

Town of *Wakarusa*



2022-2026 PARKS MASTER PLAN

DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WAKARUSA TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS

Matt Moyer	President
Carl Gilbert	Ward 1
Phil Klotz	Ward 3
Annette Brown	At Large
Rocco Rigsby	VP At Large

ELKHART COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Steve Warner	Chairman
Roger Miller	Vice Chairman
Lori Snyder	Secretary
Steven Edwards	Frank Lucchese
Tony Campanello	Jeff Burbrink
Tom Stump	Philip Barker

ELKHART COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

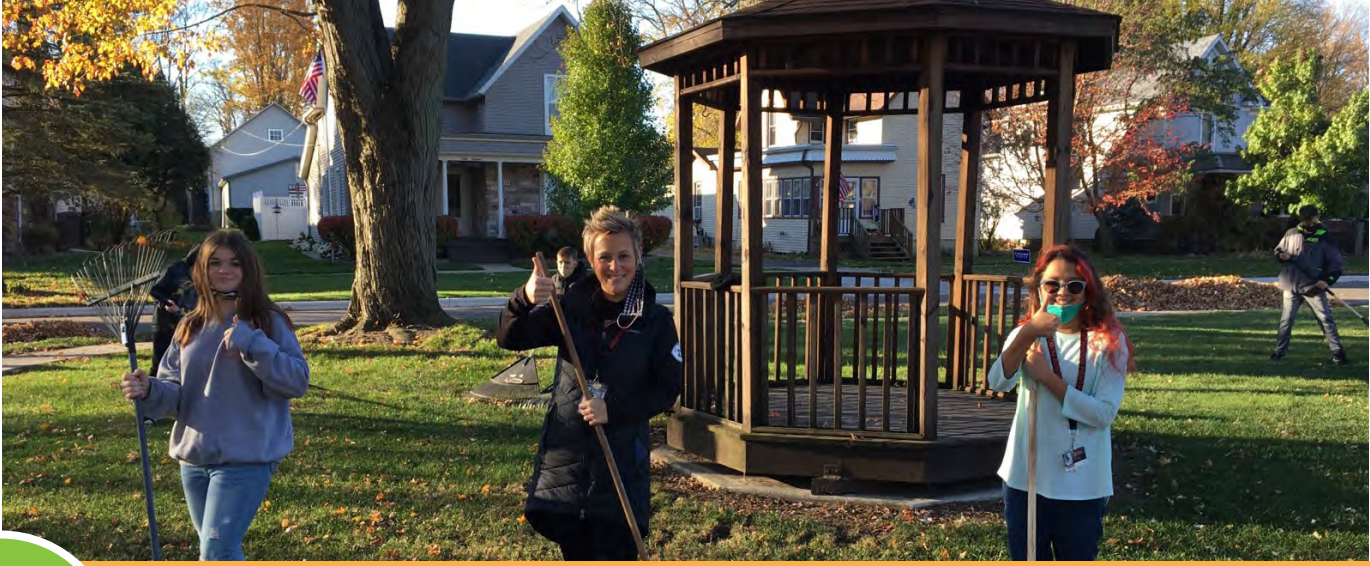
Suzanne M. Weirick, President **Frank Lucchese**, Vice-President **Brad Rogers**, Member

STEERING COMMITTEE

Annette Brown	Town Council Member, Town of Wakarusa
Billie Roeder	Wakarusa Resident, Family of Community Leader
Christopher Knight	Senior Pastor, Wakarusa Missionary Church
Deb Shively	Wakarusa Chamber of Commerce
Holly Landis	Town Manager, Town of Wakarusa
James Emans	Town Engineer, Emans Engineering
James Geleske	Sergeant, Town of Wakarusa Police Department
Jason Auvil	Planning Manager & Zoning Administrator, Elkhart County Planning & Development
John Payne	Principal, Woodview Elementary School, Wa-Nee Community Schools
Jolinda Lengacher	President, Wakarusa Chamber of Commerce, and J&N Stone
Jon Andrews	Program Director, The Family Christian Development Center (The Center)
Judy Briganti	Wakarusa Resident
Kathy Welker	MOTTTTS, Wakarusa Missionary Church
Matt Bowers	Director, Wakarusa Public Library
Molly Geleske	Wa-Nee Community Schools
Rocco Rigsby	Town Council Member, Town of Wakarusa
Sharla Weldy	Business Owner, New To You

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
	Purpose	5
	Definition of the Planning Area.....	5
	Wakarusa Maintenance Department.....	5
	Parks Board	6
	The Guiding Vision & Core Values.....	6
	Supporting Plans & Organizations	7
2	EXISTING CONDITIONS	9
	Natural Features & Landscape.....	9
	Man-Made, Historical, & Cultural Features.....	10
	Socioeconomic Factors	13
3	PARK & RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES	19
	Wakarusa Parks Facilities Map.....	20
	Wakarusa Trail Network.....	22
4	ADA COMPLIANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY ...	23
	Overview	23
	Statement of Accessibility.....	23
	Wakarusa Parks Accessibility Review.....	24
5	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	26
	Steering Committee Meetings	26
	Community Engagement.....	27
	Stakeholder Interviews	27
	Public Input Survey.....	27
	Public Comment of Final Draft Plan.....	28
6	NEEDS ANALYSIS	29
	Acreage & Parklands Level of Service Standards	29
	Gap Analysis	29
	Parks & Programming Needs Analysis.....	31
7	ACTION PROGRAM	32
	Priority Action Schedule.....	33
	All Other Action Strategies	36
	Implementation & Funding Opportunities	37



1

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in Elkhart County’s rural beauty is a quaint small town with a welcoming atmosphere where everyone is treated as family is Wakarusa. Wakarusa has a standing history of being known as a community of “growers” for growing attractive plants and contributing to being a Tree City. Wakarusa offers Susie’s Garden in Memorial Park and is a featured stop on the Quilt Gardens Tour in Elkhart County. As a community, Wakarusa has a strong sense of belonging, community pride, family values, and a commitment to see others succeed in life. Whether you’re a business owner, a distant employee, a homeowner, or a young child learning to navigate life, Wakarusa strives to strengthen one another to grow and flourish in life.

Wakarusa prides itself on being a quintessential small town with a unique ambiance in every season. Wakarusa offers a wide diversity of seasonal events and attractions including the annual Christmas Tree in the “smack-dab” middle of Town Square in the winter, the Maple Syrup Festival in the spring, the Quilt Garden Tour in the summer, and the Pumpkin Tree and Fall Party in the fall. Wakarusa boasts a wide range of businesses from popular local downtown merchants like Wakarusa Dime Store and Cook’s Pizza and nationally recognized manufacturing companies like Thor Industries.

More people are valuing to live in communities that have the quality of life amenities and services that appeals to them rather than choosing to live in a community solely based on the availability of jobs. Although Wakarusa has attractive assets and features, it is imperative that the Town continues to value and invest in parks and recreation opportunities to attract and retain Wakarusa’s residents and businesses. It is the desire of this plan to continue on the momentum of the past to improve and plan for the future. That process begins today with this planning effort.

PURPOSE

As the Town looks to Grow its Future it is imperative that a detailed review of the Town's parks and recreational facilities be done to establish a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges the community needs to offer high quality recreation opportunities for its residents. The Town has never gone through the process to create a parks master plan but does have a Town Maintenance Department responsible for the maintenance of the parks and expressed the need to create a 5-year plan to help establish priorities to guide the Town to maintain and enhance its parks and recreation system. The Town of Wakarusa partnered with the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) to guide the Town through the planning process to create its first parks master plan.

This Plan seeks to establish a vision for the Town's parks system and should be used as a guide for the Town making financial investments in maintaining its parks and to plan for enhancements that meet the needs and aspirations of the community. This Plan analyzes the Town's existing conditions that include social and economic factors, natural and cultural features, historical assets, and other elements that affect the usage and needs of Wakarusa parks. Public engagement was a vital component to identify the needs and vision of the residents and the creation of the action program. Chapter 5 outlines the community engagement efforts used for the development of this plan with the action program described in Chapter 7.

DEFINITION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The Town of Wakarusa is one of the five towns located within Elkhart County, Indiana. The Town occupies approximately 2.3 square miles in primarily Olive Township with a small portion of the area in Harrison Township. Wakarusa's parks make up approximately 25 acres of the town's land area. The planning area consists of the Wakarusa town limits. Nearby cities include Elkhart, Goshen, Nappanee, Warsaw, Plymouth, Mishawaka, and South Bend. Nearby towns include New Paris, Millersburg, Middlebury, Bristol, Wakarusa, Bourbon, LaPaz, Lakeville, Osceola, Etna Green, and Milford.

WAKARUSA MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT

The Town of Wakarusa Maintenance Department is responsible for the maintenance of the parks and recreation facilities in Wakarusa. The Maintenance Department has two full-time employees. A maintenance schedule includes seasonal mowing, maintaining plants, and sealing the asphalt walking path in Memorial Park when needed. While the Maintenance Department is responsible for maintaining the park spaces, it is a long-term goal of the Town to have additional staff to create a dedicated parks and recreation department.

PARKS BOARD

Currently the Town does not have an established Parks Board but it is a priority of the Town Council to enact a Parks Board to oversee the management of the Town's parks and recreation facilities.

THE GUIDING VISION & CORE VALUES



Vision

Wakarusa: Grown from the tradition of neighbors helping neighbors; will intentionally grow for the next generation while maintaining a strong sense of community and small town charm.



The Town desires to Grow its Future as it is positioned to attract residents, businesses, and development in the coming decade, but not forget the core values that have defined and shaped Wakarusa's past.

These core values include:

1. **Quality Hometown Living**
2. **Strong Sense of Place**
3. **Parks, Festivals, and Trails**
4. **Access to Public Services**
5. **Local Business Community**

SUPPORTING PLANS & ORGANIZATIONS

Wakarusa 2030 Comprehensive Plan – In 2021, the Town developed its first comprehensive plan tagged Growing Our Future. This plan provides a framework that acts as a road map to guide investments and development decisions for the next 10 years. This plan provides a vision and action program unique to Wakarusa. It empowers the local community to collaborate and strategically think through creative ways to address community challenges and enhance strengths and opportunities related to housing, water and sewer

systems, transportation, downtown, community facilities, and quality of life amenities like parks, trails, and entertainment. Parks and trail development were expressed by the Town leaders and its residents as essential amenities the Town needs to include more of. The Town envisions expanding Memorial Park to serve a potential future housing development off of CR 38. The Town encourages developers to incorporate or set aside a percentage of their site plans to add a neighborhood-scale park in new residential developments to serve new residents or to add small-scale, passive-style park spaces in new commercial developments to provide opportunities for workers to go for walks during breaks. This could include adding a new park in the proposed mixed residential and shopping center commercial character areas off SR 19 and Kemar Street. Additionally, the Town envisions creating a trail network linking residents to its parks, schools, downtown, shopping centers, and to regional communities like Bremen, Nappanee, and Goshen.



Elkhart County Vibrant Communities – Vibrant Communities is a movement in Elkhart County that began in 2016 focusing on strengthening Elkhart County’s communities by connecting economic growth and quality-of-place initiatives and raising local champions. Vibrant Communities published a 77-item action plan to inform residents of projects the movement hopes to undertake. One of the published action items was a project to build a multi-use bike and walking trail that would connect Wakarusa to Nappanee. Vibrant Communities is also working towards creating an Action Committee to implement the Wa-Nee (Wakarusa and Nappanee) action agenda, which may make projects such as the desired multi-use trail easier in the future.

Connect in Elkhart County – Connect in Elkhart County is a mobility master plan for Elkhart County led by the Community Foundation’s Placemaking Committee. The project will assess gaps in the county’s existing trail systems, engage the community about its future, develop design recommendations, and create strategies for improving trail systems and using them to create new development opportunities.

Elkhart County Park Master Plan – The Elkhart County Park Master Plan provided an Action Plan which detailed the projects Elkhart County would like to undertake. One of these projects is continuing to partner with other County entities and nonprofits to support multi-use trail connections including a 40-mile long looped trail system in Elkhart County connecting the Pumpkinvine, MapleHeart, and Quaker Trace trails as well as trail connections from St. Joseph County, Wakarusa, and Nappanee. The County is also exploring acquiring land in southwest Elkhart county for future parks which could serve Wakarusa residents.

MACOG Active Transportation Plan – MACOG prepared a regional active transportation plan in 2016 that identified community needs and strategies to improve the walking and bicycling experience in Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall, and St. Joseph Counties. This plan serves as part of the Michiana on the Move: 2045 Transportation Plan and builds on the support of its local municipalities.

Elkhart County Community Foundation – The Elkhart County Community Foundation strives to support nonprofits and community endeavors that improve the quality of life of Elkhart County’s communities, businesses, and residents. This is accomplished through their holdings of \$295 million in assets and over 350 endowment funds, and awarding over \$25 million in grants and scholarships to hundreds of county nonprofit organizations and students. The Community Foundation and the Elkhart County and Convention Visitors Bureau partnered to create the Vibrant Communities Initiative in 2016.

Elkhart County Historical Society – The Elkhart County Historical Society (ECHS) is a nonprofit organization and partners with the Elkhart County Parks Department to help maintain the Elkhart County Historical Museum. ECHS is based in Bristol and is located in the Museum. ECHS operates as a public trust that collects, preserves, and shares artifacts, documents, and images that highlight Elkhart County’s culture and history.

Elkhart County Genealogical Society – The Elkhart County Genealogical Society is a non-profit organization that also finds its home in the Elkhart County Historical Museum. This group of dedicated volunteers seeks to further interest in genealogy in the region, contributes to the preservation of genealogical and historical records, strives for accuracy in research through careful documentation, and publishes a quarterly journal containing records of the area and other genealogical information of importance to society members. They also assist visitors to the Museum with research.



2

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Town of Wakarusa is located in the north-central region of Indiana in Elkhart County and is located along SR 19. This route connects the southwestern portion of Elkhart County to the City of Elkhart and the City of Nappanee, and to major transportation routes of US 20 and the I-80/I-90 Indiana Toll Road. Access to these routes links Wakarusa to larger cities such as South Bend, Michigan City, and Gary. SR 19 also connects Wakarusa to US 30 to the south connecting it to larger cities such as Warsaw and Fort Wayne. This connection provides the town access to I-69 that runs north and south through Indiana. These connections make the major Midwestern cities of Indianapolis, Chicago, Detroit, and Columbus, OH all within a couple of hours. This ease of access to regional amenities such as Lake Michigan beaches, state and national parks, year-round use of trails, high-end restaurants, major and minor league professional sporting events, theaters, universities and colleges, and shopping expand residents' quality of life.

NATURAL FEATURES AND LANDSCAPE

Soils – The Town of Wakarusa comprises 2.3 square miles or 1,472 acres. The elevation of the town is approximately 840 feet above sea level. According to the USDA Soil Survey of Elkhart County, there are two major soil classifications in Wakarusa. These are Riddles-Crosier-Oshtemo and Crosier-Brookston-Barry soil groups. Riddle-Crosier-Oshtemo soils may have the best recreational potential although they have slight-to-moderate limitations related to small stones which may be found in the soil. These limitations can be overcome or alleviated by planning, design, or special maintenance. Riddle-Crosier-Oshtemo soils are better suited for building site development than Crosier-Brookston-Barry soils although they still have some moderate-to-severe limitations related to sloping or wetness and are therefore not necessarily ideal for development without intervention. The Crosier-Brookston-Barry soil group has the best farmland suitability when drained but is not ideal for recreation or building development due to limitations regarding wetness and flooding. The soil properties are generally unfavorable for these uses but may possibly be offset by costly soil reclamation or intensive maintenance.



Water Resources – Wakarusa has no major water features located in the Town or the parks. The Town sits about 1 mile to the east of Baugo Creek, which flows north into the St. Joseph River in St. Joseph County. The Town sits just north of the Continental Divide between the St. Joseph River and the Kankakee River Basin.

Climate – The climate of Wakarusa, like other communities in northern Indiana, can drastically change within a season. The wettest month is July with an average of 4.8 inches of rain. The average high temperature in the summer is 84 degrees Fahrenheit with July typically being the hottest month. The average low temperature in the winter is 17 degrees Fahrenheit with January being the coldest month. The first freeze typically occurs in the middle of October and the last freeze typically occurs at the beginning of May.

Invasive Species – Wakarusa has not seen major issues with invasive species and is monitored by the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District.

MAN-MADE, HISTORICAL, & CULTURAL FEATURES

Historical Background



Wakarusa's story begins with the indigenous Potawatomi and Miami nations who were the first caretakers of the land. The Potawatomi tribe call themselves the Neshnabek or the "original people." Their origin tells how they moved from modern-day Canada into the region near Michigami (meaning the Great Lake), known today as Lake Michigan. Their traditional homeland includes southern Michigan, northern Indiana, northern Illinois, and eastern Wisconsin. The Miami tribe calls themselves the Myaamia or "the downstream people," signifying their place of origin where the St. Joseph River empties into Lake Michigan. Their culture spread throughout the Wabash River Valley with major communities near Fort Wayne, Indiana and Vincennes, Indiana. Their traditional homeland includes the whole of Indiana and parts of Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan.



The state of Indiana formed Elkhart County in 1830 from the traditional homeland of the Potawatomi and Miami nation. The origin of the County's name remains unknown. The first European settlers arrived in 1829 mainly from New England which gave the region a distinctly "Yankee" character. As more settlers arrived, the native Potawatomi tribe was forcibly removed from their land in 1838 to Kansas, now referred to as the Trail of Death. The Miami tribe was forcibly removed in 1846.

By 1836, Olive Township was formed and in 1849 a post office known as Mt. Olive was opened. The Town of Salem arose around the Mt. Olive post office. Since there was already a town in the state named Salem, the name was changed in 1859 to Wakarusa, which means "knee deep in mud." For much of the next century, Wakarusa became known for its rich agricultural heritage and high quality R.V. manufacturing. These two industries still drive the economy today.

Historic Sites

The Wakarusa Historical Society, Inc was organized in 1975 in an effort to obtain and restore the old Wakarusa train depot. This train depot was built in 1892 and was once used for both passenger and freight service. The depot was closed officially in 1975 after Norfolk and Western Railroad donated the depot to the historical society. Another private donor gave the old coal yard to the historical society in 1976. The Wakarusa Historical Society has put on many different events over the years including the 1977 Quasquicentennial (125th) anniversary of Wakarusa's founding. The Historical Society is located at 403 E. Wabash Avenue and offers a tour of sites near Railroad Street and Wabash Avenue.

- Memories Building
- Wakarusa Wabash/Norfolk and Western Depot
- The Doctor Wagner-Clay Office Building
- Norfolk and Western Caboose & Passenger Coach
- Grandma's Haus
- Windmill
- The Little Red School House
- Fire Station
- Dean's Tool Shed
- Blacksmith's Shop
- Bird's Eye Museum

Community Facilities

Libraries: Wakarusa has one public library at 124. N. Elkhart St. The library serves residents in the Town of Wakarusa as well as residents in Olive and Harrison Township. The library has over 69,000 volumes in rotation and features wireless internet, computer labs, audio books, and movies with an online circulation of materials including eBooks, eMagazines, and eAudio

books. The library offers many learning programs for children of all ages that include book clubs, summer reading clubs, and a LEGO club. The library also has a meeting room for organizations to host events and a history room. The library also offers curbside service, collecting or selecting materials for patrons to pick up without having to browse the collection.



Festivals and Events



- **The Wakarusa Maple Syrup Festival** - The Maple Syrup Festival is a long-standing local festival that is a three-day spring festival celebrated annually in April in downtown Wakarusa. The festival began in 1969 and is free admission for all ages. Features include a pancake breakfast, queen contest, live music, 5K run, food vendors, flag football tournament, a sweetheart contest, and carnival rides.
- **Wakarusa Bubble Bash** - This is a popular summer event held on the hill in Memorial Park that features a slip n' slide.
- **Wakarusa Pumpkin Tree & Fall Party** - These are local favorites celebrating the fall season held annually in October. Downtown businesses decorate their storefronts with party activities include free cider and donuts, costume contest, and games.



- **Christmas Around the Tree** - To kick off the Holiday season the Town puts up a Christmas tree in the middle of downtown with locals coming together to enjoy free hot chocolate, homemade cookies, and a visit with Santa Claus.
- **Elkhart County Quilt Gardens Tour** - The Quilt Gardens is a unique tour that joins quilting, gardening, and art into one featuring more than a million vibrant flowers, 16 gardens, and 14 quilt mural sites along the Heritage Trail. Wakarusa is known for its stunning quilt garden displays and a colorful patchwork quilt mural in downtown.



SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Population

Determining a community’s population trend can present the Town with a direction of necessary services and real estate demand based on a growing or declining population.

In addition to the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, the U.S. Census provides annual population estimates through their Population Estimates Program (PEP) that better reflects past trends and leads to a more accurate estimate than the ACS 5-year population estimate. Therefore, the 2020 Decennial Census data was used to reflect the most recent data for Wakarusa’s population, the PEP estimate was only used to provide a better snapshot of Wakarusa’s trend in population, and the 2019 ACS 5-year estimate was used for all other analyses in the existing condition elements.

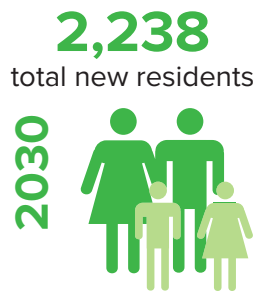
According to the 2020 Decennial Census, Wakarusa was home to 1,998 residents. Between 1990 and 2000, Wakarusa had a 4.6 percent decrease in population. Between 2000 and 2010, Wakarusa experienced a 10.6 percent growth in the total population of the town. Between 2010 and 2020, Wakarusa’s population increased substantially by 13.7 percent. These population changes are outpacing the growth in Elkhart County as a whole in the same period of time.

Wakarusa Population Trend

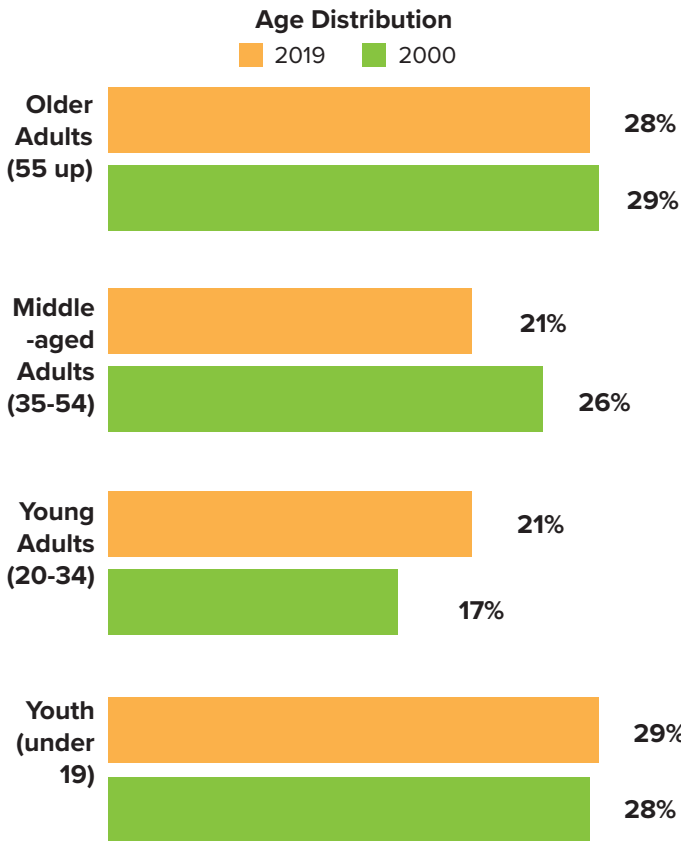
	Decennial Census			Annual Estimates								
	2000	2010	2020	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Wakarusa	1,590	1,758	1,998	1,789	1,802	1,787	1,960	1,024	2,030	1,938	1,983	1,957
Elkhart County	182,791	197,559	207,047	197,614	198,214	198,662	199,544	200,685	201,640	202,924	203,604	204,558



Population Projection – Analyzing the county’s population trend over the last 10 years, as shown in Table A.1, shows a slow growth at a rate of about 24 people annually. If the town continues at this rate, by 2025 the population will increase by 120 people (2,118 total population), and by 2030 the population will increase by 240 people (2,238 total population). A turnaround in this projected population trend is possible for Wakarusa as a whole, but the expected population growth will most likely continue into the ending years of this decade.



The town’s proximity to the growing South Bend-Mishawaka metropolitan area among other community assets and strengths could contribute to future population growth. The town of Wakarusa has the potential to grow as bedroom communities to the larger communities in St. Joseph and Elkhart counties for residents who want to live in a charming small town yet close to large municipalities. The projected growth provides an important opportunity for Wakarusa to plan for whatever the future holds and ensure it can attract future residents through high-quality parks and recreation systems and facilities.



Age and Sex – The success of parks can be based on several factors including the number of users attracted each year, the quality of places, and how inclusive park facilities are. It is imperative for Wakarusa to continue planning efforts by considering the age and sex of residents. The median age in Wakarusa has decreased from 2000 (38.5 years) to 2019 (34.9 years) by 16.9 percent. Differing from the town, Elkhart County has seen an increased median age in the first two decades of this century from 33.2 years in 2000 to 35.6 years in 2019, a 7.2 percent increase.

The trends seen in the U.S. Census data show that Wakarusa’s population is getting younger, which is a sign of a growing, vibrant community - people want to stay (or return) to their hometown. Looking at different age cohorts, the most significant increase was a 123 percent increase in 55 to 59-year-olds from 2000 to 2019. The Under 5 years age group increased by 76.3 percent and the 20 to 24 years-olds age groups increased by around 91.5 percent in the same time period. The only age group under 50 years old to decrease was a 20.9 percent decrease in 10 to 14-year-olds. This shows a growing and younger population that Wakarusa

will need to program for in the future. Providing a high quality of life through parks and recreation could help continue this trend of population growth and retention.

HISPANIC POPULATION REPRESENTS 3.1% OF WAKARUSA RESIDENTS

Race & Ethnicity – Wakarusa has been classified as predominantly White (93.8 percent in 2019) over the last two decades. The two other largest racial categories in the town are Asian at 3.7 percent and Black or African American at 1.3 percent. The race with the largest growth from 2000 to 2019 was Asian with 1750 percent growth while the White population experienced a 4 percent decline.

The Hispanic population in Wakarusa represents approximately 3.1 percent of the community residents and experienced a 150 percent increase between 2000 and 2019. This percentage is lower than Elkhart County as a whole which has 15.9 percent of its population identified as Hispanic.

Disability – Wakarusa has 12.8 percent of its population classified as disabled and of those disabled, 4.8 percent are 65 years or older.

Poverty – Wakarusa’s poverty rate (based on the population for whom poverty status is determined) increased from 4.0 percent in 2000 to 5.9 percent in 2019. That is a 48 percent increase in the poverty rate in just two decades. This is still lower than Elkhart County as a whole which experienced a 59 percent increase in the poverty rate in the same time period.

Looking at the poverty rate by race shows that whites in Wakarusa have nearly the same rate as the town as a whole (6.2 percent). However, when looking at the poverty rate by age, 9.5 percent of residents Under 18 live in poverty. This is a concern as it is higher than the town’s percentage and the other age groups.

Wakarusa’s Poverty by Age

	Wakarusa			Elkhart County		
	Total	Below Poverty Level	Percent Below Poverty Level	Total	Below Poverty Level	Percent Below Poverty Level
Population for whom poverty status is determined	1,827	107	5.9%	200,909	24,885	12.4%

AGE

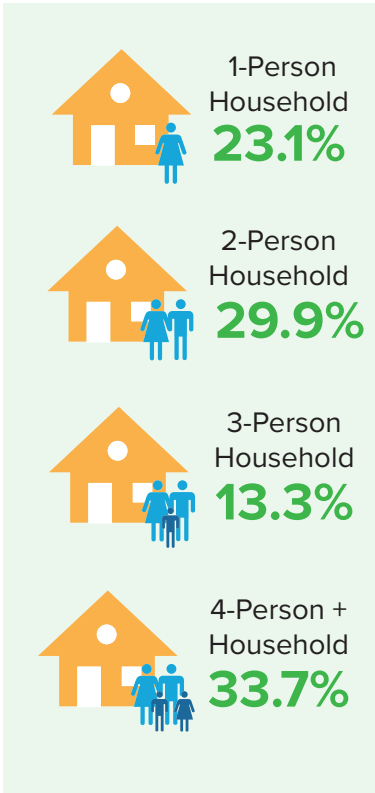
Under 18 years	516	49	9.5%	55,930	9,663	17.3%
18 to 64 years	1,049	50	4.8%	116,889	13,113	11.2%
65 years and over	262	8	3.1%	28,090	2,109	7.5%

Educational Attainment – Educational attainment rate can help Wakarusa identify the need for workforce development programs and guide industry opportunities. Additionally, the educational attainment rate can give an idea of the characteristics of the county’s workforce and should be examined with the types of industries and jobs the county is trying to attract and retain.

From 2000 to 2019, the percent of residents in Wakarusa with less than a 9th-grade education dropped by 31 percent. In the same time period, there was a resounding 180 percent increase in those who hold a Bachelor’s Degree within the town. This means that in 2019, 84.3 percent of Wakarusa residents held a high school diploma or higher and 27.1 percent held a bachelor’s degree or higher. These numbers are lower than both the national (88.6 percent) and state percentages (88.8 percent).

Housing

As Wakarusa experiences changes in demographics and growth, in both population and jobs, ensuring Wakarusa has an adequate supply of housing for all types of residents will be crucial in maintaining its quality of life. Wakarusa will have to consider where new housing should be located while maintaining a proper balance with current development, and how to preserve and maintain the existing housing stock. Housing is linked to other elements like population (identifying changes in households and establishing their needs), land use (evaluate its fiscal impacts to develop on undeveloped lands or infill on underutilized lands), and community facilities (does the neighborhood have access to appropriate utility systems and assets).



Housing Types – According to the 2019 ACS 5-year estimates, the majority of housing units (77.2 percent) are single-family detached. Approximately one percent of housing is single-family attached, the majority of these homes likely reflecting duplexes. Approximately five percent of Wakarusa’s housing stock is multi-family housing with three to nine units.

Occupancy Rates & Tenure – The percentage of occupied housing units in Wakarusa decreased from 96.3 percent in 2000 to 93.3 percent in 2019. The vacancy rate in Wakarusa increased 79.4 percent from 2000 (3.7 percent) to 2019 (6.7 percent). The percentage of owner-occupied housing units decreased slightly from 80.8 percent in 2000 to 79.3 percent in 2019. Alternatively, the percentage of renter-occupied housing increased from 19.2 percent in 2000 to 20.7 percent in 2019. The homeowner vacancy rate in Wakarusa increased from 2.3 percent in 2010 to 3.7 percent in 2019. The rental vacancy rate in Wakarusa couldn’t be calculated, but the rental vacancy rate decreased from 12.4 percent in 2000 to 7.6 percent.

Households by Type & Average Household Size – According to the 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, approximately 53 percent of occupied housing units are occupied by one or two people (23.1 percent 1-person and 29.9 percent 2-person), see graphic on the left. The number of non-family households decreased from 29.7 percent in 2000 to 25.2 percent in 2019. The percentage of married couples with children increased slightly from 58.2 percent in 2000 to 61.8 percent in 2019. Single parent family households increased slightly from 10.9 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2019.

The average household size in Wakarusa has slowly increased since 2000. The town’s average household size was 2.51 in 2000 and increased to 2.97 in 2019. This is higher than the national average (2.6) as well as the state average (2.52).

Household Income – Household Income is an indicator of a community’s economic health and is the total income of all person living in a household over the age of 15. The chart below shows the trend in the share of households by income cohorts for the Town of Wakarusa. A majority of households in Wakarusa



earn under \$100,000 with only 26.2 percent of households earning more than \$100,000. Median Household Income is a factor that helps in determining an area's quality of life and shows the stability of a place's real estate market. The median household income in Wakarusa increase from \$50,833 in 2000 to \$65,673 in 2019. Wakarusa's Median Household Income is 116.6 percent of Indiana's Median Household Income (\$56,303) and 105 percent of the nation Median Household Income (\$62,843). This is down from 2000 when Wakarusa's Median Household Income was 122 percent of Indiana's Median Household Income (\$41,567) and 121 percent of the national Median Household Income (\$41,994).

Housing Costs – The cost of housing in Wakarusa is rising. The median home value for owner-occupied housing units in Wakarusa was an estimated \$150,300, up 10.9 percent from 2010 (\$135,500). The median monthly housing cost for owner-occupied housing units was \$940 while the same costs for renter-occupied housing units was \$740. 49.8 percent of homeowners owned homes that were valued less than \$149,000. This means that only a slight majority (50.1 percent) of homeowners in Wakarusa owned a home that was valued at \$150,000 or more. This is an increase from 2010 when only 40.9 percent of homeowners in Wakarusa owned a home valued at \$150,000 or more.

Housing Affordability – In order to determine housing affordability in Wakarusa, we need to consider the percentage breakdown of household income. If costs exceed 30 percent of income, households are considered housing cost-burdened. In 2019, approximately 9.3 percent of households with a mortgage in Wakarusa were considered housing cost-burdened. In the same year, 9.5 percent of households without a mortgage were considered housing cost-burdened. Likely barriers in Wakarusa include the limited supply of affordable housing options such as lower priced starter homes for families and individuals entering the housing market for the first time.

Employment Trends

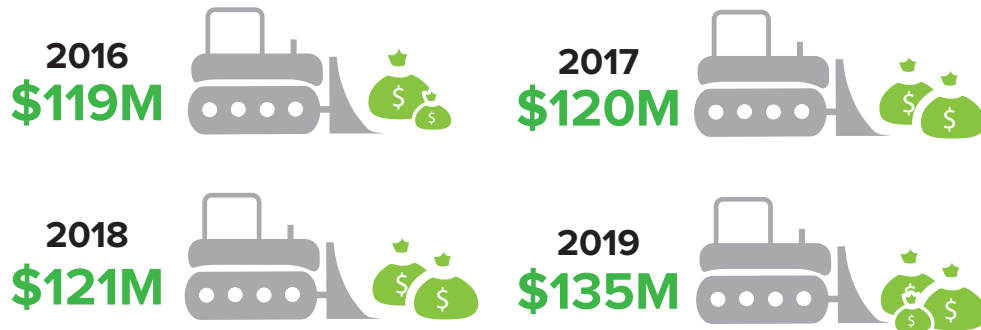
Major Industries – The major industries data can only be collected at the county level, thus the following numbers reflect Elkhart County as a whole. However, it serves as a guiding baseline for this plan. According to the US Census Bureau, the top three industry sectors over the last ten years have consistently been manufacturing, retail trade, and healthcare and social assistance. In 2019, 41.4 percent of total jobs in the county were in manufacturing with 7.9 percent in retail trade and 7.7 percent in health care and social services. These major industries are also the three largest industries within the state of Indiana as a whole. The county's arts, entertainment, and recreation sector only account for 0.8 percent of the county's employment. Below are the top five major employers in Elkhart County.

Largest Employers

- **Norfolk Southern (Elkhart)**
- **Keystone RV Co. (Goshen)**
- **Always in Stone Monument Co. (Goshen)**
- **Jayco (Middlebury)**
- **Elkhart General Hospital (Elkhart)**

Labor Force and Unemployment – Labor force refers to the number of persons actively employed and those unemployed who are looking for employment. Within Wakarusa in 2019, approximately 973 residents made up the labor force, nearly a 15 percent increase from 849 persons in 2010. The annual unemployment rate held at 7.3 percent, well above the state’s average of 4.8 percent and the county’s (5.4 percent). This doesn’t necessarily indicate economic distress, rather it could mean more Wakarusa residents were entering the labor force than elsewhere.

Net Assessed Value – Examining Wakarusa’s net assessed value can give an indication of the construction activity, which correlates to the Town’s budget for capital expenditures and demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses. The town’s assessed value has increased by nearly 14 percent from \$119 million in 2016 to \$135 million in 2019. Elkhart County saw a 22.17 percent increase in assessed value going from \$7.9 billion to \$9.2 billion in the same time period.



Per Capita Income – Wakarusa’s per capita income level can measure the access to high-quality living-wage jobs for residents’ ability to have a higher disposable income after paying bills. This also gauges the health of the local economy to support local businesses and enjoy parks and recreation activities. According to the 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Wakarusa’s per capita income increased by 45 percent from \$19,615 in 2000 to \$28,480 in 2019.

Wakarusa’s Household Per Capita Income



Jobs to Household Ratio – The jobs to household ratio gauges the distribution of employment opportunities and workforce (those actively employed) population across a geographic area. A ratio of 1.0 to 1.5 indicates a community has approximately an equal balance of jobs and housing. A ratio of less than 1.0 indicates a community has more housing than jobs; whereas, a ratio greater than 1.5 indicates a community has more jobs than housing. These numbers are only collected at the county level and reflect all of Elkhart County. Based on the numbers provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, Elkhart County has a Jobs to Household Ratio of 1.369.



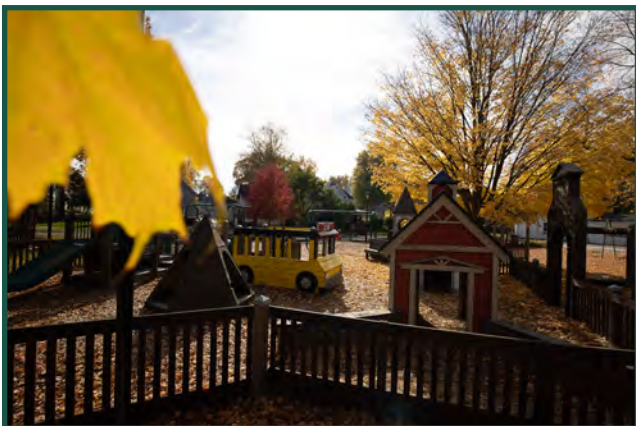
3

PARK & RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Town of Wakarusa features two parks, a splash pad, a sledding hill, a disc golf course, a playground, a garden, a basketball court, and a baseball/softball complex.

Wakarusa Downtown Park - The approximately .25 acre Wakarusa Downtown Park is located on the corner of S. Walnut St. and E. Harrison St. This park features a playground with swings, slides, multi-level playground structures, and a dedicated “Tot Lot” which is specially designed for use by children ages 2-5 years. The park also features a sheltered picnic area, a small basketball court, and the Wakarusa Town Cabin which is available to be rented out for parties and receptions.

Memorial Park - Located near Wakarusa Elementary School, Memorial Park is the largest community park in Wakarusa, totaling around 25 acres. Memorial Park features a splash pad, Suzie’s Gardens, a baseball/softball complex, a 9 hole disc golf course, a 5/8th mile multi-use trail loop, a gazebo, a war memorial, a sheltered picnic area, and a sledding hill. The Town of Wakarusa has also dedicated part of the park to become a tree-planting area which contributes to Wakarusa being designated as a Tree City.







**Downtown
Park**

WAKARUSA TRAIL NETWORK

Currently, Wakarusa’s only multi-use trail exists in Memorial Park. As such, the Town desires to create a multi-use trail network through town, connecting to its major destinations, downtown, schools, neighborhoods, and employment centers. The Town of Wakarusa would also like to create trail connections to the Pumpkinvine Trail and Bremen, Nappanee, and Goshen.

The Elkhart County Heritage Trail runs through downtown Wakarusa, connecting Wakarusa to Elkhart County’s rural landscapes and scenic back roads. The Heritage Trail leads to Wakarusa’s Quilt Garden, which is a part of the Elkhart County Quilt Garden tour. Both the Heritage Trail and the Quilt Garden attract tourists, supporting tourism-based businesses, local artists and artisans, and economic development activities in downtown Wakarusa.





4

ADA COMPLIANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

OVERVIEW

According to the U.S Census 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, 11.8 percent of Wakarusa residents have some level of disability. The Census defines a person as having a disability if they have difficulty performing a specific task such as seeing, hearing, bathing, or doing light housework, or if they have a specific condition, such as Alzheimer’s disease. Below is the percentage of Wakarusa residents by age group that reported having a disability.

- **Under 18 Years: 0.8 percent**
- **18 to 64 Years: 4.3 percent**
- **65 years or Older: 6.6 percent**

STATEMENT OF ACCESSIBILITY

The Town of Wakarusa will provide reasonable conditions and accommodations for all people with disabilities to all of the future facilities, programs, activities, and services. This includes utilizing universal design and inclusion principles that provide access and inclusion for people with disabilities, either physical or mental. The Town of Wakarusa complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits discrimination in the provision of services, programs, or facilities to individuals with disabilities.

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that local governments, including park boards, remove any barriers to access and inclusion in facilities, programs, activities, and services. The town of Wakarusa will provide these accessibility modifications that meet ADA guidelines for any significant alterations of an existing facility, program, activity, and service. Beyond physical alterations and improvements, inclusion and universal design will be utilized for the development of programs, services, activities, communication, signage, policies, and procedures

The Town of Wakarusa has an ADA Transition Plan (2020) in place along with a county ADA Coordinator, Holly Landis. Doug is also the Maintenance Supervisor for the county. There is a process for submitting complaints. Complaints that a program, service, activity of the Town of Wakarusa is not accessible to a person with disabilities should contact Holly Landis:

Holly Landis
574-862-0067 | Holly@TownofWakarusa.com
100 W. Waterford Street
P.O. Box 474
Wakarusa, IN 46573

WAKARUSA PARKS ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW

The Town of Wakarusa strives to provide barrier-free and inclusive parks and recreation facilities as much as possible. It is a Town goal to make every effort possible to remove and/or upgrade non-compliant amenities and structures to improve and expand Wakarusa’s parks and recreation facilities. Additionally, the Town integrates improvements in the planning of future public facilities and infrastructure systems and ensures public capital projects meet ADA requirements.

During the collection of existing conditions data, MACOG conducted an ADA accessibility review of Wakarusa’s parks as a preliminary self-evaluation for the Town. This included assessing ADA requirements for the approach and entrances for parking, access to recreation facilities, pathways, and assessment of the play areas (playgrounds).

The majority of Wakarusa’s parks and playground equipment need to be improved to mitigate accessibility barriers and comply with the current ADA standards. Other ADA improvements should also be prioritized and implemented as funding becomes available. A detailed review of the accessibility of Wakarusa Parks is provided below. While MACOG did conduct an ADA accessibility review to provide the Town with a baseline understanding, the Town should still conduct a detailed accessibility review as they continue to improve the priorities from the ADA Transition Plan. A review of the accessibility of Wakarusa’s parks and recreation facilities is provided next.



Downtown Park

Wakarusa's Downtown Park provides a unique experience for children to build memories with their families and friends. It features a multi-level wood playground structure, swing sets, play areas for toddlers, a roof-covered pavilion and grill, and a cabin available to rent for events. While the majority of the playground is bordered by raised landscape timbers and is inaccessible, there is an ADA accessible route from the pavilion (off Harrison Street) for those with mobility impairments to access the playground. While the raised wooden playground structure is not ADA accessible, the Town does offer several at-ground level play elements for those in wheelchairs to interact with and enjoy. The ground cover material is wood mulch and is inaccessible for those in a wheelchair to maneuver. Access to the cabin is off Walnut Street and has two 4-foot concrete walkways to the front door. The front doorway while is accessible in height being 35 inches off the ground, the handles are levers and may be challenging for those in wheelchairs to efficiently open the door and maneuver on their own.

Memorial Park

Memorial Park is Wakarusa's largest community park with features such as a splash pad, walking path, sledding hill, disc golf, Suzie's Garden, roof-covered pavilion, and public restrooms. The walking path is 8 feet wide. Memorial Park features multiple ball diamonds located behind the elementary school that residents can enjoy and spectate throughout the year. The diamond is located off a 12-foot wide accessible concrete path. However, access to the bleachers is inaccessible for those with a wheelchair having to maneuver through the grass. The parking lot to the ball diamonds has two ADA accessible parking spaces. Public restrooms are also available at Memorial Park with accessible routes and entrances.





5

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community Engagement throughout the process is key to understanding the needs and aspirations of Wakarusa residents. Facilitating a community-based planning process encourages residents and stakeholders to take an active role to plan for their community's future and see the plan become a reality. This builds trust, accountability, and ownership, a sense of community pride, and establishes a lasting relationship between the Town and its community residents. The success of any plan starts with community engagement to build excitement to carry through the plan development process and through to implementation. Community engagement can take the form of multiple facets that range from meetings, surveying the community, or hosting pop-up events. This chapter of the plan discusses the forms of community engagement the Town utilized to involve residents through the development of this plan.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

MACOG held monthly Steering Committee meetings to guide the committee through a five-step planning process, detailed below, and report on the progress of the Plan development. Community engagement and past public participation was a vital component in the planning process that gave valuable feedback and guidance to the Parks Board on their grand vision for their Wakarusa parks and recreational amenities.

1. **Establish a Vision and Goals for the Parks Board**
2. **Analyze Existing Conditions, Community Needs, and Conduct a Gap Analysis**
3. **Develop Action Strategies**
4. **Prepare Plan Document and Review**
5. **Adopt the Final Plan**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was evident throughout the planning process and served as the foundation for the development of this Plan. This ensured the plan was truly developed by those who call Wakarusa home. The Town issued two input surveys throughout the planning process. The first survey received



244 responses that helped establish the vision and core values and the second survey received 140 responses that helped identify the priorities and future development concepts. The Town organized small group discussions, known as “Waky Chats” to allow deeper discussions with residents and stakeholders on community aspects like its downtown, parks, and housing to know the major opportunities and challenges and potential solutions. The Town also engaged participants at the Maple Syrup Festival as another opportunity to hear residents’ vision to Grow Wakarusa’s Future. More information about public comments and answers to surveys can be found in the Appendix.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Following the vision-building process, MACOG conducted interviews with town officials and other stakeholders to dive deeper in identifying where Wakarusa’s parks and recreation system is currently at, areas in which the Town is doing well, and areas in which the Town needs to improve. Interviews were conducted over the phone in December 2020.

PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY

The Wakarusa Parks Board, assisted by MACOG, decided to create public input surveys to engage the community on what they desired for the Wakarusa park and recreation system, amenities they would like to see developed, and how Wakarusa should focus its priorities over the next five years. Utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, notifying residents of the survey with door hangers, and capitalizing on the extensive local network from the steering committee, the public input survey generated an incredible response rate from the community.



The first survey was available February 1 -February 28 and received 244 responses, representing over 12 percent of Wakarusa residents.

Below are the highlights of the public’s responses to the first survey. A full summary of the survey results can be found in the Appendix.

- **97%** of respondents had visited a Town of Wakarusa park or recreational facility.
- **75%** of respondents have visited Memorial Park, **64** percent have visited the Downtown Park, and **18** percent have visited Susie’s Gardens.
- Respondents who had indicated that they had visited a park were then asked to rate that park in the following categories: Outstanding, Very Good, Satisfactory, and Needs Improvement.

3% of respondents said any of the parks fell into the “Needs Improvement” category.

The second survey, which allowed residents to voice their opinions on how Wakarusa should focus their short-term priorities to begin working towards the goals identified by the planning process, was available August 1- August 14 and received **140 responses, representing about 7 percent of Wakarusa’s population.**

In this survey, respondents indicated that the top short-term priority strategy they would like to see Wakarusa undertake is to collaborate with Bike Elkhart County and neighboring communities on the potential to create a regional trail that connects to their parks, recreational facilities, and local trails. A full summary of the second survey results can be found in the Appendix.

PUBLIC COMMENT OF FINAL DRAFT PLAN

Wakarusa residents were given another opportunity to provide their input on the draft park master plan. A 30-day public comment period began on October 4, and ended on November 3, to allow residents the opportunity to review the narrative and comment on the draft priorities to guide the Parks Board’s implementation efforts for the next five years. The Town of Wakarusa solicited public input by providing an online comment form for residents to use on the Town’s project website. Residents could also leave comments by leaving messages for the Steering Committee or by attending the public open house held on October 20th.



There were approximately 30 attendees at the open house. We received 9 comments: 3 were submitted through the online comment form, 5 were submitted at the public open house, and one was submitted to Wakarusa’s Town Manager. All comments received can be reviewed in the Appendix.



6

NEEDS ANALYSIS

MACOG and the Steering Committee used several quantitative and qualitative methods to identify the Town’s major challenges to provide adequate parks and recreational amenities to its residents. Quantitative methods included results from the public input surveys, analysis of Census demographic and socioeconomic data, and evaluating the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Acreage and Parks Level of Service (LOS) Metrics. Qualitative methods included exercises from the Steering Committee meetings such as a “Wow, Now, How” exercise, a thematic mapping brainstorm exercise, stakeholder interviews, summaries of the open-ended questions from the surveys, and a spatial gap analysis of parks and recreational amenities in Wakarusa.

ACREAGE & PARKLANDS LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

The Steering Committee used NRPA’s Acreage and Park LOS Metrics to determine if the Town provides adequate acreage of outdoor recreation use and the number of parks available per the current and projected population. NRPA Acreage and Park Metrics measure the total acreage of recreational land per 1,000 residents and the total number of parks per 2,277 residents. These metrics are regarded as the most utilized standard given the ease of measurement and can be used by the Town as a vitality indicator to help measure residents’ quality of life in terms of parks and recreation enjoyment. These metrics can also be useful for the Town of Wakarusa to have a general sense of what comparably sized communities operate and maintain for their park and recreation systems.

According to the 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review, a typical (established) park and recreation board or agency have approximately 9.9 acres of land for outdoor recreation use per 1,000 residents in the service

area and one park for every 2,277 residents served. Wakarusa’s population in 2020 was 1,998 residents (2020 US Census). Analyzing the trend in population between 2010 and 2020, it is projected that the Town’s population could grow to approximately 2,238 residents by 2030.

Using 2019 aerial photography and Elkhart County parcel records, the Town’s two parks total approximately 25 acres of land for recreational use. Using the NRPA Acreage and Park LOS standards, the Town needs approximately 20 acres of land for outdoor recreation use and one park in the service area to adequately serve Wakarusa residents. Factoring the projected Wakarusa population in 2030, the Town would need two additional acres (22 acres total) of land for recreational use. One park in the service area would remain sufficient to serve Wakarusa residents. The Town of Wakarusa currently has an adequate amount of acreage to serve its current and projected populations for outdoor recreational use with approximately 25 acres of recreational land and two parks in the service area.

Additional metrics provided in the 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review is the average park and recreation agency has an annual operating expenditure per capita of \$88.30, manages 12 miles of trail for walking, hiking, running, and/or biking has a revenue-to-operating expenditure of 22.9 percent, and has 8.2 full-time equivalent employees per 10,000 residents. In light of this analysis, it should be noted that NRPA states the diversity of communities and their park systems do not necessarily lend themselves to comparing different systems against each other.

GAP ANALYSIS

While it is vital to evaluate Wakarusa’s LOS to help understand the deficiencies from a quantitative perspective, this is only one tool. The Steering Committee also used qualitative methods to do a gap analysis to identify Wakarusa’s major challenges and needs for improvement for its parks and recreation system. The

qualitative methods included a “Wow, Now, How” exercise, a thematic mapping brainstorm exercise (SWOT analysis), stakeholder interviews, and the public input surveys. A summary of the input survey results is provided in the Appendix.



To kick the planning process off, MACOG facilitated a “Wow, Now, How” exercise with the Steering Committee. The “How” component was reserved for later in the planning process during the formation of the priority action program. This exercise led the Committee to identify their aspirations for Wakarusa’s park

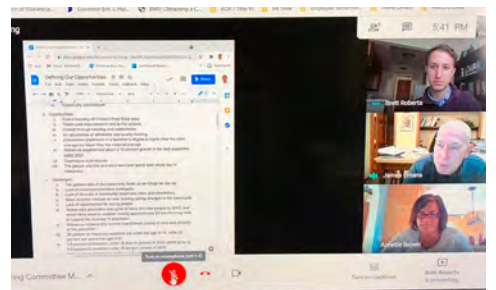
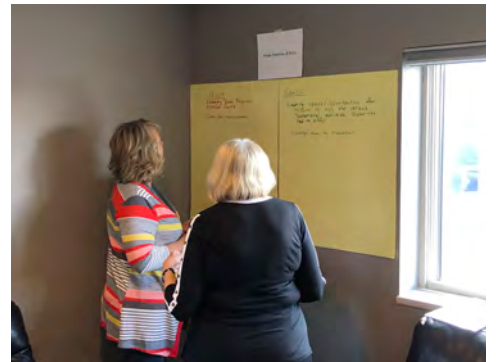
and recreation system, identify what the Town is doing well to support their aspirations, as well as the major barriers preventing their aspirations from being a reality. Similar questions were asked in the first public input survey to serve as a comparison of what the general community thinks and what those on the Steering Committee thought to identify the similarities and differences. MACOG summarized these results and shared them with the Steering Committee at the second Steering Committee meeting. From this, the Steering Committee then conducted a thematic mapping brainstorming exercise to identify the major challenges the Town needs to address to achieve the community's aspirations identified from the "Wow, Now" exercise.

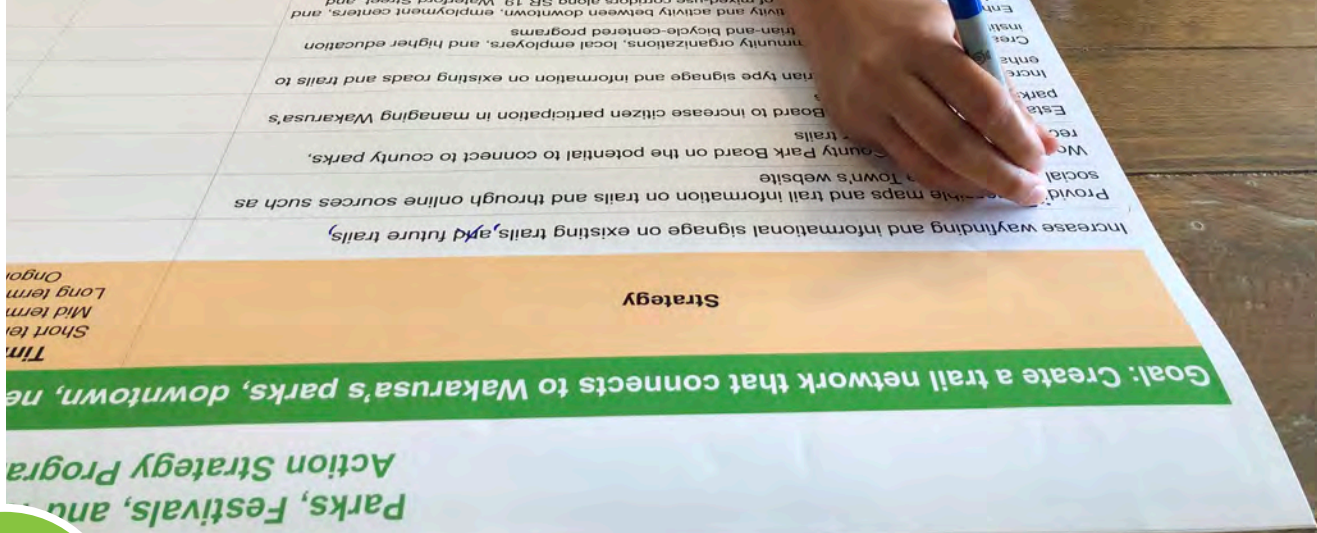
PARKS & PROGRAMMING NEEDS ANALYSIS

During the planning process, committee members were asked to identify what they would like to see in Wakarusa in 2030, what activities or work is being done to move toward that vision today, and what barriers exist that prevent that vision from being realized. After listening and receiving this feedback, the following were identified as the major challenges that need to be addressed to achieve the community's aspirations for their park and recreation system.

Top Priority Needs

- Lack of a community trail network and other bike amenities
- Seeking recreation or entertainment elsewhere
- Park cleanliness and regulation
- Limited variety in education programs and facilities for parks and recreation





7

ACTION PROGRAM

This chapter provides the framework for “how” the Town of Wakarusa plans to achieve the community’s aspirations with an actionable plan that addresses the major challenges of its parks and recreation system. The priority action program was developed by the Steering Committee by going through the “How” portion of the “Wow, Now, How” exercise. Using the outcomes collected from the quantitative and qualitative methods to know of the major needs, the Steering Committee was able to think through “how” the Town will address these major challenges. MACOG worked with the Steering Committee to frame the list of major challenges into goals and then brainstorm action strategies that achieve these goals.

The major challenges were framed into the following three goals:

- **Create a trail network that connects to Wakarusa’s parks, downtown, neighborhoods, and employment centers**
- **Integrate high-quality gathering spaces throughout the town**
- **Expand offerings through parks and recreation: programs, facilities, and attractions**

The Steering Committee next went through an exercise to prioritize the action strategies to have the most impact in improving Wakarusa’s parks and recreation system in the next five years. These priorities were included in a second public input survey for residents to have another opportunity to provide their input by selecting the top three priorities they would like to see implemented in the next five years. Results of the second survey are provided in the Appendix. Following the second survey, the Steering Committee identified an implementation effort for each strategy to have a better understanding of when a strategy could be implemented in terms of effort and cost. This is shown in the Priority Action Schedule

PRIORITY ACTION SCHEDULE

The following is the Priority Action Schedule identified by the Steering Committee and residents as the top priorities to improve Wakarusa’s parks and recreation system and are organized by the three goals identified in the Action Program.

Goal: Create a trail network that connects to Wakarusa’s parks, downtown, neighborhoods, and employment centers

Strategy	Time Frame Short term < 2 years Mid term 3-5 years Long term >5 years Ongoing	Responsibility The lead entity, primary and secondary partners	Priority Level High, Medium, or Low
Collaborate with Bike Elkhart County and neighboring communities on the potential to create a regional trail that connects to their parks, recreation facilities, and local trails	Long term	Town, Bike Elkhart County, MACOG, INDOT, Elkhart County, & Local Communities	High
Establish a Wakarusa Parks Board to increase citizen participation in managing Wakarusa’s parks and outdoor amenities	Short term	Town & Interested Citizens	High

Goal: Integrate high quality gathering spaces throughout the town

Strategy	Time Frame Short term < 2 years Mid term 3-5 years Long term >5 years Ongoing	Responsibility The lead entity, primary and secondary partners	Priority Level High, Medium, or Low
Promote the new downtown Doc’s Pavilion constructed at Waterford Street and Olive Street coming 2022	Short term	Festival Leaders, Local Schools, Sports Programs and Talent	High
Work with industrial property owners and supporting organizations to identify ways to beautify surrounding industrial properties	Ongoing	Town, Chamber of Commerce, & Employers	High

Goal: Expand offerings through parks and recreation: programs, facilities and attractions

Strategy	Time Frame Short term < 2 years Mid term 3-5 years Long term >5 years Ongoing	Responsibility The lead entity, primary and secondary partners	Priority Level High, Medium, or Low
Develop an asset management and maintenance plan for parks, recreation facilities, and tree canopy	Ongoing	Town Parks Board	High

ALL OTHER ACTION STRATEGIES

GOAL

Create a trail network that connects to Wakarusa’s parks, downtown, neighborhoods, and employment centers

- Complete a Walkability Score Analysis to identify areas for targeted sidewalk development
- Incorporate the FHWA Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks Guide to design and program into the Town’s Capital Improvement Program appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities offering connections to downtown, Wakarusa’s parks, schools, and neighborhoods
- Continue to financially support the Town’s Sidewalk Improvement Incentive Program to ensure sidewalks are updated, ADA compliance, and gaps are filled
- Install the Wakarusa Wayfinding System signage on existing and future trails to increase pedestrian traffic to key locations within Wakarusa
- Increase the use of bicycle and pedestrian signage on existing roads and upgrade pavement markings at trail and pedestrian crossings to enhance the safety of users
- Create relationships with community organizations and local employers to promote pedestrian and bicycle-centered programs
- Explore feasibility to add equestrian trails and horse-drawn carriage rides to expand entertainment value

GOAL

Integrate high-quality gathering spaces throughout the town

- Explore the feasibility of establishing neighborhood organizations to initiate, promote, and manage neighborhood-level projects, programs, and events
- Explore opportunities to construct “pocket parks” or small-scale neighborhood parks in underserved areas

GOAL

Expand offerings through parks and recreation through programs, facilities, and attractions

- Implement the strategies identified in the 5-Year Parks Master Plan to improve existing parks, expand programs, and update the Plan every 5 years to remain eligible for grant resources
- Create a “Movie in the Park” series in Memorial Park as seasonally appropriate

- Partner with local schools to create a music/concert series within the parks and downtown spaces
- Partner with Beacon Health to create a fitness/wellness program or class in the parks system
- Explore the feasibility of repurposing courts to be dual-use for tennis and pickleball by Northwood Middle School
- Continue to support the seasonal downtown festivals and events to build community pride, increase tourism, and support for local businesses
- Create a strategic plan for the Maple Syrup Festival to enhance its features in the future
- Partner with the Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau to expand tourism opportunities in Wakarusa that showcases small-town charm, natural beauty, and attractions
- Create a Wakarusa wayfinding system (maps, QR codes, signs, and kiosks) to be accessible on the Town’s website, social media pages, and at targeted areas
- Create a public art program to incorporate features in public spaces such as parks and trails and private projects
- Partner with the Elkhart County Historical Society to explore the feasibility of creating a self-guided “historical walking tour” to highlight historic properties

IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the action strategies in the plan can be implemented through administrative decision-making or Town funded programs. However, others may require outside assistance, in which case the Town may need financial assistance through grant resources. Below are the several funding sources which include Town revenue sources that can be used to finance projects.

General Fund

The Town’s General Fund accounts for the revenue collected from all Town enacted funding sources including property taxes, utility fees, and any permits. The General Fund pays for personnel and department operations, with a small percentage available for capital improvements. The amount used for capital improvements is set by the Town Council prior to the adoption of the annual capital budget.

Land Exactions

An Impact fee is one land exaction tool the Town could use to implement public infrastructure and facilities. Impact fees are intended to require developers to pay a fee, prior to acquiring building permits, to help offset the cost impacts from the new development in order for the Town to efficiently serve the community for public safety, utility services, parks, and transportation. These fees are established based on the capital and operation effects of new

development. Currently, the Town does not have an impact fee policy but could coordinate with the Elkhart County Planning Department to review and determine the feasibility to enact such a fee.

Fee-in-Lieu is another land exaction tool to implement public infrastructure and facilities. They operate differently than impact fees in that they are not based on the impacts of development but the requirement for developers to construct public infrastructure or facilities to serve the area. Fees can be used as subject to final site plan approval, and the Town may work with a developer to pay a fee-in-lieu of constructing the public infrastructure or facility so long as the infrastructure or facility is proportionate and reasonably tied to the development area. Projects eligible for fee-in-lieu include constructing bicycle and pedestrian facilities like sidewalks or trails, and parklands.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Rural Development Program

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Program provides a Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program to rural communities with no more than 20,000 residents to aid in constructing or improving their utility systems or essential community facilities such as hospitals, health clinics, schools, public safety buildings, community centers, museums, local food systems, and other community-based initiatives.

Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) Quick Impact Place-based (QuIP) Grant

QuIP is designed to fund small-scale projects that make a quick community enhancement and transformation of underutilized spaces to spark community conversation and creativity. This grant encourages the establishment and strengthening of partnerships between the Town, residents, community groups and organizations, and businesses. Grants requests must be between \$2,500 and \$5,000 and have a local match of either cash, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both.

IHCDA Patronicity CreatiNG Places Grant

The CreatiNG Places grant is a crowdsource funding mechanism that communities can apply and submit a project campaign that seeks public donations. Eligible projects include bike and pedestrian paths and park enhancements. IHCDA will match the dollars raised for successful campaigns up to \$50,000.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources Indiana Trails Program (ITP)

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) offers the Indiana Trails Program (ITP) which is a grant to aid local communities in land acquisition and/or developing multi-use trails. The ITP reimburses a local community up to 80 percent of the project expenses upon project approval. This could be a potential resource the Town could pursue to help construct trail projects.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is available for local communities that have a state-approved Park and Recreation Board and Five-Year Parks Master Plan. The LWCF is a state match grant that provides 50 percent of the costs for land acquisition and/or development of parks and recreational facilities upon project approval.





7

APPENDIX

The development of Wakarusa’s 2022-2026 Parks Master Plan was built on the foundation of community engagement. This ensured a community-based planning process that empowered and equipped the community to create a plan to Grow Wakarusa’s Future. Engagement efforts included two public input surveys, hosting small group discussions called “Waky Chats,” connecting with residents and visitors at the Maple Syrup Festival, hosting a series of Focus Group Workshops, conducting stakeholder interviews, posting promotional materials at public facilities and downtown businesses, and using the Town’s Facebook page. Knowing what residents and stakeholders would like to see in Wakarusa, guided the Steering Committee to create a priority action schedule and supporting strategies to offer a high-quality parks and recreation system for its community.

This appendix summarizes the public input of the results from the two input surveys, Waky Chats, and the submitted comments during the 30-day public comment period in October 2021.

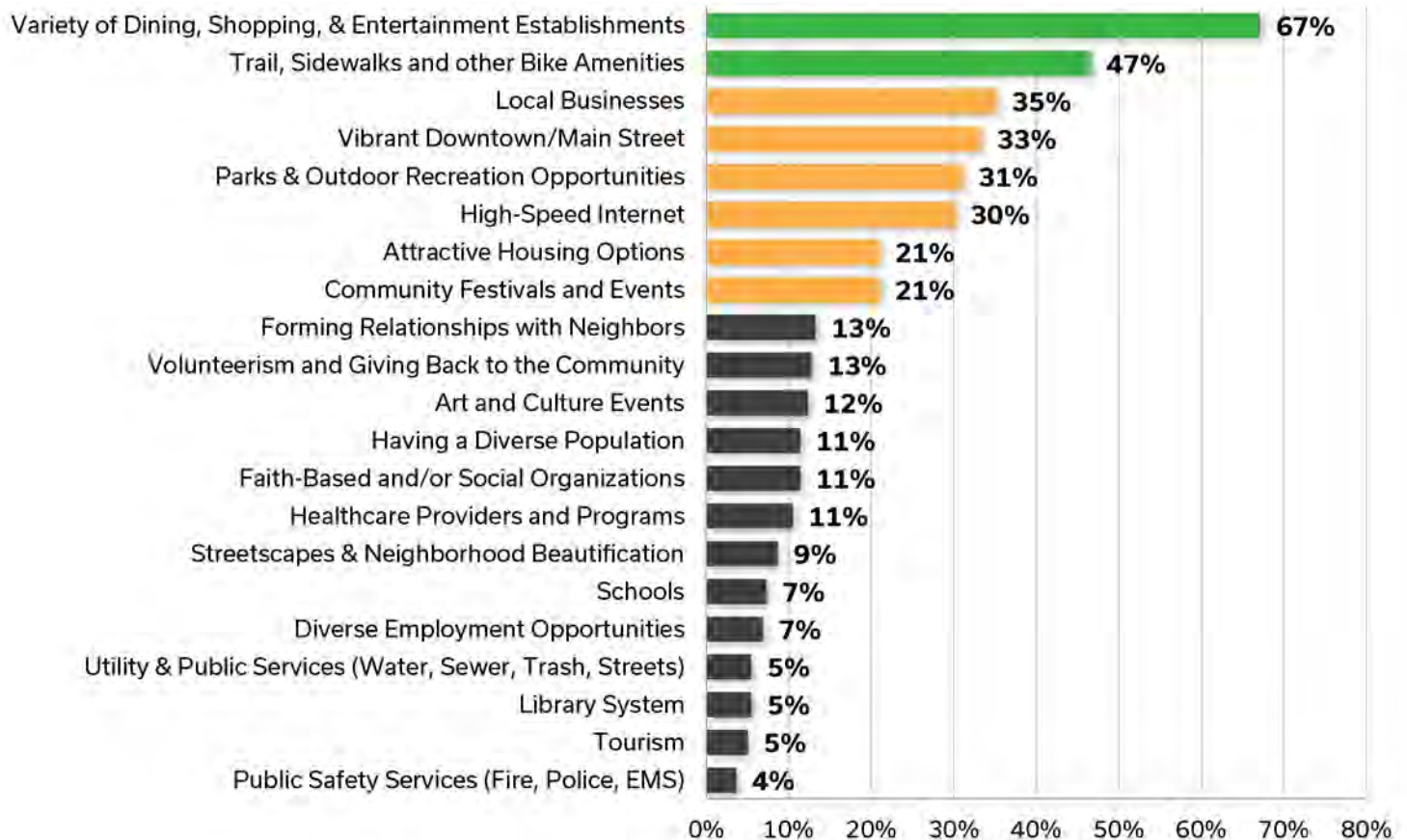
INPUT SURVEY #1 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

The first Public Input Survey was available for the Wakarusa community to fill out and inform the Steering Committee of their aspirations for Wakarusa's future and areas they thought the Town can grow in to enhance the quality of life including parks and recreation. The survey was available online and paper copies were posted at Town Hall and the Public Library in February and March 2021. Households in the Town of Wakarusa were first notified that the survey was coming in their utility bills. Additional promotion of the input survey was done through a press release in the Wakarusa Tribune, flyers were posted in downtown businesses, local churches, WaNee Schools, the Library, and Town Hall, and advertised on the Town's Facebook page. We received input from 244 residents, representing approximately 12 percent of Wakarusa's population. We received 229 responses to the online survey and 15 responses to the paper survey.

How can we Grow Our Future in Wakarusa?

The first set of question asked participants to select four features in which they thought Wakarusa needs to focus on more in the coming years and then rate how well the Town provides those features. The goal of these questions was to find common areas where the town could improve and grow in the future, and help inform the Steering Committee with identifying the major challenges.

What areas can we grow in as a community?



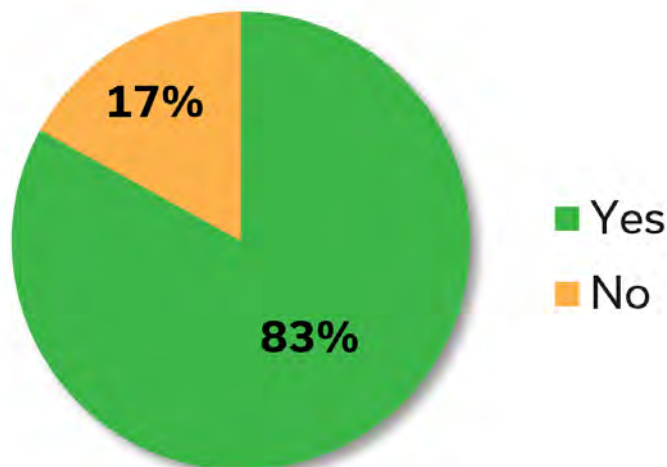
How can we Grow Our Future in Wakarusa?

Average Rating for Wakarusa's Features



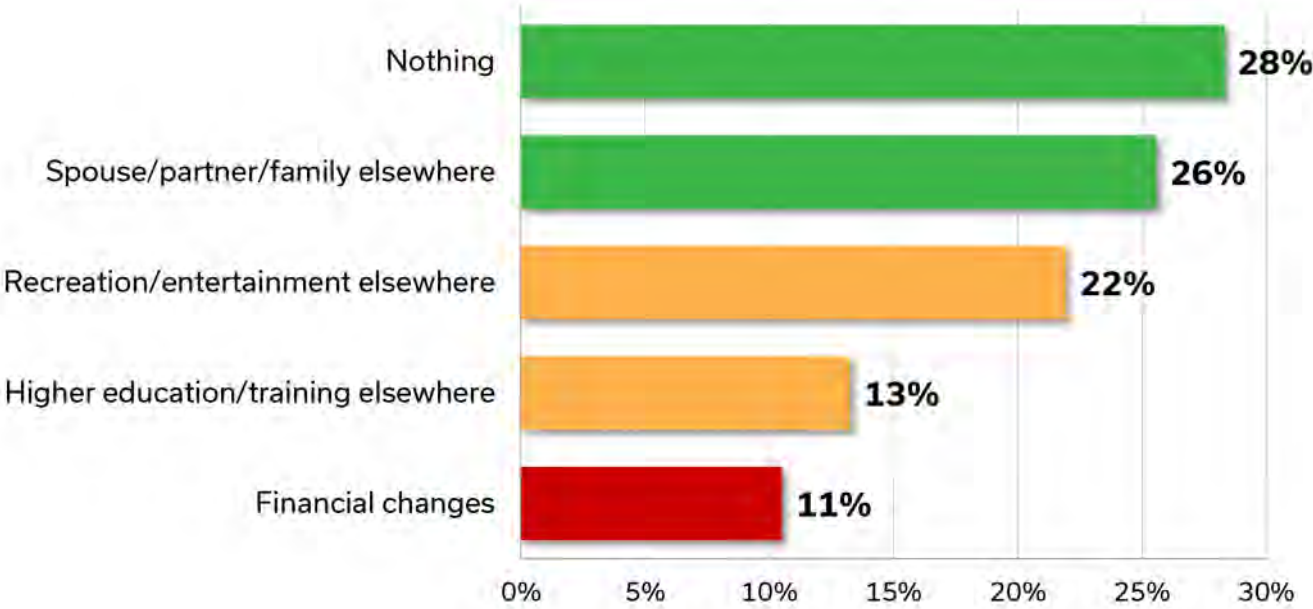
Why do you choose to live, work, and play in Wakarusa?

Have you spent a portion of your adulthood (18+) living outside of Wakarusa?

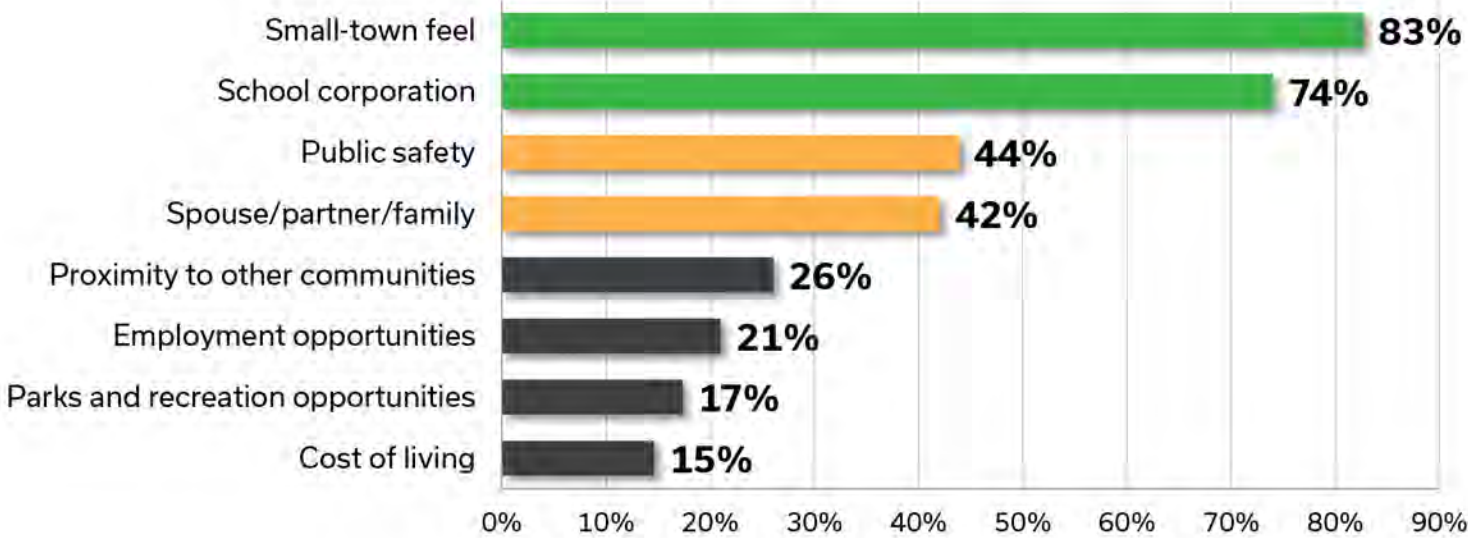


Why do you choose to live, work, and play in Wakarusa?

What factors would prompt, or have prompted, you to leave Wakarusa?

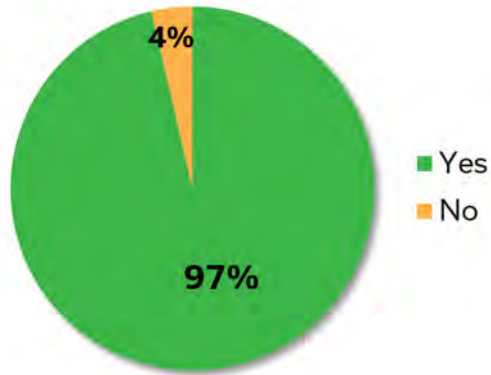


What factors drew you to live in, or remain in, Wakarusa?

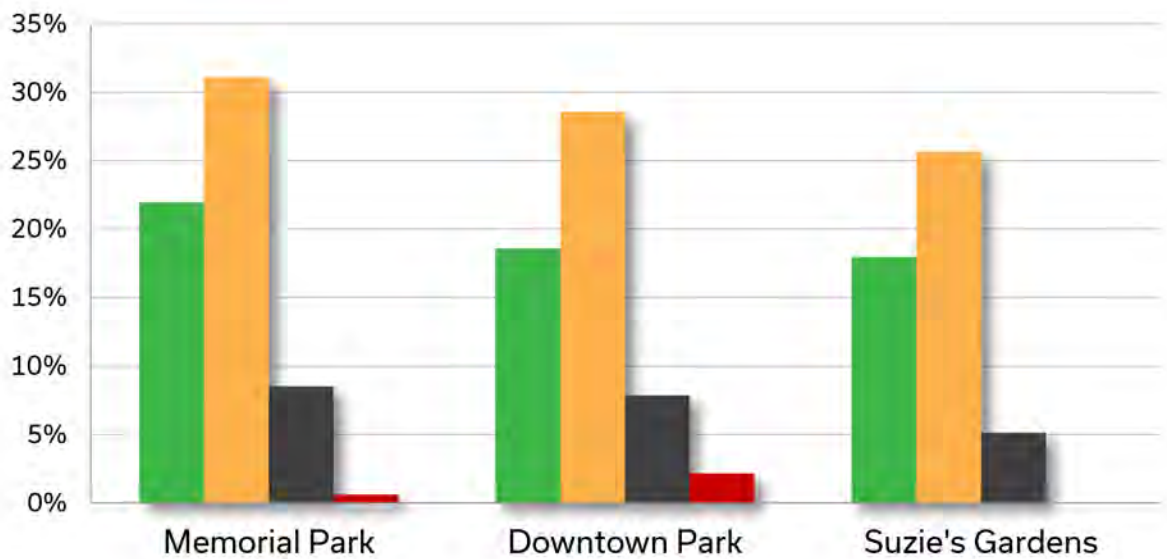
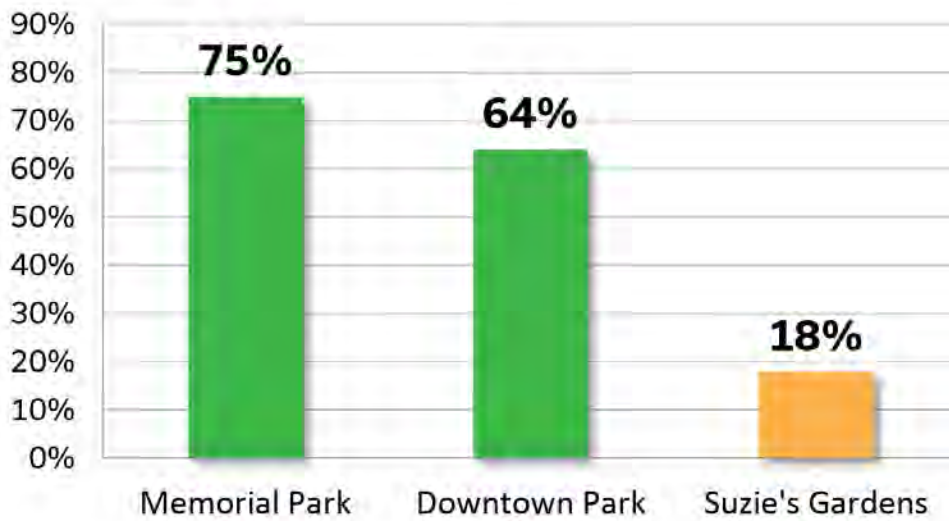


Parks & Recreation

Have you visited at least one of Wakarusa's parks?



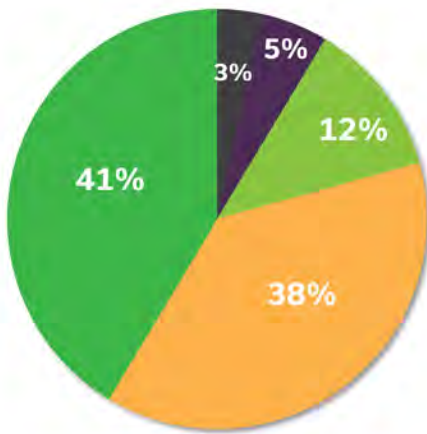
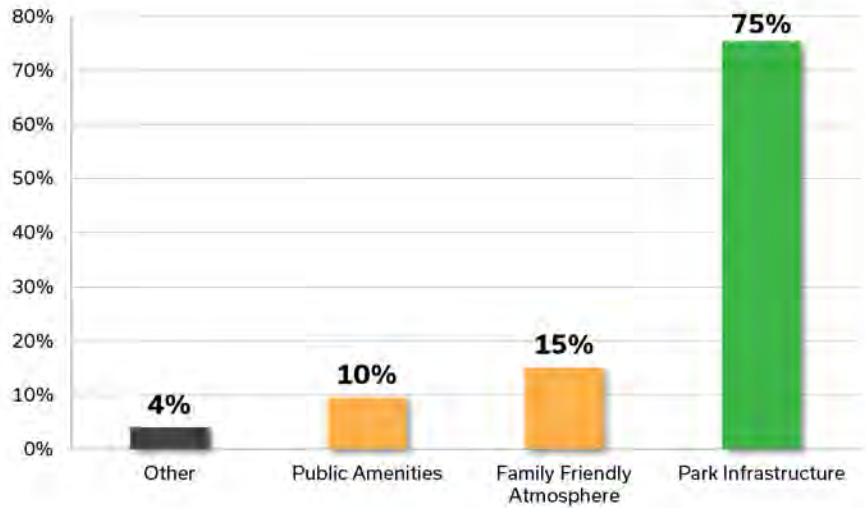
Indicate which parks you visit and your rating.



■ Outstanding ■ Very Good ■ Satisfactory ■ Needs Improvement

Parks & Recreation

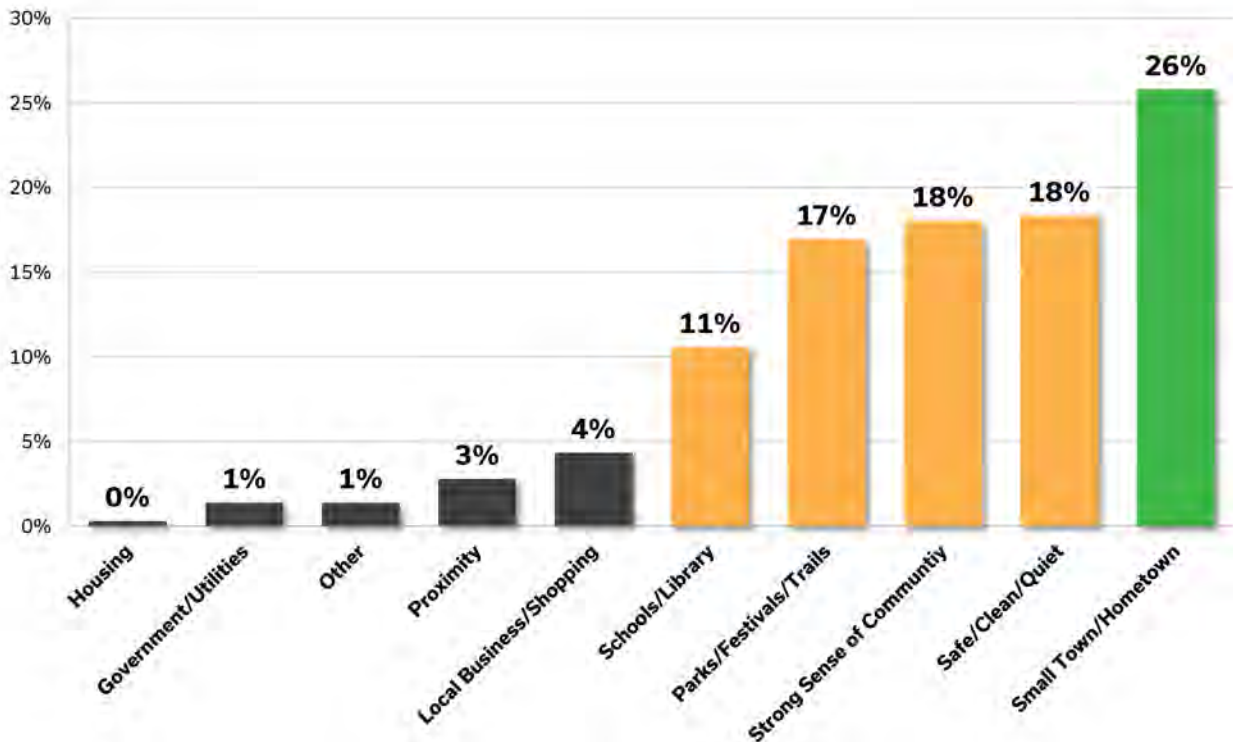
What are your favorite features about Wakarusa's Parks?



Breakdown of the "park infrastructure" features

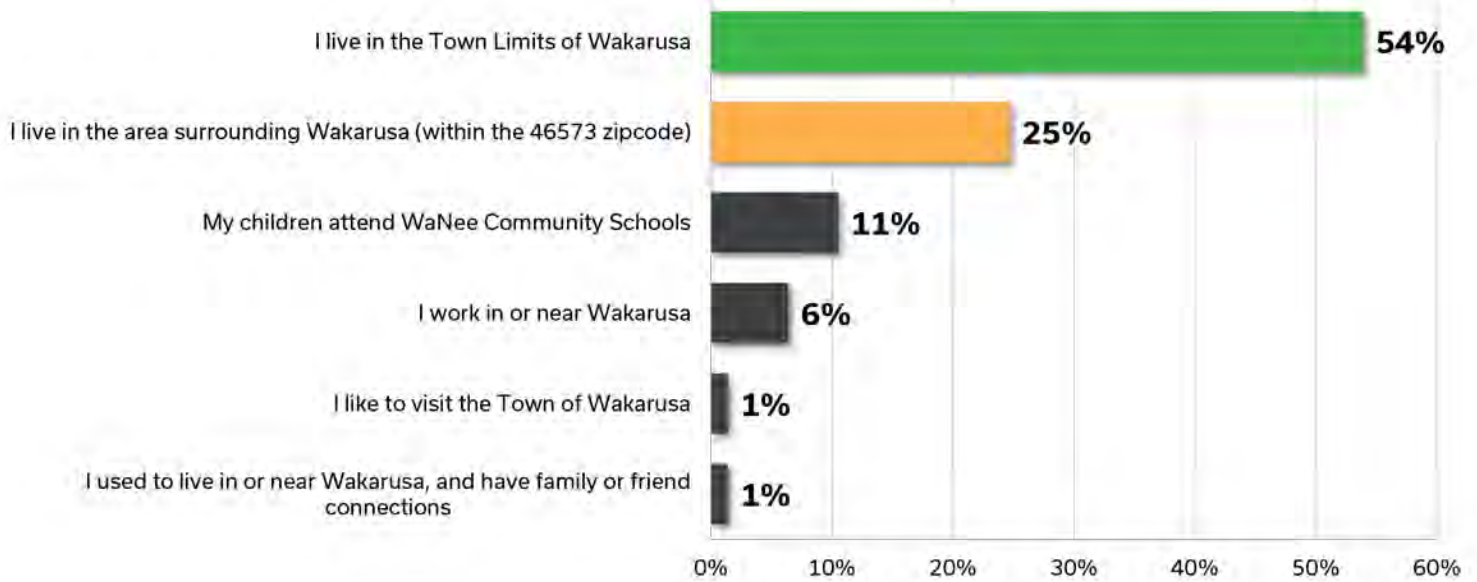
- Memorial Garden
- Disc Golf
- Splash Pad
- Trails/Paths
- Playground/Equipment

Favorite Features about living in Wakarusa

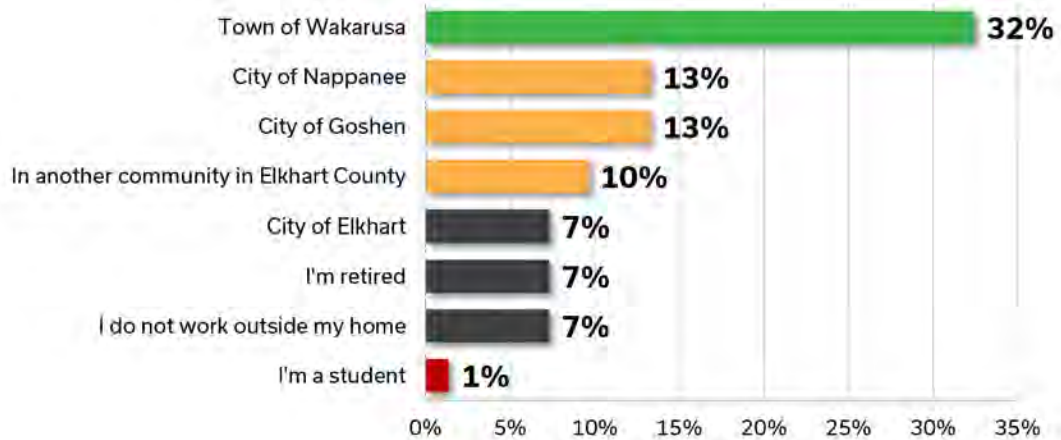


Tell Us About Yourself

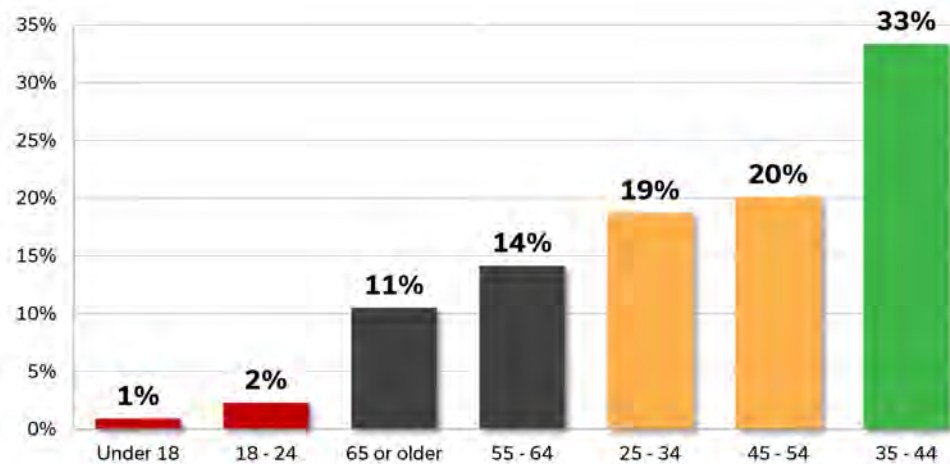
Which best describes your connection to Wakarusa?



Which community do you work in?



How old are you?





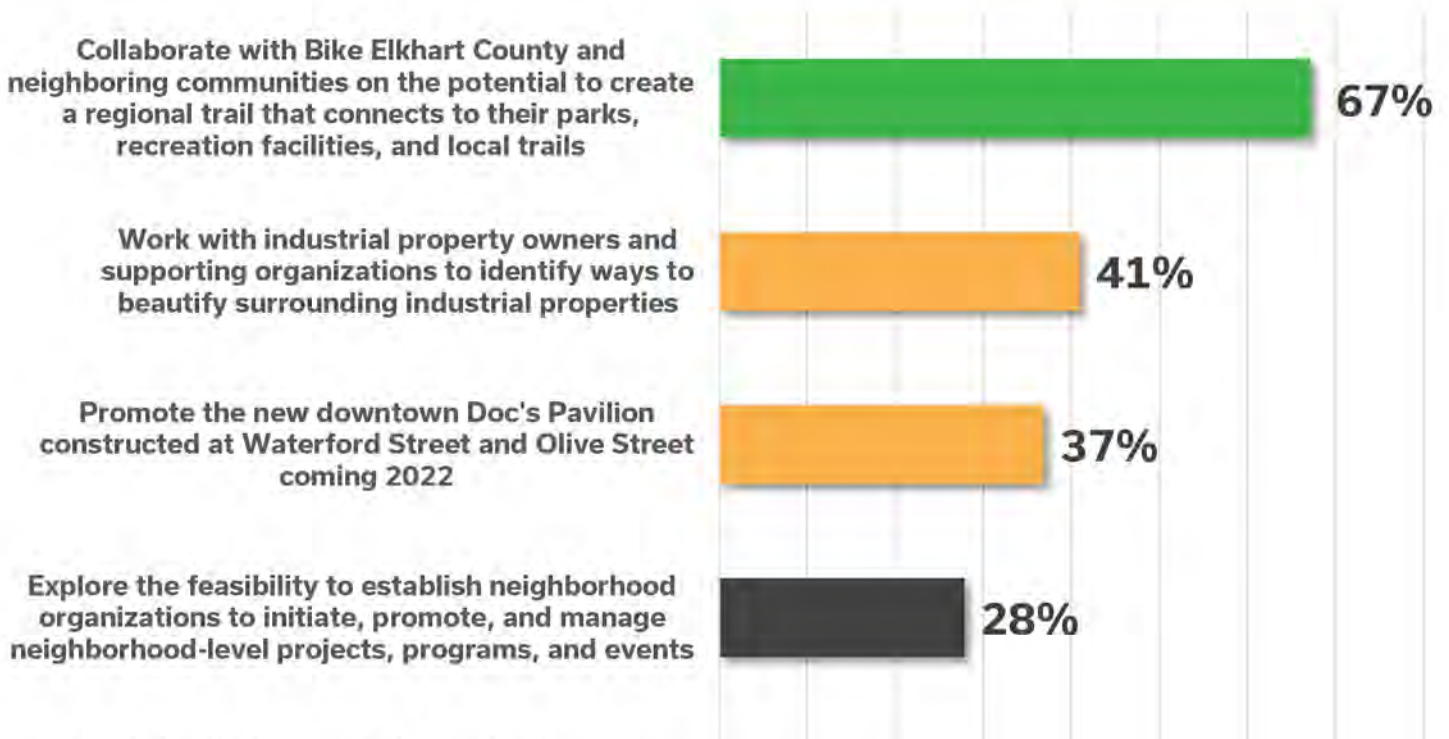
INPUT SURVEY #2 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

For two weeks in August 2021, a second Public Input Survey was available for the Wakarusa community to fill out and share what they thought should be the short term priorities. Households in the Town of Wakarusa were notified by door hangers and the Town’s Facebook page. Postcards were also distributed to downtown businesses. We received input from 140 residents, representing approximately seven (7) percent of Wakarusa’s population. The survey was available online and paper copies were also available at the Wakarusa Public Library. We received 126 responses to the online survey and 14 responses to the paper survey.

Top Strategies

Participants were asked to select their top two (2) strategies they would like to see implemented in Wakarusa in the next five (5) years for an enhanced parks and recreation system. These strategies address the major needs and goals residents identified from the first public input survey and from the series of Steering Committee meetings. The strategies were first prioritized by the Steering Committee before the release of the second survey to serve as a comparison to the community’s response. The chart below summarizes the public responses.

Parks, Festivals, and Trails



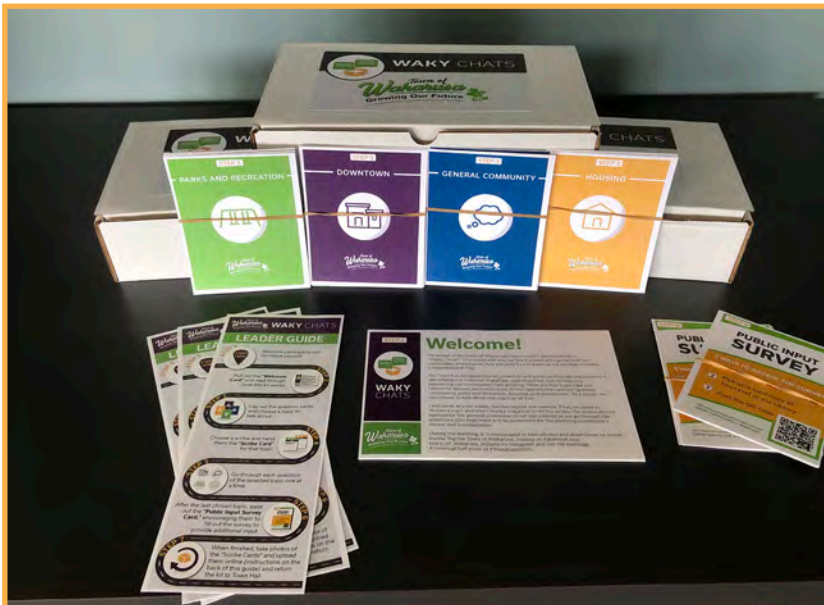


SUMMARY OF “WAKY CHATS”

Wakarusa residents had the opportunity to attend small group discussions known as “Waky Chats.” Waky Chats were hosted between February 15, 2021 and April 14, 2021. The Town organized these small group discussions to allow deeper discussions with residents and stakeholders on community aspects like Wakarusa’s downtown, parks, housing, and the general community to identify the major opportunities and challenges and their potential solutions. The following chart summarizes the comments provided regarding parks and recreation.

Parks and Recreation - Public Comments

Date	Location and attendance	Share a memorable experience from your childhood or today that highlights the benefits of Wakarusa’s parks.	What would bring you to Wakarusa’s parks more often?	How often do you visit Wakarusa’s parks? What keeps bringing you back?	What can you do to improve the parks?
2/15/2021	Lions Club 10 people	Movie in the park, concerts	Connect Memorial Park to CR 40. Advertise Parks.	Once a month, walking trail. No one knew about Susi’s Garden	Promote them, use baseball park for like American Legion Tourneys, Bring in food trucks
2/23/2021	Maintenance Building 5 people	May poll	Music/concerts, organized activities	Splash pad, pavilion, playground equipment, trees, kids to play, sledding hill	Splash pad improvement, new pavilion, restroom improvement (heat), concrete pads for Disc golf with number, Gazebo (safety issues), no alcohol, park irrigation (uptown park).



Pictured to the left is a “Meeting in a Box” or “Waky Chat” kit. Kits contained instructions, a leader guide, and themed feedback cards. Kits also contained a QR code that led to the Public Input Survey.



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Wakarusa residents had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Wakarusa 2022-2026 Parks Master Plan between October 4, 2021 and November 3, 2021. Residents were able to submit their comments using an online comment form on the project website, www.growwakarusasfuture.com, at the Public Open House on October 20th, or leave a message for the Steering Committee. We received nine (9) public comments with a summary of those comments provided in the tables below.

October 4, 2021 - November 3, 2021 Public Comments

Date	Submitted by	What do you love about the plan? What strategy excites you most for the future?	What did you learn from reviewing the plan?	What would you change about the plan or strategies presented?	Additional Comments or Questions
10/19/2021	Anonymous Submitted to Town Manager				We are concerned about the proposed bike path that appears to go through West Gate subdivision.
10/20/2021	Heather Telschow, Submitted on the online comment form				We need the dog/people water fountain replaced. It was taken out when the city put in the parking lot next to the town hall.
10/20/2021	Alex Mast, Submitted on the online comment form	I am excited for more businesses to be attracted to Wakarusa.	I learned of the overwhelming amount of interest for a coffee shop. Wakarusa has been my goal of opening a coffee shop for the last three years.	Everything is on the right track.	I am a business owner. My name is Alex Mast and I am with a mobile coffee shop named The Forte Cafe. I have actually attended and served at the Wakarusa maple syrup festival in 2018 and 2021. I have been in contact with Deb from the planning team and was super excited about the interest in a coffee shop. I am from the Wa-Nee school system when I was in grade school and have always wanted to open my physical location in a Wakarusa. I just wanted to voice my interest in filling that need of a coffee shop one day. Keep me in mind if anything comes up or you have an approach to have that need filled.

October 4, 2021 - November 3, 2021 Public Comments

Date	Submitted by	What do you love about the plan? What strategy excites you most for the future?	What did you learn from reviewing the plan?	What would you change about the plan or strategies presented?	Additional Comments or Questions
10/20/2021	Submitted at the Public Open House	Bringing in a more diverse demographic of residents	Some residents want to move beyond the outdated "the way it's always been" mindset. (This is a good thing!)	Encourage building owners to present their properties to look occupied. Especially downtown.	
10/20/2021	Submitted at the Public Open House	Restaurants, shops, trails			
10/20/2021	Submitted at the Public Open House	Bike trails			
10/20/2021	Submitted at the Public Open House			Wellhead protection planning	
10/20/2021	Submitted at the Public Open House			Golf carts on bike path?	
11/1/2021	Darlene Delaurelle, Submitted on the online comment form				I would like to see more entertainment activities for seniors like: bingo, exercise programs, quilting, genealogy, cook offs, some more festivals. Where I used to live we had a festival called Paws in the Park. Residents dressed their dogs (pets) in costumes, veterinarians had walk up rabies clinics, priests blessed the pets, it was a wonderful community event!



2022-2026 PARKS MASTER PLAN