



Chapter 2

Introduction: History & Background



Introduction

The Town of Munster, Indiana has worked collaboratively with the Planning Resources Team to develop a Comprehensive Master Plan for the Parks System. This plan will help guide the Department in making better more-informed decisions regarding parks facilities and programs for the future of the community. Munster enjoys economic stability and offers its residents a plethora of green space, parkland, trails, golf courses and more. Parks and open spaces are one of the most visible elements of the Parks and Recreation Department and can instill a strong sense of pride in the residents of the community. A great parks and recreation agency lets citizens, visitors, and staff know that the leadership of the Town is interested in providing the best for its citizens. The leadership of Munster has long been recognized for its teamwork, excellent work ethic, and overall concern for its residents. The Town recognizes that recreation plays a critical role in the quality of life for the residents. They also believe that a strong parks and recreation network promotes multi-generational recreation, activities and trail systems which provide healthier environments, improves well-being of young and old, and reduces the potential for crime in the community.

The purpose of this Comprehensive Master Plan is to provide an assessment of the current system, to allow the citizens and stakeholders to voice their opinions regarding their desires and concerns about the Parks and Recreation Department and its direction, and to provide a set of recommendations and priorities that will guide in shaping the Department's future.

The master plan involved a comprehensive, community-driven methodology that evaluated the current conditions of the Parks and Recreation Department's open spaces, parks, and programs. The team evaluated not only the vision, mission, and goals, but the recommendations and other implementation tools as well. An extensive community outreach program was conducted to ensure a broad, effective and defensible public involvement process. This was integral and key to the development of the plan. The



planning method also included an assessment of local and statewide recreational trends as a means to examine park and outdoor recreation user patterns and future demand for amenities and facilities.

Definition of Planning Area

The planning area for Munster Parks and Recreation Department is the same area that is the Town of Munster. While there are multiple suburban communities surrounding Munster that the Department can service as well, the focus of the Comprehensive Master Plan remained within the Town. Each map in this report has defined boundaries of Munster, either isolated for clear identification of the map's features or faded municipalities surrounding Munster, including where Indiana and Illinois meet, to offer context.

Inventory and Assessment

This section includes the assessments of each of the park sites, open spaces, and facilities during an on-site evaluation of each property. Each park assessment includes an overall narrative of the site, discussions regarding individual amenities and features of each park, and photographs of the park's amenities. The assessment includes a summary of the recommendations based on the team's observations and discussions with program and operation's staff and others. These recommendations incorporate feedback from the public engagement process both online and with focus groups as well as staff meetings and Board discussions.

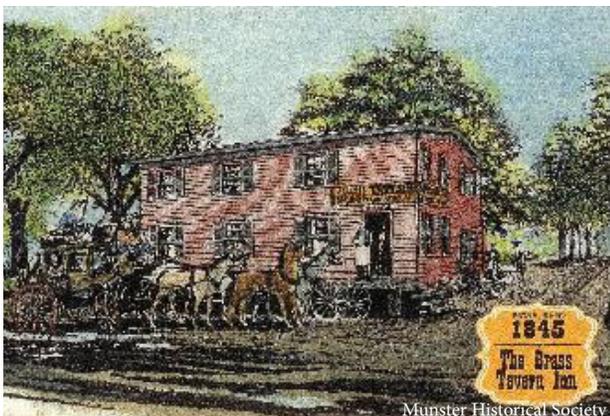
History and Background

Munster Indiana's history begins with the Potawatomi Native Americans, the earliest known people to have lived in the area. As it was with many pre-settlement lands, there was an existing trail well-traveled by the Potawatomi situated on a dry sandy ridge. Today, this is known as Ridge Road, a prominent transit corridor in Munster where a number of civic and town service destinations are found including the town hall, a post office, police department and fire department.

The French claimed the land of today's Munster in the 1600's and 1700's as a part of their territory. By the 1760's, the British Empire claimed it. As it is commonly acknowledged today, these colonial nations had little regard for the Potawatomi living there at the time. Their condition only worsened in 1828 when the American Government removed them from the land in the interest of westward expansion. They were forced to Oklahoma.

With the absence of Native Americans, more European settlers began to locate to the area. They began to farm and establish a destination for the railroads. It can be said that today's town of Munster began around this time, as the first official structure was a tavern built in 1837 by a man named David Gibson. It was settled on the corner of Ridge Road and Columbia Avenue, around Heritage Park and Bieker Woods.

The town name's origin is from a Dutch immigrant, Jacob Munster. Mr. Munster built Munster's General Store which also served as a U.S. post office for local



Munster Historical Society

farmers and other settlers. It was often referred to simply as "Munster". By 1907, the area was incorporated as a town, with 76 residents voting "yes" to incorporate, outnumbering 28 residents voting "no".

Beyond the General Store/Post Office Munster destination, the area also had a place known as the Stallbohm Inn, where social connections were cultivated and evening dance gatherings occurred. The Inn still exists today at Heritage Park off Ridge Road, known as "Stallbohm Barn-Kaske House" and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In time, the land surrounding the Stallbohm property diminished from 202 acres in the 1950's to 90 acres by 1934. By the 1960's, the property had been reduced to 44 acres. In 1968, the Town of Munster Board of Parks and Recreation and the Town of Munster School Board together purchased 32 acres on the west side of Columbia Avenue. The school developed some of the land, while the Parks Department left the remaining land in its natural condition, in what is today known as Bieker Woods (named after the Biekers who had lived in the Stallbohm home).

Munster has been a booming town at various points in its history, especially post-WWII. The town's integrated public networks are seen particularly as it relates to the historic preservation of various open spaces.

Today, Munster's Parks and Recreation Department can focus on a variety of services offered to the community. This is manifested through the recent completion of Centennial Park, Munster's iconic and newest outdoor destination in town.

Park Board Mission Statement

It's important to review the Department's Mission Statement as a way to tie it into the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan. The language for the Munster Parks and Recreation Department's Mission Statement is as follows:

“Munster Parks and Recreation mission is to provide and maintain quality parks, facilities, open/natural space, programs and services which will enhance the physical, social and emotional well being of all the citizens of Munster and the surrounding Communities.”

The overt language to “provide and maintain” valuable resources for the people of Munster is manifested through all of the existing conditions of the Department's facilities and parks. It is clear that the layout of the parks have been planned in the past. With time, however, some quality fades and improvements are needed to comply with up-to-date accessibility, safety, and health codes. In addition, the general intentions behind the idea of “quality”, as referenced in the Mission Statement, may evolve with time.

The Master Plan is what will inspire and direct the Department's efforts to honor the needed improvements in Munster so that their Mission Statement is demonstrated as effectively as possible.

Planning Goals

The goals of this Comprehensive Master Plan were determined through one of the initial public participation meetings in January of 2018. There was a focus group represented by the staff of the Parks and Recreation Department, and their feedback influenced what the specific goals of this Plan are. The goals are the following:

1. Enhance the Department's special events
2. Expand the Department's public recognition
3. Recognize staff input in the Department's operations
4. Generate more volunteers for special events and programs
5. Understand the current trends and the additions needed to the Department