



Hamilton County Parks & Recreation 5 Year Comprehensive Plan 2017-2021 Celebrating 50 Years!

Hamilton County Indiana
April 2017



Prepared by:



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Acknowledgements

Comprehensive Plan Committee Members

Al Patterson, Director
Chris Stice, Deputy Director
Bruce Oldham, Regional Park Operations Manager
Amanda Smith, Superintendent of Natural Resources & Education
Don Nicholls, Resource Development Specialist
Facilitated by Mader Design LLC

Park Board Members

Andrew (Terry) Prather, President	Stephen Andrews
Larry Roudebush, Vice President	Jan DeJarnatt
Mark McCauley, Secretary	Susan Peterson
Philip Shelby, Treasurer	Dr. Judith Campbell

County Council Members

Paul Ayers	Brad Beaver
Jeff Hern	Fred Glynn
Amy Massillamany	Rick McKinney
Steve Schwartz	

County Commissioners

Christine Altman
Steven Dillinger
Mark Heirbrandt

MISSION

The Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Mission Statement:

“The Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department exists to serve the leisure and recreation needs of its residents and tourists, and to enhance the quality of life in the county. We strive to preserve and to provide, high-quality passive parks and facilities, to offer natural resource education and services, and to be recognized as a leader and resource for our community and its citizens in pursuit of living an environmentally responsible lifestyle”

VALUES

The Hamilton County Parks & Recreation Department continually strives to:

- Maintain current levels of maintenance and programming
- Create Partnership/Sponsorship opportunities
- Identify creative and new sources of funding
- Emphasize marketing
- Create Volunteer support, staffing support and viable alternatives
- Include Political influence
- Acquire additional park property – where logical and possible
- Increase Administrative Infrastructure – facilities & technology available to provide staff effective resources to be mobile and operate at appropriate park buildings
- Provide Creative & New Amenities - Maximum utilization of resources and communication while providing new and greater attractions

INTRODUCTION

Location and Planning Area

Hamilton County is located in the central part of the state, immediately north of Marion County and the state capitol of Indianapolis. Hamilton County is the fastest growing in the state, and in the top 20 counties for growth in the nation. In 2008, Hamilton County was named America's Best Place to Raise a Family by *Forbes.com* due to its strong economy, affordable living, top-ranked schools, and close proximity to Indianapolis. The county has been growing at nearly 6% per year for the last decade.

The planning area for the department is Hamilton County. Several communities are located in the county, some with their own park departments/boards, planning boards, and commissions; the county park board has the duty to plan for parks and recreation opportunities within the entire area. Having locally established park boards within the county enables both the local and the county park board to better plan and to provide parks and services. Municipal park boards typically provide services for those close to home, allowing the county park board to concentrate efforts on serving a wider population base.

Several communities make up Hamilton County. The largest are Carmel, Cicero, Fishers, Westfield, Sheridan and Noblesville, the county seat. The southern half of the county is developed, while the northern half remains more rural. When first settled, access to transportation and agriculture were major area of concern. Today, the county enjoys a good transportation network, with US 31 running north/south through the county, and State Road 32 running east/west. Several other State Roads (19,37,38, and 213) crisscross the county and Interstate 69 touches the southeast corner of the county. This road network brings travelers and commerce to this central region.

The uniqueness of many of the County Parks draw visitors from outside the county. From survey results we see park visitors regularly come from many of the surrounding counties, and from throughout the state. Actual visitor counts are difficult to determine given most parks are not staffed, but visitation is counted and noticeably increasing at the Cool Creek Nature Center and Taylor Center for Natural Resources. At this time it is not possible to obtain general park visitor counts or where visitors reside, however the Department is starting to work with the County Tourism Bureau to strategize and implement ways to capture this data and better plan for the future. With a larger draw than just the county footprint, and longer travel times for many visitors, it is important to plan for park amenities and programs and features to sustain longer park visits including overnight options for park users.

Hamilton County History

The land containing Hamilton County was brought into the possession of the United States by the Treaty of St. Mary's in 1818. William Conner was the 1st white settler in the county. In the summer of 1822, after realizing there were enough settlers in the area, Conner and other settlers applied to the Indiana Legislature for a charter authorizing them to become a separate and independent county under Indiana law.

The application was presented to the Legislature at the 1822-23 session and the act was passed and approved by the Governor on January 8, 1823. The act took effect on the 1st Monday in April (April 7), 1823. The County Commissioners 1st met on May 5, 1823 at the house of William Conner. Conner's house would also serve as the County Circuit Court. The county was named after Alexander Hamilton, the 1st secretary of the treasury.

The county seat is Noblesville. The center of population of Indiana is located in Hamilton County, in the town of Sheridan.

Hamilton County's roots are in agriculture. However after World War II, Indianapolis grew north and the county developed as a suburb. Many farm fields have been replaced over the past couple decades by both residential and commercial development.



County Location Map

Community Description, Natural and Man-made Features

Hamilton County lies in the central part of Indiana, immediately north of Marion County and comprises about 400 square miles. Like much of central Indiana, Hamilton County has very little topographical relief, consisting mainly of a large, flat plain. There are several waterways located within the county's borders, with the White River being the most prominent. Hamilton County has a humid climate, influenced somewhat by the Great Lakes. Cool and warm air masses converge in Indiana, making for a wide seasonal range in temperature and moisture. The area enjoys an average of 27 inches of rain yearly, with the majority of that precipitation falling April through September. The average temperature in the summer is 72 degrees and the average winter temperature is 29 degrees. Snowfall averages 21 inches per year.

Generally, opportunities for outdoor recreation rely upon the natural features of a region. Natural features are very important, especially to a rapidly developing area like Hamilton County. With such broad expanses of flat, easily developable land, very little is left over for parks and recreation sites. Rapid residential, industrial, and commercial developments quickly eat up available tracts. This usually means the 'less desirable' parcels are all that is left for public spaces. Unfortunately, those characteristics that make the land undesirable for development (floodplains, steep slopes, and poor soils) are also the same ones that make it difficult for park departments to improve sites for active and (sometimes) passive recreation. While every area needs river corridors and wooded tracts to be left in their natural states for passive enjoyment, it is also important to supply community

members with open spaces for organized team field sports and neighborhood pick-up games. It is the focus of the Hamilton County Park and Recreation Board to supply those natural and passive areas for community enjoyment. Local municipal park departments generally focus on the more active, organized activities and spaces. The White River has the potential to provide a huge recreation opportunity for a wide variety of users. There are several sites along the river corridor that could be acquired and preserved for passive recreation as well as flood control and natural preservation. Several spots lend themselves to canoe launches and portage sites. Also, there are always opportunities for both bank and boat anglers along with other passive activities such as birdwatching and nature photography.

Since the county was originally settled, agriculture has played a big role in the development of the area. Past agricultural practices included ditching waterways, adding artificial drainage, and converting large forested acreage to agricultural fields. Current residential and commercial development has continued this trend, leaving the county with fewer and fewer natural areas to preserve. Much of the developed areas lie in the southern portions of the county, so land acquisition plans may want to focus in the more northerly areas to acquire the largest, most pristine tracts of land. The board should also keep in mind that, while there will be less available land and that land may be more costly, it makes sense to acquire land near where the population pressure exists. However, after a lull in development in the 2008-2014 timeframe, population centers are beginning another significant round of growth and development, especially in Westfield and Noblesville. This resurgence continues to drive up land costs and develop areas that could potentially serve as park land.

Man-made features also play a big part in outdoor recreation supply. Hamilton County is blessed with a fairly well laid-out and accessible roadway system. Ample opportunity exists for a comprehensive multi-use trail system to mirror the roadways and connect communities and sites throughout the townships and county. There are also a number of railroad corridors crossing the county providing additional opportunities for multi-use trail connections. Also, because of the large amount of development in the county, there are abundant utility corridors available to consider for trail development.

Geist and Morse reservoirs are two man-made lakes in Hamilton County that offer residents and visitors recreational opportunities such as boating, fishing, and waterfront living. These two bodies of water along with the White River account for 8.17 square miles of water



Cool Creek Nature Center

which makes up 2.03% of the total area of Hamilton County.

Ecologically, existing natural areas and park lands are experiencing some pressures. The Emerald Ash Borer is significantly impacting Ash Tree populations in the county. Recent drought and flooding cycles are pressuring ecosystems and flood plain areas, along which many parks are located. Despite these challenges, ongoing growth of the trail network throughout the county, including efforts by cities and towns, as well as park growth along riparian corridors is helping to connect habitat fragments within the county. There is still a long way to go in managing invasive species such as honeysuckle and garlic mustard while continuing to connect natural spaces through wildlife and habitat corridors.



Historic Hamilton County Courthouse
Source: www.visithamiltoncounty.com

Social and Economic Factors

As noted earlier, Hamilton County is located in the central section of Indiana. The county's estimated total population is 309,697 (*US Census, 2015 population estimate. Actual 2010 Census data shows 274,259*). The population is fairly evenly divided among gender (51.1% female and 48.9% male). Just over half of the population (53.3%) is between 18 and 65 years old, with a median age of 36 years. The population is nearly exclusively white (87.8%). Just under eight percent (about 21,400 persons) of county residents consider themselves to have a disability. Along with being young and married with children, local residents are also well educated (55.6% of the population having at least a bachelor's degree), despite the lack of higher educational opportunities in the county. Hamilton County residents also enjoy a high standard of living. The median household income in 2014 was

\$84,635, assuring a fair bit of disposable income people can use for leisure pursuits. Although Hamilton County has the highest median income in the state, there are still around 4.9% of households living below the poverty rate.

Hamilton County has seen a phenomenal growth in population over the last decade, and that trend shows little sign of slowing down. It was the fastest growing county in the state in Census 2010, with 50% growth rate since 2000, and a total growth rate of 185% between 1990 and 2014. Carmel, Fishers, and Westfield have seen growth rates of over 100% from 2000 to 2010. Within the last five years all three of these cities' populations have grown between 12% and 22%. Population projections have Hamilton County continuing as the state's fastest growing county and doubling in size by 2050 to become the state's second largest county.

Indiana is one of many states undergoing the predicament of losing some of the best-educated citizens. While the population is steadily growing, more and more persons with higher education are moving to other states. Hamilton county is no exception to this experience, although it is faring better than any other Indiana county. Job opportunities, schools, and health care are central factors when deciding where a person chooses to live. Equally important, however, is quality of life. Hamilton County fares well here, as well. Communities have been recognized as a "Best Place" and routinely score high marks in quality of life ratings, including 8th in a recent listing from *American City Business Journal*. The quantity and quality of leisure opportunities are important not only to individuals and families, but they are becoming crucial to businesses when determining where to locate.

Currently the Hamilton County Economic Development Corporation has identified that the county has achieved critical mass in five employment areas, including, Knowledge and information technology, Business, legal and financial services, Life sciences, Amateur sports-



related, and Innovation-based manufacturing. Other key industries for the county include AgTech, Corporate Headquarters, Defense & Security, Entrepreneurs, Information Technology, Innovation-Based Manufacturing, Life Sciences, and Sports & Tourism.

Using statistics like those presented above can help the park board in planning for future park growth. The board can generalize some demand and thus know to provide facilities and programming (in the near future at least) for young, active persons with families.

The county as a whole is more developed in the southern portions and somewhat less developed in the northern region. This growth pattern presents the Park Board with some challenges. While the park systems of some communities within the county are fairly well developed, more land can always be acquired to accommodate the increase in population and to provide alternative outdoor recreation opportunities. In these developed areas, the Park Board must compete with a variety of other uses for available space. On the other hand, land is in good supply in the northern reaches of the county. While it may be more cost efficient to acquire large tracts in the north and west regions at the present time there may not be the population base to support developing park activities or facilities within the next five years. Land could (and perhaps should) be acquired now and banked for later development. The Park Board has developed and continues to act on its strategic land acquisition policy. In the past few years the Department has added property adjacent to many of its existing parks, including Strawtown Koteewi Park, Cool Creek Park, as well as adding and developing a section of the Monon Trail providing opportunities for Westfield to connect to the south and Sheridan to the north. Bishops Park and Bray Park have been added as well. The Board and staff continue to explore options focused on the northeast and northwest areas of the county, the White River Corridor, adjacent to existing parks and connector trails, and in focused areas to best serve the community.



Demographic Information

Since 2010 Hamilton County population has grown from 274,569 to an estimated 359,035 in 2015 - 12.8%. The estimated increase for the state of Indiana was 2.1%. It remains the 4th largest county in Indiana by population and represents 4.7% of Indiana's total population.

In the report "Indiana Population Projections 2010 - 2050", the Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) provides projected Indiana population growth for the state and its counties through the year 2050. According to those projections, Hamilton County population will increase to nearly 548,000 by 2050.

According to the 2015 Census estimates, the population of Hamilton County is predominantly Caucasian (87.8%), with the African-American, Native American, Asian, Latino, and Pacific Islander populations accounting for 10.3% of the total population. From 2010 to 2014 estimates, the population appears to be aging with the percentage of residents over 65 increasing from 8.6% to 10.4% of the population. The percentage of residents under the age of 18 is dropping slightly. With these factors, it is important for the Park Department to continue to plan facilities and programs for the aging population, while continuing to provide great opportunities for families and children. Also, despite being one of the wealthiest counties in the state, 4.9% are estimated to be at or below the poverty line, including 5.7% of children. Therefore, the Department maintains free access to all of their parks. Most programs are free, and the remainder are maintained at low cost.

The statistics tell us Hamilton county is one thing, while we at the parks get to see a different view of our county. We see a county whose population growth is coming in the form of a much more diverse makeup. We see a county that has a dividing line represented by state route 32. This line physically divides north from south, but it also separates suburban from rural, and economically stable from those more economically challenged. History teaches that diversity and the integration required to coalesce into community are preceded by a comfort level. We in the parks have a role to play, as our programs often see this diversity early. As a service based, not profit based park department we work with our visitors to make sure they feel included and rarely refuse service or admission to a program. For now, we can absorb any costs incurred to support this philosophy. If the dollars become an issue, we will turn to our park foundation for grant monies to subsidize the need, so we may continue to serve the entire population of Hamilton County as we are fortunate enough to see it.

Climate

Climate too, plays an important role in outdoor recreation opportunities. People like to play outdoors year round, and if the weather won't cooperate, then there are fewer opportunities available. Fortunately, climate is one area that isn't impinged upon by developers/development. Hamilton county enjoys a relatively mild climate. Hamilton County has a continental climate characterized by winter temperatures cold enough to support snow cover, with warm temperatures typical of tropical climates in the summer. The county enjoys a mild climate overall. Winter is the most unpredictable season, as precipitation takes on all forms (rain, sleet, freezing rain, snow, and hail).

- Average rainfall per year is 39.2 inches.
- Average snowfall per year is 21.3 inches.
- Average July temperature is 85 degrees high/64 degrees low (Fahrenheit)
- Average January temperature is 34 degrees high/18 degrees low (Fahrenheit)
- Lowest recorded temperature -23 degrees Fahrenheit in 1994
- Maximum average precipitation month is May (4.96 inches)

Warmest average temperature month is July and the coldest average temperature month is January (Source: 2009 NOAA – www.nws.noaa.gov). Overall, the summers are long enough and warm enough to enjoy plenty of beach time and summer sports, and spring and fall seasons are mild enough to extend the play seasons for a few months on either side of summer. Winters are the most problematic. Central Indiana does not get a great deal of snowfall, limiting the availability of outdoor winter sports



like cross-country skiing and sledding. The Park Board may need to consider investing funds into creating outdoor activities in winter. The technology to create snow for ski/sled hills and for artificial ice is certainly available should the public demand these activities.

Soils

The soils in the county fall into seven major Associations, the majority of which are poorly drained. The Crosby-Brookston soils comprise the majority of soils in the county, with Miami-Crosby soils being the next most common. These soil types have some limitations on construction due to their wetness and potential for erosion. These soils are typically poorly drained and have severe to moderate limitations for recreational uses, including campgrounds, picnic areas, play areas, and paths and trails. These limitations are based on the soils' restrictive features such as flooding, wetness, and slope. It should be noted that these limitations might be overcome through appropriate site design, intensive maintenance, limited use of the site, or a combination of measures.

Historic Landmarks, Facilities, & Places

Hamilton County has the following Landmarks, Facilities, and Places on the National Register of Historic Places:

- George Boxley Cabin
- Carmel Monon Depot
- Castor Farm Site
- Catherin Street Historic District
- Cole-Evans House
- Connor Street Historic District
- William Connor House
- William Houston Craig House
- Daniel Craycraft House
- Davenport-Bradfield House
- Hamilton County Courthouse Square
- Dr. Samuel Harrell House
- Holliday Hydroelectric Powerhouse & Dam
- John Kinzer House
- Micah Newby House
- Nickel Plate Road Steam Locomotive
- Noblesville Commerical Historical District
- Noblesville Milling Company Mill
- Potter's Covered Bridge
- Roads Hotel
- Roberts Chapel

- Sheridan Downtown Commercial Historic District
- South 9th Street Historic District
- Judge Earl S. Stone House
- Strawtown Enclosure
- Union High Academy Historic District
- West-Harris House
- Robert L. Wilson House

Those recognized by Indiana Historical Bureau with Historical Markers:

- The Central Canal
- Rhodes Family Incident
- Potter's Covered Bridge

Hospitals and Health/Family Services

Hamilton County is served by numerous hospitals, healthcare facilities, and other health related organizations providing a range of health and family services to the local community. Hamilton County is home to numerous health care facilities, including Indiana University Health North Hospital; St. Vincent Carmel Hospital; St. Vincent Heart Center; IU Health Saxony Hospital; Riverview Health; and the Heart Center of Indiana.

Education System

Six public school districts operate within the county, as well as several private and charter schools. Carmel-Clay, Hamilton Heights, Hamilton Southeastern, Noblesville, Sheridan, and Westfield-Washington have between them 12 high schools, 18 middle schools, and 41 elementary schools.

Each school has a comprehensive list of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities which vary by school, but include: athletics, clubs, arts and performance, and recreation facilities. Partnerships between the schools and the county's various parks and recreation programs provide opportunities for shared resources.

Libraries

- The Hamilton North Public Library serves the residents of Jackson Township in northern Hamilton County, Indiana. They have two branches in Cicero and Atlanta.
- The Hamilton East Public Library serves the residents in central and east portions of the county with branches in Noblesville and Fishers.
- The Carmel Clay Public Library serves Clay Township

and the City of Carmel with their main branch in Carmel, a Digital Media Lab in Carmel, and a Mobile Library.

Recreational Amenities

There are several private and public recreation facilities available to Hamilton County residents. These include private, semi-private, and municipal golf courses as well as private facilities like Overdorf Lake, Ben & Ari's, Noblesville Golf and Batting park, and River Bend Campground. Additionally, there are numerous elementary and high school facilities that offer at least some part-time public recreation. The Hamilton County park department has continuously striven to be focused on passive recreation to help attain the necessary balance of active and passive recreation for the current and growing population. The department has been an active partner in providing current and emerging recreation opportunities throughout our jurisdiction.

Within the county there are 8 public park departments operating within their local jurisdiction, as well as some trail development and advocacy groups.

Other departments include:

- Noblesville Parks and Recreation
- Carmel-Clay Parks and Recreation
- Fishers Parks and Recreation
- Washington Township Parks
- Sheridan Parks and Recreation
- Westfield Parks and Recreation
- Cicero Parks

HCPR endeavors to coordinate and complement the local parks with the county parks, trails, amenities, and programs. The department is active and involved in the Hamilton County Parks Association (HAMPA), an informal group of all public park departments in the county that meets regularly to discuss current activities and coordinate between departments. This group provides all members opportunities to work together in a collaborative fashion to meet the needs of all county residents with park facilities, programs, and activities.

HAMILTON COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION

Park Department History

The Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department began in 1967 and acquired its 1st park in 1970 with Potter's Bridge. Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department ordinance was established on March 11, 1967. The ordinance was filed May 1, 1967 in the office of Auditor, John Randall. The Parks Department now houses 12 parks, 1 is over 800 acres (Strawtown Koteewi Park), 3 parks over 100 acres, and 1,589 acres of land. The Parks Department also offers some of the finest workshops, school programs, staff, and facilities in Indiana.

Many developments and improvements have been made to the Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department throughout the years. Every year offers a new and exciting time for expansion and learning opportunities.

Early Parks & Recreation Department Board

The 1st board of directors was appointed for a 2 year period in 1968. Meetings of the board of directors were held at the Commissioner's Court at the Hamilton County Court House, located in Noblesville. Appointed to the 1st Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Board of Directors were:

Jerry Barr, Secretary
Henry Burgher, President
Floyd Overdorf, Member
Paul Wheeler, Member

Previous Planning Efforts

Hamilton County Parks & Recreation regularly completes and updates its DNR 5 Year Master Plans.

5-Year Master Plan Goals

The goals of this plan are to maintain and improve parks and programs as the department celebrates its 50th Anniversary. The department wants to continue offering innovative resources for the community while continuing its record of success. Specific plan goals include:

- Maintenance & updates for facilities starting to show their age and ever increasing use
- Administrative staff space and functionality throughout the system
- Create new partnerships and to offer new and unique amenities to park visitors
- Review and affirm land acquisition policies
- Work to lose the designation of 'Best kept secret'

Hamilton County Park Board

Andrew (Terry) Prather, President
Larry Roudebush, Vice President
Mark McCauley, Secretary
Philip Shelby, Treasurer
Stephen Andrews
Dr. Judith Campbell
Jan DeJarnatt
Susan Peterson

Full Time Staff

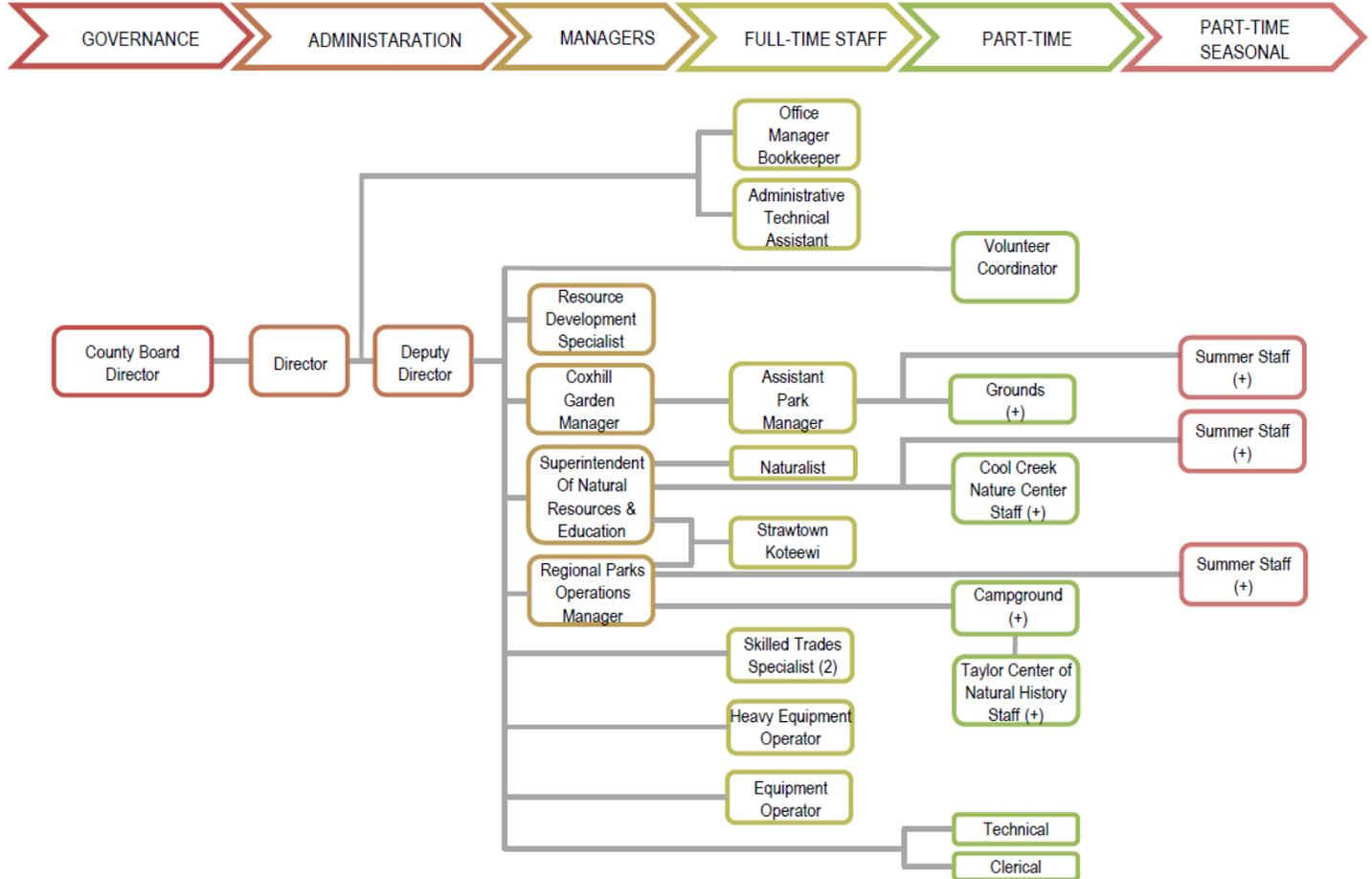
Allen Patterson, Director
B. Christopher Stice, Deputy Director
Amanda Smith, Supt. of Natural Resources & Education
Bruce Oldham, Regional Parks Operations Manager
Andy Kingsley, Coxhall Gardens Park Manager
Don Nicholls, Resource Development Specialist
Dan Popiela, Naturalist
Alesa Cox, Office Manager
Carrie Melillo, Administrative Technical Coordinator
Steve Sneath, Volunteer Coordinator
Christy Brocken, Historical Resource Specialist
Kris Cage, Campground Office Supervisor
Steve Shew, Skilled Trade Specialist
Lori Hacker, Park Manager Asst. Coxhall Gardens
Kyle Stocks, Equipment Operator
Kerry Graham, Heavy Equipment Operator
Garrett Goldman, Skilled Trade Specialist

The department employs numerous part time and seasonal staff, filling essential roles in the department throughout the year. The organizational chart on the adjacent page provides a detailed view of the department staffing model.

Volunteers

The department is always looking for people who are creative, enjoy working with kids, want to be outdoors, or like to learn new things, to serve as a Park volunteer. It's a great way to give back to the community, meet new people, and help preserve Hamilton County's natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of this and future generations. Volunteering for the Hamilton Parks and Recreation Department can be a fun and rewarding experience! Volunteer opportunities include general

Organization Chart



park up-keep, assisting with special events, helping with gardening, caring for the nature center’s wildlife friends, greenhouse tending, landscaping, cleaning, socializing, educating and more. Information can be found online and within the *Chatterbox!* program guide.

Budget Summary

The department operates on an annual budget of about \$3.5 million. Occasionally grants, bonds, and other outside monetary sources supplement the budget by providing capital for land acquisition, capital improvements, maintenance, and special opportunities.

Parks Foundation of Hamilton County

Formed in 2006 as a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation to support the Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department, the Friends of Hamilton County Parks, Inc. (FHCPI) was created with the goal of “assisting in revenue generation and marketing efforts.” Since its creation, FHCPI has managed over 1.5 million dollars and benefits from

more than 5 million dollars of investments.

The Hamilton County Park system operates in one of the most densely populated and fastest growing counties in Indiana. Even though the Parks Department has successfully increased land holdings on behalf of the community it serves, the county is described by the Department of Natural Resources as being “critically deficient” in terms of providing adequate outdoor recreation land for its residents. Without a concentrated effort by the county’s park departments, that problem will continue to escalate at a parallel rate with population growth.

While the Hamilton County Parks Department has been soliciting support for some time by seeking donations, park/program sponsorships, and tree and bench dedications, the formation of the Friends of Hamilton County Parks is a major development intended to elevate fundraising and giving to a significantly higher level.

Highlights include Coxhall Gardens (donated), Strawtown Koteewi Park (bargain sale, acquisition through Charitable Remainder Trust), Bray Family Homestead Park (donated),

ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Creating accessibility throughout a park system is no small task. Accessibility encompasses so many different things, from people with temporary disabilities to people who lack financial resources. Each person, regardless of physical, mental, emotional, or financial ability must be considered and included in all facets of facility and program design. Given the notable percentage of residents with a disability and a population that is aging, particular attention should be paid to acquiring training to meet the challenge of appropriate universal design and access. Board members and staff should either receive such training, or ensure that any outside contractor is cognizant of the importance of providing parks and programs for all users.

The 2014 estimates from American Community Survey (by the U.S. Census Bureau) estimated that over 15% of the population in Hamilton County has a physical or mental disability or is over 65 years old.

By age group those with a disability include:

- 4.9% of the population under 65 have some form of disability.
- 10.4% of the population is aged 65 and older

In order to meet the recreation needs of those county residents and visitors with disabilities, it is the goal of Hamilton County Parks & Recreation to offer barrier-free facilities, programs and services that are inclusive of all users whenever feasible.

The existing surface materials of some nature trails and intended use of some of the park's facilities may be restrictive and make meeting ADA requirements challenging. The department is committed to accommodating all individuals with special needs and has policies and procedures in place to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

The department provides the following ADA Notice within the *Chatterbox!*, other publications, and the county website:

Hamilton County, will upon request, provide appropriate aids and services leading to effective communication for qualified persons with disabilities so that they can participate equally in Hamilton County's public meetings. For special accommodations for a meeting contact the ADA Facilities Coordinator/Safety & Risk Manager at (317-770-1976) or dan.papineau@hamiltoncounty.in.gov at least two (2) business days prior to the scheduled meeting or event to request an accommodation. Hamilton County Parks and Recreation is committed to accommodating all

individuals with special needs. If assistance is required at any county park event, program or facility, please contact the Administrative Office in advance at 317-770-4400.

Accessible Parking

All facilities and most parks with developed parking have accessible parking spaces and accessible routes that meet ADA requirements at a minimum. Some undeveloped or minimally developed parks plan to provide accessible parking as the park and facilities are developed.

Facilities

All facilities are designed to meet or exceed accessibility requirements. Some storage facilities and barns are not universally accessible, but accommodations are made for park users and programs as needed.

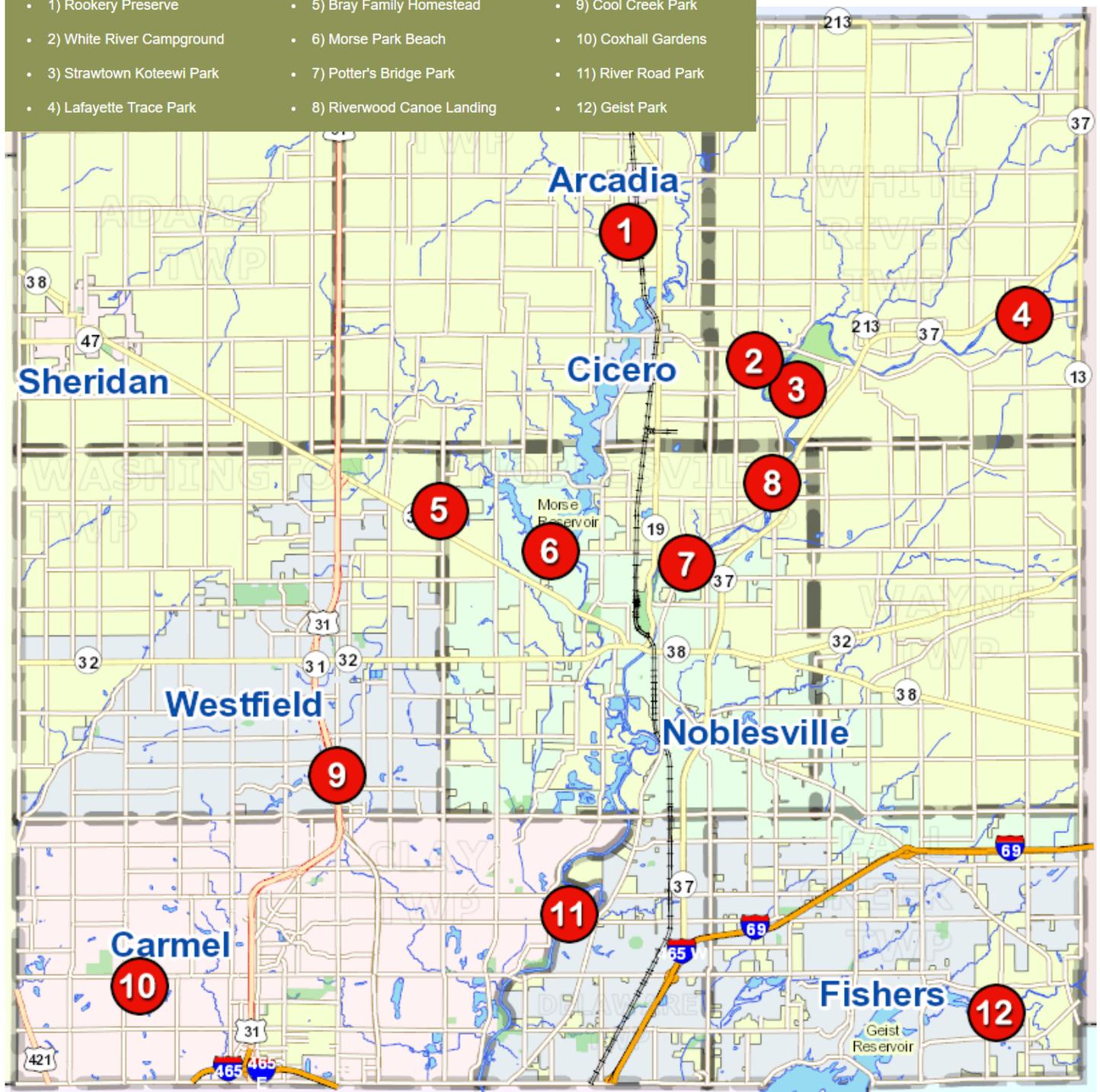
Trails

Most trails in the park are either paved or constructed with an accessible crushed stone. Some nature trails are narrow compacted earth paths. When well-compacted, some of the unpaved trails are readily used by those using a wheelchair or walker or those with other limited mobility disabilities. Occasionally crushed stone surfaces may develop loose or unstable surface and along with natural earth pathways, may not be readily accessible.



EXISTING FACILITIES & PROGRAMS

- 1) Rookery Preserve
- 2) White River Campground
- 3) Strawtown Koteewi Park
- 4) Lafayette Trace Park
- 5) Bray Family Homestead
- 6) Morse Park Beach
- 7) Potter's Bridge Park
- 8) Riverwood Canoe Landing
- 9) Cool Creek Park
- 10) Coxhall Gardens
- 11) River Road Park
- 12) Geist Park



EXISTING FACILITIES & PROGRAMS

PARKS

Hamilton County Parks & Recreation operates 12 parks with over 1589 acres. Parks are primarily located in the central portion of the county with some to the south and a few to the north. The northwestern and northeastern portions of the county are the only areas without significant parks.

Parks & Properties	Acres
• Acorn Farm	40
• Administration Facilities	15
• Bray Family Homestead Park	94
• Cool Creek Park and Nature Center	90
• Coxhall Gardens	125
• Geist Park	17
• Harger Trace	7
• Lafayette Trace Park	124
• Monon Trail	19.7
• Morse Park & Beach	25
• Potter's Bridge Park	30
• River Road Park	64
• Riverwood Canoe Landing	2
• Rookery Preserve	34
• Strawtown Koteewi Park	810
• Weimeyer	4.1
• White River Campground	20
• White River Greenway Trail	46.7
• Bishop Park (undeveloped)	24.4

The department has also acquired property recently that includes Acorn Farms and Bishops Park as well as the Morris Family Homestead at Strawtown, adjacent to Strawtown Koteewi Park.

TRAILS

The Monon Trail was recently opened through northwestern portions of the county connecting the Westfield area with Sheridan. The White River Greenway is another popular trail connecting park areas. The department also maintains numerous miles of trails within their parks.

PROGRAMS

HCPR provides programs and activities aimed at a variety of ages, user groups and interests. New and updated programs and recreational activities respond to changing community needs and interests. Many of the programs offered by Hamilton County Parks and Recreation are free to participants, while others are reasonable to low

cost. Many of the Department's programs are focused on interpretation of nature and history/pre-history, with special emphasis on archaeology and Native American Culture. Programs are conducted by Park Department Naturalists/Interpretive Staff, as well as volunteers, and partners. The biggest events hosted by HCPR are the Cool Creek Concert Series hosted at the park throughout the summer months. The concerts drew 6114 attendees in 2016 and profited just under \$5000 to support other programs and operations in the department. Other popular events include the Daddy Daughter Dance, Maple Syrup Program, the Hamilton County Bluegrass Festival, 4 free Concerts in the Centerpiece series at Coxhall Park & Gardens, Little Haunt on the Prairie, and Holly Jolly Jamboree. Archaeology Month in September continues to grow and provide school field trips and program participants first hand and views and of the process of archaeology and interpretive experiences related to the importance of archaeological studies at Strawtown Koteewi Park. HCPR is in discussions with local acting groups for a possible Shakespeare in the Park program as well.

Programs are generally centered around the following categories:

- Nature Camps
- Scout Programs
- Family Programs
- Historical Programs
- Guided Nature Hikes
- School Field Trips
- Special Events
- Concerts

The department publishes the *Chatterbox!* quarterly, providing information on all programs, activities, and park news. It can be found online as well as in print at park and county facilities, and is mailed to subscribers. Programs are also publicized on social media and on the department's website.



Cool Creek Park

Cool Creek Park encompasses 90 acres in the south central portion of the county. It's located on 151st Street, just east of US 31. Cool Creek Park is one of the most popular spaces for area residents to gather and play or enjoy nature. The park has over 3 miles of wooded trails, picnic shelters, and a popular playground. There is also a large pavilion with ample grass area for seating while listening to the wide variety of musicians during the summer concerts. The nature center located on the site contains a wide variety of seasonal displays, live animals, and a bird watching room. Also in the nature center is a library and a large meeting room for classes and other leisure activities. The nature center receives an average of 50,000 visitors annually. The park administrative offices are located in cool creek park.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Removing hazard trees throughout the park
- Expand the park boundary
- Aggressive removal of invasive plant species
- Improve Interpretive Signage
- Study the Nature Center facility for accommodation of staff and visitors
- Upgrade playground equipment

Coxhall Gardens

Coxhall Gardens is located on 116th Street in the southern part of the county, near the western county line. This 125 acre site is one of the newest Hamilton County Parks, and is the generous legacy of Jesse and Beulah Cox. Jesse and Beulah lived for many years on this site and built a replica of the Governor's mansion at Colonial Williamsburg. This park site is one of many jewels in the county park system. This unique facility provides visitors with formal gardens, childrens' gardens, a large play area, a large lake, plenty of open greenspace, a center piece and twin bell towers.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Improving the Williams Homestead
 - Designing and installing picnic areas throughout the park
 - Installing interpretive signage
 - Establishing an art/sculpture program in the park
 - Constructing a conservatory and meeting space
 - Establishing a trail system in the park linking the amenities and community
-

Geist Park

Geist Park is located at the eastern edge of the county, on Florida Road. This 17 acre site lies along the banks of Fall Creek at the edges of Geist Reservoir. This park contains a play area, picnic shelter, and restrooms. It also provides the perfect spot for fishing, canoeing, or just spending time with nature. There is a boardwalk and wildlife observation deck, concrete canoe launch and areas along the bank for fishing. There are trails that wind through the park providing walkers with different views of the area's natural setting.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Installing hard surface trails
- Implementing items from the connectivity plan developed with Fishers
- Removing hazard trees

Morse Park & Beach

Morse Park and Beach is located in the central area of the county, at the southern edge of Morse Reservoir. This 23 acre park's biggest draw is, of course, the water. Morse Reservoir provides ample opportunity for boating and swimming. The park has a swimming beach area, playground, disc golf course, picnic shelters, and grills. There are also 2 adult softball fields and an enclosed pavilion - Osprey Pointe that offers meeting space and limited kitchen facilities.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Upgrades to the restroom/bathhouse
- Trail connector to Noblesville and Cicero
- Benches and picnic areas for visitors

Potter's Bridge Park

Potter's Bridge Park is centrally located in the county, on Allisonville Road east of SR 19. This 30 acre park is the site of a restored historic covered bridge, constructed by Josiah Durfee in 1870. This only remaining original Hamilton County covered bridge was restored in 1999 and has become a gathering place for local park goers. The park contains a picnic shelter and playground, a canoe launch and bank fishing opportunities. There is a trail in the park that connects to the White River Greenway Trail.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Providing continued maintenance to the covered bridge
 - Bank stabilization
 - Removal of invasive plant species
 - Trail maintenance
 - Additional interpretive signs
-

Rookery Preserve

The Rookery Preserve is located on Scherer Ave. south of Arcadia. Acquired in 2010, it houses over 100 active nesting sites for the Great Blue Heron. Parking and an overlook are available for visitors to view the Herons nesting near Little Cicero Creek.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Improve views to nesting sites
- Add scopes/binoculars
- Connection to Bishops Park
- Remove hazard trees

River Road Park

This 63 acre park lies in Clay Township along the White River. There are trails, riverside bike trails, softball, soccer, and rugby fields, a canoe launch, restroom facility and plenty of open space. There is an archaeological theme to this site, with a unique play area, an enclosed interpretive exhibit designed to give visitors a peek at a typical day in the life of Native Americans thousands of years ago.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Repairs to play area
- Additional interpretive signs

Strawtown Koteewi Park

This 800+ acre site is an archaeological gem located in the northeast area of the county along the White River. Several seasons of scientific digs have unearthed numerous pieces of early American history. This site is home to the Taylor Center for Natural History, over 6 miles of multi-use trails and a canoe launch. This site is popular with equestrians, as it provides several miles of riding trails and parking lot for horse trailers. Recently an archery range has been added, along with an equestrian facility, new trail connectors, an outdoor exhibit for archaeology, and aerial adventure course. A lake is nearly complete as is a sledding/tubing hill. Also, the Morris Family Homestead adjacent to the park has recently been acquired providing opportunities for additional programming and parkland.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- Complete lake
 - Construction of a conference center/lodge
 - Installing additional prairie and woodland plantings
 - Expansion of archery facility
 - Expansion of the Taylor Center for Natural History
-

White River Park & Campground

This park offers the perfect spot for a weekend getaway. This 25 acre park provides 106 modern and primitive campsites along the White River. The campground offerings include a boat launch, large picnic shelter available, shower and laundry facilities, restrooms, a campstore with recreation room, and playground. There are also plenty of fishing and canoeing opportunities. This site lies just across the White River from Strawtown Koteewi Park, and in 2016 was connected to the park through the installation of historic bridge spans to allow pedestrian access between the campground and the park.

Some of the priorities for this park site include:

- New wastewater treatment facility
- Improve administrative capabilities
- Update campground offices and storage facilities

EXISTING AMENITIES

	showers	beach	boat dock	fishing	canoe launch	music pavilion	picnic tables	picnic shelters	restrooms	playground	archery	disc golf	soccer field	baseball/ softball	basketball court	volleyball	bicycling	greenspace	nature trail	paved trail	equestrian trail	camping	wetland/prairie	
1. Administration Office 15513 S. Union Street, Carmel																								(317) 770-4400
2. Bray Family Homestead Park (BFHP) 4528 Sheridan Ave, Noblesville																		●	●					(317) 770-4400
3. Cool Creek Park (CCP)/(CCNC) 2000 E. 151 st Street, Carmel						●	●	●	●			●	●	●		●	●	●	●				●	(317) 774-2500
4. Coxhall Gardens (CHG) 116th Street & Towne Road, Carmel				●		●			●	●						●	●	●	●				●	(317) 774-2582
5. Geist Park (GP) 10979 Florida Road, Fortville				●	●		●	●	●	●								●	●				●	(317) 770-4400
6. Lafayette Trace Park (LTP) 15796 E. Strawtown Ave, Noblesville				●	●													●						(317) 770-4400
7. Morse Park & Beach (MPB) 19777 Morse Park Lane, Noblesville	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	●					(317) 770-4400
8. Potter's Bridge Park (PBP) 19401 N. Allisonville Road, Noblesville				●	●		●	●	●	●						●	●	●	●					(317) 770-4400
9. River Road Park (RRP) 12575 River Road, Carmel				●	●				●	●						●	●	●	●				●	(317) 770-4400
10. Riverwood Canoe Landing (RCL) 20814 Riverwood Ave, Noblesville				●	●																			(317) 770-4400
11. Rookery Preserve (RP) 25440 Scherer Ave, Arcadia																		●						(317) 770-4400
12. Strawtown Koteewi Park (SKP)/(TCNH) 12308 Strawtown Ave, Noblesville				●	●					●							●	●	●		●	●		(317) 774-2574
13. White River Campground (WRCG) 11299 E. 234 th Street, Cicero	●			●	●		●	●	●						●	●	●					●		(317) 770-4430

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community Survey

Between December 9, 2016 and January 6, 2017, a community survey was available via the Department's website, via Survey Monkey, online and as hard copies distributed at the Administrative Office and Park facilities. The survey was advertised through social media, email blasts to the Department's database, and the department website. The survey was open to the public, but is not to be considered a randomized or statistically accurate survey. Due to costs and a long history of public input and interaction with the department it was determined that a non-randomized survey would be sufficient for the current master plan update.

The Department received 283 completed responses online. No paper responses were received. The survey included 38 detailed questions about the Parks Department, facilities, parks, trails, programs, and community parks and recreation needs, and demographic information. The survey was formatted in multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended style questions.

The information received was consistent with past surveys and identified known needs of the Department. Most ranked the parks, facilities, and programs as 'Very Good' or 'Good' in quality, condition, and value. Some specific items to note:

- Over 35% of respondents make over \$100,000 household income.
- Nearly 15% of respondents recreate more than 5 times per week, and 60% recreate at least once a week.
- Most park visits occur with families attending together, while over 10% of respondents visit parks alone.
- Hiking/walking/running, nature, birding, were top park activities listed. Horseback riding and camping are also frequently listed.
- Rankings were very high for quality of facilities and programs, and very well maintained.
- Less than 2% felt that too much tax money (\$11/ resident) went to support parks. Over 56% felt it was too little, and 42% felt it was about right. Nearly 58% would pay \$1-\$25 more per household, 15% would pay \$26-\$50, and 7% would pay \$75-100 or more, while only 17% were not willing to pay more.



Our first stakeholder meeting included all current department staff. The meeting was held at Osprey Pointe Pavillion, and the participation rate was very high with nearly everyone providing input throughout the meeting. The meeting focused on parks, facilities, and activities/ programs in each park. Input was noted and all ideas were coalesced into the action plan for further evaluation and prioritization.

A series of four stakeholder meetings were held March 21st and March 23rd and included mixed groups of Park Board, Elected Officials, and other critical groups. These meetings were held to garner input on the ongoing activities of the department, facilities, and programs; gain insight into current views on parks and the department by influential county leaders; and continue to prioritize the action plan.

Each meeting began with a review to update the stakeholders with information on parks, acres, staff, facility visits, and event attendees. The department is working with the County Tourism group to focus efforts on marketing and gathering park visitor data. There is a desire to move away from the term 'Best Kept Secret' in the county.

All seemed impressed and happy with the progress the department has made since 1992 when the department was tasked with being something more than the city/local parks, but less than the state park system. All believed the department has been very successful in bridging that gap. Continuity of leadership with staff and board has been important in the ongoing growth, evolution, and success of the department.

Budget impacts of 2009/2010 are still being felt, as staffing is still significantly lower than when at its peak at that time. Most agreed that adding staff is always tough within the county budget. Many also agreed that the current staff is working very hard to cover all the tasks required, and achieving a lot with very limited resources. It was suggested that any requests for additional staff be thoughtful and supported with data illustrating need. A 5-10 year staffing plan would help elected officials balance staffing needs/requests across all county departments. Working with private vendors in cooperative efforts in areas where specific expertise is needed, such as archery, equestrian, and the adventure course is great as they allow more opportunities for park visitors without adding to park staff requirements. It was noted that \$500,000 for capital expenses was the first capital funding budget since 2003. Most of this money is focused on maintenance of existing facilities. Bonding was discussed, and could be used on a case by case basis for park needs. A more detailed facilities study, understanding operations and maintenance costs and future projections would be helpful to consider. A contingency building fund would be something to consider in future budgets to accommodate maintenance needs.

Several commented that the lack of political involvement with the Park Department is a very good thing... Commissioners have full confidence in the Park Board and staff. Many elected officials tout the parks as a campaign point. Parks are a good part of the quality of life in Hamilton County. This is often in conflict with budgeting efforts as parks often play a secondary priority to public safety and corrections which are state mandates.

Safety and security was discussed in each meeting. The department has a great relationship with the Sheriff's office, and they patrol parks very well from where they can access with their vehicles. Discussions are starting regarding getting more patrols on trails and more remote areas of parks not visible from roads or parking lots. This could be accomplished through more bike patrols on trails, or possibly the development of a Park Ranger patrol within the Sheriff's Department. It was agreed that staff or patrols will never be everywhere all the time, and it's important for park visitors to always be vigilant, aware, and prepared.

The Park Foundation was discussed in all meetings as a good and growing supporting arm for the parks. Much of the money held by the foundation is designated to specific parks, functions, or facilities. They are working to grow and increase their flexibility as their funding expands.

Each meeting discussed the preliminary action plan, focusing on priority areas, including; Administrative offices, Growth of existing facilities to meet increasing use/visitor counts, Conservatory at Coxhall, Campground sewer facilities are in need of study and repair, Cabins, Lodge, or other overnight accommodations at Strawtown Koteewi Park.

All were asked to prioritize their desire for Land Acquisition, Maintenance of existing facilities, Staff, Programs, and development of new facilities. While there was not a clear priority among all groups, there was a desire and commitment to maintain what we have first. Land Acquisition was important, following the land acquisition plan. It was noted that the elected officials are typically supportive when key pieces of land are available to add to the park department's inventory. Partnerships were discussed as being important for all of the items. Staffing was discussed as being important, and increases in full time staff may be warranted in the near future.

Community Group Meetings

The first public meeting was held on October 13 at 6:30 pm at the Cool Creek Nature Center. It was advertised in the local newspapers, on the Department's website, and through social media and email blasts. Seven people attended, including the park director, and 3 additional staff members, two residents, and the 2 facilitators. While not the number of attendees desired, the group did have a good, in-depth discussion about each of the parks, facilities, and future of the department. The group discussed existing parks, programs, and activities offered by the Department. Discussions centered around activities for seniors and innovative ideas to encourage more park use. For example, many of the parks are large with long trails not suitable for seniors with difficulties walking long distances. Park tours on golf carts, segwes, or other accommodations could encourage more people to experience the larger parks in the system.

Final Public Meeting

A final public meeting to present the completed plan was held at the Park Board Meeting April 17, 2017. It was advertised in local newspapers, on the website, and via social media and email blasts. The plan was presented, focusing on an overview of the master planning process, an overview of the department, and a review of the proposed Action Plan. The plan was well received by the public and the board, and was approved in the course of the board meeting.

NEEDS & PRIORITIES

NEEDS ANALYSIS

We have analyzed the data after reviewing existing programs and facilities, public survey, public input, stakeholder input, and committee and park board input. Along with considerations for national standards, neighboring and overlapping park departments, we have identified needs for each of the department's properties and facilities. In the previous sections, each park cover sheet identified specific needs for that park. Overall park and department needs have been identified on the following Action Plan.

When determining what parks and programs are needed, it is common to compare the total number of park acres available to the total population. This type of model has been used for a number of decades and provides a good basis to begin an analysis. Through NRPA's standards and per the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Hamilton County is considered Critically Deficient in the amount of parkland available to the population. Without National Parks or Preserves in the area, and solely relying on the county and local park departments, Hamilton

County will perpetually fit in this category given its rapidly growing population.

HCPR, along with other local departments, are continuously looking for reasonable opportunities to add to the available parkland to , and have land acquisition policy in place to guide its search. This is evident in the fact that HCPR has added several properties to its park offerings over the last several years throughout the county.

PRIORITIES

In keeping with the department's vision and mission, the Action Plan assigns a priority of 1 through 3 for each of the needs listed, indicating importance to the community, stakeholders, staff, and board. Funding and opportunity will be key in how much of the Action Plan can be accomplished.

The Action Plan is intentionally a stretch goal for the department, providing a guide for operation and development for the next 5 years.



ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan is intentionally a stretch goal for the Department, providing a guide for operation and development for the next 5 years. The committee has assembled all relevant input from stakeholder meetings, community meetings, surveys, and staff. They evaluated the data and incorporated all pertinent ideas into the action plan. Items were prioritized and assigned a budget to allow for ongoing reference and planning.

Currently the Action Plan is in DRAFT form, and while most items are shown on the list, priorities and budgets are yet to be determined by the master plan committee. It is anticipated that further input may add additional items to the list.





BOARD RESOLUTION ADOPTING PLAN

WHEREAS, the Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Board is aware of the parks and recreation needs of the residents of Hamilton County, Indiana, and

WHEREAS, the Board realizes the importance of sound planning in order to meet the needs of its citizens,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE HAMILTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD, by unanimous declaration, does adopt the Hamilton County five-year Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan as its official plan for the next five years, for the growth and development of parks and recreational opportunities in Hamilton County.

Passed and signed this _____ day of _____, 2017

HAMILTON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

Mr. Andrew T. Prather, President

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY/COMPLIANCE

Whereas, the Hamilton County Park and REcreation Board is aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended (Public Law 101-336); and,

WHEREAS, The Hamilton County Park and Recreation Board desires to provide the highest level of accessibility reasonably practical for all residents of Hamilton County, regardless of ability and consistent with the responsibility to conserve and protect natural and cultural features; and,

WHEREAS, The Hamilton County Park and Recreation Board recognizes the responsibility to provide a quality leisure and outdoor recreation experience for everyone,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE HAMILTON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION BOARD will work to provide said experiences and to resolve any and all complaints pertaining to these Acts.

Passed and signed this _____ day of _____, 2017

HAMILTON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

Mr. Andrew T. Prather, President

**ASSURANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE WITH:
ARCHITECTURAL BARRIERS ACT of 1968 (As Amended);
SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (As Amended);
AND TITLE II OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990
(As Amended)**

The _____ (Applicant) has read the guidelines for compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (As Amended); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (As Amended); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (As Amended) and will comply with the applicable requirements of these Acts.

SIGNATURE _____
APPLICANT PRESIDENT

(President's printed name)

SIGNATURE _____

(Secretary's printed name)

DATE _____



APPENDIX

Land Acquisition Plan

Community Survey

Census Data