

VIII. OUTDOOR RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Evaluation of solicited public input, and analysis based on set recreation standards are the two most commonly used methods for conducting a community outdoor recreation needs assessment. Utilizing both methods together will most accurately pinpoint the needs of the community. This section of the CORP provides a summary of the public input process, an assessment of the current park and open space facilities in Somers based on a Town-customized version of National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) guidelines and standards, and a summary of the recreational activity findings outlined in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and their bearing on local park planning.

Needs Assessment: Public Input

Without year-round inventories of how many people use each of the parks, public input from residents and park users is needed to identify the current state of the parks, the future needs of the parks, and how well the current and future amenities serve the public. Because public input is critically important, several meetings were held during the development of the CORP to obtain feedback from residents and park users. A summary of these meetings is as follows:

1. Public Meeting 1: A kickoff meeting with Town staff and the Park Commission was held on April 13, 2009. Residents were invited to attend via public notice. At this meeting every park and potential park in the Town was individually identified. Discussion ensued regarding the present state of each park and the facilities available at each park. A "wish list" was created to identify desired improvements that could make each park more attractive or user friendly.
2. Public Meeting 2: A second meeting with the Park Commission was held on June 15, 2009. Residents were again invited to attend via public notice. At this meeting a draft list of desired park improvements for the next five years was drafted, and service areas for each of the existing Town parks were identified on maps. There was then discussion regarding areas that were identified as underserved, and the potential need for new parks.
3. Public Meeting 3: A third meeting with the Park Commission was held on August 17, 2009. Residents were again invited to attend via public notice. At this meeting drafts of the proposed concept plans for each of the Town existing and proposed parks were reviewed and discussed, and feedback was received from the Park Commission and the public.
4. Public Meeting 4: A public open house was held on September 21, 2009 to display the drafts of the proposed concept plans for each of the Town existing and proposed parks. The format of the open house was very informal, and residents were invited to view the plans up close and to have one-on-one discussions with Park Commission members and the Ruckert-Mielke project team. Approximately 25-30 residents attended the open house.
5. Public Meeting 5: A final meeting with the Park Commission was held on September 21, 2009, immediately following the public open house. Residents were again invited to attend via public notice. At this meeting discussion took place regarding the feedback received from residents at the open house. A draft of the CORP was also reviewed, and the majority of the discussion surrounded the prioritization of the recommended improvements over the next five years, so

that a 5-year capital improvement schedule could be developed as the last step in completing the CORP. Minor revisions to the CORP draft were suggested by the public officials as well as residents.

6. Public Meeting 6: A public hearing was held on October 12, 2009, immediately preceding a combined meeting of the Park Commission and Plan Commission. Residents were allowed to speak in advance of the scheduled consideration of the recommendation to approve the plan at the combined meeting.

In addition to the public meetings, a community public opinion survey was created to obtain additional feedback from residents regarding the state of the Town parks, open spaces, and trails. The survey was made available on the Town website, and it was also distributed at several Town meetings in the summer of 2009, as well as at the public open house on September 21st. See **Appendix E** for the survey and results.

Needs Assessment: Recreation Standards Analysis

Table 5 depicts the NRPA recommended acreage standards for each type of park per 1,000 persons in the population, and the existing Town-owned active and accessible passive acreage per park category in Somers. Using the 2009 estimated population, **Table 5** indicates that the Town of Somers is far below both the acreage recommended by the NRPA guidelines and the adopted Somers standard with an aggregate 17.35 acres for recreational activity. This breaks down to 1.86 acres per 1,000 persons – well below the NRPA range of 6.25 to 10.50 acres of developed park and open space land per 1,000 persons, and Somers' standard of 10.50 acres per 1,000 persons.

Mini-parks are the smallest unit of parks and open space. **Table 5** depicts the NRPA recommended acreage for this type of park to be 0.25 – 0.50 acres per 1,000 persons. The Somers standard coincides with the high end of this standard at 0.50 acres per 1,000 persons. According to the inventory of existing public park facilities, Somers does not have any parks that classify as mini-parks. According to the calculation based on the 2009 estimated population, the Town should have 4.68 acres classified as mini-parks to satisfy the needs of residents.

Fabiano Park and the unnamed park in the Valley View Subdivision are the two developed neighborhood parks in Somers. At 2.00 acres per 1,000 persons, Somers' standard again coincides with the high end of the neighborhood park acreage provision recommended by NRPA (as shown in **Table 5**). To date, the two neighborhood parks in the Town account for 3.35 acres, or 0.36 acres per 1,000 persons, far below the standard.

The 14.00 acres of parkland south of Somers Town Hall serve as the only developed community park in the Town. This calculates out to 1.50 acres of community parkland per 1,000 persons, far below the NRPA recommended 5 – 8 acres per 1,000 persons and the Somers standard of 8 acres (see **Table 5**). Petrifying Springs County Park also contains both active and passive recreational facilities typical of a community park. Since these facilities are readily accessible to the public, for the purpose of this study, Petrifying Springs County Park is considered to function as a community park. With roughly half of its 360 acres comprised of active and passive accessible recreational

parkland, the Petrifying Springs County Park acreage increases the available community park acreage in Somers to 20.72 acres per 1,000 persons, well above the Town standard.

There is not a clearly defined standard for the provision of special use area acreage. Somers does not currently have any parkland classified under this category in the Town park system.

Table 5
Active and Passive Accessible Acres in the Town of Somers' Public Park and Open Space Facilities

<u>Type of Park</u>	<u>NRPA Guidelines</u> (Acres per 1,000 persons)	<u>Somers Standard</u> (Acres per 1,000 persons)	<u>Public Park Facilities in the Town</u>			
			<u>Total Acres</u>	<u>Acres per 1,000 persons</u> (2009 estimated population) ¹	<u>Acres per 1,000 persons</u> (2015 projected population) ²	<u>Acres per 1,000 persons</u> (2020 projected population) ³
Mini Park	0.25 - 0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Neighborhood Park	1.00 - 2.00	2.00	3.35	0.36	0.33	0.31
Community Park	5.00 - 8.00	8.00	14.00	1.50	1.37	1.31
Special Use Area	Variable	Variable	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	6.25 - 10.50	10.50	17.35	1.86	1.70	1.62

¹ Based on the 2009-estimated population of 9,361 for the Town of Somers (See Table 2).

² Based on the 2015 projected population of 10,229 for the Town of Somers (See Table 2).

³ Based on the 2020 projected population of 10,692 for the Town of Somers (See Table 2).

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

In the fall of 2006 the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources published the 2005-2010 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The Plan provides insight into current trends, needs, and participation rates for outdoor recreation activities on a statewide level.

Data regarding recreation demand in the state was acquired via four separate survey sources: 1) The 1999-2004 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) and version 18 of the NSRE (called the Wisconsin Survey), which was conducted September to November, 2004; 2) The Outdoor Industry Foundation (OIF) 2002 Outdoor Recreation Participation & Spending Study, A State-by-State Perspective; 3) The Department of Tourism 2004 Wisconsin Advertising Awareness and Competitive Analysis Wave VIII Study (WAVE VIII); and 4) written, internet, and mail comments obtained at a series of eight public meetings held in 2005 to discuss barriers for increased outdoor use. The survey results include Wisconsin residents as well as visitors who recreate in Wisconsin.

According to the SCORP, the following ten outdoor recreation activities have the highest participation rates among Wisconsin outdoor recreation participants ages 16 and older:

1. Walking for pleasure
2. Family gathering
3. Viewing/photographing natural scenery
4. Gardening or landscaping for pleasure
5. Visiting nature centers, etc.
6. Driving for pleasure
7. Viewing/photographing other wildlife
8. Attending outdoor sports events
9. Picnicking
10. Sightseeing

These ten activities represent mainstream recreation activities that warrant facility design considerations for the future planning of Somers' park system. The Town's existing parks offer opportunities for only some of these activities, and the ranked list may help the Town prioritize facility development at recreation sites so that all of these activities can be adequately offered to residents in the future. With the majority of the activities on this list being passive or nature-based recreational activities, a review of this list is also a good reminder of the importance of meeting recreational demand while simultaneously preserving natural resources and the scenic beauty of the planning area.

The SCORP also assesses local recreational needs, and includes a summary of 373 local park and recreation plans on file from communities across the state as part of the WDNR recreation grants program. The assessment identifies the top planning recommendations resulting from this summary in the categories of park and open space acquisition needs, general recreation improvements, and new recreation developments. The needs identified in each category are as follows:

Park and Open Space Acquisition Needs:

- Community Parks
- Dog Parks
- Ice Age Trail
- Mini Parks
- Neighborhood Parks

General Recreation Improvements:

- ADA accessible facilities
- Athletic field upgrades and improvements
- Better signage
- Playground equipment upgrades
- Restroom upgrades

New Recreation Developments:

- Bike trails
- Boat launches

- Camping
- Disc golf courses
- Ice skating rinks
- Indoor recreation complexes
- Nature trails
- Park shelters
- Picnic areas
- Scenic drives
- Skateboard parks
- Sledding hills
- Soccer fields
- Swimming pools
- Tennis court development
- Trail connections
- Volleyball courts
- Water access
- Water trails
- Water spray parks

Overall, the results indicate a need for safer and easier access to existing facilities, and development of parks with a varied mix of both active and passive recreational activities. These recommendations should be taken into consideration as the Town prioritizes future park improvements and developments.

DNR Stewardship grant funding programs and priorities change on an annual basis. It is important to continually monitor funding programs and priorities and attempt to integrate SCORP priority projects into stewardship grant applications whenever possible.

Indication for Future Park and Recreation Facilities

An evaluation of existing parks, the facilities and recreational opportunities that they offer to residents, and the current population is important when assessing the immediate needs of the Town of Somers park system. An element of the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is an evaluation of the future needs of the Town. A future needs assessment can be used to assist Somers with planning and budgeting for future park improvement, acquisition and development. The future needs of the Town are determined both through an application of the recommended minimum acreage standards to a reliable population projection, as well as through an examination of the locations of existing facilities in comparison to where the population density is located and where the potential population growth is projected to occur.

Somers' population is projected to grow steadily over the next ten plus years, with a 14% increase expected from 2009 to 2020, as shown in Table 2. Comparing the future population to the Somers recommended park acreage standard (also the high end of the acreage guidelines recommended by NRPA) of 10.50 acres per 1,000 persons, Somers should provide and maintain 112.27 acres of parks and open space in the year 2020. Currently 17.35 acres of parks are available for public use. Therefore, if the population of Somers grows as projected through the year 2020, the number of

acres of developed parkland currently provided by the Town is vastly insufficient to meet the established standard.

Even though the numbers would seem to project a considerable deficiency, the outlook for the near future of the Somers park system is considerably more positive. The main reason for this outlook is the considerable amount of vacant parkland that is already under the control of the Town of Somers, and proposed to be developed as future parkland. The Town in fact has a beneficial jumpstart on the development of the vacant parkland as it is also currently working with the Ruekert/Mielke project team to finalize conceptual designs for these properties, in conjunction with the development of the CORP. An additional 60.90 acres of vacant parkland has already been acquired and is currently in the conceptual planning stage for development as park and open space land. Adding 60.90 acres of useable recreational land would increase the total acreage of parkland in Somers to 78.25, or 7.32 acres per 1,000 persons based on the projected 2020 Town population. This total would fall within the acreage range recommended by NRPA, but would still be below the 10.5 acres per 1,000 persons required by the Town standard. This means that if Somers develops all of the currently vacant land in Town that is proposed for parks, there will still be an acreage deficiency in the near future. The Town should therefore not hold off on looking to add more park and open space land. Along with a larger population, future development absorbs vacant land. If properly planned for, Somers will be able to provide more acreage and facilities to the park system to remain ahead of population growth.

The proximity of Town residents to the parks and open space facilities is another important indicator of how well the existing facilities meet the needs of the community. The easiest way to show the geographical need for parks and open spaces is to create maps indicating the service areas, or distance people will travel to use the parks. The Town of Somers uses different service areas based on the types of parks as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6
Park Types and Corresponding Service Areas

<u>Type of Park</u>	<u>Service Area</u>
Mini-Park	¼ mile
Neighborhood Park	½ mile
Community Park	3 miles
Special Use Area	Variable

Maps have been created to illustrate which areas of the Town are served adequately by existing neighborhood and community parks based on these typical service radii. **Map 3** illustrates the location of the two neighborhood parks in the Town and the standard one half-mile service area around them. The map also shows the same service radii around an existing community park and County park because for the purpose of this study each of these larger parks also functions as a

neighborhood park for residents within the service area around them. A service radius is also projected around Somers Elementary School because the school grounds contain some of the facilities typical of a neighborhood park. In some instances the radii are interrupted and do not extend beyond arterial roadways or railroad lines, because these transportation routes are considered to be pedestrian barriers that do not allow for safe travel, especially by children, to and from neighborhood parks.

The service area of the existing community park is shown on **Map 4**. A service area is also shown around Petrifying Springs County Park on the map because it functions as a community park. This map illustrates that almost the entire Town, except for several small isolated areas, is sufficiently serviced by community parks.

Specific recommendations for future park and recreation facility locations are described in Section IX.