

Section 4

Citizen Participation and Input

Good plans and their successful implementation depend on active, ongoing citizen participation and input. This section provides a summary of the various methods used to facilitate public involvement in Todd County’s outdoor recreational and open space planning process as well as the input that was gathered.

A. Introduction

Continuing the tradition of active, ongoing citizen participation as established in the Todd County Community Based Comprehensive Plan, this planning process employed numerous public involvement techniques and methods to gather input from the public and encourage ongoing public involvement. The primary methods used include the following:

- County Fair Booth.
- Press Conferences/Luncheons.
- Area Meetings.
- Citizen Questionnaires.
- Landowner Workshops.
- Citizens Advisory Committee.

B. County Fair

To help increase awareness about the County’s recreational planning process, a booth was organized at the Todd County Fair from July 16 – 19, 2003. The booth was organized and manned by County staff.

The purpose of the booth was to distribute information about the recreational planning process to the large number of citizens who were attending the fair. Over the four-day event, citizens were able to view a number of maps, read information, learn about planning process and the upcoming area meetings, share their thoughts and ideas for potential recreation projects, and ask questions.



Although it is difficult to get an accurate estimate of the number of people who viewed the materials at the fair booth, County staff members were pleased with the opportunity to connect with hundreds of citizens.



At the booth, a sign up list for persons wanting to get involved in the recreational planning process was provided along with a suggestion box for ideas. The following is a list of ideas that citizens suggested at the County Fair booth:

- Canoe route along the river with access points – scenic good for economy.
- Connecting trails to Lake Wobegon Trail.
- Horse trails along the Long Prairie River.
- More biking trails.
- Walking trails.
- More ATV trails – yes – many more!
- Birding trail.
- I do not believe we need more.
- Bicycle trail along 71 to Wadena.
- Canoe accesses (with parking – legal ones).
- Bike trails.
- More camping.
- Trail for biking/winter snowmobile.
- Bike trails.
- Campgrounds.
- Canoe access points on river.
- Athletic parks with tennis/cross-country ski trails.
- Horse trails.
- Horse trails are necessary.



C. Press Conference/Luncheons

On four occasions, County staff and the County’s planning consultant gave presentations on the recreational opportunities planning process at press conference/luncheons sponsored by the Todd County Development Corporation (TCDC). These luncheons provided a useful and effective way to increase communications with the public through the local media. In the future, these luncheons held on a periodic basis could help continue the distribution of information about recreational opportunities as well as the ways in which the County and its departments are serving their citizens.

D. Area Meetings

Five public area meetings were held in August of 2003 to gather input from citizens for the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan. In total, approximately 100 people attended the five meetings. The following is a list of the dates, times and locations of each the five meetings:

- Area Meeting # 1 – Thursday, August 7, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. – Bertha Community Center.
- Area Meeting # 2 – Friday, August 8, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. – Osakis Bar & Grill.
- Area Meeting # 3 – Saturday, August 9, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. – Grey Eagle – The Hub.
- Area Meeting # 4 – Thursday, August 14, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. – Long Prairie – Pier 71.
- Area Meeting # 5 – Friday, August 15, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. – Sylvan Shores.

Purpose of the Area Meetings

In order to provide greater opportunities for citizens to share their views, thoughts and concerns early in the process, five “Area Meetings” were held in different locations throughout the County. With the County covering almost 1,000 square miles, these meetings in various locations provided citizens greater opportunities to attend a meeting by reducing their travel time. Holding multiple meetings also helped for those people to attend another meeting, if a given meeting did not fit their schedule.

The input gathered from the public at the five area meetings was intended to be one of the sources of information for the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to consider as they developed and refined the draft Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan.

Organization and Format of the Area Meetings

One of the decisions in organizing the Area Meetings made by members of the Project Management Team (PMT) was that a meeting should be held in each of the five commissioner districts in the County. This was done in order to create a fair geographic distribution of the meetings. It also helped to even out the number of people attending any one of the meetings. The report in **Appendix F** summarizing the area meetings provides a list of people who signed in as participants for each of the five meetings.

In preparing for the area meetings, members of the PMT with input from a group of concerned citizens selected specific meeting sites and facilities and coordinated the preparations for each meeting. All meetings were open to the public and advertised as such. Several methods of notifying the public were used. They included press releases, newspaper articles, announcement at the County Fair booth, and a meeting schedule placed on the County’s website.

A presentation was made at the beginning of each meeting by the County’s planning consultant. The presentation provided the meeting participants with an overview of outdoor recreational and open space planning process; background information on the different types of parks, open space and trails; a review of the maps prepared by the County that inventoried existing park and recreation facilities in the County; and a review of the preliminary schedule for the planning process.

The presentation was followed by a questions and answers session. It should be noted that this session took the majority of the time for each of the five area meetings. Following the question and answer session, meeting participants were asked to complete a questionnaire as well as a worksheet with four questions designed to guide small group discussions by meeting participants.



As intended, the area meetings generated a large number of ideas, suggestions, issues and concerns. And as could be expected, there were some in depth and intensive conversations that took place at the five area meetings. Only through thorough discussion and reflection of the ideas and issues is it possible to start developing a common framework to guide the development of future public and private recreation and open space opportunities in the County. The Area Meetings Summary Report in **Appendix F** provides the comments received from the questions and answer session as well as the small group discussions from the five area meetings.

Some of the key issues that were generated at the area meetings, in which the CAC and County Board should consider not only in the planning process but in implementation, include the following:

- Protect private property rights.
- Consider project costs, explore opportunities for outside funding.
- Look at the effects on taxes.
- Maintenance.
- Liability.
- Protect natural resources.
- Consider the importance of improving and maintaining the quality of life in our communities and the role that recreation has in this.

A suggested approach from one of the citizens attending the area meetings was to focus on enhancing what we already have in terms of recreational opportunities.

One of the many insightful comments made by citizens at the area meetings suggested the following: “Enjoy life and have as much fun as you can, but do not do it at the expense of other people.”

E. Citizen Questionnaire

A citizen questionnaire was developed as yet another method of gathering input from the public for the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan. The Questionnaire Summary Report in **Appendix F** describes the results from the returned questionnaires.

Purpose of the Questionnaire

The purpose of the citizens' questionnaire was two-fold. First, the questionnaire was designed to provide citizens an opportunity to give input on an individual basis on what recreational opportunities they would like to see develop in the County in the future. The second purpose for the questionnaire was to stimulate interest by the public in the recreational planning process.

Design of the Questionnaire

The County's planning consultant prepared the initial draft of the questionnaire. It was reviewed and refined by the Project Management Team (PMT) and several members of the Drumlin Hills Coalition at meetings in July of 2003.

The PMT suggested that other recreational opinion questionnaires developed by counties in the region including Benton, Stearns and Morrison counties be reviewed for the content and direction developed in their surveys. The final questionnaire document was based on comments from the PMT and coalition members.

The questionnaire included questions covering the following five areas:

1. Respondent Information
2. Public Park and Trails
3. Open Space
4. Funding and Maintenance
5. Additional Comments

Distribution

With over 24,000 people residing in the County and thousands of visitors traveling to the County each year, it would not be possible to survey the entire population. Due to the limited budget and staff resources for the project, it was decided that the approach to distributing the questionnaire was to hand it out to all persons attending the five area meetings.

Results

A total of 65 questionnaires were returned to the County. Attached to the end of this report as Appendix B are the tabulated or compiled responses. It should be noted that not all respondents completed all questions on their questionnaires. As a result, the compiled responses for each question often do not total up to 65 responses. For example, only 49

people indicated their gender on the questionnaire forms. Further, a similar situation existed for those questions requiring multiple selections.

The following provides a short narrative or summary based on the complied responses from the questionnaire for each of the five sections:

Respondent Information

- Age. Three-fourths (48 of 64) of the respondents were in the age group “20 to 65”. Fifteen persons (23 percent) were “over age 65” and only one person (1 percent) was “under 20” in this respondent group.
- Gender. Two-thirds of the respondents were male and one-third were female.
- Primary Residence and Type. The cities of Long Prairie and Osakis (10 each) had the largest number of respondents as having these communities for their primary residence. Bruce, Little Elk and Little Sauk townships had the highest responses at the township level. It should be noted that some people indicated more than one community as their primary residence. Over 85 percent of the respondents indicated that they were permanent residents of the County.
- Occupation. The “retired” category received the largest response with 20 of the 52 responses with farmers (7), education (4), and housewives (3) as the next highest responses.

Public Park and Trails

- Adequate Opportunities and Facilities. There was an even response of yes (28) and no (28) to this question by the respondents.
- Use of Public Recreational Facilities. “Annually” (17) and “weekly” (16) had the greatest response to the question on the current use of public recreational facilities. “Less than annually” had 10 responses, “monthly” had 12 and “never” had 6 responses.
- Types of Recreational Activities. There was a wide range of recreational activities that respondents selected that they felt should be provided in the County on Question 8. Two water related activities, boat access/landings and swimming beaches had the greatest response rate with 33 and 29 responses respectively. Collectively, the trails and waterways (bicycle, hiking, cross country skiing, snowmobile, canoes, equestrian and mountain biking) had a total of 124 responses.
- Most Important Activities. The three recreational activities receiving selected as the most important were 1) wildlife habitat areas, 2) swimming beaches, and 3) picnic sites. A total of twenty other activities were selected also representing a broad range of desired activities interests by respondents.
- County Role. On Question 10 which asked what facilities should be provided by the County, the “none” category received the highest response with 14, bike trails had 11 responses, boat access and waterways had 6. There were numerous other facilities selected.
- Additional Facilities. 35 of the 49 respondents indicated that they would not use public parks and trails more often if additional facilities were provided and 24

indicated that they would use the facilities more often. Restrooms and trails were the most frequently suggested facilities.

Open Space

- **Preserve and Protect Open Space.** Of the 57 people responding to this question, 40 persons or 70 percent indicated that they thought that the County should work to protect and preserve specific areas as open space. There were over 20 different types of areas that should be protected including wetlands, forestland, agricultural lands, natural areas, lakeshores and yards.
- **County Role.** Respondents offered a number of roles for the County to take on open space component including protect landowner rights, communications with landowners, leadership/coordination, lead the planning process, and let landowners take care of their lands (Question 15).
- **Additional Information.** There were 22 persons who would like more information on ways to protect open space and 25 people that did not want to learn more about open space. Some of the topics identified by the respondents included options to set aside, how to designate open space, land management, conservation easements, cost share, and fish habitat.

Funding and Maintenance

- **Property Taxes.** When asked if they would support an increase in property taxes to fund public recreational projects in the County, 26 persons said yes and 29 people responded no.
- **Amount of Increase.** Of the persons saying yes, the following was the tabulated response:
 - 10 persons selected the \$10 to \$25 category.
 - 9 persons selected \$5 to \$10.
 - 5 persons selected \$25 to \$100.
 - 1 person selected \$1 to \$5.
- **Donation/Contributions.** Of the 55 persons responding to Question 20, 24 persons indicated that they would be willing to contribute time or money to build and maintain public recreational facilities. Thirty (30) people indicated they would not be interested. The types of projects that persons who responded yes to this question identified 19 projects such as office help, trail development, habitat projects, etc.
- **User Fees.** Of the 59 responses made, 40 people supported user fees and 18 did not. Some of the areas where respondents felt user fees could be used included parks, campgrounds, canoe and boat access, and wildlife observation areas. Several others were also identified.
- **Other Financial Resources.** Respondents to this question listed out ten additional sources for public recreation including local businesses, civic organizations, tax forfeit land sales, tourism, and others.

Additional Comments

The following is a list of the additional comments that were made by respondents:

- “I question if people really want this as such a high priority.”
- “Need to focus on what types of facilities or types of recreation.”
- “I don’t think we need any public areas. It would not, I feel, get used enough.”
- “Don’t want any of this to go through if I can help it.”
- “Nothing should be started that can’t be maintained and managed for twenty years without tax dollars.”
- “No eminent domain to obtain properties for any parks, trails, etc..”
- “Todd County is way behind in outdoor public recreation and outdoor public areas.”
- “Parks and trails only put more pressure on our existing resources and there is already enough pressure on these resources now.”
- “Sell stickers to use ATV trails or have ATV businesses donate or add on ATV sell price for trails.”
- “Live here because I choose to – I’m not here to give recreational opportunities to everyone else from the cities.”
- “With the schools and law enforcement in the county in financial trouble we should be trying to help them out not trying to spend money on something we don’t need!”
- “We can’t maintain the parks we have now. What makes us think that we can or should take on another project that won’t get used enough to substantiate doing this.”
- “We live where snowmobilers use road right of ways and many go on our property. Some, or many – go so fast. They fly over our paved driveway. Some land on edge and have ruined our driveway. It would be fine to go over our driveway – but go **slow**. We never know when we drive out. If a snowmobile or 3 wheeler will fly by just before us. This needs attention.”
- “No parks, No trails.”
- “Don’t try to take away our landowner rights.”
- “Good luck! Let’s work together.”
- “This could be a bicycling haven; flat roads, some rolling slopes, great sunsets, long horizons – This is a great opportunity for marketing the area.”
- “I don’t want to see property taxes supporting an elaborate public infrastructure like in the Cities. Those levels of financial support are unsustainable for some of us. (But high use fees make recreation areas inaccessible for some of us). No ATV trails! I question how much the county can afford to do when they will be cutting back on library hours. Private landowners should be respected. ATV trail land can be purchased, but adjacent landowners would be ticked off (loud like the jet skis on lakes.)”

Summary of the Questionnaire Results

Although the distribution of the questionnaire at the area meetings resulted in a small sampling of citizens and visitors in the County, the tabulated results did provide useful insights for the Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC) to consider as they developed the

recommended goals and policy framework for the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was not intended to be the single or primary decision-making tool for whether or not parks, trails or open space should be developed and/or expanded in the County. Rather, the questionnaire was designed to collect a range of viewpoints from citizens on each recreational element or system and to help set some initial directions for the CAC to consider in their efforts to develop the Parks, Open Space and Trail Plan. The following points summarize the questionnaire results:

- There is a strong interest in protecting open space or important natural areas and maintaining the rural character of the County.
- The responding citizens viewed the three recreational systems – parks, open space, and trails – differently in terms of support or opposition, role of the County and other public entities, how each system should be developed and paid for, and maintenance.
- While there were people who expressed strong concerns about not wanting any more parks and trails, there were also people who wanted to see more public parks and trails in the County. There was an equal response to the yes/no question regarding enough opportunities and facilities for public recreation in the County. Written comments made by responding citizens generally reflected the viewpoint against more parks and trails. Enhancing the existing system of parks was one commonly suggested approach for the County to consider.
- When support for the various types of trails are added together as in Questions 8, 9, 10 and 12, there was a relatively large amount of support for trails.

In summary, the results from the questionnaire demonstrate that citizens have a fairly wide range of viewpoints on the future needs and opportunities for parks, trails and open space in the County. Citizens are concerned about private property rights and with respect to any recreation project – public or private – and the County and local officials should thoroughly consider and address these concerns. In addition, citizens also want to see public funds used wisely. The ongoing budget dilemmas at the state and local levels amplify this concern. And lastly, it will be important for the CAC and other local officials to understand the concerns and issues facing recreational facilities in the County and consider a range of options before moving forward on projects.

Perhaps the most important comment made on one of the returned questionnaires was the following:

“Let’s work together.”

F. Landowner Workshops

In 2004, two landowner workshops were convened as a part of the planning process for the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan. The overall purpose of these workshops was to provide landowners in Todd County with useful information on ways to help them maintain and enhance opens space on their property and to create recreational opportunities that they and their families and friends can enjoy.

There are many ways that open space and natural resources can be managed and protected on privately owned lands. Further, each landowner has a different or unique set of circumstances that affects how they use and manage open space and natural resources on their property. Given the variety of interests and complexities involved, the County incorporated the workshops as an educational component into its outdoor recreation and open space planning process. The specific outcomes for the two workshops included the following:

- Define what is open space and why open space is important to people.
- Discuss some of the major economic, environmental, and legal perspectives facing the management of land use, open space, recreation, and natural resources.
- Share information about the agencies, businesses, and organizations that work with landowners to help conserve, enhance, protect and/or restore natural resource features and open space areas.

Todd County received a national honor with a grant from the Kodak American Greenway Awards Program from Arlington, Virginia. The Kodak Award, administered by the Conservation Fund, provides small grants to non-profit organizations and local units of government to help develop new action oriented open space and greenway projects by providing seed money to spark creativity in conservation, outdoor recreation, trail and greenway planning and development.

In addition to the grant from the Eastman Kodak Company, other sponsors of the workshops included the Blandin Foundation, Initiative Foundation, and the Drumlin Hills Coalition.

“With so much of the land in the County being privately owned, it only makes sense for us all to work together to find ways to help landowners maintain and enhance their own lands while creating recreational opportunities for their benefit. We have put a lot of effort into trying to help the landowners through the County’s recreation planning process. The landowner workshops are one of first major efforts to implement the outreach component of the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan.”

Alex Weego
Executive Director
TCDC

The focus of the two workshops is noted below followed by a brief description of each:

- Workshop 1 – “Open Space: What is it and why is it important?”
- Workshop 2 – “Protecting and Enhancing Opens Space: What are the options? How to do it?”

Landowner Workshop 1

The first workshop was held at the Browerville High School on March 20, 2004. After the welcoming remarks and an overview of the County’s outdoor recreational and open space planning process, there were three presentations on the management of land use, open space and natural resources.

Guest speakers included Professor Brian Ohm, land use law expert on private property rights; Mike Lee, an ecologist from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources with an overview of the natural resources in the County; and Chuck Pelzer, the Todd County Assessor, giving an overview of the property tax system.

In addition to the presentations, several organizations and agencies that work with landowners and local units of government to protect and enhance natural resources in Todd County were represented at the workshop. These organizations set up display tables and distributed brochures and information handouts to the workshop attendees.

Some of the local organizations and agencies that participated as exhibitors and service providers included the Drumlin Hills Coalition, Todd Area Trails Snowmobile Association, Todd County SWCD, and the Sauk River Watershed District.

In addition, there were several state level organizations and agencies with staff and/or displays at this workshop including the Minnesota Land Trust, University of Minnesota Extension Service, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Minnesota Forest Resources Council, and the Department of Natural Resources.



Landowner Workshop 2

The second landowner workshop was held at the Long Prairie High School on October 2, 2004. Opening remarks from the Executive Director of the TCDC and a presentation on the outdoor recreation and open space planning process started off the workshop.

Following these introductory items, there were twelve different sessions covering a broad range of topics from wildlife habitat improvement, shoreland landscaping, enforcement of conservation and trespassing laws, forestry management, trail design, land use planning, and cost share programs. The sessions were held in one of three tracks within a concurrent session format. This allowed participants an opportunity to attend the types of sessions that met their interests.



Ryan Bronson, Hunter Recruitment and Retention Coordinator from the MN DNR gave a presentation on whitetail deer management as a keynote speaker. In his presentation, he addressed many of the benefits and issues relating to managing whitetail deer in the state as well as opportunities for landowners and hunters to participate in new resource management efforts such as Quality Deer Management (QDM).

Exhibitors at the second workshop included recreation and land management businesses, private contractors, sportsmen organizations, and agencies from the region. They set up displays and distributed literature that described the services and products they provide to landowners. For example, the local chapter of Pheasants Forever provided a large display, which presented some of the habitat projects that the organization had completed in Todd County. Two native prairie landscaping companies were represented at the workshop along with numerous public agencies that provide landowners with technical and financial assistance including the MN DNR Shoreland Habitat Program.

The Todd Area Trails Snowmobile Association and the participating landowners were awarded a certificate of appreciation from the TCDC recognizing their commitment to managing the extensive network of trails in the County. The trail system extends more than 450 miles throughout the County and has over 470 landowners providing access for the trail system to operate.



Participants Evaluation of the Landowner Workshops

An evaluation form was distributed to all participants at both workshops. Of the 31 forms returned, not one indicated that the workshops were not helpful. Rather, many people expressed the desire to have more opportunities to attend additional sessions while many others wanted to see more landowners attend the workshops and get involved.

Workshop participants enjoyed the broad range of topics that were presented. They found that the speakers were knowledgeable, well prepared, and gave great presentations. One person noted that the quantity and quality of handouts for landowners were outstanding and found them to be very valuable resources as a landowner in Todd County.

The workshops were not meant to be a public hearing or a forum to make governmental decisions. Rather the workshops were designed to help inform landowners and local officials alike, so that when faced with major decisions on recreational activities, land use or natural resource management, they will be able to make more informed decisions.

In summary, the workshops focused on helping to identify and share what resources are available to help landowners protect open spaces and natural resources on private lands. With much of the land in the County being privately owned, this is a critical component to protecting not only the natural resources but also to help increase recreational opportunities while maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Todd County.

What People Said About the Workshops

- *Good, very good.*
- *Lots of good materials and information.*
- *Very helpful.*
- *Very good that the public school could be used for this day's program.*
- *Well done, a lot of valuable information provided.*
- *Wish I'd been able to attend more of the sessions offered.*
- *We need more people attending these workshops.*
- *My thanks to the sponsors of today's seminar.*
- *An afternoon well spent!!!*

Other Workshops and Events

During the planning process, there were several workshops held on various rural land management and open space protection topics. One event was held on October 11, 2003, at St. John's Arboretum. The workshop was sponsored by several organizations involved with forestry management and land conservation. Flyers and information on the workshop were distributed to local officials. The County's planning consultant also worked with the Headwater Forestry Cooperative and the University of Minnesota Extension Service to support up to six workshops on open space, recreation, and related land and natural resource management topics.

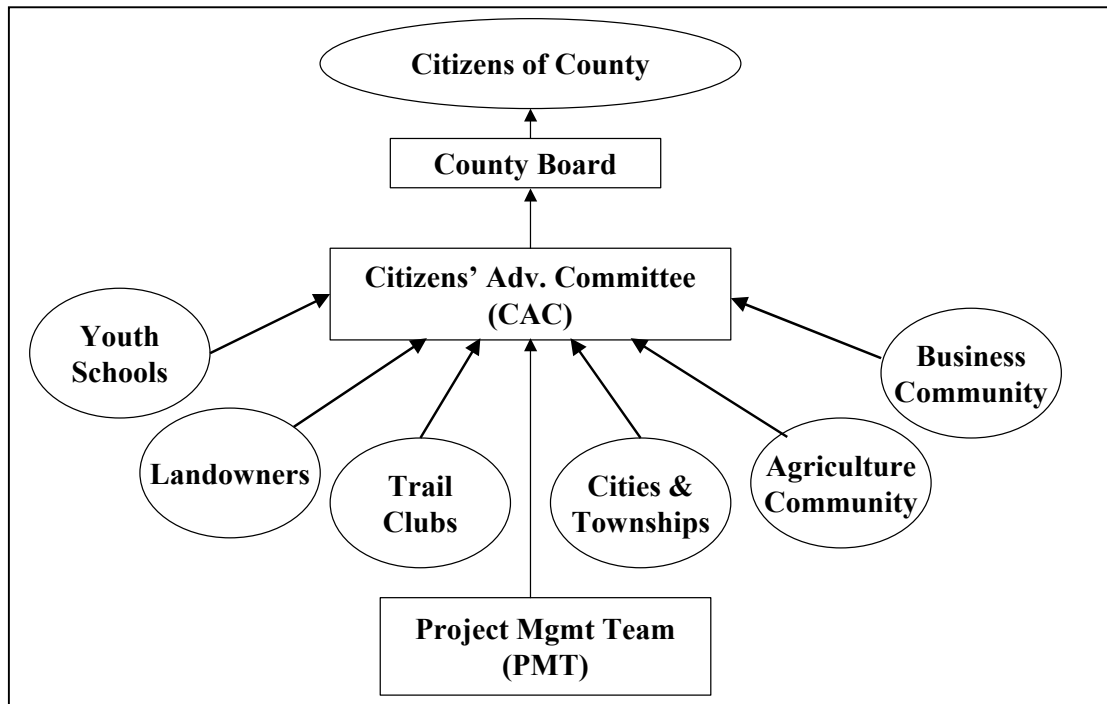
G. Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC)

To guide and oversee the development of the Todd County Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan, an advisory committee was created. The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was the key ongoing citizen involvement component throughout the development of the County’s Plan. The CAC was established to ensure that the planning process maintained a local focus and to provide a local knowledge base on recreational opportunities and issues in the County.

To establish the CAC, the County worked through several approaches to ensure diverse membership and representation. County staff sent letters to all 28 townships requesting that they provide the County with names of persons they thought would be good representatives to serve on the Committee. A similar letter was sent to the 11 cities in the County requesting their nominations. The County’s planning consultant also met with Todd County City Clerks Association to follow up on the request to the cities. Contacts were also made with numerous recreation groups active in the County. A fourth approach was the sign up list provided at the County Fair booth. Local newspapers provided a fifth method as a follow up to the presentations made in the press conferences.

Members on the CAC represented a wide range of interests and concerns relating to recreation. The figure below illustrates the general composition of the CAC and its relationship to the various stakeholder groups and the County Board. **Appendix A** lists the individuals on the CAC and the groups and organizations that they represented.

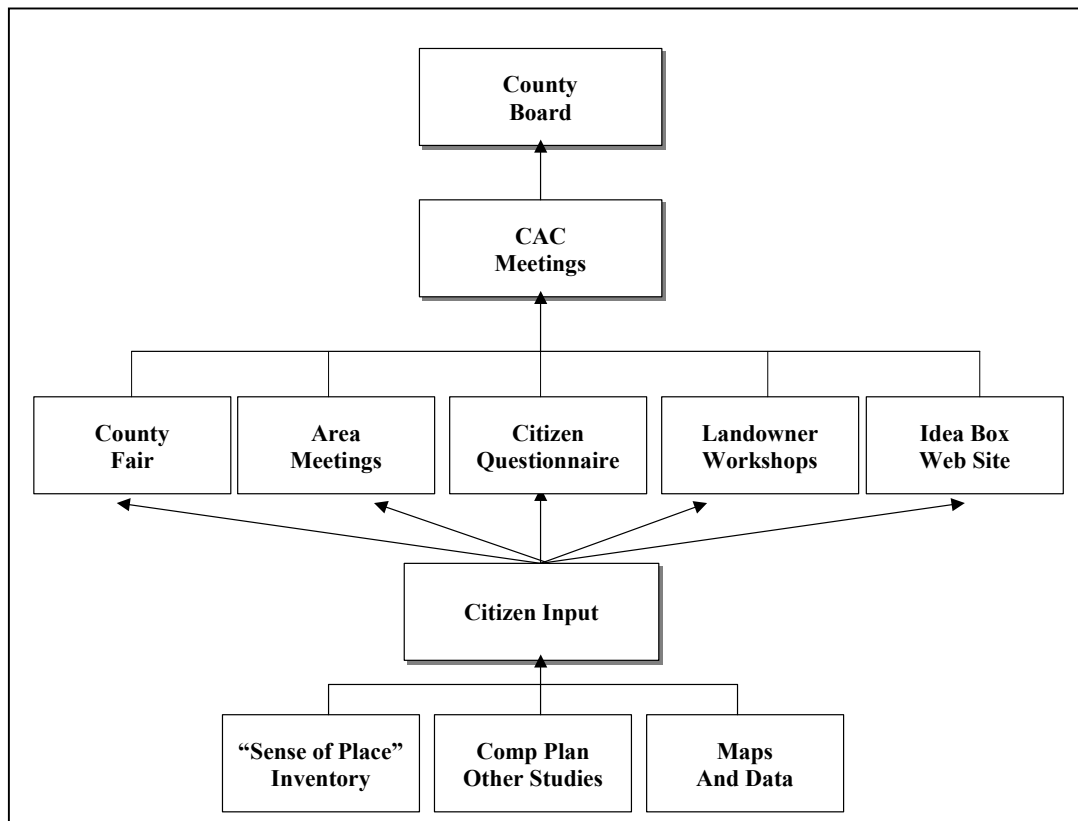
**Figure 13
Recreational Planning Process Organization Chart**



The CAC met on eleven occasions to review and discuss what should go into this Plan. One of the primary tasks for the Committee was to review input from citizens. Citizen input gathered for the County’s recreational planning process was presented to the members of the CAC at their meetings.

Based on ideas, suggestions, comments and concerns from citizens, the CAC refined and prioritized a list of issues and assets regarding recreation opportunities in the County. From this priority setting process, the Committee then formulated a series of guiding principles, mission and vision statements and a series of goals, objectives and action items. Through this approach, input obtained from citizens through the recreational planning process has become a foundation for development of this Plan including the policy framework established in Volume 2 and the discussion on how to implement the Plan described in Volume 3. The figure below illustrates how the citizen input was incorporated into the planning process.

Figure 14
Use of Citizen Input in the Recreational Planning Process



(This page has been left intentionally blank)