RIVER EDGE PARK EXTENSION MASTER PLAN
CITY OF KENT, PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
FULLER DESIGN GROUP, AIA, APA
JOHN VITTUM, ASLA, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
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RIVER EDGE PARK EXTENSION MASTER PLAN
A PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROJECT FOR THE CITY OF KENT PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
CONTENTS
Acknowledgements
Introduction
PROJECT SUMMARY
General Recommendations 2
Development Priorities 4
Funding Opportunities 5
BACKGROUND 6
THE NATIONAL CONTEXT 6-7
REGIONAL INITIATIVES 8-10
LOCAL LINKAGES 11-12
KENT PARKS & RECREATION 13-14
THE RIVEREDGE EXPANSION 15
THE METHODOLOGY 16
SECTIONAL ANALYSIS 17-68
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the late Pat Moffit, whose vision and leadership laid the foundation for a regional greenway for Western Portage County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Bill Wisnewski
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INTRODUCTION
(March 1993 Draft)

This is a report of our findings of the Master Planning project for the extension of Riveredge Park in Kent into the spine of a regional greenway that could link the major metropolitan areas of Northeast Ohio with a transportation and recreation trail network that respects the land and the wildlife that inhabits it. This master plan is a study emerged from a long held objective of the Parks and Recreation Board to evaluate the linkages of existing parks with these in neighboring communities. It's focus has thus been on the city wide park, namely Riveredge/Fred Full and the possibilities for its physical expansion, development of existing lands, and direct/indirect connections to existing regional parklands. It was not the objective to evaluate programs or needs, but rather to envision linkages. For the past 16 months, we have held a series of meetings and workshops at which pre-existing concepts were tested and reviewed, and new ideas were generated. The public was openly invited to participate, and an advisory committee offered many helpful suggestions.

Over the next 2 months, we will be finalizing our findings in a final draft report, of which this is the draft. We therefore ask that you take the time at this juncture to provide additional comment.

Given the time available, the drawings and maps in this version are by no means complete. Any suggestions that you have in this regard would also be very helpful. If you need additional information or would like to make comments, please contact:

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PROJECT SUMMARY

To increase the usefulness of this document, we have developed a project summary as the beginning of the report and follow it with the context, methodology and analysis.

The following pages summarize the results of the project, through the means of general recommendations, development priorities and funding opportunities.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of developing this Master Plan, we have recognized some ideas that are of general character that would, if pursued, greatly enhance the character, visibility and usefulness of the existing parks. These ideas also include means by which the parks staff and policy board members can better understand and provide for the future needs of their constituents. We have put these recommendations in narrative form.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

One of the results of this planning method was that we heard that there are a multitude of parks and recreation needs that must be evaluated to develop priorities for resources. Some of the expansions recommended here will require additional funding and staff to develop, program and maintain. There is rightfully a concern that these needs do not jeopardize existing programs.

In the course of our work, we heard of interest in a variety of facilities, including public golf courses, outdoor pools, recreation centers, wading pools, equestrian stables, boat livery, ice skating rinks and playgrounds. Each of these and other ideas as well, need to be evaluated in some systematic fashion.

We therefore recommend that a comprehensive needs assessment be undertaken, in which users are surveyed and the community as a whole is questioned as to their interests in a variety of parks and recreation developments. A key question will need to determine the willingness to support future development with funding.

Joint Development Agreements

As we have been in several sections of this study, the development of parks facilities do not always fall into neat categories of jurisdiction. Indeed, if some of these proposed trails are developed, there will be a need for joint development and maintenance agreements between city, township and county parks officials. These types of agreements are very common, and models are readily available for adaptation to our circumstances.

Just as park facilities might not fall in easy categories, neither do users care where a facility is. Indeed, based on observation of license plates, Kent parks facilities are enjoyed by many from outside the community. With this in mind, as the county parks board develops a county wide strategy for parks and recreation there will be a need for joint analysis of user needs and a development of facilities on a regional basis.

Comprehensive Plan Update

Efforts are presently underway to update the city's comprehensive development plan. As part of this plan update it would be good to update the strategic plan for the parks, as well as the base data on existing parks.

Volunteer Coordination

Some of the proposed developments could be undertaken with volunteer help, similar to the way the existing river edge park was originally developed. Other parks systems have groups that are willing to help maintain and improve stretches of trail or facilities such as bikeways. The establishment of a "friends of the river edge" or a trail council would be a way of providing for the effective use of volunteers. The Parks and Recreation Board should consider having volunteer coordination as part of a staff persons job description.

Promotion and Marketing

At present the Parks and Recreation Department has a variety of information available on parks and programs. It also has a mailing that periodically informs city residents of upcoming programs. We recommend that these existing methods be enhanced and that the variety of information be updated into a unified graphics system. A systematic distribution of this information through schools, at the library, Chamber of Commerce and other locations would also assure more widespread knowledge and increased use of facilities and programs. The aggressive use of press releases and other media methods would fit into a larger program of promoting parks and recreation in the city.

Interpretive Programs and Literature

As we have seen, one of the greatest untapped uses of the parks is as an outdoor classroom. Continued collaboration with the Kent Historical Society and Kent Environmental Council on development of literature, interpretive markers and displays could greatly enhance the experiences of passive park users. The development of hikes and lectures would be a logical component of such a program. Grants can be pursued for all of these projects.

Access and Identity

One of our most important general recommendations is that of the development of a strategy of identity and access. The use of appropriate directional signage on city
thoroughfares and the completion of a clear and consistent program of entry signs would be most helpful.

As a park development makes the trail more accessible, there is an opportunity to serve more elderly and disabled citizens. Programs oriented towards these groups and special transportation arrangements for them would be most beneficial. There are grant programs that focus on increasing the use and accessibility of urban parks which would be applicable to this particular need.

Tree Protection,
Structural Erosion Control

In the more developed areas adjoining the park there is a need to develop a strategy to control erosion and storm water as well as protect trees from damage or loss during construction. In redevelopment areas such as the West River Neighborhood, the Parks and Recreation Department needs to have the formal ability to review building plans. To assure that erosion and storm water are handled properly and that trees are properly protected, special ordinances may be required to modify the zoning code.

Security

One of the most sensitive issues that has arisen during the course of the workshops is that of security. Concern for safety of persons and adjacent property is a very real one, and it must be addressed squarely.

First, we must begin by saying that when it comes to this issue, there is little difference between perceived and real threats. A balance must be achieved between what is an acceptable level of control and surveillance based on use and community standards one hand, and what is acceptable on a policy level on the other.

Kent Parks and Recreation and Kent Police officials indicate that the level of safety and security concerns for the Riveredge Park are very low. The Parks and Recreation Department has had no designated parks patrol since 1977, and has not had the need for one, based on the level of illegal activity occurring. The primary problems encountered in the Riveredge Park are littering, loitering and graffiti. The use of the Parks beyond the dusk closing hours contributes a large part of the nuisances.

The Kent Police Department (KPD) has no official policy regarding parks, because, according to Captain John Peach, "The parks in Kent are very safe...among the safest places in town". KPD generally does not patrol the parklands, except when a complaint call comes in, and occasional passes by park areas at dusk. General pass by's are the rule in all neighborhood and community parks, with warnings issued to those violating the posted closing time.

The downtown foot patrol travels the Riveredge Park on occasion, when opportunity or concern might arise.

Construction is set to begin on the lighting of a small stretch of the Riveredge Park trail south of Main Street Bridge. While this promises to attract additional use of this area in the evening hours, Captain Peach feels that the lighting adds a level of security that should balance out any concerns. Members of the West River Neighborhood have expressed interest in perhaps lighting the Riveredge North of the bridge. This has yet to be discussed in any detail.

As far as security is concerned outside of the downtown, the primary issues that arose during the workshops have to do with remoteness and proximity to property and possible damage.

Regarding the safety of using trails in remote areas, this is an issue that each Park District and Park users must contend with. In general, Park areas have been found to be as safe as any other area, and require no greater level of common sense or caution than any other place. How safe one feels they are is just as important as how safe one really is.

Our discussion with other park districts have indicated that regular patrolling is used more to police the legitimate use of the trail rather than to provide security to persons and property. John Daly of Akron Metroparks indicated to us that their trails have a very good record of personal safety and security, as well as security of neighboring parcels. Only in one section of one stretch of the Metroparks has it been necessary to construct a fence at a property line, and then only because the property owners insisted.

The issue of whether patrols and fences are required on trails will need to be addressed through development of policy from discussion with trail users, neighbors and legal council.

Another possible way of developing increased security is to modify hours of maintenance in areas susceptible to vandalism. For example, the need for staff to work on baseball fields in evenings (4 p.m. to 8 p.m.) might be coordinated with general maintenance of larger parks as well as the Riveredge as a way of having an increased presence of patrol during afternoon and evening hours.

Operation

Operating the expanded sections of the park may require additional personnel for supervision and surveillance. Maintenance is discussed as a separate topic below.

Depending on the extent of trails developed and their locations, this item will be a factor in negotiation between Kent Parks and Recreation, township trustees, and County officials.
At this point in the parks growth and operations, a staff member for parks patrol may already be warranted. Incidents of vandalism, loitering, and other illegal activities are already causing problems, which dealt with in a preventive fashion could justify a reallocation of personnel from the maintenance tasks. One scenario would be to have a full time or two part time staff who worked from noon until 8 PM, and would have a dual function of light maintenance and patrol. This has been done in other parks with much success, and could be tried with volunteers for a trial basis.

The issue of night hours for the park remains an issue to be resolved. The planned lighting of the accessibility ramp and the water falls, which will open parkland beyond the existing policy of closing at dusk, will need to be carefully monitored.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the Kent parklands is presently undertaken with a crew of 3 full time and up to 18 seasonal and part time personnel. The type of work they perform is general moving and pruning, repair of structures and paths, cleaning of restrooms, painting and other maintenance work.

As the park is developed there will be a corresponding need for increase in maintenance activities. We therefore recommend that any future developments be naturalized to the greatest extent possible to eliminate the need for mowing. If trails are developed, their maintenance will need to be built into the operating budget or volunteers will need to be recruited.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

With this plan in place, there would be a need to create a development strategy. The following is our recommendation for priorities for development which would need to be integrated into a capital plan. Some of the projects would be contingent on special sources of funding, such as donations, local, state and federal grants, or special levies.

1. Complete upgrades to existing developed Park lands:
   a. Boat launch and restrooms at Kremer Fields.
   b. Complete accessibility projects.
   c. Repair and replace stairs.
   d. Complete signage program.
   e. Develop comprehensive information and interpretive literature.
   f. Further evaluate boat portaging facility at Dun.
   g. Consider opportunity for developing a livery north of Main Street Bridge.

2. Develop sections of undeveloped city park lands as follows:
   a. Dock at Plum Creek Outlet.
   b. Trestle bridge.
   c. Develop park at Riverbend.
   d. Access to Canal lock structure.

3. Develop opportunities as they arise:
   a. Atlantic and Great Western Bikeway.

4. Pursue easements for future development:
   a. Pursue CSX easement from Brady's Leap to Crain Avenue bridge. Develop bridge, trail and stair.
   b. Pursue easements on west bank of river from Brady's Leap to Cuyahoga Street. Develop integral relationship within development and zoning regulations to gain better control development that will effect the river edge.
   c. Pursue easements on east bank for access to lock/dam structure.
   d. Continue to keep track of ownership of Oak Knolls Golf Course for future development along that edge of the river.
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

A project of this magnitude would likely be funded by a combination of sources. Our research has found that there are thirteen likely sources for funding various phases of this project:

1. Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds
2. National Park Service
3. Local Service Groups
4. Volunteer Labor and Services
5. ODNR Land and Water Conservation Fund
6. Ohio Department of Transportation
7. Community Development Block Grants
8. Local Foundations
9. City General Funds
10. Development Fees
11. Local Tax Levies
12. County Funds
13. Township Funds

1. Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, raised from fees from offshore drilling, have been used extensively by local governments, including Kent, to obtain or develop parks.

2. National Park Service funds provide technical assistance for the implementation of river trail master plans. The Recreation Grants division also has an urban Park and Recreation program which sponsors Innovation and Rehabilitation Grants.

3. Local Service Groups have participated in past projects to improve parks facilities and would be an important component in promoting a master plan involving park/trail development.

4. Volunteer Labor and Services have been an important part of the development of the existing parks, and local ecological, hiking, cyclist and other groups have a great interest in making such a project a success. Also, the Civilian Conservation Corps, has donated labor and supervision on past construction projects.

5. ODNR Land and Conservation Fund monies are a 50% match to local funds (20% non-federal) for park development. They have been used in Kent in the parks. Restrictions on the use of these monies are as follows:
   1. All new utilities in the project areas must be under ground.
   2. The area must be perpetually operated solely for outdoor recreation.
   3. A land and water conservation symbol will be placed at the entrance to the area.

4. The area must be open to the public with any fees levied in a non-discriminating manner (except for non-resident differentials if applicable).

6. Ohio Department of Transportation funds are available for 80% federal funding of Bicycle Projects that are transportation in nature. There is also a category known as the Transportation Enhancement Program that provides funding for bicycle, pedestrian, historic preservation and scenic beautified projects. It could be substantiated that a bicycle trail from Ravenna to Kent via the Conrail right of way would be used by people going to work or school, such funding could become a component of development funding.

7. Community Development Block Grant funds could potentially be used for a percentage of the project so long as they comply with requirements of serving low and moderate income populations or eliminating slum and blight.

8. Local, State, and National Foundations have been critical players in the funding of other trail projects, such as the Celina Coldwater Trail, in Celina, Ohio.

9. City General Funds in the form of increases to the Parks Department Budget could provide monies for land acquisition and development.

10. Development Fees charged to developers could be used to directly fund the acquisition of land and easements for this project.

11. Local Tax Levies
The Kent Parks and Recreation board or a yet to be established County Park District, have authority to place levies on the ballot for consideration of the public.

12. County Funds from County Commissions or a County Park Board could provide monies for land and easement acquisition and development. These funds could be county general funds or development park fees paid under the County Subdivision Regulations.

13. Township Funds could be provided by the township trustees for development of the trail or donation of labor and material by township crews.
BACKGROUND

This master plan is the first step in the creation of a network of multi-purpose trails for western Portage County is an exciting prospect. While the development of such a public amenity is not a novel undertaking, to do so here, with the many intricacies and issues involved, is a challenging opportunity.

In the course of evaluating the possibilities, we have put this planning project in the context of current recreational and transportation development on the national, regional and local levels.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

To understand the bigger picture of parks and recreation development, we need to begin by looking at the developments on the national level. The areas that we will briefly review are as follows:

The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors

National Parks Service Initiatives

Rails to Trails Conservancy

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act

THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON AMERICANS OUTDOORS

In January of 1986, the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (PCAO), established in 1985 by President Reagan, released its report. In it, the commission outlines the opportunities for meeting the outdoor experience needs of an increasingly urbanized citizenry.

Among the findings of this commission:

- The average age of the population is increasing.
- We are seeking more frequent recreation, closer to home.
- More women, minorities and handicapped persons participate in outdoor recreation.
- Open space is a silent social worker in its ability to reduce crime and delinquency.
- Americans have much leisure time, yet it is decreasing.
- The quality of environments around the places where we live is often degraded by pollution.

The commission also found that there are many pressures on existing communities that effect the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities. These include:

- The elimination of open space due to suburbanization in the very places where it is most needed.
- Deteriorated or obsolete conditions of existing facilities.
- Growing demand for recreation facilities.
- The non-rationalized benefits of outdoor enjoyment mean that parks and recreation budgets are constantly in jeopardy.
- Large park parcels are not readily available and/or are very expensive.

The commission report also contains some possible solutions and recommendations for the growing need for maintaining and creation of public open space. These items include:

- The creation of coalitions to evaluate, plan and advocate for open space preservation and recreation development.
- Development of sound strategies for plan implementation.
- Encourage local concern and investment in preservation of outdoor opportunities.
- The creation of a network of greenways-linear open spaces containing trails and wildlife corridors linking existing open areas. It is recommended that these greenways can be developed on river and stream corridors, railroad lines and utility right-of-ways.
RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY

The Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTTC) is a national organization that is actively advocating and facilitating the conversion of abandoned railroads into multi-purpose trails. Since its inception in RTTC has been instrumental in the development of 500 rail-trail conversions in the United States.

NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE

The National Parks Service, the mission of which is to preserve natural and historic treasures for access and appreciation by all Americans, has recently undertaken the development of National Heritage Corridors. These corridors are the historic lands and structures of primarily canal lands. At present, the NPS is evaluating the possibility of recognizing the Ohio and Erie Canal Corridor as the 4th National Heritage Corridor.

The National Parks Service has joined in partnership with Rails to Trails Conservancy to encourage a nation wide network of linear parks in the form of trails, greenways or corridors as the next national park system.

INTERMODAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY ACT (ISTEA)

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act is the latest re-authorization of the Surface Transportation Act which provides for the planning, development and operation of the nations transportation infrastructure. In a major re-emphasis, ISTEA provides funding that encourages the interaction of mass transit, pedestrianism and bicycling with other modes. These monies are a very viable source of 80% federal funding for the development of bikeways, bikelanes and trails that serve as pedestrian transportation routes.
REGIONAL INITIATIVES

The nationwide movement to create greenways and human powered transportation corridors is composed of a web of regional initiatives. These initiatives all begin with existing trail facilities and look to ways to expand and link them into an all encompassing network.

Among those that come to bear on the planning in Portage County are the Ohio Rails to Trails plans, Ohio and Erie Canal Corridor, the Ohio to Erie trail, and the Akron Metropolitan Regional Bikeway.

OHIO RAILS TO TRAILS

Figure 2 indicates a existing railway right-of-way that have been converted into bike/hike trails, as well as present initiatives to develop such trails in Northeast Ohio. Included in these initiatives is a growing interest in conversion of the soon to be abandoned Corrail "Freedom Secondary" into a multi-purpose trail for recreation and transportation use. Such a trail would be a vital east-west connector to the northeast Ohio web.

A part of this freedom secondary was a component of this master plan, and so was evaluated in some detail in the course of our work. This section is discussed in detail in another section of this report.
OHIO AND ERIE CANAL CORRIDOR

The Ohio and Erie Canal, built from 1825 to 1837, was a major impetus for the agricultural and industrial development of Northeastern Ohio. It connected Lake Erie to the Ohio River, opening up the new state for interstate commerce. Now, 170 years after its completion, a coalition of groups is evaluating the potential of developing a greenway along the canal from Cleveland to Zoar. This proposed greenway is being considered as a National Heritage Corridor. (See figure 3)

As a spur canal that joined the Ohio and Erie Canal at Akron, the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal played an important role in the early nineteenth century development of Summit and Portage County. One of the critical aspects of our master plan was the tracing of the bed of the P & O as it moves through the 20th century landscape of Franklin Township, Portage County.

FIGURE 3
OHIO CANAL SYSTEM
1925-1913

Ohio's 108-mile network of navigable canals, constructed between 1825 and 1847, provided a system of economical transportation where none had previously existed. The young state with its isolated frontier economy was transformed almost overnight. The canals opened many markets for its agricultural and industrial products, and attracted thousands of immigrants to the state. Today only a few of the deep excavations, the high earthen embankments and the massive structures of timber and cut stone are left to remind us of our debt to those who built Ohio's first transportation system.
OHIO TO ERIE TRAIL

The Ohio to Erie Trail (Figure 4) is a proposed 320 mile long off-road trail that will cross Ohio from Cincinnati through Columbus to Cleveland. This proposed trail, which would incorporate the proposed Ohio and Erie Canal greenway, is intended to provide the following uses: backpacking, bicycling, bird watching, horseback riding, snowmobiling, skiing, walking, wheelchair touring and exploring.

FIGURE 4
OHIO TO ERIE TRAIL

AKRON METROPOLITAN BIKEWAY

Closer to home, 23 miles of bike/hike trail exist as part of the Akron Metroparks system (Figure 5). These trails which connect Kent and Stow to Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area as well as to Cleveland, are a popular recreational amenity. As both Legs of the bike/hike trails end at the Portage County Line, a critical component of this master plan is to evaluate potential ways of connecting with these existing trails.

FIGURE 5
AKRON METROPOLITAN BIKEWAY
LOCAL LINKAGES

In the light of national and regional developments, the need for the evaluation of the long term possibilities for greenway development for Kent and its vicinity led to this master plan project. In 1990 the Kent Parks and Recreation Board adopted a policy of pursuing the possible linkages within the 3 mile limit that was within the planning jurisdiction of Kent until 1992. While a long standing goal has been the linkage of existing city wide and neighborhood parks, the emphasis of these linkages was regional in nature. These linkages are illustrated in figure 6.

In the course of this planning, we have evaluated the potential for linking both existing and proposed public open spaces with trails. As a part of this effort, a schematic regional trail system for Western Portage county has come to the fore (Figure 7). This plan is essentially an enhancement of the A.M.A.T.S. Regional Bikeway Plan of 1980. The schematic regional trail plan indicates some preliminary possibilities of expanding the existing Metroparks off road trail system into Portage County and supplementing it with improved bike lanes and shoulders. At present, this plan is being evaluated as part of a county wide trail study being conducted by the Portage County Regional Planning Commission.

FIGURE 6
KENT AREA
OPEN SPACE LINKAGES

KEY
EXISTING OPEN SPACES
PROPOSED LINKAGES
KENT PARKS AND RECREATION

This Master Plan, undertaken by the Kent Board of Parks and Recreation, is a significant milestone in its history. This work springs from the need to plan for the long term needs of a city that has been growing in both size and population. While this plan focused primarily on park expansion and the provision of trail needs, it does contain some analysis of the physical conditions of the Riveredge Park. As the recommendation states, findings of this study need to be evaluated in light of a comprehensive needs assessment for the entire parks and recreation system.

To date, the City of Kent Parks and Recreation Department owns 14 parklands, including 3 parcels that are heretofore undeveloped (Figure 8). Among these parks are 6 which are considered city wide facilities. 4 developed parks are over 10 acres, with Fred Fuller being the largest at 56.56 acres. These parks provide for a large variety of active and passive recreation. Figure 9 is a table summarizing these facilities.

This report focuses upon the expansion of the park known as Franklin Mills Riveredge Park, which technically stretches from Brady's Leap to Fred Fuller. In the course of our evaluation, we include a look at the undeveloped and developed sections of Fred Fuller Park. Also incorporated in our discussions are "Brady's Leap" park, John Brown Tannery Park and 10 acres of undeveloped parkland east of Standing Rock cemetery.

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**FIGURE 8 (INCOMPLETE)**

INVENTORY OF PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES
CITY OF KENT, OHIO

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<tr>
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<td>Football Field</td>
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X - EXISTING
O - PROPOSED

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<th>FACILITY NAME</th>
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<td>3. Plum Creek Park</td>
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<td>4. Riveredge Park</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brady's Leap Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Jessie Smith Park</td>
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<td>7. A1 Lease Park</td>
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<td>8. Fish Creek Park</td>
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<td>9. Highland Park</td>
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<td>10. Chadwick Park</td>
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<td>11. Kent Recreational Center</td>
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<td>12. Yacovona Park</td>
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<td>13. Rhodes Road</td>
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<td>14. Athena Drive</td>
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<td>15. Riverhead</td>
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A. Kent Roosevelt High School
B. Franklin School
C. Walls School
D. Central School
E. Davey Jr High School
F. Longyear School
G. Holden School
H. Board of Education

13