Village of New Era Recreation Plan

January 2020

WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (WMSRDC)

The WMSRDC is a regional council of governments representing 120 local governments in the West Michigan counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana.

The mission of WMSRDC is to promote and foster regional development in West Michigan… through cooperation amongst local governments.

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INTRODUCTION

The Village of New Era Recreation Plan is intended to guide present and future recreational resources development within the village, including parkland, parks facilities, recreational programs, and public open space.

This plan, in addition to serving as a guide for recreation facilities and program development, is prepared to satisfy the requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Recreation plans are required by the MDNR for state and federal grant eligibility.

Overview of the Planning Process

In 2019, the Village of New Era contracted with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) to concurrently assist in the update of the Village of New Era Future Land Use Plan (1998) and the Village of New Era Recreation Plan (2014). As a result of this coordinated effort, the two plans are now better aligned. This edition of the New Era Recreation Plan builds upon the 2014 edition, which was also created with assistance of the WMSRDC.

Citizen input is very important in addressing recreation-related issues facing the Village community. The planning process is most effective when all sectors of the citizenry provide input into the future of their community. The opportunity for input was provided through a public meeting on June 13, 2019; Village Council meetings; a public hearing on December 12, 2019; and a recreation questionnaire available at www.wmsrdc.com from July through October 2019. Notices of the public meeting and public hearing were published in the Oceana Herald-Journal, a general circulation newspaper in the Village of New Era. The effort to update the Village’s recreation and land use plans was also discussed in the bi-monthly WMSRDC newsletter.

Function of the Plan

This particular plan is intended to serve as a guide for future decisions and actions related to recreation. It should be used by the decision-makers of the Village of New Era based on the desire of the general public and the availability of resources.

The following are specific goals of this plan:

- To provide a means for village residents to participate in determining the future of their community, thereby promoting the interests of the community.
- To establish goals and objectives to be used as a guide for future decisions regarding public recreation and open space and not to be competing with private enterprise.
- To outline implementation strategies that can ensure that future development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the village.
• To provide a detailed inventory of recreation facilities and assist decision-makers with development decisions related to those facilities.
• To provide means by which grant funding can be secured for recreation related development projects.
• To prepare a plan that is consistent with Michigan Public Act 156 of 1917, as amended.

Legal Basis and Development

This plan is enabled by Michigan law, but does not carry the power of statutory law or ordinance. Its principles are derived from Public Act 156 of 1917, an act authorizing villages to operate systems of public recreation and playgrounds which states, in part that:

Sec. 1 (2-4). Villages may acquire, equip, and maintain land, buildings, or other recreation facilities. Villages may employ a superintendent of recreation and assistants. Villages may vote and expend funds for the operation of such a system.

Sec. 3 (1-4). Villages may operate a system of public recreation and playgrounds, independent, or cooperate with any other city, village, county, township or school district in its conduct in any manner in which they may mutually agree, or delegate the operation of this system to a Recreation Board created by any or all of them, and appropriate money, voted for this purpose, to such board.

Every effort has been made to present information that is accurate. The Village of New Era Council and the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission shall not be held liable for any errors or omissions related to this plan. This plan is a general planning document. Therefore, a thorough investigation with original research materials should be undertaken before proceeding with any specific implementation decisions.

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Village of New Era is located in the south-west quadrant of Oceana County, which lies in the west central part of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula nearly halfway between the Michigan-Indiana border and Grand Traverse Bay. The Village is bordered by Shelby Township to the north and Grant Township to the south. The village lies within the Shelby Public School District. New Era Elementary School, part of the Shelby Public School District, is located in
the Village and services fourth and fifth grades. In addition, the Village is home to New Era Christian School a private school offering preschool through 8th grade classes. Map #1 indicates the regional location of New Era within Oceana County. The Village encompasses an area of 537.6 acres, or approximately .84 square miles. The 2010 Census lists the Village’s total population at 451 with a total of 188 housing units.

Table #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forecasted Population</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2025</td>
<td>2030</td>
<td>2035</td>
<td>2040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>466</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Roles of the New Era Village Council

All recreational and maintenance decisions within the Village of New Era are made by the New Era Village Council. In the summer, the Village employs high school students responsible for doing work and recreational duties around the Village. The individuals report directly to the Village Council.

Village of New Era Organizational Chart

Annual and Projected Budget

Table #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village of New Era Parks &amp; Recreation Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Current Funding Sources**

The Village of New Era does not have any sources that generate funding specifically for recreation within the community. Funding for recreation purposes within the Village are taken directly out of the general fund of the budget.

**Recreation Programming**

The Village of New Era does not currently offer any recreational programs. However, there are a few youth and adult recreational programs offered by locally-run and organized recreational leagues.

**Role of Volunteers**

The Village of New Era does not currently receive any volunteer work from the community unless requested.

**Relationship(s) with School Districts, Other Public Agencies or Private Orgs**

The Village of New Era partners with the Shelby Rec Club for their programs including swimming, soccer, softball, and T-ball by contributing $1,000 annually toward the program, which is open to area residents. The Village of New Era does not currently work with or partner with the local school districts for recreational purposes. However, it is important to note that the two schools provide the community with playgrounds and athletic fields that are important to the community.

**RECREATION & RESOURCES INVENTORY**

**Methods Used To Conduct the Inventory**

Officials from the Village of New Era, along with staff from the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, completed an extensive tour of the area along with recreational facilities within the village. Located on page 5 is a map identifying the location of area parks and recreation facilities.
Location Map

Map #2

Village of New Era
Parks Map

This map is for general planning purposes only.
Aug 5, 2013

Non-Motorized Trail
State Park
Municipal Park
School
Village-Owned Parks and Recreation Facilities

New Era Ball Field

The New Era Ball Field is located at the corner of James Street and Oak Avenue. The approximately 1.5-acres property is owned and maintained by the Village. Amenities on the property include a fenced in ball diamond with bleachers; pickle ball, four-square and basketball courts; and a storage shed and portable restrooms. The ball field is utilized throughout the year for outdoor recreation, and leagues and youth soccer during warm seasons.

The Village applied for and received a Land & Water Conservation recreation grant through the Michigan DNR in 2015. Improvements to the park were completed in 2018.

Depot Park

Depot Park, also known as the Rail Trail Depot, is owned and maintained by the Village of New Era. The property is approximately one acre and is located adjacent to the Hart-Montague Trail. The park is widely used by community members and trail users for picnics and a place to rest. Amenities of Depot Park include a covered shelter with picnic tables, portable restrooms, and a wooden bridge over Carlton Creek. A small gravel parking lot with two to three parking spaces is located next to the shelter and trail. Improvements made to the park in 2018 include a small plaza with seating and ornamental lighting along First Street, and a paved sidewalk connecting the plaza to the depot shelter. Improvements were made possible through a cooperative effort between the Village of New Era and the New Era Chamber of Commerce. Lastly, in the fall of 2019, the depot shelter was beginning to show cracking in the floor, which is apparently resulting from, or exacerbated by, rainwater runoff. This issue may need to be addressed within the next five years.
**New Era Village Hall Property**

The New Era Village Hall is located on Garfield Road in the southeast quadrant of the village. The hall sits along the roadside on approximately five acres. The property behind the village hall is wooded and undeveloped. The property has the potential to be developed for recreational use if the village determines there is a need for additional recreational opportunities within the village limits.

**Accessibility Assessment**

Below is an assessment of the current accessibility of the two New Era parks. A ranking of 1-5 has been assigned by the Village Council to provide a baseline for improvements that are needed and to track future progress. Rankings are given on the following scale: 1 = none of the site elements meet 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design; 2 = some; 3 = most; 4 = all; and 5 = the facility meets the Principles of Universal Design.

**New Era Ball Field**
Accessibility Ranking: 3 (most site elements are accessible)
Description of Accessible Elements: Paved handicap parking; paved, level walkways.
Needs to improve accessibility: Portable toilets are not currently handicap accessible.

**Depot Park**
Accessibility Ranking: 3 (most site elements are accessible)
Accessible Elements: Paved walkway connecting plaza on 1st Street to depot building.
Needs to improve accessibility: Portable toilets are not currently handicap accessible.

**Other Recreation Facilities**

**New Era Christian School**

The New Era Christian School property is located across the street from the New Era Ball Field on the corner of James Street and Oak Avenue. The property stretches eastward to Redwood Avenue and is approximately four acres in size. The Christian School maintains a playground with climbing structures, slides, swings, benches, and a basketball court. Beyond the playground area, the school has numerous soccer fields utilized by the community.
through youth soccer leagues. Portable restrooms, provided by the village, are also located adjacent to the soccer fields. The eastern edge of the property is utilized for parking by the soccer leagues.

**Hart – Montague Park Trail**

The William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail State Park is a 22-mile paved trail owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The trail was the State of Michigan’s first linear trail. The Hart-Montague Trail passes through rural and forested lands. Scenic overlooks and picnic areas are located along the route, including the Village of New Era. The DNR currently provides only emergency maintenance services and seeks governmental agencies to operate and maintain its linear park trails. Activities allowed along the trail include biking, hiking, wildlife viewing, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling. A local snowmobile group grooms the trail on a volunteer basis during the winter.

**New Era Elementary School**

The New Era Elementary School is located on Hillcrest Drive in the western portion of the village. The property is approximately three acres in size. It includes a playground with climbing structures, slides, swings, benches throughout the property, basketball court with four hoops, backstop for baseball, and a large soccer field with nets. Playground equipment here was updated in early 2019.

**Status Report for all Grant-Assisted Parks and Recreation Facilities**

(Included in appendix)
In 2018, The Village of New Era approached the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) for assistance with updating the Village of New Era Recreation Plan. A contract between the village and the WMSRDC was signed in May 2019 with work on the Plan beginning in June 2019. WMSRDC staff attended a Village Council meeting held on May 9, 2019. During the meeting, WMSRDC staff informed the attendees of the steps involved in the process of creating the plan. A draft schedule outlining the planning process was also presented at the meeting, and information was gathered regarding past, current, and future recreational issues regarding the Village through an open dialogue with the Council.

On May 17, 2019, representatives from the Village guided WMSRDC staff on an extensive tour of the community. During the tour, the group visited recreational facilities within the Village. WMSRDC staff was able to gather detailed information regarding the area, take photos, and gain a better understanding of the local recreation system.

On June 13, 2019 at 6:00 p.m., the Village hosted a public meeting at The Avenue Event Center in on First Street in New Era. Notice of the meeting was published on May 30, 2019 in the Oceana Herald-Journal, a general purpose newspaper of circulation within the Village of New Era. A copy of the notice is located in the appendix. The purpose of the public meeting was to explain the purpose and process of developing a recreation plan, as well as to gather input from the public to help evaluate the goals and objectives of the New Era Recreation Plan.

Attendees of the public meeting were asked to complete a survey asking the following questions.

- What do you like about the current recreation facilities in New Era?
- What don’t you like about the current recreation facilities in New Era, or what would you like to see changed?
- What types of new programs or facilities would you like to see in New Era?

Each attendee was asked to share his or her responses to the questions with the group at the meeting. This exercise resulted in an in-depth discussion regarding recreational activities and facilities within the area. Responses to each of the three questions recorded during the meeting have been categorized and tabulated in the tables below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bike Trail</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton Creek</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Ball Diamond</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkability</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depot park</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Number of Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Fest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer's Market</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickle ball</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What don’t you like about the current recreation facilities in your community, or what would you like changed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgrounds</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough public property</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor maintenance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need sprinklers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need picnic tables</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tennis court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities can be increased</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pavilion at Depot Park needs attention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What types of new programs or facilities would you like developed in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog park</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuffleboard court</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise park/path</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice skating</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land acquisition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic tables at Ball Field</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potable water at bike trail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation at parks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve parks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little league use ball field</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make New Era a walking community</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase red building/demolish police garage at Depot Park</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize tournaments (shuffleboard, broomball, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize right of ways</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other comments regarding current and future recreation opportunities in New Era:

- Consider possibility of New Era Elementary closing and possible acquisition by the Village
- Ask students and young families for input
- Beautification
GOALS & OBJECTIVES

As a result of the public meeting held on Thursday, June 13, 2019, participants provided valuable input regarding their wishes and desires for the recreational facilities and activities within the Village of New Era. This information was documented and taken into consideration by the Village Council to evaluate the recreation goals and objectives established in the 2014 edition of this plan. The main tools used to formulate these goals and objectives were the answers to the questions asked during the group activity conducted during public meetings, as well as the general discussions with the community leaders in attendance during the fact finding meeting and community tour held in May 2019, and during the recreation goals and objectives work session conducted by the Village Council on August 8, 2019.

Based on the feedback gained through the above methods, the following goals and objectives were formulated. Please note that the goals and objectives are listed in no particular order.

GOAL: Continually seek opportunities to partner with local, regional, and state recreation providers/organizations to enhance recreational advantages in the Village of New Era.

OBJECTIVES:

• Support the efforts of the two schools located within the village to provide safe and adequate playground facilities.
• Where possible, assist the local rail trail groups in the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the Hart-Montague Rail Trail.
• Work closely with Oceana County and the Oceana County Parks & Recreation Committee regarding potential recreation projects in and near the Village of New Era.
• Remain knowledgeable regarding state recreational opportunities and programs.
• Establish a relationship with local recreation groups/organizations, and continually support their efforts to provide recreational opportunities within the village.
• Partner with other Hart-Montague Trail communities to promote recreation and commerce.

GOAL: Uphold the ongoing maintenance of existing recreational facilities and programs within the Village of New Era.

OBJECTIVES:

• Continue to hold the yearly street festivals, parades, and related activities within the village.
• Strive to maintain the depot facility near the Hart-Montague linear trail for use by residents and trail users.
• Where possible work with and support local rail trail groups in order to maintain the quality and usage of the Hart-Montague linear trail.

**GOAL:** Strive to improve and expand recreational facilities in the Village of New Era to foster and maintain a sense of place and community pride.

**OBJECTIVES:**

• Seek opportunities to improve the facilities at Depot Park.
• Consider the acquisition of additional property for recreational purposes, such as an exercise park, dog park, or bird watching.
• Support efforts to improve the Hart-Montague linear trail.
• Seek opportunities to develop a village owned playground area, especially in the event of a school closure.

**GOAL:** Leverage recreation, parks, and community events to attract visitors to the downtown.

**OBJECTIVES:**

• Utilize vacant storefronts as “pop-up shops” during events and other times of increased traffic.
ACTION PROGRAM

Over the next five-year period, the New Era Recreation Plan will be used by the Village of New Era to accomplish the goals set forth through this planning process.

Through the planning process, it became apparent that the community values the recreational opportunities and programs currently available in the village. Community leaders stressed the need to sustain the existing recreational opportunities within the village and celebrate the rural character of the community. It remains a priority for the community to continue supporting annual festivals, parades, and many other community activities.

The village will continue to work with and support the numerous partnerships required to hold community events, as well as seek opportunities for new partnerships. With limited financial resources, it will be necessary for the community to forge additional partnerships to not only sustain existing recreation opportunities, but also to improve or expand upon them.

While the two existing community-owned parks are highly valued, it was noted during the planning process that additional public land for recreation is desired by some members of the community. Therefore the village will be open to considering land acquisition opportunities for public recreation. The planning process also indicated there may be public support for unique recreation opportunities that encourage physical activity. There was also a noted desire to leverage recreation opportunities and community events to support commerce in the downtown district, which has experienced decline in recent years. New recreation opportunities, such as a dog park, exercise walkway, or bird-watching, may be utilized to encourage physical activity within the community, as well as attract new visitors and entice encourage bike trail users to linger within the community longer.

CONCLUSION

When used appropriately, the Village of New Era Recreation Plan will assist village leaders in the management of existing recreation facilities and the development of new recreation opportunities. The plan is a guide for decision making and should be consulted regularly. Public input should not to be forgotten as an essential facet of recreation planning. The desires of the community should always be taken into consideration when specific recreation facility decisions need to be made. Lastly, this plan should be updated as the local situation warrants, or every five years as required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, to allow the village to remain eligible for grant consideration.
Appendix

Public Involvement and Plan Adoption Process