

Memorandum



Date: October 14, 2026
To: Buchanan Area Recreation Board
From: Tony McGhee
Subject: Parks Programming Discussion

Background

The community has a history of partnering with other community organizations to provide summer programming for children in Buchanan's parks. Years ago, the City worked with Buchanan Community Schools and Clark Equipment on a program that brought activities directly into neighborhood parks during the summer.

While the community and the organizations serving it have changed since then, the basic concept may still worth revisiting. Rather than one organization trying to develop and operate an entire summer recreation program on its own, several community partners could bring their individual resources, staff, volunteers, and areas of expertise together to create a broader program.

Under this approach, the City's role would not be to develop, staff, or operate the activities. The City would make its parks available and ensure they are ready for use by participating organizations. The City would also coordinate the overall schedule and promote the programming through its website, social media outlets, and other communication channels. The partner organizations would be responsible for developing and providing the actual activities.

The purpose of this discussion is to determine whether the Buchanan Area Recreation Board has an interest in helping bring potential partners together to explore what summer park programming could look like in 2027. This would not commit BARB or the City to a specific program or level of funding. It would simply begin the conversation early enough to determine what interest, programming, and resources already exist within the community.

Benefits of Summer Park Programming

Summer park programming provides children with safe, structured, and affordable opportunities to remain active and connected while school is not in session. Programs

could include physical recreation, art, reading, educational activities, nature programs, games, and other activities that allow children to learn and interact in a less formal environment.

Providing activities in neighborhood parks also makes programming more accessible to families who may not have transportation or the financial ability to participate in traditional summer camps. Bringing programs directly into neighborhoods can help reach children who might otherwise have limited access to organized activities during the summer. Beyond the immediate benefit to participating children, summer programming can:

- Encourage physical activity and healthy habits;
- Support reading, creativity, and continued learning during the summer;
- Help children build friendships and social skills;
- Connect children with trusted adults and community organizations;
- Give families access to free or low-cost activities close to home;
- Introduce residents to parks and recreational assets they may not otherwise use;
- Build a greater sense of ownership and pride in neighborhood parks; and
- Strengthen relationships among the organizations serving Buchanan's children and families.

The City has invested significantly in its parks and recreation system over the past few years. Programming provides an opportunity to build on those physical investments by giving children and families more reasons to use the parks regularly.

Potential Initial Partners

Potential organizations to include in an initial discussion could include:

- **Roti Roti Art Center** – Art instruction, crafts, public art, and other creative activities.
- **Buchanan Community Schools** – Educational programming, outreach to students and families, and potential coordination with existing summer activities.
- **Buchanan District Library** – Reading programs, storytelling, literacy activities, and science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics programming.
- **Boys & Girls Club** – Youth development, organized recreation, mentoring, and structured activities.
- **City of Buchanan and BARB** – Making the parks available and ready for use, coordinating the calendar, promoting the activities, and helping bring the participating organizations together.

- **Michigan Gateway Community Foundation** – Potential program funder and convenor of other funding entities
- **Other community organizations** – Local nonprofits, churches, service clubs, athletic groups, public-safety departments, healthcare organizations, businesses, and residents interested in supporting youth activities.

The goal would not be for every organization to participate in every activity. Each partner could identify what it already does well and determine whether that programming could be offered in a park setting as part of a coordinated summer schedule.

Potential Approach

If there is interest, the first step would be to hold a roundtable meeting with potential partners before the end of the year. The meeting would focus on what programming already exists, what each organization may be willing to provide, the age groups that should be served, and the practical needs associated with offering activities in the parks.

A 2027 program could begin as a manageable pilot rather than attempting to build a full summer recreation program in the first year. One potential model would be to offer activities one or two days per week over a six- to eight-week period, with programming rotating among selected parks. Activities could be organized around themes such as art, reading, sports, nature, public safety, and community history.

Participating organizations would be responsible for developing and leading their activities, providing the necessary staff or volunteers, and supplying the materials needed for their programs. The City would coordinate dates and locations, prepare the parks for scheduled use, and promote a unified calendar so families could easily see what activities were available throughout the summer.

As the concept develops, the partners would need to work through staffing and volunteer requirements, background checks, insurance, weather policies, restrooms, supplies, accessibility, registration, parental permissions, and any funding needs. Beginning the discussion now would provide enough time to address these items before the summer of 2027.

Discussion

Staff is asking BARB to discuss whether it has an interest in helping convene a meeting of potential community partners to explore summer park programming for 2027.

If the Board is supportive, staff would begin reaching out to the Roti Roti Art Center, Buchanan Community Schools, Buchanan District Library, the Boys & Girls Club, and other community organizations to schedule an initial planning meeting. Information from that meeting would then be brought back to BARB for further discussion before any final program or funding commitment is made.

This could be a good opportunity to build on Buchanan's history of community partnerships while creating additional opportunities for children and families to use and enjoy the investments being made in the community's parks. It would also allow the City to support summer recreation without taking on the staffing and operational responsibilities of running the individual programs.