

Parks and Open Space

Summary of Current Park Facilities

Plain Township recently purchased the Diamond Community Park, bringing its total parkland area to 60 acres. When looking at the National Recreation and Park Association’s recommended community park standard of 16 to 18 acres per 1,000 people, Plain Township would need 572 to 644 acres of park and recreation facilities to meet the needs of its 35,750 residents. Based on this standard, it would seem that there is an obvious need for additional parkland. But this is before taking into account park and recreation facilities offered at the Plain Local Schools, nearby parks of the Cities of Canton and North Canton as well as the trails and greenways of the Stark County Park District.

The Plain Local Schools recreational facilities include 8 football fields, 22 baseball fields, 1 softball field, 2 soccer fields, 8 tennis courts, 5 basketball courts, 2 tracks, 1 volleyball court and 7 playgrounds. This equates to approximately 68 acres of recreational area. Taking into account parks in Canton and North Canton located within close proximity to Plain Township, there are 429 additional acres of park area available for use by Plain Township’s residents.

Park and Recreation Facilities Available to Plain Township Residents

	<i>Number of Parks and Recreation Facilities</i>	<i>Size in Acres</i>
Plain Township	2	60
Plain Local Schools	11	68
Canton	12	390
North Canton	13	89
Total	38	607

All totaled there are approximately 607 acres of park and recreation facilities locally and in adjacent communities available for use by Plain Township’s residents. This does not include the Stark County Park District’s plans to develop several existing and proposed trails and connectors throughout the Township. So while there are limited park and recreation facilities offered by Plain Township, there are plenty of opportunities for Township residents to enjoy and use facilities in the immediate area. As the Township grows, it may want to encourage the preservation of open space conservation districts through the dedication of land.

Additional Open Space Needs

The preservation of substantial areas of open space over the long term may also require an investment of public funds. State funding is available through the Clean Ohio Act and other programs, but competition among all the communities in the state for these funds limits the likelihood of Plain Township receiving enough state grants to adequately protect important natural areas.

Another consideration is placing a dedicated open space levy on the ballot for the purpose of generating local funds for open space preservation. A successful example of this approach is Anderson Township in Hamilton County, Ohio. Over the past eleven years, this open space program has purchased or otherwise obtained easements for more than 500 acres of undeveloped land.

Anderson Township uses a volunteer Greenspace Advisory Committee to administer its open space purchase program. The committee includes between ten and twelve members who evaluate purchase options on property and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The committee includes an attorney for legal advice and contracts other professionals for real estate, title work, and geotechnical evaluations of properties when evaluating a property for purchase. All property that is purchased is preserved as unimproved open space. It is not made a part of the Anderson Township Park system. The funding and administration of the open space program is entirely separate from the parks and recreation department. In Plain Township, because of the scarcity of remaining open land and limited resources, it may not be appropriate to maintain such a separation between open space and public parks.

Future Park and Open Space Mapping

As stated in the Land Use Planning section, much of Plain Township has developed with suburban uses expanding from the cities of Canton and North Canton. As growth continues to expand from Canton and North Canton, the rural areas of the Township are developing with other uses. Planning ahead to preserve open spaces, create new recreation and green spaces, and provide linkages between them will help ensure that rural characteristics of the Township will not disappear entirely. Developing parks and open space in the right areas of the Township can also help with natural resource and stream corridor protection, floodplain management, cultural resource protection, and aquifer recharge area protection.

Approximately 4,700 acres of undeveloped land remain. Some of this land is actively farmed, some is vacant, and other parcels contain woods, wetlands, and other natural features. All of it is important to maintaining and enhancing the character and attractiveness of Plain Township. Much of this remaining undeveloped land is also located in areas key to protecting the local environment and the health, safety, and

welfare of current and future Township residents. Providing additional recreation space is necessary both to accommodate the needs of a growing and diverse population, and to strengthen the Township's character and identity.

The *Upper Muskingum Ecosystem Analysis: Plain Township* report prepared by Davey Resource Group analyzes these areas in detail in terms of their environmental and ecological significance. The data prepared in this study will be invaluable to the Township administration in deciding how and where to protect the area's environmentally sensitive areas through park development, open space preservation, and development regulations.

PKG used data from the *Upper Muskingum Ecosystem Analysis: Plain Township* report to prepare a generalized priority map for future parkland and open space preservation. The first step was to identify all vacant or undeveloped areas two acres or larger from the current land use map. These areas were then cross-tabulated with the following factors:

- Wetland areas;
- 100-year floodplain;
- Aquifer recharge areas; and
- Stark County parks trail system.

The vacant and undeveloped areas are ranked according to how many of the above characteristics it contains. For example, a property that contains wetlands and is within the 100-year floodplain ranks higher than a property that only contains wetlands. The resulting thematic map can be used as a tool for selecting future park development areas. Many other factors will eventually be considered as the Township moves ahead with park planning. But this analysis yields valuable information on what areas can satisfy park needs while achieving natural resource and environmental goals as well.

This general priority map should be useful to the Township in deciding which areas to focus open space preservation efforts on, and also where linkages between existing and future parks can be created. The Land Use Policy Area recommendations contained in the Land Use Planning section of this report outline regulations and other methods the Township could use to promote and protect open space and natural assets. For more detailed environmental site analysis, the Township should rely on the data presented in the *Upper Muskingum Ecosystem Analysis: Plain Township* report. This information can form the basis and justification for more stringent regulation of development through the R-6 Planned Unit Development zoning district, or for selected property acquisition through eminent domain.

Existing Parks Inventory

Plain Township Parks and Recreation Department

Plain Township's 5 Year Draft Plan addresses parks and recreation needs and recommendations for maintaining and developing existing parks as well as acquiring future open space. The Township recently purchased the Diamond Community Park and will need 10 years to pay off the \$2.2 million purchase cost. The Township generates fees through tournaments. This money then goes to the general fund to cover maintenance costs.

The Township plans to maintain the current facilities, develop some passive recreational uses and pursue funding to acquire and develop additional parkland and recreational programs. In addition, the Township would like to work with other Parks and Recreation Departments for further enhancement of the park facilities. One such possibility is working with the Stark County Park District to create a linear park system.

Plain Township Parks and Recreation

	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Facility Description</i>
Alpine Community Park (Alpine Street & Pinetree Ave NE)	18	Active (walking, running, tennis, volleyball, basketball, picnicking and nature observations)
Diamond Community Park (Diamond St & Middlebranch Ave NE)	42	Active (indoor and outdoor soccer, baseball/softball and football fields)
TOTAL	60	

Source: Plain Township Parks and Recreation, 2000

Plain Local Schools

There are 11 elementary, middle and high schools offering recreational facilities to Plain Township residents during non-school hours. It is estimated that the schools have approximately 68.4 acres of recreation facilities. The types of facilities, their space requirements and service radius are listed below.

Plain Local Schools Recreational Facilities

	<i>Football Field</i>	<i>Baseball Field</i>	<i>Softball Field</i>	<i>Soccer Field</i>	<i>Tennis Court</i>	<i>Basketball</i>	<i>Track</i>	<i>Volleyball Court</i>	<i>Play-ground</i>
Avondale Elementary 3933 Eaton Road, NW		1				2			1
Barr Elementary 2000 47 th Street, NE	2	8							1
Day Elementary 3101 38 th Street, NW		1							1
Frazer Elementary 3900 Frazer Avenue, NW		1		1					1
Plain Center Elementary 1000 55 th Street, NE		1							1
Warstler Elementary 2500 Schneider Road, NE		2							1
Pleasant View School/Arts 3000 Columbus Road, NE	1	2							1
Middlebranch Middle 7500 Middlebranch Avenue, NE	1	2				2			
Taft Middle 3829 Guilford Avenue, NW	1	2				1	1	1	
Glenoak Career Center 2300 Schneider Road, NE	1	1	1	1	4				
Glenoak High School 1015 44 th Street, NW	2	1			4		1		
Total # of Facilities	8	22	1	2	8	5	2	1	7
Total Acres by Facility	12	40.8	1.5	3.4	1.3	.3	8.6	.1	.4
Total Acres	68.4								

Source: Plain Local Schools, 2000

Facility Standards for Plain Local Schools Recreation Facilities

	<i>Space Requirement</i>	<i>Service Radius</i>
Football Field	Minimum 1.5 Acres	15 - 30 minutes travel time
Baseball Field	Official 3.0 - 3.85 Acres Little League 1.2 Acres	¼ - ½ mile
Softball Field	1.5 - 2.0 Acres	¼ - ½ mile
Soccer Field	1.7 - 2.1 Acres	1 - 2 miles
Tennis Court	Minimum 7,200 square feet single court area	¼ - ½ mile
Basketball Court	2,400 - 3,036 square feet	¼ - ¼ mile
Track	4.3 Acres	15 - 30 minute travel time
Volleyball Court	Minimum 4,000 square feet	½ - 1 mile
Playground	2,500 square feet - 1 acre	Less than ¼ mile

Source: Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, A Publication of the National Recreation and Park Association, 1995.

Canton Parks

The City of Canton has 12 parks totaling 390 acres that are in close proximity to Plain Township and can be used by its residents.

Canton Parks Accessible to Plain Township Residents

	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Features</i>
Arboretum Park 3220 38 th St, NW	42	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	shelters, athletic field, river/stream, play apparatus
Bors Field 2665 Harrisburg Rd, NE	20	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	athletic fields
Covered Bridge Park 4500 Guilford Ave, NW	62	Large Urban Park (serves entire community)	shelter, athletic fields
Harmont Park 2701 Harmont Ave, NE	24	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	shelter, athletic fields, play apparatus, game courts, walking track
Herbruck Park and Annex 1900-2500 Royal Ave, NE	24	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	play apparatus, game courts
Maple Park 2500 Maple Ave, NE	20	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	shelters, athletic fields, play apparatus, footbridge
Martindale Park 4001 Martindale Rd, NE	19	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	shelters, athletic field, play apparatus
Reifsnyder Park 1855 Spangler Rd, NE	30	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	open space
Spiker Park 3300 Westmoreland Blvd, NW	27	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	pond and stone bridge
Stadium Park 1200-2500 Stadium Park Dr, NW	76	Large Urban Park (serves entire community)	shelters, athletic fields, play apparatus, game courts, fountains, footbridges, walking track
Carl O. Weis Park 2600 Harvard Ave, NW	26	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	Shelter, fountains, athletic fields, game courts
Willig Field 2300 30 th St, NE	20	Community Park (0.5 to 3.0 mile service radius)	athletic fields, fountains
Total	390		

Source: Canton Parks, 2000

North Canton Parks

The City of North Canton has 5 parks, totaling 39 acres that are in close proximity to Plain Township and can be used by its residents.

North Canton Parks Accessible to Plain Township Residents

<i>Park Name</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Dogwood Park 7 th Street NE	12	Village/Citywide	Woodlands/arbo- retum Shelters or lodge Pool or beach Play apparatus Athletic fields Game courts	Picnicking Swimming Games and sports Skating Nature study
Price Park West Maple Street	19	Village/Citywide	Woodlands/arbo- retum Shelters or lodge Play apparatus Athletic fields Game courts	Picnicking Games and sports Fishing Hiking and riding
Schneider Park Clearmount Avenue SE	3	Neighborhood	River or stream Woodlands/arbo- retum Play apparatus Athletic fields Game courts	Picnicking Games and sports
Woodside Playground Woodside Avenue SE	2			
Eastwoods Park	3	Neighborhood	Shelters or lodge Play apparatus Game courts	Picnicking Games and sports
Hoover Nature Park Easton Road	50	Citywide	Playground Nature walk Bike trail	Picnicking Games Hiking Playground
Total	89			

Source: Inventory of Public Recreational Facilities Stark County, 1990, Municipal Park Facilities North Canton

Stark County Park District

The Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan identifies several proposed trails and greenways that traverse through Plain Township. According to the Stark County Park District (SCPD), the purpose of the plan is not so much to develop a county trail system, but to preserve greenspace. The SCPD expects that the majority of trails and greenways identified in the following table will be completed in five years.

Proposed Stark County Trails & Greenways Located within Plain Township

<i>Trail/Greenway</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Location</i>
Mt Pleasant/ Dogwood Park Trail	Existing roadway/drainage basin to be improved with bike lanes along Mt. Pleasant from Jackson Township, under I-77, terminating at Dogwood Park	Plain Township North Canton
Hoover Park Connector	Proposed connection (roadway routes and greenway) linking area east of Hoover High School to town of Middlebranch and a north-south trail along the Middle Branch of the Nimishillen Creek	North Canton Plain Township
West Branch Trail	Existing north-south trail along the West Branch of the Nimishillen Creek, parallel to I-77 in need of improvements. It would link Dogwood Park and Hoover High School in North Canton to the Canton park system.	North Canton Plain Township Canton
Covered Bridge Trail	Proposed east-west connector through the northern suburbs of Canton, connecting the West Branch Trail at Covered Bridge Park to the Middlebranch Trail at Martindale Park.	Canton North Canton
Upper Middle Branch Trail	Existing north-south connector within the center of the County needing improvements. It connects the historic core of Hartville to downtown Canton at Riverside Park, parallels the Middle Branch of the Nimishillen Creek.	Canton Plain Township Lake Townships
Canton Downtown Connector	Proposed loop through the downtown business district, connecting this area to the West Branch Trail on the west and the Upper Middle Branch Trail on the east.	Canton
Stark Electric Railroad Trail	Proposed trail along historic electric rail connection that would provide an important link between the eastern portion of the county and downtown Canton.	Canton Plain Township Nimishillen Township Washington Township Louisville Alliance

Source: Stark County Trail and Greenway Master Plan, 1999

Recommendations

While there are many different active and traditional parks and recreation opportunities listed below, Plain Township has an opportunity to provide something more to its residents. Niche recreation amenities like a dog park, water park, or other unique attractions can set Plain Township parks apart from those already provided by Canton and North Canton. Likewise, preserving areas for passive recreation, or unused open space will help build the identity and character of the Township, and provide a higher quality of life for residents.

Plain Township has already made a significant investment and shown willingness to invest public funds for active recreation with the purchase and improvement of Diamond Community Park. The existing trend is toward concentrating active recreation amenities (soccer fields, ball parks, large playgrounds) into the existing active centers, while spreading passive recreation areas and open space more evenly throughout the Township. Continuing this trend for future park and open space planning will have many benefits to Plain Township, and will emphasize the natural resource and community character goals of the land use strategies of this plan.

Some open spaces that are extremely sensitive to development should be preserved entirely free of any construction. Wetlands and riparian areas along the Nimishillen Creek are some examples of this type of resource. Other open areas are not so sensitive, and could be developed as non-active Township parks with walking trails, bike paths, open unprogrammed play areas, dog parks, or nature centers. These kinds of parks would provide residents of Plain Township a recreation experience not readily available in the active playgrounds in the area.