

CHAPTER 7

PARKS, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Waterford Township contains numerous public and private recreational facilities. These facilities provide residents and visitors access to the community's inland lakes, the Clinton River, and its woodlands and other natural areas, which are a fundamental contributor to the Township's quality of life.

PARKS AND RECREATION

In 2023, the Township maintains 16 parks and facilities, which encompass 860.7 acres of parkland in total. The Township's facilities range in size and amenities offered, but their total acreage results in 11.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. This exceeds the national average of 10.6 acres per 1,000 residents found in the 2024 National Recreation and Park Association Performance Review. Examples of individual sites include public canoe launches on the Clinton River, sports and recreational facilities at Civic Center Park, and a variety of trails, hiking, and cross-country skiing amenities at Hess-Hathaway Park. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) categorizes parks depending on their size and provision of different amenities. Most of Waterford Township's parks are defined as Community Parks, which are relatively large facilities that serve users outside the immediate vicinity, or Special Use Facilities, which serve a particular activity or purpose such as kayaking or team sports. The Township is currently drafting the *2024 Charter Township of Waterford, Oakland County Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, which provides a comprehensive inventory and lists recommendations for further improvements to parks and recreational facilities in Waterford.

Another 10 park facilities exist in the Township that are maintained by local elementary schools; many of these facilities accommodate youth recreational activities. Oakland County also owns and operates Waterford Oaks County Park on the east side of the Township, which includes diverse recreational amenities. The State of Michigan owns and operates Pontiac Lake Recreation Area and Dodge 4 State Park, which afford visitors access to inland lakes. Altogether, these non-Township maintained owned park provide an additional 776 acres of publicly accessible parkland. Around 500 acres of private parkland are accessible for a minor fee or reserved for certain users. A full list of the Township's parks and those maintained by other entities are shown in the table on the following page and on the parks inventory map on page 50.

Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan

Waterford Township maintains a five-year parks and recreation plan to establish goals and improvements to its park system. The Plan was most recently updated and adopted in 2019. The plan engaged the community through an online survey to determine residents' priorities for the Township's parks and recreation system. The plan used this input to establish a series of goals and recommendations to enable the Township's overall visions for the park system, which serves as the basis to dedicate local funds and acquire external funding, such as grants, for projects and improvements to the park system.

Though the 2019 parks and recreation plan found that the Township currently has an adequate quantity of parkland relative to its population, it noted that very few neighborhood-serving or mini parks exist, which are smaller facilities that residents typically travel to on-foot. The plan did not recommend that the Township develop any new neighborhood or mini parks due to the current adequate quantity of park space and predominance of automobile travel in the community. The plan defined a need for several park facilities, including a new Community Center facility. The five-year parks and recreation plan will be maintained and updated to establish a shared vision and actionable path forward to create a robust park system.

Clinton River Riverwalk

Along the section of the Clinton River as it passes under M-59 is the Clinton River Riverwalk, which is a paved bike/pedestrian trail extending from Riverside Elementary School in the south and Crescent Lake Road in the north. Having a trail along the river provides a safe north/south route for walkers, bikers, runners, and more. The Township plans to extend the riverwalk along the length of the Clinton River within the Township. The Riverwalk should eventually connect to the Drayton Plains subarea district along Frembes Road. The Township should work with other jurisdictions in the region and at the state level to eventually connect the Riverwalk to the Iron Belle Trail, a long-distance hiking and biking trail extending from Detroit, MI to Ironwood, MI in the Upper Peninsula. Doing this would further the Township's presence as a recreation destination.

and encourage visitors to spend time in the Town Center district.

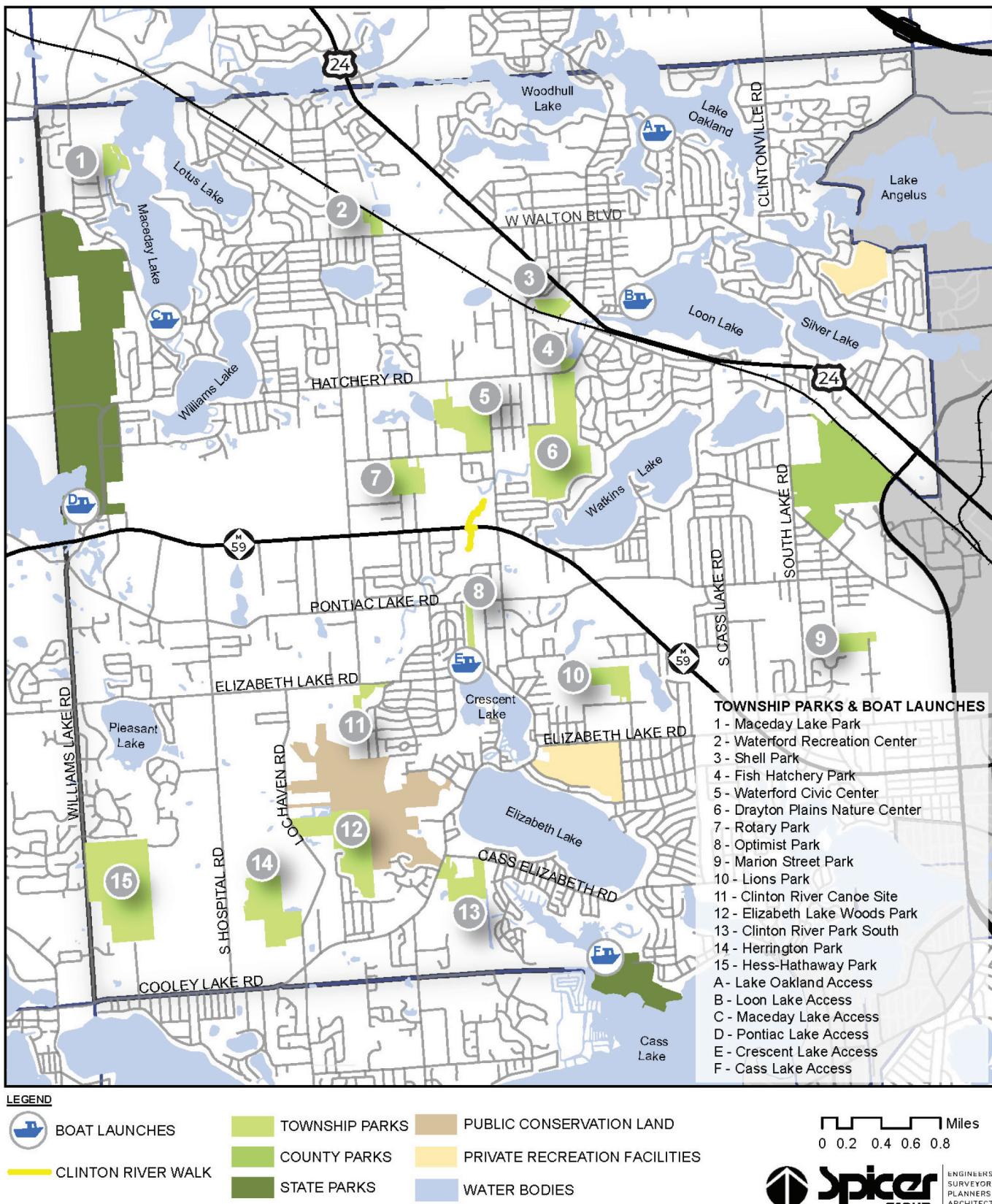
Township-Owned Parks and Recreational Facilities

Facility Name	Location	Park Type (NRPA Classification)	Amenities
Civic Center Soccer Fields	West of 5200 Civic Center Drive	Community	6 soccer fields, warming house
Herrington Park	1216 Lochaven Road	Community	Concessions, restrooms, two lighted ball fields, picnic area, and picnic shelter
Hess-Hathaway Park	825 S Williams Lake Road	Urban	Restored farmhouse, animal exhibit barn, ball field, volleyball courts, horseshoe courts, picnic shelters, gazebo, accessible children's playscape, restrooms, community meeting room, nature trails for hiking and cross country skiing, group hayrides, farm animal tours
Lions Park	4250 Fenmore Avenue	Community	Picnic shelter, restrooms, lighted ball field, and picnic area
Rotary Park	5485 Tubbs Road	Community	Picnic shelter, restrooms, concession stand, ball fields, play area, five soccer fields
Shell Park	4373 Dixie Highway	Special Use	Three ball fields, picnic shelter, grills, and tables, concession stand, restrooms
Clinton River Canoe Site	5971 Elizabeth Lake Road	Special Use	Public canoe landing, children's play apparatus area, picnic shelter, grill, and tables
Clinton River Park South	5250 Cass Elizabeth Road	Natural Resource Area	Undeveloped passive parkland and nature preserve
Clinton River Walk	Along Clinton River north and south of M-59	Park Trail	Paved trail and along a section of the Clinton River
Fish Hatchery Park	4490 Hatchery Road	Special Use	Renovated historic farmhouse, office and museum of the Waterford Historical Society, restrooms, boardwalk, fishing, canoeing, and picnic shelters
Waterford Recreation Center	5640 Williams Lake Road	Special Use	Activity center for senior, youth, and adult programs, room rentals, enrichment classes, gymnasium, and dining room
Elizabeth Lake Woods Park	Accessible off Lochaven Road and Cooley Lake Road	Natural Resource Area	Undeveloped passive parkland, nature preserve, canoeing
Marion Street Park	Northern end of Marion Avenue	Natural Resource Area	Nature trails, handicap-accessible trail, observation decks
Optimist Park	5320 Elizabeth Lake Road	Community	Concession stand, restrooms, ball fields, picnic shelter, picnic area, lighted basketball court
Drayton Plains Nature Center	2125 Denby Drive	Natural Resource Area	Interpretive nature center building, fish hatchery ponds, hiking trails and a picnic shelter, indoor meeting room available for rent

Maceday Lake Park	Northern end of Rich Street	Natural Resource Area	Undeveloped waterfront land passive and nature preserve
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Non-Township-Owned Parks and Recreational Facilities

Facility Name	Location	Park Type (NRPA Classification)	Amenities
David Grayson Elementary	3800 W Walton Boulevard	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Dodge 4 State Park	4250 Parkway Street	Regional Park	Cass Lake beach
Donelson Hills Elementary	2690 Wewoka Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Eliza Seaman Leggett School	3621 Pontiac Lake Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Haviland Elementary	5305 Cass Elizabeth Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, two tennis courts, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Kinglsey-Montgomery Training	4265 Halkirk Drive	School-Park	Playground equipment and indoor gymnasium
Knudsen Elementary	5449 Crescent Lake Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Riverside Elementary	5280 Farm Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and indoor gymnasium
Schoolcraft Elementary	6400 Maceday Drive	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Thomas M Cooley Elementary	2000 Highfield Road	School-Park	Playground equipment, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
William Beaumont Elementary	6532 Elizabeth Lake Road	School-Park	Playground equipment and fields, one basketball court, indoor gymnasium
Pontiac Lake Recreation Area	7800 Gale Road	Regional Park	Hiking, biking, and equestrian trails, campground, picnic area
Waterford Oaks County Park	1702 Scott Lake Road	Regional Park	Waterpark, BMX track, hiking trails, accessible playscape, sports courts



Source: 2024 Charter Township of Waterford, Oakland County Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Waterford Recreation Center

The Township's Recreation Center is located along Williams Lake Road west of Dixie Highway. The Recreation Center is operated by the Township's Parks and Recreation Department and offers a rentable space for events and parties, a gym and fitness room, and space for senior, youth, and adult programs. Though the Recreation Center provides valuable programming and space, residents noted that the facility is outdated and should be replaced with a new center. Several members of the community want the new facility near the downtown subarea along Dixie Highway.

Recommendations

Waterford Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining and improving the Township's parks and recreation facilities in partnership with agencies at the State and County level. The five-year parks and recreation plan defined a list of projects to further the Township's Park system, and several of the key recommendations are listed below.

The Township and its Parks and Recreation Department should take the following measures to support the provisions of quality parks and recreation facilities:

- Continue to update the five-year Parks and Recreation plan every five years to establish an up-to-date schedule of improvements to the park system.
- Develop new amenities and improvements at various Township Parks to address evolving recreation needs as defined in the adopted five-year Parks and Recreation Plan.
- Continue to gauge whether new mini parks and neighborhood-serving parks are appropriate in the Township as new nonmotorized trails and sidewalks are added over time.
- Allocate and/or seek funding to renovate or replace the Waterford Township Recreation Center.
- Ensure that public parks are safe.
- Provide both passive and active facilities for a variety of ages and abilities of the population.
- Continue to work with existing recreation partners in the community to provide programs, leagues, and special events. Explore options for new and expanded partnerships to provide additional recreational opportunities.
- Encourage the development of pathways, sidewalks, and bike lanes to the Township's parks.
- Add walking and multi-use paths within existing parks and improve existing path surfaces.
- Add canoe/kayak launches at strategic locations.
- Retain existing parkland and acquire new public lands to meet the recreational needs of the community.
- Work with local organizations to provide unique programming opportunities at the Township's recreational sites and venues.
- Preserve and protect open space and other important natural features in Waterford Township.
- Improve barrier-free access to existing recreation facilities.
- Ensure that improvements and upgrades to the Township's park facilities are accessible.
- Strive to meet universal design standards with new signage, park amenities and facilities.
- Coordinate with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to maintain MDNR-owned lakes as assets for the Waterford community.
- Extend the Clinton River Riverwalk along the entire length of the river and coordinate with outside partners to connect it to the Iron Belle Trail.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Waterford Township's natural features, including its abundant waterbodies, are among its most distinctive attributes and set the community apart from others in southeast Michigan. To a large degree, the opportunity to live near one of its inland lakes catalyzed Waterford's residential growth during the middle part of the 20th Century and underpins residents' quality of life today. During the community outreach phase of the Master Plan process, participants emphasized the importance of preserving the quality of the community's natural features, especially the inland lakes, while allowing greater access to these amenities for

residents and visitors.

Inland Lakes

Waterford Township contains 34 inland lakes, which comprise nearly 3,300 acres, and constitute around 15 percent of the Township's total area. They are a defining feature of the land cover map on the following page. The largest of these lakes include Cass Lake, Elizabeth Lake, Maceday-Lotus Lake, Otter-Sylvan Lake, Watkins Lake, and Woodhull Lake. Much of the Township's inland lakes are developed with private residences, although public access to Cass Lake and Pontiac Lake exist at Dodge 4 State Park and Pontiac Lake State Recreation Area, respectively. Water quality in the lakes is affected by property owners' decisions, although the Township can exert some degree of control through its zoning ordinance.

Tree Cover and Open Space

When gauging Waterford Township's current land use, it is important to consider the land cover of each parcel. Although the Future Land Use Map on page 28 gives the impression that most of the Township is developed, the Land Cover Map on the following page reveals that this is not entirely true. More than half (58%) of the Township's land cover consists of open space/grasslands or trees. When combined with the percentage of water cover, nearly 73% of the Township contains some form of natural land cover.



Land Cover: Number of Acres, Percentage of Land Area

Buildings: 1,779 acres	7.89%	Other Pavement: 646 acres	2.87%
Railway: 27 acres	0.12%	Trees: 6,374 acres	28.27%
Roads: 1,247 acres	5.53%	Open space / grassland: 6,703 acres	29.73%
Driveways: 941 acres	4.17%	Bare land: 297 acres	1.32%
Parking Lots: 944 acres	4.19%	Water: 3,356 acres	14.88%
Sidewalks: 236 acres	1.04%		



Source: Oakland County, Michigan (2020)

Clinton River

Waterford Township is primarily within the Clinton River Watershed, with its western portion in the Huron River Watershed. The term watershed refers to the geographic area within which groundwater and precipitation flow into a waterbody. The Clinton River flows through the center of the community and travels from its headlands just north of the Township in Oakland County to Lake Saint Clair to the Township's east. Waterford Township's location upstream from other Oakland and Macomb County communities means that land use decisions in the Township affect the water quality of communities located downstream. In addition, Waterford residents depend upon groundwater recharge for its well-based municipal water system. Though the Clinton River remains a high-quality natural asset, threats from stormwater and the use of pesticide or fertilizer have the potential to affect its quality.

Floodplain and Wetlands

Waterford Township has considerable areas of floodplain and wetlands, which are largely concentrated west of Elizabeth Lake near the Clinton River and south of Watkins Lake near Fiddle Lake and Lake Geneva. Developing within floodplains is a risk, as damage that results from frequent flooding can be costly. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which administers the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), regulates development activities in the floodplain and encourages local governments to adopt higher standards for floodplain development. Future development should not be located within floodplains and existing development located within the floodplain should be made more resilient or relocated outside of the floodplain.

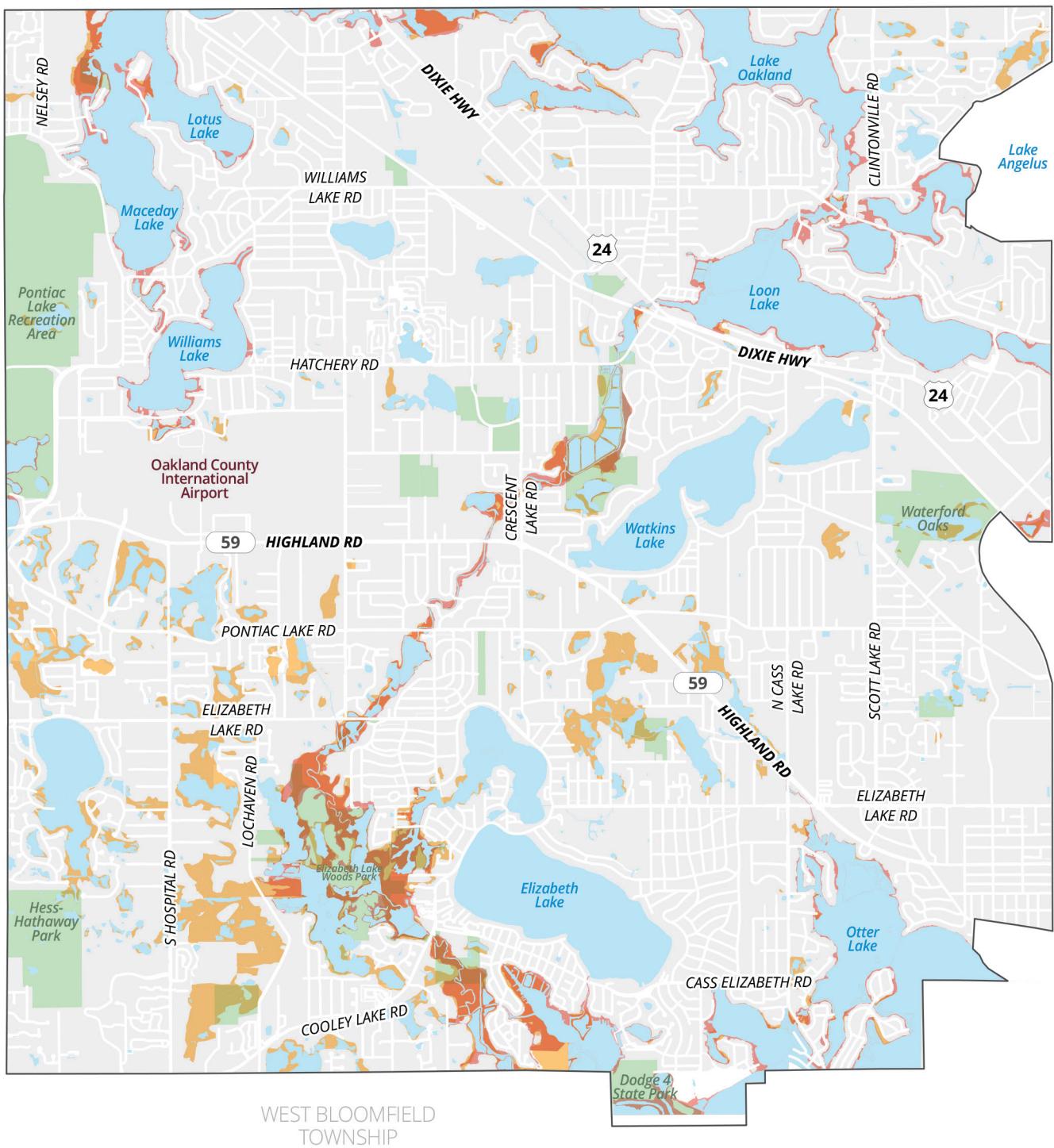
Natural Features Setback

The Township's zoning ordinance contains a natural features preservation section that requires a setback of 25 feet from the boundary or edge of a wetland or from the ordinary high-water mark of rivers or lakes. The Section limits soil removal and materials deposit, as well as the construction and placement of structures within the setback area. Retaining these regulations presents a key opportunity to retain and enhance the health of the Township's waterbodies. Some communities have enhanced their natural features setback standards by requiring or encouraging the addition of native landscaping on private property surrounding lakefront and riverfront. Waterford Township should consider similar measures to further ensure the quality of the Township's water features.

Oakland County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) and Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI)

The Oakland County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) collaborates with townships, villages, cities, county agencies, educational institutions, and conservation non-governmental organizations dedicated to managing invasive species. Established in December 2014, CISMA's mission includes preventing the spread of invasive species, raising public awareness, responding to new detections, and implementing long-term control measures. The partnership now comprises over 40 members, including local and county governments, non-profits, and universities, working together to protect and restore ecosystems. The Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) supports these efforts by providing essential data and mapping for invasive species monitoring and biodiversity conservation. This collaboration is crucial for maintaining the health and sustainability of Waterford's natural resources.

INDEPENDENCE
TOWNSHIP



FLOODPLAINS & WETLANDS

- Bodies of Water
- Floodplain
- Wetlands
- Parks/Open Space

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



Landscaping Standards and Other Environmental Provisions

The Township currently has greenbelt provisions in its Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance also specifies interior lot landscaping requirements, including a set quantity of landscaping near building entrances, along building foundations, pedestrian walkways, and along service areas. These standards are essential to enhancing stormwater retention and environmental performance throughout the community. Many communities in Michigan have stronger landscaping standards that prescribe a defined quantity of native trees, shrubs, and other vegetation on sites, off-street parking areas, and around building foundations. Waterford Township should consider updating its landscaping standards to ensure enhanced environmental performance.

Stormwater

Stormwater runoff from properties is a continual challenge in Waterford Township. Rain, sleet, snow, and other precipitation falls on properties in the Township and can collect on lots with a large degree of impervious surface such as those along Dixie Highway and M-59. This can cause damage to structures and features such as off-street parking lots when stormwater freezes and thaws. Stormwater precipitation can also runoff into waterbodies such as the Township's inland lakes or the Clinton River, which can induce flooding or increase the quantity of pollution flowing into these waterbodies.

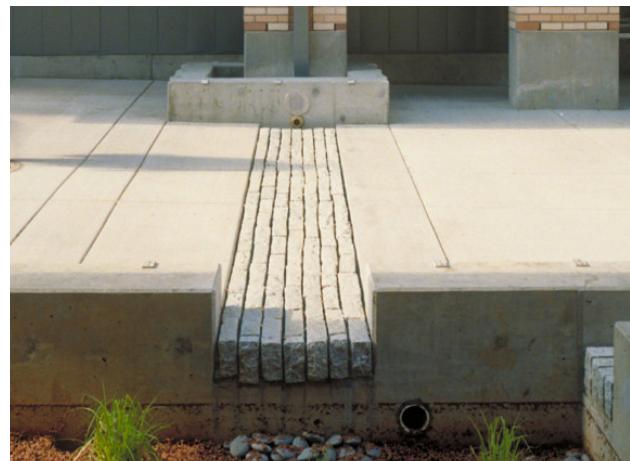
Stormwater Management Resources

Currently, the Oakland County Water Resource Commissioner has the responsibility of monitoring, controlling, maintaining, and building storm drainage systems in Waterford Township. The Road Commission for Oakland County and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) are also responsible for monitoring, controlling, maintaining, and building storm drainage systems connected with its road system. There are also natural drainage systems that the Water Resource Commissioner does not take responsibility for and are the responsibility of the land owner or subdivision. The Development of a Stormwater Drainage Master Plan would help the Township identify the strengths and weaknesses in the existing stormwater drainage facilities and provide a significant planning and budgeting tool for the Township and surrounding governmental agencies to reduce, if not eliminate, the system's flaws and weaknesses.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Green infrastructure represents an approach to stormwater management that utilizes natural or engineered systems to mimic natural landscapes and capture, cleanse, and reduce stormwater runoff before it makes its way into the traditional stormwater piping system. Implementing green infrastructure as redevelopment/development occurs would help decrease the Township's impact on its natural environment and has been shown, in some cases, to help reduce long-term infrastructure costs.

The Township should consider utilizing Township-owned open space and right-of-way to install trees and native landscapes that increase stormwater absorption. Additionally, the Stormwater Drainage Master Plan should include recommendations for development ordinances that encourage green infrastructure, such as offering developers an incentive if they commit to reducing impervious cover. Examples could be the utilization of permeable surfaces in the pavement of parking lots or the installation of rain gardens. These types of measures will also ensure that as new development is brought into the Township, no negative stormwater related impacts will occur to existing residents, businesses, and infrastructure capacity.



Water Quality Resources

Waterford Township has several measures in place to regulate and ensure the quality of its waterbodies. Chapter 8 of the Code of Ordinances contains a wetlands protection ordinance that limits the construction of structures and any dredging or other soil disturbance. The Township has a stormwater management ordinance within its code of ordinances that requires the approval of a stormwater management plan showing on-site retention and detention of stormwater for major development activities. The Township also has a Wellhead Protection Program to protect public community water supplies from contaminants. The program defines 10-year capture zones around public wellheads and controls activities that could adversely impact water quality in these zones.

Woodlands

Waterford Township contains several areas of natural woodlands, native landscape vegetation, and unique natural features. Extensive wooded areas are present in recreation areas such as Elizabeth Lake Woods Park and Hess-Hathaway Park, and along the Clinton River corridor. Wooded areas provide critical habitats for plant and animal species, enhanced air quality, and recreational amenities.

Waterford Township established regulations to assist with the preservation of woodlands within Article 7 of the Township's Code of Ordinances which defines woodland management standards and requires woodland management permits for any removal of protected trees and establishes standards for the replacement or relocation of removed trees. These standards will be key to enhancing tree preservation as development continues over time. Some communities require a greater quantity of replacement trees for any removed trees, depending on the removed tree's size.

Recommendations

A mix of appropriate environmental regulation and community education will be key to retaining the quality of the natural environment in keeping with the community's priorities. The Township should consider the following actions.

- Promote low-intensity land uses where natural conditions are least capable of supporting significant development, such as in floodplains, wetlands, and wooded areas.
- Direct unattractive development away from sensitive natural resources including inland lakes, the Clinton River, floodplains, and wetlands.
- Continue to protect the Township's existing wetlands to preserve water quality, stabilize stormwater runoff, recharge groundwater, and provide fish and wildlife habitats.
- Promote conservation development techniques where mature vegetation and trees exist on select areas that can accommodate residential development (see Chapter 5 for greater detail).
- Conserve woodlands to protect water and soil quality, increase air quality, buffer noise pollution, moderate local climate and storm hazards, preserve wildlife habitats, and preserve aesthetic values and community beauty.
- Promote the preservation, protection, and diversification of trees and vegetation throughout the Township and continue to evaluate whether the tree preservation standards in the Code of Ordinances should be updated.
- Encourage the use of native plants to minimize the hazardous effects of invasive species in required landscaped areas.
- Encourage the preservation of natural site grades, rather than alteration through grading, to enhance stormwater management.
- Continue to evaluate the on-site landscaping standards in the Zoning Ordinance in case they need to be updated or specified.
- Maintain the Natural Features Setback requirements in the Zoning Ordinance and continue to evaluate whether the standards should be updated.
- Require the preservation and protection of groundwater recharge areas as open space or low-density uses to retain as much of the permeable surface and water retaining characteristics as possible.
- Consider developing a Stormwater Drainage Master Plan to help the Township identify the strengths and weaknesses in the existing stormwater drainage facilities.
- Encourage and promote the restoration and enhancement of natural vegetation and topographical features, particularly along stream corridors and waterways.
- Monitor and control surface water runoff to prevent flooding and erosion.
- Educate the community on the care and use of herbicide and fertilizer sprays to preserve and protect stream corridors, waterways, and their natural drainage and runoff channels.
- Regulate, preserve, and protect natural areas identified as essential to maintaining Waterford Township's unique heritage, character, and habitat.
- Consider tree protection requirements for new construction.
- Explore the use of performance bonds to address reforestation needs in the event that a proposed project fails after tree clearing.
- Promote the integration of green infrastructure into new development as a means of managing stormwater naturally on-site.
- Draft an ordinance to require new construction to match the existing grades of adjacent properties.
- Aspire to be a Tree City certified community.