

IX. COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Parks

1. Town Community Parks

The Town of Somers is currently deficient in the provision of community park acreage. A service area of three miles around the Town community parks on **Map 4** indicates that the geographic location of the existing community parks sufficiently serves roughly the entire Town; however, this spatial analysis is somewhat deceiving because Petrifying Springs County Park is included on the map as a community park because it provides many of the facilities typical of a community park. The acreage standard analysis reveals that adequate community park acreage under the control of Somers is not provided to serve the current population of the Town. Even though Petrifying Springs County Park realistically provides community park facilities which serve the needs of Town residents, any improvements or changes to these facilities is not under the control of the Town, and it is in Somers best interest to work toward satisfying the community park needs of its population independent of outside parkland. Even with the proposed future development of two vacant Town properties into 58.90 acres of additional useable community parkland, the Town would still only then have an estimated 6.82 acres of community parkland per 1,000 persons in 2020 based upon the projected population of 10,692. With the Somers standard at 8 acres per 1,000 persons, a deficiency will therefore exist, and the Town will need to add additional community parkland acreage to meet the needs of residents according to the standard.

The two Town-owned properties that are proposed for development as community parks are a 24.20-acre site north of Town Hall, locally known as the "Gitzlaff property," and a 34.70-acre property on C.T.H EA, approximately ½-mile south of C.T.H. E. Conceptual master plans have been prepared for each these potential parks in conjunction with the development of this CORP. These plans are included in **Appendix F**.

The Gitzlaff property is an "L"-shaped property that is roughly bisected diagonally by an unnamed tributary of the Pike River. The southern half of the property is currently still being farmed. The northern half of the site consists of mostly upland area with scattered scrub vegetation. A linear forested corridor parallels the creek. This corridor has been identified as secondary environmental corridor. The conceptual master plan for this site details mostly passive recreational facilities designed around the unique natural resources on the site.

The 34.70-acre site on C.T.H. EA is a mostly flat site that is currently in agricultural use. The conceptual master plan for this property details a predominantly active-recreational use park. The development of this site as a quasi-sports complex would provide a location for local sports organizations to more comfortably accommodate their need for space to program competitive events, and would also allow for future expansion of Town recreation programs. Existing storm water drainage patterns are very evident on this site, and the proposed design calls for these patterns to remain intact, with the site storm water features such as rain gardens and bioretention swales to be designed efficiently around the natural contours of the landscape.

2. Town Neighborhood Parks

The Town of Somers is currently served by two neighborhood parks. According to the figures, the Town is deficient in the provision of the neighborhood park acreage required to serve its current population; however, when demonstrating the geographic need for neighborhood parks, one must also take into account the proximity of community parks and public school facilities. Community parks are larger in scale than neighborhood parks, but in some areas of Somers the community parks provide for many of the recreational facilities typical of neighborhood parks, and therefore also serve the function of neighborhood parks. Somers Elementary School is a public school facility that also provides many facilities of a neighborhood Park and functions as a neighborhood park for those residents in the service area.

The Neighborhood Park Service Area Map (**Map 3**) indicates areas of Somers that are not currently served by neighborhood parks. That is, they do not fall within the 1/2-mile recommended service area of any of the Town's neighborhood parks, or the service area boundary is broken by a pedestrian barrier, such as a major arterial roadway, railway, or water body. This map shows that the vast majority of the Town of Somers, including most of the densely populated areas, is not within the service area of a neighborhood park. The neighborhood park deficiency that exists in the indicated areas on the map, along with future growth, will require additional neighborhood park facilities to be provided by the Town of Somers in the future. It is recommended that Somers explore future opportunities for development of neighborhood parks in currently underserved population concentration areas, and in conjunction with any new residential development. Every effort should be made in areas of new development to provide access from the residential areas to new or existing neighborhood parks via interconnecting trails, sidewalks, or low-volume residential streets.

The Town currently owns a 2-acre property in the Country Charm subdivision that has been proposed for development as a neighborhood Park. A park on this site would satisfy the neighborhood park deficiency in this residential area. The site has historically been used for agricultural purposes and is relatively flat in grade. See the conceptual master plan for this site in **Appendix F**.

Below is a list of facilities and associated estimated costs in 2009 dollars for a typical new neighborhood park (approximately 8 acres in size). It is recognized that neighborhood parks vary greatly in size and type and number of facilities, but the information below can be used as a guide for Somers when initiating the planning process for a new neighborhood park.

Typical Neighborhood Park

Park Element:	Estimated Cost:
Topographical site survey	4,500
Master planning	12,000
Construction documents	13,000
Play equipment (purchase and installation)	50,000
ADA playground surfacing	10,000
Multi-use playfield	35,000
Soccer field	40,000
Basketball court	15,000

Open-air shelter w/attached restroom building	120,000
Asphalt parking (20 stalls)	20,000
Asphalt walking trail	5,000
Site landscaping	40,000
Picnic tables (10)	10,000
Grills (2)	1,000
Benches (8)	9,600
Trash receptacles (5)	4,000
Total	\$ 389,100

The above total cost assumes that the parkland is acquired at no cost to the Town of Somers. This would occur through a donation or by dedication. If land does need to be acquired for the development of a neighborhood park, land acquisition costs should also be included in the estimated cost at a rate of approximately \$30,000 per acre. The above total cost also includes minor grading for the development of the listed facilities, but substantial site preparation and earthwork would be an additional cost, if necessary.

3. Town Mini-Parks

Currently, the Town of Somers park system does not include any parks that would be categorized as mini-parks. It is recommended that Somers explore future opportunities for the development of mini-parks to satisfy the minimum acreage standard (0.50 acres per 1,000 persons) for this type of park. In a rural community such as Somers, the most effective mini-parks that receive the most use tend to be small play structures, pocket green spaces, or sitting areas in close proximity to multi-family residential housing. These locations meet the needs of the residents of these developments because they do not have access to their own attached yards. It is therefore also recommended that Somers explore opportunities to site future mini-parks adjacent to multi-family residential areas.

4. Town Special Use Areas

NRPA does not recommend an acreage standard for this park category because these types of parks tend to be unique to the community. They are considered special use areas because there are few amenities available and there is normally a single facility or two that the parks provide, such as a canoe launch or community gathering area. The Town of Somers is currently in discussion with private landowners about the possibility of acquiring two properties for possible addition to the park system as special use areas. The first property is owned by the Ho-Chunk Sovereign Nation, and it encompasses approximately 16.5 acres of land on the northeast corner of C.T.H. A and 13th Avenue, just east of the Kenosha Country Club. Approximately 900 feet of the Pike River runs through the southwest corner of the property, the length of which is surrounded by a linear corridor of forested floodplain. This entire corridor is classified as primary environmental corridor. The remainder of the property consists of wetlands and upland scrub brush. The site is currently used by fisherman, mostly during the seasonal salmon, steelhead, and brown trout spawning runs up the river, and an unimproved gravel parking area is located off of the road intersection at the southwest corner of the property. The site has tremendous potential for development as a passive use special use area with improved access to the river, and it is recommended that the Town continue to pursue this opportunity.

Recommended improvements would include: general site cleanup, improved parking and access from the road, improved trails and river access points, signage, seating areas, and invasive vegetation management.

The second property with potential for acquisition and development as a special use area is located on C.T.H. E, immediately west of the Canadian Pacific Railway line, and just west of the Gitzlaff property. The property encompasses 7.86 acres, almost all of which is designated as secondary environmental corridor. The majority of the property consists of forested wetlands, with a small upland area adjacent to the road access point. A very narrow extension of an unnamed tributary of the Pike River runs through the property. The site has potential for development as a nature-based special use area, with recommended improvements to include: improved access from C.T.H. E and a small parking area, primitive trails, signage, and seating areas. There has also been discussion between the Town and adjacent property owners about acquiring the property to serve as a regional storm water detention area. If this approach is pursued, it is recommended that the storm water functionality be designed in such a manner so as to preserve the significant natural resources on the site, including the wetland vegetation and the wildlife habitat. It is also recommended that the Town explore a future connection between this site and the proposed park on the Gitzlaff property to the east.

In addition to the previously-mentioned properties, it is recommended that Somers continue to explore opportunities to add special use parkland along the shore of Lake Michigan. This exceptional water resource is a recreational jewel that Somers essentially turns its back on in regards to public access. The Town should take advantage of all future opportunities to provide this access, including developing parkland in conjunction with utility, conservation, and drainage easements.

Town Trails

According to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, walking for pleasure is the highest-ranking recreational activity for residents ages 16 and older. A system of trails and connections to regional trail systems can provide excellent passive recreational opportunities for community residents. Somers' park system currently lacks opportunities for on-trail and off-trail walking in the Town parks, as well as pedestrian routes and connections between individual parks, and to other Town destinations. During the development of this CORP there was a great deal of discussion about the desire of Town residents to implement a trail system, and ultimately to provide a connection to other nearby trails. **Map 5** depicts the existing and proposed trails in the Town of Somers.

1. Existing Trails

The northern segment of the Kenosha County Bike Trail, locally referred to as the "North Shore Bike Trail," begins at 35th Street and 28th Avenue in the City of Kenosha and runs north through Somers along an old railroad right-of-way all the way to the City of Racine. The entire length of this trail is crushed stone, and it is marked with signage at most major intersections. From the southern end of this trail in downtown Kenosha, an approximately 5-mile on-road route winds around to a connection with the southern end of the Kenosha County Bike Trail at 89th Street and 30th Avenue. This is where the trail again turns into an off-road crushed stone path

that runs south all the way to Lake Bluff, Illinois. There is also an asphalt connector trail that was installed in 2008, extending 1.75 miles west from the Kenosha County Bike Trail along C.T.H. E to Petrifying Springs County Park.

The Kenosha Lakefront Trails are a series of asphalt bike paths through several lakefront parks in Kenosha. With several small on-road connections, these trails form a route that comes within a very short distance of connecting to the Kenosha County Bike Trail at the west end of Poerio Park, in the far northeast corner of the City of Kenosha.

2. Proposed Trails

In following the recommendation in the Kenosha County Park and Open Space Plan to establish recreational trails along the Pike River corridor, the Town of Somers submitted a grant funding request through the State CMAQ program in early 2009 for a proposed trail segment. The proposed trail would start at the northwest entrance to Petrifying Springs County Park off of C.T.H. A, and would follow a route along A and S.T.H. 31 north into the Village of Mount Pleasant, roughly paralleling the Pike River for most its length. A second trail segment is also proposed by the Town along the more easterly section of the Pike River. This trail segment would start at the connection with the Kenosha County Bike Trail ½-mile south of C.T.H. A, and would follow the River corridor south to an eventual connection with the northern end of the Kenosha Lakefront Trails. The majority of this trail segment is proposed to be off-road, via easements and existing road rights-of-way, but some on-road segments may also be necessary to make the complete connection.

Another major north-south trail is proposed for the future along the corridor adjacent to the South Branch of the Pike River. This trail would be mostly a recreation trail that would take advantage of the scenic beauty of the secondary environmental corridor along the river. The route would start at the Town boundary with Kenosha on the south end and run all the way north to Petrifying Springs County Park. Again, a combination of easements through private property and off-road sections of trail would need to be incorporated to implement this trail.

Following the theme of trails along river corridors, another trail is proposed by the Town of Somers to follow the Kilbourn Ditch corridor from C.T.H. K at the Kenosha County airport north to the Village of Mount Pleasant. Roughly the northern two-thirds of this trail would be implemented along 100th Avenue. The goal of this trail would be to have as much off-road trail as possible, but stretches of on-road trail may be necessary to implement the entire length of the proposed route.

A major east-west trail is also proposed as a way to connect the civic center of the Town, and all of the existing and proposed parks in this area, to all of the previously mentioned north-south trail routes. This route would essentially be an extension of the 1.75-mile asphalt connector trail that was implemented in 2008 along C.T.H. E. Proposed future connections would extend the trail to the east along E to a meeting with the proposed Pike River Trail, and to the west along E to a connection with the Town Hall site and nearby parks. A further segment to the west would take a roundabout route to the proposed park in the Country Charm subdivision, and an eventual connection to the proposed trail along 100th Avenue.

In addition to the trails mentioned, it is recommended that Somers continue to explore opportunities to develop trail connections from all outlying areas into the central civic area of Town, and to work with neighboring communities to implement a regional trail system. It is also recommended that all future park development and improvements in the Somers park system be coordinated with the development of new trails, connections to existing trails, and overall enhancement of the Town trail system. An extensive network of trails connecting to local and regional destinations would best serve the recreational needs of the residents of Somers. Incorporating trails into all new development will help to make this a reality. Some of the more economical ways to implement improvements to bicycle and pedestrian travel between parks and other Town destination points in the short term are as follows:

- 1) Establish on-street and off-street trail connections between community destinations, including parks.
- 2) Provide crosswalk improvements.
- 3) Create trailhead locations that include wayfinding and interpretive signage at Town parks and other important Town destinations.

It is recommended that the Town of Somers conduct a more comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian facility study in the future, with a focus on assessing the state of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and specific recommendations for improvements. This will include a more detailed analysis of proposed trail routes, and identification of necessary easements, road improvements, and property acquisitions.

Recommended Improvements to Existing Parks and Open Space Areas

Individual parks and park equipment have been identified as in need of improvements, augmentations, or upgrades. The recommended changes to the park system include:

1. Overall Park System

- Gradually make the park system accessible for those with disabilities.
 - Provide hard-surface barrier-free access from parking and main circulation areas to park facilities.
 - Upgrade for disabled persons the usability of park facilities such as benches, water fountains, and picnic tables.
- Implement an Adopt-a-Park program to help with park maintenance.
- Implement forestry management practices at all parks to maintain the health of all park vegetation.

- Install uniform signage to identify all Town park sites.
- Obtain survey boundary maps and legal descriptions for all Town park sites.
- Investigate the opportunity to acquire parkland with a minimum 15-acre tract available for implementation of a fenced dog park.

2. Park behind Town Hall

- Install a hard-surface walking trail.
- Relocate and expand the existing playground with new ADA-accessible play equipment and surfacing.
- Add safety fencing between the playground area and parking/entrance drive.
- Expand the existing parking area.
- Add field lighting to all softball fields.
- Add new bleachers to all softball fields.
- Replace backstops at all softball fields with new fencing.
- Implement outfield fencing at all softball fields.
- Define the parking area with striping.
- Install an open-air shelter with restroom facilities.
- Install a restroom/concession building.

3. Park north of Town Hall (Gitzlaff property)

- Create final park design construction documents.
- Eradicate invasive vegetation.
- Remove garbage and debris from site.

4. Fabiano Park

- Relocate and expand the existing playground with new ADA-accessible play equipment and surfacing.
- Install an open-air shelter with restroom facilities.
- Install a hard-surface walking trail.

- Relocate the existing fitness equipment.
 - Relocate and upgrade the horseshoe pit.
 - Install landscape screening of U.S. Cellular compound and adjacent private property.
 - Relocate the park sign.
 - Implement a new memorial feature.
 - Redefine the parking area to be safer and more efficient.
 - Designate parking stalls with signage for park use only.
5. Park in Country Charm subdivision
- Create final park design construction documents.
6. Park on C.T.H. EA
- Create final park design construction documents.
7. Park in Valley View subdivision
- Implement two (2) unlighted tennis courts.
 - Expand the existing playground with new ADA-accessible play equipment and surfacing.
 - Install a hard surface walking trail.
 - Thin existing vegetation along 64th Avenue for safety and access.
 - Eradicate invasive vegetation.
 - Install trees throughout the site.

Park Improvement Cost Schedule

The Town of Somers Park Commission has developed a park improvement cost schedule to prioritize improvements and acquisitions for the next five years. The schedule is subject to change as it is anticipated that the Park Commission revenue budget will be supplemented with additional funds from alternate sources such as grants and private donations, or depleted due to unforeseen maintenance items. A summary table of this park improvement cost schedule is located in **Appendix B**.

Review of Existing Operation and Maintenance Capabilities and Impact of Planned Park Improvements

The Town of Somers Public Works Department currently has four full-time year-round employees involved in the maintenance of the park system.

A variety of equipment and materials is used to maintain the Town of Somers park system, including a multitude of both power and hand tools that are typical of a landscape installation and maintenance company. Power tools include landscaping items such as mowers, weed eaters, leaf blowers, etc. Hand tools include rakes, shovels, picks, etc. The Public Works Department also utilizes a range of vehicles including dump trucks, large pick-up-trucks, etc. to maintain the Town park properties.

As more sites are added to the park system and facilities are added to existing parks, it is recommended that the Town re-evaluate the maintenance staff and equipment that are allocated to maintaining the Town parks. This evaluation should take place in conjunction with the budgeting and funding discussions for each individual project.

Conclusion

In comparison to other southeastern Wisconsin communities, Somers has been somewhat behind in recent history in regards to satisfying the outdoor recreational needs of residents. The major community park in Town, the land immediately south of Town Hall, is centrally located and has served the needs of residents adequately as a central gathering space and the site for most sporting events. Overflow needs for recreational space beyond what this park can handle have never seemed to be extreme because many residents have adapted to using their own large rural properties as additional recreational space, and the quality of life in the Town therefore has not suffered greatly due to the park acreage deficiency. Instead, the quality of life in Somers has remained high due to a combination of other factors, including the natural beauty of the area and the quality of the housing and schools. As the population continues to grow, it will be increasingly difficult for the Town to accommodate the needs of residents without adding parkland and improving existing facilities. The Town took a positive step towards rectifying this situation through the formation of a Park Commission in 2008. This measure established a group that can now focus on enhancing and building up the Town of Somers park system. Even with the proposed addition of two community parks to the Town park system in the near future, Somers' will still face a deficiency in the park acreage that is available to meet the recreational needs of Town residents, as well as deficiencies in

service area coverage and the proximity of parks to residential population concentrations. Led by the Park Commission, Somers expects to address acreage deficiencies and gaps in service area coverage by exploring opportunities to implement new park facilities in conjunction with new development. Gradual improvements should also be made to upgrade disabled accessibility at all existing parks as funding becomes available to do so. Somers should also continue to explore opportunities to develop a multi-use trail system that would connect not only to existing parks and other popular Town destination points, but also to a regional trail system, and ultimately to other neighboring communities. Finally, it is critically important that the preservation of sensitive natural resources be a component of parkland acquisition, so that scenic beauty and important wildlife habitat can be preserved in the Town, and recreational access to these resources can be programmed in an environmentally sensitive manner.