
SECTION III • ANALYSIS

The Park is heavily utilized for a variety of recreational uses and considered a gem in the county park system. The appeal of the Park can be attributed to both the natural and physical characteristics of the site. While the Park provides a variety of recreational opportunities, like many parks, financial resources for upkeep and maintenance of the facilities is limited and is apparent in a few of the Park facilities.

A NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS

The common element that ties the Park together is open space. Large areas of open space exist in a variety of conditions and include the mature stands of trees west and north of Cascade Falls, open maintained lawns around Cascade Falls with scattered trees, and the large wetland system with canals and ponds east of Brown Street.



Cascade Falls is situated on a prominent landform and provides panoramic views to the surrounding neighborhoods. A second vista exists at the high point on Randolph Street and provides internal views to Cascade Falls, wetlands, canals, and ponds.

Over the last decade, the historic Paredo, the formal, landscaped promenade leading to Cascade Falls, and the contiguous canals, ponds, and footbridges have fallen into disrepair. The Paredo is currently overgrown with trees and shrubs, blocking the original sight lines to Cascade Falls from its easternmost terminus. The mowed fields have become too wet to maintain lawn and have converted to cattails and other emergent wetland species. Purple loosestrife, a highly invasive, non-native species, is prevalent through this wetland. The canals and ponds have water quality concerns (circulation) and are in need of sediment removal. Large algae blooms occur throughout the summer months. The arched bridges that crossed the canals in three locations have been removed.

B BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The arrangement of recreational uses has evolved over time, and as a result, their arrangement on the landscape represents a layout that appears unplanned. Hard-surfaced recreation including tennis and basketball, and the batting cages are situated far apart. Parking could be better located based on use areas, and the trail system is only complete on the east half of the Park. The following is a brief analysis of Park facilities.



- The playgrounds are in great condition, and the adjacent ice cream concessions building continues to be a major draw of Park users.
- The spring displays of daffodil plantings along the path system are spectacular and contribute considerably to the curbside appeal of the Park.
- The little league fields are well maintained and are heavily used during the summer by teams throughout lower Michigan.
- The trails and boardwalks are in great condition and are heavily used for walking, jogging, and bicycling.
- Programming for special events continues to draw increasing numbers of users and often requires the closure of Brown Street to vehicles.
- The grounds are well maintained and mowed frequently.
- The Park buildings are in good condition with repairs limited to the exterior façades. Architectural styles vary between the Tudor style of the Cascades Manor House and ice cream concessions building to the more modern precast concrete block construction of the maintenance building, the Cascade Falls concessions, and the driving range building.
- Restrooms exist at the little league fields, Cascade Falls, and near the bandshell. There are no restrooms in proximity to the playground and picnic shelter.
- The construction of the Cascade Falls Amphitheater in 1970 resulted in a concrete structure that protrudes from the landscape and limited pedestrian circulation along the west side of Brown Street. It also blocks the historic view from Brown Street.

- Cascade Falls is in need of extensive structural, mechanical, electrical, sound, and program control renovations. The Cascade Falls' infrastructure is based on 1930s components and technologies. Technologies exist today that would dramatically reduce power consumption, and reduce maintenance costs by using readily available mechanical and electrical devices designed specifically for water features such as Cascade Falls. Despite all of the previous upgrades, Cascade Falls is still using 1930s transformers, valves, underground wiring, and was never truly designed to operate throughout the day; it was conceived as an illuminated, "nighttime" attraction. Cascade Falls' traditional appearance can be preserved, but the unseen components, those that affect its performance, reliability, and longevity for generations to come, are in dire need of extensive upgrading.
- Cascade Falls' hours of operation are limited to summer evenings, which impacts visitor use.
- The historic Denton Road vehicular bridge over the canal has structurally deteriorated and will be replaced by the City of Jackson in 2007.
- The Cascades Manor House is frequently used for catering and wedding receptions. Over the years, the non-profit Cascades Park Foundation has provided financial assistance for maintaining the building and financing renovations and upgrades. Building maintenance is an ongoing cost and will be forever necessary.
- Brown Street has become a primary road through the Park and creates safety concerns for Park users due to vehicle speed and the lack of safe pedestrian crossings.



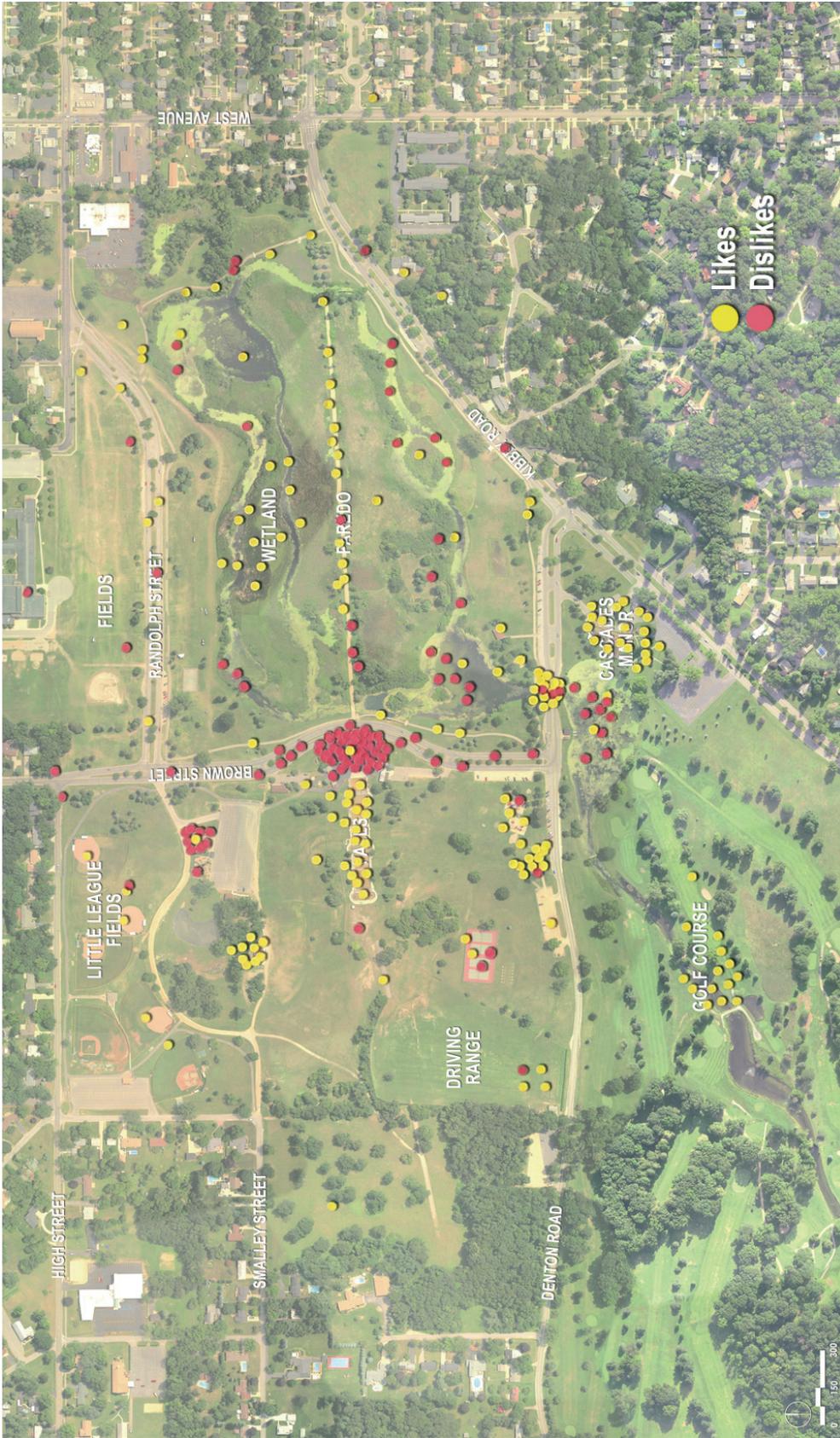


Figure 4: Likes and Dislikes