



Mecosta County Park Commission

22250 Northland Drive, Paris, MI 49338 (231) 832-3246
WEBSITE: www.mecostacountyparks.com FAX: (231) 832-2078

2020 Millage Proposal Questions and Answers

What is the amount and term of the proposed millage?

The Park Commission is asking for a millage of up to .5 of one mill (\$.50 per \$1,000 of taxable value), for a period of five years, 2020 through 2024 inclusive.

Why do Mecosta County Parks need a millage?

The Park Commission would like to both continue to offer, and enhance day use recreational opportunities to Mecosta County Residents. The park system has operated without a tax appropriation for over 50 years, however not all park and recreation areas generate enough revenue to pay for their operating cost. These parks have been supplemented with funding from other Mecosta County Parks in order to remain open. As large-scale maintenance items have been deferred for many years due to lack of funding, it is inevitable that some of the parks will require an additional funding source in order to remain in operation.

What is the current revenue vs. expenses outlook?

Though the Parks have seen record numbers of visitors and, in turn, increases in revenue, the revenue generated will not cover the necessary anticipated expenses of the parks in the next 5-years. The Park Commission has evaluated all current assets and estimates that just over 3 million dollars in non-operating expenses are necessary within the next 5 years to ensure amenities are not cut from the system. Over the past few years the Park Commission has been able to fund \$250,000-\$300,000 in Capital Projects per year. If current trends continue the parks could fund 1.25-1.5 million dollars in major repairs leaving a deficit of more than 1.5 million dollars in needed funding.

If passed, what will the tax funds be used for?

Key elements of the proposal include:

- Keeping current parks open that are in consideration to be closed.
- Providing additional year-round availability to park facilities such as trailheads, boat launches, playgrounds and parking areas.
- Enhancement/Replacement of day use amenities such as playgrounds, boat launches, swimming areas, beaches, picnic areas and parking areas.
- Increase in community events hosted by the parks.
- Overhaul to ADA accessibility accommodations throughout the parks.
- Park upgrades for community response during local emergencies.
- Enhancement/upkeep of existing trails within the park system.
- Renovation/addition of community use facilities such as picnic pavilions.
- Renovation of deteriorating buildings and park grounds for public use.
- Re-brand as a Parks and Recreation entity with community first priorities.
- Historic Paris Fish Ponds to be renovated and available to residents and school groups at no charge.
- Evaluation and possible implementation of youth sports activities
- Evaluation and possible implementation of facilities such as mini golf, a spray park or winter ice rink.

As a County Resident how will I benefit if this proposal is approved?

In addition to the proposal enhancements listed above, if approved, county residents would be given a discount on season and daily vehicle or boat permit charges when visiting the parks. The current fee of \$30 each for a season vehicle or boat pass would be reduced to \$20 each for county residents and day use vehicle or boat passes would be reduced from \$7 to \$4 each for county residents. The current proposal is based solely on funding park improvements related to day use amenities, outdoor recreation opportunities, community support initiatives and community events.



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Are most County Park and Recreation organizations supported by tax appropriations?

Yes, the vast majority of County Park Commissions in the State of Michigan receive funding through tax appropriations to provide services to their communities. The Mecosta County Park Commission has been structured to operate with a more business-like plan of operation, which considers return on investment and revenue generation as a primary factor when evaluating capital projects. Most county park systems operate with less of a business focus and a more community-oriented focus. This proposal, if approved, would allow for the enhancement of community related projects and bring the focus back to "county park" related services vs campground-oriented priorities.

How will County Park operations change if the proposal is voted down?

Though it is the goal of the Park Commission to keep as many opportunities available as possible for County Residents to experience the vast array of recreational offerings in our community, some facilities that are not able to cover operating expenses, or where renovation costs are too great for the Park Commission to absorb, may be closed or removed. Length of the park operating season will remain condensed with few additions to program offerings. Capital expenses will be prioritized by return on investment and business outlook vs. community service improvements to ensure sustainability of the park system.

Was public input taken into consideration regarding this proposal?

Yes, in 2017 an extensive survey was completed by the Park Commission. The survey was advertised through local newspaper, internet, and radio. Over 1,500 surveys were completed with questions relating to capital improvement plans, community events, trails, user statistics, quality of park experiences, benefits of the parks, camping amenities, and millage proposals. In 2019 four Park Masterplan public comment sessions were held within the county parks. These sessions were advertised through local newspaper, internet and throughout the parks. The sessions provided much of the feedback utilized to ensure this millage proposal was created in accordance with what the local community is seeking from your park system.

What are some of the other benefits of having a well-maintained, community-oriented park system?

There are many benefits to having quality park services and outdoor space available within your community. County Parks are a tremendous economic driver for Mecosta County. Many businesses are able to operate within the County due to the visitor traffic that the parks bring into our communities. Real Estate is proven to be more valuable in areas with quality park offerings with parks being a draw toward bringing working families into the area. During the operating season the county parks are a significant employer. In 2019 the park commission maintained 48 staff, who are local residents distributing their earnings back into the community.

Most recently, personal health as it relates to outdoor recreation has shown to be extremely important from both a physical exercise and mental stress relief aspect. Parks are a place to hit the reset button and recharge your internal batteries from the stresses of the world. County Parks provide a venue for families to spend time together away from technology and for school friends to meet, play and exercise together. They provide a venue for rest, relaxation, fun and are the place to be to cool off during those hot summer days!

Where can I find additional information on the Mecosta County Parks?

Information on your County Parks is available online at www.MecostaCountyParks.com or by visiting any of our park offices during the operating season.

Additional questions regarding this proposal can be submitted to the Park Commission administrative office at 22250 Northland Drive, Paris MI 49338.

E-mail – admin@MecostaCountyParks.com or phone 231-832-3246.