

## I. INTRODUCTION

Quality of life is an important component of why people choose to live where they do, and many elements of everyday life contribute to perceived quality of life. Elements such as the quality of local housing and schools, government-provided services, employment opportunities, the natural beauty of the surroundings, and easy access to quality recreational opportunities and facilities all factor into why people choose to live in one community over another. Parks, open space areas, and trails are key components of high quality living environments. From mini-parks that provide little green oases all the way up to regional parks serving people from both far and near, a well-designed park system adds immeasurable value to any community. Parks, open space areas, and trails serve a broad range of key community functions, which include: meeting human needs for recreation and aesthetics, protecting and enhancing the natural environment, and shaping the extent and patterns of development. Every community's park and open space system should be planned and designed to meet the diverse needs of persons living in the community. Proper recreation-based planning requires a focus on both the types of preserved lands and resources and developed facilities needed to meet the needs of the community, as well as the geographic distribution of those features in relation to the persons who will use them, and the access that is provided.

In today's world of constant stress, continual movement, and hectic schedules, recreational activities are necessary. Recreation is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as "the refreshment of one's mind or body after work through activity that amuses or stimulates." Outdoor recreation has many benefits, which include personal health, stronger family and community, preservation of open space, and protection of sensitive natural resources.

Personal health, both physically and psychologically, is strengthened as a result of outdoor recreation. Physically, people tend to exercise more when outdoor facilities are available and easily accessible. Psychologically, people also need a place and time to breath the fresh air and unwind from their hectic lifestyle. Preserved natural areas and open spaces in parks provide that place.

Having sufficient parks and open space areas also contributes to stronger family and a stronger community. Whether it is friendly sports competition bringing people together, a mom and dad playing with their children on the playground, or neighbors gathering in a community space, parks can make a significant improvement in the quality of a community, or more specifically, a residential neighborhood.

The natural environment and the aesthetic beauty that comes with it can also be preserved in open space areas while still providing opportunities for outdoor recreation. Access to these areas must be designed in a manner that is environmentally responsible and sustainable so that the impact on sensitive plant and animal species and habitat is minimized. This is contrasted with the mounting pressure to develop any and all open land within communities such as Somers. Preserving the open spaces and transforming them into functional recreational areas takes a significant amount of effort and planning.

There are open spaces classified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as environmental areas due to the presence of woodlands or wetlands. These environmental areas, or corridors, are difficult to develop into anything more than limited access local parks or recreational areas. These woodlands and wetlands serve important purposes for nature and storm water drainage as well as for the community.

Planning for parks is a key component in producing and maintaining a sustainable park and open space system. Effective planning will also include considerable foresight to measure the future demand for parks and open spaces. The creation of the Town of Somers Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) will provide an inventory of current park facilities, include a study of the park and open space needs of the community, generate recommendations for additions and improvements, and prioritize a course of action for the next five years.

This CORP has been prepared in accordance with guidelines that will make it certifiable by the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and will qualify the Town of Somers for matching grant funds through the State of Wisconsin Stewardship Local Assistance Programs, the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the Federal Recreation Trails Program. To remain eligible for these funds, the CORP must be updated every five years to ensure that it reflects the current needs of the community. The CORP can also be amended within the five-year period of grant eligibility to include additional park improvements or new park projects that come about because of new development, redevelopment, or previously unforeseen opportunities.

This CORP was prepared under the direction of the Town of Somers Park Commission. This group serves as an advisory entity to the Town Board for all decisions pertaining to park budget expenditures, facility scheduling and operations, maintenance and improvements, regulations, and land acquisition.