





5 PARKS, SHARED-USE PATHS, AND TRAILS

Pedestrians, bicyclists, and others enjoy walking, riding, and playing in places designated specifically for them, without having to deal with the rush, noise, and exhaust caused by motor vehicle traffic. This chapter highlights parks, shared-use paths, trails, greenways, and boardwalks, which are gaining in popularity across Michigan and the United States.

Parks

From urban metro parks to northern wilderness spaces, Michigan parks offer endless possibilities for active living. The key is to make sure parks can be accessed easily by people in all income groups and offer recreation for all ages. A community's network of parks should include more than just ball diamonds and swing sets—they should have facilities such as natural areas, walking trails, and boardwalks to provide activity options for people of all ages, abilities, and levels of mobility.

Shared-Use Paths and Trails

Shared-use paths and trails are paved routes specifically designed for cycling, walking, inline skating, and other forms of non-motorized transportation. Often separated from motor vehicle traffic, these paths may use a different route than roadways, instead following passages such as abandoned railways, utility lines, and drainage corridors. Because shared-use paths often run through scenic areas without a lot of vehicle traffic, many types of users—from families with small children to persons with disabilities—feel comfortable using them for transportation and recreation.

Every community, regardless of location, population, or density, can incorporate shared-use paths. Their development can contribute to a



Nestled in a residential neighborhood, this small park provides a lovely setting for an evening stroll. Photo credit: Dan Burden.



This shared-use path is wide enough to accommodate all types of users. Photo credit: Grand Rapids Department of Parks and Recreation.

Photo credit: © Hans F. Meier, <http://www.iStockphoto.com>.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Population: 197,800

Promoting Active Communities Award recipient, 2003

Millennium Park, located in Grand Rapids, is a greenway following the Grand River. It connects Kent County's Johnson Park to John Ball Park and Zoological Gardens, the county-owned zoo. In total, more than 1,800 acres are dedicated greenspace. The Park provides access to Kent Trails, a 15-mile regional trail. This non-motorized trail connection makes it possible to safely enter the park without driving or walking along roadways.



Photo credit: Kent County Parks Department.

Today, Millennium Park is in the process of reclaiming 1,500 acres of industrial land to become an urban greenway that will

link the cities of Grand Rapids, Walker, Wyoming, and Grandville. In addition, this process will restore depleted gravel pits into recreational areas, preserve 10 miles of frontage on the Grand River, and protect 2,000-year-old, sacred Native American burial mounds. When complete, it will be one of the nation's largest urban parks, containing 8 miles of walking and hiking trails and a 10-mile multi-use trail along the Grand River waterfront. The master plan envisions numerous nature and bicycle trails, playgrounds, beaches, and canoe and kayak trails through restored habitat, providing diverse opportunities for physical activity.



Photo credit: Staff at Kent County Parks Department



Photo credit: © Dale Taylor,
<http://www.iStockphoto.com>

comprehensive plan to promote and support active living. Whenever possible, communities should aim to:

- Develop new shared-use paths throughout the community
- Connect existing path segments to expand the network and connect to other non-motorized facilities such as sidewalks and bike lanes
- Encourage or require developers to build path segments when constructing new projects

When developing shared-use paths, planners should consider several design factors, including those mentioned next.

Designed for All Users

Shared-use paths should allow people to travel via many modes and in both directions. Bicyclists of varying speeds and abilities will ride alongside pedestrians, inline skaters, and people with pets and small children.

Separated from the Roadway

Shared-use paths should not be placed next to roads, unless the roads have very few driveways and cross streets.

Sufficient Width

According to the *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities* (AASHTO, 1999), the usable paved surface of a shared-use path should be at least 10 feet wide. In areas where heavy use is expected, 12 feet is the recommended width. In addition, a 2-foot graded area on either side of the path provides enough space to avoid other obstructions.

Convenient Path Access

The existing transportation system should allow people easy access to pathways and trails, with public transit connections whenever possible. Pathways and trails should also provide routes to places people often go—schools, worksites, parks, museums, and even ice cream parlors.

Other Design Features

Successful shared-use paths require adequate paving and maintenance. Designers should give special attention to slope, grade, sight distance, sign placement, and turn radii. For more information on these topics, consult the AASHTO guide (AASHTO, 1999).



The loose surface of this path and its narrow width make it unsuitable for bicycles. Clear signage indicates the appropriate use. Photo credit: Institute of Transportation Engineers Pedestrian and Bicycle Council

Connections to Waterfronts



The Heritage Riverwalk Bi-Path in Alpena allows easy access from downtown to the Thunder Bay River for residents and visitors alike. Photo credit: Dan Burden.

Michigan has the second longest shoreline in the United States, more than 11,000 inland lakes, and over 30,000 miles of rivers. Communities can provide access to these natural settings by creating attractive,



The first Michigan State Park in an urban area, Detroit's Tri-Centennial State Park and Harbor, connects residents to the riverfront and provides great recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. For more information on the exciting plans for the Detroit riverfront, visit <http://www.detroitriverfront.org>. Photo credit: Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.



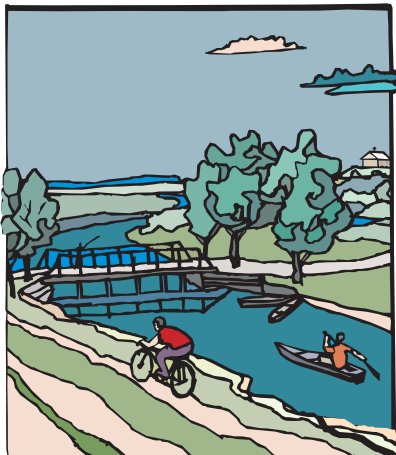
Climbing the dunes at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore sure provides a workout, even in winter! Photo credit: Julia Reich.

pedestrian-oriented waterfronts. Where appropriate, waterfronts should be accessible by foot, bicycle, and public transportation, as well as by car.

Waterfront facilities that contribute to active living communities include:

- Boat launching and takeout facilities, oriented for canoes and kayaks
- Swimming beaches
- River trails and walking paths around lakes
- Pedestrian lookouts
- Spaces for festivals and art fairs
- Park space for recreation such as volleyball and picnicking
- Bike access and parking
- Connections to public transit
- Fishing piers or stations
- Pavilions or shelters

Graphic Credit: *Art Explosion, Vol. 2*, Nova Development.



MANISTEE, MICHIGAN

Population: 6,586

Promoting Active Communities Award recipient, 2004

Manistee has built a first-class riverwalk that allows users to walk to Lake Michigan along a 1.5-mile scenic path. The riverwalk is a combination of wood and cement with nautical-style railings and lampposts. Wooden stairways from many spots lead to the walkway, which is also wheelchair accessible at several points. Flowerbeds and benches line parts of the riverwalk. A brochure describing the history of the Manistee River is available at various points. Manistee's decision to design a greener, more inviting, and more walkable riverfront has created a destination for community residents and tourists alike. For more information, check out their website at <http://www.manisteecounty.com/riverwalk.htm> (Guy, 2001).

Boardwalks

Boardwalks are a combination of bridges and trails. They typically extend a trail or pathway across sensitive environments, such as wetlands, dunes, and fragile habitats. Boardwalks provide access (and often educational experiences) while doing minimal damage to the ecosystems they cross.

Boardwalks should have smooth, stable (non-warping), and non-slippery surfaces and should be wide enough for pedestrians to pass safely. Persons with physical limitations must be able to use boardwalks, so construction should follow all Americans with Disabilities Act regulations. (See the entry for Guidelines for Accessible Public Right-of-Way in the “Designing for Walking” section of “Active Living and Recreation Resources” near the end of this book.)

Outdoor Education

Trails and greenways offer great opportunities for environmental, historical, and cultural education. Outdoor educators can help plan pedestrian and biking routes to maximize the connection with nature and create options for educational programs. These programs can inspire more people to use trails and greenways.



Boardwalks in parks support physical activity—and learning about nature—for people of all ages. Photo credit: Ingham County Parks Department.



Boardwalk at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, located in Empire, MI. Photo credit: Julia Reich.



This display imparts one aspect of Alpena’s heritage as a port city, namely, the history of the city’s Second Avenue Bridge. Photo credit: Dan Burden.