

# The Recreation and Leisure Framework Plan

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City of Shaker Heights

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ACP-VISIONING & PLANNING, LTD.

# The Recreation and Leisure Framework Plan

## Table of Contents

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<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
The Recreation and Leisure Framework Plan	
<b>The Process</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Describes the steps taken to develop the Framework	
<b>The Framework</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Provides an overview of recommended initiatives	
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>1.13</b>
Identifies key players and funding strategies	
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>1.15</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix A: Principals for Recreation Framework</b>	<b>A.1</b>
<b>Appendix B: Recommended Actions</b>	<b>B.1</b>
Provides a detailed description of the Framework's 33 initiatives	
<b>Appendix C: Focus Group Summaries</b>	<b>C.1</b>
Summarizes the results of the Focus Group interviews	
<b>Appendix D: Public Outreach</b>	<b>D.1</b>
Includes copies of fliers and newsletters for the public	
<b>Appendix E: Public Workshop Summaries</b>	<b>E.1</b>
Summarizes the results of the first two public workshops	
<b>Appendix F: Case Studies and Best Practices</b>	<b>F.1</b>
Research and best practices of various initiatives on regional cooperation arrangements and the use of natural grass and synthetic fields in various communities	
<b>Appendix G: Field Data</b>	<b>G.1</b>
Research on the usage of fields in Shaker Heights	
<b>Appendix H: Cuyahoga County Greenprint</b>	<b>H.1</b>
Map of the Cuyahoga County Greenprint	
<b>Appendix I: Thornton Park Pool Survey</b>	<b>I.1</b>
Results of 2004 pool survey	
<b>Appendix J: Skate Park Working Group Report</b>	<b>J.1</b>
2004 Report summary	
<b>Appendix K: Horseshoe Lake Master Plan</b>	<b>K.1</b>
Maps of the Horseshoe Lake Master Plan	

References to the appropriate appendices are included in the report.

## The Recreation and Leisure Framework Plan

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In 2004 the City invited the Schools, the Library and all interested residents to work together to develop a Recreation Framework to meet community needs for now and into the future. We recognize that recreation plays a large role in our daily lives, and that Shaker's facilities need to change with the times.

Over five hundred residents participated in the Recreation and Leisure Assessment through focus groups, brainstorming sessions, and public workshops. They suggested and prioritized hundreds of ideas covering all facets of recreation and leisure - from sports to the arts.

To manage the process, the City empowered a Task Force that included six residents plus representatives from City Council, the School Board and the Library Board. The Task Force synthesized the public's suggestions into thirty-three short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives. This report discusses the short and medium-term initiatives. The chart on page 1.14 summarizes the various initiatives, while Appendix B discusses them in more detail. These initiatives constitute the core of the Recreation and Leisure Framework (the Framework).



The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes is a year round facility dedicated to wildlife education.

### **A. The Process**

The 9-month Recreation and Leisure Assessment process began with multiple focus group interviews, and moved to three public workshops, plus monthly meetings with the Task Force.

#### **Focus Groups**

Focus group meetings with dozens of community activists and leaders representing field sports, skating, the arts, swimming, senior activities, the schools and neighborhoods, were the basis for the public workshops. Strong themes related to recreation and leisure emerged from the focus groups that were later confirmed at the public workshops. They include:

- Concerns for the physical condition of existing facilities, in particular playing fields, and the lack of facilities and programs for young residents and seniors;
- A strong preference for improving facilities rather than building new ones;
- Support for regional facility sharing; and
- Recognition that well-run facilities and programs can spur economic development.

A summary of the focus group interviews is located in Appendix C.



The first public workshop deliberately involved students from Shaker's middle and high schools.



### Public Workshops #1 and #2

At the first public workshop, residents, including middle and high school students, generated hundreds of ideas for recreation and leisure in Shaker (see Appendix E). At the second workshop, participants rated and prioritized the ideas developed at the first workshop.

These two workshops reinforced the themes so clearly expressed in the focus groups. They led specifically to the identification of fourteen initiatives, which are listed to the left. The full results of these two workshops are included in Appendix E.

#### Public Workshop #2

The 14 initiatives were ranked in the following order at the second public workshop:

1. Fields
2. New or Improved Pool
3. Walking, Hiking, and Biking Trails
4. Skateboard Park
5. Basketball Courts
6. Multi-purpose Center
7. Ice Skating Rink
8. Parks
9. Outdoor Performance Space
10. Dog Park
11. Community and Cultural Center
12. Fitness Center
13. Teen Meeting Place
14. Tennis Courts



Public workshop #2 participants

### The Task Force Meetings

The Task Force met once a month from April to October 2004 to shape a Framework, based on input from the public process and staff research. In two workshops held in August and September 2004, the Task Force reviewed all proposals advanced by the public and agreed on 33 specific actions, which were sorted by priority into short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions. These actions constitute the Framework.

### Public Workshop #3

The preliminary Framework was presented at the third and final public workshop; public feedback was encouraged.

The meeting drew ice hockey, skateboarding, swimming and field sports advocates. It also attracted Thornton Park area residents expressing concerns that the proposed ideas could negatively impact their neighborhood.

The advocates for new playing fields and a second sheet of ice petitioned the Task Force requesting their projects receive priority consideration and increased funding in the final Framework. The Taskforce agreed that the City and School District should work together to consider multiple options for field development, maintenance and access. It also agreed that the Framework must maintain a wide focus in order to address the multiple needs of residents.

### Shaker Lakes Parkland

The Shaker Lakes Parkland, including Southerly Park and Horseshoe Lake Park, form an important open space reserve for the City and a link to regional greenways. Historically parks and lakes have been a major component of Shaker Heights recreation, and one that sets it apart from the surrounding communities.



## B. The Framework

The Recreation and Leisure Framework recommends a wide range of recreational and leisure improvements that addresses the needs residents of all ages and reflects the ideas gathered throughout the public process.

The Framework follows two primary guidelines. First, funding for the short-term initiatives will come from the \$1 million City commitment plus whatever funds are allocated by the School District. An additional \$1 million are earmarked for improvements to the City's public pool; see separate discussion on page 1.10. Public dollars will be leveraged against grants and other sources of funding in order to increase the total resources available to fund the initiatives.

Second, facilities, not programming, are the focus of this Assessment. Both the community and the Task Force focused on a variety of high-quality recreational opportunities woven throughout the community. The Framework recommendations are divided into four initiative categories: Parks and Trails; Fields; a Multi-Purpose Park; and Arts & Culture. Fields (new and improved) are scattered throughout the community. The other improved and new facilities are located, for the most part, in four areas of the community, allowing residents easy access to many opportunities.

*Area #1, the Shaker Lakes Parklands*, contains most of the parks-focused improvements. It is also the hub of the City's existing and proposed trails network.

*Area #2, the Shaker Towne Centre Area*, is appropriate for all initiatives. Its potential to serve as a vibrant community and cultural core will be explored as economic development opportunities continue to expand. In the first year, the Task Force recommends drainage improvements to the playing field and expanded exercise equipment in the Community Building.

*Area #3, Thornton Park*, is where new and existing uses are merged in a re-designed, multi-purpose park.

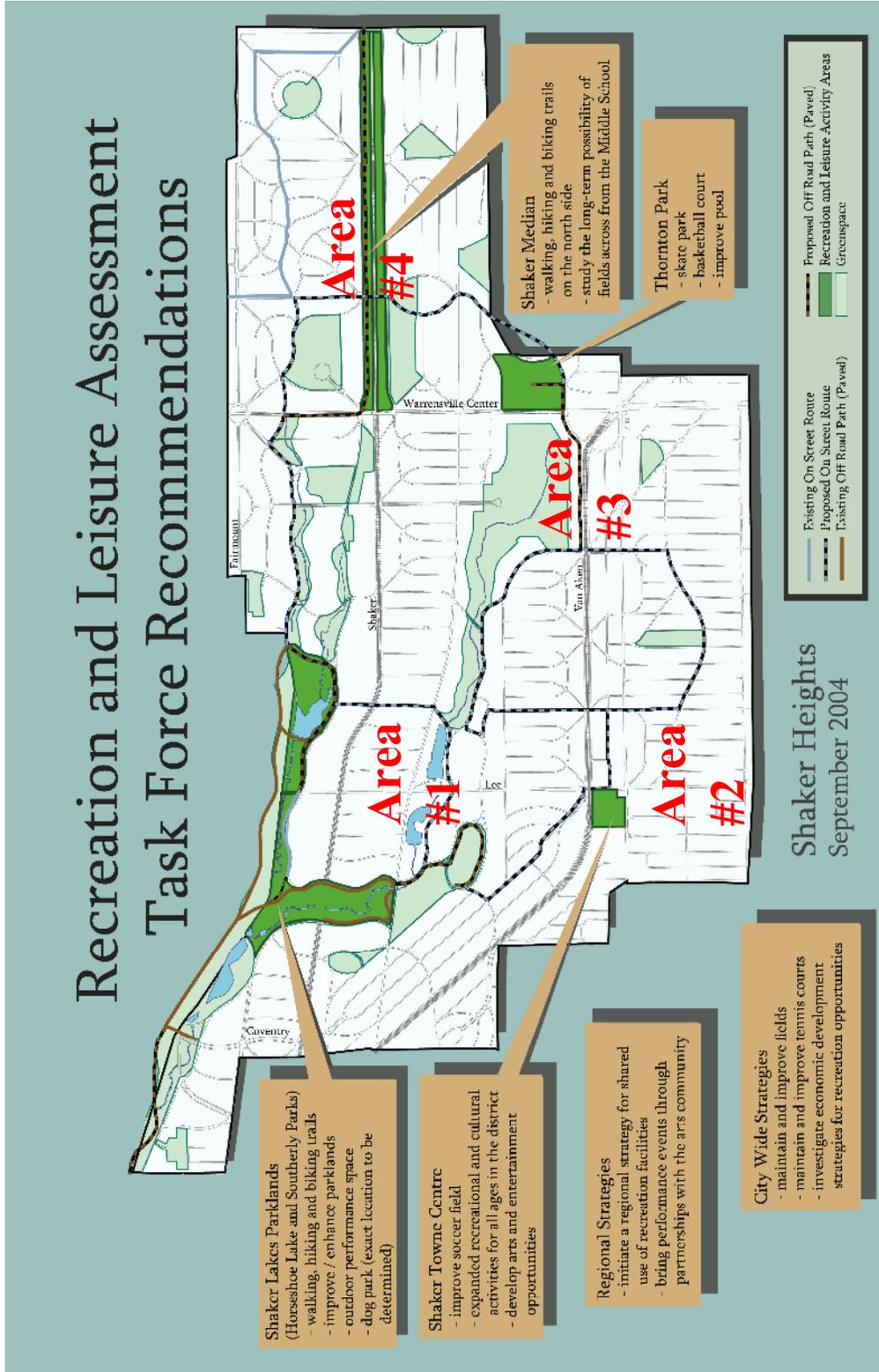
*Area #4, the Shaker Median*, space set aside for future needs, including new fields and trails.

### Around the World Park

Areas such as the one surrounding the Public Library already concentrate a variety of leisure related facilities, from the Community Building to playing fields.



# Recreation and Leisure Assessments Task Force Recommendations



**Illustration #1: The Four Initiative Areas.** The four initiative areas identified by the Task Force capture and prioritize the ideas presented by the public. The actions are described in detail in Appendix B.

**Parks and Trails**



Shaker's system of existing trails is positioned to become the hub of a larger regional network planned for Cuyahoga County.

**Parks and Trails**

After identifying and ranking priorities at the second public workshop, Walking, Hiking, and Biking Trails ranked as the third preferred initiative. The need to renovate and improve the City's parks and lakes was also mentioned throughout the process. Because of their similarities, the Task Force merged these two initiatives.

The emphasis on Parks and Trails reflects a national trend. Walking and bicycling are popular activities that all residents can enjoy at relatively low cost, with minimal physical exertion, and without highly sophisticated equipment. The 2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment found that walking outdoors is the single most popular activity in the United States. The Task Force recommendations for Parks and Trails actions are:



Walking and bicycling are popular with residents of all ages.

**Short-term Actions**

- Create a network of marked bike-lanes in existing roads to take full advantage of Shaker's attractive network of streets.
- Continue ongoing efforts to improve the existing off road network of all-purpose trails. These two networks will link the City's parks, schools and major destinations.
- Link Shaker's trails to the trail networks of adjacent communities. Use City dollars to leverage grants from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. All trail networks should reinforce the regional system envisioned by the Cuyahoga County Greenprint Framework already adopted by Shaker Heights.
- An exciting Master Plan for Horseshoe Lake Park can begin the process of upgrading all Shaker Parks, with possible enhancements such as a sculpture park, boat docks, new picnic pavilions and winter ice skating opportunities.



Horseshoe Lake Master Plan public meeting

**Medium-Term Actions**

- Expand regional dialogue on issues of shared development and maintenance of parks and trails, involving in the process civic organizations such as the Shaker Lakes Nature Center, Eco-City Cleveland and the Metroparks.
- Develop a master plan for Southerly Park, which could include a dog park.



**Horseshoe Lake**

Horseshoe Lake is one of the City's most beautiful green spaces, yet many of its features are difficult to see and enjoy.



### Fields

During the public workshops, issues related to playing fields emerged as the highest priority, with an emphasis on improving and repairing existing natural grass fields. A petition presented to the Task Force and signed by 900 residents advocating the conversion of grass into synthetic fields confirmed that demand for fields is strong and concern for maintenance and access to them is considerable.

According to a recent inventory, the City and Shaker Schools operate a total of fifteen playing fields. The City owns four fields, and the Schools own eleven. All of these are grass fields and their use in recent years has increased dramatically. School uses for the fields are for Middle School, High School Freshmen, Junior Varsity and Varsity sports teams. City uses include Men's softball, Girl's softball, Parent pitch T-ball, soccer, field hockey and lacrosse leagues. Independent Associations such as Shaker Youth Baseball and Shaker Youth Soccer use the fields for league games. The Task Force recommendations for Fields are:

### Short-Term Actions

- Immediate improvement and repair of a number of existing fields.
- Specific actions focus on major improvements to grass fields such as the City's field at the Library as well as repairing and reconfiguring a number of fields on school grounds, as determined with the School District.
- Staff members from the City and Shaker Schools have also started a review of current field utilization to recommend ways to optimize their use.

### Medium-Term Actions

- Continue discussion regarding the need for new and/or synthetic fields. The notion of diverting a substantial portion of the \$1million dollars to synthetic field conversion was considered, but deferred. Several funding partnerships for this purpose, or for new fields, are available and can be explored.



### A Multi-Purpose Park

Improving the existing swimming pool at Thornton Park emerged from the public workshops as the second highest priority. Thornton Park was also identified as a desirable place to locate two new facilities that also gained strong support in the public workshops: a basketball court and a skateboard park.

The introduction of these two new activities at Thornton Park calls for a transformation of the existing space into a more diversified park. The renovated pool, added activities, and overall redesign and re-landscaping of the Park together with an emphasis on buffering activities from surrounding residential areas is likely to re-establish Thornton Park as the center of recreational activities in Shaker Heights.



The redesigned pool and Thornton Park will offer amenities for residents of all ages.

#### Short-term actions

- Take immediate steps to transform Thornton Park into an attractive redesigned and re-landscaped multi-purpose recreation park. Develop a plan that includes the redesigned vehicular access and parking, the creation of landscaped buffers, and extended trails to the park.
- The first step is to renovate the existing swimming pool. Work is scheduled to start on a pool and park redesign in 2005. Estimated completion date for pool restoration is Summer 2006.
- Additional priority steps include addition of other activities such as basketball and skateboard, etc.
- Maximize usage of ice rink. Pursue regional partnerships to expand the range of opportunities available to residents through facilities sharing. For additional information on what these other communities have done see Appendix F.



Cooling off at Thornton Park.

**Medium-Term Actions**

- Study the addition of a second sheet of ice. This should enhance Shaker's position in its efforts to develop a regional facility sharing agreement and make financial sense.



The ice skating rink at Thornton Park is one of Shaker's best-known and used facilities.



The Shaker Community Building.

### Arts and Culture

Because the ideas related to arts and culture generated at the first public workshop were more programmatic in nature, they were ranked lower on the list of initiatives at the second public workshop. The Task Force also recognized that Shaker Heights is located in a region rich with cultural opportunities within close proximity – which are heavily patronized by Shaker residents - thereby raising the issue of duplication of services with limited resources.

Several ideas, however, focused on improving facilities at the Community Building for community and cultural activities. The Community Building is located at Shaker Towne Centre, an area that currently is the focus of major redevelopment. Because many of the ideas are more likely to be implemented by the private sector (such as an Internet café serving as a youth gathering place), focusing on the Shaker Towne Centre area provides the opportunity to link recreation and leisure with economic development. Task Force recommendations for Arts and Culture are:

#### Short-Term Actions

- Expand activities and programs at the Community Building (transform the basement into a fitness area) and expand and promote the teen center currently hosted at the Shaker Public Library, as immediate actions.
- Coordinate with economic development efforts to introduce recreational and cultural facilities into the overall development of the Towne Centre.
- Collaborate with other Heights governments to identify any regionally unmet performing arts needs and seek a shared regional solution. The Task Force discussed at length the role performing arts should have in the context of recreation and leisure in Shaker Heights, yet expressed strong concerns about investing in a performing arts facility (as suggested by the public) in a region already rich in such facilities.

#### Medium-term Actions

- Examine conversion of the Community Building into a community and cultural facility.

### C. Implementation

The matrix on the following page provides an at-a-glance view of the Task Force’s recommendation for the distribution of the \$1 million. It also lists what type of additional funds can be leveraged to implement the Framework’s short-term actions. Implementation of the entire Framework, however, will require funding beyond the \$1 million set aside by the City.

Clearly, the success of this Framework rests on partnerships, collaboration, leveraging funds and cooperation among many groups. While the City will take the leadership role in the implementation of the Framework, the continued efforts of the Shaker Schools, Library, youth sports organizations and private sector and civic organizations are pivotal. City Council will also continue to carefully balance recreation and leisure needs with the core services critical to the safety, health, and well being of Shaker residents. This makes leveraging City funds with grants and public and private partnerships all the more important.



**One-time Fund Investments**

Initiative	Cost	Possible Maximum Grant Funding
<b>Parks and Trails</b>		
Implement a network of marked bike-lanes in the existing right of way to connect recreational locations and parks.	\$50,000	
Build paved bike trails connecting with existing trails within the community and with adjacent communities.	\$150,000 <sup>1</sup>	\$300,000
Implement recommendations of Horseshoe Lake Park Master Plan.	\$180,000 <sup>1</sup>	\$300,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$380,000</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>
<b>Fields</b>		
Improve and repair natural grass field at Library and fields at schools.	\$300,000	\$250,000 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>
<b>A Multi-purpose Park</b>		
Develop plans for the transformation of Thornton Park into a diversified and attractive multi-purpose park. Redesign vehicle access and parking, buffer and landscape, add proposed activities, and connect to trail system. Consider other activities attractive to residents.	\$25,000	
Repair and improve pool	\$1,000,000	
Build a skateboard park at Thornton Park as part of the reorganization.	\$175,000	\$5,000 <sup>3</sup>
Build a basketball court at Thornton Park as part of the reorganization.	\$75,000	
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,275,000</b>	
<b>Community and Culture</b>		
Take the lead with other Heights governments to identify any underserved areas in the performing arts arena and then address regionally.	\$25,000	
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,980,000</b>	<b>\$855,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Represents matching grant from the State of Ohio. The \$150,000 proposed for trails development and for improvements to Horseshoe Lake Park are to leverage State grants. The grant program is a 20% local/80% state match for projects.

<sup>2</sup> A portion of this amount represents Block Grant funding potentially available for Lomond Field and USA Soccer and NFL grants available for school fields.

<sup>3</sup> Represents grant from the Tony Hawk Foundation with support from local skateboarding community.

## **Acknowledgements**

The City of Shaker Heights would like to thank all the Members of the Recreation and Leisure Assessment Taskforce for their time, effort and help in creating this Framework. Without their insight and hard work, it would not have been possible.

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*We would also like to acknowledge the City Staff who worked on this project:*

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*Leslie Grodin, Director, Communications and Outreach Department*

*Kelly Beck, Senior Administrative Assistant*

*Kauser Razvi, Project Planner*

*We would also like to acknowledge the staff of the Shaker Heights School board that worked on this project:*

*David Puffer, Executive Director*