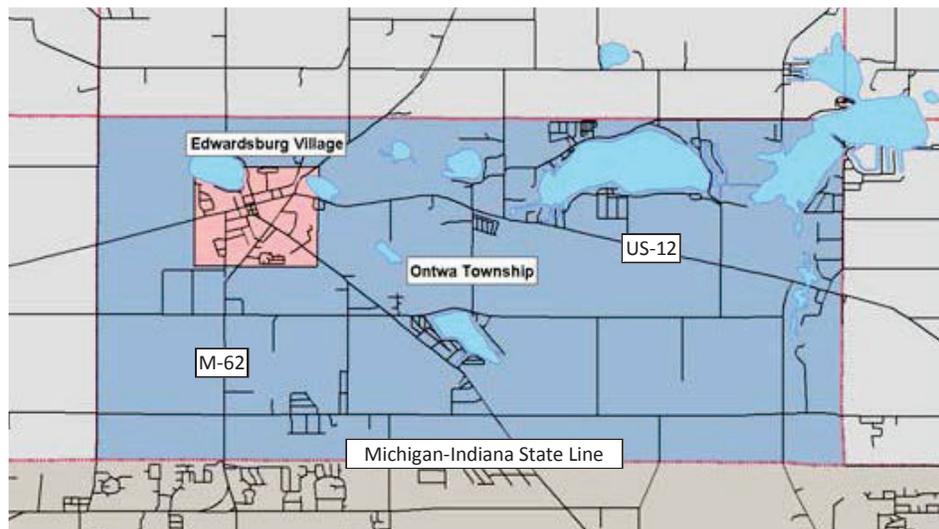
Ontwa Township, which includes the Village of Edwardsburg, is located in southwest lower Michigan, in southern Cass County. Edwardsburg is located entirely within the boundaries of Ontwa Township. Ontwa Township's southern border is the Michigan-Indiana state line. The Township and Village are approximately 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.

Figure 1 Location Map



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 6,000 vehicles passed through the Township and Village on US-12 in 2014. Additionally, M-62 transects the Village and Township. As the major north-south thoroughfare in the area, an average annual daily volume of 8,200 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.

Figure 2 Ontwa Township & Edwardsburg Village



### *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 South Bend, Indiana. The average temperature of the coldest month (January) is 23° Fahrenheit. In the summer, the average temperature of the warmest month (July) is 68° Fahrenheit. The average annual precipitation is 38.4 inches, while the average annual snowfall is 70.9 inches.

### *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 freshwater 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 2014, US-12 had a 24-hour annual average traffic volume of 6,000, 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 of almost 8,200 vehicles in 2014.

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 has experienced a slight increase in population, a 9.8% increase between 1980 and 2010. Ontwa Township experienced a slight growth rate of 11.6% during the same timeframe, with an acceleration of growth over the past three decades.

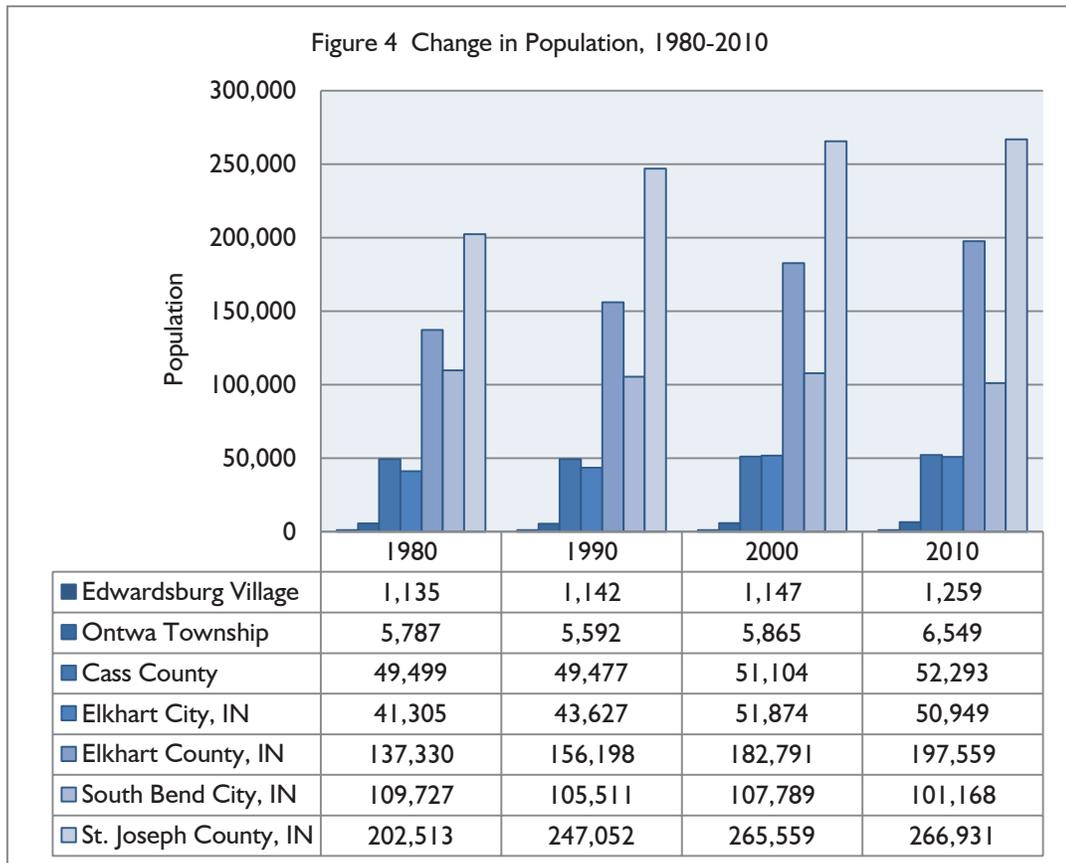
Table 1 and Figure 4 examines the population changes over a 30-year span for the Village of Edwardsburg, Ontwa Township and the adjacent cities and counties, including South Bend and Elkhart, Indiana, and the counties of Cass (MI), Elkhart

(IN) and St. Joseph (IN).

A substantial number of people in the greater Edwardsburg area work and shop in Indiana. Migration figures are not available for the 2010 Census but it is anticipated that they will indicate a number of people moving out of the urban areas of Indiana into the more rural areas of southern Michigan, particularly Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg Village.

Community	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	1980-2010
Village of Edwardsburg	0.6	0.4	8.9	9.8
Ontwa Township	-3.5	4.7	10.4	11.6
Cass County	0.0	3.2	2.3	5.3
Elkhart City, IN	5.3	15.9	-1.8	18.9
Elkhart County, IN	12.1	14.5	7.5	30.5
South Bend City, IN	-4.0	2.1	-6.5	-8.5
St. Joseph County, IN	18.0	7.0	0.5	24.1

Source: US Census Bureau



Source: US Census Bureau

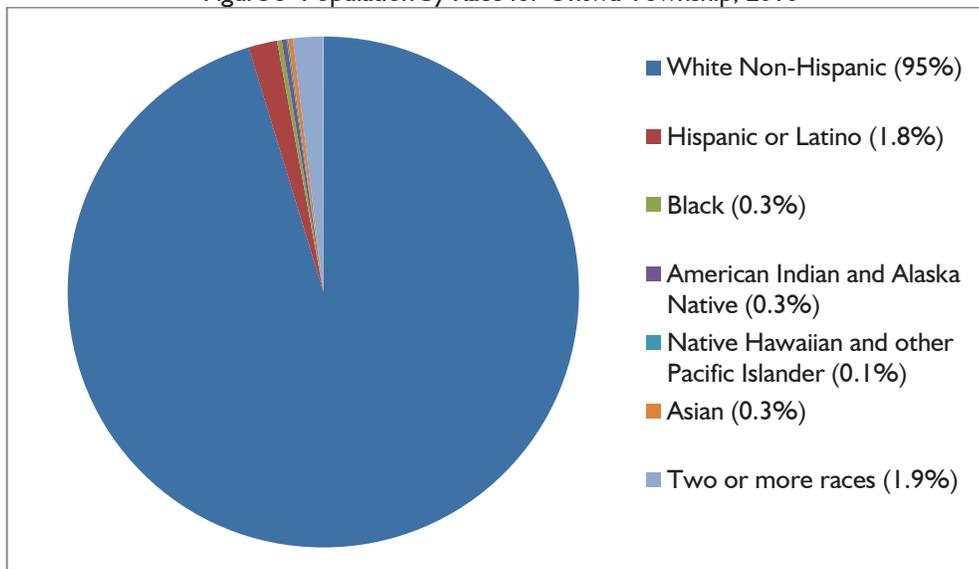
### Persons with Disabilities

In 2013, there were a total of 873 non-institutionalized persons reported as disabled in Ontwa Township. Of this total, 131 persons were between the ages of 5 to 17, 443 were between the ages of 18-64 and 299 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. Those identifying themselves as two or more races make up the next largest segment of the population (1.9%), followed by those identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino (1.8%). Those identifying themselves as Black alone, American Indian or Alaskan Native alone, Asian or Pacific Islander alone, or some other race alone each make up less than 1% of the population.

Figure 5 Population by Race for Ontwa Township, 2010



Source: US Census Bureau

### Housing

There were 2,984 housing units in Ontwa Township according to the 2010 Census, with an owner-occupied occupancy rate of 85.1%. The average persons per household in Ontwa Township from 2009 to 2013 was 2.78, compared to 2.63 persons per household in Cass County.

### Income

The median household income in and around Ontwa Township had a wide range in 2013. Table 2 shows that the median household income was \$49,057 for Ontwa Township. This income level exceeds median household income levels in neighboring Elkhart and St. Joseph counties, Indiana. Edwardsburg Village had a significantly lower median household income in 2013 (\$31,094).

Edwardsburg Village	\$31,094
Ontwa Township	\$49,057
Cass County	\$43,743
Elkhart County, IN	\$33,614
St. Joseph County, IN	\$44,582

Source: US Census Bureau

In 2013 it was estimated that approximately 10.8% of the population in Ontwa Township was under the poverty level, a decrease from 12% in 2010. An estimated 7.8% of persons 18 years and older were below the poverty level in 2013, a decrease of 8.8% in 2010.

#### *Employment Trends*

In recent years, unemployment has gradually declined throughout the United States and Michigan, including the Cass County region. Table 3 demonstrates that Ontwa Township had an average unemployment rate of 8.2% in 2012, decreasing to 6.3% in 2014. The Cass County unemployment rate was consistent with Ontwa Township and slightly higher than the national average over this timeframe.

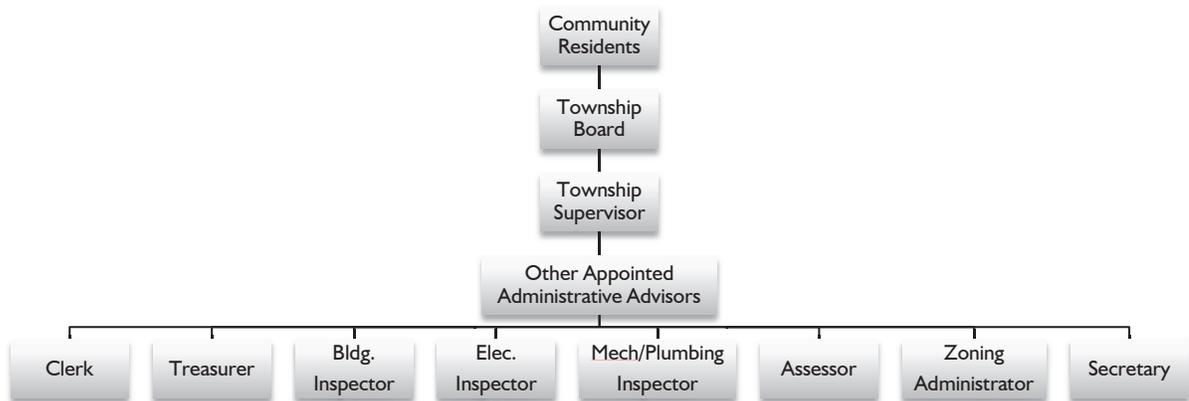
Community	2014 Average	2013 Average	2012 Average
Ontwa Township	6.3%	8.0%	8.2%
Cass County	6.3%	8.0%	8.2%
Michigan	7.2%	8.8%	9.1%
United States	6.2%	7.4%	8.1%

Source: US Census Bureau

## 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 6.)

Figure 6 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 zoning administrator, and a secretary. The Township Board consists of a supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and four trustees.

The Township maintains Township parks. Park maintenance and recreation activities received approximately \$2,397 of the Township's \$883,282 general fund budget in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015. Parks and recreation was allocated a budget of \$5,000 for the fiscal year.

Currently, a formal parks commission does not exist within the Township government. 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.

### Opportunities within Ontwa Township

#### *Primary Public Properties/Facilities*

1. **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.
2. **Gunn Park**, located in the Edwardsburg Village limits, is 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.
3. **Library Park** is an open space adjacent to the library in Edwardsburg Village, 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.

#### *Other Community Assets within Ontwa Township*

1. Ferndale Park
2. Radabaugh Nature Preserve
3. Redfield-Bucklen Landing
4. Eagle Lake East End Beach Access
5. Lindbergh Park at Pleasant Lake

Figure 7 Park and Recreation Facilities in Ontwa Township

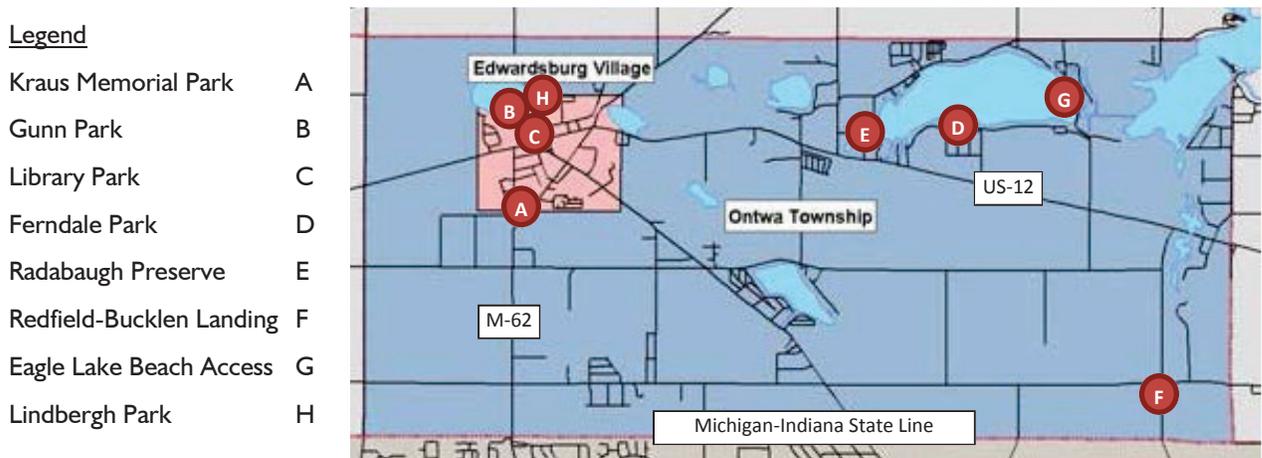


Table 4 Public Parks within Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg Village

Facility No.	Name	Activities / Equipment	ADA Accessibility Rating
1	Kraus Memorial Park	-Open Play Areas -ADA-Compliant Play Structure -5 Picnic Tables -1 Picnic Shelter -BB Stations -Vehicle Access -Paved Road Access -Parking	4 / Paved parking spaces and paths are provided, and playground equipment is ADA-compliant
2	Gunn Park	-Open Play Areas -Sanitation Facilities -BBQ Stations -4 Picnic Tables -1 Basketball Hoop -Vehicle Access -Paved Road Access -Parking -Water Available -Boat Launch -Fishing	Parking spaces are provided and roadways/sidewalks are paved
3	Library Park	-1 Bike Rack -Open Play Areas -Vehicle Access -Paved Road Access -Parking	2 / Paved parking spaces are provided, but there are no amenities located here (other than open space)
4	Ferndale Park	-Beach access	n/a / This site is open space and not possible to score
5	Radabaugh Nature Preserve	-Destination point for hiking (owned by Michigan Nature Preserve)	n/a / This site is open space and not possible to score
6	Redfield-Bucklen Landing	-Canoe/Kayak Launch (operated by MI DNR)	n/a / This site is open space and not possible to score
7	Eagle Lake East End	-Beach Access	n/a / This site is open space and not possible to score
8	Lindbergh Park at Pleasant Lake	-Beach Access	n/a / This site is open space and not possible to score

*School Properties/Facilities*

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.

Opportunities Available in Surrounding Communities

*City of Niles*

The city of Niles has a number of recreation opportunities available. Located less than 10 miles from Edwardsburg, Niles is the home of Riverfront Park, Plym Park, Island Park and Fort St. Joseph. Riverfront Park is located along the banks of the St. Joseph River and contains walking paths, a play area, a new dock and a skate park.

### *City of Elkhart*

Elkhart, Indiana, just south of Ontwa Township, is a city built on rivers. The St. Joseph River and the Elkhart River combine 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 also just south 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, 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.

### *Cass County*

Cass County has a number of parks in the county, the largest being Dr. T. K. Lawless Park. This park has a number of open spaces and is used by many as a place to relax, as well as mountain bike trails which hold various race events. Arthur Dodd Memorial Park (non-motorized boat launch and fishing area) and Russ Forest County Park (equestrian park) are two more parks in Cass County. Russ Forest County Park also has an extensive trail system.

The Edwardsburg Sports Complex is a not-for-profit sports and recreation facility developing just outside of the Edwardsburg village limits. The 102-acre complex is currently home to youth soccer and high school cross country, but the finished facility will support all kinds of sports and outdoor activities for people of all ages. 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.

### Barrier-Free Evaluation

Generally, the Township's park facilities revealed the recreation areas meet current ADA requirements. The play structure that was erected at Kraus Memorial Park is ADA compliant. The other parks have paved access and contain primarily open space. Additionally, 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. 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. Conducting surveys and visioning sessions can also 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:

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 Population	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

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 Population	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 Population	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 Population	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 Population	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

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 Population	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 Ferndale Park Radabaugh Nature Preserve Redfield-Bucklen Landing Eagle Lake East End Beach Access Lindbergh Park at Pleasant Lake

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 Population	Variable
Desirable Site Characteristics	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 6,549; 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 of required per 2010 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	depends on climate	n/a	-
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	-
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	0
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	-
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 the park, recreation and open space needs. This Master Plan is the culmination of extensive public outreach with community members and stakeholders.

In an effort to solicit citizen input, two methods of public outreach were conducted: an online community survey and a public open house.

### Survey Summary

An online survey was conducted during the preparation of the plan beginning on November 30, 2015. The survey was conducted using the Survey Monkey website, and a series of questions 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. The online survey was available until December 31, 2015. (See the Appendix for a copy of the online community survey and results.)

The survey resulted in a total of 145 responses from the community. Of the respondents, 96 live in Ontwa Township (66.2%), 25 live in the Village of Edwardsburg (17.2%), 15 live elsewhere in Cass County (10.3%), 6 live in Indiana (4.1%) and 3 live in jurisdictions within or adjacent to Ontwa Township (2.1%). The majority of participants were in the age group of 55-64 years old (30.3%), with the next-highest age group 45-54 years old (23.4%).

The survey also indicated that Gunn Park was the most utilized of the parks in Ontwa Township, with Kraus Memorial Park the next-most utilized. When asked what benefits of parks were most important to them, the majority of respondents indicated the most important was to provide opportunities to enjoy nature and the outdoors. Hiking trails were the next-most important benefit, and the third-most important benefit was bike trails and future connections to other networks.

When asked that the most important parks and recreation improvement shall be in Ontwa Township, the majority of respondents indicated developing a township-wide bike and pedestrian walkway was most important, and maintaining existing parks and facilities was the next-most important. The third-most important parks and recreation improvement was to develop a village bike and pedestrian walkway to help kids get to school.

Finally, when asked what parks and recreation amenities, facilities and services the community was most interested in, the majority of respondents indicated they were most interested in walking trails. The next-most popular response was bike trails, followed by water trails for kayak/canoeing and a trail head with restroom facilities.

## Open House Summary

In addition to the online community survey, a public open house and visioning session was held at the Ontwa Township Hall in on December 15, 2015. This open house format allowed attendees to review existing conditions of the parks and recreation network throughout Ontwa Township, and provided them the opportunity to provide feedback through the use of a comment form. The open house was advertised on the Township website, as well as flyers made available at the Township Hall. Additionally, the open house was publicized in the local newspaper (The Argus).

During the open house, the Ontwa Township staff and consultant gave a presentation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan process, and provided an overview of the existing conditions on the Township and enabled attendees to inquire about the plan adoption process and provide recommendations for the Township parks and recreation goals over the next five years. Additionally, hard copies of the community survey were made available to the attendees in the event they did not have online access to take the survey.

Following the presentation, attendees provided recommendations for the park, recreation and trail facilities throughout the Township. These recommendations include the following:

- Kraus Park
  - Construct boardwalk around lake
  - Construct trail from Village limits to park along M-620
  - Purchase land south of park for expansion
  - Create hiking trails around lake
  - Create a dog park
  - Build a sanitary sewer connection for restrooms
  - Add a fishing platform or dock
  - Add a bird watching area
  - Build a restroom facility
  - Stock the pond with fish
  - Purchase access to Pleasant Lake (add park and pathway)
  - Build an interpretive trail / fitness trail
- Library Park
  - Construct a gazebo or sitting area
- Parks and Trails Plan – Phase 1
  - Provide signage/wayfinding to indicate park locations
  - Create and distribute brochures that highlight all parks in Township and available for public use
  - Connect the Sports Complex through the village by Library Park out to Krauss Park

### 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. Suggestions received to improve the plan were incorporated into the document, which was then revised and finalized. The Ontwa Township Board adopted the plan on \_\_\_\_\_.

## CHAPTER 7

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A series of goals and objectives have been 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 are felt to be 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.

Objectives:

1. Explore funding opportunities for land acquisition and park development, including the MDNRE Trust Fund Recreation Grants Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
2. Acquire, plan, develop and maintain additional land and facilities for passive and active recreation; primarily locating new facilities in areas underserved with parkland, near population concentrations.
3. Encourage or require developers to create pocket parks or natural areas in future residential developments in higher density areas of the Township.
4. At a minimum, design facilities in compliance with ADA requirements; and strive to achieve universal design.
5. Ensure that existing park facilities are preserved and well-maintained through adequate and appropriate maintenance, and remain suitable for future improvements.

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

Objectives:

1. Identify desired trail routes, taking into account likely emerging growth areas, existing regional trails, natural feature destinations, regional parks, public and quasi-public uses and cultural venues.
2. Coordinate trail planning with adjoining communities and property owners.
3. Explore funding opportunities or general resource partners, including SWMPC, Village of Edwardsburg, Federal (CMAQ, STP, TAP and Safe Routes to School), State and 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. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require the inclusion of pathways and sidewalks throughout new development to promote pedestrian connections between neighborhoods and developments.
7. Ensure all trail and pathway improvements are ADA-accessible.

Goal 3: Ontwa Township will continue and expand cooperative efforts 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 area's aging population.
2. Pursue public engagement strategies such as community surveys, recruitment of volunteers, partnerships and providing updates via website.
3. Coordination among and communication between the Township, Village, schools, and the citizens of the Edwardsburg area is paramount to the success of parks and recreation. Maximum cooperation and collaboration between Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg shall be facilitated 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

## CHAPTER 8

# ACTION PROGRAM, CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEDULE AND BASIS FOR ACTION

### Action Program

The 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 discussed on the pages following the schedule. With regard to funding sources, it is the intention of the Township Board to match local funds with state, federal, and/or private funds whenever possible.

Table 6 Capital Improvement Schedule			
Year	Action	Estimated Costs	Potential Funding Source(s)
2016	Develop non-motorized pathways along US-12, and other thoroughfares where appropriate, to link regional trail systems and schools/facilities	TBD	MDNR Grants, Township general fund, private contributions /donations, fund-raisers and foundations
	Continue to develop and implement Phase I of the Proposed Trails Plan		
2017	Construct ADA-accessible pathway/boardwalk and viewing area at Kraus Park around Weed Lake	TBD	
2018	Connect trail from Kraus Park to existing trail network	TBD	
2019	Develop ADA-compliant trails and viewing areas at other community assets	TBD	
2020	Continue to make park and amenity improvements based on community recommendations	TBD	

### Basis for Action – 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.

Hiking trails, bike trails and connections to existing networks are important to the Township residents. 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.

In keeping with the recommendations of the residents of Ontwa Township to develop a non-motorized trail system, a non-motorized trail adjacent to US-12 is a natural project to undertake. This project fulfills the desire of visioning session and survey participants to develop and enhance and off-road motorized and non-motorized path system.

### Basis for Action – Kraus Memorial Park

The residents of Ontwa Township consider Kraus Memorial park to be a vital asset to the community; however there is strong consensus that various improvements and enhancements need to be considered for the future.

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 the intent to build a boardwalk/nature trail around the lake. 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.

For these reasons, a link to the school, village and Kraus Park is planned to be developed. The community also expressed interest in constructing a restroom facility at the park.