



Chapter 8

Benchmarking



Benchmarking

To better understand how well the Munster Parks and Recreation Department serves its residents, a comparative analysis with other local park agencies was developed. Benchmarking is a tool used by agencies to measure where they fall in contrast to other agencies. The Munster Parks and Recreation Department was benchmarked against three surrounding communities: Hammond, Highland, and Dyer.

For this analysis, the key benchmarking data sought included:

- Population
- Median household income
- Total number of parks
- Total park acres
- Acres per 1,000 residents
- Total number of outdoor tennis courts
- Number of athletic fields, including:
 - o Baseball/softball
 - o Soccer
 - o Football
- Number of Playgrounds
- Total expenditures (to come)
- Capital improvement expenditures (to come)
- Equalized assessed value (to come)

Population Characteristics

The three parks and recreation departments included in this comparison range in population from 15,941 to 77,577, with an average of 47,770. The Town of Highland is nearest this average, with a population of 23,727. While the range is somewhat expansive, the parks and recreation departments were chosen for this benchmarking due to their proximity to Munster.

Parks and Facilities

Relative to parks and facilities, the total acres of owned and leased land by the communities was used for comparison. The four parks and recreation departments

being compared range in park acreage from 208.4 to 838.9 acres. Munster was closer to the middle of the range, with ~345 park acres.

Traditional park baseline standards set by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) in “Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenways Guidelines” suggests 6.25 to 10 acres of park land per 1,000 people (Mertes & Hall, 1996). These recreation standards are commonly used in open space planning purposes and can be adjusted based on community preference. Munster exceeds the baseline, with 14.7 acres per 1,000 residents. This ratio is bolstered by several large community parks and Centennial Park. All park agencies with accessible information in this benchmark do, indeed, meet these NRPA guidelines.

Number of Playgrounds

The number of playgrounds per capita vary significantly nationwide. Due to this variability the National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) has not established a specific recommendation or standard for the number of playgrounds each community should provide.

Due to the proximity of Munster to the Chicago Metropolitan Area our analysis utilizes a per capita playground standard like the regional standard of 0.72 playgrounds per 1,000 population. Applying the 0.72 playgrounds per 1,000 to the Town of Munster’s 23,103 would equate to a recommended target of ± 17 playgrounds. The Town’s Park and Recreation Department currently manages 17 playgrounds, which basically meets the standard, however when reviewing the exhibit showing locations of playgrounds within the community, most all residential areas fall within service the $\frac{1}{2}$ mile service areas of the existing playgrounds.

When comparing the Town of Munster with adjacent communities Hammond and Highland, Munster is comparable to Highland which provides

0.75 playgrounds per 1,000 population while Munster provides 0.73 playgrounds per 1,000 population. Hammond on the other hand provides only 0.28 playgrounds per 1,000 population. Both Munster and Highland meet the standard while Hammond falls significantly short of the standard.

There are three areas within the Town that do not fall within the playground service areas of the 17 existing playgrounds, they include an area in the northwest corner of the community north of Ridge Road and west of Calumet Avenue; a small residential area north of Ridge Road east of Baring Avenue; and, a residential area south of Ridge Road and east of White Oaks Avenue.

Potential park or open space sites for consideration for development of a playground area to address these three areas not within the ½ mile playground service

areas include: development of a playground in the area of the Manor Avenue Green Space, this would extend the playground service area sufficiently to the east to cover the previous void area. The second area could be addressed if the existing open space in the far northeast corner of the Town north of Ridge Road east of Hawthorne Road in the open space west of Hart Ditch. The third area could be addressed by developing a playground at Orchard Park.

Capital Improvements

Comparing the level of capital improvement expenditures can also be used as a comparison between communities. The Town of Munster has issued approximately \$1,900,000 in capital improvement bonds each year over the last several years. These bond proceeds fund park capital improvements as well as needed capital equipment replacement.

	Munster	Hammond	Highland
Community Overview			
Population (1)	23,103	77,134	23,727
Median Household Income (2)	\$70,894	\$41,685	\$62,240
% of population growth since 2010 U.S. Census	-5.2%	-4.8%	-3.8%
Parks Department Overview			
Total Number of Parks/Facilities	44	33	23
Total Park Acres	344.5	838.9	230.1
Acres per 1000 Residents	14.9	10.9	9.69
Total Outdoor Tennis Courts	15	21	5
Baseball/Softball	8	36	7
Soccer	7	6	3
Football	1	6	1
Number of Playgrounds	17	22	18
Number of Full Time Employees	12	27	14