
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Erie County owns and operates a parks system containing nearly 11,000 acres of land on 38 sites throughout the county. These sites include eleven large multi-purpose parks, five undeveloped parks, thirteen forestry lots, seven small special-purpose parks and two multi-use recreational trails. The County park system was established in 1925, and initially comprised of four sites and 2,280 acres of land. Periodic land acquisition, over the years, has expanded the original holdings to the system's current size, and future expansion is always under consideration.

Since the last Master Plan was undertaken in 1988, much has changed in the park system and throughout the County. The County therefore initiated an update of its Park System Plan in 2002. This current Parks System Master Plan is the first component of a full update of the Erie County Comprehensive Plan. Subsequent components will address County-wide land use, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, farmland protection and similar regional planning issues.

The public consultation approach included outreach to as many interested groups and individuals as possible throughout the course of the project.

The resulting Master Plan is comprised of the following elements:

- A. *Inventory and Assessment of Existing Facilities and Conditions*
- B. *Review and Update of Existing Park Plans, along with new, conceptual master plans for five designated parks within the overall system. These are:*
 - *Hunters Creek Park*
 - *Wendt Beach Park*
 - *Bennett Beach Park*
 - *Como Lake Park - expansion area*
 - *Akron Falls Park - expansion area*

OUTREACH WAS ACHIEVED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING METHODS:

- *Web site dedicated to the Parks Master Plan*
- *Parks User Survey circulated to park user groups and posted on the Web site*
- *Traveling Exhibits highlighting park plans and key Master Plan recommendations were set up at various sites and at key events throughout the County*
- *Public Open Houses at two locations in the County*
- *Meetings and Work Sessions with a number of park user groups that requested a separate meeting, on specialized or park specific issues*

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- C. *Recreational Trails*
 - D. *Waterfront Strategy*
 - E. *Assessment of Consolidation and Management Opportunities*

2.0 THE COUNTY PARK SYSTEM TODAY

The Erie County Park system is a substantial network that includes developed parkland, waterfront properties, and extensive conservation lands. The amassed land-base is impressive, as is the range, quality, and uniqueness of the natural, scenic and cultural heritage features that the sites encompass, with many comparable to State parks. The parkland and reserve lands are well distributed throughout the County, and by previous reports the system is well utilized by residents throughout the seasons. The oldest of the County parks include a large number of excellent examples of Works Progress Administration (WPA) era structures, constructed in the 1930's. Constructed with thoughtful design and precise craftsmanship, the WPA structures include casinos, picnic pavilions, stone cairns, park shelters, and other specialized park structures. They are significant for their association with the history of the county and state parks system throughout the nation, and the contributions of Depression-era work groups. Their efforts have created structures of lasting quality, in tune with their natural setting and define a significant style in architecture and landscape design. The collection of structures within the County Parks, has created a series of parks that are second to none, and comparable to a number of State parks.

As a system, the Erie County Parks have the potential to be marketable as a tourist destination, providing the significant natural and cultural heritage resources are preserved and maintained. There are challenges, however, facing the Erie County Parks System. Although extensive land has been assembled over the years, new park development has not kept pace, increasing the usage of the existing multi-use parks, and placing demands on them to provide 'something for everyone'. The County has continued to acquire parkland, including the Botanical Gardens within the Olmsted designed South Park, along with other smaller and less notable properties, particularly along the

Buffalo waterfront. The Master Plan inventory and assessment revealed a park system that offers tremendous recreation potential, and a series of unique and memorable scenic, heritage and natural environment resources. However time and limited financial resources have taken their toll on some of the park's best assets, particularly in the heritage parks. There is increasing pressure to open up undeveloped parkland for recreation activities, while the forests and natural environment areas in the developed parks are in need of appropriate management to ensure their sustainability. Significant intervention is needed to ensure that the park facilities, heritage structures, and natural environment areas are protected and preserved for future generations.

3.0 CURRENT AND FUTURE RECREATION TRENDS

Recent trends in regional planning are toward an eco-system based approach to land use management that acknowledges links between natural systems, communities and people, in the development of healthy, sustainable environments for living. LandVote 2001, a report by the Trust for Public Lands, reports that in 17 states, *voters approved state and local ballot measures in the last state elections that generated \$1.2 billion for open space and parks*. This indicates strong public support and a willingness to commit tax dollars to land conservation and environmental issues.

Current recreation statistics indicate *rising interest and increased participation in self-directed, nature-based activities*. The most recent National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE200), indicated highest participation in unstructured activities such as: walking for exercise or pleasure, attending gatherings in an outdoor area away from home, and picnicking. Visiting an outdoor nature center, nature trail, or visitor center also ranked high, along with viewing and photographing natural scenery, and driving for pleasure on country roads and in parks, forests and other natural settings. Similarly the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) by the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), notes that 75% of New York State residents participate in some form of outdoor activity, with number one activities ranked as: relaxing in a park, walking, swimming and biking.

Visiting historic sites, boating' and fishing were also well-represented activities.

With its extensive river and lakefront lands, and over 11,000 acres of County managed parkland, much of it in a natural state, Erie County is well positioned to deliver these leisure activities. The County will be expected to continue into the for-seeable future, its support and influence on land conservation, environmental protection measures, and the provision of passive recreation opportunities, in conjunction with state and federal initiatives. In particular, it is expected that the revitalization and development of the Buffalo waterfront will be of paramount public and political interest over the next decade.

4.0 COUNTY ROLE IN RECREATION SERVICE DELIVERY

With today's fiscal limitations, and changing expectations in recreation service delivery, it is appropriate that the County revisit the mandate of the County Park system to ensure that it continues to fulfill its original objectives, while remaining a viable and sustainable entity for future generations. Based on the County Park System's historic role in recreation service delivery, a *Mission Statement* was affirmed. Accordingly, the *Goals and Objectives* of the 1988 Master Plan were reviewed for their appropriateness and refined to be relevant to this mandate.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Erie County Park System has traditionally been positioned to fill a niche in the regional parks and recreation framework. Specifically the County park system has emphasized the provision of recreation activities and facilities in natural environment areas as an alternative to localized park settings.

As a result of the demographic decline in the City of Buffalo and the transfer of population to the outlying towns and villages, there has been pressure to have the County Parks serve more local active recreation functions. Over the years

THE ROLE OF THE COUNTY PARK SYSTEM SHALL BE:

- To provide residents opportunities to enjoy recreational pursuits in natural settings on a year-round basis
- To protect regionally important areas of exceptional scenic, environmental, and cultural heritage significance
- To contribute to the economic vitality of the County
- To promote public awareness of the resources available within the park system

THE FOLLOWING PARK CLASSIFICATIONS ARE PROPOSED FOR THE ERIE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM.

Heritage Parks – which are comprised of the four original ‘County Parks’: Chestnut Ridge, Emery Park, Como Lake, Ellicott Creek (c. 1925) and Akron Falls Park (c. 1933) which was acquired by the County in 1946. These parks are superb examples of integrated sites with significant scenic, natural and historic significance. Each of the parks has unique, man-made structures of unmatched historical character and beauty, constructed as part of the WPA movement.

Waterfront Parks – which are key elements of the County Parks system, and include the significant sites of Wendt Beach, Bennett Beach and Isle View Park, several smaller lots along the County’s shoreline and linear parcels/recreational trail systems. The following sub-categories are proposed that rationalize the landholdings and establish the framework for system of waterfront parks.

*Destination Parks
Windows on the Water
Linkages*

Special Purpose Parks – which are parks with unique characteristics, that fulfill a specific function within the recreation delivery system. Elma Meadows Golf Course, Grover Cleveland Golf Course, Sprague Brook Park, Botanical Gardens.

Conservation Parks – which are the former ‘undeveloped parks’. The primary purpose of these sites is for conservation of the natural environment, and nature-based outdoor recreation activities, and the lands are to generally remain in a natural state in perpetuity. Hunters Creek, Beeman Creek, Eighteen Mile Creek, Franklin Gulf, Scoby Dam, Boston Forest.

Forest Management Areas – which are the former forest lots comprised primarily of plantation forests. Limited recreation potential in the form of trails or education on resource management is recognized for these lands, along with the potential for commercial resource management activities.

the provision of active recreation facilities has impacted the overall appearance and quality of certain areas of the heritage parks. As well the valuable assets of the parks – the heritage buildings and structures and the natural environment areas – will require significant and costly management and restoration efforts over the long term.

It is recommended that the County refocus on its core services, with an emphasis on the *provision of passive, nature-oriented recreation, and only continue or expand “sports” functions if there is a partner (sports group, local municipality) that brings funding and long term operational and management assistance.* The provision of active facilities should only be undertaken in areas where there is no negative impact, either visually or physically on the parks natural areas or heritage resources.

5.0 A NEW PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Recognizing the diversity and variety of uses within the County parks, a park classification system is recommended for the Erie County Parks System. The classifications will serve as a guide to the ongoing management and use of the existing parks and open space lands, and the future development of new ones. It is recognized that within the existing park system, parks may share some of the characteristics of other park categories.

6.0 PRESERVING THE PARKS VALUABLE RESOURCES

To meet the County Parks mission and mandate, the future focus of park operations and management should be on:

- Preservation and restoration of cultural heritage features
- Preservation and restoration of the natural systems

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- Parks improvements to address safety & liability issues
upgrade park appearances, and enhance park user
experience
 - Environmentally responsible parks management

6.1 PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES

In order to ensure the long-term preservation of the heritage parks, significant efforts need to be made toward the restoration of the heritage buildings and structures. Some existing *staff should be re-deployed or retrained to undertake the restoration and rebuilding of declining facilities*, i.e. stone shelters, picnic tables, steps and walkways, etc.. The County should undertake an *“adaptive re-use feasibility study” to find appropriate and financially responsible uses* for the main casino buildings and other historic structures such as Wendt Mansion and the Emery Inn.

The County should consider applying for *“National Historic Register of Historic Preservation”* status, as designated by the National Parks Service, for the five oldest parks – Chestnut Ridge Park, Emery Park, Como Lake Park, Ellicott Creek Park, and Akron Falls Park. This would elevate these parks to a new status in the region, equivalent to that bestowed on the Olmsted Parks System in Buffalo, and the Niagara Reservation State Park, in Niagara Falls., and would qualify the parks for Federal grants for historic preservation/restoration, as funding programs are available. The County should also continue to support the preservation of significant cultural heritage parks, such as the historic Buffalo Olmsted Parks and Botanical Gardens, in order to ensure that these important regional resources are adequately maintained.

6.2 PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATURAL SYSTEMS

Within the Erie County Park System environmental management strategies will initially focus on the return of maintained landscape areas to a more natural state through reduced mowing. However, with the extent of parkland in a natural state, and the significance

of the features contained within, there will also be a need to develop a long term plan for natural heritage preservation, and to identify priority conservation or restoration projects that require remedial action. This will require additional study, and will be along term initiative for the County. The resource management plan should be based on a Natural Resources Inventory. The study should include: *a detailed assessment and evaluation of the features*; and, provide *detailed prescriptive measures for management of the resources*, including priority areas for remediation and habitat restoration, recommendations for improved water quality management, and appropriate management strategies.

6.3 ENHANCING PARK USER EXPERIENCE

An initial step toward the restoration of the County parks system, is the undertaking of general parks improvements that will improve the park user experience and present a revitalized appearance to the parks. These activities include: *closing and decommissioning facilities that are underutilized or present public safety and liability hazards*, i.e. playground equipment, park buildings, parking areas; *removing derelict structures, such as picnic shelters, that do not have heritage significance*; *replacing picnic tables, restoring picnic shelters*.

6.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PARKS MANAGEMENT

To assist in the preservation and enhancement of the park's natural assets, an environmentally based park management system, should be adopted. This would include employing ecologically sound maintenance practices, such as: *changing mowing limits to return some manicured areas to naturalized zones*; and, *limiting the use of herbicides and pesticides*. Other strategies would include: *establishing re-naturalization or reforestation areas, improving aquatic habitats* (e.g. rehabilitating open water ponds, establishing natural riparian corridors), and, *creating or enhancing specialized habitat areas* (e.g. wetlands, meadows) to promote ecological diversity.

The use of naturalized landscapes must be understood and promoted as a landscape management tool whose principal goal is the restoration of ecological systems, rather than simply a reduction in mowing. Therefore, staff re-training and education may be needed, along

with the establishment of a public awareness program, and the seeking of assistance from environmental agencies.

7.0 PROMOTING THE PARKS

The five ‘heritage’ parks, and the Buffalo Olmsted parks, combined with the outstanding scenic qualities of Akron Falls, Emery Park, Chestnut Ridge and the Scoby Dam and Eighteen Mile Creek properties have resulted in a park system that is second to none in New York State. Collectively, the Erie County parks offer *a unique and marketable experience to County residents and visitors interested in both heritage and nature-based tourist destinations*. The parks system is not well understood by residents, who appear to be familiar only with parks close to them. Visitors are not introduced to the County Parks system or its attractions through general tourism information.

Once sufficient upgrades have been undertaken to ensure a quality visitor experience (with initial efforts focused on the heritage parks), the County should undertake a broad-based marketing program to raise awareness of the park system and its cultural and natural resources.

8.0 COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

It is recommended that the County seek partnerships amongst local municipalities, supporting agencies, and non-government organizations with special interest in the parks to assist in the provision of a higher quality of park than could be undertake otherwise. This would include furthering of cooperative relationships with organizations like the University of Buffalo, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, to improve the quality of services.

The efforts of the County, and its partners, would be bolstered by a newly created network of volunteers, cultivated through a *‘Friends of Erie County Parks’* program. Areas in

MARKETING STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- *Development of a park visitor information system, including the potential use of the Chestnut Ridge Park casino as a Visitor Centre, and satellite information kiosks in the various parks, using heritage structures (i.e. casinos, picnic shelters, well structures), and a comprehensive park signage system.*
- *A communication strategy involving: a new Park system logo, a Park web site, brochures, park and trails maps.*
- *Media outreach including newspaper articles, TV/radio spots, and press releases, to coincide with funding announcements or the launch of park projects.*
- *Cross-marketing and ‘packaging’ of the County Parks and their resources with other local and regional recreation providers, cultural organizations, neighbouring Counties, and local and regional attractions.*

which volunteer assistance could be provided include environmental and cultural heritage restoration, habitat enhancement projects, trails development and management, events coordination, park programming, and public awareness. An appropriate level of volunteer involvement would need to be reviewed with the Unions, to ensure no-conflict.

The addition of a Department staff person whose role is to co-ordinate the marketing program, and serve as liaison to the volunteer efforts may be warranted.

9.0 A STRATEGY FOR THE WATERFRONT PARKS

Given its role within the overall planning of the region, the County needs to assume the lead in working with other levels of government to ensure that waterfront development is undertaken in a comprehensive and unified manner. The waterfront strategy should build on past waterfront planning efforts, and work towards the underlying principles of economic renewal, public accessibility, recreation enhancement and environmental conservation.

However, the ability of any planned waterfront revitalization to generate tourism potential and economic success for the region will be substantially based on the quality of the recreational experience for prospective residents and visitors. This will require a high standard of park development, accompanied by an equally high standard of management and maintenance, for all of the major waterfront sites. The County owned and/or managed waterfront park system already represents a significant part of the County park operational costs, and Wendt Beach and Bennett Beach, are in need of upgrading. The County has also assumed responsibility for the maintenance of several smaller City of Buffalo owned riverfront parks. At the same time, the 'heritage' parks, which represent the County's best assets, are also in need of significant capital investments, and the County is increasingly involved in the preservation of the

Olmsted park system, which is currently primarily a City responsibility.

To ensure that the collective vision for the Lake Erie and Niagara River waterfronts is realized, the County should enter into discussions with its waterfront partners, i.e. the State, Buffalo Museum of Science, City of Buffalo, and local governments, to rationalize the ownership and management for the waterfront park system. A role for each partner should be defined that reflects the mandate of each level of government, and ensures a system of high quality, well managed and financially sustainable parks. Within the emerging waterfront parks and greenway system that is underway, there is a potential pattern of ownership/management emerging, with the State taking on the lead role in developing and managing significant sites along the Lake Erie waterfront, i.e. Gallagher Beach, Small Boat Harbor, Woodlawn Beach and, potentially a state park in the South Buffalo Redevelopment area, along with Times Beach and the Tiff Nature Reserve. The County may wish to investigate whether the State's interest would extend to Wendt Beach and Bennett Beach. Alternately the management of these sites for partial cost recovery should be investigated, similar to the State-run beaches. The County should also consider its role in the current and future management of Buffalo riverfront parks, particularly if it assumes greater responsibility for the Olmsted Parks.

Notwithstanding these opportunities for change, future County decisions concerning new waterfront land acquisitions, or the assumption of management of existing parks and open space areas, should be consider the mission and mandate of the Erie County parks system, and should further ensure the *provision of adequate funds to manage and operate them to a high standard.*

Any redevelopment and upgrading of the County (and other) waterfront parks, should be undertaken with a view to establishing an ecological framework throughout the system that supports the significant migratory bird corridor (Important Bird Area) along the Lake Erie and Niagara River corridors. Visibility and connectivity of the waterfront park system should also be ensured, and future improvements should include: development of a cohesive *waterfront signage and wayfinding system*, reviewing opportunities to *improve the routing and landscaping of the Riverwalk trail*, and adding *additional access points for fishing canoe/kayak launches.*

10.0 RECREATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM

10.1 REGIONAL WATERFRONT TRAIL SYSTEM

The Regional Waterfront Trail System described within this report will be a continuous network of pathways that connect parks, waterfront areas, businesses and neighborhoods. The entire system will be comprised of over 88 miles of individual trail segments within Erie County. These segments are now at various stages of development which range from early conceptual planning to trails that are built and currently in use. The purpose of this section in the report is to provide the framework that will facilitate the planning, funding, design and construction of a completed facility. The impacts of a completed facility will be far reaching and justify the capital expense necessary for implementation.

The completed facility will provide for safe, identifiable and maintainable means of alternative transportation, recreational opportunities and improved access to the County's extensive waterfront. A completed trail system would also advance the vision of making this network a state owned and operated facility. Erie County certainly is worthy of a first-class amenity that enhances one of New York State's great waterfronts. The Regional Waterfront Trail System would also allow for the completion of a continuous trail system that someday could extend beyond the limits of Erie County.

10.2 RECREATIONAL TRAILS

The Recreational Trails portion of the report responds to the goal of constructing a connected countywide system of parks, trails and greenways. With a specific focus on leisurely family recreation, this effort explored opportunities to create an easily accessible trail system comprised of both on-road and off-road facilities. The study concentrated on both the suburban and the rural population centers within Erie County because trail development in these areas is significantly behind that of the more urban areas of the County. Therefore the proposed system compliments, but does not repeat, the bicycle network previously developed by others.

Whenever possible there has been an attempt to utilize County roads within the proposed trail system so that these routes could be developed as extensions of the County park system. However, the sentiment that was received during the public consultation period indicated that off-road facilities were the preferred option, especially for family recreation. Therefore, recommendations have been made for Erie County to explore forming partnerships with some non-county entities in order to develop off-road trails in abandoned railroad corridors, along utility easements and within both local and State road right-of-ways.

The initial goal of the Recreational Trail study was to establish community-based trail linkages that provide opportunities for connections to the nearest County Park and other points of interest through day long or half day long bicycle trips. These routes are mostly comprised of on-road facilities and the utilization of existing off-road pathways. This provides the greatest cost efficiency in the initial phases of development. Later phases of Recreational Trail development will focus on establishing countywide park-to-park linkages that will also improve access to the existing urban and waterfront trail systems.

Over the anticipated twenty year life span of this report, the total projected development costs for the initial phase of the Recreational Trail system would result in annual expenditures of roughly 1.6 million dollars. However, since it can be assumed that most trail projects would include either federal or state grant assistance this would reduce the County share to levels consistent with current annual spending on recreational trail development.

11.0 PARK SYSTEM INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

11.1 PARK SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

As part of this study, all sixteen of the developed County parks were examined to assess their current condition. The undeveloped properties that were excluded from the inventory have only very basic features, such as rudimentary roads or trails, and do not require the same level of management and maintenance that the developed

· parks require. All of the assessment information was compiled into a single database. The database can be queried in a variety of ways that will enable the County to both monitor the general condition of each park as well as assess specific features within each park. Photographs of most features are linked to its description within the database. As repairs or changes to facilities are made, the database can be updated to reflect these changes. This information can continually be used to target where improvements need to be made and thus, provides Erie County a valuable tool for park management.

12.0 PARKS DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 PARK MANAGEMENT ZONES

· Within the County Park System there are many diverse settings and management concerns. The classification of parks into categories according to their significant features, and special functions is recommended, to provide a framework for parks management and the allocation of resources. To accompany the parks classifications, a zoning system and management strategies were developed to guide the long-term preservation and upgrading of the parks.

· The following Management Zones were applied, as relevant, to each of the Park Master Plans:

- A. *Nature Reserve Zones*
- B. *Recreation Zones (Active and Passive)*
- C. *Heritage Zones*
- D. *Service Zones*

12.2 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION STRATEGIES

· The Erie County Parks includes extensive natural environment areas including streams and waterbodies, forested areas, and wetlands. Although many of these areas are preserved from development, they will require active management to ensure long-term protection, and to restore some of the degraded systems. There are also opportunities within the management of the parks to enhance and restore wildlife habitat.

THE PARK MASTER PLAN INCLUDES STRATEGIES FOR:

- *Vegetation management*
- *Habitat enhancement and protection*
- *Water quality protection including: stream protection, stormwater management, erosion and sediment control measures, pesticide/fertilizer use*
- *Areas for reduction of mowing*
- *Public Awareness and Education Initiatives*
- *Signage System, including Park Identification/Information Signs, Directional Signs, Regulatory Signs, and Interpretation and Education Signs*
- *Park Rules and Regulations*

13.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

13.1 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

Given the age and diversity of the parks, and the unique nature of their buildings and structures, a substantial amount of upgrading is needed, particularly within the 'heritage' parks. In addition, a number of opportunities have been identified to improve the park visitor experience, and to raise the profile and quality of the parks, to meet their marketing potential as a first-class park system. It is anticipated that the capital improvements will need to be undertaken incrementally, and over the term of the master plan, which is assumed to be at least twenty years. Prioritization is therefore needed to ensure that the highest needs for repair and upgrading are undertaken first, followed by projects that expand recreation opportunities.

Although many positive programs and changes have recently been undertaken within the parks system, the implementation of recommendations for capital improvements is faced with certain challenges. These include:

- *static or declining tax-based funding that is limits budget growth*
- *increasing costs for daily operation and maintenance*
- *increasing costs of repair to "heritage facilities" as they deteriorate over time*
- *need for new facilities within the waterfront parks that are costly to operate*
- *expanding responsibility for the County to take on greater role in parks system funding, maintenance, and management (i.e. Olmstead Parks and regional waterfront operations)*

THE FOLLOWING ORDER OF PRIORITY IS RECOMMENDED FOR THE UNDERTAKING OF CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS:

- *Repair and Removal of Facilities that Compromise Public Safety*
- *Restoration of Significant Heritage Structures*
- *Improvement of Facilities That Extend Core Recreation Opportunities*
- *Construction of New Facilities to Expand Waterfront Opportunities*

THE BUSINESS PLAN SHOULD ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING:

- *Market research and analysis*
- *Cost/benefit financial (ROI) analysis*
- *Maximization of revenue generation and service provision at special use facilities (golf courses, beaches, other)*
- *Development of a comprehensive marketing plan*
- *Development of a comprehensive communication plan*
- *Development of a comprehensive corporate sponsorship program*
- *Development of a comprehensive grant-writing strategy*
- *Development of a “friends of”, volunteer committee, and strategic planning/community committee infrastructure*

13.2 DEVELOPING A BUSINESS PLAN

The most efficient allocation of Erie County Parks Department resources ultimately requires making management and operations more efficient while optimizing revenue generation for the individual parks and the parks system as a whole. Strategies that will generate attendance and potentially increase revenues are:

- *Maximizing the use of existing parks: optimizing investment in the existing parks system and ensuring that the visitor experience is the best possible (resident and non-resident)*
- *Ensuring that the parks are efficiently operated: improving financial returns on investment by ensuring that revenues are maximized and that the parks are being operated efficiently*
- *Selectively developing new parks: ensuring that new investments address unmet community needs or respond to new opportunities that have been identified through market research*

An evaluation of comparable operations and current industry literature indicates that it is possible to manage a contemporary parks system using a business planning model. This model requires a “market driven” approach to providing services and programs, and necessitates developing a better understanding of current and future park users and analysis of regional market trends.

It is recommended that different operating models are reviewed and one selected that best fits the political, financial and operational context. In order to determine the most appropriate model, the Department should undertake a business plan to guide decision-making.

13.3 ACQUISITION AND CONSOLIDATION STRATEGY

The Parks Department is increasingly being asked to take on a greater role in funding, maintenance, and management,

for sites within the overall system that are costly to operate and which require major capital development, i.e. the Olmsted Parks and regional waterfront operations. The waterfront strategy recommends entering into dialogue with the State and the City of Buffalo to determine whether greater efficiencies and a higher level of service can be achieved, through a rationalization of the waterfront parks management. That is, identifying an appropriate level of involvement of local, state, and county levels of government across the entire waterfront system.

Within the balance of the park system, there are still extensive undeveloped land holdings within the system that will likely remain that way for the long term, as demands have not increased significantly in recent years. The focus of the Parks Department in the foreseeable future should remain on the upgrading and management of the existing parks, rather than on the acquisition of new parkland, or on the development of new parks. However, opportunities may arise from time to time for the acquisition of lands that are adjacent to existing parks. These should be considered, at the time, on the basis of their contributions to the park system for either recreation or natural environment protection reasons. *Any acquisition or expansion of the system should, however, be consistent with the Mission Statement and should be financially sustainable without burdening the balance of the system.*

There have also been suggestions in the past of the disposition of certain underutilized County parks. *Any disposal of County parks should consider the need to maintain the established standards for acreage and distribution, and ensure long-term public recreation uses and protection of significant natural areas.*

The role and function of the Forestry Lots, as well as their economic management over the long term should be evaluated. *Any consideration of opening up the Forestry Lots for recreation uses, or potential disposition, would need to be assessed against the resource management aspects, including both revenue generation potential as well as any broader objectives for retention and protection of forest cover within the County.* The recommended undertaking of a Natural Resource Inventory and Management study would assist in this regard.