



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS LAUNCHES 'MISSION 26' A LONG-TERM VISION FOR A MORE CONNECTED PARKS SYSTEM

- *Community input will play a major role in shaping the vision for the future as the parks system celebrates its 60th anniversary*
- *Key areas of focus include accessibility, health and wellness, environmental stewardship, and community connection*

WATERFORD, Mich. (January 12, 2026) – Oakland County Parks is excited to announce the launch of Mission 26, a long-term vision to strengthen the county parks system, improve outdoor experiences, and better connect parks across the county – making it easier for residents to enjoy the area's incredible natural spaces.

Released as Oakland County Parks marks its 60th anniversary and following strong voter support through the 2024 parks millage renewal, Mission 26 establishes a shared direction for the future while inviting the public to help shape priorities, approaches and outcomes.

"Oakland County has extraordinary parks and natural assets," said Chris Ward, Director of Oakland County Parks. "Mission 26 is about making them work better together – providing access for all, experiences for all four seasons, spaces to get active, restore and connect, and decisions driven by public value, public input, and impact."

The vision responds to the critical role parks play as essential public infrastructure enhancing our everyday lives. It also addresses climate-related impacts affecting infrastructure, public spaces and community resilience and equitably serving the country's large, diverse population. .

"Voters made it clear that parks matter," said Ebony Bagley, Chair of the Oakland County Parks Commission. "Mission 26 honors that trust by setting a clear, responsible vision for the future while engaging residents in shaping what comes next."

Community Input Essential

Mission 26 will help take community engagement to the next level through a new online platform, the Co-Creation Lab. The new online engagement platform will allow residents

to follow and share input on projects with interactive maps, discuss proposals, and support community recommendations that inform project development.

The first engagement opportunity will be the Waterford Oaks Transformation Plan. Waterford Oaks is one of Oakland County's most iconic parks, featuring a world-class BMX track, more than three miles of hiking trails, a universally accessible playscape, year-round court sports, sand volleyball, a winter sledding hill, outdoor fitness equipment, rental facilities, and the popular Oakland County Farmers Market.

Additional park and systemwide initiatives will be added to the site throughout winter and spring. These existing features provide a foundation for discussion as the transformation planning process begins and public input is gathered.

"These are shared community spaces," Ward said. "Getting input from residents helps us make better decisions about how our parks grow and change."

Framework for the Future

Mission 26 establishes guiding principles and a strategic roadmap, creating a framework for future decisions, partnerships and investments. Key areas of focus include:

- Creating inclusive spaces for everyone of all ages and abilities
- Promoting physical and mental well-being through recreation and nature
- Protecting natural resources, managing habitats, and encouraging sustainable practices
- Fostering partnerships with local governments

Residents will see continued, significant investment in park improvements and programs. To learn more about Mission 26, visit

<https://www.oakgov.com/community/oakland-county-parks/mission-26>

To register and begin participating in the Co-Creation Lab, visit

<https://engage.oaklandcountyparks.com/>

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About Oakland County Parks

Founded 60 years ago, Oakland County Parks has 17 locations boasting more than 7,000 acres of natural areas and miles of scenic trails that provide guests with year-round opportunities for recreation, wellness, and connection to nature.

From championship golf courses and a destination waterpark, to accessible playscapes and flourishing wildlife habitats, Oakland County Parks offers something for everyone while staying committed to inclusion, environmental stewardship and strengthening communities through innovative programs, partnerships, and events that bring people together. Learn more:

OaklandCountyParks.com.