

4.5 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

Community facilities encompass a wide array of amenities and services in an area, some of which include educational facilities (both public and private), police and fire protection, and religious institutions. Utilities refer to items such as sewer, stormwater collection, water, electric and natural gas infrastructure. This section contains information pertaining to implementation recommendations for these facilities and utilities that are found within the study area.

4.5.1 Recreation

Recreation areas refer to parks, open space and pay-to-play facilities that play a vital social and economic role in the viability and health of a community. They provide necessary space for gathering, interaction, and recreational activities, which helps shape the identity of a neighborhood. Several ideas are proposed to enhance and ensure the ongoing upkeep of existing parks and to implement new recreation facilities where appropriate. Subsequent subsections of this chapter provide greater detail about improvements to recreation in Latonia.



Figure 4.5.1: Twin Oaks Golf & Plantation Club

Short Term 0-5 Years

Urban Park System

There are 11 recreational facilities within the study area established under public, private and public/private partnerships. The upkeep and maintenance of existing facilities along with identifying opportunities for new parks within

the study area will assist in the establishment of a Latonia Park System.

According to an article published by The Urban Institute titled *Beyond Recreation: A Broader View of Urban Parks*, a new more expansive view of urban parks has been recently emerged. The article describes that the traditional value of parks is that they are places of recreation as well as visual assets to communities. This article focuses on how policy-makers, practitioners, and the public can begin to think about parks as valuable contributors to larger urban policy objectives, such as job opportunities, youth development, public health, and community building. Comments made by the task force and the attendees at the first public meeting indicate a general concern about the future of Latonia in terms of attracting and retaining desired population. The provision and upkeep of a Latonia park system would assist with this desired outcome.

Several comments were made at the first public meeting regarding recreational opportunities. The comments ranged from wanting better maintenance of existing parks to the need for new pocket parks within the neighborhood. According to the market study, the population of Latonia in 2013 is projected to consist of approximately 32 percent of households with children. This emphasizes the need to identify active recreational opportunities in the area. By 2013 Latonia is expected to consist of roughly 68 percent of households without children. The population contained within these households, will likely desire different recreational activities than those oriented toward children's use. Passive recreation opportunities such as greenways (which can accommodate trails), plazas within the redevelopment areas, or new pocket parks in the neighborhood are likely amenities to be desired and enjoyed by most population segments including the elderly and individuals without children.

Maintenance

During the first public meeting, concerns were expressed about the maintenance of existing parks within the study area. The City makes every effort to maintain its parks; however, due to budget constraints it is essential that neighborhood associations and other park interest groups interested in parks may be needed to assist the City with maintenance needs. This could be accomplished during organized volunteer days and could be accomplished with guidance and in coordination with the City's Recreation Department.

Potential

There may be a potential for additional mini- or neighborhood parks or even community gardens within the study area as housing is razed or additional vacant land becomes available. Having an established urban park system in Latonia, a strong foundation for which is already in place, would assist in marketing Latonia to a wide variety of potential homebuyers and businesses.

Apart from the larger recreational facilities like Bill Cappel Youth Sports Complex or even facilities such as Victory Avenue Covington Field, there are only three tot lots with play equipment within the study area. Smaller parks such as these and larger recreational facilities need to be supplemented by new facilities in order to best service the needs of the Latonia community. Based on the current population of Latonia national park standards indicate the following:

Mini Parks - A mini-park is approximately 1 acre in size and serves an area 1/8 to 1/2 mile in radius. Mini-parks typically include amenities such as playgrounds, small multi-use areas, and benches. While mini parks are most often provided in association with school facilities, they should also be provided as needed in high density neighborhoods where children do not necessarily have adequate yard space. Typically a mini-park serves 1,000 people for every 1/2 acre.

The population of the Latonia study area is approximately 4,700. Per the standards, the area should be served by at least 4.7 acres of mini parks. Based on current area in mini-park approximately two acres or two mini-parks are needed. Currently there are three tot lots that are located west of Winston Avenue providing a total acreage of approximately three acres. The neighborhood east of Winston Avenue does not have any tot lots but has the larger recreational fields. Three sites have been identified with the potential to be transformed into mini-parks:

The City of Covington impound lot located at the Bill Cappel Sports Complex just south of E. 43rd Street is a potential location for a mini-park. The City has indicated a desire to relocate this impound lot and this space may be improved with playground equipment and benches to better serve the needs of the population in the vicinity of the Sports Complex. The Task Force suggested using the impound lot to add future facilities such as sand volleyball courts to the sports complex. Facilities like these could likely be constructed with little sub-surface modification, thus lessening the need for environmental mitigation.



Figure 4.5.2: Police Impound Lot

The fairly level, but deeply wooded, land just south of East 34th Street known as the Latonia Depot, has potential to partially serve as a mini-park. The site in question is comprised of approximately 15 acres and access to usable land could be challenging. Topographic constraints

on the periphery of the land and the location of the railroad present access issues that would need to be designed around. A small portion of this land could be reserved for a mini-park and installation of playground equipment could help fulfill the mini-park needs of the neighborhood. Due to its close proximity to the Licking River this land could also be improved as a park in combination with access to the river.



Figure 4.5.3: Latonia Depot Area

In addition to the two locations mentioned above, a third potential location for a mini-park is the vacant Marathon gas station located at the corner of Decoursey Pike and 32nd Street. Business and neighborhood associations in the area are already working on acquiring this site and improving it with foliage and benches in coordination with the City of Covington.

Neighborhood Parks - These parks are usually 5 to 15 acres in size and serve a radius of ½ mile to 1 mile. Common facilities include field games, playground equipment, small pools, small neighborhood center, drinking fountains, and restrooms. Typically, a neighborhood park serves 5,000 people for every 2 acres. The study area is well served by larger recreational fields and parks including the Bill Cappel Youth Sports Complex, the Eva Farris Sports Complex and the Victory Avenue Covington Field.

Additional Opportunities - In addition to the above mentioned locations there may be a

potential for additional mini- or neighborhood parks or even community gardens within the study area as housing is razed or additional vacant land becomes available. Having an established urban park system in Latonia, a strong foundation for which is already in place, would assist in marketing Latonia to a wide variety of potential homebuyers and businesses.



Figure 4.5.4: Potential Mini-Park Location

Community Pool - Significant interest was reported through various public involvement avenues for a community pool within the study area. While specific locations have not been discussed, it is important that a feasibility analysis be undertaken to determine if a community pool would be viable within the study area.

During key person interviews, it was also discovered the Covington Independent Public School system had interest in exploring the possibility of a joint venture to create a community pool. Discussions should commence shortly after the completion of this study with public and private schools, the City, and other interested parties to determine the feasibility of developing a combined community center and aquatic facility in Latonia. Ideally, the aquatic facility will be indoors so it can be utilized year round and provide the most benefit to the community. See Section 4.5.5 for further discussion of a proposed community center.

Construction of new parks

During the mid-term planning period, the actual construction of mini parks within the study area is recommended to begin. One of the properties recommended for mini-parks within the study area, the police impound yard, is already owned by the City of Covington and should be considered a prime candidate for additional recreation facilities.

Linkages to the Licking River Greenway

The Licking River Greenway Master Plan envisions a trail and greenway system along approximately 5 miles of the Licking River from its confluence with the Ohio River to I- 275. This greenway system will be a major regional amenity, which will attract jobs, visitors and potentially new residents to the area when fully realized. The Licking River Greenway Impact Analysis published by Vision 2015 in September 2010, indicates that direct effects of the initial investment will be to create between 117 and 164 jobs and add between \$12.9 and \$18.1 million to industry output in the Cincinnati MSA.

A major element of the realization of the Licking River Greenway Master Plan is to provide adequate linkages to the Licking River from neighborhoods that are immediately adjacent to the river. The entire eastern boundary of the study area is encompassed by the Licking River. Potential linkages to the river and interconnecting neighborhood parks with the greenway should be further evaluated by the strategic action committee.

Work toward implementing Licking River Greenway Master Plan is a longer term goal of this recommendation. The realization of the Licking River Greenway Master Plan as a regional amenity will be important in attracting jobs and improving home ownership within the study area. The strategic action committee

and other interest groups within the City should coordinate with the City of Covington in implementing the plan.

Sporting Events at Bill Cappel Youth Sports Complex

The approximately 63 acre complex located along the south side of 43rd Street is an area attraction hosting over 1,000 sanctioned sports contests annually. Sports leagues and tournaments held at the facility bring large numbers of visitors into the study area. This facility has the capacity and potential to attract larger regional sports events; however, these events may have historically avoided the area because of the need additional amenities such as hotels and restaurants in close proximity. Efforts should be explored to coordinate with hotels that are located outside the study area in Wilder to provide housing for events. Enhanced wayfinding efforts (section 4.6 Transportation, page 65) will help to make the complex easier to locate.

Create greenway connections between parks in the neighborhood

Ravines within the study area provide a great opportunity to create greenway connections between the various parks within the neighborhood. These areas provide good linkages because they are not likely to be built upon due to topographic constraints. Although a highly dense urban area, Latonia has a great potential to market itself with an urban park and greenway system differentiating this neighborhood from others. This requires a strong vision and an even stronger implementation strategy as coordinated efforts will likely take several years to fully implement. Comments heard through public involvement sessions established a strong community desire for outdoor recreational opportunities.

Utilization of the Licking River and Banklick Creek

The Latonia neighborhood, bounded by the Licking River and Banklick Creek boasts of some unique opportunities as identified in the Licking River Greenway Master Plan published December 2008. While these natural features could be perceived as barriers or obstacles, they have a great potential to generate interest and economic activity from people within the area as well as draw outsiders to the area. The use of stream corridors for recreation purposes has been accomplished in many different cities across the nation for economic development purposes. Providing adequate and safe public access to the river is essential in using them for recreational opportunities and to attracting economic opportunities through recreation.



Figure 4.5.5: Kayaking on Banklick Creek

4.5.2 Schools

Short Term 0-5 Years

Public and private schools are important assets within Latonia. Several recommendations such as working towards a community pool and addressing parking issues are located within various sections of this plan. These recommendations will require cooperation and/or coordination with schools to be fully realized. It is suggested that local schools play an active role in the strategic action committee to ensure that the needs of these important institutions can be met during redevelopment changes that happen well into the future (See Section 4.1).

Ongoing

One of the most important attractions of a community is to have a well regarded school system. Comments received from the survey, interviews, and from the first public meeting reflected a mixed perception and potential school related issues that may need to be addressed as the study is implemented. Schools must be viewed by the public as an asset in order to assist Latonia in attracting future residents. Improvements in the school system may also help stem increased residential vacancy trends indicated by data collected as part of the market study. A concerted effort by the school system, City government, residents, and business owners of Covington is needed to focus on improving the school system by ensuring existing strengths and new improvements are recognized in the region.

4.5.3 Utilities

Utilities refer to items such infrastructure amenities as sewer, storm sewer, water, electric and natural gas infrastructure. This section provides recommendations for changes to utilities as the plan moves forward.

Short Term 0-5 Years

Underground Utilities

Overhead utility lines can add to visual clutter and make an area appear disorderly and unattractive. Duke Energy should be approached to discuss a plan to bury the power lines as redevelopment occurs to improve the overall appearance of the community. Efforts should begin along Winston Avenue and continue into Ritte's Corner, thus strengthening the appearance of the neighborhood's core. Burying the utility lines could occur as the central commercial area redevelops. Power lines may need to be moved to make way for the redevelopment to occur, which would provide a good opportunity to bury the utility lines with cost-benefit opportunities. A before and after



Figure 4.5.6: Before and After Photo Rendering of Utility Lines Moved Underground in Ritte's Corner

rendering of how Ritte's Corner could look with underground utility lines is displayed in Figure 4.5.6 on the previous page.

Duke Energy Substation

During their key person interview, Duke Energy reported plans to remove a substation on the southern side of the railroad at Decoursey Avenue. The building's proximity to the Railway Museum of Greater Cincinnati could provide additional space for historic exhibits. However, given the building's location immediately on the railroad, this structure could prove difficult to lease or sell. Another potential use of the lot could be for parking for businesses, residents and schools in the area.



Figure 4.5.7: Duke Energy Substation

4.5.4 Safety & Emergency Services

Ongoing

As the Latonia Plaza shopping center redevelops this study anticipates additional vehicular traffic and pedestrian activity will be experienced in Latonia. To be prepared for this the City fire, police, and emergency services should be informed of the changes and consulted on the final design of the redevelopment as it begins to occur. As redevelopment efforts will be long term, these relationships will need to be ongoing to ensure that emergency service plans stay up-to-date with the changes in the phased development. For more information on phasing in the redevelopment area please see section 4.8 Latonia Plaza Redevelopment page 83.

4.5.5 Other Community Facilities

Other community facilities typically include activities and physical facilities provided by non-public or semi-public organizations that provide their services to the public. These services also include those activities not customarily provided by the public, such as food and/or clothing distribution and school supply assistance to those in need. In Latonia, there are several organizations and potential facilities that come under this category and that provide opportunities for enhancing the quality of life in the area or provide services needed by persons living in Latonia.

Short Term 0-5 Years

Outreach programs

There are currently several programs helping those in need to acquire basic goods and services. These programs operate out of a variety of government and private non-profit agencies some of which include Catholic Charities, Latonia Christian Church, Calvary Baptist Church, the American Legion, and Action Ministries. It is recommended that these services communicate more closely with each other and coordinate their programs to maximize effectiveness. A study should be conducted to determine which needs are not being met by the current programs and what adjustments should be made to provide these unmet needs. Research into the practices of similar cities in providing these needs could also be productive.

Community Center

As mentioned previously, the Latonia community should begin investigating how to build a community center that will address needs of the neighborhood on as many levels as possible. This center could become the hub of activity for the area, and should be located within the Latonia Plaza Redevelopment Area of the neighborhood (section 4.8 Latonia Plaza Redevelopment, page 83). The community, along with the City's assistance, should

discover if there are government grants and/or loan programs or other funding sources, such as private foundations, that could assist in building this facility.

Some of the amenities that could be provided within the community center are; meeting rooms, a community art gallery, senior center, day care, and/or possibly a library branch. One potential use that could be a part of this facility is the aquatic center mentioned in Section 4.4.1 that could also meet the need for a new community pool in Latonia. In section 4.8 Latonia Plaza Redevelopment page 83, the redevelopment concept for the Latonia Plaza identifies a location for a potential community center and/or facility containing a combination of public type uses. This facility would provide a center for the community, and a convenient place for organizations to hold meetings. Placing a park and/or a plaza adjacent to the community center would also expand the use of the facility by providing a larger outdoor area to hold community events.

Museum

Latonia has a rich history and heritage that includes the railroads and the Latonia horse racetrack. During public involvement sessions, respondents expressed an interest in having a museum to highlight this rich history. The

initial idea for a history museum focused only on Latonia's horse racing heritage. However, efforts are currently underway to create a museum that will cover a more comprehensive view of the neighborhood. This plan embraces the idea of a Latonia museum as increased knowledge of an area and civic pride can strengthen revitalization efforts. Location of a museum, like the community center, provides an opportunity to enhance the attraction of Latonia for visitors and residents. One consideration is to locate the museum and community center in close proximity to the Latonia Plaza redevelopment area and/or Ritte's Corner.

Landscaping

The strategic action committee should work with city officials, and other community organizations to install landscaping at prominent locations throughout the area. A small amount of landscaping can make a dramatic difference in the appearance of the community. Landscaping projects a message that residents in an area care about their community and think it is a good place to live. These areas could be maintained by a special group and/or the neighborhood associations. If possible, the landscaping should perform as stormwater maintenance facilities as well as detailed in section 4.4 Green Infrastructure on page 49.