

5. PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE

Parks, recreation, and open space are important community elements that add to the local quality of life, character, and economic competitiveness of the area. Parks provide public spaces to meet, play, and interact bringing the community together, strengthening the social fabric, and growing community pride. Open spaces are critical to create relief in the landscape and provide opportunities for residents and visitors to connect to the natural world.

Together these space create opportunities for recreational activities growing opportunities for children to engage in physical activities and establish healthy lifestyle patterns. For adults, these spaces create opportunities to forge relationships alongside practicing a healthy lifestyle.

By investing in the future of the park system, Wooster can continue to grow and promote the overall health of the community.

5.1

existing conditions

- Wooster’s current park system, including those not owned by the City, contains 18 parks that occupy approximately 778 acres. The system also includes three indoor facilities consisting of a community center, an ice arena, and a recreational center.
- While the City is generally well served by community and regional parks, there is a deficit of approximately 24 acres of neighborhood parks and 11 acres of mini-parks when compared to national standards.
- Of the total park space in the City, approximately 34% are active and 66% are passive.
- Many of the residential areas in the west and northeast of the City are underserved by parkland. These areas are outside of the ¼-mile and ½-mile walking distances of parkland.
- Approximately 1,300 acres of undevelopable land within Wooster could potentially be used as parks or natural protection areas.

5.2

public input

- Residents of Wooster are generally satisfied with the current parks, recreation, and open space network.
- There is a desire to add additional public/green space in and around the Downtown to further promote the economic success and pedestrian friendliness of the area.
- Citizens desire to strengthen local connections throughout the City by creating a complete network of bike paths and greenways.
- Enhancing park security and safety should be a priority to create a safe and comfortable environment in the parks.

5.3

current trends

- Communities are creating new park spaces that are dynamic and engaging, balancing recreation, interactive play, and passive spaces in a dynamic environment that serves a variety of age groups and abilities.
- There is a growing trend to create new urban like public spaces in suburban and exurban communities to serve as places of entertainment and gathering. These spaces are typically heavily programmed with a variety of community events and activities to engage the community and grow the local economy.
- Creating new open space and passive parks and preserves is a growing trend communities are implementing to establish new economical ways of growing local park systems.
- Many communities are creating partnerships with the private sector to create, enhance and maintain parks and public spaces.

5.4

plan principle + objectives

GET ACTIVE

A leader in offering quality parks and public spaces with diverse opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and education for a variety of age groups and abilities.

Objective PR.1

Preserve and expand open space areas.

Objective PR.2

Be a leader in environmental stewardship.

Objective PR.3

Maintain and enhance the existing park network.

Objective PR.4

Partner with the private sector, local organizations, and civic groups to help support new and existing park spaces, programming, and public events in the City.

Objective PR.5

Protect and enhance the Little Apple Creek greenway.

5.1

existing conditions

Wooster’s current park system, including those not owned by the City, contains 18 parks that occupy approximately 778 acres. The system also includes three indoor facilities consisting of a community center, an ice arena, and a recreational center.

Figure 5.1 shows the location of all the parks in Wooster’s current park system, as well as any school recreation facilities and undeveloped/vacant land.

Table 5.2, on the following page, is a detailed analysis of the condition and use of the facilities within the park system.

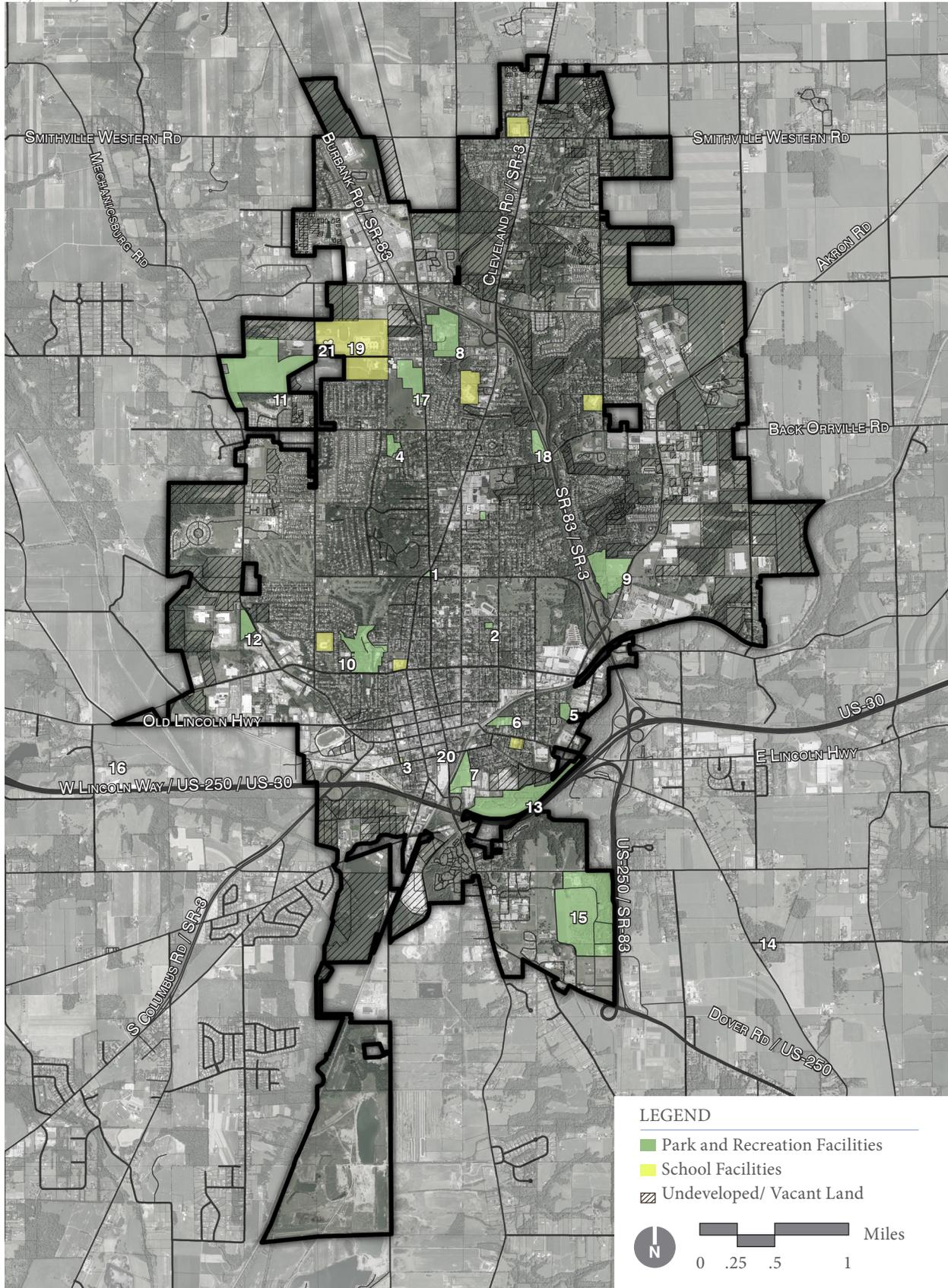
TABLE 5.1 EXISTING PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Mini Parks		Acreage	Type
1	Diller Park	0.58	Passive
2	Jaycee Park	1.16	Active
3	Walnut Street Park	0.33	Active
Neighborhood Parks			
4	Cohan Park	5	Passive
5	Stan Miller Park	5.01	Active
6	Knights Field	6.16	Active
7	Schellin Park	12.78	Active
Community Parks			
8	Freedlander Park	31.9	Active
9	Gerstenslager-Martin Park	28.95	Passive
10	Christmas Run Park	35.3	Active
11	Oak Hill Park	105	Passive
12	Walton Woods	15.3	Passive
13	Grosjean Park	57.5	Passive
14	* Barnes Preserve	76	Passive
15	* Secrest Arboretum	120	Passive
Regional Parks			
16	Wooster Memorial Park	253.7	Passive
Sports Complex			
17	* Soccer Complex	17	Active
18	* Miller Park	6.76	Active
Indoor Facilities		Square Footage	
19	* Gault Fitness and Recreation Center	55,000	
20	Wooster Community Center	17,250	
21	* Noble Ice Arena	31,000	

City of Wooster 2013

* Indicates facility not owned by City of Wooster

Figure 5.1 Existing Park and Recreation Facilities



Park Classifications

While the City is generally well served by community and regional parks, there is a deficit of approximately 24 acres of neighborhood parks and 11 acres of mini-parks when compared to national standards.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) is a national advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks, recreation and conservation. The mission of the NRPA is to advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people.

The NRPA classifies parks into two categories, regional and local/close-to-home parks. Local/close-to-home parks can be defined further as mini-parks, neighborhood parks/playgrounds, or community parks. A mini-park is defined as a specialized facility that serves a concentrated or limited population within a ¼-mile radius and is desirably one acre or less. A neighborhood park/playground is defined as an area for intense recreational activities, serves an area between ¼-mile and ½-mile, and is normally at least 15 acres. A community park is defined as an area of diverse environmental quality and may include areas suited for intense recreational facilities such as athletic complexes and large swimming pools. A regional park is defined as an area 200 acres or larger that serves more than one community and is contiguous with or encompasses natural resources.

Table 5.3 shows the total acreage of existing park types in the City of Wooster compared to the NRPA suggested acreage.

Passive and Active

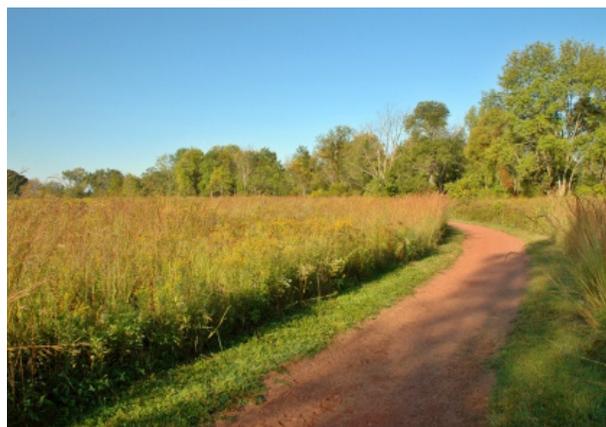
Of the total park space in the City, approximately 34% are active and 66% are passive.

Parks can also be divided into active and passive spaces. Active parks typically have recreational opportunities and encourage participation in activities. Active parks feature sports fields, playgrounds, splash pads, and other recreational activities. Passive parks require much less direct active recreation and focus primarily on open spaces and preserving natural states of the area. The City’s parks system currently contains more than 20

active and passive amenities distributed throughout the City.

Table 5.4 shows the amenities included in each park or open space. This table gives a current overview of amenities that can be found at each park. Analysis of the following data provides useful information to planning for the needs of the community as a whole and in specific locations throughout the City.

Physical conditions of the park system are an important part of this chapter. Knowing current maintenance and upkeep issues can help plan for future development, direction, and expansion of the park system as a whole. Table 5.2 shows the current park conditions within the Wooster park network. Comparing the conditions and usage of facilities identifies failures and successes in the current park system. Facilities with high usage and poor condition are seen as an issue, Wooster Community Center is an example. Successful parks include Schellin Park, Christmas Run Park and Freedlander Park as they all have high usage and good conditions.



An example of a passive park with natural amenities.



This splashpad acts as an active park.

TABLE 5.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS AND USAGE OF PARKS, THE CITY OF WOOSTER

Park	Condition	Usage	Type
Freedlander Park	Good	High	Active
Christmas Run Park	Good	High	Active
Knights Field	Good	Moderate	Active
Schellin Park	Good	High	Active
Wooster Memorial Park	Good	Moderate	Passive
Gerstenslager-Martin Park	Poor	Low	Passive
Cohan Park	Fair	Moderate	Passive
Jaycee Park	Fair	Moderate	Active
Stan Miller Park	Fair	Low	Passive
Walnut Street Park	Fair	High	Active
Oak Hill Park	High	High	Passive
Walton Woods	Fair	None	Passive
Wooster Community Center	Poor	High	Active
Diller Park	Good	None	Passive
Soccer Complex	Good	High	Active
Miller Park	Good	High	Active
Gault Fitness and Recreation Center; Shapiro Natatorium	Good	High	Active
Noble Ice Arena	Good	High	Active
Secrest Arboretum	High	High	Passive

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TABLE 5.3 NRPA SUGGESTED PARK AREA TO POPULATION RATIO STANDARD, CITY OF WOOSTER

Park Type	Existing Total Acres	Suggested Park Size (NRPA Standards)	Existing Ratio (Total Acres/1,000 Population)	NRPA Suggested Ratio	Suggested Total Acres based on Population	Surplus or Deficit (Acres)
Mini Parks	2.07	<1 Acre	0.079	0.5	13.05	-10 .98
Neighborhood Parks	28.95	15+ Acres	1.067	2.0	52.24	-24.37
Community Parks	469.95	25+ Acres	17.99	8.0	208.95	+261
Regional Parks	253.7	>200 Acres	9.713	10.0	261.19	-7.49

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*Based on 2010 US Census Bureau population of 26,119

Park Access

Many of the residential areas in the west and northeast of the City are underserved by parkland. These areas are outside of ¼-mile and ½-mile walking distances of parkland.

Park space accessibility measures for mini and neighborhood parks are quantified based on walking distances. Generally, average acceptable walking distance is between ¼-mile and ½-mile.

For analytic purposes, accessibility to local park space for Wooster residents has been identified as underserved for those outside of ¼-mile radius and severely underserved for those residing outside of a ½-mile radius.

Open Space and Undeveloped Land

Approximately 1,300 acres of undevelopable land within Wooster could potentially be used as parks or natural protection areas.

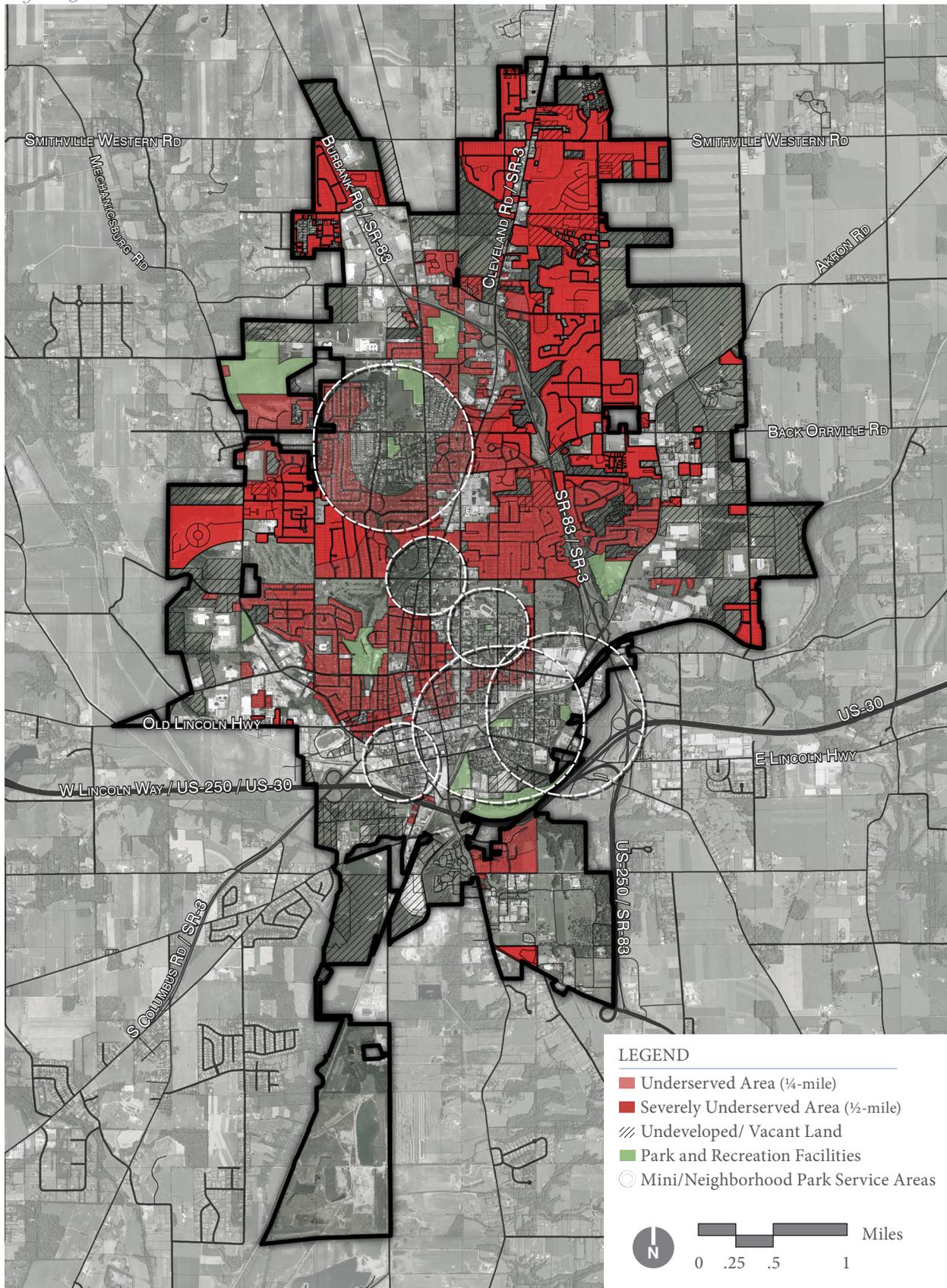
While some of the 2,400 acres of undeveloped land may be held for future development, 1,300 acres of that land is undevelopable. This land may be within the 100-year flood zone, heavily wooded, or too steep for development.

Undeveloped land within a city can be a valuable tool for parkland expansion. These areas can be targeted for future park construction. More important, some of these undeveloped lands can be used for passive parks that require little, if any, disruptions of their current natural state.

TABLE 5.4 EXISTING PARK AMENITIES, THE CITY OF WOOSTER

	Diller Park	Jaycee Park	Walnut Street Park	Schellin Park	Cohan Park	Stan Miller Park	Knights Field	Grosjean Park	Freedlander Park	Gerstenslager-Martin Park	Walton Woods	Christmas Run Park	Oak Hill Park	Soccer Complex	Miller Park	Wooster Memorial
Basketball Courts			●	●		●			●			●				
Volleyball Courts									●							
Tennis Courts							●					●				
Multi-purpose Field		●							●				●			
Ballfield		●		●		●			●	●					●	
Swing Sets		●	●	●	●	●	●		●			●				
Play Structures		●	●	●	●		●		●			●				
Pavilions		●		●	●		●		●			●	●		●	●
Picnic Tables		●		●	●		●		●	●					●	
Grills		●	●		●		●		●	●		●				
Benches						●	●					●			●	
Restrooms		●		●	●		●		●			●	●	●	●	
Horseshoe Pits							●		●							
Disc Golf									●							
Concessions									●			●		●	●	
Swimming Pool							●		●			●				
Lake, Ponds, & Streams				●	●				●			●				
Nature Trails									●							●
Ice Skating				●					●			●				
Fishing				●					●			●				
Dogcentric Area				●												
Skateboarding				●												

Figure 5.2 Underserved Park Locations



5.2

public input

Residents of Wooster are generally satisfied with the current parks, recreation, and open space network.

As part of the community survey residents were asked on a scale of one to five, with one being excellent and five being poor, the survey showed that the public rated Wooster’s recreational department at an average of 2.72. This response is similar to the survey conducted in 2012 indicating a general satisfaction with the department (see Figure 5.3).

Conversations and input gathered from both public meetings and Steering Committee meetings indicated a general satisfaction with parks and recreation. However there is some room for improvement. Generally, safety and public spaces in and around the downtown were noted as desired improvements in the park system.

Figure 5.3: How would you rate the quality of Wooster’s recreational department? (1 highest, 5 lowest)

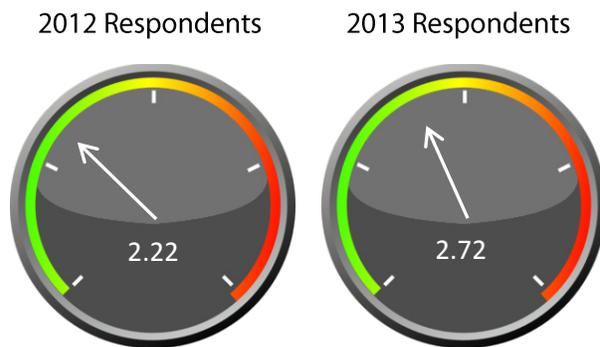
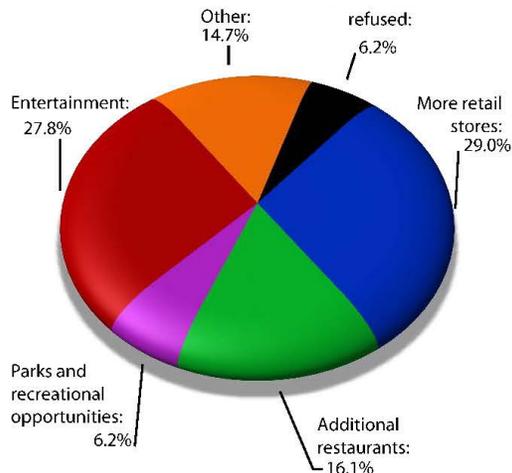


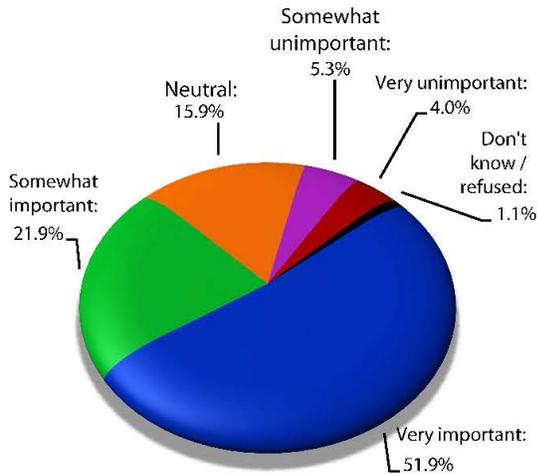
Figure 5.4: What would encourage you to come downtown more often?



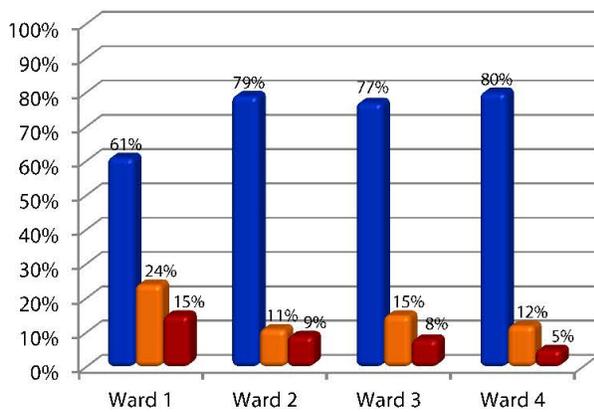
There is a desire to add additional public/green space in and around the Downtown to further promote the economic success and pedestrian friendliness of the area.

Wooster residents indicated a desire for new public space in and around the Downtown, including pocket parks, 'green' infrastructure, and community event space (see Figure 5.4). These responses indicated a need for green space that would attract more people to Downtown and create more opportunities for public programming and special events that add to the entertainment and economic value of the area.

Figure 5.5: How important is it to you that the community be connected by sidewalks, bike paths, and recreational trails?



Ward Breakdown



Also as indicated in Figure 5.4, 6.2% of respondents to the survey indicated that parks and recreational opportunities would encourage them to go Downtown more often.

Citizens desire to strengthen local connections throughout the City by creating a complete network of bike paths and greenways.

Over 50% of the telephone survey respondents indicated it as very important that the community be connected by sidewalks, bike paths, and recreational trails.

Online conversations indicated a strong need for non-motorized connections throughout the City. These discussions also indicated a disconnect between different parks in Wooster. Residents would like alternative connections between parks and recreational opportunities that would create a more cohesive network of parks.

Enhancing park security and safety should be a priority to ensure a welcoming atmosphere for all age groups.

Generally, the residents value their parks and have expressed the desire to increase the level of park activity throughout the City. However, many are troubled about the extent of park security at night. In order to maximize the usage of parks and attract a population with a wide demographic range, park safety and security needs to be considered as the City moves forward.

Citizens have mixed thoughts regarding park improvements and developments.

Some residents would prefer to enhance the quality of the existing parks rather than adding more parks to the City. Many have suggested improving the current parks by adding bicycle and walking paths to increase accessibility and convenience, implementing amenities to underserved parks, and promoting safety and security.

However, citizens have also proposed ideas regarding new park developments. Some have expressed that the existing parks are not well-dispersed throughout the City and that the focus of park development should be directed to the north and northeast part of town.

5.3

current trends

Communities are adopting placemaking strategies to create new park spaces that are dynamic and engaging, balancing recreation, interactive play, and passive spaces in a dynamic environment that serves a variety of age groups and abilities.

Placemaking is a collaborative community process that highlights and capitalizes on local assets and potential to create interesting public spaces that serve common needs. Placemaking creates spaces that provide the medium for interaction which merges community values and goals. Parks provide a key tool for placemaking in cities by creating destinations and unique public spaces that increase community interaction.

There is a growing trend to create new urban like public spaces in suburban and exurban communities to serve as places of entertainment and gathering. These spaces are typically heavily programmed with a variety of community events and activities to engage the community and grow the local economy.

An important part of successful parks are the activities that take place within them including sporting events, community classes, and festivals. These programs benefit residents and provide the platform to fully utilize the park system. Appropriately programmed parks utilize the parks system throughout different seasons, creating a year round approach to park activity.

Parks and recreational services are often regarded as unimportant in city budgets because their cost exceeds their direct revenue. The benefits of parks and recreation services are instead measured by the social and economic impacts on the surrounding area and the community as a whole.

Home and business values of parcels bordering parks are generally higher than the surrounding area. This increased property values generates more tax revenue for the City. In many cases, construction of parks has almost doubled the value of surrounding properties. Parks and recreation services also act as a tourism attraction, generating revenue for a city by attracting outside visitors who spend their money within a city.

By investing in parks and recreation, cities can generate revenue for themselves while providing the social benefit

for the community that makes it a desirable place to live and raise a family.

Creating new open space and passive parks and preserves is a growing trend communities are implementing to establish new economical ways of growing local park systems.

Park preserves are dedicated areas of open space that have been dedicated as park space. These parks require no formal equipment and instead are left in their natural state. These parks are used as nature preserves that allow users to interact with the natural environment while getting exercise. Park preserves can be used by people of all ages and benefit the whole community. These are also frequently used by schools to teach students about nature.

Development of passive parks and preserves can be done at a low cost to the City, while providing high benefits to the community as a whole. These are simple and low-cost ways to utilize open land to enhance the park system as a whole. Parks and recreational services are often regarded as unimportant in city budgets because their cost exceeds their direct revenue. The benefits of parks and recreation services are instead measured by the social and economic impacts on the surrounding area and the community as a whole.

Home and business values of parcels bordering parks are generally higher than the surrounding area. This increased property values generates more tax revenue for the City. In many cases, construction of parks has

almost doubled the value of surrounding properties. Parks and recreation services also act as a tourism attraction, generating revenue for a city by attracting outside visitors who spend their money within a city.

By investing in parks and recreation, cities can generate revenue for themselves while providing the social benefit for the community that makes it a desirable place to live and raise a family.

Many communities are creating partnerships with the private sector to create, enhance and maintain parks and public spaces.

Public-private partnerships of park services are a way of utilizing private funding for operation, management and construction of park facilities. These partnerships can work in a number of ways, including:

- Concession services
- Activity programming
- Facility construction
- Programming

For the community, private partnerships relieve some of the stress placed on budgets by the parks and recreation department, making it easier to enhance current parks and expand the system if need be. For private companies, these partnerships allow them to give back to the community while gaining positive recognition.



5.4 plan principle + objectives



Quality parks and public spaces with diverse opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and education for a variety of age groups and abilities.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WOOSTER LEADERSHIP
- PLANNING AND ZONING
- CITY ENGINEER
- PARKS AND RECREATION
- POLICE DEPARTMENT
- FIRE DEPARTMENT
- CODE ENFORCEMENT
- WAYNE COUNTY
- MAIN STREET WOOSTER
- CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
- THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER
- OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER
- WOOSTER COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
- PRIVATE LAND OWNERS

TIMEFRAME

Short Term	1-3 years
Medium Term	3-6 years
Long Term	6-10 years
Ongoing	Action to be continuously addressed

Objective PR.1 Preserve and expand open space areas.

Action PR.1.1

Promote the incorporation of open space in areas that are underserved.

The City should analyze its location of parks in order to fully serve all residents and provide spaces for recreation and activity for all. Policy should be created to promote accessibility to parks for all residents.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.1.2

Support the development of the OARDC and the BioOhio Research Park through planned improvements to the area and low-impact land use planning around the complex.

BioOhio and the OARDC should be buffered by low-impact green space and connected to the rest of the City by greenways. This will increase the overall attractiveness of the area while promoting connectivity and inclusion to the rest of the City. The creation of the greenway over or under Dix Expressway0 will better the connection between the OARDC and Downtown.



Time Frame: Short - Mid Term

Action PR.1.3

Create standards to promote conservation style development to encourage preservation of natural areas.

Policy should be established that requires the dedication of undevelopable land to be used as passive park space or natural preserves. This policy will ensure the preservation of natural areas while increasing overall park space for the City.



Time Frame: Short - Mid Term

Action PR.1.4

Require all new residential developments to create or dedicate park space or usable open space as a community amenity.

Action PR.1.5

Promote the dedication of passive open space as part of future development with the goal of creating a greenway network around and through the City.

Policy should be established that holds natural areas for preservation in order to minimize development impact on the community while increasing park space. By strategically preserving this land, the City can create a network of greenspace that promotes healthy lifestyles and pedestrian connectivity. Adding greenspace to connect areas of interest will create a greenway network that will make Wooster one of a kind.



Time Frame: Mid Term



Time Frame: Long Term/Ongoing

Objective PR.2 Be a leader in environmental stewardship



Action PR.2.1

Promote sound environmental practices through sustainable zoning and engineering standards.

Time Frame: Short Term/Ongoing

By creating policy that protects vulnerable land from heavy development, the City can support environmentally-friendly development patterns such as cluster development that minimize infrastructure impact. By revising zoning and engineering standards to be more sustainable, Wooster can lessen its impact on the environment and be a healthier community. All engineering standards should be studied to maximize their long-term benefits of the City.

Action PR.2.2

Support programs which encourage the community to learn about and experience nature and natural resources (e.g., agricultural or watershed resource center).



Time Frame: Ongoing

Wooster should partner with the School District and the Parks and Recreation Department to create education programs about nature and the environment. These programs should include education about the benefits of preserving land, including agricultural resources.

Action PR.2.3

Support and promote green building standards as part of both public and private developments.



Time Frame: Short Term/Ongoing

Policy should be revised to set standards for sustainable building practices. Standards should establish requirements for all new private development to use "green" practices for construction as well as sustainable materials. All new public buildings should be LEED certified.

The City should offer incentives for private development that achieves certain LEED certifications.

Action PR.2.4

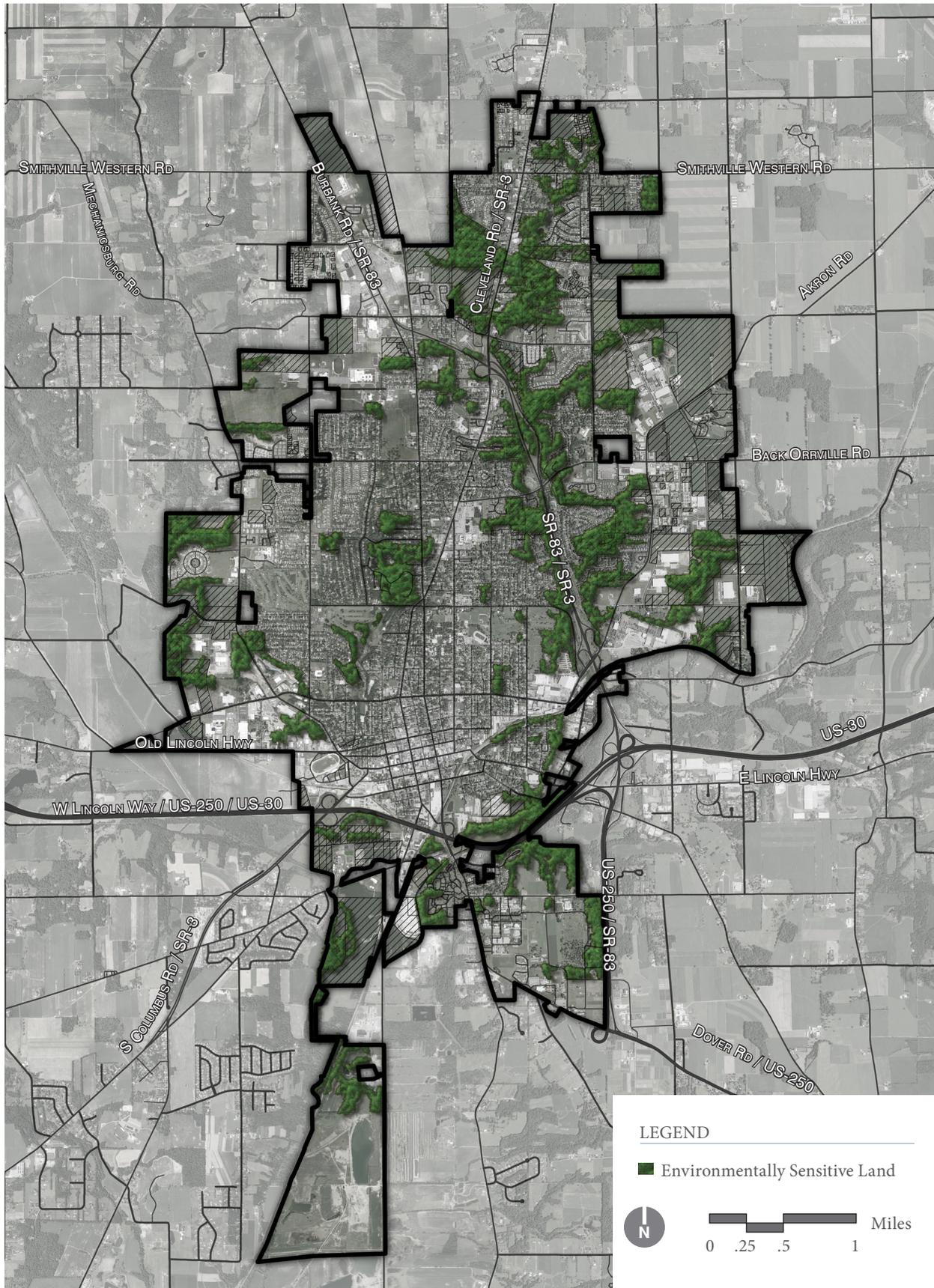
Work with local groups such as the OARDC or Trout Unlimited to make improvements to Grosjean Park that will enhance access and serve as a destination for environmental education and/or outdoor recreation.



Time Frame: Mid Term

The proximity of Grosjean Park to the Little Apple Creek and Downtown make it a very valuable space for enhancements. By partnering with local groups, the City can use this space to educate while enhancing the function of the park itself. The

Figure 5.3 Undeveloped Areas



advancement of the park will establish it as a destination and resource.

Action PR.2.5

Work with the Wayne County Sustainable Energy Network to promote environmental stewardship in the region.

Partnering with larger organizations like the Wayne County Sustainable Energy Network will allow Wooster to better promote themselves in the larger arena of environmental practices. Wooster's size and location make it an important asset to bettering environmental stewardship to the larger region.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Objective PR.3 Maintain and enhance the existing park network.

Action PR.3.1

Ensure new development near Little Apple Creek maintains naturalized, publicly accessible, passive park space.

Little Apple Creek is one of Wooster's best natural assets and should be preserved at all costs. The area should be used as an asset to the whole community by making sure it is accessible to the public and undeveloped. Creating a bike path along the Creek will make it more attractive to residents while ensuring the area does not get developed.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.3.2

Identify low cost opportunities to create new park space in the western and northeast areas of the community with a focus on neighborhood parks.

Policy should be created that enhances accessibility and access to neighborhood parks for residential areas to the west and northeast. Small, inexpensive parks should be constructed within these areas to ensure parks are evenly distributed throughout the City.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.3.3

Consider developing the Melrose Drive water tower site into park or open space.

By taking advantage of already publicly owned land to establish new park space, the City can improve its overall system. Developing this land into park space can provide park access to new development in the northeast of Wooster.



Time Frame: Mid Term

Objective PR.4
Partner with the private sector, local organizations, and civic groups to help support new and existing park spaces, programming, and public events in the City.

Action PR.4.1

Work with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wooster, Wayne Center for the Arts, and others to promote and expand local events.

Partnering with local organizations to host programs within Wooster’s park system will allow better utilization of the current system and provide more entertainment options for residents. Ideas for these partnerships could include park concert series, festivals, and art exhibits. These partnerships will create a more unified City while promoting community activities.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.4.2

Collaborate with the Wayne County Fair Board to enhance the image and character of the area.

Work together with the County Fair Board to create and maintain park space in and around the County Fair Grounds to make better use of the land when not in use. This allows the community to enjoy and use the area year round.



Time Frame: Long Term

Action PR.4.3

Partner with the private sector (service clubs) to enhance and maintain existing park space.

Establishing public-private partnerships for the park system will decrease the burden placed on the City to maintain the park system while adding vitality and activity to the parks. Ideas for partnerships include creating exhibits, operating concessions, and hosting and operating sports leagues.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Objective PR.5 Protect and enhance the Little Apple Creek greenway.

Action PR.5.1

Protect the riparian areas along the Creek.

City Code should be revised to ensure vegetation and wildlife adjacent to the Creek is undisturbed and protected. Development around the Creek should be required to have minimal impact on the natural amenities of the riparian strip.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.5.2

Create new recreational and educational amenities and activities along the Creek.

The City should create a multi-use path that runs alongside the Creek that does not disturb the present wildlife and vegetation. The Little Apple Creek Trail would provide recreational activities for the City and encourage visitors and residents to enjoy the beauty of the Creek.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.5.3

Support the creation of a “Friends of the Little Apple Creek” group for fundraising and volunteer labor, promotion, and security.

This group would be responsible for promoting and fundraising an effort to keep the Creek beautiful and active. Members will work on a volunteer basis to maintain the Creek’s natural state while improving its surroundings.



Time Frame: Ongoing

Action PR.5.4

Work with Trout Unlimited to create or attract an angling or conservation event.

Trout Unlimited is currently promoting the Creek as a high-quality angling destination in Ohio. The City should continue to work with Trouts Unlimited to help improve and promote the watershed as a regional destination for angling.



Time Frame: Short Term/Ongoing