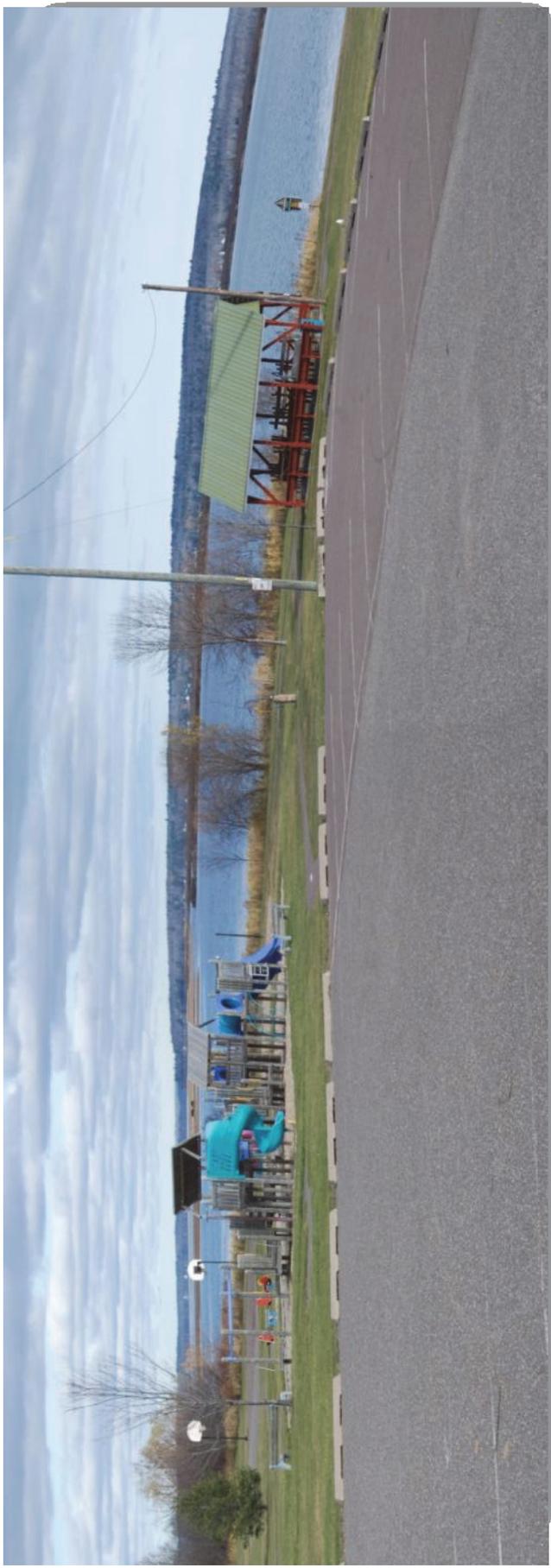


# CHASSELL TOWNSHIP RECREATION PLAN

2012-2017



## **INTRODUCTION**

Chassell Township is fortunate to have an excellent assortment of recreation opportunities available for its citizens and the surrounding area. The location of Michigan Technological University within the immediate area has provided recreation facilities that typically would only be available in larger cities. Furthermore, the township's geographic location in the Copper Country (near the Keweenaw Peninsula) offers remarkable outdoor recreation resources.

The Chassell Township Recreation Plan describes the community, inventories existing recreation facilities, and presents a five year action program for future recreational development. This Recreation Plan was adopted by the Township Board on April 11, 2012. A copy of the Board's resolution has been inserted in the Plan.



## **COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION**

Chassell Township is located in Houghton County in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. A portion of the township borders Baraga County and Portage Lake, the Portage River, and Lake Superior's Keweenaw Bay.

The township is largely rural, but has one main population center – the community of Chassell. This urbanized area is not incorporated and thus is governed by the Township Board. The total land area for the township is approximately 48 square miles.



Chassell grew up as a lumber processing center with limited influences from area mining activities. Extensive lumbering operations ended by 1920, and today the community is primarily residential. The few commercial establishments include a service station, restaurant, lodging facilities, and small retail shops. Most local residents and the summer tourist

population go to the Houghton-Hancock area to do their shopping.

Chassell Township is well suited for agricultural purposes due to unique micro-climate conditions. The soils and climate are especially well suited for strawberries, and most of the approximately 650 acres planted in Houghton County are located in Chassell Township. Chassell is the home of the Copper Country Strawberry Festival. Farming activity has declined over the years.

Many Chassell residents are employed by Michigan Technological University in Houghton, or work in commercial establishments of the surrounding area.



The population of the western Upper Peninsula reached a peak in the 1920's when mining and lumbering activities were

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booming. Since that time there has been considerable out-migration of residents in response to the decline of those industries. The population of Houghton County and Chassell Township also followed this trend, decreasing 51.8 percent (71,930 to 34,652) in the period from 1920 to 1970.

Since 1970, Houghton County's population seems to have stabilized due to the presence of Michigan Technological University (MTU), government and service sectors.

Chassell Township's population is further characterized by a seasonal influx of tourists.

Chassell Township's climate is affected by Lake Superior, moderating temperatures and generating large amounts of snow during the winter months.

Average snowfall in the area exceeds 200 inches annually.

The coldest month is January, when temperatures average 14.6°F. The hottest month is July, with an average temperature of 65.6°F. Prevailing winds are southerly during warm weather and northwesterly during the rest of the year.

Chassell Township has a variable topography with ridges and valleys which generally run southwest to northeast. Slopes along the ridges range from 8.1 to 15 percent, and exceed 15 percent in several small areas. However, most of the land in the township is quite flat, with slopes of less than 8 percent.

The northwestern portion of the township is the most rugged with elevations exceeding 1,000 feet above msl (mean sea level datum). In the central portion, elevations decrease to almost

600 feet along Pike Bay and the valleys of the Sturgeon and Snake rivers. Extensive swampy areas are found between these two rivers and on the delta which forms at their mouths. East of the river valleys, elevations again rise to 757 feet on a small ridge in the east central portion of the township. Elevations along Keweenaw Bay range from 606 to 670 feet above sea level.

Chassell Township lies in the Sturgeon and Portage Drainage area, both of which flow into Lake Superior. The Sturgeon River basin includes the Snake River, the Pike River, Sturgeon River, Otter River, and a number of small tributaries. This basin drains western Baraga County and southern Houghton County, and empties into Portage Lake at Chassell. There are no known sources of industrial waste discharging into the basin, but runoff from agricultural activities near the mouth may have a minor influence on water quality.

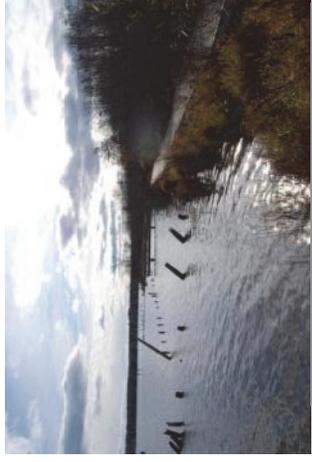
The Portage drainage area includes Portage Lake and River, the Trap Rock River and numerous creeks in northern Houghton County. The Portage River and lake serves as a shipping channel.

is a large vacant tract of land which was previously occupied by the Worcester Lumber Company. A portion of this tract was acquired by the township and developed as a Township park.

The Chassell Township School District, which provides education for K-12 school is south of town along US-41. Among recreation facilities on school district lands are a baseball field, an outdoor ice facility, and ski trail.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

In Chassell Township, park and recreation facilities are managed primarily by the Township Board, with the exception of the school-related properties. The ski trails are managed by volunteer groups. The Township Board serves as a committee to develop plans and recommendations for Township recreation facilities and programs. Major initiatives are discussed and voted on by the township board before implementation. An organization chart is included in this plan.



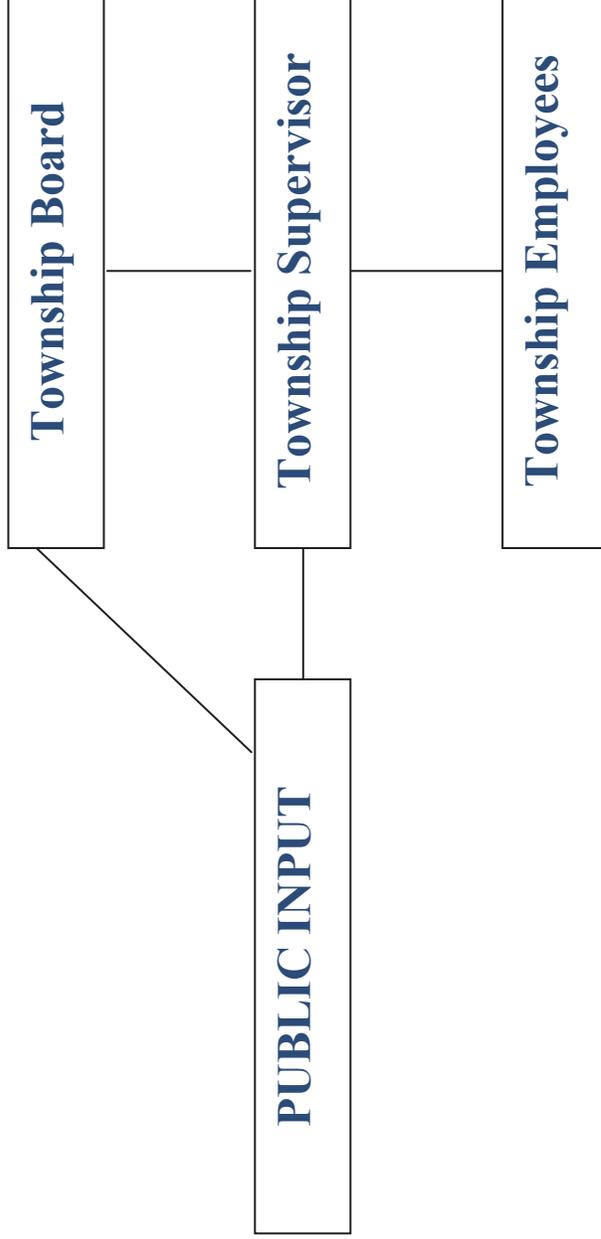
The community of Chassell, located on Pike Bay in the northwestern part of the township, is the main concentration of population in the township. The community is predominantly residential with a number of homes located along the east, west, and south shorelines of Pike Bay. Immediately north of town along Portage Lake is a concentration of year-round and seasonal homes, some of which are rented to tourists in the summer.

The commercial character of the community is primarily roadside commercial and composed primarily of unique retail shops, and service establishments. Within the town are a number of vacant lots, and additional large open space is located north and east of town. East of town, along Pike Bay,

Chassell Township supports and maintains recreation facilities through annual budget appropriations. In 2010, Chassell Township expended approximately \$35,000 for maintenance and upgrades of recreation facilities. Additional funds are

budgeted for development of new recreation projects and facilities as funds are available. Maintenance is carried out by Township employees.

**Chassell Township's Organization**



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**DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING PROCESS**

The development of the Chassell Township Recreation Plan involved several groups and provided for public input and comment. The Township Board serves as the Recreation Committee for the Township.

Annually, the Township solicits and considers citizen views and comments on recreation issues. This is done at the Township's Annual Meeting held the last week of March every year.

In the 1990s, a number of Chassell Township residents participated in a strategic community planning process. This program helped the Township identify issues and opportunities in the community, and defined specific projects and actions. Since not all of the improvements identified in the strategic planning program were completed, a planning meeting was held to identify additional improvements.

Recreation facilities, specifically the Centennial Park, were identified as very important to the community, contributing significantly to the quality of life. A majority of the improvements to the park suggested in the strategic planning program have been completed (i.e. Pavilion expansion, swimming beach dredging, etc.). However, some improvements were not completed and are included in this Recreation Plan.

The Township Board held a public hearing specifically for the Recreation Plan on December 8, 2010. This hearing was

attended by approximately 20 people from the general public who provided input to the Township Board on recreation needs and opportunities. Township officials have been talking about this recreation plan for the past seven consecutive months at its monthly board meeting, encouraging public participation. The township also inserted a note to landowners in the township in December 2010 tax bills that they could conduct an online-survey by navigating to a site on SurveyMonkey.com. The ideas generated by all this public input is presented in this document.



**RECREATION INVENTORY**

**CHASSELL TOWNSHIP RECREATION FACILITIES**

A variety of recreation facilities can be found in Chassell Township and the region.

**Chassell Township School**

The Chassell Township School System consists of a K-12 school building (1991) located near the community of Chassell. Facilities on the school grounds include a gymnasium and playground. A multi-purpose field is under construction.

**Misslitz Field**

The Misslitz Field ballpark is located west of the old high school property. The 4-acre site includes a little league/softball field and the ski trailhead.

**DNR Trail**

The old Soo Line Railroad grade is currently owned by the DNR and runs from the south end of Chassell to the north end, paralleling US-41. The DNR trail provides local opportunities for walking and bicycling.

**Centennial Park**

The Chassell Township Centennial Park is located on Pike Bay. This facility was developed with the assistance of DNR Waterways, LAWCON and MNR/TF funding, and is continually being improved.



The Park includes:

- two boat launching ramps with trailer parking
- fishing and mooring docks
- swimming beach (improved during the winter of 2004-2005)
- small picnic area
- playground equipment
- horseshoe courts
- vault toilets
- ice skating rink (winter months only)
- open air pavilion
- community center building

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The community center building includes a kitchen, walk in cooler, restroom/ changing rooms, and a meeting room. The building is designed for multi-seasonal use to serve summer activities, the skating rink and facilitate staging of year round fishing tournaments.



### **Chassell Classic Ski Trail**



Chassell Township has cooperated with a volunteer group for the development and maintenance of ski trails. A 10 kilometer groomed ski trail loop is located near the Heritage Center. The ski trail is being expanded, and constant improvements are being made to make the trail usable as a nature trail for non-winter months.

### **Sturgeon River Sloughs**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources maintains a public access site at the Sturgeon River Slough. This access site is located two miles south of the community of Chassell.

The Slough is known for hunting and fishing opportunities, as the wetland swamp provides excellent fish and waterfowl habitat. The Army Corps of Engineers operate an access site at Portage Entry. This site is located five miles south of Chassell, and includes a boat launch, a large concrete pier used to tie up large craft and a picnic area with vaulted toilets.

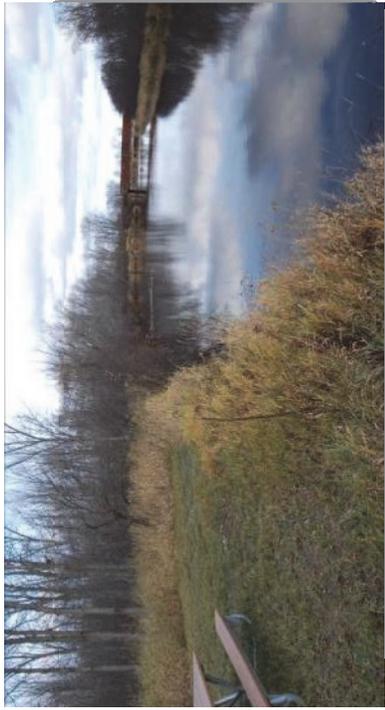
A group of volunteers has established Portage Lake and the Keweenaw Waterway as the Keweenaw Water Trail.

In addition to these local recreational facilities, the City of Houghton and Michigan Technological University offer facilities for Chassell Township residents. The campus of MTU offers extensive facilities, including an ice arena, ball fields, Student Development Complex (which includes basketball courts, indoor running track, indoor pool, racket ball courts, and fitness equipment), and tennis courts. These facilities are available to the public. The closest indoor swimming pools are at Finlandia University (Hancock), MTU (Houghton), and the Houghton-Portage Township High School in Houghton.

As a result of a Master Shoreline Plan, several improvements were made in recent years. A new fishing dock accessed by a boardwalk expands fishing opportunities. A new walkway improves access to the park.

The township is currently in the process of completing a fish-and-game-cleaning station at Centennial Park. The station is expected to be completed in 2012. The project has been funded

by the township, donations, and a Land and Water Conservation Grant.



Downhill skiing can be experienced at MTU's Mont Ripley, adjacent to Hancock, at Mt. Bohemia in Keweenaw County, and at the Porcupine Mountains State Park in Ontonagon County.

Cross-country skiing has long been a traditional winter activity on the Keweenaw and its growing popularity in the Midwest has benefited area tourism. In addition to the Chassell Trail, groomed and tracked trails are located in Copper Harbor, at Michigan Tech in Houghton, the Maasto Hiito Trail in Hancock, and at Swedetown near Calumet. More trails are needed in the area to attract and accommodate visiting skiers. The Keweenaw Peninsula is rich in water-orientated recreation opportunities. In addition to Lake Superior and the Keweenaw Waterway, the region contains numerous inland lakes and streams.

### **OTHER RECREATION FACILITIES**

In addition to the facilities described above, there are numerous other recreation opportunities in the Keweenaw Peninsula. A number of regionally-orientated parks are easily accessible for residents of Chassell Township, including Isle Royale National Park, McLain, Fort Wilkins, Twin Lakes and Baraga State Parks. The Keweenaw National Historical Park is preserving important heritage sites in the area.

Ice skating and hockey are popular winter sports in the area. Indoor ice facilities are located at the Houghton County Arena in Hancock, the Dee Stadium, and Student Development Center in Houghton.

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main recreation goal for Chassell Township is to continue to expand recreational opportunities for residents while minimizing the activity costs associated with the recreational activities. The objective of this recreation plan is to develop a list of citizen wants and ideas, and when a citizen or group comes forward with an offer to assist the township, we will be ready to proceed.

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The following are the ideas citizens made during the December 8, 2010 public hearing on this recreation plan.

- Boardwalk along Pike Bay
- Overnight campground near Centennial Park
- More water recreation opportunities
- Year round pavilion
- Railroad grade – trail for walking in summer, snowmobile in winter
- Ski trail expansion – night skiing
- Snowshoe trails
- Warming house for ski trails
- Mountain biking trails
- Skate board park
- Full-service marina
- Community garden
- Multi-use trails joining other communities – preferably paved
- Separate the current boat launch from the swimming beach
- Spend more dollars on existing recreational opportunities to add amenities
- Clean up debris from Portage Lake/Chassell Bay
- Can restroom facility at park be made easier to clean?
- Ice rink expansion
- Publish in print or on a website a map of all recreation opportunities in the township

Among the many citizens who have provided input during the previous months are the following attended the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 public hearing:

Chassell Recreation Plan	Public Hearing/Meeting
Randy McClellan	PO Box 375, Chassell, MI 49916
Dan Aho	PO Box 285, Chassell, MI 49916
Judy Rupley	42580 Lakeshore Dr., Chassell, MI 49916
Paulette Archambeau	21225 Creamery Road, Chassell, MI 49916
Louis Menara	21987 Peepsock, Houghton, MI 49931
Frank Cherubini	PO Box 601, Chassell, MI 49916
LaVerne Aho	42522 Lakeshore Drive, Chassell, MI 49916
Alfred Aho	42522 Lakeshore Drive, Chassell, MI 49916
Julie Hamar	42061 Halfmoon Beach Rd, Chassell, MI 49916
John Hamar	42061 Halfmoon Beach Rd, Chassell, MI 49916
Walt Kalliainen	38940 Fishermans Lane, Chassell, MI 49916
Elmer R. Liimatta	41261 Halfmoon Beach, Chassell, MI 49916
Tom Heikkinen	41733 Halfmoon Beach, Chassell, MI 49916
Joanne Kuntze	42115 Halfmoon Beach Rd., Chassell, MI 49916

## **ACTION PROGRAM**

### **Capital Improvement Items and Goals**

Chassell Township's top priority in its Action Program is trail improvements within the township. These trails will focus on pedestrian, non-motorized as well as motorized, depending on the particular project.

Within this Action Program item, the township has identified a project that it hopes to work on immediately: improving the trail that runs from the township to the City of Houghton. The improvements may include constructing a barrier-free surface over the existing surface. The new surface could be a crushed limestone product that tends to harden with precipitation provides a more stable base for pedestrians, bikers, and other users. The project could also include widening the trail and brushing out overgrown portions of the trail. The overall objective is to create a better user experience for trail users traveling from Houghton, through Portage Township to Chassell Township's Centennial Park. It is our desire to make Centennial Park a well-defined trailhead because of its existing parking infrastructure, potable water, and the public restrooms. It is also our desire to improve the surface through areas located south of the park. We understand this project will take some coordination with our neighbor Portage Township, and may also require the assistance of Houghton County. We welcome all partnerships with other local units of government who seek to improve trails. The township is in favor of seeking funding for such projects through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust, through transportation enhancement programs

run by the State of Michigan, or from other sources that would support its efforts.

During the data gathering phase for this recreation plan, citizens of the township offered many ideas for possible projects. In the current fiscal environment, Chassell Township must work with community groups who wish to be our partner and assist the township in completing future projects. Because the township is unsure of exactly who may come forward at any given time, we wish to list the many opportunities and ideas that currently exist, and we encourage community groups to come forward if a particular project interests them:

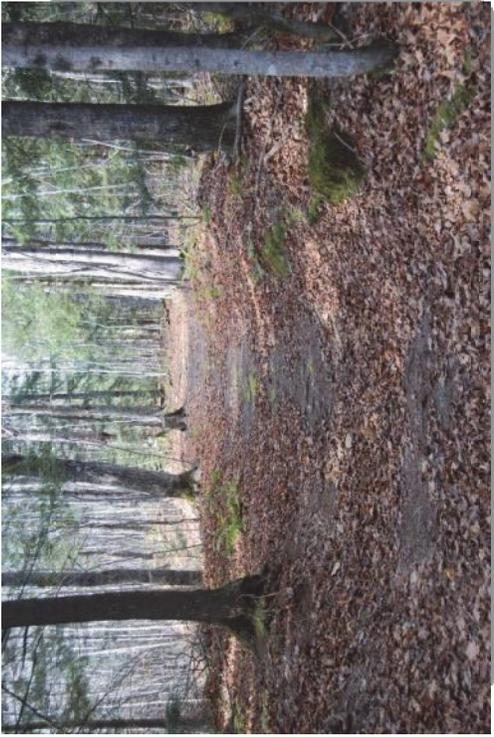
#### *Nature Trails*

The addition of nature trails in the township would greatly increase the use of the existing natural environment. The Township is interested in exploring any new nature trails that the community desires, whether it is along Pike Bay or inland. The township believes that the combination of boardwalks and natural trails would allow access to areas currently inaccessible.

#### *Mountain Biking/Snowshoe Trails*

Expansion of the ski trail recreation area to include mountain biking and snowshoe trails will expand use of the recreation area. Mountain biking is rapidly becoming a popular activity. The addition of mountain biking trails would attract tourism to

the area. The mountain biking trails will be used for snowshoe trails in the winter.



*Marina Feasibility Study*

The Township is exploring the feasibility of construction of a new public marina. A study aimed at identifying construction methods and site development alternatives is currently planned. This study will also identify estimated costs, user demand and possible funding and phasing opportunities.

Chassell bears a strong relationship to Pike Bay and the Keweenaw Waterway. Historically it was founded upon the water as a lumbering town. With logging technology no longer water dependent, the waterfront is being reclaimed by the community. Residents recognize the important role this resource can play in the economic prosperity of this quiet, friendly community and hope to build upon their ability to attract boaters.

*Skate Board Park*

Conversion of an old ice rink concrete slab into a skate board park will expand recreation opportunities. The skate board park will utilize an existing facility for youth that is currently unused. Currently skate boarders do not have a facility for skate boarding activities.

*Campground*

It has been proposed that a small camping area be created if the park is expanded. Several locations were considered for this facility. The area proposed for the campsites is isolated from nearby residential properties. The proposed site is situated where sawdust is several feet thick from historical use of a sawmill. Any road would require the sawdust be removed and replaced with a suitable base material. The township has considered developing RV sites with power, water and sewer.