

Identify Practicalities of a Lakefront Park

Time Line: *approximately 2017 - 2019*

Estimated Cost: *\$0 - \$3000*

Guiding Principle(s):

- *The Parks and Recreation Commission should focus on opening Whitmore Lake up to the public by assisting in the creation of a public access point and/ or a lakefront park*

Creation of a lakefront park on Whitmore Lake seems like an obvious way to make the most of one of Northfield Township's greatest assets and to create a regional draw into downtown Whitmore Lake. A lakefront park could create a real community gathering point for residents from across the township, including the rural areas, possibly helping to unify the township, and it could generate significant business for the merchants of downtown Whitmore Lake.

Many Northfield Township residents, especially those who do not live on the lake, would like to see some type of recreation access to Whitmore Lake. However, providing such access would be a difficult and expensive task. Many residents living on the lake would frown upon additional lakefront development, which could hamper their own use and enjoyment of the lake (for which they have paid a premium). Nonetheless, many residents desire greater access to Whitmore Lake and feel as though this major asset is not being utilized to its full potential. A well-designed effort could potentially provide access to the lake and a significant recreational asset without overcrowding the lake. As the Parks and Recreation Commission contemplates the possibility of a lakefront park, various issues would need to be considered.

Starting from scratch, one must consider purchase of available property as a challenging step. Taking into account the need for parking and pedestrian crosswalks, it seems that Main Street between 8 Mile and East Shore would be a preferred location. One location that is not already built up: the Van Curler property, across from the post office, would be ideal. This property is currently for sale, but is only being offered as a part of a much larger parcel that spans from Main Street to Barker Road. The projected cost could exceed two million dollars.

Next, we might consider buying two or three existing houses and demolishing them to make room for a park. Depending on which houses are selected this would likely run from \$500,000 to a million or more. Furthermore, there is very little vacant land left anywhere on Whitmore Lake in Northfield Township. It might be useful to investigate the possibility of working with Green Oak Township and developing a shared facility in Green Oak, on the lake, assuming a suitable property could be found, and agreements reached.

When considering initial cost it is important also to review the intended uses for the park. If it is to include swimming and a beach, then sand would need to be brought in. Whitmore Lake has mostly a muck bottom. Prior to bringing in sand, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) would have to be consulted and necessary approvals sought. Other issues to be considered would include ongoing maintenance, safety, Township liability, etc.

It should be pointed out that a public beach/swimming area is already available to our residents in neighboring Webster Township, one which they support through county tax dollars: Independence Lake. Island Lake State Park and Kensington Metropark also offer public beaches in the near vicinity.

One final possibility is that the township could come to an agreement with a private buyer of the Van Curler property, whereby the developer could provide a lakefront park across from the post office as part of a bigger commercial or residential development on the rest of the property, thereby providing benefit to their own development and to the township residents as a whole.

Action Items:

1. Monitor all lakefront properties for sale to identify any viable locations.
2. Engage the residents on exactly what type of amenities they wish to see in a lakefront park (e.g., gazebo, bandshell, beach, picnic tables, etc.).
3. Engage lakefront residents to see what type of uses they would find beneficial (or at least acceptable).
4. Consider the costs of such a development and consider whether residents would be willing to bear those costs.