ADOPTED: December 1, 2022

THE MEADOWS

DESIGN PLAN, FOREST HOME TOWNSHIP

THE MEADOWS

DESIGN PLAN, FOREST HOME TOWNSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

This project was initiated by Forest Home Township, Michigan, and was guided by a local steering committee that included members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Township Board, Planning Commission, Township Staff, and Residents.

The Meadows Design Plan benefited from significant collaboration with Township staff and officials, stakeholders, and citizens of the community. Without this support and input, completion of this plan would not have been possible.

ADHOC COMMITTEE:

- Stephen Barnard
- Dean Crandall
- Douglas Dewey
- Sheryl Guy
- Suzanne Mahan
- Thomas Sheneman
- Terry Smith
- Paul Trumble

Public engagement, planning, and design services were provided by Williams & Works.

Conceptual Funding Strategy concepts and data were provided by Ric Cicone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

PAGE 01 Introduction

PAGE 03 Planning Process

PAGE 05 Public Participation

PAGE 11 Design & Phasing

PAGE 19 Implementation

INTRODUCTION

The Meadows property is located off Bellaire Highway, east of North Arms Road, and is home to 70 acres of public natural area. The vacant land was purchased by Forest Home Township and now the Township is exploring long-range options for public facilities and recreational improvements through the creation of a Design Plan.

MAP 1. The Meadows Property Location

SITE LOCATION & CONTEXT:

The Meadows property is located in Forest Home Township, Michigan.

Adjacent to:

- Rotary Soccer Park
- Antrim County property managed by Grass River Natural Area
- Residential

Zoned: Rural Residential

Adjacent Zoning: Rural Residential, Waterfront Residential, Village Residential, Agricultural

Future Land Use: Rural Residential

MEADOWS

Gradual slopes, picturesque views, mowed trails, and lush meadows are major elements of the Meadows property today. Invasive species management has been ongoing in the Meadows, including Autumn Olive removal in the fall of 2021.

WOODED WETLANDS

The southern third of the property is comprised of wooded wetlands. Antrim County has ownership of the properties directly south and southeast of the site. These sensitive lands are managed by Grass River Natural Area.

ROTARY SOCCER PARK

The Village of Bellaire owns Rotary Soccer Park, just east of the Meadows property. This popular recreational facility is well used in the warmer months but has few supporting amenities for the soccer complex. Forest Home Township has been coordinating with the Village and County to allow them to pave the access drive.

MAPLE GROVE

A lush maple grove exists at the end of Elmwood Drive. This natural feature is unique on the site, as most of the property is covered with meadows and wooded wetlands. Storm damage in 2022 impacted the grove and additional clearing and replanting will be necessary to restore the grove's character.

NORTH ARMS ROAD

North Arms Road exists along the west side of the site. It is the sole access for multiple residences to the south and west. The road is currently under private ownership, but because the Township is one of the property owners with access along this road, they do contribute their share of annual road maintenance funds.

PINE FOREST EDGES

Stands of pines are scattered throughout the Meadows and border the western edge of the property. The pine stands include a mixture of native and non-native species that form a distinct sense of enclosure around the footpaths that meander through. The removal of invasive scotch pine is ongoing.

PROCESS

May, 2022	May, 2022	June, 2022	Aug, 2022	Aug, 2022	Sept, 2022	Oct, 2022	Nov, 2022
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Site Visit	Kick-Off Meeting & Goal Est.	Concept Design Review	Community Survey	Open House	Revised Concept Design	Design Plan Creation	Design Plan Adoption

The open house and online survey were advertised through mailers sent to each property owner, online through the Township's official website, and on yard signs located in front of the Township Hall and along the highway.

ADHOC COMMITTEE:

The process for this Design Plan was guided by a local adhoc committee that includes members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Township Board, Planning Commission, township staff, and residents. Their institutional knowledge and understanding of the community were used to help craft the preliminary conceptual design that would become a starting point for public discussion about the property.

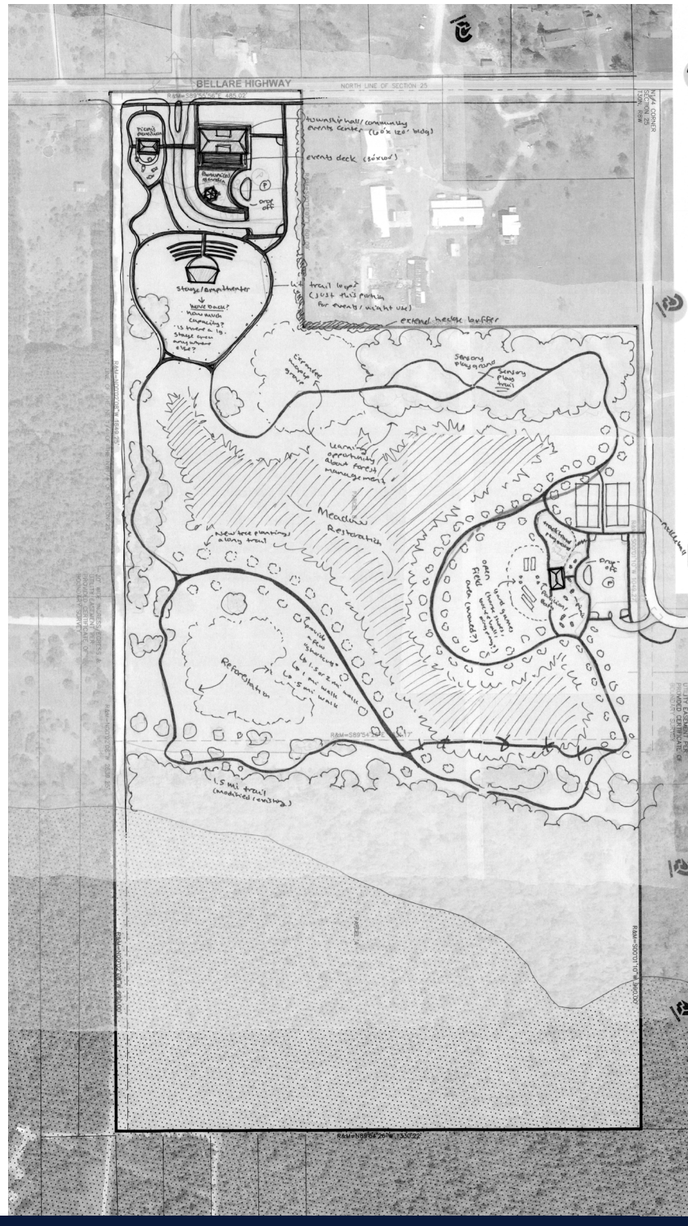
PLANNING PROCESS:

This process began with a site inventory phase, reviewing relevant planning documents, collecting publicly available property data, and conducting a site walk of the Meadows. The consultant team worked with a local adhoc committee on the creation of early plans that were then vetted by the public through an online survey and community open house. Once this review process was complete, the Design Plan was then revised to better respond to public critiques and community needs.

PURPOSE:

A Design Plan for the Meadows will serve a variety of purposes. It will help guide local decision-making regarding:

- Long-term property investments;
- Improved public facilities;
- Habitat restoration and protection;
- Trail expansions; and
- Recreation improvements



A DESIGN PLAN PROVIDES A VISION FOR LONG RANGE INVESTMENT IN A PLACE.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The public engagement for the Meadows property Design Plan encompassed a variety of outreach techniques and methods to solicit community feedback from numerous sources. A hybrid of virtual and in-person events was conducted to accomplish these purposes. The hybrid approach allowed participants to choose events and activities that most interested them.

A survey was designed to solicit feedback from participants through a virtual method. Participants were able to respond anonymously and leave comments and feedback through the survey. A community open house was also conducted to gather public input through word of mouth and engaging planning activities.

A summary of engagement responses are provided in this report. All data collected for this planning process can be found in the supplemental engagement report.

A TOTAL OF 167 RESPONSES WERE COMPLETED FROM THE LAUNCH OF THE SURVEY ON AUGUST 2ND, 2022 THROUGH THE CLOSE OF THE SURVEY ON SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2022.

SURVEY PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND:

The first section of the survey provided context about the Meadows Design Plan, the purpose of the survey, and inquired about the participant's background.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they lived in Forest Home Township (75.9%) followed by the Village of Bellaire (13.3%). The majority of the respondents also reported being full-time residents of Antrim County and about a quarter of the respondents were seasonal residents. Over 40% of the survey participants identified as being in the 65-74 age group. People of ages 55-64 were the second largest group of survey participants, making up about 23.4% of the respondents.

37% of the respondents indicated that they have visited the Meadows property and just over 40% answered no, but reported being familiar with the property. A majority of the respondents who have visited the Meadows property specified that they visit the site for walking, hiking, and watching nature and wildlife. Other common responses were ultimate frisbee, visiting while attending a soccer game at Rotary Soccer Park, and dog walking.

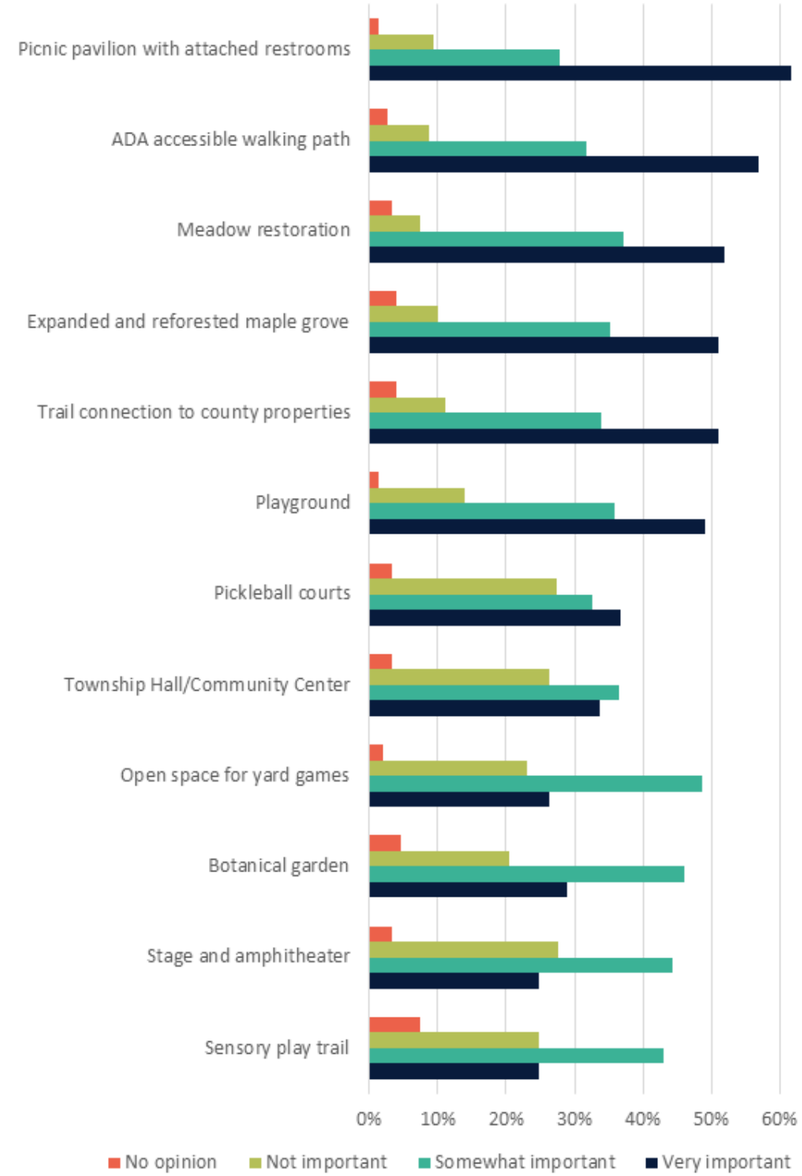
SURVEY PRELIMINARY DESIGN ASSESSMENT:

A preliminary conceptual design was provided for respondents to answer the remaining survey questions. This included a short narrative of the concept and an image of the design that could easily be referenced throughout the rest of the survey.

Picnic pavilion with attached restrooms, ADA accessible walking path, and meadow restoration were among the top three amenities that the participants listed as most important in the preliminary design. The botanical garden, stage and amphitheater, and sensory play trail had the lowest weighted averages of amenities that were provided in the design. Interestingly, no amenity had a majority of respondents deem it "not important".

Participants were asked to rank the phases of the projects in terms of importance. The participants ranked the 'Natural Area Passive Recreation' phase as most important followed by 'A Space For Play' phase. The 'Township Facilities Expansion' phase was ranked third.

Figure 1. In terms of potential amenities provided on the plan, how important are the following?



Respondents were asked to list elements that they liked and disliked from the preliminary Design Plan. Overall, more respondents expressly stated their support for the preliminary design versus their opposition, while the majority discussed aspects of the preliminary design that they both liked and disliked. Common like and dislike themes are listed below.

Lastly, survey participants were asked to provide any additional thoughts on public or recreational amenities that may be missing in their community that may be a good fit for the Meadows property. Many respondents reiterated the desire to keep the site natural and build upon the existing trail system. Providing programming/facilities for the site in winter was a common comment, with several suggesting indoor courts (pickleball, basketball, volleyball) or other indoor exercise equipment, sledding/tubing hills, and cross-country ski trails. Other repeated ideas included a dog park, bike trails, disc golf, and creating a safe connection to downtown Bellaire and/or Glacial Hills Trails.

LIKES

- Trails and spaces to walk
- Activities and accessibility for all ages
- Gathering spaces (amphitheater, pavilions, community center)
- Connections to Rotary Soccer Park
- Restroom facilities
- Pickleball courts
- Natural area preservation
- Playspaces
- Meadow restoration and reforestation
- Amphitheater and stage

The words “great” and “good” were used 19 times to describe elements that participants liked from the preliminary Design Plan.

DISLIKES

- Potential expense to taxpayers
- Feeling that needs are already being met in the community by other facilities:
  - Township Hall is centrally located in the Village and has space for meetings and elections
  - Pickleball is at the senior center
  - Richardi park has a playground and pavilion
  - Glacial Hills has an extensive trail network
- Amphitheater would create noise and attract crowds
- Traffic and circulation concerns
- Maintenance for botanical gardens

5 respondents indicated their dislike for the overall design and over 19 respondents expressed support.

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE: A community open house was held from 5 pm to 7 pm on August 24, 2022 and provided residents the opportunity to actively participate in the design process. This created a space for attendees to talk directly with the consulting team, members of staff, and their neighbors about the preliminary design.

ORIENTATION

Sign-in sheets and a welcome board were included. An informational presentation was held twice, once at 5:15 pm and again at 6:15 pm.

DRAW YOUR OWN DESIGN

Blank sheets of paper and crayons were provided for participants to sketch out their own concepts for the property.

PAPER SURVEY

Paper copies of the survey and a QR code to the online collector were available for participants who hadn't already taken the survey. Printed surveys were manually entered into the online collector.

DESIGN EVALUATION

Two activity boards were provided. One focused on constructive feedback about the overall preliminary design while the other addressed individual elements of conceptual key development areas.

ORIENTATION:

A presentation providing further context regarding the site and the planning process, preliminary results of the online survey, and a brief overview of the conceptual design was shared twice during the meeting. Q&A occurred after each presentation and generally focused on the cost of the project and implications to taxpayers.

DRAW YOUR OWN DESIGN:

Blank sheets of paper and crayons were provided for participants to sketch out concepts for the Meadows property. Few participants engaged in the Draw Your Own Design activity, instead taking part in the other planning exercises, such as the printed survey, design evaluation boards, and general group discussion.

Returned designs included suggestions such as creating a grand entrance along Bellaire Highway, focusing development on North Arms Road, and engaging youth programs, such as the Bellaire Youth Initiative, to assist with the environmental restoration of the site through volunteer and educational programs.

A total of 50 people signed-in during the open house, although more may have been in attendance as some likely signed-in as a family unit. An informational welcome board was present that provided an agenda for the open house, context about the planning process, and encouraged participants to take part in the available activities. Attendees were able to come and go as they pleased and participate in the activities of their choosing.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN EVALUATION BOARDS:

Two activity boards were displayed to collect feedback on the preliminary design. The first exercise asked participants to provide construction comments on a large map showing the overall design. The second exercise focused on two key development areas and asked participants to assess specific features and their proposed locations on the design.

KEY DEVELOPMENT AREAS:

Two activity boards were displayed to collect feedback on the preliminary design. The first exercise asked participants to provide construction comments on a large map showing the overall design. The second exercise zoomed in on two key development areas and asked participants to assess specific features and their proposed locations on the design.

The key development area titled **A Place to Gather** included the Township Hall/Community Center, amphitheater, walking paths, a botanical garden, and picnic spaces. Discussion topics included a positive response to the amount of parking for the proposed amenities, having an outdoor space for gatherings, a community center to support indoor recreation and gatherings, ADA walking paths, garden spaces, and general planting of trees and habitat restoration efforts. Concerns included traffic and noise generated from the amphitheater, moving the Township Hall, and the overall expense/burden on taxpayers.

The key development area titled **A Place to Play** featured traditional park elements like a picnic pavilion and restroom, play equipment, and pickleball courts. Conversations had during the event included a desire to safely connect the Rotary Soccer Park to the Meadows facilities, support for the trails and pathways, a desire to preserve nature and create quiet spaces along the trail, concern over noise and partying at the pavilion after dark, and discussion about the appropriate mix/separation of tennis and pickleball facilities.

OVERALL PRELIMINARY DESIGN:

The design evaluation board looking at the entire preliminary design gave participants a chance to step back and assess the concept as a whole. Comments in support of the design tended to center around the idea of having a long-term plan for the property, the inclusion of walking and accessible trails, pickleball courts, garden spaces, and protected natural areas. Comments that addressed concerns included worries over safety connections to and from the Rotary Soccer Park, noise and light pollution from the play area and the amphitheater, a desire to preserve as much of the natural space as possible, and the feeling that these amenities are already available in the community and aren't needed.

The majority of comments were neutral and gave feedback on how to improve the plan. Suggestions included providing tennis as well as pickleball facilities, frisbee golf, cross country skiing trails, an indoor pool, and non-motorized connections to downtown Bellaire and Glacial Hills Trails.

DESIGN & PHASING

The final conceptual site design maintains the intent of the Meadows to preserve natural habitat while providing recreational access to the community

DESIGN NARRATIVE:

The preliminary design was modified to respond to public feedback. The final conceptual design balances the natural and built environment, the need for habitat restoration and preservation, and the community input collected during this planning process. Changes from the preliminary to the final design include:

- Replacing intensive uses that have the potential to create large crowds and noise, like the amphitheater, with more passive and flexible spaces, like the open green;
- The removal of less popular built elements, like lawn games and the botanical garden;
- The addition of space, as needed, for tennis to allow for separation of uses between pickleball
- Re-focusing the community center as a space for indoor recreation and gathering; and
- The consideration of need for the relocation of Township Hall, which space has been provided for in this design should the need arise, but should be reassessed in the long-term future as the community grows and changes.

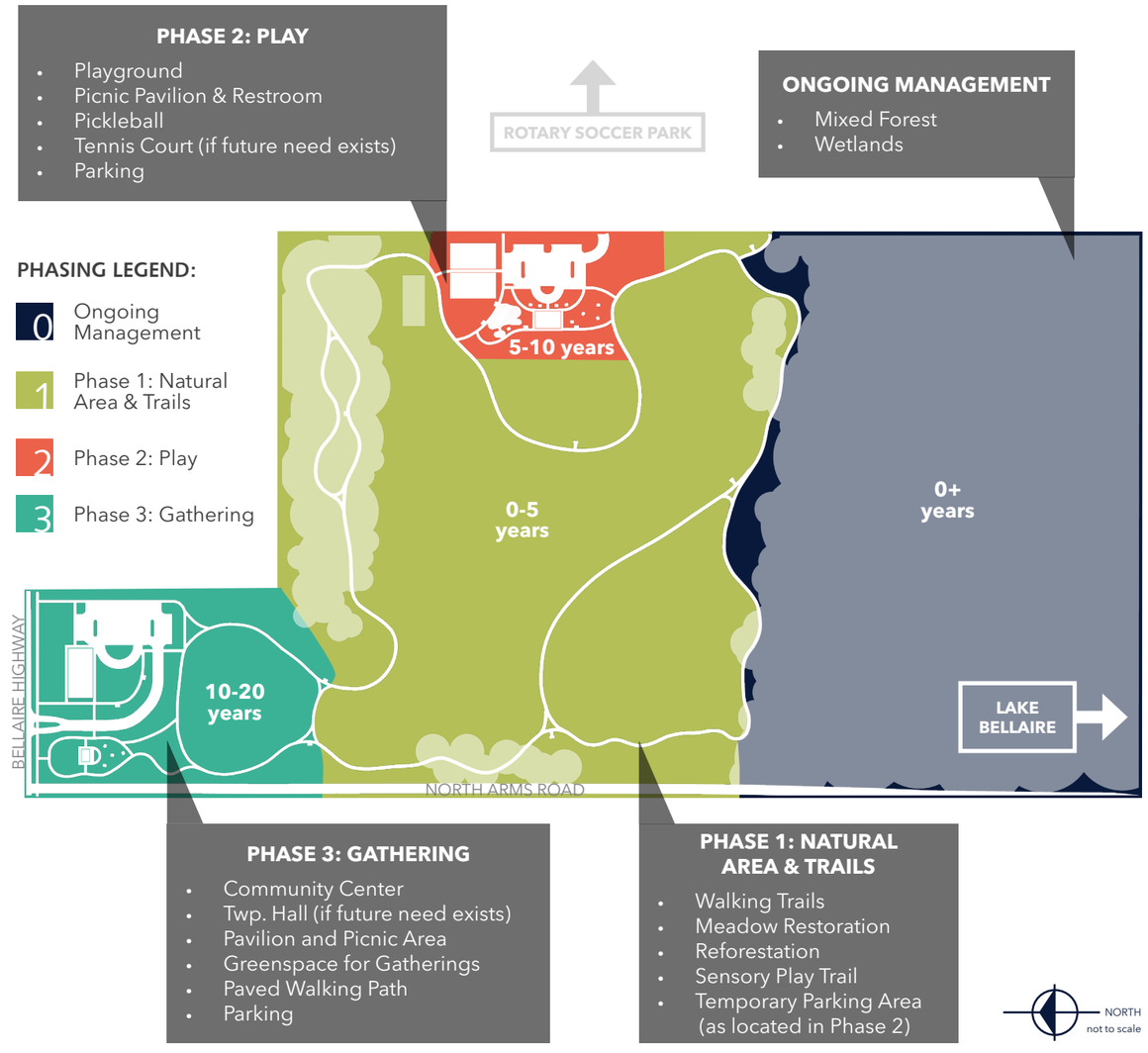
The majority of the Meadows will be kept as a natural preserve, with two specific nodes planned for built improvements. Keeping with the original intent of the property purchase, the existing wetlands and mixed-forest to the south will remain undisturbed and protected as natural habitats. The restoration of the Meadows, pine stands, and maple grove will provide additional habitat for native flora and fauna. The preservation and restoration of natural areas and the creation of trails will connect people with nature, and are imagined as the first phase of improvements to the site. Spaces for play and gathering have been established along the eastern and northern property boundaries, acting as formal trailheads. Elements highlighted in Phase 2 provide places for people of all ages to play, whether that be on play structures, at the pickleball courts, or frisbee in the picnic areas. Connecting the park to one of the Township's main thoroughfare, long-term improvements shown in Phase 3 are located just off of Bellaire Highway. Features like a community center and flexible outdoor green provide spaces for residents to gather year-round.

DESIGN PLAN PHASING:

Implementation of the Design Plan will occur over many years. Smaller elements, such as trail improvements or tree planting could be implemented fairly immediately, while larger-scale elements, such as buildings, pavilions, or restrooms, would likely take more time to design and fund.

Prioritization of the Design Plan determines the first steps in the implementation process. The phasing plan below was developed based on general feasibility factors (level of effort, environmental impacts, assumed cost), perceived need, and amenities most desired by the public.

MAP 2. Phasing Plan



CONCEPTUAL SITE DESIGN

Ⓐ Park Entry

Ⓑ Community Center/ Space for Twp. Hall (if need exists)

Ⓒ Pavilion and Picnic Area

Ⓓ Flexible Greenspace for Gatherings

Ⓔ Paved Walking Path

Ⓕ Meadow Restoration

Ⓖ Expanded and Reforested Maple Grove

Ⓗ Sensory Play Trail

Ⓘ Pickleball

Ⓙ Space for Tennis Court (if demand exists)

Ⓚ Playground

Ⓛ Picnic Pavilion with Attached Restroom

Ⓜ Trail Connection to County Properties Managed by Grass River Natural Area Compacted

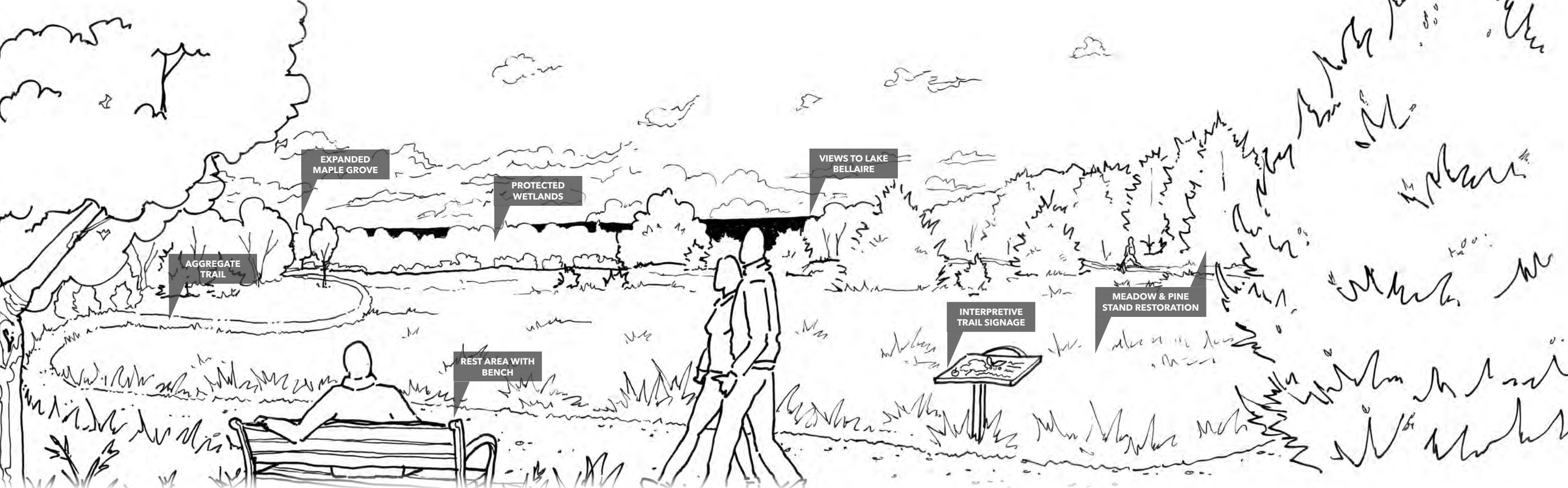
Ⓝ Aggregate Walking Path

Phase Boundaries

NORTH

0′ 100′ 200′

MAP 3. Conceptual Site Design



NATURAL AREA & TRAILS:

Phase 1 includes approximately 1.3 miles of trail that weave through woodland edges and bring visitors into the heart of the Meadows. Based on existing topography, the creation of accessible walking paths could likely be achieved with minimal disturbance to the land. Aggregate trails are proposed for the majority of the site and the first phase of work to keep the natural feel of the property. A sensory play trail in the maple grove creates a unique space for individuals with sensory impairments, providing a low-cost feature of play and observation that connects people of all ages and abilities to nature. Newly planted trees along the borders of trails throughout the meadow areas will create a more comfortable walk, providing natural forms of shade and windbreaks. Areas of respite are shown at regular intervals and are set-back off the primarily pathway to help further immerse visitors in the natural settings.

Habitat restoration efforts are focused on the central meadows and maple grove. Continued removal of invasive species, including autumn olive and scotch pine, throughout the meadows and planting of native prairie grasses and forbs should be a first step. Clearing of any hazardous trees or limbs from the storm-damaged maple grove is necessary prior to the implementation of trails and the proposed reforestation and expansion of the grove. Ongoing stewardship and maintenance of the meadows, maple grove, pine stands, and wetlands will be key to creating healthy habitats for generations to come.

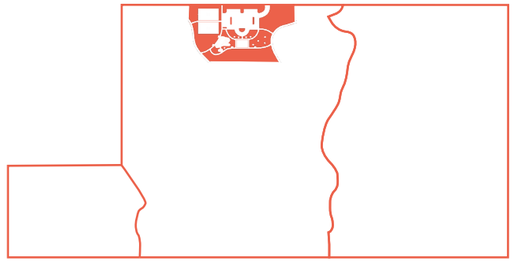
1 Phase 1: Natural Area & Trails

NORTH nts

MAP 3. Phase 1 One-Mile Alternate Trail Routes

NORTH not to scale

A PLACE TO PLAY: The east side of the park focuses on connections to other community facilities, like the Village of Bellaire's Rotary Soccer Park and the County's conservation lands managed by Grass River Natural Area. The play spaces, pavilion, restroom, parking area, and trails all provide amenities that complement the uses of these other facilities and add to the overall recreational quality of the park. A space for tennis has been identified and is recommended for inclusion if other tennis facilities in the greater community are not enhanced in the near future. The established parking area can be used as an overflow lot during soccer games and a formal trailhead for the trail system at the Meadows and Grass River Natural Area.



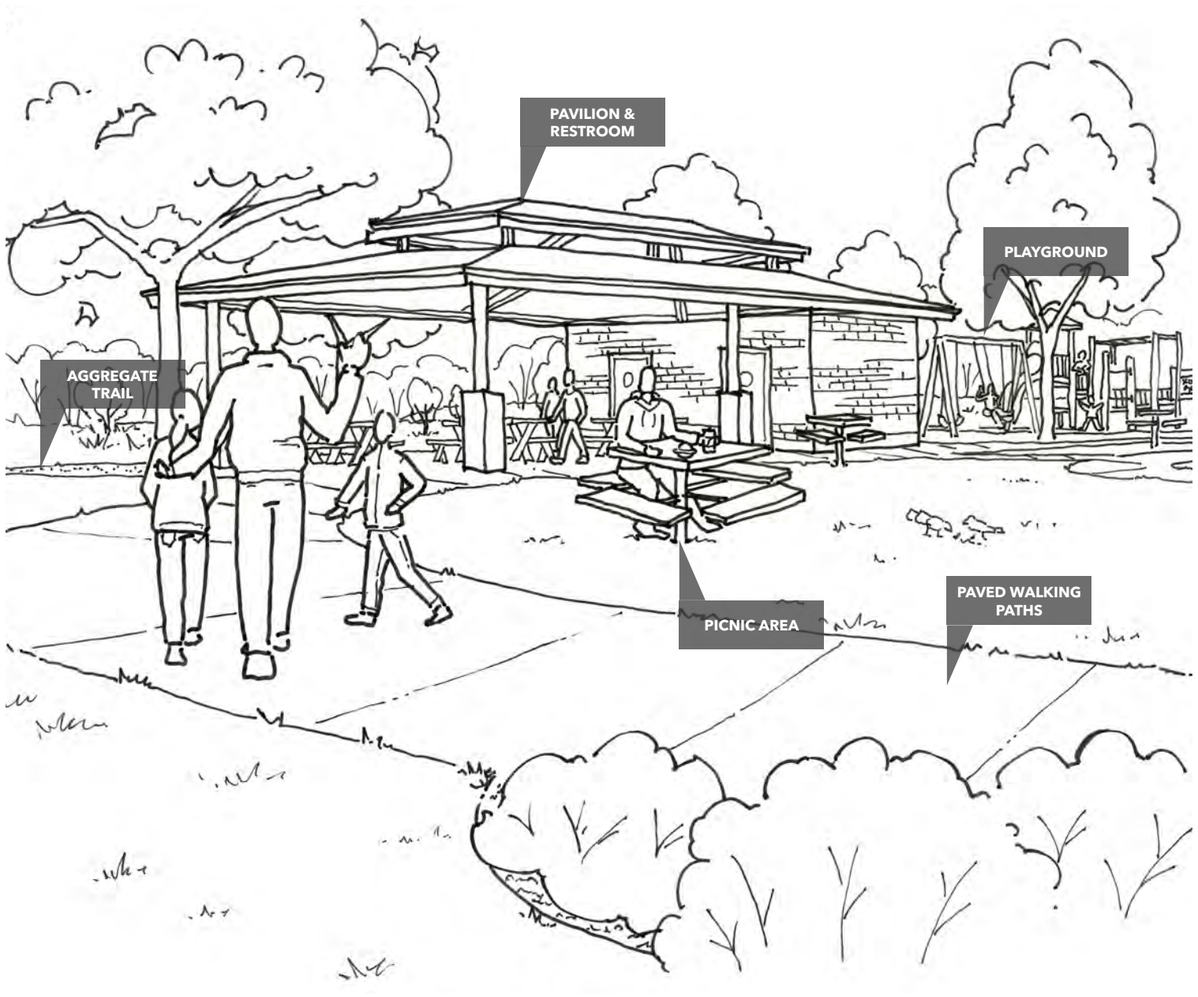
2 Phase 2: Play

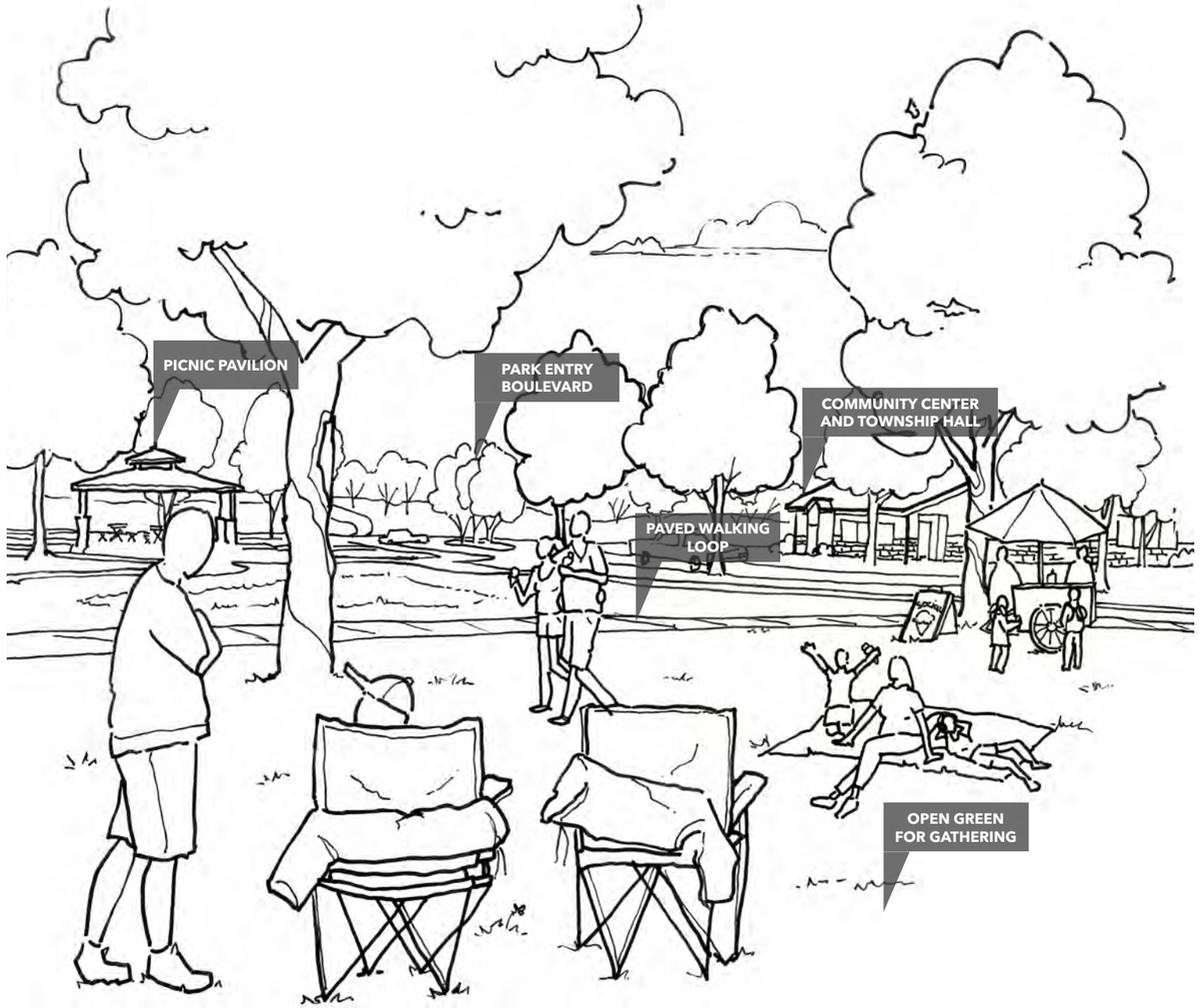
NORTH nts

A PLACE TO GATHER: Creating a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces for gathering at the Meadows provides added value to the area. The inclusion of a community center on the north end of the property creates a place for year-round activity, such as indoor court sports like basketball and pickleball, exercise equipment and programming, and social events. If the future need exists as the community grows, Township Hall could be relocated to the Meadows Park to allow for a building expansion and more adequate parking. Outdoor picnic spaces, shelters, and a large flexible greenspace surrounded by a quarter-mile, paved walking path provide unique spaces for outdoor gatherings and exercise, all with views across the park to Lake Bellaire.

3 Phase 3: Gathering

NORTH nts





IMPLEMENTATION

This Design Plan provides guidance on implementation over short- and long-term periods, and is imagined to take considerable time to complete. Phasing the plan over many years is a strategy that allows the Township to (1) continually reassess the need and demand for items identified in the plan and (2) strategically budget for these improvements. The concept design is not set in stone but does provide clear direction on improvements deemed important today, like the natural areas and trails, and anticipated future needs, like the community center and Township Hall.

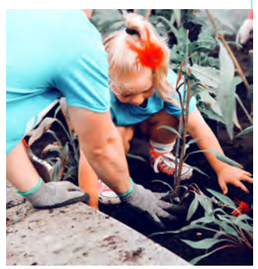
CONCEPTUAL FUNDING STRATEGY:

The Township's general fund is the intended immediate source of capital to complete portions of the Design Plan. This means that the Township will need to carefully consider the size and scope of specific projects and the fiscal years for expenditure to distribute funds appropriately. A major public concern throughout this planning process has been the worry of increased taxes to pay for the implementation of this plan. Using the Township's general fund to support these efforts will not raise taxes. A tax increase could only occur by voter approval, but this method of funding for the Meadows should not be considered.

FOUR PROVEN MECHANISMS OF PROJECT FUNDING INCLUDE:

1) VOLUNTEERS:

Forest Home Township has several recreational spaces that successfully grow through volunteer efforts. This is proven in Glacial Hills and the Grass River Natural area. Early priority efforts like site restoration, pathway development, and tree plantings can be accomplished with volunteers. According to some estimates, over 2,000 person-hours in 2021 and more than 700 person-hours (excluding invasives removal volunteers) were contributed by Glacial Volunteers as of August 2022. This is a significant value when considering the cost of labor. Volunteers could become a resource of talent needed for long-term maintenance of the Meadows natural areas and pathways.



2) DONATIONS:

Local organizations and people are giving. The Grass Lake Natural Area received donations in excess of $50,000 after conducting an auction of goods donated by the community. Glacial Hills relies on individual donors who have contributed several tens of thousands of dollars over the past several years. Donations can come in several forms, including large monetary donations from individuals or organizations, small donor campaigns, or in-kind donations of goods (construction materials or site amenities) or services/expertise (fundraising, engineering, environmental). Interest groups eager to see elements of the plan executed, like local birding groups or pickleball leagues, may be an excellent source of support.

3) GRANTS:

Many of the features illustrated in the Meadows Design Plan would qualify for a variety of private and government-supported grants. Large portions of the recreational elements can be funded through Michigan DNR Grants, including Spark Grants (up to $1 million), Natural Resource Trust Fund Grants (up to $300,000), and Recreation Passport Grants (up to $150,000). Habitat Restoration efforts can be partially funded through the Michigan DNR Land and Water Conservation Fund (up to $500,000). Other private organizations have smaller available grants for specific elements, like the DTE tree planting program grant (up to $4,000).

4) PARTNERSHIPS:

Forest Home Township will need partners to make the Meadows a success. Coordination with the Village of Bellaire will be important in connecting the Meadows to Village assets, like the Rotary Soccer Park and downtown. Many suggested during the Open House that walkable and bikeable connections between the Township and Village will be important in providing a safe and equitable method of access for all within the community. Other partners may include Friends of Glacial Hills, as this was also deemed an important non-motorized connection to make. Local environmental groups, like Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and Grass River Natural Area, should be engaged, as they may have an interest in stewardship of the land or expansion of trails and boardwalks.

RESOLUTION

ADOPTING THE PROPOSED MEADOWS DESIGN PLAN

FOREST HOME TOWNSHIP
ANTRIM COUNTY, MICHIGAN
(Resolution No. 7-4) 2022-2023

At a regular meeting of the Forest Home Township Board held on December 1, 2022, at Forest Home Township Hall, the following Resolution was offered for adoption by Board Member S. Steiner and was seconded by Board Member T. Kent:

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE PROPOSED MEADOWS DESIGN PLAN

WHEREAS, Forest Home Township acquired approximately 70 acres of land on Bellaire Highway, now known as the Meadows, with the intent of developing the site into a recreational asset for the community and to protect sensitive natural habitats; and

WHEREAS, the Township desires to adopt and implement the design plan for the Meadows that depicts the conceptual development of the Meadows property, including priority phasing of specific features and methods to assess future need and general financing strategies were identified; and

WHEREAS, an adhoc committee comprised of members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Township Board, Planning Commission, and township staff, with the assistance of a professional planning group, prepared a Design Plan for the Meadows with substantial community feedback; and

WHEREAS, in November of 2022, the adhoc committee reviewed the proposed Design Plan and recommended approval of the Plan to the Forest Home Township Board; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board finds that the proposed Design Plan is desirable, proper, and reasonable, and furthers the use, development, and recreational goals of the Township.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. ***Adoption of the Meadows Design Plan.*** The Forest Home Township Board hereby approves and adopts the proposed *Meadows Design Plan Report* that contains the conceptual Plans for the Meadows, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps, tables, and designs contained therein.

2. ***Findings of Fact.*** The Township Board has made the foregoing determination based on a review of existing recreational needs in the Township, a review of the existing Master Plan, input received from the adhoc committee and the public, as well as the assistance of a professional planning group. The Township Board also finds that the *Meadows Design Plan Report* will accurately reflect and implement the Township's use, development, and recreational goals for the property.

3. ***Effective Date; Repeal.*** The Design Plan for the Meadows shall become effective upon the adoption of this resolution.

YEAS: Kent, Stevens, Smith, Mahan

NAYS: None

ABSENT/ABSTAIN: Crandall

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Forest Home Township Board at the time, date, and place specified above pursuant to required statutory procedures.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: 12/1, 2022

By Suzanne C. Mahan
Suzanne C. Mahan
Forest Home Township Clerk

THE MEADOWS

DESIGN PLAN, FOREST HOME TOWNSHIP