



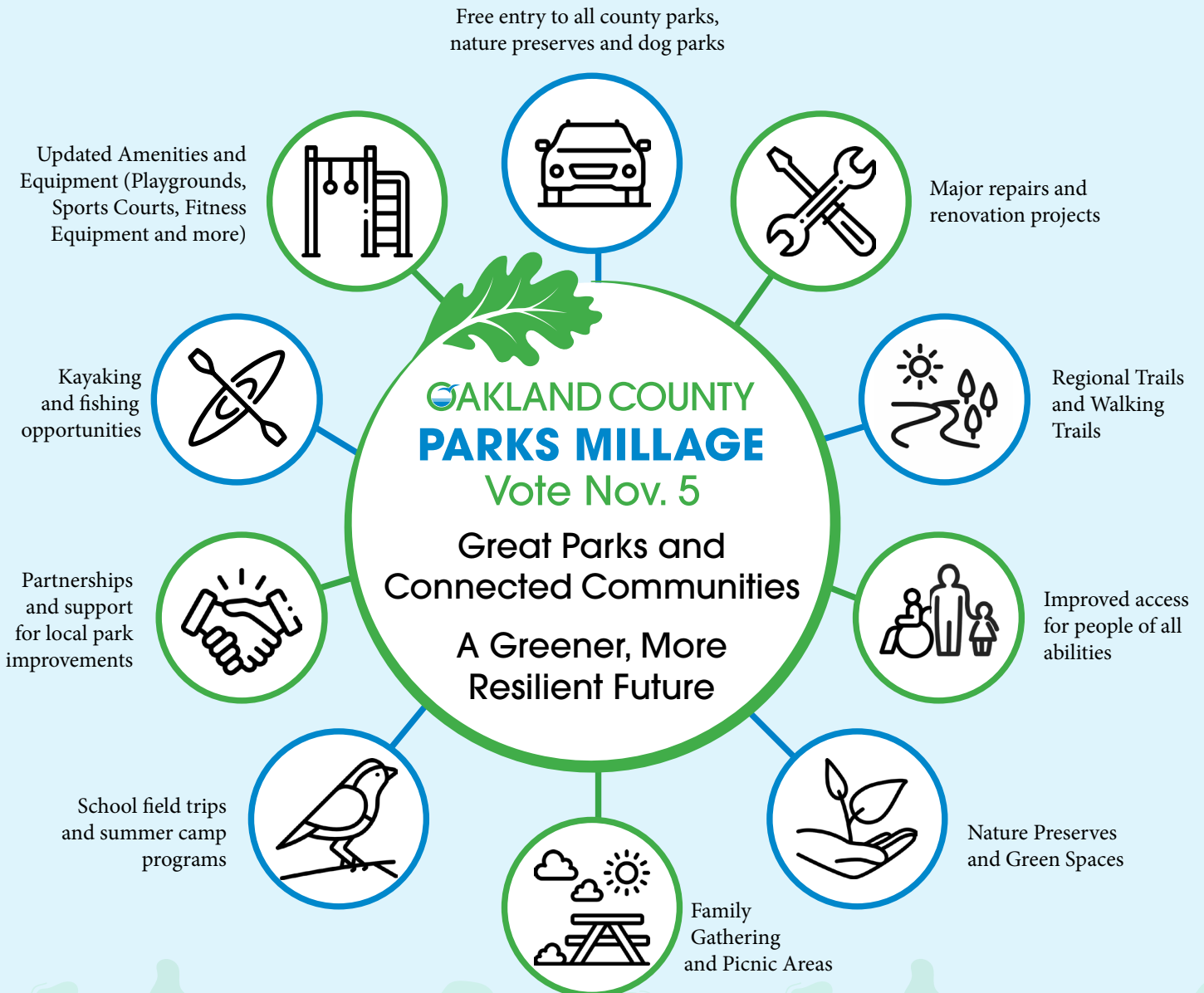
Oakland County Parks 2024 Millage Vision

*Revitalized Parks, Recreation for All,
Connected Communities,
Green Restoration and Resilience
for the Future*



The 2024 Millage Proposal

In July, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners – in a bipartisan vote – approved placing an Oakland County Parks millage proposal on the November 5, 2024, ballot. This proposal would replace the existing 0.35 mill levy – set to expire in 2023 – with a 0.65 mill levy authorized through 2043. The net 0.30 increase would equal \$40 a year for the average residential taxable value home. The additional 0.30 mill levy will generate approximately \$24 million in additional funding for OCP annually (for a total of \$52 million annually when combined with the current levy). Importantly, the extended millage duration would authorize Oakland County Parks to utilize Oakland County’s AAA bond rating to finance a major park and facility improvement program, estimated to kick-off in 2026.



In study after study the evidence is clear – spending time in nature has a positive effect on our bodies and minds. As we all navigated through the worst public health crisis of any of our lifetimes, many of us found relief and restoration exploring public parks, trails greenspaces and waterways. This experience made clearer than ever the importance of investing in parks and outdoor recreation to create healthier, more resilient communities that can adapt and thrive through challenging times.

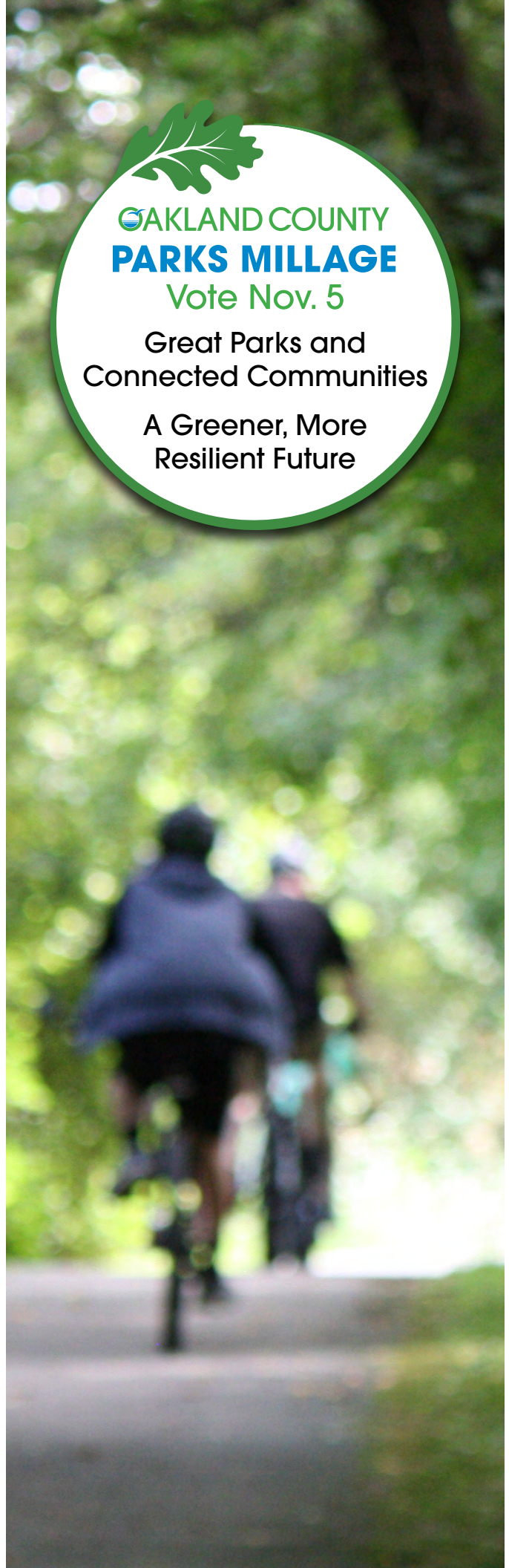
Parks are essential to building thriving, strong communities, and everyone needs and deserves access to welcoming public spaces, opportunities to be active and the countless benefits of being outdoors.

Adapting to the realities of a changing climate may be the next great challenge we will collectively face. Extreme weather events are disrupting our lives, threatening the safety of our families and causing damage to our homes, workplaces and communities. In recent years, extreme heat and poor air quality conditions have forced us indoors, and floods caused by severe storms have overwhelmed our drainage systems, causing significant property damage and creating dangerous conditions on our roads. Experts predict we can expect these events to increase in frequency and severity. The good news is we have the opportunity to step up and build a brighter, more resilient future for our region by investing in nature-based solutions like conserving natural areas and green space, creating walkable and connected communities, restoring and protecting wetlands, and promoting responsible environmental stewardship.

For nearly 60 years, Oakland County Parks has been proud to do our part to provide residents with great outdoor recreational experiences through access to great county parks, engaging programs and a wide variety of activities to do year-round. In recent years, we've expanded our focus beyond our own parks to take a more active role in supporting local community restoration and recreation needs. Through collaborative partnerships with these communities and other agencies, we are leveraging our grant opportunities and organizational resources to support local efforts to expand recreation and environmental sustainability across Oakland County.

In the coming years, financial limitations will force difficult decisions and sacrifices as we seek to balance the important priorities of protecting past investments in recreation, pursuing partnerships that increase recreational opportunities in the present and making the investments needed for a greener, more resilient future. The Oakland County Parks millage proposal provides voters with an opportunity to support the additional funding required to meet each of these complex challenges.

The following is intended to provide voters seeking additional information with more detail regarding this proposal, our plans to utilize this much-needed additional funding and how it supports our vision for a greener, more resilient future for Oakland County.



OAKLAND COUNTY
PARKS MILLAGE
Vote Nov. 5

Great Parks and
Connected Communities

A Greener, More
Resilient Future

Protecting a Legacy of Recreational Investment and Adapting for the Future

The great parks and public lands we treasure today are ours to explore because of wise, forward-thinking decisions made in the past that protected these special spaces and made them available for all of us to enjoy. They are our inheritance. Like any asset, they can languish if neglected. But we have an opportunity now to make the intentional decision to invest in these assets, to protect and enrich them for the benefit of future generations. A broken system for financing costly improvement projects has tied the hands of decision-makers for decades, preventing leadership from addressing major problems that inevitably arise as structures, equipment and infrastructure within county parks age.

The limited duration of the current millage authorization that provides funding for these improvements effectively eliminated the possibility of accessing the low interest borrowing tools typically used by government entities to finance these types of projects over time. Therefore, Oakland County Parks' capacity for funding improvement projects is limited to the amount of cash we have on hand from accumulated savings. When projects exceed our financial capacity to address, we have little option beyond pursuing short-term solutions to extend the lifespan of failing infrastructure. Inevitably, these situations result in disinvestment and deterioration.

Waterford Oaks Waterpark

Waterford Oaks Waterpark was once a popular aquatic attraction for families across Oakland County. Over the past 15 – 20 years, the waterpark has closed several features due to a lack of funding to replace those that no longer function or are unsafe. This disinvestment led to declining attendance and increasing costs to operate the park, which has operated with a subsidy for the past decade. Major investment is now needed to replace these aging, failing facilities with financially and environmentally sustainable recreation attractions that better serve the needs of county residents.



Extending the millage duration, adapting Oakland County Parks for the 21st Century

Extending the duration of the Oakland County Parks millage authorization to a 20-year period would open the door to take advantage of Oakland County's AAA bond rating to finance a capital improvement program across the entire park system. The goal of this program is to reduce operating costs and subsidization to ensure long-term financial sustainability, activate underutilized assets that no longer respond to public demands, address facility problems that are resulting in negative experiences for guests, promote environmental sustainability and enhance opportunities for health and wellness-oriented recreational activities. To see a list of proposed projects visit: [Oakland County Parks and Recreation Modernization & Revitalization Chart](#)

Collaborating for Connected Communities and Great Parks For All

Recreation is a big part of the formula that makes Oakland County a great place to live, work and raise a family. We enjoy more public recreational land than any other county in southeast Michigan, as well as an abundance of outstanding natural features, including nearly 400 inland lakes and five major river systems. The responsibility for managing these assets is in the hands of a complex mix of federal, state, regional and local governments, along with non-profit and volunteer organizations. Greater collaboration between these agencies has the potential to dramatically improve the recreational opportunities available to the public while reducing overall costs to taxpayers.

In recent years, Oakland County Parks has developed collaborative partnerships that have resulted in the creation of Normandy Oaks Park in Royal Oak, the Holly Oaks Off-Road Vehicle Park, Pontiac Oaks County Park, and planned county park locations in Oak Park and Southfield. We have also brought together the leaders of communities in south Oakland County to develop a plan for a recreational corridor and trail along Nine Mile Road.

Revitalizing Neglected and Underutilized Spaces

Neglected and underutilized recreational spaces limit opportunities for the public and have negative impacts on the surrounding community. Partnering with local communities to invest in the improvements needed to make these locations accessible and welcoming restores these hidden gems for residents and visitors. Oakland County Parks has already developed plans with local communities to move forward with two exciting projects if the millage is successful:



Nowicki Park in Rochester Hills, while open to the public, has not been developed beyond a small dirt parking lot. By partnering with Rochester Hills, Oakland County Parks will be able to support the master plan for the development of Nowicki Park, providing new recreation opportunities (including trails, boardwalks, water features, a playground and a pavilion) in this area of the county.



Pine Lake Park in West Bloomfield is a former elementary school site that West Bloomfield is leasing from the school district to operate as a park. By partnering with West Bloomfield, Oakland County Parks will support the implementation of the master plan for the park, providing much needed sport courts, as well as a nature-themed playground and trails.

Creating Connected Communities Through a County-wide Trail Network and Water Trails

The responsibility for developing, maintaining and expanding our county trail network has largely fallen on the shoulders of local governments and volunteer groups. A lack of county-wide support for these important recreation assets is resulting in higher costs for trail administration and maintenance, insufficient resources for regular and large-scale maintenance of the trail network, and missed opportunities to develop plans and secure funding for greenways and trails that connect communities across municipal boundaries.

Oakland County is also home to five major river systems: the Clinton, Huron, Rouge, Flint and Shiawassee. These rivers play an important role in the county and region, from providing critical fish and wildlife habitat to creating spaces for people to recreate on or near the water. Oakland County Parks is well positioned to support the work of our local communities and watershed councils to assist in the development and maintenance of water trails, including acquiring land on/near rivers, creating new access points and launches, and assisting in maintenance.

A portion of millage funding will be dedicated to providing support for our existing regional trails and water trails, as well as support for new trails and greenways to continue to connect our communities.

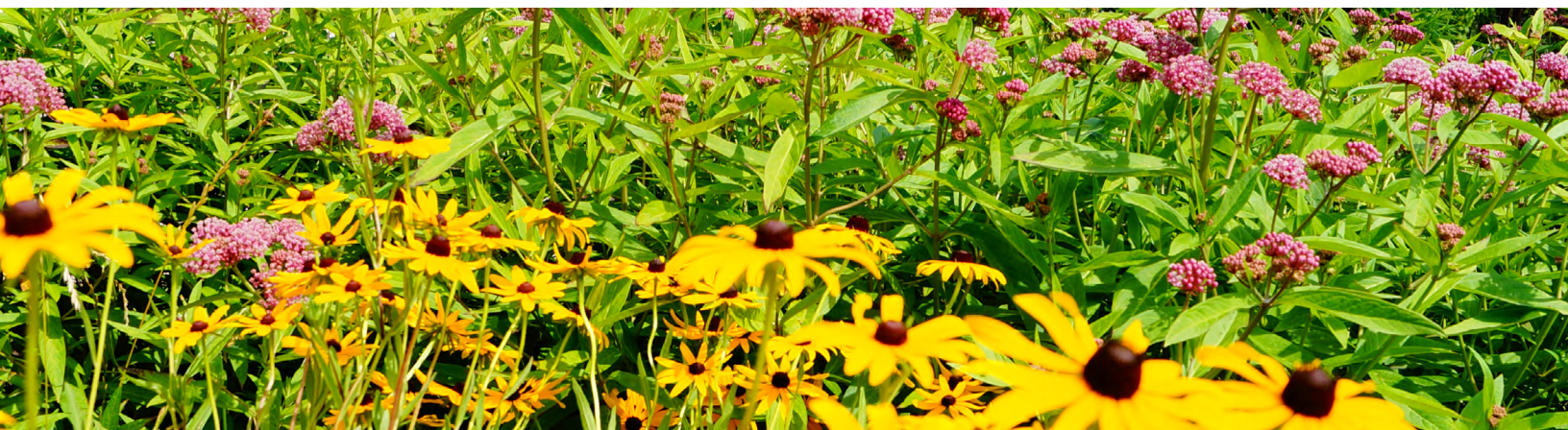


Removing Barriers by Eliminating Entry Fees, Improving Accessibility for All

If the millage proposal passes, park entry fees will be eliminated for all Oakland County Parks (excluding pay to play facilities, such as golf courses, campgrounds, waterparks and the ORV Park). Increased investments will be made to ensure park facilities and equipment are designed to be universally accessible and welcoming for people of all abilities.

Action For a Greener, More Resilient Future

Investments are needed to expand the quality, quantity and connectivity of green space in Oakland County and to ensure that public benefits of green infrastructure are resilient, equitable, and improve the quality of life for Oakland County residents.



Southeast Michigan leaders came together last year to develop a GREEN (Growing our Resilience, Equity, and Economy with Nature) Framework Plan for our region. Their recommendations provide a solid blueprint for action utilizing nature-based solutions like:

- **Green Stormwater Infrastructure** – including rain gardens, bioswales and green streets
- **Resilient Natural Landscapes** – including riparian corridors, habitat, trees and wetlands that can withstand extreme weather and temperatures
- **Protected and Public Lands** – including agriculture, conservation land, parks and trails

By working on implementation of tools at a county and regional level, we can ensure that all communities in the county see positive benefits to their residents' health, safety and quality of life. Oakland County Parks will partner with conservation organizations to pursue the acquisition and protection of high-quality natural spaces at risk of loss to development. Funding limitations have restricted our ability to act when these rare opportunities have arisen in the past – funding from the millage proposal would allow us to move quickly and strategically to secure key properties around the county.

Turtle Woods

Oakland County Parks has been working in partnership with Six Rivers Land Conservancy and the Troy School District for more than three years to secure 70 acres of woods and wetlands known as Turtle Woods in the City of Troy. Without the financial resources to purchase the property, OCP has been reliant on potential grant funding to acquire the property. A grant was not awarded last year, but a new application is pending with the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. This lengthy process, while providing incredible support for parks and recreation across Michigan, often results in losing out on high quality property where quick action is required.

