Homer...is Home!

VILLAGE OF HOMER

Settled in 1832

Village of Homer Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan

2024-2028

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DRAFT
DECEMBER 2023

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This plan was prepared for the Village of Homer with assistance from Wightman. In accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Guidelines for the development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans.

Introduction

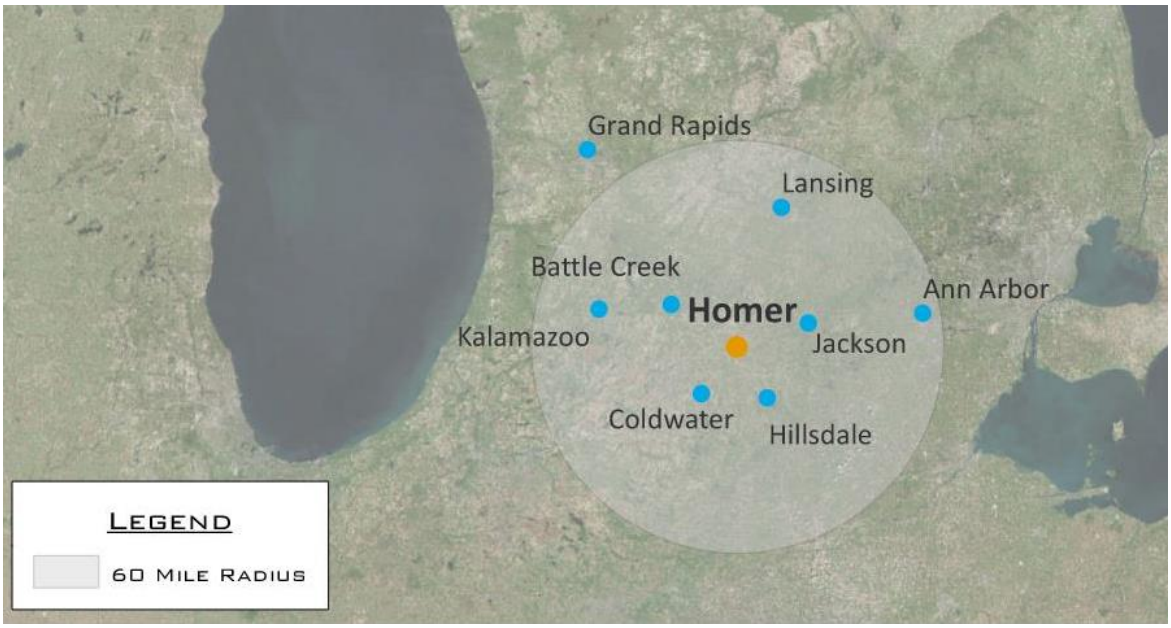
The Village of Homer's park system was developed and coordinated into a 5-year plan from 1999 to 2004 with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Youth initiatives Program.

This Community Recreation Plan is a general, long-range development tool used to achieve and maintain a high-quality park, recreation and open-space system. It evaluates the needs of the community and makes strategic recommendations for recreation, beautification and economic development to be implemented over the next five years.

Community Description

The Village of Homer covers an area of approximately a square mile. The village is located within Calhoun County on the eastern shore of Homer Lake. The south branch of the Kalamazoo River cuts through the eastern part of the Village. Homer is located 9 miles south of Albion, 25 miles west of Jackson and 35 miles southeast of Battle Creek, Michigan with state highways M-60 and M-99 providing access to the Village. Homer is 30 minutes from downtown Jackson and 60 minutes from Kalamazoo and Lansing.

The service area of this recreation plan is confined to the Homer Village limits, covering approximately 1.45 square miles.



Plan Focus

The recreation plan was prepared for the Village of Homer. The plan focuses on providing recreation opportunities to residents of the Village of Homer through the acquisition, development, and maintenance of community-owned parks. While the primary focus is on providing the area's residents with recreation opportunities, improvements to the area's park system will benefit adjoining townships and nearby communities, schools, and visitors.

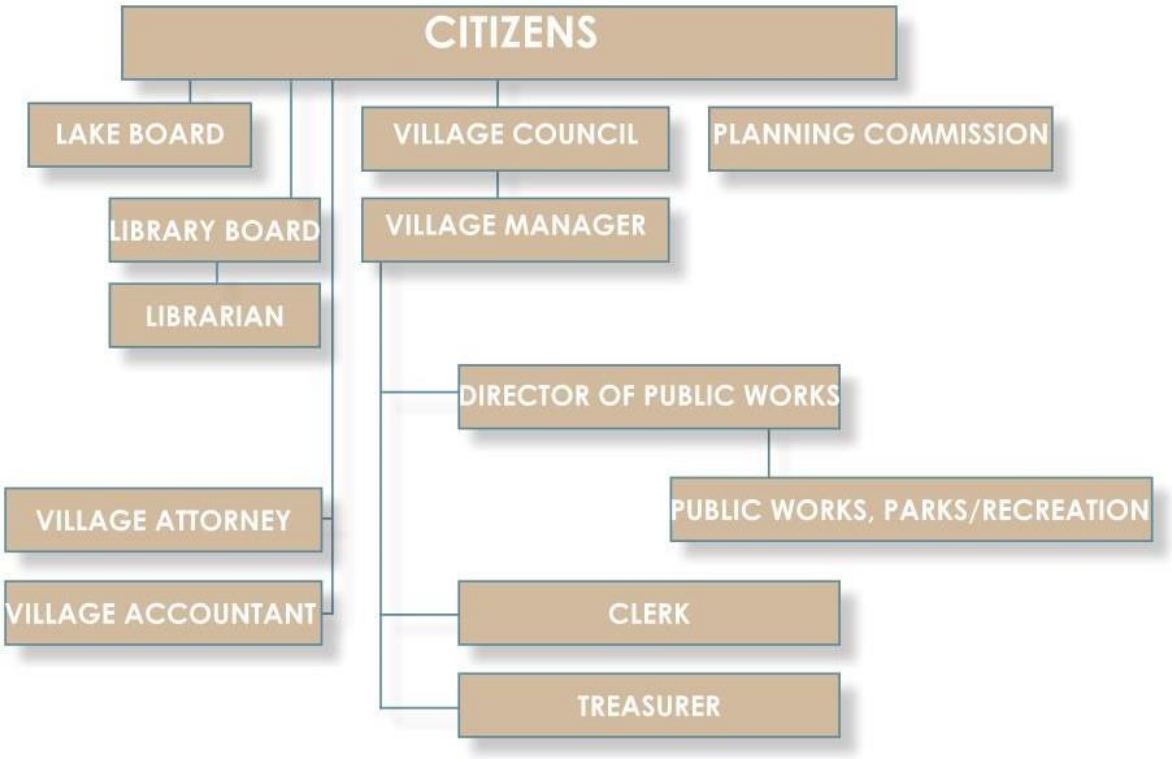
Administrative Structure

The following section identifies the administrative structure for the Village of Homer. It also describes the functions regarding parks and recreation for the Village. The Village of Homer is a General Law Village with a full time manager (Art Kale). The current Village Council members are: Brent Michael, Jeff Sherman, Jeff Daglow, David Shaw, Mike George, Scott Hrcka, and Kyle Renfroe.

The Village Council is responsible for appropriations of Parks and Recreation funding. The Department of Public Works is responsible for park maintenance and operates with an annual operating budget of $33,000.

A Kellogg Youth Initiative Program Grant for park improvements has allowed for the employment for a youth coordinator in the past for implementation of a grant, as well as coordinating other activities. The management of Homer Lake, an important natural feature of the Village, is handled by the Lake Management Board.

The following is the Organizational Chart for the Village of Homer.



The current year budget for parks and recreation operations and maintenance, recreation programming, and capital improvements is $33,000. This budget has seen increases that mirror inflation since the previous plan. The fiscal year runs from January 1st - December 31st.

The funding for the Parks and Recreation budget are provided by the Village of Homer. In addition the Village receives a portion of the Calhoun County Parks Millage, which equals approximately $5,000 per year. They expect to receive funding from private sources to match state funds. They also have a sinking fund and foundations.

Volunteer Programs and Community Relationships

The area recreation programs were established in 1980. Initial funding for the summer recreation programs was provided by a collaboration of the townships and Village through the Homer Community School system. Subsequently the municipal funding lapsed and the school system continues to sponsor the programs with the assistance of user fees.

Currently community volunteers oversee the administration of recreation programs with input from the School staff. The Homer Community Schools employs a director to administer the recreation programs.

Operation of the recreational programs and maintenance of the school recreational facilities are under the direction of the School District and volunteers. The Homer Community Schools has assumed the responsibility for the administration of some recreational programs in the Homer area. The school administration employs a Recreation Director from their annual budget. The programs are additionally funded through entry fees of participants and candy sales.

Recreation Inventory

The area recreation programs were established in 1980. Initial funding for the summer recreation programs was provided by a collaboration of the townships and Village through the Homer Community School system. Subsequently the municipal funding lapsed and the school system continues to sponsor the programs with the assistance of user fees.

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Below is a list of recreation facilities within the Village of Homer that are owned by the Village.

Roadside Park

Size: 2 acres

Facilities: This proposed park (currently undeveloped) is located adjacent to Webster Street along the Kalamazoo River.

Webster Street Park

Size: 1 acre

Facilities: This park is located in the northeastern section of Homer, is bounded by N Webster Street, E Platt Street, E Sprague Street and Sophia Street. The park contains a shelter, playground, sand volleyball courts, a parking lot, restroom facilities and walking paths.

Grist Mill Park

Size: 1 acre

Facilities: This park is located on the shores of the Kalamazoo River adjacent to M-60. It has two shelter areas, one for picnicking and one as a scenic overlook of the park and historic grist mill dam along with covered bridges, canoe launch, fishing pier, scenic pedestrian trail, park benches and picnic tables. The Kalamazoo River flows through Homer and offers opportunities for hiking, canoing and fishing. A 0.5 acre improved canoe launch is located along M-99/M-60 in Grist Mill Park.

Water Tower Park

Acres: .25 acres

Facilities: This park is located adjacent to Sophia Street and the Water Tower area along State Highway M-60. It acts as a gateway into downtown Homer. Current developments include parking, benches and a kiosk. It is part of the Linear Park and Trail System. There is a beautiful indoor Farmers Market in the park which was made possible with grants from the FireKeepers Local Revenue Sharing Board and the local Homer Area Community Foundation.

Lakefront Park

Size: 3.5 acres

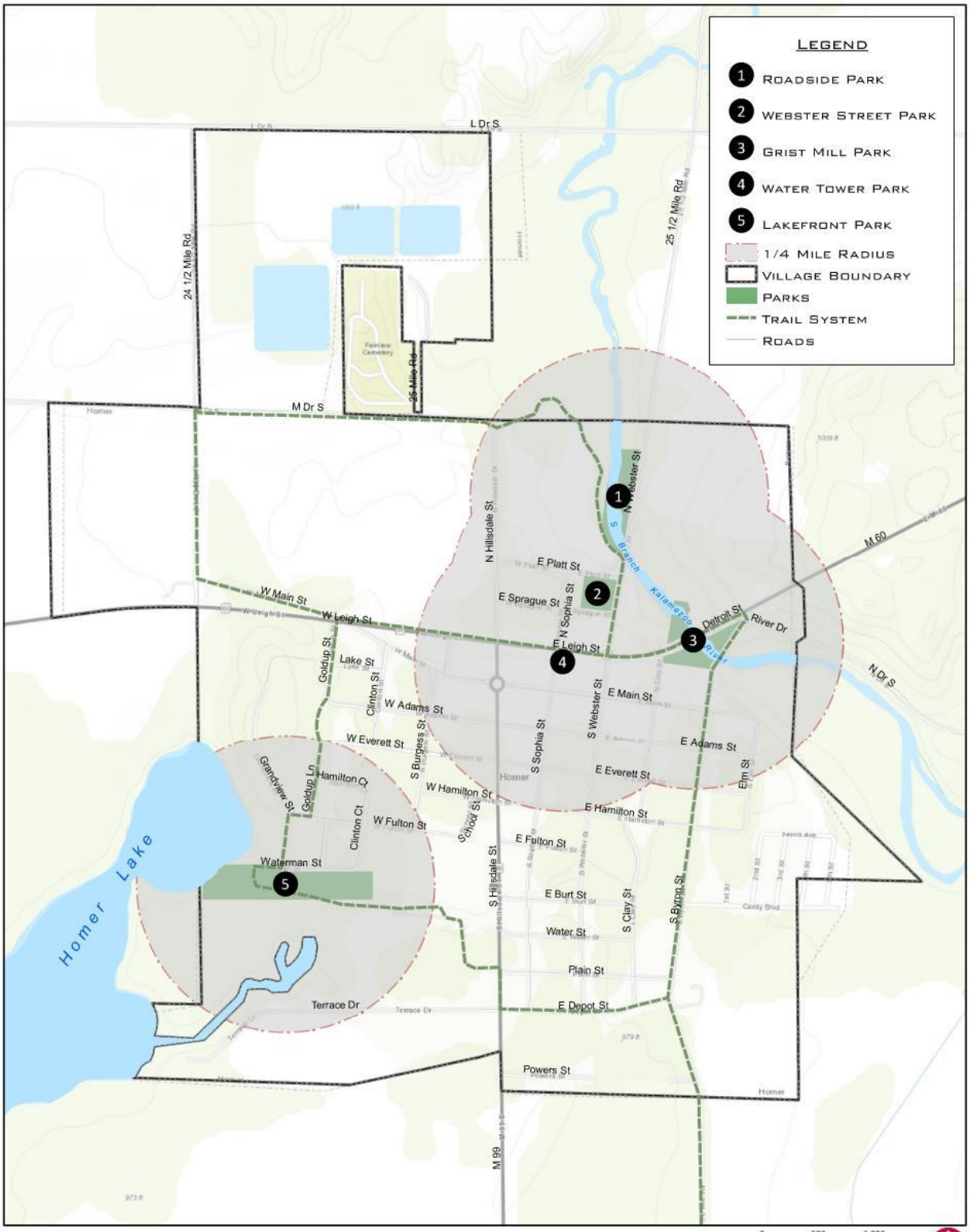
The largest of the Village parks at 3.5 acres, Lake Front Park offers Public access to Homer Lake for fishing, boat launch, picnicking, observation deck and parking lot.

Homer Linear Park

Size: 1.5 miles long

Facilities: This park is a linear park/trail which begins at Webster Street Park, running north to M Drive S, running west along M Drive S, then turning south along 24 1/2 Mile Rd to West Main St. Additional trail sections are required to complete this linear park: including new trail from Grist Mill Park along M-60 and Webster Street. The trail includes benches along it.

The following map shows the parks located in the Village of Homer as well as a ¼ mile radius around each park to show each park's primary service area.


LEGEND
1 ROADSIDE PARK
2 WEBSTER STREET PARK
3 GRIST MILL PARK
4 WATER TOWER PARK
5 LAKEFRONT PARK
1/4 MILE RADIUS
VILLAGE BOUNDARY
PARKS
TRAIL SYSTEM
ROADS
L Dr S
M Dr S
24 1/2 Mile Rd
25 1/2 Mile Rd
25 Mile Rd
N Webster St
N Hillsdale St
E Platt St
E Sprague St
N Sophia St
E Leigh St
W Main St
W Leigh St
Lake St
Goldup St
Clinton St
W Adams St
W Everett St
S Burgess St
Grandview St
Goldup Ln
Hamilton Ct
Clinton Ct
W Fulton St
Waterman St
W Hamilton St
School St
E Fulton St
S Hillsdale St
E Burt St
Water St
Plain St
E Depot St
Terrace Dr
Powers St
M 99
S Webster St
E Main St
S Sophia St
E Adams St
E Everett St
E Hamilton St
Elm St
S Clay St
S Byron St
Detroit St
River Dr
M 60
N Dr S
S Branch Kalamazoo River
Homer Lake
Homer
0 500 1,000
1 Inch = 1,000 Feet
WIGHTMAN
it's all about people
184109
VILLAGE OF HOMER
MASTER PLAN
WALKABILITY MAP
12/20/2018

An accessibility assessment was conducted at the time of the recreation inventory. The Village of Homer has worked to increase accessibility to the parks as they are updated and further developed. A brief description of the park accessibility is below along with a rating based on the following guidelines criteria.

1 = none of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
2 = some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
3 = most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
4 = the entire park meets accessibility guidelines
5 = the entire park was developed/renovated using the principals of universal design

Roadside Park

Park is currently undeveloped.

Webster Street Park

This park has paved pathways throughout. Picnic shelter areas are accessible however the park would benefit from both ADA picnic tables as well as extended pads under the benches to allow a wheelchair user to sit next to the benches. The playground area itself is accessible however the playground could be updated to provide more diverse and accessible play opportunities long with access ramps. Restroom facilities are not ADA accessible. Parking lot is lacking both designated handicapped parking spaces and handicapped signage.

Rating: 3

Grist Mill Park

This park has paved pathways throughout. Picnic shelter areas are accessible however the park would benefit from both ADA picnic tables as well as extended pads under the benches to allow a wheelchair user to sit next to the benches. The canoe launch does not meet accessibility guidelines, a curb needs to installed between sidewalk and river to provide a wheelstop for wheelchairs at the edge of the water. Parking lot is lacking

both designated handicapped parking spaces and handicapped signage. Recently the walkway through the park was updated to be accessible.

Rating: 2

Water Tower Park

This park has paved pathways throughout. The park would benefit from extended pads under the benches to allow a wheelchair user to sit next to the benches. Parking lot is lacking both designated handicapped parking spaces and handicapped signage.

Rating: 3

Lakefront Park

This park has paved pathways throughout. Picnic areas are accessible however the park would benefit from ADA picnic tables. Parking lot is lacking both designated handicapped parking spaces and handicapped signage. The fishing pier and observation deck both meet accessibility guidelines.

Rating: 3

Homer Linear Park

This park has paved pathways throughout. The park would benefit from extended pads under the benches to allow a wheelchair user to sit next to the benches.

Rating: 4

The Village of Homer will look to continued public comment throughout the implementation process, especially from those with special needs. Their suggestions play a key role in developing and implementing proposed barrier-free improvements.

Previous Recreation Grants

HOMER RECREATION AREA, 1975, #26-00629, $23,824.39

Develop one softball diamond, 1 baseball field, 2 lighted tennis courts, and LWCF sign.

CURRY PARK, 1977, #26-00899, $54,030.44

Develop lighting for softball field, and boat ramp, access road, and parking/ with lighting, LWCF sign.

LAKEFRONT PARK IMPROVEMENTS, 1999, #TF99-070, $89,690.00

Development of existing park property on Homer Lake, including paved parking facilities, wetland boardwalk, observation platform and picnic shelter.

IRON BELLE TRAIL VILLAGE OF HOMER GAP DEVELOPMENT, 2020, #TF00-0157, $101,000.00

Development of missing link of Iron Belle Trail within the Village.

Other Recreation Opportunities in or near the Village of Homer:

A variety of significant recreational resources are either owned privately, owned by a non-profit organization, or owned by another governmental unit that are located within or nearby the Village of Homer. The following is a brief description of some nearby parks and recreation opportunities.

Homer Community House

This local effort to renovate this 1930's structure has a stage, small kitchen, restrooms, and improved sound system. It is available to the community for social events, reunions, elections, private family events, dances and other special events. The Community House capacity is between 250 - 500 persons, and is used approximately 35 times per year. This resource is owned by the Village of Homer.

Homer Fire Museum

The Homer Fire Museum is a historical site open from July 4th and through the month of September. Annual attendance to the museum is approximately 100 persons. The Village owns the building and leases it to the Homer Area Fire Authority for the museum.

Blair Farm and Historic House

The Blair Farm is sponsored by the Homer Historical Society. Three main events are scheduled annually to celebrate the heritage of the Homer Area.

Historic Bridge Park

Historic Bridge Park, formerly known as “County Park” is located at 14930 Wattles Road. The park is located along the Kalamazoo River and Dickinson Creek. The park offers a variety of passive recreational opportunities including: picnicking, walking/hiking, bike riding, fishing, boating and wildlife observation. The park also serves a trailhead for the County Linear Trailway that will eventually connect to the Battle Creek Linear Trail to the west and the Marshall Riverwalk to the east. The park is unique in that it contains a number of restored iron or steel bridges. The park when fully developed will have a total of 15 bridges.

Kimball Pines County Park

Covering nearly 100 acres of plantation pines planted in 1930’s and 1940’s. Planted in the 1930’s and 1940’s, Kimball Pines Park is one of the oldest stands of urban pines in Michigan. The park also contains deciduous woodlands, ponds and a creek that is a tributary of the Kalamazoo River. Kimball Pines offers scenic areas, hiking trails, picnicking facilities, cross-country skiing, and nature observation. The park is located off of Michigan Avenue behind the Calhoun County Medical Care Facility in Emmett Township.

Ott Biological Preserve

Ott Biological Preserve is often considered to be “hidden jewel” in Calhoun County. Located just east of Battle Creek, at the end of Arlington Street, off of Michigan Avenue in Emmett Township. The undeveloped park covers approximately 300 acres of natural habitat shaped by glaciers. Within the park there are two spring fed kettle lakes, as well as the east edge of Dexter Lake, wet peaty lowlands and dry, sandy uplands. Activities available in the park include: hiking on trails and boardwalks and wildlife viewing. In 2013 the trail in the preserve was extended to connect to the Linear Park in Battle Creek to the west and to Kimball Pines to the south.

Homer Community Schools

The Homer Public Schools are all located at 403 S Hillside Street. They have a wide variety of outdoor and indoor recreation facilities.

R.K. Curry Athletic Facility

Acres: 60 acres

Facilities:

- One all-weather 440-yard track with multi-purpose field
- Four softball diamonds
- Two baseball diamonds
- Two outdoor tennis courts
- Two soccer fields and/or a football field
- Two basketball courts

Lilian Fletcher Elementary School

- 1 gymnasium
- 3 playgrounds (lower, middle and upper elementary)

Homer Area High/Middle School

- 1 weight room
- 1 cafeteria for special programs
- 2 full size gymnasiums

Water Bodies

The south branch of the Kalamazoo River flows through the northeast corner of the Village of Homer, flowing in a northerly direction. Homer Lake, on the western edge of the Village, is the other significant body of water within the Village. A MDNR (Michigan Department of Natural Resources) Public Access site is provided as access to the lake for the general public at the Village's Lakefront Park, where a boat launch, fishing pier and scenic lookout on a nature preserve are located.

The restoration of Homer Lake has been a priority for a number of years and is a top priority for the Homer Lake Management Board (HLMB). Two Village storm drains have been rerouted that had been discharging storm water into the lake for over forty years. Prior to the re-routing, these drains had left the lake with excessive nutrient-laden buildup impacting lake activities. The HLMB continues to evaluate all options to address these concerns, including dredging. The Homer Lake Management Board has been established with participation from local citizens, governmental units, businesses and the Calhoun County Drain Commissioner. The HLMB is committed to finding a way to restore the beauty of Homer Lake for the public to enjoy for summer and winter recreational activities.

Planning and Public Input Process

The planning process for this recreation plan update began in 2023 with the update of the previous recreation plan. Wightman created question boards each with 1 question. Along with the community input gathered, Wightman collected detailed recreation inventories and deficiencies. Wightman used a systems approach to planning which incorporated the information gained from the various forms of public input and the detailed recreation inventories and deficiencies as well as demographic information to determine the recreation needs of the City.

Three 24x36" sized poster boards were created for public input from 5-7:30 pm during JV and Varsity boys basketball games at Homer Community High School on December 5th, 2023. Project team members were in attendance to gather public input. The poster boards asked questions about the park and recreation in Homer and asked the respondents to write in the answers. The boards provided open-ended, candid responses. The poster boards with the questions and responses can be found in Appendix A.

Public Review

A draft Community Recreation Plan for Homer Township was available at the Homer Municipal Building for public review from December 7th, 2023, through January 8th, 2024. Members of the public were invited through an announcement in The Homer Index and Village of Homer Website on December 5th, 2023 to comment on the draft Community Recreation Plan. They were encouraged to submit written communication with Wightman and Associates, Inc., the City's consultant, and/or by attending the public hearing.

A copy of the notice of availability of the draft Community Recreation Plan for comment as well as the affidavit of public comment are included in Appendix A.

Public Hearing

The second public input method used was the public hearing. The Council advertised a public meeting notice in The Homer Index and Village of Homer Website on December 5th, 2023 to present the Community Recreation plan for the Village of Homer for public input on January 8th, 2024. The plan was presented for adoption during the regularly scheduled Village Council meeting on January 8th, 2024 where all Board Members approved the resolution to adopt the Community Recreation Plan.

A copy of the notice of the public meeting and the affidavit of publication for the public meeting have been included in Appendix A.

A copy of the Village Council meeting minutes have been included in Appendix B.

A copy of the resolution adoption the Community Recreation plan dated January 8th, 2024 has been included in Appendix B.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objects were developed using the public input received and discussed earlier in this document as well as demographic information provided in the 2019 Master Plan.

GOAL #1: MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE TRAILWAY NETWORK BY PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF WAYS TO USE THE NETWORK

Objectives:

- Connect Iron Belle, North Country and Homer Trail systems and parks throughout the Village
- Install bike racks and bike fix stations throughout trailway network
- Improve perceived safety by adding call buttons and other safety features

GOAL #2: IMPROVE PUBLIC ACCESS TO WATER IN THE VILLAGE OF HOMER

Objectives:

- Provide recreational access to Homer Lake and the Kalamazoo River
- Current dock area at Homer Lake is inundated by weeds and is difficult to use, update the dock or remove the weeds
- Update and add to handicapped fishing areas in the Village

GOAL #3: PLAN FOR THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES OF PEOPLE BY PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES THAT SPAN ALL OF MICHIGAN'S FOUR SEASONS

Objectives:

- Serve an aging population with social, recreation, active and healthy options
- Ensure that all parks are accessible to people with a range of physical capabilities
- Offer a new recreational opportunity within the City
- Plan for each of Michigan's seasons to ensure residents have year-round recreation opportunities

Action Program

Year 1- 2024	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources	Goals Met
Add handicapped parking at all parks	$7,500	Grants / General Fund	3
Inspect Playground at Webster Street Park	$2,500	General Fund	3

Year 2- 2025	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources	Goals Met
Add bicycle racks and maintenance stations along trail	$15,000	Grants / General Fund	1
Renovate court at Webster Street Park, Add Pickleball	$75,000	Grants / General Fund	3
Update restrooms at Webster Street Park	$100,000	Grants / General Fund	1,3
Maintain trails, crack seal	$5,000	Grants	2

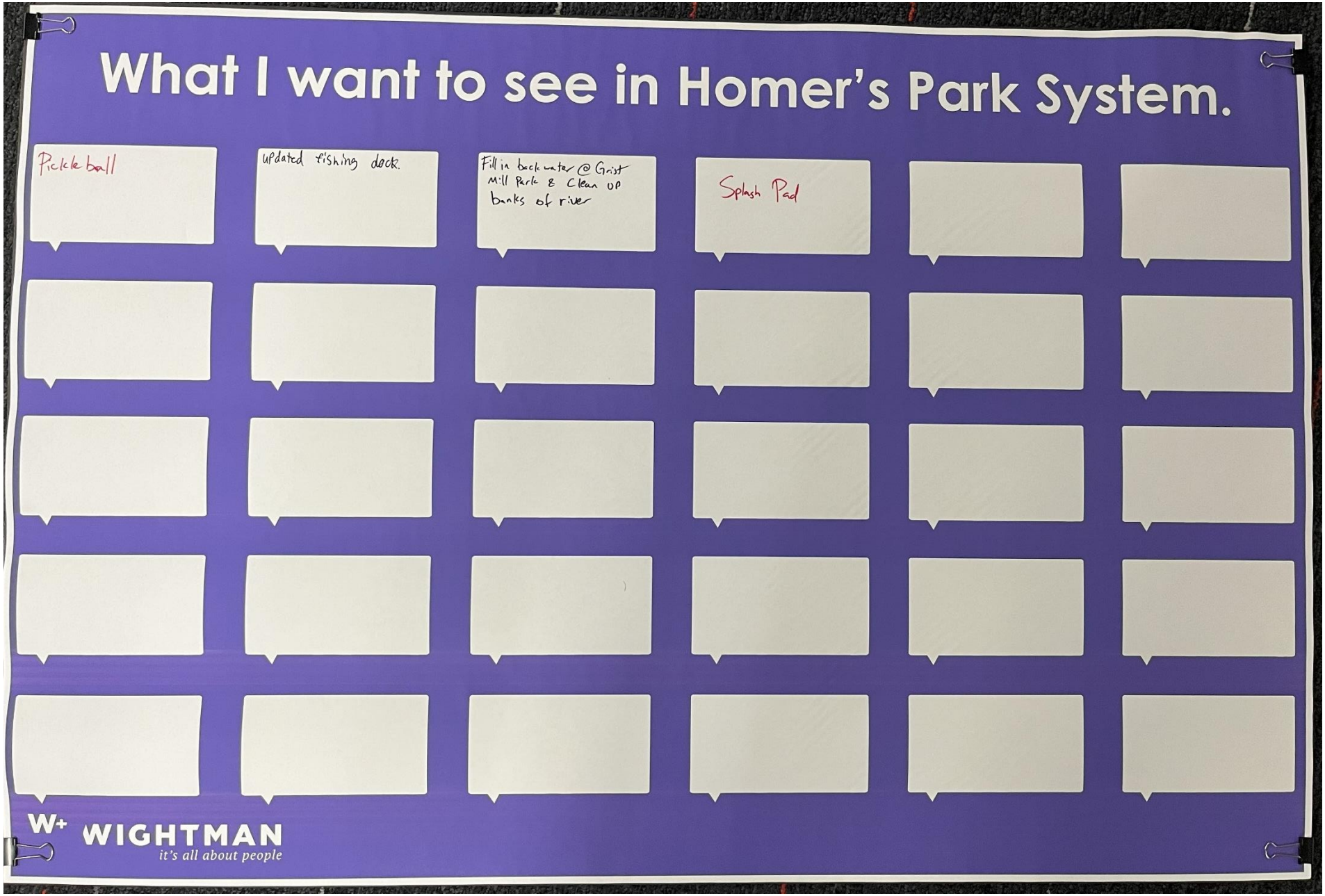
Year 3- 2026	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources	Goals Met
Update boat launch at Lakefront Park	$65,000	Grants / General Fund	2
Evaluate restroom and swimming area at Lakefront Park	$10,000	Grants / General Fund	2,3

Year 4- 2027	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources	Goals Met
Update handicapped fishing area at Lakefront Park	$30,000	Grants / General Fund	2,3
Maintain trails, crack seal	$5,000	Grants	2

Year 5- 2028	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources	Goals Met
Improve river bank and old Mill channel at Grist Mill Park	$30,000	General Fund	2,3
Update 5-year recreation plan	$10,000	General Fund	3

Appendix A

My favorite recreation activity in Homer.
Paths. & Trails.
Playgrounds
Homer Lake Access
Running
WIGHTMAN
it's all about people


What I want to see in Homer's Park System.
Pickle ball
updated fishing dock.
Fill in back water @ Grist Mill Park & Clean up banks of river
Splash Pad
WIGHTMAN
it's all about people

What I want to see in Homer's Trail System.
Fitness elements
Connections to neighborhoods
Not on my Land
WIGHTMAN
it's all about people

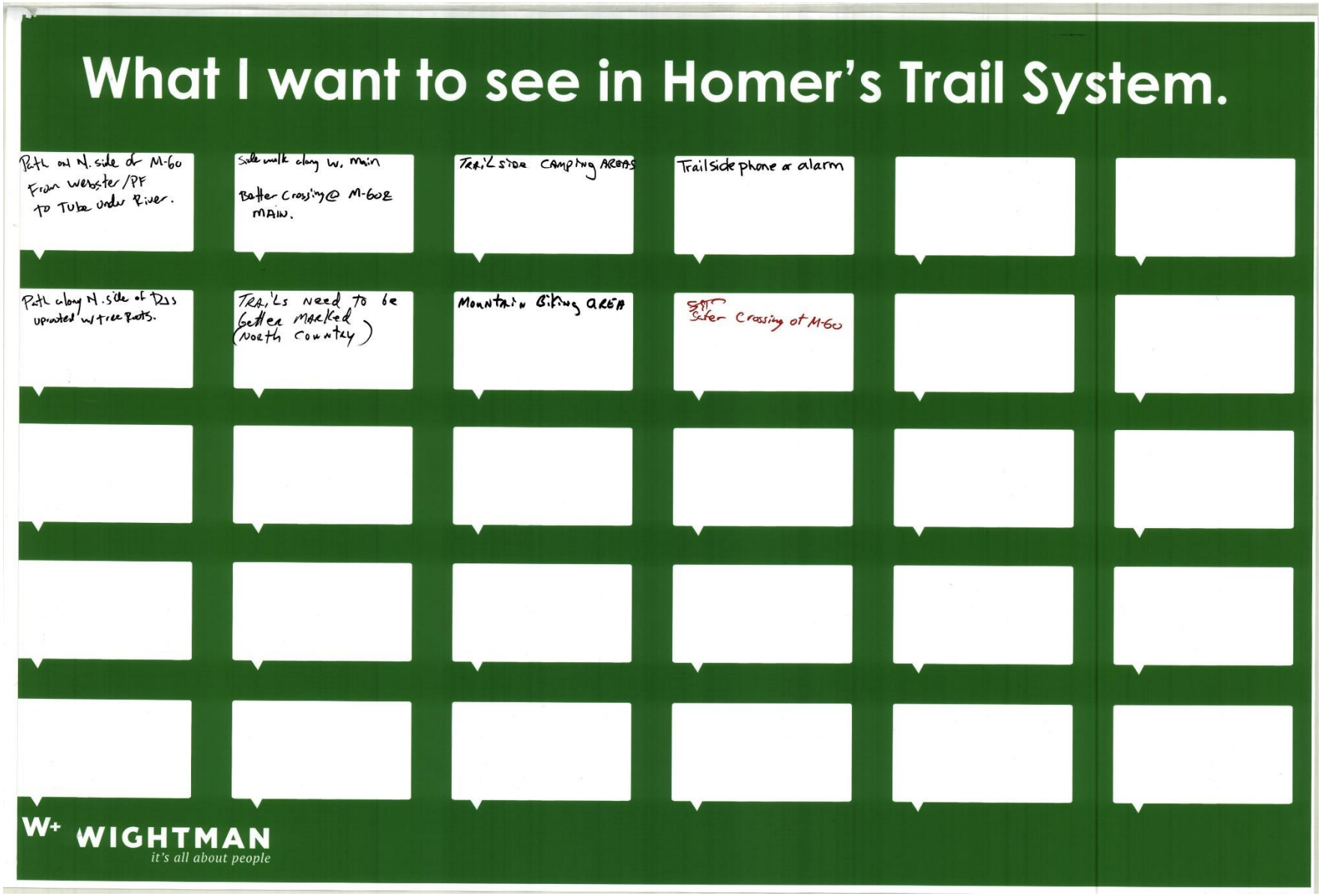
Previous Input

My favorite recreation activity in Homer.
Trails. Well Plowed in winter
Walking TRAIL System
Boating + fishing Homer Lake
Baseball Diamonds
Access to lakes & Rivers
Up Grade Track / Locker Rooms ETC.
Horse shoe pit
shuffle board
Talk Tubes
W+ WIGHTMAN
it's all about people

What I want to see in Homer's Park System.

X Country SKi + Snow Shoe TRAILS	Dog PARK	Archery RANGE Frisbee Golf PARK	Baseball/softball	BiKE Jumps Bike RACKS Bike mateninceStation	UPdated Boat Launch New Docks.
Splash Pad +1 @ webster	IMPROved Dock and Boat ACCESS at Lake	UPdate Handicapped fishing area @ Homer lake	Dredge 1st Lake	Sledding hill	TRAP/SKeet Range
ICE SKATing RINK ✓	SKATE BOARD Park	BAND Shell	swimming pool	Net climber	BIKE PATHS + DOG PARKS

W+ WIGHTMAN
it's all about people


What I want to see in Homer's Trail System.
Path on N. side of M-60 From Webster/PF to Tube under River.
Sidewalk along W. main
Better Crossing @ M-60 & MAIN.
Trail side CAMPING AREAS
Trailside phone & alarm
Path along N. side of RDS uprooted w/ tree roots.
TRAILS need to be better MARKED (North country)
MOUNTAIN BIKING AREA
SAFE Safer Crossing of M-60
W+ WIGHTMAN
it's all about people

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D