

# A Vision for Flint Park Lake & Adjoining Neighborhoods

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# A Vision for Flint Park Lake & Adjoining Neighborhoods in the City of Flint, Michigan

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Residents and businesses in the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake

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***What is your vision for Flint Park Lake?***

## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Flint, Michigan is unique in that it is a large city of 102,434 that features three distinct lakes within its city limits – Thread Lake, Flint Park Lake, and Kearsley Reservoir (US Census, 2010). Currently, these water bodies are underutilized assets in the community as years of neglect have resulted in concerns about water quality, safety, and widespread blight or abandoned land nearby. This report focuses on Flint Park Lake, and is one of three prepared to promote a better future for these lakes and the people of the neighborhoods that surround them. Flint Park Lake is located in the northwest part of the city near Max Brandon Park (*Figure 1*).



*Figure 1: Flint Park Lake, located northwest of downtown Flint, features Fleming Park and Max Brandon Park in close proximity.*

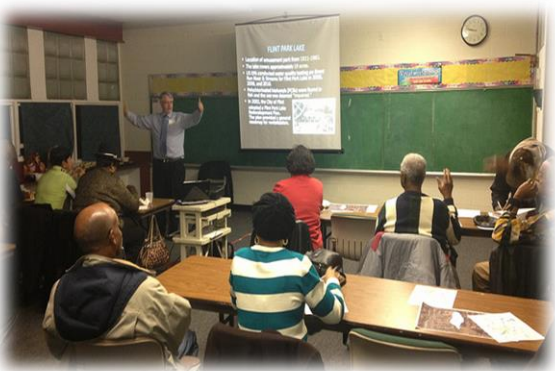
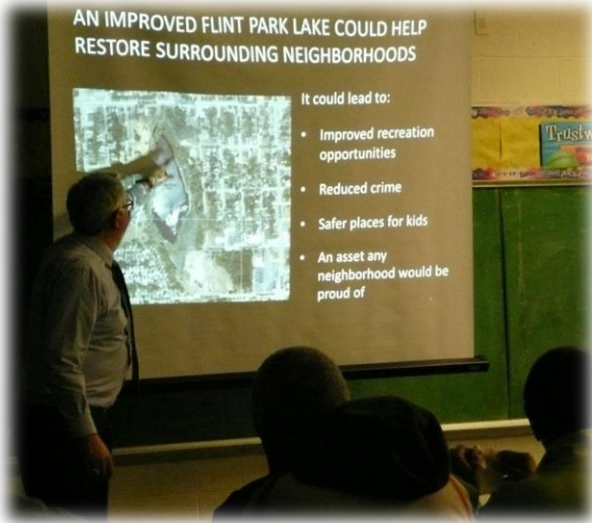
Blight and vacant lots dominate the streets in blocks surrounding Flint Park Lake. Residents at times feel neglected and grow wary of the prospects for improvement in the face of political, fiscal, and economic uncertainty in the city. Nevertheless, amidst these trying times there is hope in the neighborhoods to improve the health, safety, and welfare of the residents. The project that led to the creation of this report is one such effort. With assistance from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in partnership with the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC), the Planning and Zoning Center (PZC, a part of the Land Policy Institute (LPI) at Michigan State University) engaged local residents around Flint Park Lake to create a vision document for this keystone asset.

By increasing awareness of existing assets and opportunities, collaboration may begin to lead to tangible improvements to the Flint Park Lake study area and its residents, (hereafter referred to as the *Flint Park Lake Community*). The dedication and enthusiasm of the many long-term residents deeply invested in their neighborhoods illustrate this potential for further teamwork in revitalizing the Flint Park Lake Community.

This document is designed to report a short- and long-term Vision for Flint Park Lake that aims to restore its significance as a once-treasured natural amenity for the neighborhood and surrounding area. By capturing this Vision on the printed page and creating a record of these goals and desires for the study area, the project team hopes this will further motivate and inspire efforts for concrete implementation of the actions recommended at the end of this document. This Vision document was prepared based on input from a variety of sources, most importantly the residents of neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake and a Citizens District Council Redevelopment Plan prepared in 2002.

PZC staff members and FRWC, with support of the City of Flint Planning Department, engaged residents of the Flint Park Lake Community in a mini-planning process. Participants included a city planning commissioner and a city councilwoman who both live in the area. Many of these residents comprised the former Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council (CDC), a deeply invested group whose hard work led to the drafting of the 2002 Flint Park Lake Redevelopment Plan. This plan, which will be summarized in greater detail later in this report, played an instrumental role in the research and drafting of this Vision document since much of the plan was not implemented, but remains relevant today.

After studying the history, existing conditions, and past initiatives that focused on improving the Flint Park Lake Community, the project team identified and met with key leaders and stakeholders in the area to gain more local knowledge of the study area and its challenges. A neighborhood visioning session was then conducted by PZC and FRWC staff at the New McCree Theatre on November 14, 2013. Residents from the surrounding area gathered to provide their insight and opinions on current conditions and future hopes for the Flint Park Lake Community in regards to water quality, safety, access, connectivity, and future recreational opportunities. Small group exercises were conducted with the aim of brainstorming specific short- and long- term desired outcomes, strategies, and improvements. The resulting input from this engagement event is compiled in this Vision document, along with additional research by staff and students at PZC. A follow-up meeting was held March 18, 2014 again at the New McCree Theatre to receive citizen and stakeholder input on the draft document. The final Vision was refined based on public feedback and further input from partner organizations.



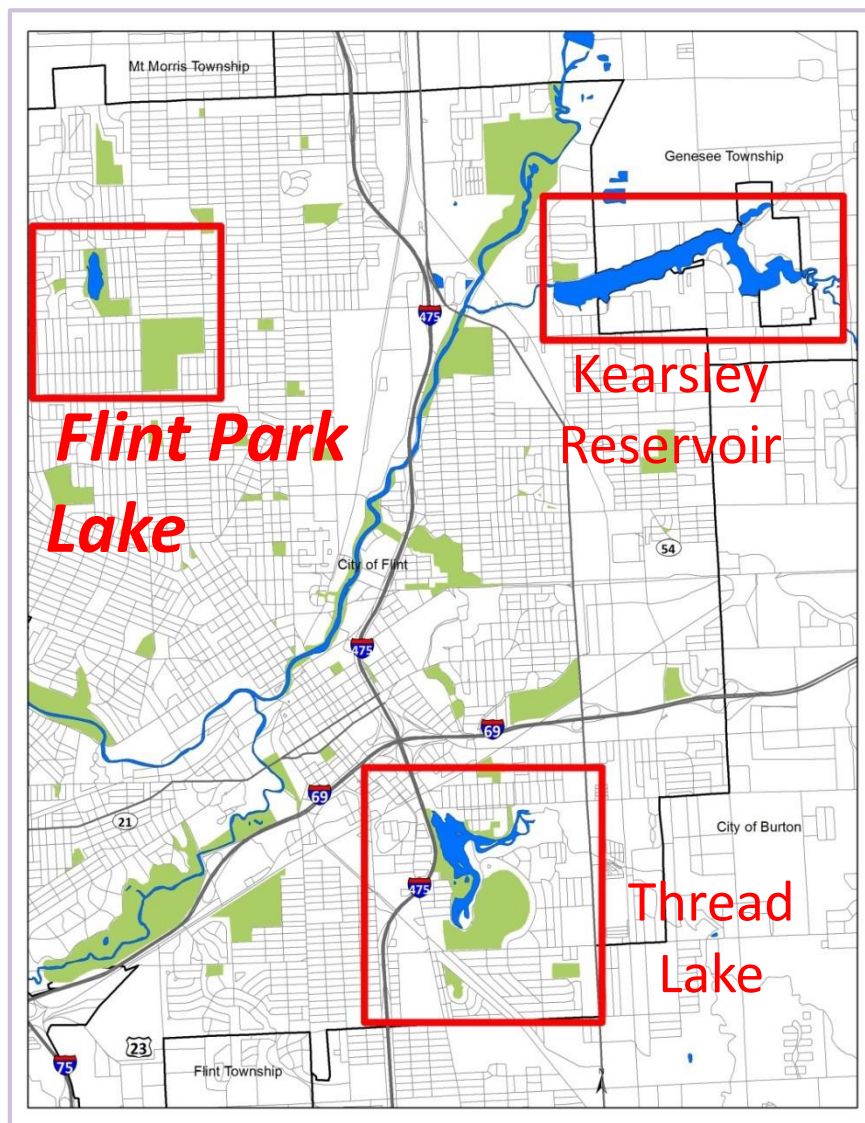
***PZC, in collaboration with FRWC, conducted a Visioning Session with Flint Park Lake residents at the New McCree Theatre on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.***

(Photos: FRWC, MSU Planning & Zoning Center)

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Flint Park Lake represents a seriously underutilized water resource that offers unique opportunities for the community. The lake has considerable value as a scenic water body that creates enhanced value to adjacent land, while offering a natural respite in the middle of a large city. Flint Park Lake also sustains a valuable ecological habitat for fish and wildlife while providing natural green space for public use. The stakeholders discussed in the following section can all play a role to further improve and enhance the appearance and utility of Flint Park Lake by investing their efforts to capitalize on this natural resource.

Flint Park Lake lies northwest of downtown Flint (*Figure 2*) and is one of three lakes located within the boundaries of the city.



*Figure 2: Flint Park Lake is located on the northwest side of Flint, Michigan.*

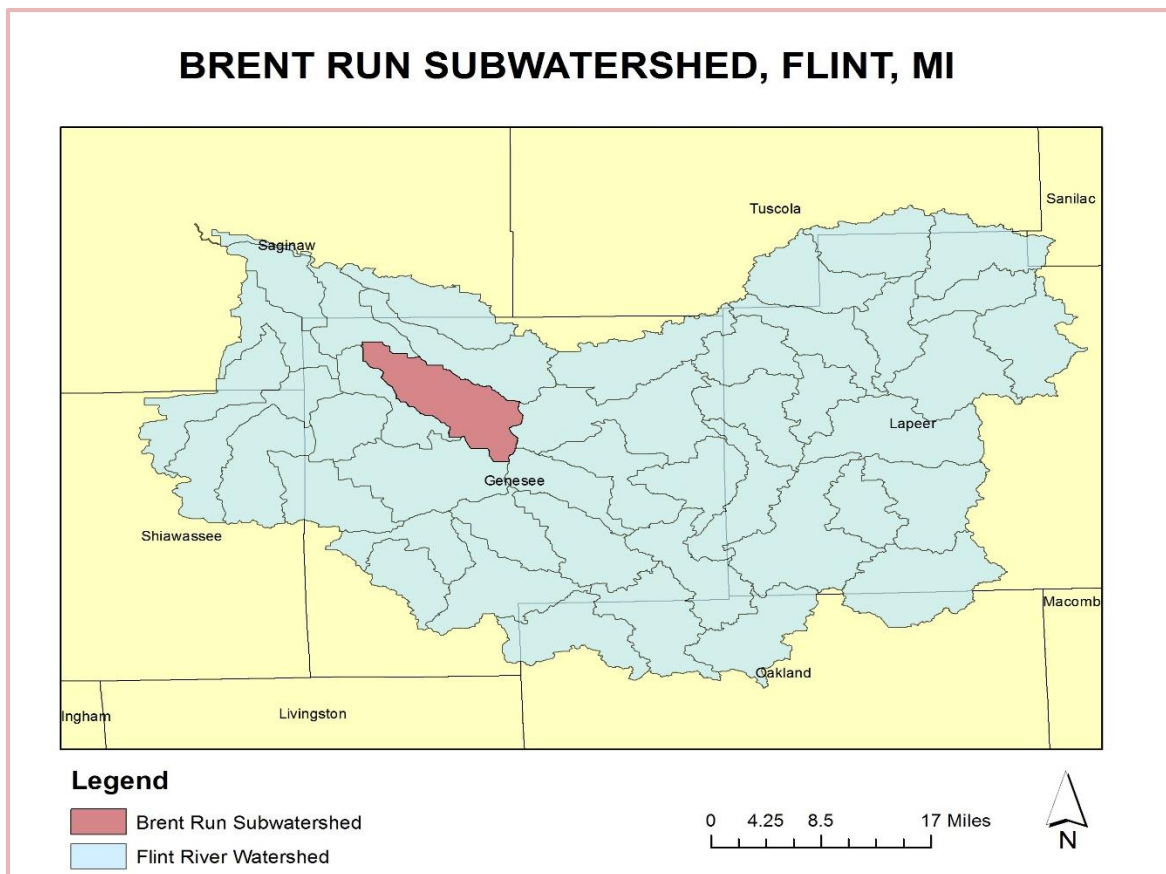


## Flint Park Lake and the Brent Run Subwatershed

The Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council Redevelopment Plan features an infrastructure study by Rowe Incorporated and a water quality analysis by Environmental Consulting and Technology, Inc. (ECT). These studies were used as a reference for this Vision document, along with various Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reports on the study area.

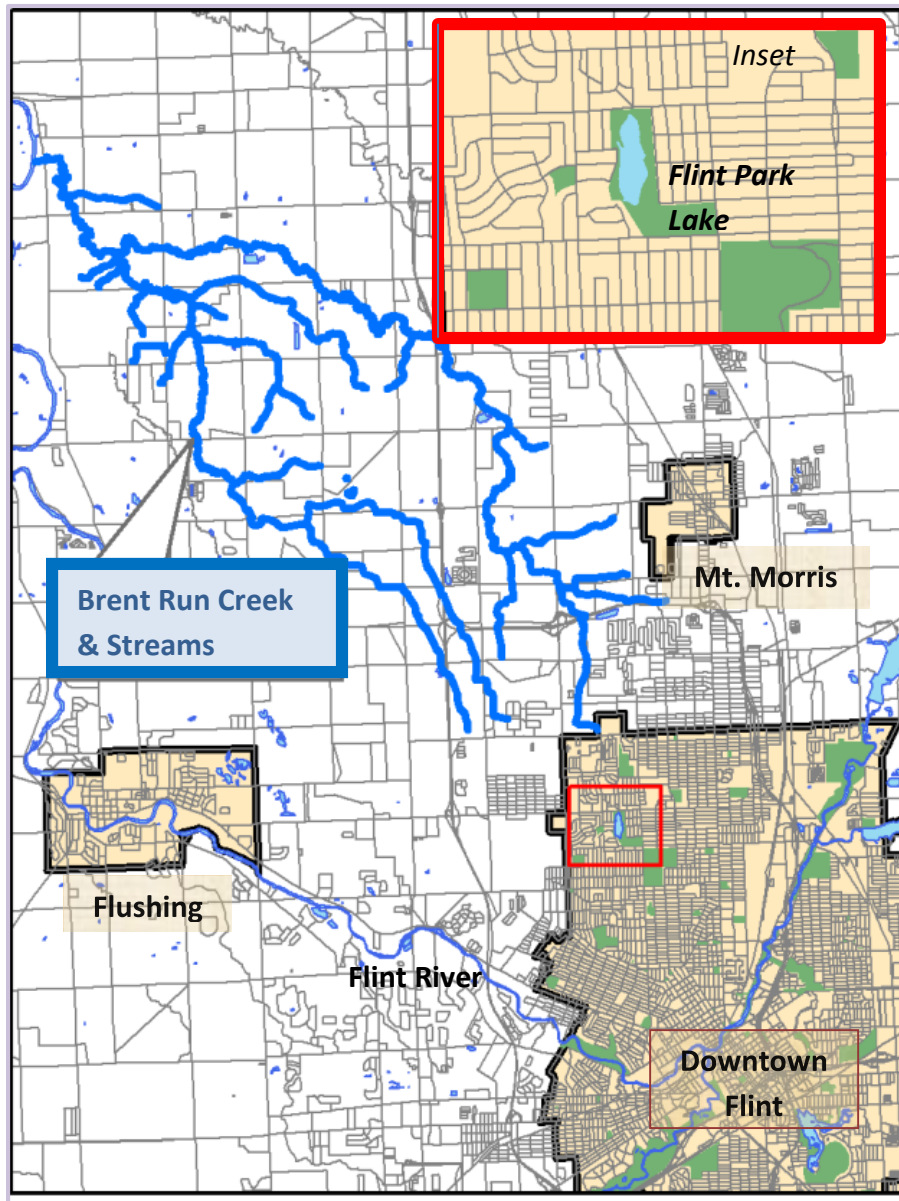
While spring fed, Flint Park Lake also receives storm water from four major storm lines draining sectors of the city to the south, east, and west of the lake. These storm lines run along Marengo Avenue and Baltimore Blvd to the east of the lake, and De Freest Street and Berger Drive to the west of the lake. Flint Park Lake drains through a 48" tube at its north end, crossing under Pierson Road and traveling north along a 72" storm line that follows Fleming Road to the Brent Run Creek Drain just north of Carpenter Road. An assessment of the Flint River conducted by the City of Flint in January 2013 notes that dissolved oxygen levels are low leading into the drainage tunnel at Pierson Road, but reach higher levels after flowing north out of the Carpenter Road tunnel.

Flint Park Lake resides within the Brent Run Subwatershed (*Figure 3*). The Brent Run Subwatershed is approximately 34,415 ft. across at its widest point and covers approximately 38.1 sq. miles, starting near Flint Park Lake and stretching northwest towards the City of Montrose near the Genesee County border with Saginaw County.



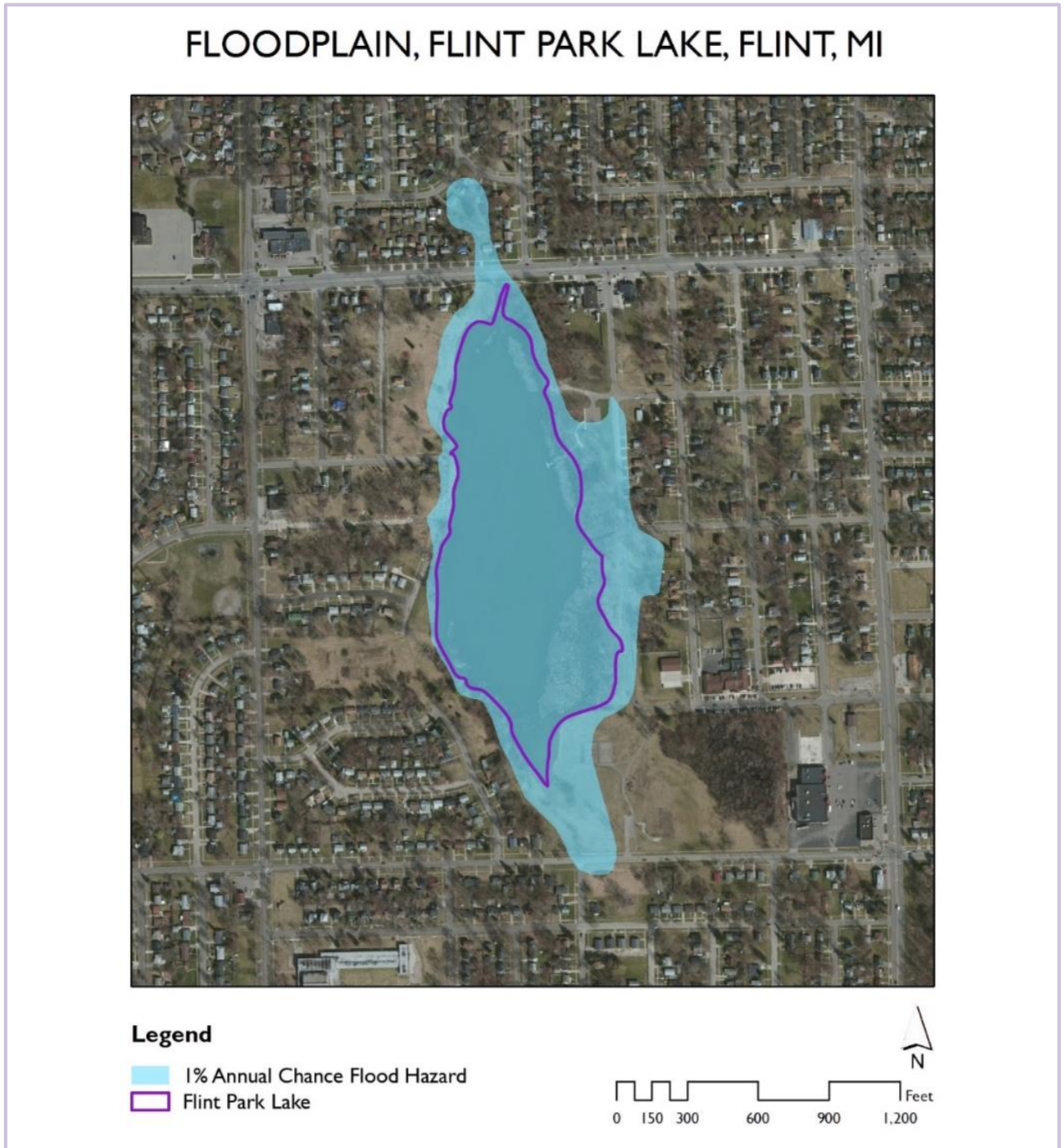
*Figure 3: Brent Run Subwatershed within the Flint River Watershed. The Flint River ultimately discharges into Saginaw Bay.*

The Brent Run Subwatershed features Brent Run Creek which flows into the Flint River as it runs through the greater watershed from southeast to northwest (*Figure 4*).



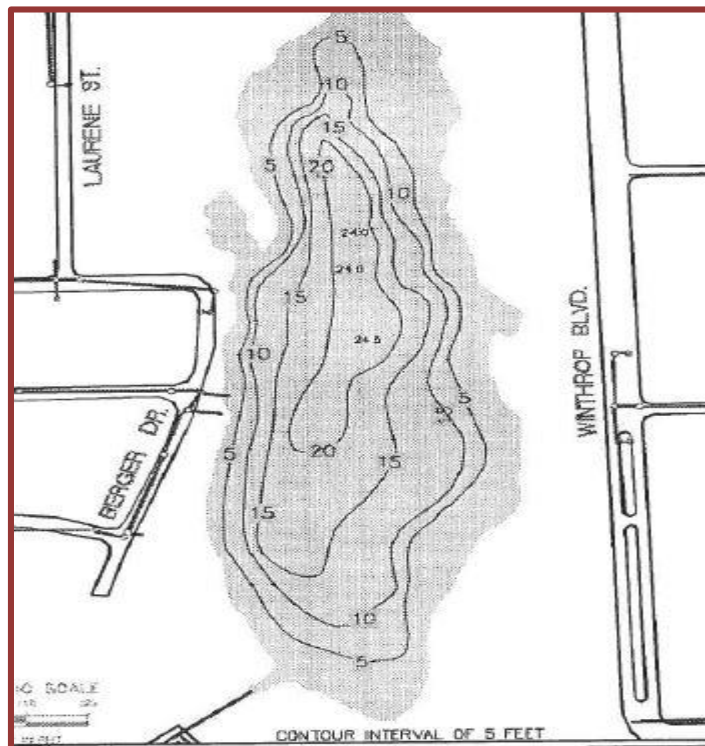
*Figure 4: Relationship of Brent Run Creek to Flint Park Lake, the Flint River, and downtown Flint.*

Flint Park Lake itself features a surface area of 14.6 acres, with depths ranging from 1.5 feet to 20 feet, per ECT's analysis. The floodplain map in *Figure 5* illustrates the potential flooding hazard areas around Flint Park Lake.



*Figure 5: The floodplain around Flint Park Lake.*

The ECT study conducted in October 2001 sampled water and sediment from Flint Park Lake to gain a better understanding of its spatial characteristics and the impacts of the major storm sewer outfalls to the lake. Water quality results indicated ammonia-nitrogen levels above Water Quality Standard toxicity levels, and dissolved oxygen concentrations consistently below the 5 mg/L Water Quality Standard for warm water fish. While tolerant species could survive at this level, the study suggests an increase in dissolved oxygen levels above 5 mg/L would allow for more attractive pan fish to thrive in Flint Park Lake and enhance fishing opportunities. In general water quality is homogenous through Flint Park Lake, with potential stratification occurring at depths near the 14 ft. to 16 ft. mark.



The depth of Flint Park Lake was calculated at a range of 1.5 ft. to 20 ft. (Figure 6), with sediment thickness spanning 4 ft. to over 13 ft. in the various samples taken by ECT around the perimeter of the lake. Total nitrogen concentrations of sampled sediments were slightly elevated, and concentrations of metals exceeded the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) groundwater/surface water interface (GSI) criteria. Further leachability analysis was recommended by ECT to determine whether these metals in the sediment would leach out into the water column. This would also help assess the depth of potential sediment contamination.

Figure 6: Contour map from 2002 Redevelopment Plan.  
(Environmental Consulting & Technology)

There have been no recent water quality tests on Flint Park Lake. The U.S. EPA conducted water quality testing on Brent Run Creek in 2006, 2008, and 2010. The EPA found “Fish Consumption” to be an impaired use in all three tests, resulting in the creek being deemed “Impaired.” Additionally, in 2008 the “Other Indigenous Aquatic Life” use tested as “Impaired,” however, it was considered “Good” in 2006 and 2010.

The cause of impairment for all reporting years was polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The probable sources (and source group) contributing to the PCB impairment in 2006 are: Atmospheric deposition – toxics (atmospheric deposition), contaminated sediments (legacy/historical pollutants), industrial point source discharge (industrial), and municipal point source discharges (municipal discharges/sewage). By 2010, the probable source was narrowed to atmospheric deposition – toxics. The wind carries air pollutants from smokestacks near and far away, and the rain picks up toxics as it falls from the sky.

Nutrients are likely coming from fertilizers used on lawns that drain into Flint Park Lake. The lake is eutrophic, meaning that it has extensive aquatic plants, due to high levels of nutrients. The marine plants completely choke the perimeter of the lake and have large patches elsewhere, as well (*Photo 1*). However, according to a 2001 Michigan DNR report, principal fish species found in Brent Run Creek consist of primarily Johnny darter, along with a modest share of creek chub, green sunfish, common shiner and white sucker.

What all this water quality data means are the following:

- 1) Water quality is presently not as good as it could be largely because of high dissolved oxygen from organic nutrients in the lake bottom, around the edges, in aquatic plants, and in water flowing into the lake from storm drains.
- 2) Water quality suffers from metals and other toxics that are likely accumulating in fish in the lake. That means fish should not be consumed with any frequency, but that catch and release fishing could occur-- especially if organic material was removed. This could be accomplished by dredging and removing the muck at the bottom and around the lake as well as by filtering stormwater through wetlands before it flows into the lake.
- 3) If the above measures were taken, the lake would likely be an attractive fishing resource and would then also be more useful for other recreational activities such as swimming and boating. Flint Park Lake would be an unusual fishing and recreation resource near a large urban population.



*Photo 1: Flint Park Lake contains a large overgrowth of aquatic plants along its shoreline restricting access to fishermen, and there are no improved boat launches on the lake. (Photo: FRWC)*

## Flint Park Lake Neighborhoods

The neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake are striving for stabilization after years of decline. The population of neighborhoods in the Flint Park Lake Community is 8,114 persons, with 94.2 percent African American and 2.9 percent white (US Census, 2010). *Figure 7* illustrates the study area for these demographic figures, with the numbers representing the block groups tabulated. Neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake endured significant population loss from 2000 to 2010 which has resulted in increased property abandonment, blight, and severely decreased home values. The remaining residents of these neighborhoods are also struggling financially as 48.2 percent of households earn less than \$20,000 per year. The median income household of neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake is \$21,025, in contrast to the median household income of \$26,339 in the City of Flint, and \$48,471 in the State of Michigan.



*Figure 7: Area examined for Flint Park Lake Community demographics.*

Beyond the Citizens District Council, the Flint Park Lake Community does not have established neighborhood associations or block clubs. While the Citizens District Council is no longer a formal organization funded by the City of Flint due to mandates of the emergency manager, the group still has a strong presence in community advocacy for the area. Also, the strong ties of deeply-rooted residents within the Flint Park Lake Community provides a more informal social network that thrives with word-of-mouth correspondence and strong connections between neighbors, many of whom have lived in the area for the majority of their lives.

Considering the levels of population loss, blight, and the economic circumstances of many residents within the Flint Park Lake Community, a challenge during this visioning process was determining the community's level of interest with issues related to water quality, in light of the more immediate concerns of many households. In this regard, improving water quality is a long-term goal in Flint Park Lake, and this Vision builds up to that goal through related short-term efforts that have a more immediate impact on the surrounding neighborhoods.

## EXISTING RELATED EFFORTS

Various stakeholders are independently invested in the redevelopment of Flint Park Lake and the surrounding neighborhoods, with a variety of initiatives that aim to restore a sense of community to the area. This section discusses these existing related efforts, either recently completed or currently underway, that seek to improve conditions on and around Flint Park Lake.

### City of Flint Planning Department

The Flint City Council approved Flint’s first master plan since 1960 on October 28, 2013. The creation of the Master Plan was a collaborative process that involved over 5,000 individuals participating in 300 events throughout the conceptual stages of development. The “Imagine Flint” master planning process was funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2011 and will include a capital improvement plan and zoning revision by the end of 2014, in addition to the Master Plan.

One area cited by the Master Plan as the focus for a sub-area plan involves the “Pierson Road Corridor” which runs along the northern border of the Flint Park Lake study area (*Figure 8*).

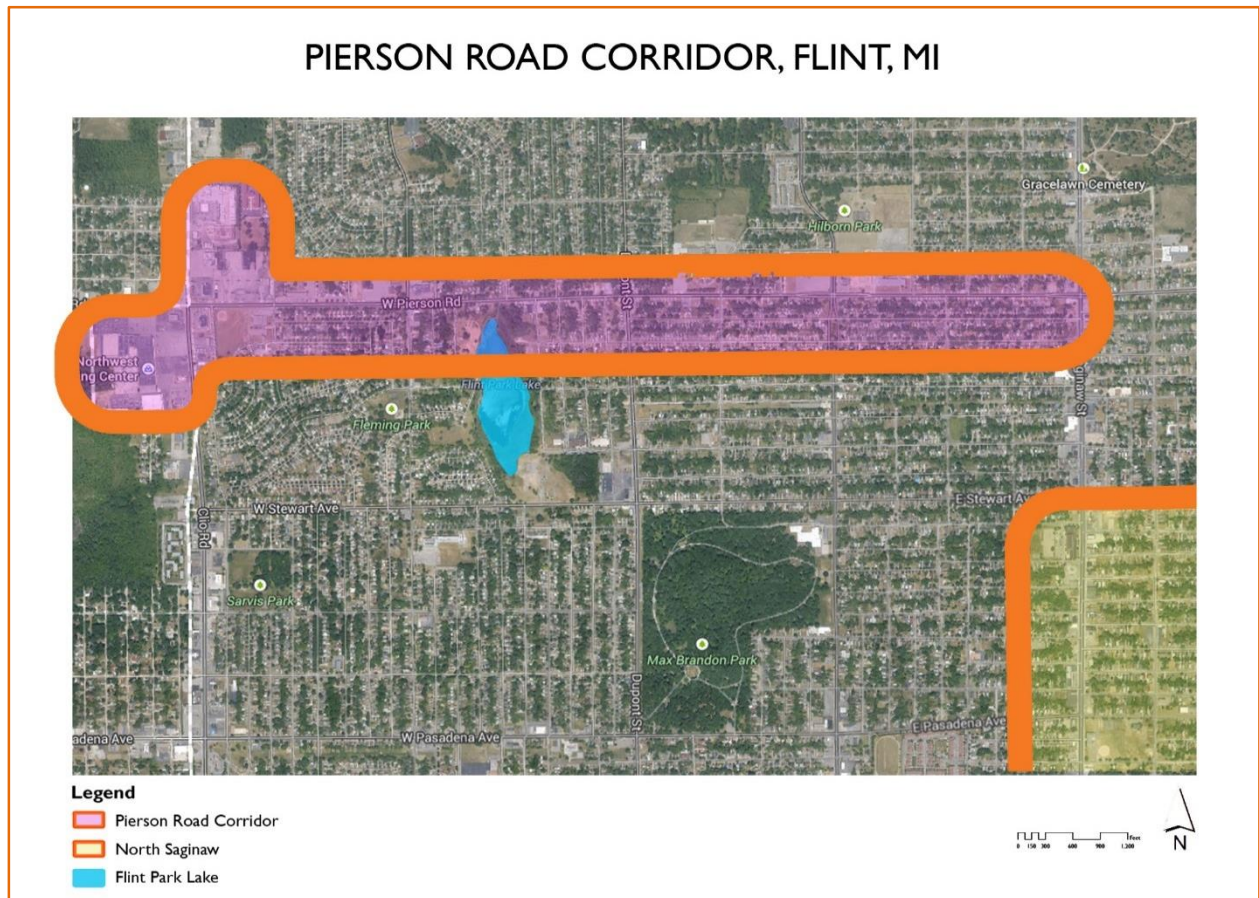


Figure 8: Proposed ‘Pierson Road Corridor’ sub-area identified in Master Plan.

Sub-area plans identify key nodes, corridors, and clusters throughout the city, and then provide more specific goals and strategies that will help facilitate Master Plan implementation within these select areas. Lessons learned and techniques utilized within these sub-areas may then be applied to a different sector of the city with corresponding features or demands. The Master Plan proposes “Traditional Commercial Corridor Development” for the Pierson Road Corridor sub-area that incorporates larger scale commercial parcels along Pierson Road, which provides direct linkage to Flint Township to the west. Future land uses for the Flint Park Lake Community as proposed in the new Master Plan are illustrated in *Figure 9*.



*Figure 9: Proposed future land use map for the Flint Park Lake Community in the Master Plan.*



Proposed future land uses found in the Master Plan designate portions of the Flint Park Lake study area as a possible 'Community Open Space & Recreation' classification. These areas promote public green space with recreational facilities and amenities designed to promote healthy lifestyles and provide a welcoming natural environment for residents of nearby neighborhoods to enjoy. Damaged and underutilized infrastructure in these areas such as vacant homes, worn roads, and declining public utilities may also then be modified to reflect current demands and align with the 'Community Open Space & Recreation' designation. Such goals require strategic coordination with the Genesee County Land Bank in securing and redeveloping blighted properties adjacent to Flint Park Lake that could lead to green infrastructure practices and gradual park expansion, opportunities that will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of this report.

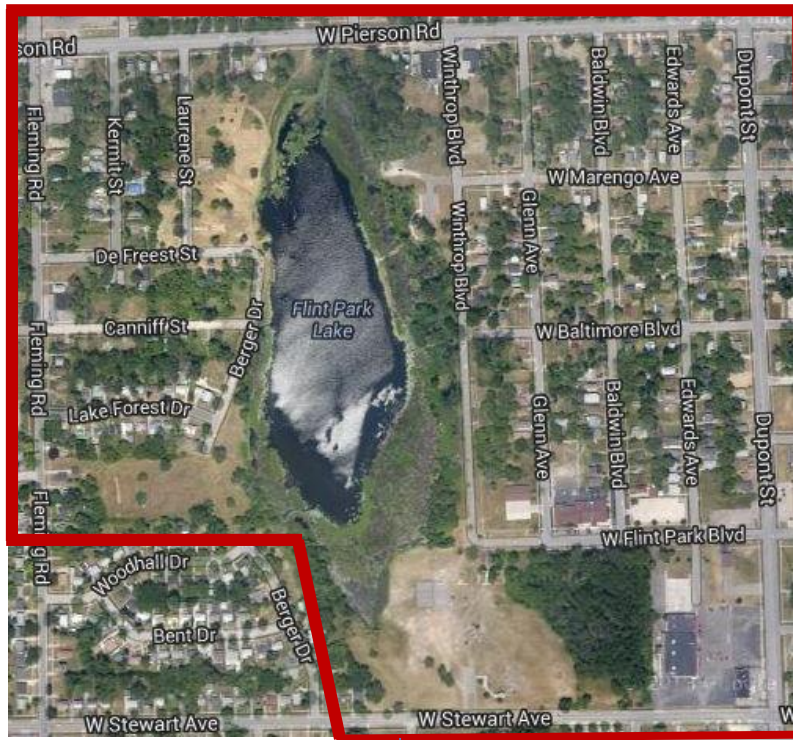
The Master Plan also suggests implementing a road diet for Dupont St., which acts as the eastern boundary of the Flint Park Lake study area. Road diets take advantage of thoroughfares that have seen a drastic decrease in traffic flow by modifying the excess lane(s) into more pedestrian friendly-uses, such as a bicycle lane or buffer zone between traffic and sidewalks. Such practices have the ability to take advantage of excess space while enhancing streetscape aesthetics and public safety.

### **City of Flint Parks and Recreation Department**

The City of Flint Parks and Recreation department is responsible for managing grounds surrounding Flint Park Lake. However, the department is severely underfunded, with limited means to address the demands of the vast acreage of public parks within the city. This illustrates the need for community stakeholders to coordinate efforts with the City of Flint to ensure that their parks are given the proper attention, and that measures are in place to help keep the park system up to community standards. Community-wide park partnerships may be necessary to help coordinate programming that promotes more activity in city parks and restores them to their natural beauty. The Master Plan emphasizes the need for these continued partnerships with organizations such as The Crim Fitness Foundation, The Ruth Mott Foundation (RMF), and Keep Genesee County Beautiful (KGCB). Further collaborations with other local stakeholder groups such as neighborhood associations, non-profit organizations, and nearby state and private universities can greatly assist the City of Flint Parks and Recreation Department with the daunting task of tending to the vast public park ground throughout the City.

### **Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council Redevelopment Plan**

Under the authority of the Blighted Area Rehabilitation Act (PA 344 of 1945), the City of Flint Department of Community and Economic Development assisted in creating the Citizens District Council (CDC) for Flint Park Lake. Established in November 2000, original CDC members were appointed by the mayor and approved by city council, with membership growing to incorporate other long-term residents deeply invested in the area. Through Community Development Block Grant funding, the Flint Park Lake CDC partnered with planning and engineering consultants to complete the Flint Park Lake CDC Redevelopment Plan in May 2002, which is one of three neighborhood plans adopted by the City of Flint. The study area is shown in *Figure 10*, and is approximately 130 acres with Flint Park Lake in the center.



*Figure 10: Flint Park Lake Redevelopment Plan study area outlined, with boundaries of Pierson Rd. (North), Dupont St. (East), W. Stewart Ave. (South), and Fleming Rd. (West).*

The planning firm of Rowe Incorporated was hired by the City to help the Flint Park Lake CDC facilitate community engagement workshops and assess the existing land uses, housing inventory, demographics, and infrastructure of the study area. Proposed future land use plans were also included, along with cost estimates for infrastructure repair and potential improvements for the area. Environmental Consulting and Technology, Inc. also contributed an analysis of water quality and lake conditions to the CDC Redevelopment Plan.

Key issues identified by the Redevelopment Plan involve stormwater management and the recurring flooding problems faced by residents surrounding Flint Park Lake, particularly along Winthrop Blvd. to the east of the lake. The multitude of vacant buildings and abandoned homes in the surrounding neighborhoods were another prevalent concern of residents emphasized in the plan. Similarly, participants of these public workshops stressed the ongoing issue of pollution and trash dumping on public lands surrounding Flint Park Lake. Residents grow weary of the negative impacts such blight conditions can have on the health, safety, and aesthetics of the neighborhood community. The plan also emphasized the need for infrastructure improvements to roads, housing, and street lighting, as well as intensifying trash clean-up and brush clearing efforts around the lake. A summary of proposed improvements is provided in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council Redevelopment Plan, 2002**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>1</b>	Flooding, storm sewers & drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better maintenance of infrastructure by City</li> <li>• Local system improvements</li> <li>• Regional system/watershed improvements</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	Vacant buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demolish vacant/hazardous structures as necessary</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	Dumping & trash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean-up initiatives</li> <li>• Better collection service in area</li> <li>• Neighborhood watch program for recurring dumping areas</li> <li>• Clear vegetation, open visibility of potential dumping sites</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	Housing (proposed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home ownership, new and upgrades</li> <li>• Mixture of ranch &amp; 2-story single family</li> <li>• 1,100-1,500 sq. ft. on 0.1-0.25 acre lots, 20-25 ft. setback</li> <li>• Misc. features regulated by homeowner association: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Privacy fencing, quality materials, property maintenance and upkeep, limited rental properties</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	Road conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve existing roads first</li> <li>• New pavement, 2 lanes of traffic &amp; 1 lane of parallel on-street parking</li> <li>• Sidewalks part of development</li> <li>• Paved driveways, no alleys</li> <li>• Cul-de-sacs are acceptable</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	Shoreline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear overgrown vegetation</li> <li>• Implement summer work program to maintain</li> <li>• Better define public access along shore and to lake</li> <li>• Create a park and trails along flooded portion of Winthrop Blvd.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	Street amenities (proposed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replaced existing wood pole “cobra-head” lights with ornamental poles &amp; fixtures</li> </ul>

Following adoption of the Redevelopment Plan, the Michigan DNR bestowed a grant to assist in recreation improvements for Flint Park Lake. Over \$150,000 in funding towards a boat ramp, parking lot and picnic facilities along the eastern shoreline were awarded. These improvements were made in 2003, but have not been adequately maintained since.

### **Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center**

Through the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (YVPC) has focused various community engagement efforts in Flint through partnerships with local organizations and institutions. These collaborations provide educational and mentoring opportunities to Flint youth along with neighborhood clean-up programs and community forums. The Michigan YVPC Community Mobilization Initiative involved teaming with students and faculty from the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice to conduct focus group discussions and community workshops designed to discuss residents’ perceptions of crime trends and explore further prevention strategies through neighborhood activism. Teaming with the Genesee County Land Bank and their Clean and Green Program, the YVPC has coordinated residents to clean up lots and develop garden plots in neighborhoods near Flint Park Lake. Such efforts to replace the negative impacts of blight with active green space lead to improvements in street aesthetics that promote a safer, cleaner

neighborhood. Another key initiative of the YVPC involves partnering with Church Without Walls, just north of Flint Park Lake, for the Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) after-school program. The YES program began in 2004 as a pilot program in Flint to help develop proper YES curriculum. The partnership with Church Without Walls started in 2010, after the YES curriculum was adopted by YVPC as one of their six intervention programs. The YES initiative seeks to develop self-empowerment and leadership skills in Flint youth so they may contribute to their neighborhood and set an example instead of falling into a cycle of crime. The educational components of this program could also be applied to further youth outreach and training on water quality issues within the community as well.

### **Flint River Watershed Coalition**

The Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC) is a 501 c(3) non-profit organization located in Flint, which advocates for clean water resources by engaging local community members and stakeholders through recreational and educational opportunities associated with the Flint River. The FRWC is a partner in this visioning process as they have engaged local neighborhood organizations around issues of water quality in Thread Lake and Flint Park Lake, with plans for Kearsley Reservoir later in 2014. The FRWC actively engages urban and rural populations in the greater Flint area with the common goal of increasing community and political investment in the natural water assets the Flint River Watershed has to offer. As a local stakeholder, the FRWC is dedicated to assisting with the implementation of both the short- and long-term action steps of this Vision.

FRWC has coordinated dumping and trash clean ups at Flint Park Lake and are currently working on further coordination of these efforts with the City, as there have been problems with City follow-up once junk was gathered for disposal. With continued neighborhood involvement it is hoped these efforts are both more efficient and effective in years to come.

**Current conditions**



(Photo: MSU Planning & Zoning Center)

**What is your vision for Flint Park Lake?**



## POTENTIAL FUTURE VISION/OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to current planning and redevelopment efforts in the blocks surrounding Flint Park Lake, other efforts are being considered for funding and implementation in the future. These efforts involve stakeholders investing time and resources into realizing a common vision while also committing to the neighborhood for many years in the future. Some of these potential opportunities are discussed below.

### Genesee County Land Bank

The Genesee County Land Bank is a large stakeholder in the Flint Park Lake Community as it holds numerous blighted properties in the neighborhoods to the north and west of the lake (*Figure 11*). As a large property owner in the area, the land bank has an opportunity to help shape the redevelopment effort in these neighborhoods and assist in implementing this Vision.

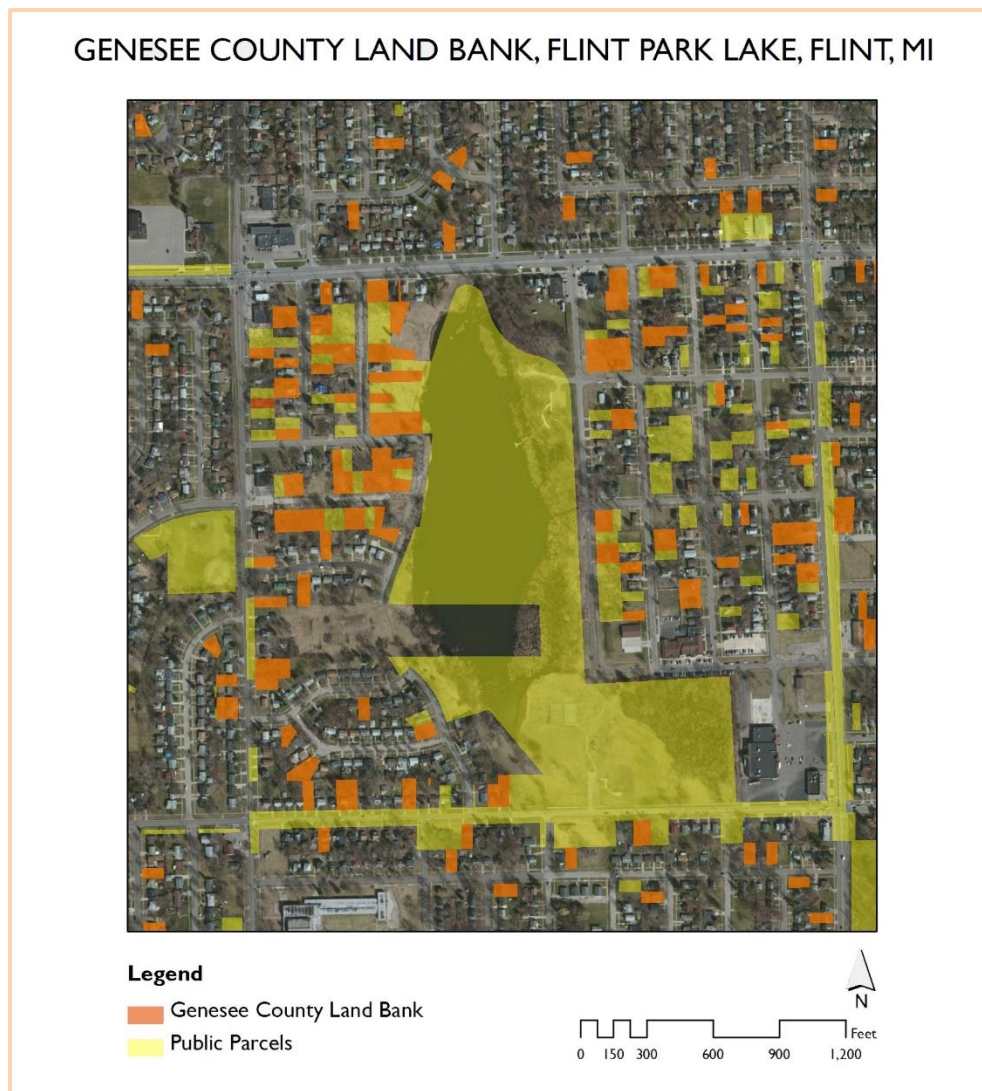
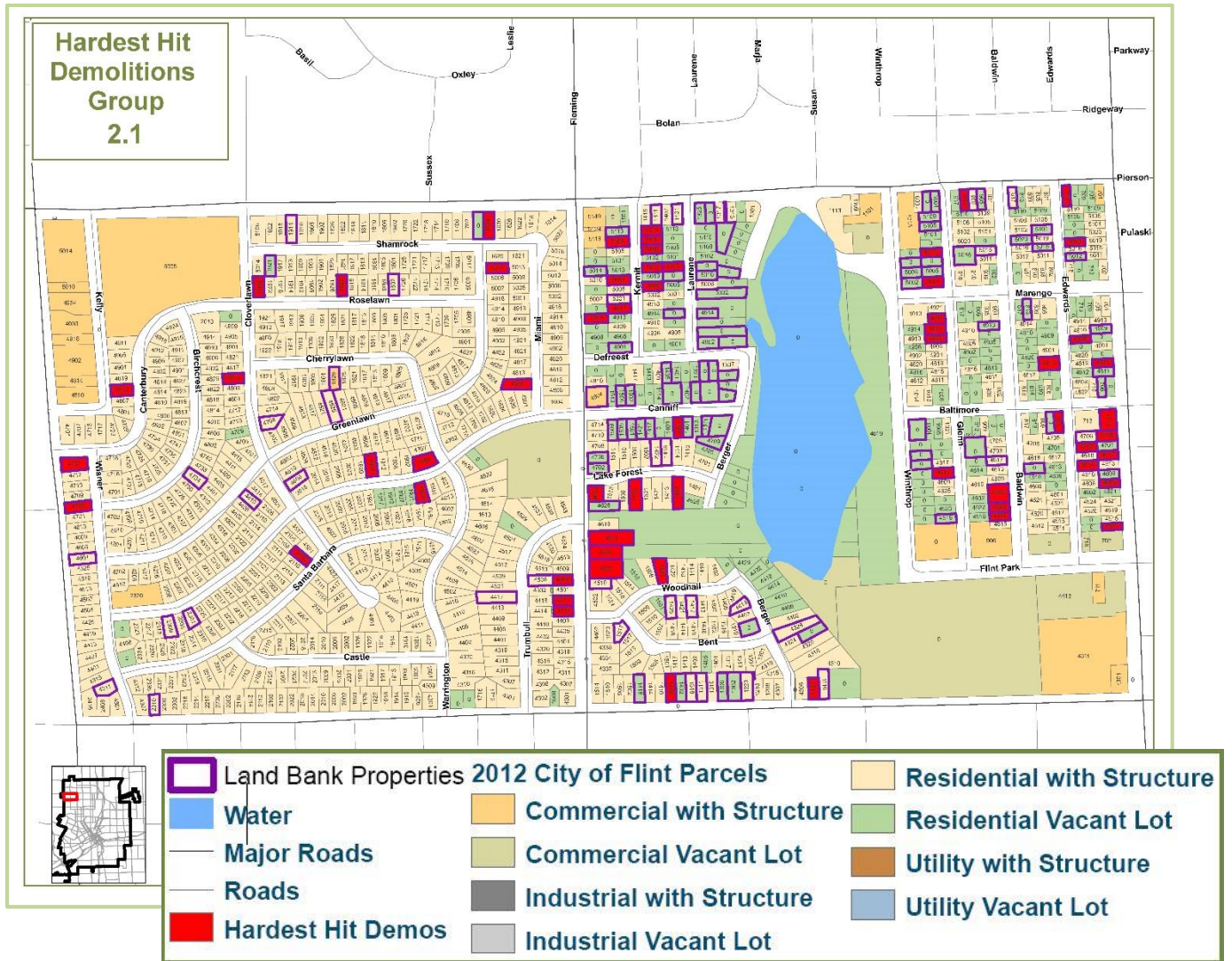


Figure 11: Current land bank properties in the Flint Park Lake Community.

In August 2013, the Land Bank received nearly \$24 million in federal funds to demolish blighted structures across the city. This funding could help facilitate demolitions for approximately 1,900 structures in Flint including many in the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake. *Figure 12* illustrates the properties scheduled for demolition in the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake. The clearing of blighted properties in the Flint Park Lake Community creates opportunities for restoration and redevelopment in accordance with this Vision, the City of Flint Master Plan, and in collaboration with current and future efforts of other stakeholders in the area.



(Source: Genesee County Land Bank)

Figure 12: Estimated 2014 demolition schedule from Hardest Hit grant funding.

## **Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission**

Due to local budget constraints, Flint Park Lake has received inadequate maintenance for a number of years. The potential improvements to recreational amenities around the lake discussed in this Vision may create opportunities for attracting residents beyond just the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake. As a potential stakeholder, the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission (GCPRC) may have more capacity to better maintain Flint Park Lake facilities than the City of Flint Parks and Recreation Department currently has. As discussed in the Master Plan, larger City parks that attract visitors from the greater region could be passed to regional agencies such as the GCPRC or the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. It may therefore behoove stakeholders around Flint Park Lake to court the GCPRC to be a major player in future park improvements and operational maintenance. Within the last decade, the GCPRC oversaw the maintenance of Max Brandon Park until those responsibilities were once again resumed by the City. A return to some similar model, at least for the short-term, may provide the consistent care needed to re-establish a clean and safe park system for the Flint Park Lake Community and others to enjoy and share. The City of Flint Parks and Recreation Department, (possibly in coordination with the Citizen Parks Advisory Board proposed in the Master Plan) may also want to establish a metric for the park system that would indicate the conditions under which a park would necessitate this shared responsibility agreement between the City and a partner agency such as the GCPRC.

## **Genesee Conservation District**

As a local chapter of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), the Genesee Conservation District (GCD) strives to raise awareness of conservation issues and sustainability practices within the community. With 78 total conservation districts statewide, these organizations serve local governments and their citizens in informing and implementing natural resource management services. Efforts such as the GCD's role in the county-wide "Our Water" Program, which teaches youth and local residents the importance of water quality protection at school programs, community events, and sports camps, illustrate how these districts contribute to their communities. The local citizen group Friends of Max Brandon Park also figures to play a role in any such research efforts. Collaborations such as these bring more attention to the needs and demands of the Flint Park Lake Community and have the potential to stimulate further investment in related efforts for the area. As a parallel to Friends of Max Brandon Park, local stakeholders could work towards forming a Friends of Flint Park Lake citizen group that serves as an advocate for future improvements and increased activity around the lake.

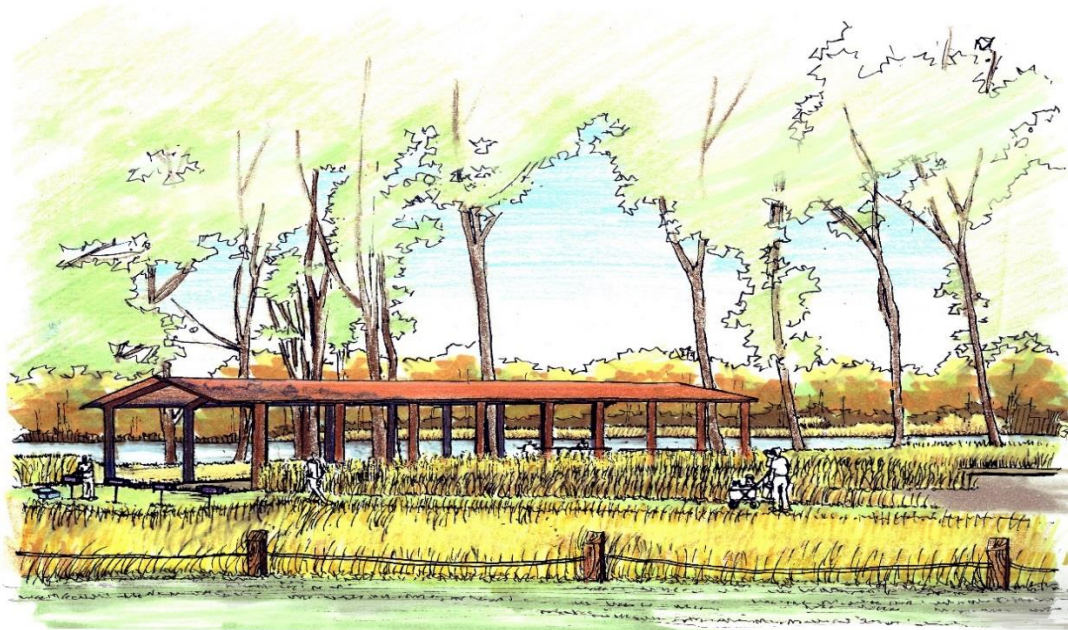


**Current Conditions**



*(Source: Google maps)*

**What is your vision for Flint Park Lake?**



## VISION, GOALS, AND ACTION STEPS

Flint Park Lake is an environmental asset to surrounding neighborhoods and the City of Flint, yet without proper attention and maintenance it will never have the chance to reach its full potential. Public ownership of a majority of the land abutting the lake greatly enhances its recreational value, but lack of clear access, safety concerns, dilapidated recreation facilities, and the pervasive blight conditions in the vicinity have all combined to further diminish its value as a natural amenity. Much of the land immediately surrounding Flint Park Lake has not been maintained or developed into a usable asset for residents and recreationalists. If maximized in accordance with the community's vision and aligned with the action steps and objectives of local stakeholders, Flint Park Lake has the potential to be a keystone asset that not only enhances residents' quality of life but may also spur neighborhood redevelopment, attract new households to the area, and provide economic, recreational, and educational opportunities for current and future residents. One plan was prepared in 2002 and much of it is still valid, but twelve years have passed and very little has been implemented. The Master Plan promotes Social Equity and Sustainability as one of its guiding principles, with the aim of ensuring policies and practices give proper attention to residents of all backgrounds, while enhancing community connections to the natural environment. The Flint Park Lake Vision can align with this goal through concerted efforts to revitalize the lake and surrounding land into active public park space for the entire community to share.

Following is a Vision that imagines an improved and redeveloped Flint Park Lake centered on three principal Goals: 1) Recreation improvements; 2) Neighborhood stabilization and targeted redevelopment; and 3) Water quality improvements (*Figure 13*). These ideas are based on neighborhood input at a Visioning Session in November 2013 and the plan prepared by the CDC in 2002. Each of the three Goal categories are interrelated, and actions must be targeted sequentially, and sometimes simultaneously, in order to thoroughly and completely achieve this Vision. Improving the water quality of Flint Park Lake is a concern that requires long-term planning, collaboration, and funding that most likely extends beyond the means of city and county government. Despite the desire and need for improved water quality as the foundation of this Vision, recreation and neighborhood redevelopment actions also exist that can be pursued more immediately. These actions can improve the existing conditions around Flint Park Lake and establish a springboard for water quality improvements in the future. The action steps are categorized as either short- or long-term, and initial stakeholder responsibility for accomplishing each task is identified at the end in **Tables 3-6**. No action will be successful without a commitment by all of the stakeholders who care about Flint Park Lake.

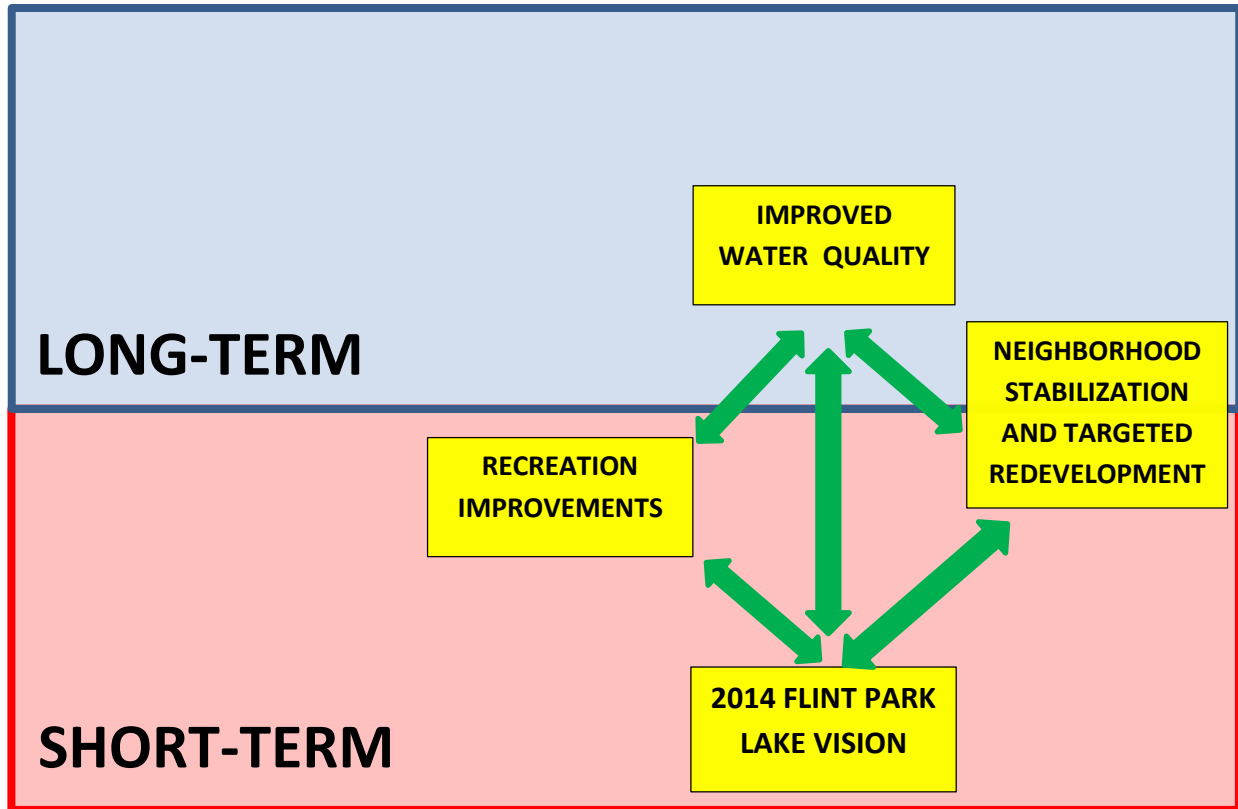


Figure 13: This Vision focuses on recreation improvements, neighborhood stabilization and targeted redevelopment, and water quality improvements. All three elements are interconnected and should be pursued in order to maximize Flint Park Lake as an asset to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Each of the Goals, action steps (and in some cases more refined objectives) that follow appear in the general order that offers the most synergistic benefits. However, it is unlikely they will be able to be implemented smoothly or even in the order proposed for a variety of reasons. As a result, it is very important to periodically revisit this vision and reprioritize based on changing circumstances.

### **A Vision for Flint Park Lake & Surrounding Neighborhoods in 15 Years**

Following is a description of Flint Park Lake and surrounding neighborhoods at a point in time after all the short- and long-term actions recommended in the next section have been implemented. This Vision is offered to describe a future quite different than the present, in order to illustrate what could be, as well as to motivate stakeholders to assume responsibility for implementation of the actions that follow. Without a clear description of the outcomes of these various proposals, it can be difficult for many people to “see” the future in their minds’ eye, and to commit to taking steps towards helping make that future a reality.

*By 2029, a child born in 2014 will have experienced a transformation of the land and neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake. This fifteen year old won't appreciate everything that has been done, but her parents and grandparents will remember. It began with a Vision built on the recognition that polishing the **unique gem** known as **Flint Park Lake** would create **new rays of hope** that would shine on a series of broader improvements, each building on the last.*

*In 2029, Flint Park Lake will be revitalized with a trail system that is heavily used by nearby residents and visitors. There will be restored picnicking facilities and increased recreation activities underway in the park around the lake and on kayaks and canoes on the lake surface. Blighted properties and decaying streetscapes will be a distant memory as cleared parcels make way for an expanded public green space incorporating Fleming Park. This enlarged park and trail system enhances connectivity to nearby Max Brandon Park and other neighborhood parks to form a natural park network linking to downtown. Homes in neighborhoods around the lake will be in good to great condition, and the Pierson Road Corridor will feature vibrant commercial spaces along with new residential development that aligns with goals of the Master Plan. Signs of renewed prosperity will be everywhere, and a positive vitality will have returned to the area. There will be many activities targeted to children, teens, adults, and seniors alike. Education quality will be higher, and all children educated in the area will have a basic understanding of how to protect water quality and how lake and river ecosystems function. The Flint Park Lake Community will be viewed as a model of urban revitalization, and it will be centered on the natural amenity of Flint Park Lake, whose water quality has been restored after major improvements to storm drains and dredging of the muck bottom in the lake. These long-term improvements help unite over time the diverse neighborhoods that all have a stake in the renewed public land around the lake, while promoting sustainability principles that lead to a cleaner, healthier natural environment for residents to appreciate together.*

The action steps to achieve this Vision fit into three Goal categories: 1) *Recreation Improvements* (REC); 2) *Neighborhood Stabilization and Targeted Redevelopment* (NSTR); and 3) *Water Quality* (WQ). Action steps are prioritized below chronologically, followed by the corresponding Goal category abbreviation. **Table 2** enumerates each of the action steps by Goal category, with the subsequent section retaining the numbering system from the prioritized list of action steps below.

### **Short-Term: Years 1-2**

- 1. Create a Friends of Flint Park Lake organization comprised of representatives of interested stakeholder groups to help guide implementation of the actions below. It would meet as needed and annually work with the Flint River Watershed Coalition to hold a lake clean-up day (REC).*
- 2. Improve existing amenities and restore recreational functions to Flint Park Lake (particularly the picnic shelter, boat launch, and dock); including continued maintenance of the grounds and facilities with assistance of state, county, and private resources (REC).*
- 3. Prepare detailed Flint Park Lake Trail Plan and the next step recreation improvement plans and financing (REC).*
- 4. Hold a major kickoff event to celebrate park improvements to the restored park that rallies support and assistance for all the actions that follow (NSTR).*

5. *Demolish targeted substandard/structurally deficient buildings and incorporate low-maintenance reseeding (NSTR).*
6. *Establish a mechanism to regularly mow vacant lots in the Flint Park Lake Community that aligns with the goals of the City's Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework (NSTR).*
7. *Neighborhood safety is improved by stakeholder design of a new neighborhood watch system and implementation of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (NSTR).*
8. *Provide incentives to homeowners to invest more in exterior home improvements (NSTR).*
9. *Develop best management practices for stormwater run-off around Flint Park Lake to stabilize and maintain current water quality and incorporate green infrastructure strategies (WQ).*
10. *Gather water quality data in Flint Park Lake and further north in Brent Run Creek; conduct a thorough analysis of options for draining and dredging, as well as options for financing these improvements (WQ).*
11. *Begin preparation and distribution of educational materials on protecting water quality to stakeholders and households, and assist schools with curriculum development on water quality protection and monitoring based around Flint Park Lake (WQ).*

### **Short-Term: Years 3-5**

12. *Continue full restoration of recreational functions to Flint Park Lake focusing on upgrading sports facilities (REC).*
13. *The Genesee County Land Bank adds to their property in the Flint Park Lake Community by strategically acquiring and holding lots in heavily blighted areas surrounding the lake (REC).*
14. *Begin aggressive paint-it/fix-it program for targeted houses and businesses in the Flint Park Lake Community (NSTR).*
15. *Enhance southern entrance off Stewart Ave. as the gateway to Flint Park Lake with improved signage and parking (NSTR).*
16. *Install wayfinding to key assets along roads adjacent to Flint Park Lake, as well as within the park itself. Use wayfinding to strengthen connections between Flint Park Lake, Fleming Park, and Max Brandon Park (NSTR).*
17. *City initiates neighborhood stabilization program with aggressive code enforcement (NSTR).*
18. *The City of Flint Planning Department teams with Habitat for Humanity and Flint Park Lake neighborhoods in planning and development of more infill housing on targeted vacant lots in neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake (NSTR).*
19. *Implement road diet recommendations from the Master Plan to Dupont St., including shifting to a three-lane configuration (NSTR).*
20. *Secure funding for major water quality improvements to Flint Park Lake (WQ).*
21. *Schools begin implementation of water quality protection curriculum (WQ).*

### **Long-Term: Years 6-10**

22. *Make additional recreational improvements associated with expanding official boundaries of public park land around Flint Park Lake to incorporate Fleming Park; enhance park connectivity to Max Brandon Park and other key points in the city (REC).*
23. *New mixed-use development (2-3 stories of residences above commercial) is built on Pierson Rd. to align with its 'city corridor' classification in the new Master Plan (NSTR).*
24. *Continue neighborhood stabilization and home improvements (NSTR).*

- 25. Continue urban residential infill projects in targeted locations, if not yet completed (NSTR).
- 26. Continue increasing residential density along Pierson Rd. and improving the quality of commercial establishments (NSTR).
- 27. Hold a giant 10 year celebration (NSTR).
- 28. Implement the preferred plan for draining Flint Park Lake, dredging, and properly disposing of the dredged material, re-contouring the lake bottom, refilling the lake, and restocking fish in the lake. Or, in the event this is infeasible, begin annual aquatic weed harvesting or use of aquatic herbicides in targeted locations (WQ).

**Long-Term: Years 11-15**

- 29. Continue urban infill and densification along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).
- 30. Complete commercial redevelopment along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).
- 31. Further enhance landscaping, lighting, and aesthetic improvements along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).

<b>Table 2: Breakdown of Flint Park Lake Vision action steps by category</b>	
<b>Goal category:</b>	<b>Action steps:</b>
Recreation Improvements	1-3, 12-13, 22
Neighborhood Stabilization and Targeted Redevelopment	4-8, 14-19, 23-27, 29-31
Water Quality	9-11, 20-21, 28

The recommended improvements above will require a substantial investment by present and future landowners in the study area, as well as by nearby stakeholder organizations, and by city, county, and state entities. This Vision will have the potential to become a reality only by these groups working together and coordinating their talents and resources to reach these common goals. The following sections provide more refined descriptions of the action steps and objectives within each Goal category that will lead to the implementation necessary to achieve this Vision. These actions are all compiled on a summary table on **pages 57-59**.

## Goal: RECREATION IMPROVEMENTS

Improved recreational facilities and infrastructure provide public health and economic development benefits to communities while enhancing the quality of life of individuals. Access to walking and bike trails, a comprehensive park system, and recreational programming are assets that attract and retain residents to a community. Recreational enhancements can also improve public health as more opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities create a culture and atmosphere of physical fitness. These efforts in turn also have the power to positively affect the overall safety, aesthetics, and quality of life within the Flint Park Lake Community.

Flint Park Lake is one of three lakes within the city boundaries of Flint, and possesses the natural amenities and assets to become a vibrant public recreational space for not only the city, but for residents in nearby municipalities in Genesee County as well. Improving recreational opportunities around Flint Park Lake is both a short- and long-term project that can be integral to neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment in the surrounding area. Such improvements are also strongly correlated with future water quality improvements. Recreational enhancements will maximize Flint Park Lake as an asset in order to improve the quality of life for existing residents, attract users from across Genesee County, and lead to further community engagement that builds more advocates for broader water quality initiatives.

### *Short-Term: Years 1-2*

**ACTION STEP 1:** *Create a Friends of Flint Park Lake organization comprised of representatives of interested stakeholder groups to help guide implementation of the actions below. It would meet as needed and annually work with the Flint River Watershed Coalition to hold a lake clean-up day (REC).*

Citizen groups such as Friends of Max Brandon Park enable a community to embrace its natural assets such as parks and lakes and give them the proper attention they require. Current conditions in public parks illustrate the lack of resources and limited funding available at the city level to address these needs. A stable organization comprised of engaged residents and invested local stakeholders would help raise awareness and attract the help necessary to begin implementing these action steps and objectives for Flint Park Lake. Organizations such as Friends of Max Brandon Park coordinate clean-up initiatives, charity drives, health-oriented events such as 5K runs, and other community functions that capitalize on the presence of such a unique natural amenity. The creation of a similar Friends of Flint Park Lake organization could have the same impact in revitalizing the lake as a key community space. An immediate activity could be an annual clean-up coordinated with the Flint River Watershed Coalition. This organization could start small and focus on acquiring community development block grants, or coordinating with Keep Genesee Beautiful on programs such as 'Adopt A Park' or Neighborhood Beautification mini-grants.

**ACTION STEP 2:** Improve existing amenities and restore recreational functions to Flint Park Lake (particularly the picnic shelter, boat launch, and dock); including continued maintenance of the grounds and facilities with assistance of state, county, and private resources.

In the early 2000s, grant funding through the Michigan DNR made possible two phases of recreational development on Flint Park Lake. Recreation bonds led to the creation of basketball courts and baseball facilities on the south end of the park, and later a second phase of development added a boat ramp, parking lot, and picnic facilities to the northeast corner of the lake. The location of these improvements ignored suggestions made in the Redevelopment Plan's environmental study to construct wetlands at the south and east sides of the lake (Figure 14) which will be discussed in later recommendations regarding water quality. Years of neglect with minimal park maintenance and recurring dumping around the lake has created an unwelcoming community space with little to offer in the way of recreational amenities. These conditions do little to encourage revitalization efforts in the neighborhood, and should be improved so that steps may be taken towards growth and renewal in the areas surrounding Flint Park Lake.

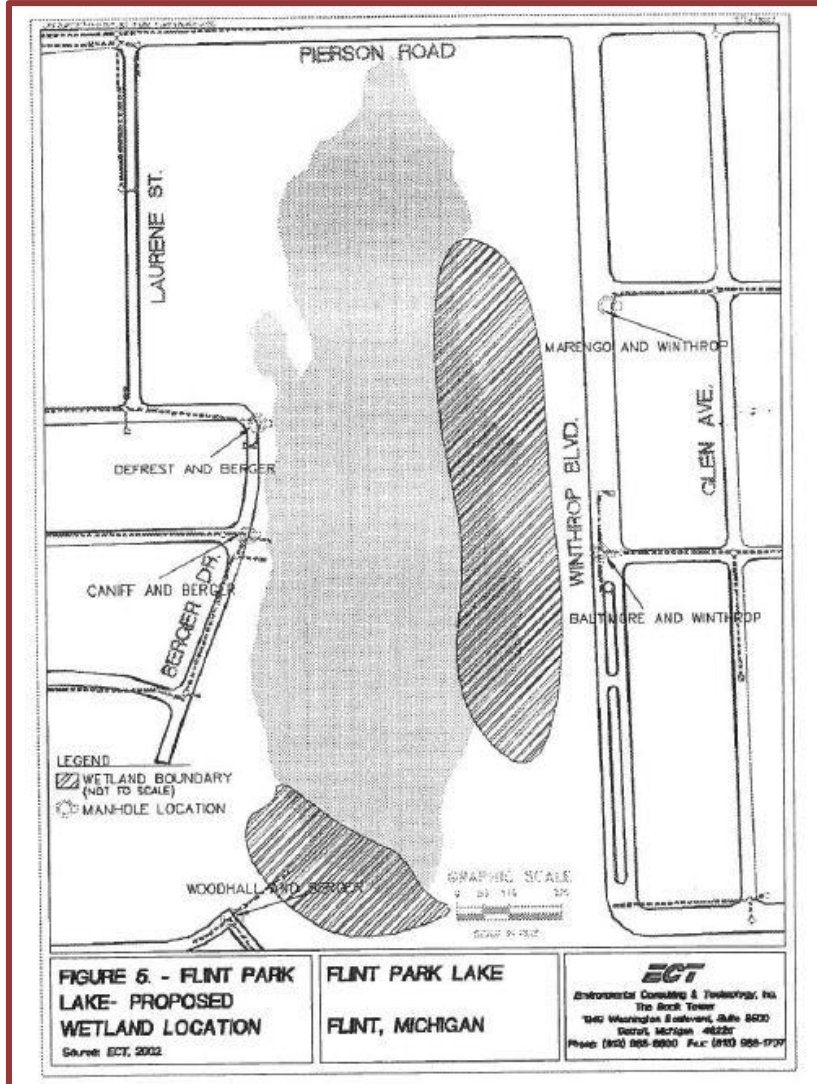


Figure 14: Proposed wetland locations from 2002 Redevelopment Plan.  
(Environmental Consulting & Technology)



Action Step 2, Objective 1: Maintain picnic shelter, improve fishing pier and trail leading to landing from parking lot on northeast side of the lake, enhance fishing/bird watching opportunities along northwest side of lake with additional seating or a small dock: Since the construction of the fishing pier as part of the grant-funded improvements in the early 2000s, aquatic vegetation, household dumping, and periodic flooding along the east side of the lake have made access to the pier difficult. Residents have noted how the walking path that leads visitors from the parking lot to the shoreline and pier is no longer serviceable, with overgrown brush obstructing the marshy trail that is frequently submerged (*Photo 2*). A dedicated maintenance plan is required to preserve the accessibility and functionality of the fishing pier and nearby picnic pavilion. Otherwise, transplanting the pier to a more accessible portion of the shoreline or developing a secondary dock area for fishing/nature viewing are options that should be considered. Many residents suggested the northwest portion of the shoreline as a possible location for another dock.



*Photo 2: Overgrown brush obstructs the marshy trail leading to fishing pier on shoreline in the distance.* (Photo: FRWC)

Action Step 2, Objective 2: Improve playground and picnic facilities at Flint Park Lake: The picnic pavilion needs to be upgraded and re-established as a premier public meeting space at Flint Park Lake. More seating such as benches or picnic tables, along with additional BBQ grills and additional sanitation equipment such as trash cans, should be added in this space. Such amenities may also be beneficial to include near the underused playground equipment near the south entrance to Flint Park Lake. Creating a more social, hospitable atmosphere around this playground area for families and their children could tie into the proposed improvements to the nearby basketball and baseball facilities and increase public activity for this section of the park.

Action Step 2, Objective 3: Utilize naturalization techniques around Flint Park Lake in coordination with the park maintenance system devised by Flint Park Lake stakeholders: The Master Plan discusses the need to embrace naturalization in selected parks and natural spaces in the city, allowing parkland to transition to native vegetation in targeted areas. These areas fall primarily in Green Innovation, Green Neighborhood, and Community Open Space place type designations detailed in the land use plan. With the limited operating expenses of the Parks and Recreation Department, naturalization practices help reduce maintenance costs while creating greater biodiversity around the lake ecosystem. Such practices must be in coordination with the established park maintenance system to ensure naturalization is focused on the areas around Flint Park Lake that most benefit nearby residents and park patrons.

**ACTION STEP 3:** Prepare detailed Flint Park Lake Trail Plan and the next step recreation improvement plans and financing.

Creating a pedestrian and bicyclist friendly path that surrounds Flint Park Lake encourages park patrons to utilize this neighborhood asset to its full extent. Increasing activity around the full perimeter of the lake will assist in combatting park dumping by raising awareness through greater monitoring of lake conditions. Such a trail network should feature accessible entrance and outlet points that promote greater park connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood and its residents. Recreation and exercise equipment could be designed in small stations around the lake path to create additional options that engage park patrons (Figure 15).



*Figure 15: A trail network around Flint Park Lake could incorporate recreation and exercise stations along its route while enhancing connections to the neighborhood and nearby parks.*

The existing infrastructure for Berger Dr. could be utilized as a foundation for the trail along the southwest portion of Flint Park Lake. Another option in this area would be to acquire easements that allow the trail to run along the backside of private property along Berger Dr., which places the trail closer to this portion of the shoreline. Proper analysis of the topography around Flint Park Lake and annual floodplain trends should also be assessed when designing the trail, particularly along frequently cited areas of flooding along the southern and eastern shorelines of the lake. A possible trail plan for Flint Park Lake is illustrated in *Figure 16*.

# FLINT PARK LAKE, FLINT, MI



- LEGEND**
- Proposed 10' Multi-Use Trail
  - Proposed 10' Multi-Use Trail Easement
  - Proposed 10' Multi-Use Trail - Optional Trail
  - Existing Hard Surface Connected to Proposed Trail
  - Parking
  - Boat Launch
  - Pavilion with Barbeque
  - Deck
  - Playground
  - Baseball Diamond
  - Basketball Court
  - KIOSK Canoe Rental Kiosk

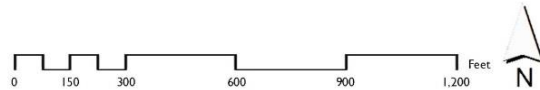


Figure 16: Map detailing potential trail around Flint Park Lake with neighborhood connectors.

The Flint Park Lake path could also be integrated into a greater trail network that provides linkage to nearby Max Brandon Park and further connectivity to rest of the city. Max Brandon Park is a valued, serene public green space that attracts residents from throughout the city who enjoy its dense forested pathways and serene landscapes as a respite from their urban surroundings. Establishing a trail linkage to Max Brandon Park would attract its users to take in the revitalized Flint Park Lake and enjoy a natural public space that boasts an attractive water body, as well - a feature not present within Max Brandon Park. Such connectivity may also encourage residents of the Flint Park Lake Community to visit and appreciate the vast beauty of this nearby natural amenity with greater regularity, and establish more bonds between these park communities. *Figure 17* imagines a potential kiosk situated along the northwest shore near the proposed new dock, where park patrons could rent kayaks or canoes for use on Flint Park Lake.



*Figure 17: Envisioned improvements to northwest shore of Flint Park Lake. The improvements also include a new dock, improved signage and lighting, and a shelter for boat and canoe rentals.*

**Short-Term: Years 3-5**

**ACTION STEP 12:** Continue full restoration of recreational functions to Flint Park Lake focusing on upgrading sports facilities.

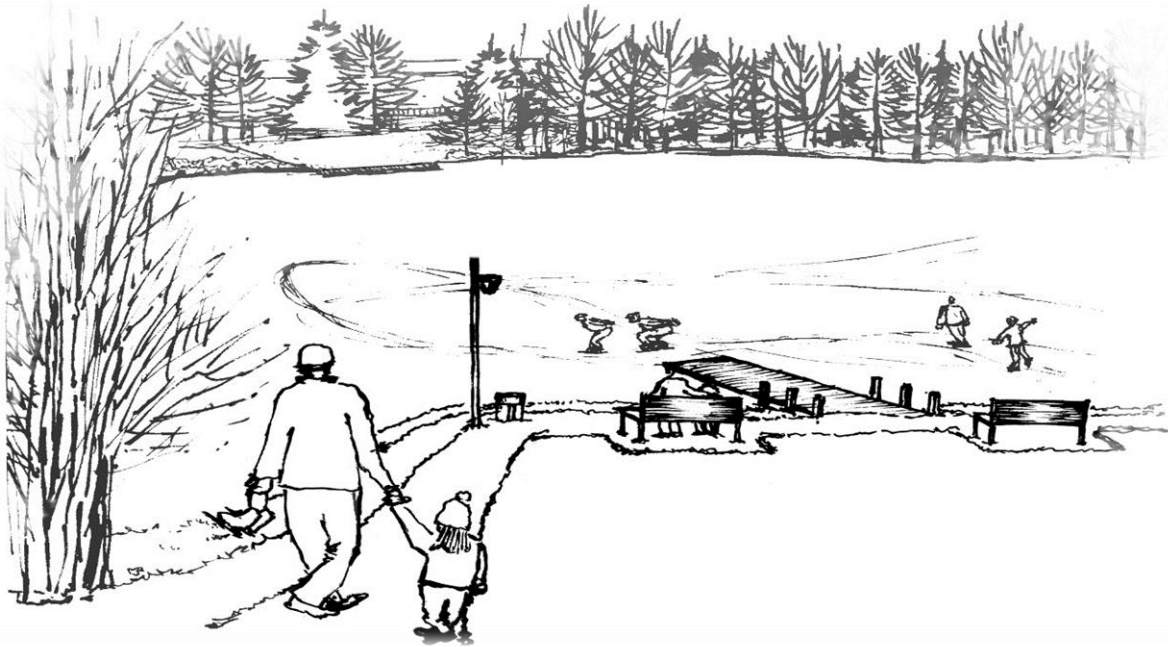
Improvements made to the recreational facilities in the early 2000s have been either vandalized or damaged due to lack of maintenance over time. In their current state, these dilapidated facilities detract from the lake's value and limit opportunities to attract park patrons (*Photo 3*).



*Photo 3: Current conditions of underutilized basketball courts near southern entrance to park.  
(Photo: MSU Planning & Zoning Center)*

Residents repeatedly expressed the need for recreational amenities in the area that keep youth active and invested in their neighborhood, and in turn less likely to fall into criminal patterns so prevalent in the city. The addition of bleachers to this area would provide more public seating and may lead to further community fellowship, with opportunities for possible community tournaments or neighborhood leagues that could encourage spectators and enhance park attendance.

That being said, residents stressed the importance of utilizing materials for these park improvements that would discourage theft, as park facilities have succumbed to various looters over the year desperate to find copper or other metals for scrapping. This further solidifies the need for routine maintenance and park supervision by establishing responsibilities and coordinating initiatives amongst stakeholders. Year round recreational activities could also be offered through ice-skating and sledding opportunities (*Figure 18*). A kiosk could also help in this endeavor by stocking related equipment and supplies for park patrons to rent.



*Figure 18: Year-round recreational opportunities at Flint Park Lake include possible ice-skating and sledding rental for park patrons during the winter months.*

***ACTION STEP 13:*** *The Genesee County Land Bank begins adding to their property in the Flint Park Lake Community by strategically acquiring and holding lots in heavily blighted areas surrounding the lake.*

In preparation for a possible expansion of park property (a notion which will be elaborated upon in Action Step 22), the Genesee County Land Bank should begin assessing and prioritizing potential lots near and adjacent to Flint Park Lake that could be incorporated into a larger community green space. Naturalization techniques on these reclaimed lots around the lake would provide opportunities to institute green infrastructure that assists in stormwater management. Furthermore, by taking ownership of these parcels and assisting local stakeholders in gradual demolition and clean-up efforts, the Land Bank could help lay groundwork that eventually incorporates Fleming Park just west of Flint Park Lake and improves connectivity to Max Brandon Park, while also consolidating public ownership within the Park.

### ***Long-Term: Years 6-15***

***ACTION STEP 22:*** *Make additional recreational improvements associated with expanding official boundaries of public park land around Flint Park Lake to incorporate Fleming Park; enhance park connectivity to Max Brandon Park and other key points in the city.*

Opportunities exist to add to the available green space in Flint Park Lake by strategically incorporating further land bank property acquisitions in the area. A large amount of public land already exists along the northwest shoreline of the lake, and by integrating select parcels secured by the Land Bank through planned acquisition in years 1-5, connections could easily be made to nearby Fleming Park. The gradual process of removing blighted properties around the lake can lead to more expansive community green space for the surrounding neighborhood, aligning with the long-term vision of the Master Plan.

Figure 19 illustrates a future vision for the potential expansion of Flint Park Lake to incorporate Fleming Park and other reclaimed parcels in the vicinity of the lake. This enlarged public green space could further enhance the natural asset that is Flint Park Lake and attract a greater number of park patrons to invest in the area. On a larger citywide scale, this expanded community open space around Flint Park Lake could lay the groundwork for a greater park network linking to Max Brandon Park and establishing gradual connections to other public parks heading southeast towards downtown.



Figure 19: Potential boundaries for Flint Park Lake expansion to incorporate Fleming Park and strengthen connections to Max Brandon Park. Such expansion would happen over long-term property acquisition and blight removal by the Genesee County Land Bank.



## Goal: NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION & TARGETED REDEVELOPMENT

The neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake have been devastated by property abandonment and population loss over the past several decades. In partnership with key stakeholders, neighborhood stabilization is a crucial step to revitalizing the neighborhood and making it more functional for existing residents and attractive to new residents. Such efforts also establish a more welcoming environment that helps attract and introduce new users to Flint Park Lake.

Neighborhood redevelopment will occur over a longer period of time. The immediate steps in redeveloping neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake require ancillary improvements, programs, and blight removal, while the long-term projects address new residential construction and expansion of public green spaces. The action steps and objectives in this section aim to harness that asset to create a safe and user-friendly family environment for both residents and visitors to Flint Park Lake.

### *Short-Term: Years 1-2*

**ACTION STEP 4:** *Hold a major kickoff event to celebrate park improvements to the restored park that rallies support and assistance for all the actions that follow.*

These action steps and objectives cannot begin to take shape without the unified efforts of stakeholders in and around the Flint Park Lake Community. Once the initial short-term improvements are made to recreational facilities in the park, a community event to celebrate these first steps should be held onsite for residents and local stakeholders to enjoy. Events such as the annual Southside Neighborhood Picnic near Thread Lake (*Photo 4*) draw large crowds of residents of all ages and illustrate the energy and enthusiasm prevalent in the City of Flint. Such gatherings provide the opportunity for further conversation and engagement amongst those with a shared passion for the area, while creating more enthusiasm and investment in the future planning initiatives for Flint Park Lake.



*Photo 4: Southside Neighborhood Picnic near the Brennan Center, August 2013.  
(Photo: MSU Planning & Zoning Center)*

***ACTION STEP 5: Demolish targeted substandard/structurally deficient buildings in the Flint Park Lake Community and incorporate low-maintenance reseeding.***

The Genesee County Land Bank is a large stakeholder in the Flint Park Lake Community and is currently in the process of demolishing 1,900 structures in the City of Flint (*Figure 9*). Demolition funding has been made possible through state and federal resources with the aim of removing blight in distressed cities. Blight removal in the Flint Park Lake Community provides opportunities to reseed lots with appropriate low-maintenance vegetation which will beautify the neighborhoods while also making them safer. Such efforts can also utilize green infrastructure in these vacant lots to help address stormwater run-off into Flint Park Lake. Removing unwanted structures is the first step in redeveloping the neighborhoods and creating a welcoming environment for residents and visitors to Flint Park Lake. Further blight removal efforts will be needed in the future as well.

***ACTION STEP 6: Establish a mechanism to regularly mow vacant lots in the Flint Park Lake Community that aligns with the goals of the City's Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework.***

Unmaintained lots within the Flint Park Lake Community create hazardous and unsightly landscapes that are detrimental to neighborhood morale and the overall safety of the area. Some nearby residents have taken it upon themselves to clear and maintain overgrown parcels near the lake when time and energy permits, yet current conditions necessitate more assistance. Local stakeholders need to coordinate a system in partnership with the City of Flint to consistently mow and maintain these vacant and unkempt lots that pose aesthetic and safety issues. Such efforts are vital in taking a positive step forward towards neighborhood stabilization and beautification. The City of Flint Planning Department and Genesee County Land Bank have drafted a Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework to form a coordinated strategy in addressing the various levels of blight in the city. Such a framework could be incorporated into the plans devised by the Flint Park Lake Community in dealing with vacant lots in the area.

***ACTION STEP 7: Neighborhood safety is improved by stakeholder design of a new neighborhood watch system and implementation of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.***

Safety concerns are a prevalent amongst residents of the Flint Park Lake Community. Short-term steps may be taken to reverse these trends and slowly improve perceptions of neighborhood residents and park visitors.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is the idea that the built environment can significantly impact the activities in a neighborhood and, when applied with specific intent, can limit and decrease crime in an area. The principles making up CPTED include: 1) Natural Surveillance by lighting and landscape architecture; 2) Natural Access Control via walkways, fences, lighting and signage; 3) Territorial Reinforcement that distinguishes public and private spaces; 4) Maintenance to preserve properties and the integrity of the neighborhood.

Action Step 7, Objective 1: Create a collaborative neighborhood watch organization: A neighborhood watch organization made up of residents, business-owners, and stakeholders in the Flint Park Lake Community could serve to collectively create and enforce expectations and rules for the area. This neighborhood watch organization should be an action-orientated group that monitors behavior while also engaging in positive outcomes outlined in Objective 3 and 4 of this action step. Existing block clubs or crime watch efforts in the area should also be incorporated into such an organization.

Action Step 7, Objective 2: Establish, display, and enforce rules around Flint Park Lake: The neighborhood watch organization in partnership with the City of Flint Parks & Recreation Department (and the Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission if it becomes involved) should come together to establish and display rules for the area. Enforcing the established rules would be a collective community effort with individuals holding each other accountable in partnership with City of Flint Parks & Recreation Department (and the Genesee County Parks & Recreation Commission if it becomes involved).

Action Step 7, Objective 3: Remove trash and prevent future dumping in the Flint Park Lake Community: Continual litter and dumping is a key concern for residents around Flint Park Lake. An annual thorough lake-wide cleanup is necessary to beautify the area and keep it clean. To prevent future dumping, signage should be placed in key spots around Flint Park Lake to indicate dumping is prohibited and must be enforced by City of Flint Police Department.

Action Step 7, Objective 4: Remove brush and dead trees along shoreline to restore clear shoreline vistas; clear dense foliage that provides opportunities for dumping: Unmaintained shorelines have resulted in an over-growth of vegetation around Flint Park Lake. This overgrowth limits both visual and physical access to the water and shoreline. Removing brush and dead vegetation will enhance accessibility and visibility of the lake to create a more welcoming public space.

Action Step 7, Objective 5: Increase lighting in park around Flint Park Lake: The neighborhood surrounding Flint Park Lake currently lacks adequate lighting that would enhance safety and deter unwanted activity in the park. Lighting needs to be improved in each of the streets and parks surrounding Flint Park Lake (and ultimately also along the proposed walking/bicycle path in this Vision).

**ACTION STEP 8:** *Provide incentives to homeowners to invest more in exterior home improvements.*

Many cities have successfully instituted housing façade improvement programs as a way to improve the value of housing stock, as well as creating more visually appealing neighborhoods. Often, communities seek Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), or receive state funding for assistance in projects such as façade improvement programs. In 2007, Flint participated in a facade improvement program through a Community Development Block Grant from HUD for revitalization of the storefronts in the central business district in downtown Flint. The grants were for up to \$25,000, but had to have matching funds from the building

owner. Improvements that were covered under the grant were signs, canopies, awnings, and other general façade improvements.

### ***Short-Term: Years 3-5***

***ACTION STEP 14:*** *Begin aggressive paint-it/fix-it program for targeted houses and businesses in the Flint Park Lake Community.*

Neighborhoods with dilapidated or aged housing stock have been successful in using “paint-it/fix-it” programs which provide a small amount of money (usually less than \$1,000) to neighborhood groups for exterior paint and small repairs on houses of persons unable to pay for such improvements. This type of project would be ideal for harnessing volunteer work forces, such as churches, community or neighborhood groups, schools, or others. Painting and making exterior improvements to neglected homes can not only improve the houses involved, but also the block and neighborhood in which they are located. It can be repeated year after year with the amounts available tied to local need.

The City of Flint may be able to support this program through the federal HOME Investment Partnerships Program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The HOME program funds a wide range of activities including building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income persons. Another avenue for implementing this initiative is Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the State of Michigan which could be applied for and accessed by the City of Flint.

***ACTION STEP 15:*** *Enhance southern entrance off Stewart Ave. as gateway to Flint Park Lake with improved signage and parking.*

The southern entrance to Flint Park Lake off of W. Stewart Ave. is currently underwhelming, with only a weathered, vandalized sign providing evidence that a park indeed exists in this location. The damaged and under-utilized recreational facilities near this entrance also do little to attract passersby to the park. Greater efforts to create a prominent gateway entrance to the park are necessary to increase visitors and local usage, so that this natural asset stands out in the community and draws the attention it deserves. Depending on the trail system devised around Flint Park Lake, other entry points to the park and applicable design features may need to be assessed beyond just improving the southern entrance from W. Stewart Ave.

***ACTION STEP 16:*** *Install wayfinding to key assets along roads adjacent to Flint Park Lake, as well as within park itself; use wayfinding to strengthen connections between Flint Park Lake, Fleming Park, and Max Brandon Park.*

Wayfinding involves utilizing displays, signage, and other physical markers to provide a sense of location and identity to a specific area. Such methods applied to the Flint Park Lake Community would help attract park patrons and better advertise the presence of a valuable natural amenity. Current signage around Flint Park Lake is ineffective due to vandalism, and gives new visitors a negative impression immediately upon entering the park (*Photo 5*).



*Photo 5: Existing signage along Stewart Ave. for Flint Park Lake.  
(Photo: MSU Planning & Zoning Center)*

Wayfinding techniques could be applied not only to directional and instructional signage that helps orient and guide park visitors, but also through displays that inform and educate visitors on local ecology and history of the Flint Park Lake Community. Implementing stronger wayfinding could also tie into initiatives for creating more engaging entranceways to the park along with enhancing connectivity to Max Brandon Park.

***ACTION STEP 17:*** *City initiates neighborhood stabilization program with aggressive code enforcement.*

The Genesee County Land Bank is currently in the process of removing 1,900 blighted properties which will reduce the housing stock in Flint but also make it easier for code enforcement on existing residential and commercial structures in the City of Flint. Code enforcement is a neighborhood stabilization initiative that will maintain the quality of individual houses, streets, and neighborhoods. Holding home and landowners in the Flint Park Lake Community accountable for the condition of their properties will assist in upholding and potentially increasing property values in the area.

***ACTION STEP 18:*** *The City of Flint Planning Department teams with Habitat for Humanity and Flint Park Lake neighborhoods in planning and development of more infill housing on targeted vacant lots in neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake.*

The demolition of blighted structures in the Flint Park Lake Community provides opportunities for infill housing development where there is a market demand. Infill development targets cleared or underutilized parcels within a neighborhood with the aim of stabilizing and improving the housing conditions for residents in the area. The types of infill housing constructed should be consistent with area market studies, and relevant to the targeted locations of the play type designations in the Master Plan. The CDC Redevelopment Plan from 2002 addresses some of these housing concerns (see **Table 1**). Such efforts should strive to align with the proposed future goals of the Master Plan by focusing new residential development near the Pierson Road Corridor, while capitalizing on opportunities for expanding Community Open Space/Recreation land uses through vacant lots adjacent to Flint Park Lake.

***ACTION STEP 19:*** Implement road diet recommendations from the Master Plan to Dupont St., including shifting to a three-lane configuration.

Dupont Street runs along the east side of the Flint Park Lake Community, and is targeted in the Master Plan as a potential site for a road diet. These methods aim to downsize excessive and under-utilized space within roadways that may instead better serve the area through different techniques. Reducing Dupont St. to a three-lane road (with the middle lane serving as a left-turn lane) maintains a two-way traffic flow that still services its current traffic levels, while leaving a full lane split on each side of the street to implement more bike-friendly uses.

### ***Long-Term: Years 6-10***

***ACTION STEP 23:*** New mixed-use development (2-3 stories of residences above commercial) is built on Pierson Rd. to align with its ‘city corridor’ classification in the new Master Plan.

The new Master Plan proposes future sub-areas to focus initial development and revitalization efforts. The results of these pilots may then be applied to similar sectors of the city. The Pierson Road Corridor is identified as one such sub-area, and runs along the northern border of Flint Park Lake while acting as a connecting thoroughfare to Flint Township to the west of the study area (see *Figure 8*). Long-term future planning initiatives involve applying “Traditional Commercial Corridor Development” to this area and attracting a mix of commercial and residential uses that may bolster Pierson Rd. as an integral corridor near the Flint Park Lake Community. Developing Pierson Rd. into a vibrant commercial corridor would potentially draw in more users to enjoy the revitalized Flint Park Lake.

***ACTION STEP 24:*** Continue neighborhood stabilization and home improvements.

The paint-it/fix it program (which provides home improvement incentives to homeowners), and the City of Flint’s current code enforcement initiatives should continue in order to facilitate neighborhood stabilization efforts. Each of the programs and initiatives should be amended over time depending on their individual successes and funding available from local, county, and state resources.

***ACTION STEP 25:*** Continue urban residential infill projects in targeted locations, if not yet completed.

New residential development in the Flint Park Lake Community should align with both the desires expressed in the Citizens District Council Redevelopment Plan, the proposed future land uses of the new Master Plan, and market demands in the area. More cleared parcels and expanded public property due to Land Bank demolitions over an extended amount of time may yield new approaches towards land use and community open space in the areas surrounding Flint Park Lake. New residential development may tie into the initiative to revitalize the Pierson Road Corridor.

***ACTION STEP 26:*** Continue increasing residential density along Pierson Rd. and improving the quality of commercial establishments.

The Pierson Road Corridor is a key thoroughfare in the Flint Park Lake Community and provides connections to Flint Township to the west. Gradual improvements to commercial lots within this sub-area that also incorporate demands for new residential opportunities will enhance street aesthetics and attract further users to the corridor. This increased activity in the Pierson Road Corridor can improve nearby neighborhood conditions while encouraging more patrons and higher usage in the revitalized Flint Park Lake.

***ACTION STEP 27:*** Hold a giant 10 year celebration.

The 10 year celebration should be a time to reflect back on the successes and challenges of the work completed in the previous decade, while looking ahead to the completion of the Vision. The celebration will serve to strengthen already existing collaborative relationships while encouraging the formation of new partnerships that will assist in completing the Vision. The celebration is a time for renewal and reinvestment in the Vision.

### ***Long-Term: Years 11-15***

***ACTION STEP 29:*** Continue urban infill and densification along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).

***ACTION STEP 30:*** Complete commercial redevelopment along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).

***ACTION STEP 31:*** Further enhance landscaping, lighting, and aesthetic improvements along Pierson Rd. (NSTR).

## Goal: WATER QUALITY

The method ultimately adopted to improve the water quality in Flint Park Lake will be determined by extensive water sampling over time, then by an evaluation of nutrients and other contaminants currently flowing into the lake. This should be supplemented by developing and analyzing options for the dredging and disposal of the waste sediment along the lake bottom. Improving the water quality in Flint Park Lake is not an isolated endeavor, as the water quality of the lake is greatly determined by run-off from nearby surrounding properties along with inflow from the four stormwater outfalls that feed into the lake.

Therefore, the water quality in Flint Park Lake cannot be examined in a vacuum, but needs to be viewed as a whole system. The entire subwatershed must be considered holistically in order to determine the appropriate course of action. Options for improving the water quality in Flint Park Lake must be examined for their financial cost, and should be carefully developed and analyzed prior to the selection of the preferred method. Considerable work was done in 2002 by the plan spearheaded by the CDC and should be updated as part of new analysis and action. The amount of public land around Flint Park Lake provides vast opportunities for educational outreach and green infrastructure efforts related to water quality, stormwater management, and sustainability practices.

### *Short-Term: Years 1-2*

**ACTION STEP 9:** *Develop best management practices for stormwater run-off around Flint Park Lake to stabilize and maintain current water quality and incorporate green infrastructure strategies.*

Applying best management practices for stormwater runoff cannot improve the current water quality, but it can stabilize and maintain the current conditions. Stabilizing nutrient flow is a crucial first step to improving water quality in both the long- and short-term. Large scale capital projects such as draining and dredging should only be considered once the sources of nutrients are identified and once it is determined how to stabilize the nutrient flows into Flint Park Lake.

The dominant concerns over stormwater flooding that residents expressed throughout the planning process (particularly along the east side of Flint Park Lake) were further explored in the study conducted by Rowe Incorporated in 2002. They concluded from their analysis several possibilities for these recurring flooding issues:

- Catch basins within the neighborhood may not be receiving proper attention, creating blockage that leads to local flooding. A routine maintenance schedule was recommended to check and clean these basins regularly, and also submit annual status reports to the CDC.
- Water flowing into Flint Park Lake during storm events may exceed the lake's capacity and create overflow of surrounding banks along with further blockage of catch basins. A study was recommended to determine if the current size of the north outlet crossing under Pierson Rd. is still of adequate size to accommodate the current levels of drainage areas flowing into the lake.



- This outlet across Pierson Rd. and the drain leading north to Brent Creek Run near Carpenter Rd. may be blocked with debris and limited in their capacity to handle increased stormwater drainage. A maintenance schedule was also recommended to periodically check and clear these areas as well, with annual status reports to the CDC.
- Storm drain sewers north of Flint Park Lake may not have the proper size to manage any drastic increases in flows coming from the lake or other drainage areas in this northern portion of the city. A further study of these possible issues by the City of Flint was also recommended.

The environmental study included in the Redevelopment Plan conducted by ECT also discussed these flooding concerns in their analysis. These issues illustrate the need for green infrastructure applications in the vacant lots surrounding Flint Park Lake that utilize wetlands and vegetation to address stormwater management.

***ACTION STEP 10: Gather water quality data in Flint Park Lake and further north in Brent Run Creek; conduct a thorough analysis of options for draining and dredging, as well as options for financing these improvements.***

*Action Step 10, Objective 1: Measure and examine nutrient run-off and their contaminants flowing into Flint Park Lake:* The first step in improving water quality is to test and measure the current health of the watershed by determining the nutrients that are flowing into Flint Park Lake from storm water drains as well as nutrient levels along Brent Run Creek. Data over time at various locations is critical to obtain.

*Action Step 10, Objective 2a: Once it is determined how to stabilize the nutrient flows into Flint Park Lake, develop options to drain and dredge Flint Park Lake to improve water quality:* Water quality improvements are possible through the draining and dredging of the lake yet these methods can be very expensive. A study is needed to determine the feasibility and degree of dredging required. Is it necessary to dredge the entire lake? If not, what parts of the lake need to be dredged?

*Action Step 10, Objective 2b: Improve Water Quality via Periphery Surface Level Techniques:* If draining and dredging is not an option, ancillary techniques can be employed to improve the appearance and surface use of Flint Park Lake by aquatic weed destruction. This process involves harvesting aquatic vegetation from the bottom of the lake and/or by application of a marine herbicide. The neutralization of aquatic weeds will not reduce sedentary toxins or nutrients in Flint Park Lake, but will clear weeded areas and permit more extensive use of the water surface.

***ACTION STEP 11: Begin preparation and distribution of educational materials on protecting water quality to stakeholders and households, and assist schools with curriculum development on water quality protection and monitoring based around Flint Park Lake.***

Acton Step 11, Objective 1: Develop an educational curriculum focused on water quality: Develop a broad-based curriculum that will educate students and stakeholders in the Flint Park Lake Community about water quality and sediment contamination in the lake and its subwatershed. This will help individuals without a formal education in Environmental Sciences to understand the level of contamination in Flint Park Lake and what can be done to mitigate it. Education on the existing conditions in Flint Park Lake invests stakeholders in the immediate challenges related to water quality and will assist in developing a collective solution.

Action Step 11, Objective 2: Work with Michigan YVPC and their YES after-school program to educate students and their parents about the current water quality of Flint Park Lake and the ongoing efforts to remediate the pollution in the lake: Coordinating educational curriculum with the strategies already in place through the YVPC's YES Initiative will help the community better understand current levels of contamination in Flint Park Lake and the steps being taken to combat these levels. This helps individuals stay engaged in the process, become informed about efforts taking place, and provide input on future land use and improvement decisions.

Action Step 11, Objective 3: Provide training workshops on best management practices for use of household and outdoor chemicals and stormwater management for area stakeholders: This knowledge is for the individual to consider his/her own practices at their home and work. The education provided would be based on practical activities, such as proper chemical application to private lawns, as well as learning the challenges of stormwater run-off.

### **Short-Term: Years 3-5**

**ACTION STEP 20:** *Secure funding for the water quality improvements to Flint Park Lake.*

Improving the water quality of Flint Park Lake is a capital project that extends beyond the scope of the City of Flint and Genesee County. Private, non-profit, and public stakeholders in the area must collaborate to target and secure funding from state and federal resources in order to make impactful improvements to water quality in Flint Park Lake. Potential funders for water quality improvements include: United States Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, among others.

**ACTION STEP 21:** *Schools begin implementation of water quality protection curriculum.*

Continuous environmental education about water quality issues is critical to attaining sustainable improvements in Flint Park Lake and all water bodies in Flint. After piloting a water quality curriculum through the Michigan YVPC's YES Initiative, the program should be modified and applied to the Flint Public School system at the middle school level.

**Long-Term: Years 6-15**

**ACTION STEP 28:** Implement the preferred plan for draining Flint Park Lake, dredging, and properly disposing of the dredged material, re-contouring the lake bottom, refilling the lake, and restocking fish in the lake. Or, in the event this is infeasible, begin annual aquatic weed harvesting or use of aquatic herbicides in targeted locations.

**IF DRAINING AND DREDGING FLINT PARK LAKE IS THE PREFERRED PLAN:**

Action Step 28, Objective 1: Work with water quality professionals after dredging to retest the lake water and sediment and establish new post-dredging pollutant levels for Flint Park Lake:

After environmental clean-up has been completed, it will be necessary to retest the water and sediment to establish new base levels for monitoring future contaminants in Flint Park Lake. Once new monitoring levels have been established, repeat testing in the future can indicate whether or not pollution coming into the lake has stopped, slowed, or whether or not the lake is being contaminated at the pre-dredging rate.

Action Step 28, Objective 2: Determine appropriate mechanism to dispose of sediment:

The disposal method for lake sediment will be determined by the chemical composition of the material. If levels of nitrogen and phosphates exceed threshold levels, the sediment may have to be disposed of in a landfill which is an additional cost to the project. Another option may be to re-use the sediment for development purposes.

Action Step 28, Objective 3: Re-stock fish in Flint Park Lake: Draining and dredging Flint Park Lake will create recreational opportunities that extend beyond the periphery activities envisioned in the short-term. Fishing is one such recreational activity that residents and stakeholders desire. Once the lake is drained and dredged, it is important to engage local fish and recreational organizations to determine desired species for recreation purposes. Local ecologists should also be consulted to help foster a lake ecosystem that preserves the health of Flint Park Lake.

**IF DRAINING AND DREDGING FLINT PARK LAKE IS INFEASIBLE:**

Action Step 28, Objective 1: Determine annual schedule for aquatic weed harvesting or use of aquatic herbicides: The schedule of aquatic weed harvesting would be determined by the funding available. Ideally, aquatic harvesting would be an annual activity. This would improve opportunities for surface usage of the lake.

## Preparing to Implement the Vision: *Community Wants to Start Small and Build*

On March 18, 2014, staff of the MSU Planning and Zoning Center and the Flint River Watershed Coalition hosted a public session to review a draft of a Vision for Flint Park Lake at the New McCree Theatre. The ideas and actions proposed in the draft Vision document were presented to 30 residents and stakeholders from the Flint Park Lake Community to obtain further public input, and to assess whether the Vision properly captured the insights and opinions expressed at the Visioning Session held in November 2013. Audience members were highly engaged and vocal about their concerns with the ideas proposed. Generally they supported all the recommendations, but they wanted to take some smaller steps first and immediate action on some of the top priorities. They want to build one small step at a time based on what they can achieve as a neighborhood independent of outside resources.

The concerns expressed by the Flint Park Lake Community were deeply rooted in historic issues that preceded the timeline of this project. Having just completed the Imagine Flint master planning process, the community uniformly expressed “planning fatigue” and failed to see the tangible results of their public input. There remains considerable resentment stemming from previous planning efforts; particularly the lack of implementation of the 2002 Flint Park Lake Redevelopment Plan, as recommended by the Citizens District Council (CDC). Other concerns included:

### *Mistrust of Local Institutions*

Deep-seated mistrust of city government has created barriers in establishing partnerships or collaborations to improve the neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake. At a previous clean-up event around the lake, the City failed to collect and properly dispose of the litter and refuse consolidated by volunteers. This lack of recognition or support of the residents’ efforts to beautify their neighborhood does little to maintain trust or foster a collaborative network. The audience expressed minimal faith in the City’s abilities to administer grant funding and maintain fiscal responsibility based upon past problems with efforts to maintain the 2002 Redevelopment Plan. There were allegations of mismanagement, if not fraud or theft, regarding neighborhood efforts to help the City acquire several million dollars to improve drainage problems around the lake, and then a complete failure to spend the money for the intended purpose. The lack of a follow-up investigation and accountability really sticks in the craws of many in the neighborhood. As a result, many in the Flint Park Lake Community are adamantly opposed to partnering with the City or any other governmental organization in future efforts to revitalize the area. They want to see how far they can get on their own.

### *Perceptions of Neglect and Discrimination*

Audience members also emphasized their feelings of neglect and discrimination by the City and other local organizations through the years. Residents expressed doubts about the City’s ability or interest in investing in their neighborhoods, saying they felt forgotten or left without a voice in discussions about improving living conditions in their community. Numerous concerns were raised regarding perceived hypocrisy in code enforcement. Residents feel slighted when they attempt to maintain their own yards and lots, only to see adjacent properties owned by the City or Land Bank left

untouched and covered with overgrown brush or dilapidated structures. Some residents carried this sentiment further by alleging that the Land Bank is purposefully neglecting properties owned in the Flint Park Lake Community in order to coerce existing residents to move out of the area and give up on their neighborhoods. These issues are compounded when set against the backdrop of years and years of conflict and dissatisfaction with local planning and implementation efforts. The neighborhood doesn't want more planning—it wants concrete action.

### *Top-Down Planning*

Flint Park Lake residents and stakeholders conveyed to the project team the lack of control they've felt in the planning process over the years, and conversely their lack of faith in top-down planning administered by the City. Some relayed the sentiment that they are "guinea pigs" of the state, where it seems everyone is profiting from their condition other than them, with grant funding and reinvestment initiatives seemingly focused on other sectors of the city. Tired of feeling neglected and forgotten, Flint Park Lake residents and stakeholders expressed a passion to seize control of actions to improve quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods. By taking initial steps towards action into their own hands, residents feel they are more likely to see immediate results and positive impacts based on their focused efforts.

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Despite these concerns, the community expressed support for the Vision as drafted but proposed an alternative starting point before the goals, action steps, and objectives outlined in the previous section of this document (p. 26-30). Weary of grand scale, long-term implementation strategies, the Flint Park Lake Community emphasized a desire for smaller, more immediate steps that can produce tangible results within a shorter time frame. The action steps they want to initiate, before attempting "formal" implementation of this Vision, are based on the following desires expressed by the community:

### *Complete Organizational Autonomy*

The mistrust and skepticism felt by area residents and stakeholders leads to a desire for complete autonomy, with organizational control over administrative, financial, and other decision-making processes. However, in the past some community groups formed in this area have become fractured and ineffective over time. This reiterates the need to start small and focus on developing tight relationships with common goals amongst local residents and stakeholders to ensure a solid organizational foundation moving forward.

### *Citizen Driven Planning and Implementation*

Local residents and stakeholders elaborated upon this desire for more control by emphasizing action on a neighborhood scale through citizen driven planning and implementation. As long-term home and landowners in the area, they feel they are more invested in the vitality of the Flint Park Lake Community than the City or other outside agencies, and therefore are the most qualified to begin affecting change in the neighborhoods surrounding Flint Park Lake.

### *Short-term and Small-Scale Projects*

Before embarking on the short- and long-term goals and action steps suggested in this Vision document, residents expressed a desire to first evaluate smaller-scale actions that can take place in the more immediate future and produce immediate tangible results. Based on the historical context of the area and the continual delays or disappointments associated with prior planning processes, the first steps taken in the Vision implementation process should focus on projects and goals that can illustrate some level of immediate impact for the community. Residents expressed a need to witness positive physical landscape change at the street and block level so that faith is gradually restored in the possibility for more substantial revitalization of the Flint Park Lake Community.

### **Preparing to Implement the Vision: *Preliminary Goal and Action Steps***

Before implementing the Vision presented beginning on page 26, the Flint Park Lake Community desires to complete a series of smaller organizational tasks and projects to better equip them with the network and institutional infrastructure to improve their current capacity. The preliminary goal and related action steps stated below were suggested by the community during the presentation of the Vision. The community believes completing these steps is a necessary prerequisite to adopting and implementing the complete Vision as outlined in this document.

***Preliminary Goal:*** Assess and organize existing related efforts to maintain vacant property in the community, mow land around the lake, improve access to the shoreline, and identify and complete several short-term/small-scale projects to build momentum towards adopting and implementing the Flint Park Lake Vision.

***Action Step 1:*** *Identify and share existing efforts by residents to improve the neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake.*

The community engagement process in Flint Park Lake has brought together residents and stakeholders who are dedicated to improving their community. In some cases, the residents and stakeholders were not familiar with all the work being done largely by existing residents in the community. Although this Vision outlines existing related efforts by the City of Flint and area nonprofits, it does not account for the informal networks and cleanup and maintenance efforts that are already taking place at the block level. It was apparent during the Visioning process that these informal efforts are abundant and concerted, and there is a desire to at least channel the efforts into a collective organized effort at some level.

***Action Step 2:*** *Establish an effective method of organization for the Flint Park Lake Community.*

The Flint Park Community expressed a desire to have organizational autonomy, and there are several available options to achieve that goal. First is just informal meetings of those who are already acting to improve coordination and possibly share resources, and then tackle a few small projects together to build trust and a group relationship. Second, this Vision recommends a “Friends of Flint Park Lake” group

made up of engaged residents and invested local stakeholders to organize events and advocate for the community. This could be organized as a local 501c (3) nonprofit organization but would not have to be. This option would allow the group to start small and attempt to secure funding from elsewhere to improve their neighborhood. A third option is for the neighborhood to become a sub-chapter of the Flint River Watershed Coalition, which would provide complete autonomy under an existing organizational umbrella. The sub-chapter would relieve the community of administrative duties, aid with facilitation, and provide the group with \$1,000 in start-up funds to immediately initiate small projects. While the Flint Park Lake Community only supported the first option at the March meeting, the other options deserve further consideration at an appropriate time.

***Action Step 3: Identify and implement two short-term projects for Summer 2014 and another for Fall 2014.***

The Flint Park Lake Community proposed three immediate projects: 1) a neighborhood clean-up and trash pick-up; 2) volunteers mowing lawns on blighted properties, and 3) volunteers mowing a pathway all around Flint Park Lake so at least people could walk around it and gain access to the shore at several points. The community identified a desire to start small with projects that have a tangible, immediate impact on its neighborhoods. These three projects will serve to not only enhance the aesthetics and safety in the community but also help the community develop its organizational capacity and a framework for larger projects and action steps that are required to implement this Vision.

***Action Step 4: Seek assistance from local partners to explore opportunities for funding and expanding organizational capacity.***

Once the Flint Park Lake Community has established an organizational structure and completed its first three short-term projects, it's desirable to explore partnerships in the region to begin implementing this Vision. For example, Keep Genesee County Beautiful offers various programs and mini-grant funding opportunities for block clubs, neighborhood associations, public schools, service clubs, and other local organizations. Opportunities such as these would empower the group to initiate small steps in improving the Flint Park Lake Community, and provide them experience in functioning as an organized group moving forward. The Vision as outlined in the previous section requires strong partnerships between the community, city, and possibly the county. Each entity could play a significant role in improving the neighborhoods around Flint Park Lake, and this Vision hopes to guide stakeholders to collaborate on this common goal.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**Tables 3-6** summarize the action steps that need to be taken to implement the Vision described in this document beginning on page 27, as well as the time frame indicating which stakeholders need to be involved. The table is organized sequentially; however, action steps within each timeframe are encouraged to be addressed simultaneously.

No single entity is responsible for implementing this or any other vision for Flint Park Lake. The ideas in this Vision document will become a reality only if residents, community groups, private investors, and local governments with a stake in the proposed outcome decide to devote the necessary time, energy, and resources. This can be a challenge for any community, much less one such as Flint that has experienced its share of hardships over the years. That said, the ideas in this Vision are no more expansive than those of hundreds of other locales around the nation where the Vision became Reality through the hard work of stakeholders determined to improve their surrounding community.



**TABLE 3: SHORT-TERM (Years: 1-2) IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIONS – INVOLVED/ RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS**

ACTION STEPS	Friends of Flint Park Lake	Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council	Flint River Watershed Coalition	City of Flint Parks/Rec Dept.	City of Flint Planning Dept.	Genesee County Land Bank	Genesee County Parks/Rec Commission	Other
1. Create Friends of Flint Park Lake organization	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X?	
2. Improve existing recreational amenities (shelter/boat launch/dock)	X	X		<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X?	
3. Prepare Flint Park Lake trail plan & next step recreation improvements	X		X	X			X?	
4. Hold a kick-off event celebrating improvements	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X?				
5. Demolished targeted buildings & incorporate low-maintenance reseeding, green infrastructure	X	X			X	<u>X</u>		
6. Establish mechanism to regularly mow vacant lots	<u>X</u>	X				<u>X</u>		
7. Design new neighborhood safety watch system, implement CPTED methods	X	X			X			
8. Home improvement incentives	X	X			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>		
9. BMP for stormwater run-off in Flint Park Lake			<u>X</u>		X			
10. Assess water quality in Flint Park Lake/Brent Run Creek. Discuss options for draining/dredging & financing	X	X	<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X?	
11. Create/distribute education curriculum on protecting water quality	X		<u>X</u>		X			Local schools

X—Indicates major responsibility

?—No formal role now, vision identifies possible future roles

**TABLE 4: SHORT-TERM (Years: 3-5) IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIONS - INVOLVED/ RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS**

ACTION STEPS	Friends of Flint Park Lake	Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council	Flint River Watershed Coalition	City of Flint Parks/Rec Dept.	City of Flint Planning Dept.	Genesee County Land Bank	Genesee County Parks/Rec Commission	Other
12. Continue restoration of recreational facilities in Flint Park Lake, focus on upgrading sports facilities	X	X		<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X?	
13. Land Bank strategically acquires and holds targeted lots in Flint Park Lake Community	X				X	<u>X</u>		
14. Paint-it/Fix-it program	X	X		<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X?	
15. Enhance southern entrance on Stuart Ave. as gateway to Lake	X	X		<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X?	
16. Install wayfinding to enhance connections in area	X	X			X	X		
17. City initiates neighborhood stabilization with aggressive code enforcement	X	X		X	<u>X</u>	X		
18. Infill housing on targeted vacant lots	X	X			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>		
19. Implement road diet to Dupont St.					<u>X</u>	X		FSM
20. Secure funding for water quality improvements	X	X	<u>X</u>	X	<u>X</u>	X	X?	
21. Schools implement water quality protection curriculum	X		<u>X</u>					Local schools

X—Indicates major responsibility

FSM—City of Flint Street Maintenance Department

?—No formal role now, vision identifies possible future roles

**TABLE 5: LONG-TERM (Years: 6-10) IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIONS - INVOLVED/ RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS**

ACTION STEPS	Friends of Flint Park Lake	Flint Park Lake Citizens District Council	Flint River Watershed Coalition	City of Flint Parks/Rec Dept.	City of Flint Planning Dept.	Genesee County Land Bank	Genesee County Parks/Rec Commission	Other
22. Additional recreational improvements expanding park boundaries to Fleming Park, connectivity to Max Brandon Park	X	X		<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X?	
23. New mixed-use development along Pierson Rd., 'city corridor' classification	X	X			<u>X</u>			Private Developers
24. Continue neighborhood stabilization & home improvements	X	X			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>		
25. Continue urban residential infill projects in targeted locations, if not already completed	X	X			<u>X</u>			Private Developers
26. Continue increasing residential density along Pierson Rd.	X	X			<u>X</u>		X?	Private Developers
27. Hold giant 10-yr celebration	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X	X?	
28. Implement preferred water quality improvement plan	X	X	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X?	

**TABLE 6: LONG-TERM (Years: 11-15) IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIONS - INVOLVED/ RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS**

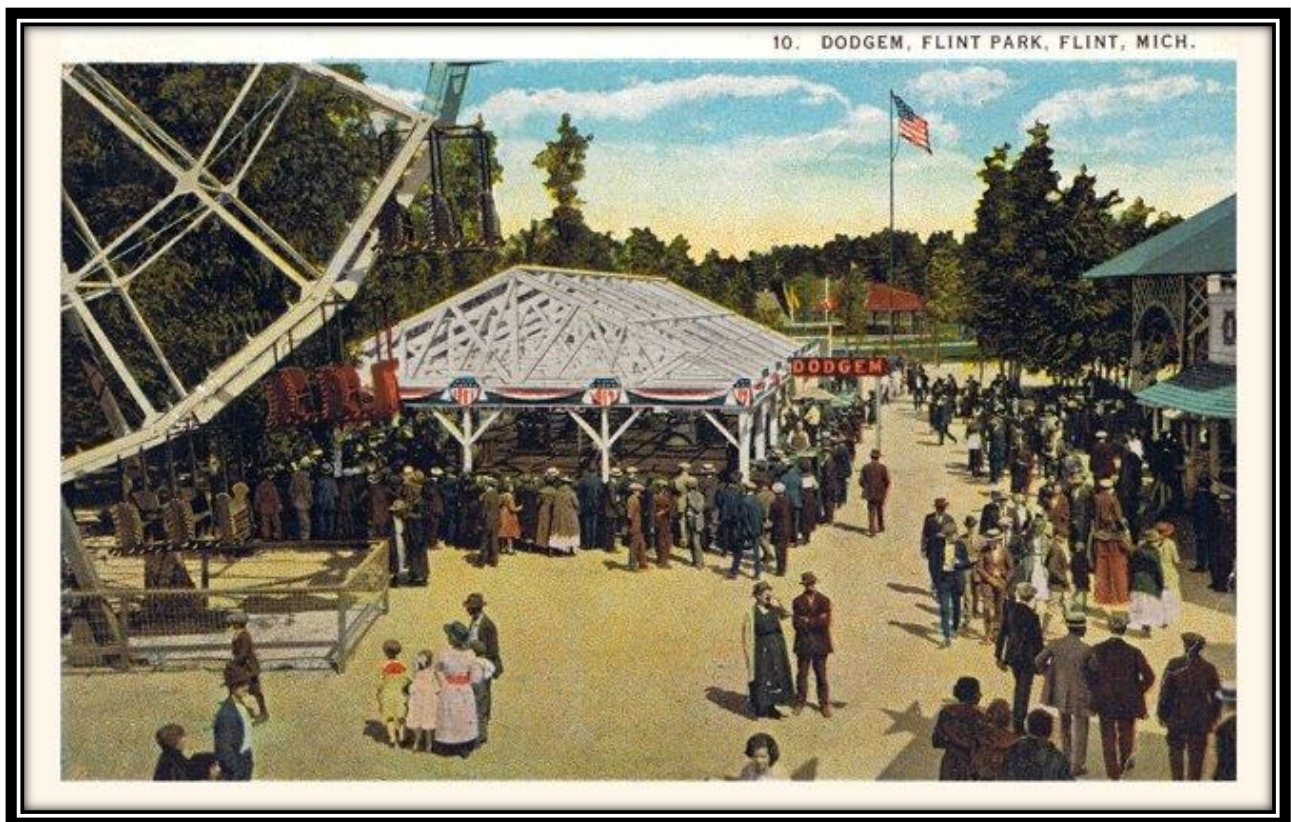
29. Continue urban infill and densification along Pierson Rd.	X	X			<u>X</u>			Private Developers
30. Complete commercial development along Pierson Rd.	X	X			<u>X</u>			Private Developers
31. Further enhance landscaping, lighting, aesthetic improvements along Pierson Rd.	X	X			<u>X</u>	X		

X—Indicates major responsibility

?—No formal role now, vision identifies possible future roles

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive and thorough implementation of this Vision will stabilize and restore Flint Park Lake to an earlier more prominent and vibrant state. Flint Park Lake once held a regional significance with the presence of Flint Park Lake Amusement Park from around 1921-1961 (*Figure 20*). This park drew large crowds to the area and is still remembered as an important part of the city's heritage. Throughout Michigan in the early Twentieth Century, many lakes similarly situated within an urban area featured popular amusement parks along their shorelines (Flint also boasted a second such park at present-day Thread Lake). The intensive use and activity that Flint Park Lake once experienced illustrates the opportunities that such a natural amenity can bring to a community. The lake's past glory as a cherished park should serve as motivation for a concerted effort to revitalize the area and restore its importance to both the surrounding neighborhoods and the region as a whole.



*Figure 20: Historic photograph of Flint Park Lake Amusement Park, date uncertain.*

Implementing and expanding on the Vision in this document is not an easy task. Reaching the short- and long-term action steps described in this Vision is a challenge that will require sustained effort from all the governmental, commercial, and residential stakeholders. Despite the challenges and difficulties ahead, the opportunity is too great not to act. Flint Park Lake is an invaluable natural asset that provides opportunities for recreation, neighborhood beautification, and attracting future development. This

Vision prioritizes short- and long-term action steps related to recreation, neighborhood stabilization and targeted redevelopment, and water quality as it pertains to Flint Park Lake and surrounding neighborhoods. Each of these topics is crucial for the successful implementation of this Vision but when all three are tackled collaboratively the synergistic benefits will be exponential. Flint Park Lake is a strong natural asset for stakeholders that are intensely invested in transforming their neighborhood park into a vibrant recreational and community hub. This Vision subscribes their passion, enthusiasm, and hard work into a single document that can propel forward the hopes and wishes of area stakeholders to once again return Flint Park Lake to a prominent and keystone status.

## FLINT RIVER WATERSHED WITHIN THE SAGINAW BASIN



### Legend

- Flint River Watershed
- Saginaw Basin

0 12.5 25 50 Miles



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