

# Mich-e-ke-wis Park MASTER PLAN



City of Alpena  
Michigan

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# **Mich-e-ke-wis Park Plan 2020**

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## **City of Alpena, Michigan**

Prepared for:

The City of Alpena

Prepared by:

Northeast Michigan Council of Governments  
80 Livingston Boulevard, Suite U-108  
P.O. Box 457  
Gaylord, Michigan 49734

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## Introduction

The City of Alpena is the steward of some of the most beautiful and cherished public park systems in the region. Mich-e-ke-wis Park is especially revered because of the natural beauty of its shoreline, sandy beach, and peaceful setting. Nearby is another incredibly special park, Starlite Beach. The approximate 20-acre Mich-e-ke-wis Park is the quiet alternative right next door to the splash park and excitement of Starlite Beach. The City recognizes the importance of these parks and their unique characters and believes that a new planning effort was needed to focus on Mich-e-ke-wis Park. This plan provides a framework, with thorough public input, that gives guidance to decision making on park improvements. This plan is intended to supplement the most recently adopted Alpena City Recreation Plan.

In a previous plan for this park, it was lamented that the receding water levels were causing issues with beach quality. In 2019, the area has experienced some of the highest water levels ever recorded. Obviously, change is all that we can count on in this regard and all recommendations in this plan must be sustainable.

## Public Involvement

The City recognizes effective planning involves thorough public involvement to ensure a great community park for the residents. The City sought public input and ideas from area citizens to create this plan and its recommendations for Mich-e-ke-wis Park's future.

The City hosted an event on March 12, 2019 at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Approximately 60 people attended and provided valuable insight into why they like the park and what they would like to see the park look like in the future. The session was well attended, and many great ideas were shared.

## THE ALPENA NEWS

### Future of Mich-e-ke-wis Park discussed



News Photo by Julie Riddle Community members who attended a discussion on the future of Mich-e-ke-wis Park on Tuesday evening mark their favorite suggestions made in an upbeat brainstorming session.

ALPENA –The public was invited to a meeting held Tuesday to discuss the future of Mich-e-ke-wis Park in Alpena.



Questions were posed to facilitate discussion and the responses were noted on the board in the room. The four questions were:

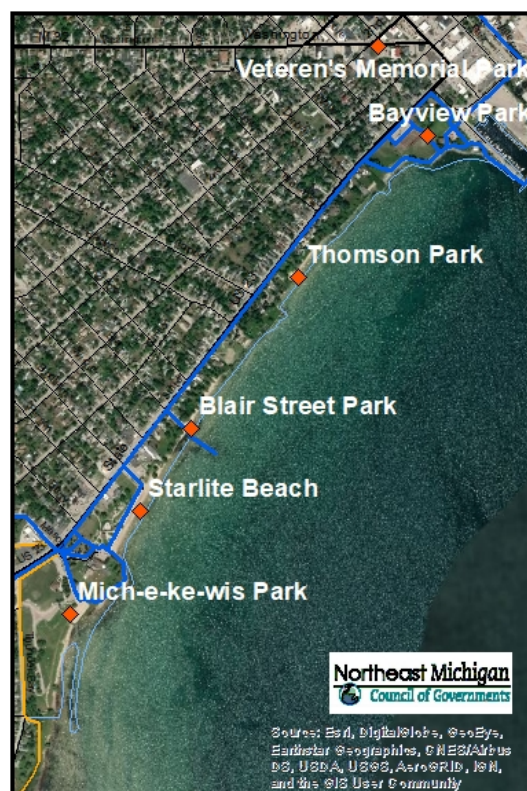
1. What do you like about Mich-e-ke-wis Park now?
2. What is a challenge at the Park right now?
3. What is the best thing that could be done to improve the Park?
4. What should not occur at the Park?

At the end of the event, the participants were asked to indicate the one response they felt was most important to them for each of the four questions. Those responses clearly showed an interest in the quiet experience that the Park provides. The top three “likes” were *water view*, *trees*, and *simplicity*. People enjoy the outdoor sports opportunities that exist in the park and the farmers’ market. Some people mentioned this might be a good park to include some historic displays. The top three challenges were *roads*, *shoreline preservation*, and *beach maintenance*. Desired additions included overwhelming support for a pavilion especially for the farmers’ market. Also, there was strong support for improvements that allowed for more accessibility to the waterfront and views of the water. Overall, keeping it simple seemed to be the theme.

On November 13, 2019, the City hosted another public involvement evening at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary for input on the draft plan drawings and suggested improvements. The public response was incredibly positive, and the final recommendations reflect the comments from each of these public involvement sessions.

## Neighboring Parks

When considering how to make the suggested improvements, it was important to review the existing recreational opportunities in the other city parks. The City of Alpena is rich in recreational resources, such as bike paths, water trails, parks, and shoreline. The parks most similar to Mich-e-ke-wis Park are those along the Lake Huron shoreline to the north that are located within the City limits. These neighboring parks are Bayview Park, Thomson Park, Blair Street Park, and Starlite Beach. Starlite Beach is immediately adjacent to Mich-e-ke-wis Park and many of these parks are a hub of activity on a summer day.





Many of the neighboring parks have their own character and are desired by visitors for different reasons. One of the most desirable waterfront parks along Lake Huron is Starlite Beach. This park includes a splash park that was installed in 2018, which has become a noticeably big attraction. A visit on a summer day will make it clear that Starlite has become a favorite of the Huron shore parks. In 2019, TripAdvisor.com, a popular travel website, listed Starlite Beach as the #5 most popular thing to do in Alpena. It is the third most popular park next to Rockport State Park (#4) and Island Park & Wildlife Sanctuary (#2). Mich-e-ke-wis Park is listed as #11 of the 27 destinations featured. The current status and planned improvements of each of these parks are included at the end of this plan.

The unique nature of Mich-e-ke-wis Park should be considered when planning park improvements. This park is clearly desired for its quiet enjoyment of the outdoors, farmers' market, volleyball, and waterfront viewing. The Park has larger open spaces closer to the heavily traveled state highway.



The view was mentioned as a desirable attraction to the site and a quality to be preserved. Clearly, the view from the main road through the park to the water is limited. However, the view from *within* the park across the water is very appealing. The views that will be the focus of improvements at Mich-e-ke-wis Park will be internal views for visitors within the park.

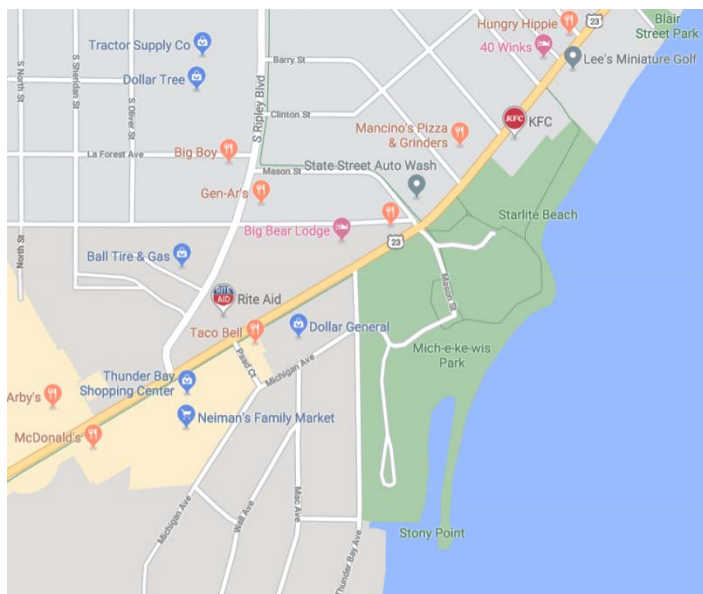
The adjacent photo is from Google Maps, taken in July 2018. The water is visible but is a small part of the overall viewshed in this area. The traffic along this road is busy and leads to very little sightseeing except to see there is a park in this location. The amenities of Mich-e-ke-wis Park that are located along the road are much more visible.

When compared with the viewshed of Starlite Beach, it is clear that Starlite Beach has more waterfront access. In addition, the splash park is clearly visible and even more visible when the crowds enjoying the splash park are present.



## Park Access

Although this plan does not propose any changes to park access, this plan makes note of the opportunities and challenges. As mentioned, the park is accessible by motorized and non-motorized means of transportation. It is located along the Alpena Bi-Path, which is a multi-user



non-motorized pathway connecting many destinations throughout the City for both recreational and daily transportation needs.

U.S. 23, also called the Huron Shores Heritage Route, is well traveled and an excellent means of motor vehicle access to the park. The annual average daily traffic (AADT) along the park's frontage on U.S. 23 in 2018 was 8,930. However, there are limited protected crosswalks. The closest crosswalk to the northeast is approximately 1,100 feet away and 1,200 feet to the southwest. Working with the Michigan Department of

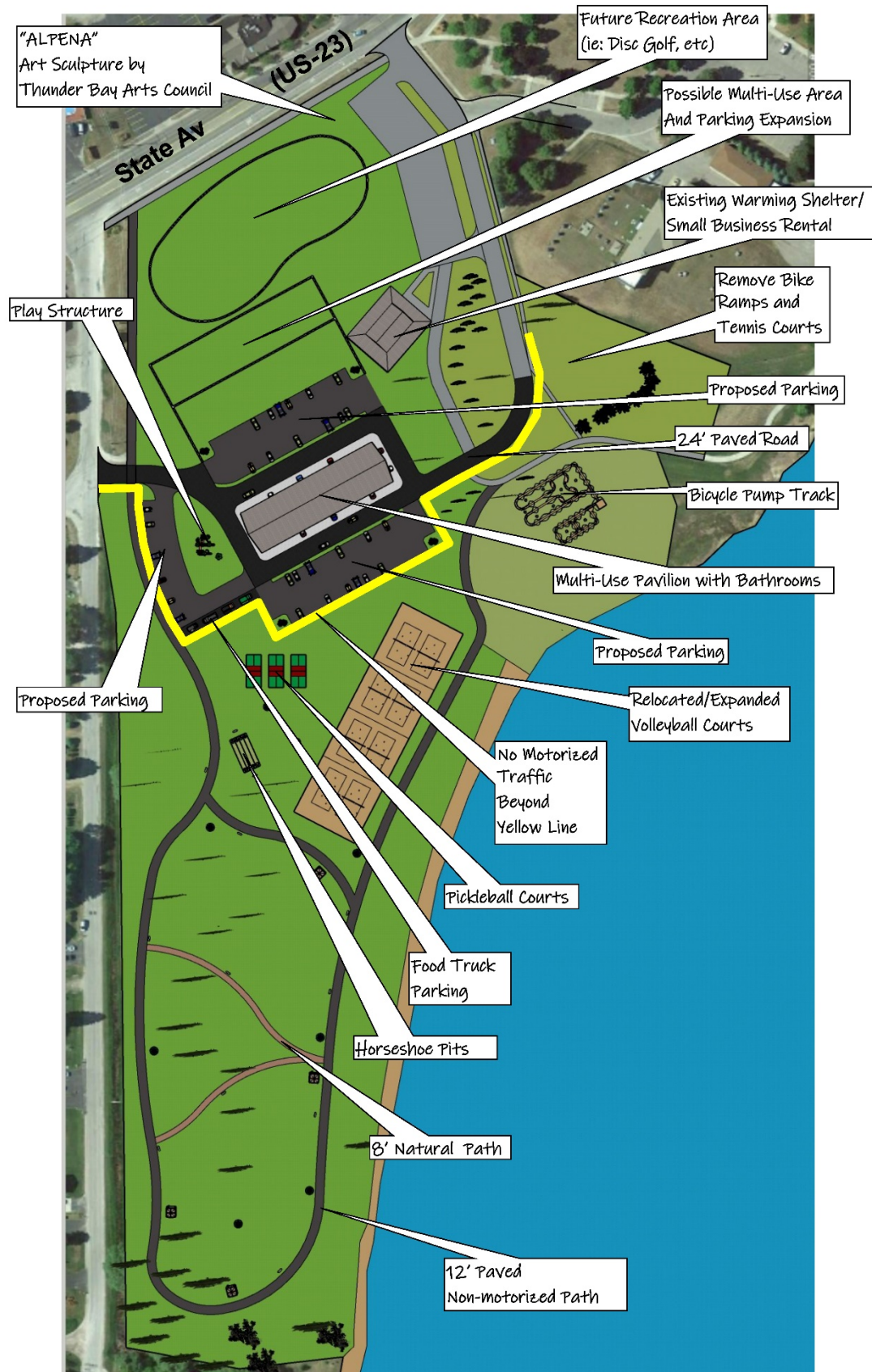
Transportation on possible improvements to park access would be worthwhile. As you can see from the Google map showing other attractions in the area and the proximity of the park, the addition of crosswalks would better connect residents to these potential destinations.

## Recommendations

Although this plan provides a number of recommendations for potential improvements to Mich-e-ke-wis Park, any steps taken will involve additional public input from the City Council, City Staff, and other stakeholders. For instance, a new pavilion was a favorite park addition since it could be used by the farmers' market and other organizations. The design and final location of such a structure would include additional and final planning with engineers and stakeholders. Other improvements should involve similar stakeholder input.

Improvements to parks are often done incrementally. This plan recommends being ready to make any of the improvements listed here by immediately starting dialog with stakeholders for each of the specific improvements. This will allow for immediate action when funding sources are identified.

Specific improvements and potential stakeholders and partners for fundraising efforts are listed in this plan.





## Proposed Amenities

### 1. Multi-use Pavilion

The multi-use pavilion was the highest rated improvement from the first public input session. The pavilion can be used for year-round programming and social events, including festivals, family gatherings, school events, class reunions, concerts and performances, and a potential ice rink. Currently, the Alpena Farmers' Market is a top-rated aspect of the Park and operates two days a week from July through the first week of October. Dependent on design and available funding, the pavilion would provide comfort for merchants and customers, potentially attract more customers, and possibly extend the market's operating season.

### 2. Quiet Area/Pedestrian Pathway

It was clear from the public input sessions that the quietness, simplicity, and water view are some of the most favored aspects of the park. This quiet area proposed, as shown on the map on page 5, provides a pedestrian/non-motorized area of the park for quiet reflection and exercise. In this area, there are many trees and quality views of the water. The pedestrian path replaces a gravel drive, which was one of the criticisms listed at the public input session. Instead of paving the gravel in this section of the park, it is converted to a quiet space for recreation and relaxation. Picnic tables, benches, horseshoe courts, and a play structure could be placed in this area.

### 3. Additional Volleyball Courts

Currently, the beach volleyball courts are in high demand and are in need of protection from rising water levels. Mich-e-ke-wis is already a popular destination for volleyball compared to other parks. There is an opportunity to build on this by creating more and better volleyball opportunities. A new location will be necessary to ensure long-term protection from rising waters but will need to retain the preferred proximity to the beach. There are currently six volleyball courts and four more are proposed.

### 4. Bike Pump-Track

Typically, these types of riding facilities receive high utilization when complemented by additional infrastructure, such as picnic tables, playground equipment, and other developed park facilities, that already draw children and families. An ideal area for a pump track is approximately 0.5-acres. The track could be created with imported clay or purchased prefabricated. The advantages of the former are lower cost (\$35,000 labor plus materials/transport), malleability, and the ability to remove the track easily through regrading. The disadvantages are a need for regular maintenance and, to some, the aesthetics of piles of clay/dirt. For a prefabricated pump track, the advantages are a much lower level of maintenance and polished aesthetics that can be easily landscaped,

while the disadvantages include a higher cost (\$15-20,000 labor and \$75,000-\$100,000 for the track components) and a lack of the ability to alter the design over time.

This type of park pairs well with the skate park that exists at Mich-e-ke-wis Park and would attract similar users.

#### 5. Horseshoe Courts

Horseshoe pitching is one of the few sports that has a national champion for men, women, boys, and girls and can still be played in one's backyard. In this day of weight watching, what better way to exercise than walking, bending, and reaching? These are integral parts of this sport. Game-related injuries are rare, and doctors have repeatedly stressed the beneficial aspects of this sport. Multiple horseshoe courts can be constructed and create an opportunity for league or individual play for all ages. An area of 55'x75' is needed to have six horseshoe courts.



#### 6. Picnic Tables/Benches

These improvements can provide additional comfortable seating to enjoy the water view from inside the park. Locations will be inside the pedestrian quiet area and other specific locations to be determined.

## **7. Bike Racks**

These can be placed around the park near the bike path's intersection with a feature in the park, such as the volleyball courts and proposed pavilion. They are relatively inexpensive and encourage people to ride their bike to the park and know there is a place to secure it.

## **8. Lighting**

A lighting plan is needed for this site to maximize security and convenience and to ensure dark sky lighting practices are followed. The International Dark Sky Association (<https://www.darksky.org/>) is a helpful resource for choosing proper lighting to limit light pollution and protect the night skies.

## **9. Play Structure**

This type of addition can improve a park experience by keeping youth involved in exercise. The type of play structure that is eventually chosen will depend on the number of children expected at any given time, the location and size available for the structure, as well as the budget. The budget for such a structure has been estimated for \$1000 times the number of children that are expected to be playing on it at any given time. The need for proper playing surface and maintenance is also a consideration of such an improvement.



## **10. Parking Area - rearranged**

This new design will improve the southern section of the park and its dusty gravel road as well as the undefined, wider maneuvering space, which has a lot of wasted space and a lack of clarity as to how motor vehicles and pedestrians should move through the space. This should increase parking opportunities and park user safety.



## Appendix

### Alpena Park System

*The following information is excerpted from the 2016-2020 City of Alpena Recreation Plan and describes the City parks along the Lake Huron shore.*

**Bay View Park** is located on State Avenue, adjacent to the Municipal Small Boat Harbor. This is one of the City's largest developed parks with multiple year-round uses. It contains four tennis courts, three basketball courts, and a multipurpose open lawn area. There is an area of shoreline, space for picnics and an open field for low profile activity. There is the Fine Arts Band shell, which is used for summer band concerts, community celebrations and by various groups for other occasions. A fenced, fully equipped young children's playground, developed by and maintained in partnership with the Alpena Kiwanis Club, is another of the facilities available at this site. Public restrooms are located on Harbor Drive. The Bi-Path runs through the park and connects the park to other recreation areas. The Alpena Yacht Club is located within the Park on property leased from the City.



*Future improvements* - Bay View Park is the City's primary multi-use park, is located in the City's Downtown Development Authority district, adjacent to the City Marina and is heavily utilized for community events and festivals, such as Art-on-the-Bay and summer music concerts. The City Council has established an objective that calls for the continued improvement, maintenance, and beautification of all City parks. The proposed improvements will continue to enhance the use, appearance, character, and quality of this park. Proposed improvements include upgrades to the tennis court lighting system, general site work, installation of a picnic pavilion, upgrades to existing playground equipment, and construction of a restroom/concession building. The construction of a new restroom/concession facility will provide additional facilities needed with increased usage of the park for special events as well as by general users. The development of a fenced dog park will create an area for dog owners to safely allow their pets to run and play.



**Blair Street Park** is a 0.4-acre park located at the end of Blair Street along 173 feet of Thunder Bay frontage. Lake Huron. The park includes a refurbished handicap-accessible fishing pier, a picnic area with tables and grills, concrete bike paths that connect the State Avenue bike path to the pier and off-street parking.



*Future Improvements* - Blair Street Park is a waterfront mini park along the shore of Lake Huron between Starlite Beach and Thomson Park. The City Council established an objective for the continued improvement, maintenance, and beautification of all City parks. Improvements include new decking for the existing pier and lighting for the pier and adjoining sidewalk to enhance the visual character of the pier and park and provide increased hours of use by the public.



### Blair Street Park

Existing and Future Facilities  
2016-2020

-  Lighting Upgrades
-  Bi-Path
-  Park Boundary
-  Sidewalk

**Thomson Park** located on State Avenue on Lake Huron, midway between Starlite Beach and Bay View Park. With 160 feet of Thunder Bay frontage, this park has an excellent swimming beach, which is used quite heavily. Several picnic tables and a bike rack are available. A portable restroom facility is placed at the park during the summer months.

*Future improvements* – This small park is located on the shore of Lake Huron and contains one of the primary swimming beaches in the City. Upgrades are necessary to adequately accommodate the large number of users at this small beach park. The proposed improvements will continue to enhance the appearance, character, and quality of this park. Improvements include upgraded site amenities and construction of a new pedestrian walkway entrance to the park.



Thomson Park





**Starlite Beach** located on Lake Huron along State Avenue, between Thunder Bay Avenue and Bingham Street. This park (Starlite and Mich-e-ke-wis Park combined) is one of the largest developed City-owned recreation areas.

#### *Starlite Beach*

- Three large children's play structures
- Two additional children's play areas
- Public restrooms
- Picnic area
- Beach
- Off street parking
- Sections of the City's Bi-Path that run along the Lake Huron shoreline.
- Pavilion with picnic tables
- Barrier-free restrooms and outdoor showers

*Future improvements* – In 2004, the City Council, City Planning Commission, and the City Recreation Advisory Board, with funding from the Michigan Coastal Management Program, adopted a master plan for both Mich-e-ke-wis Park and Starlite Beach to determine future upgrades in both parks. Initial development items from the plan have focused upon Starlite Beach. The City Council has established an objective that calls for the continued improvement, maintenance, and beautification of all City parks. The proposed improvements will continue to enhance the use, appearance, character, and quality of this park. Proposed improvements include the continued improvements to the pedestrian promenade, and construction of a pedestrian gateway into the park. Construction of the splash park facility was a recent and popular improvement which has provided a needed amenity and increased use of the park by the general public.



**Starlite Beach**  
Existing Facilities  
2016-2020

Refer to Starlite Beach/Mich-e-kis-wis  
Park Master Plan for more details on  
planned improvements.

— Alpena Bi-Path  
— Park Boundary  
— Rotary Playground

**Mich-e-ke-wis Park** is located adjacent to Starlite Beach Park on the Lake Huron shore along State Avenue/US 23. This and Starlite Beach combined is one of the largest developed City-owned recreation areas.

*Mich-e-ke-wis Park*

- An enclosed warming/general park shelter building
- Two youth/women's ball fields
- A BMX bike park (designed for beginner and younger riders)
- Volleyball courts
- Horseshoe pits
- Picnic area
- Beach
- Off street parking
- Sections of the City's Bi-Path that run along the Lake Huron shoreline.





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## 1<sup>st</sup> Public Input Session Summary

Meeting Date: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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The City of Alpena has been listening to the needs of their community and is seeking input on Mich-e-ke-wis Park. The City wants to know what could be improved upon at this favorite park. To start this process the City requested assistance from the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments to seek input from the public and, with the public's guidance, provide some recommendations for the park.

The first step of the process was a public input session, held on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, to gather information on what people liked about the park, what they don't like, what they want and what they don't want to see happen at the park. This session was held at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. There were approximately 60 people in attendance at the first public input session.

Questions were posed to facilitate discussion and the responses were noted on the board in the room. The four questions were:

1. What do you like about Mich-e-ke-wis Park now?
2. What is a challenge at the Park right now?
3. What is the best thing that could be done to improve the Park?
4. What should not occur at the Park?

At the end, the participants were asked to indicate the one response to each of the 4 questions which they felt was the most important to them. Those responses are documented exactly as they were documented during the public input session and shown on the following pages. Each item shows the number of stars that were drawn by the participants on each item, indicating the general level of importance of each item to the audience. This information is being used to create site drawings of the park representing different potential development scenarios. NEMCOG is working with staff to draft them.

### **Next Steps**

Various Park development scenarios will be provided for review by the public. These will be discussed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> public input session, which will be announced very soon. At that time, we will be asking for input on the various drafts of future Park site plans. This will most likely be scheduled to occur by June.

### **How to Learn More and Keep in Touch**

Information will be updated on the Park planning process at the following web address:  
<http://www.discovernortheastmichigan.org/michekewis.asp>.

<b>What do you like about Mich-e-ke-wis Park now?</b>	<b># of Stars</b>
Water View	6
Trees	5
Simplicity	4
Farmers' market	3
Sand beach, few rocks	2
Quiet	2
Legacy/history/memories	2
Wildlife	1
Outdoor sports	1
Access to lake (wide open view)	1
Not over-developed (partners/contrasts well with Starlite Beach)	
Open space	
Picnic space	
Sunrise	
Night view	
Volleyball	
Gateway from south	
Continuous use of shore	

<b>What is a challenge at the park right now?</b>	<b># of Stars</b>
Roads, need for pavement	6
Preservation of natural shoreline, challenges	6
Beach maintenance	4
Unfinished bike path	2
Restrooms	1
Different definitions of development	1
Costs (of maintaining and developing park)	1
Racing (of vehicles)	
Universal access	
Safety	
General maintenance	
Lack of parking	
Proper traffic flow	
No traffic? (restrict all traffic)	
Invasive species	
Flooding	

<b>What is the best thing that could be done to improve the park?</b>	<b># of Stars</b>
Pavilion (esp. for farmers' market, with power, possible ice rink)	8
Boardwalk along beach (ADA compatible)	5
Balance of uses without obstructing views	3
Improved water access: docks/movable structures	3
Historic interpretative displays	3
Natural vegetation	2
Paved parking, well-defined	2
Dark sky lighting	2
Bike parking	1
Healthy youth destination	1
Portable ice rink	1
Define what people want	
Unobstructed use by kiteboarders	
Education/Natural interpretative displays	
City employees involved in improvements	
More volleyball courts	
Remove old willows	
Quiet area	
Outdoor winter use	
Year-round use	
Scenic overlook	
The "oval", flexibility for events	
Worldwide examples of park improvements	
Cover up ditch on Thunder Bay Avenue (for more parking?)	
Ensure driveway access from Thunder Bay Avenue	
Gathering space (food truck, garden, etc.)	
Leave it alone	
Fireplace	
Improve safety of playground	
Canoe/kayak storage	
Labyrinth for meditative walk	
Toboggan run	
Pickleball courts	
Curling	

What should not occur at the park?	# of Stars
Duplicate Starlite	8
Over-develop	7
RV park	6
Short sightedness	2
Unintended consequences	1
Community garden	
Flower gardens (unnatural)	

### Other Ideas Shared After the Public Input Session and on Posters at the Session

Keep it simple and natural as possible

Keep it open

Leave it alone - as it is!!

Sledding Hill

Basketball court to go along with baseball & volleyball

Yurts

Fire pits on the beach

Add room for more volleyball courts if needed (big league in-town

Sledding hill

clean bathrooms

Area near volleyball courts, in front of parking area, for kiteboarders/windsurfer launch area

Beach activities (Sandcastles, swim, walk, picnic, various games with balls etc.)

Kite flying

Launching sail boards, kayaks, small watercraft

Family-friendly activities

Shuffleboard

Croquet and other lawn games

Dog park for small dogs

Dog park for large dogs

Handicap walk to the water

Volleyball

Bike Park

Clear view of Lake Huron from US 23

Winter activities

Ice skating rink

Small sledding hill built so it does not obstruct the view. Could be used for rolling down hill in the summer.

(Could it be built of snow cleared from city property? If a season of little snow, the hill would be small. If a lot of snowfall, a bigger hill.)