

6. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Introduction

Open space is generally defined as an area of undeveloped land and water that is devoted to the preservation of natural resources; passive outdoor recreation; public health and safety; and scenic and visual enjoyment. Open space includes urban open space (e.g., parks, buffer strips or common areas in a development); rural/non-agricultural open space (e.g., forest tracks, stream corridors or buffers); and agricultural open space.

Open space provides such benefits as natural resources, habitats for flora and fauna, and stability in ecosystems. Public recreation, education, community gathering and various cultural events are also afforded by open space. Not only does open space make communities more aesthetically pleasing and viable, but it also provides economic benefits and an enhanced sense of community identity and pride.

Despite its numerous benefits, there is widespread concern throughout the country regarding a growing consumption of valuable open space by new development. In order to create and preserve open space and to restore appropriate balance between economic development and conservation, many communities have been creating open space and wetlands ordinances, amending zoning and subdivision ordinances, and researching other innovative tools.

Process

Civic Alliance members reviewed public feedback on community issues and then met with or surveyed a number of key stakeholders in the community. After further research and discussion they decided on the following as key issues for this topic area. City staff provided technical support.

Statement 1

South Bend's park acreage for community, neighborhood, and block parks is below national standards as set by the National Recreation and Park Association.

Facts and Supporting Information:

- National acreage standards vary by park type (*National Recreation & Park Association and South Bend Parks & Recreation*):

Park Type	National Acreage Standards	Existing Acreage	Needed Acreage	Present Acreage Deficiency
Community	7 acres/1,000 people	568.13	754.52	186.39
Neighborhood	3 acres/1,000 people	227.88	323.36	95.48
Block	0.5 acres/1,000 people	24.72	53.89	29.17
TOTAL		820.73	1,131.77	311.04

- The figures in the table above are based on the population of 107,789 for South Bend in 2000 (*US Census Bureau*).
- There are 57 public parks, playgrounds, and other park properties in South Bend encompassing 1,290.28 acres and ranging in size from 0.30 acres to 313.25 acres (*2004-2008 Parks Master Plan Update*).
- There are 11 community parks, 22 neighborhood parks, 17 block parks, and 7 special parks (e.g., golf courses, trails, and a stadium) in South Bend (*2004-2008 Parks Master Plan Update*).
- Based on the 2008 population projection (109,683 people) for South Bend, the deficiency for community, neighborhood, and block parks will increase to 330.93 acres if no new space is created (*2004-2008 Parks Master Plan Update*).
- Parks serve as recreational and educational centers and facilities; build a sense of community; offer people contact with nature; provide formal and informal gathering places for the public; improve property values and public health; and make urban areas more inviting for living, working, and relaxing (*American Planning Association*).

Strengths and Opportunities

- 2008 population acreage deficit for community, neighborhood, and block parks is offset by special parks, which occupy 469.55 acres, resulting in a surplus of 158.83 acres.
- South Bend Parks and Recreation Department's programming (after school, fitness, East Race, Men's and Women's Olympic Kayaking Trials, O'Brien Skate Park, Zoo, high-quality website, etc.).
- South Bend's Parks & Recreation Department is applying for accreditation by the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA). There are fewer than 50 cities in the US with this level of accreditation.
- South East Park, Kennedy Water Park, and Potawatomi Park.
- Major improvements to Martin Luther King Center and Charles Black Center.
- 2004-2008 South Bend Parks Master Plan Update, which serves as a guide for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Benefits of Addressing the Issue

- South Bend will meet national park acreage standards when all types of parks are considered.
- Present and future South Bend residents will receive needed recreational services.
- Sufficient open space will be preserved and maintained for citizens' recreation and leisure.
- Park system will accommodate population growth and community needs.

- Land most suitable for parks, due to natural assets and unique characteristics, will not be consumed by urban development.

Stakeholders

The following stakeholders were consulted:

- Sierra Club
- City of South Bend Parks & Recreation Department
- St. Joseph County Parks Department
- The Troyer Group
- Michiana Watershed

General stakeholder reaction:

Most stakeholders identified the need to promote park acreage development in South Bend as a critical issue.

Some stakeholders noted the lack of local ordinances requiring that a certain amount of open space be set aside for parks in annexed areas.

Stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of connectivity of our parks (e.g., lack of transportation and bike trails).

Stakeholders noted the poor condition and age of some park facilities and equipment.

Stakeholders observed that people tend to frequent parks in their immediate vicinity rather than enjoy parks farther from their places of residence.

Statement 2

The South Bend Municipal Code does not sufficiently promote protection, preservation, and creation of open space and wetland habitats.

Facts and Supporting Information

- Wetlands are areas that are covered or saturated by surface or ground water for part or all of the year. They include swamps, marshes, bogs, forested wetlands and similar areas (EPA).
- Wetlands and wooded areas provide a unique environment for animals, plants, and insects. Wetlands protect water quality by filtering runoff and reducing sediment. Wetlands control flooding and significantly prevent property damage (EPA).
- Habitat degradation since the 1970s has been the main cause of species extinction (EPA).
- There are 813,000 acres of wetlands in Indiana (*Indiana Department of Natural Resources. Wildlife Management and Research Notes. #532. Indiana's Wetland Inventory*).
- St. Joseph County has 1,095 acres of wetlands, which is 0.4% of the total area of the county (290,948 acres) (IDEM; *St. Joseph County Surveyor*).
- No legal requirement for a certain percentage of annexed land to be set aside for open space.
- There are 35.5 acres of wetlands within South Bend City limits or 0.14% of the City's area (*US Fish and Wildlife Service. National Wetlands Inventory*).

Strengths and Opportunities

- EPA Programs for wetlands conservation, restoration and monitoring.
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources Wetlands Conservation Program.
- Partnerships between EPA, US Army Corps of Engineers, local watershed organizations, local governments, the private sector and citizens.
- Indiana National Wetlands Inventory maps developed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service.
- South Bend zoning ordinance provides incentives for preservation of open space in single-family residential areas. At least 5% of new development within multi-family districts is required to be set aside for open space.
- Tree-lined banks of the St. Joseph River.
- Interpretive services (e.g., Rum Village Nature Center; future Fredrickson Park education facility).
- Coveleski Stadium and Belleville Softball Complex.
- Green space and trails development (e.g., Frederickson Park, construction of a trail from Angela Boulevard north to Keller Park).
- Planting of wild flowers along retention basins by South Bend Public Works.

Benefits of Addressing the Issue

- Development of stricter requirements for maintaining a sustainable balance between green space conservation and development.
- Reduced loss of wetlands and habitats for fish and wildlife.
- Preservation of certain species of animals, plants and insects that can only survive in wetlands and wooded areas.
- Valuable open and green space will not be consumed by development.
- Reduced sprawl.

Stakeholders

The following stakeholders were consulted:

- Michiana Watershed
- SJ Valley Greens
- Sierra Club

- The Troyer Group
- South Bend-Elkhart Audubon Society
- South Bend Department of Public Works

General stakeholder reaction:

Most of the stakeholders agreed that preservation of wetlands, wildlife habitats, and open space is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Some stakeholders noted that there is insufficient greenway infrastructure in South Bend, and that wildlife is not given sufficient attention in local plans.

Stakeholders also pointed out that we should not interfere with the natural erosion and tree decaying processes along the St. Joseph River bank because, if left alone, it provides a natural habitat for fish and water birds.

Statement 3

Most of South Bend's urban form does not encourage walking or biking as a transportation alternative for fulfilling the needs of daily life.

Facts and Supporting Information

- Urban form encompasses characteristics related to land use patterns, transportation systems, and urban design (*Handy. Methodologies for Exploring the Link Between Urban Form and Travel Behavior. Transportation Research. 1996. pp. 151-165*).
- The Principles of New Urbanism emphasize the presence of most services in a neighborhood within a five-minute walk or bike ride of home or work, interconnected street grid networks, and a pedestrian-friendly street design (e.g., buildings close to the street, tree-lined trees, front porches) (*Congress for the New Urbanism*).
- Mixed land uses (e.g., shops, housing, and entertainment) were not allowed under the South Bend zoning ordinance in effect until 2004; that ordinance promoted a separation of uses and “single-use” land use patterns (*St. Joseph County Area Plan Commission*).
- Improved pedestrian infrastructure, mixed uses, connected streets/blocks, strengthened city centers and increased densities promote walking as part of a lifestyle (*Reid Ewing. The National Center for Smart Growth Research & Education*).
- Urban parks offer opportunities for health-promoting physical activity (*American Planning Association*).
- Biking and walking positively influence residents' activity levels and help to reduce obesity (*National Center for Bicycling and Walking*).
- Obesity is believed to be caused by lifestyle, environment, and genetics (*American Obesity Association*).
- According to national park standards, South Bend lacks 311.04 acres of park land, which includes community, neighborhood and block parks, to accommodate its present population (*National Recreation & Park Association*).
- Obesity is the second leading cause (after heart disease) of preventable death in the US. Obesity kills more people than smoking (300,000 excess deaths). Obesity is linked to 30 medical conditions, including cardiovascular and liver disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers (*American Obesity Association*).
- 65% of Americans (about 127 million) are overweight, 31% (60 million) are obese, and 5% (9 million) are severely obese. This number has continued to increase (*American Obesity Association*).
- Indiana, as a state, now holds the #4 ranking in the nation for levels of obesity (26%) in adults age 20 and older after Alabama (28.4%), Mississippi (28.1%), and West Virginia (27.7%) (*United Health Foundation. America's Health: State Rankings. 2004 Edition*).
- 43% of St. Joseph County telephone survey respondents were found to be overweight, and 21.6% were found to be obese. A total of 178 people were surveyed (*St. Joseph County Health Department*).

Strengths and Opportunities

- More attention is paid to obesity today than in previous years.
- National obesity research programs have increased.
- Existing organizations in South Bend promote public health (e.g., St. Joseph County Health Department, City of South Bend Parks and Recreation Department, Healthy Communities Initiative, Memorial Hospital's Health Center, and St. Joseph Medical Center).
- The mixed-use designation in the current zoning ordinance encourages a mix of uses in downtown and along South Bend's commercial corridors.
- South Bend's relatively flat topography is conducive to the development of trails.
- South Bend's public transportation system provides alternatives to the automobile (e.g., buses, trolleys, South Shore train).
- Walking lunch programs for office employees in downtown South Bend promote activity among office workers.
- 6 miles of existing multipurpose bikeways and walkways in South Bend.
- East Race Trail, which is suitable for walking, biking and jogging.
- 1.78 miles of bicycle lanes on Twyckenham Drive between McKinley and South Bend avenues.

- Planned construction of a ten-foot wide bikeway/walkway occupying 1.05 miles on the west side of Portage Avenue between Lathrop Street and the Toll Road Bridge.
- Construction of the Riverside Trail, which will create 3.2 miles of bikeway/walkway along the west bank of the St. Joseph River between Angela Boulevard and Darden Road.
- Proposed construction of a ten-foot wide bikeway/walkway from Jackson to Kern Roads as part of the Miami Street widening.
- Existing sidewalks provide an opportunity for walking.
- The South Bend Municipal Code allows people to ride their bicycles on the sidewalks in residential areas.
- 820.73 acres of community, neighborhood, and block parks in South Bend.
- Walking paths in South Bend's parks.

Benefits of Addressing the Issue

- More active lifestyles, enhanced quality of life, higher self-esteem and socialization in individuals.
- Decreased risks of serious diseases and premature death of a parent from obesity-related causes that impact the mental health and socialization of children in particular and all age groups as a whole (i.e., education, crime).
- Decreased healthcare costs.
- Improved work attendance and performance records.

Stakeholders

The following stakeholders were consulted:

- St. Joseph County Health Department
- Michiana Watershed
- SJ Valley Greens
- Sierra Club

General stakeholder reaction:

Stakeholders believed that the urban form of South Bend neighborhoods does not promote walking, biking, or jogging.

They expressed concern over the lack of park acreage and bikeways/walkways, which are thought to contribute to obesity.

Some stakeholders stated that public transportation and car-pool options are not sufficiently promoted among South Bend residents.

Statement 4

South Bend does not have a sufficient number of public swimming pools, volleyball courts, and baseball and football fields to accommodate its population.

Facts and Supporting Information

- According to the National Recreation & Park Association, South Bend is deficient in swimming pools, baseball, volleyball and football facilities based on the 107,789 population for South Bend in 2000 (*US Census Bureau*):

Recreation Type	National Standard	Existing Facilities	Needed Facilities	Present Facility Deficiency
Public swimming pools	1/20,000 people	1	5.4	4.4
Baseball	1/5,000 people	10	21.6	11.6
Volleyball	1/5,000 people	4	21.6	17.6
Football	1/20,000 people	4	5.4	1.4

- Participating in sport activities helps individuals develop character, discipline, confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of well-being (*The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports*).
- Active sports and physical activity improve flexibility and energy levels; reduce high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity; reduce stress, depression and anxiety; and help prevent violence and substance abuse (*World Health Organization*).
- Natatorium, Kennedy and Pinhook Beach were closed in the late 1970's and the 1980's. Natatorium and Kennedy were closed because of building maintenance issues. Pinhook ceased operations due to decreased attendance and increased costs of life guards caused by the competition from newly opened beaches like Potato State Creek Park and Indiana Dunes State Park (*South Bend Parks & Recreation*).

Strengths and Opportunities

- The South Bend Parks Master Plan provides guidance for the development of recreational opportunities.
- South Bend Parks Department offers water aerobics classes at the Potawatomi Park and Clay High School swimming pools. An outdoor interactive water playground is also located at Kennedy Park and the Southeast Neighborhood.
- Volleyball courts at Belleville Gardens, Boland Park, Martin Luther King Park and Pinhook Park.
- Baseball fields at Stanley Coveleski Stadium, Kennedy Park, Belleville Gardens, Boehm Park, Boland Park, Marshall Park, Muessel Park, and Voorde Park.
- Football fields at O'Brien Park, Boland Park, Muessel Park and Potawatomi Park.
- South Bend Community School Corporation has five indoor swimming pools. These pools are at LaSalle and Jackson Intermediate Centers and at Adams, Clay and Riley High Schools. They are used during the school day and after school by high school swim teams. The Parks Department has access to the pools after 7 p.m. for paid aquatic programs.
- East Race Waterway offers whitewater courses, rafting, canoeing and kayaking opportunities to the public as well as the site for Olympic trials.

Benefits of Addressing the Issue

- Increase in the population's fitness, relaxation, mental and social needs through swimming, baseball, volleyball and football.

- Children will be provided with a safe and recreational environment that will discourage them from engaging in less productive activities.
- Families will have more opportunities to learn how to swim and play active sports.
- Increased viability of South Bend neighborhoods.

Stakeholders

The following stakeholders were consulted:

- St. Joe Valley Greens
- Michiana Watershed
- South Bend Parks Department
- St. Joseph County Parks Department

General stakeholder reaction:

Some stakeholders believed that South Bend lacks certain types of recreation facilities. Some stakeholders mentioned that South Bend should work towards resolving this issue.