

# Lakefront Vision

---





## Vision Introduction

The vision for Whiting Lakefront Park is a set of shared values, a rational hope, a pragmatic dream. The vision itself is a description of the intent of the plan and what is to come. It does not explain how we are going to get there, but sets forth what the community hopes to achieve. The goals, objectives, and projects outlined in this plan serve as an extension of the vision, defining how the City of Whiting is going to realize its vision for the lakefront.

## Whiting Lakefront Park: Existing Conditions

Along the southern shore of Lake Michigan lies the city of Whiting. The majority of Whiting’s three-mile lakefront is occupied by Whiting Lakefront Park. The 26-acre park overlooks Lake Michigan and provides spectacular views of the Chicago skyline. The park property is bounded by Lake Michigan to the north, the BP Refinery to the east, downtown Whiting to the south, and Whihala Beach to the west. The Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan provide an excellent backdrop to Whiting’s shoreline and make Whiting Lakefront Park a popular destination for residents and tourists.

Beachfront at Whihala Beach



**The Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan provide an excellent backdrop to Whiting’s shoreline and make Whiting Lakefront Park a popular destination for residents and tourists.**

The park is approximately 26 acres, with a half-mile shoreline along Lake Michigan. While the stunning views of Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline are the most notable features of the park, there are several amenities offered throughout the park that attract residents and visitors. The 5,000-square foot Whiting Lakefront Park Pavilion hosts several community events throughout the year and is home to the popular “Summer with the Symphony” four-part concert series performed in the pavilion during the summer.

The majority of the park’s shoreline is lined with gravel parking that can be accessed by the public and is often used by residents and visitors enjoying the views of Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline. The shoreline is also home to the historic Gun Club building that offers meeting space to various community groups. The Gun Club is currently the only structure immediately adjacent to the lake. A fishing pier that jets out into Lake Michigan can be accessed through a gravel parking lot near the Gun Club.

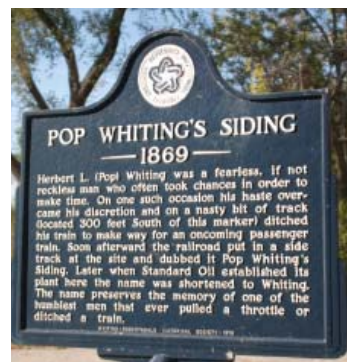


The park currently offers several different structural play areas for preschool- and elementary-aged children. The play area is located in the northwestern portion of the park. Approximately over a mile of paved trails exist throughout the length of the park. The trail network connects all amenities throughout the park with several access points along Front Street, which runs through Whiting Lakefront Park.

The park has several active sport fields, including a full-size baseball diamond, two sand volleyball courts, and four tennis courts. The baseball diamond, located in the eastern portion of the park, is the primary entry feature to the park, with an entry from Front Street. The tennis and volleyball courts are located in the southern portion of the park.

Whiting Lakefront Park contains several unique characteristics, including a fish pond and garden area near the western portion of the park. Purple martin birdhouses are located throughout the park and contribute to the park's attraction as a bird watcher's haven. Its expansive open space creates an abundant area for picnickers to enjoy the park, lakefront, and amenities.

Whihala Beach, owned and operated by Lake County, extends along Lake Michigan west of Whiting Lakefront Park to Hammond's Horseshoe Casino. Access to Whihala Beach is off the road that runs through Whiting Lakefront Park and is a visual extension of the park. Whihala Beach is most popular in the summer. The beachfront provides Whiting and Hammond residents access to swim in Lake Michigan. Whihala Beach also offers the only Lake Michigan boat access for the Whiting community with two boat ramps. A portion of the BP Refinery lines the Lake Michigan shoreline in Whiting, along the eastern edge of Whiting Lakefront Park. Immediately to the south of the park are several railroad lines still in use. The numerous railroad tracks create a barrier between the Whiting community and the lakefront.



Historic sign describing Whiting's namesake in Whiting Lakefront Park



Trail system in Whiting Lakefront Park



Flowerbed in Whiting Lakefront Park



Whihala Beach entrance



Road through Whiting Lakefront Park



Pavillion in Whiting Lakefront Park

Landscape features in Whiting Lakefront Park

## Whiting Lakefront Park: Issues

The City of Whiting has recognized the lakefront park as one of its most valuable assets; however, the City is aware of numerous issues requiring attention within the park.

The first issue is the location of the railroad tracks. The tracks separate the City core from the park and are highly active with five sets of track crossings. The railroad crossings present a danger for both pedestrians and vehicles. It is not uncommon for park guests to wait for a train when entering or exiting the park. On special event days, lines of cars can back up along Front Street, 119<sup>th</sup> Street, and 117<sup>th</sup> Street to gain access to the park. The railroad tracks also present a sound-related issue. The whistle blows are frequent and loud for both the residents and business owners.

The next issue is the road currently located in the park. The road can be accessed from Front Street or 117<sup>th</sup> Street. Additional traffic comes from Whihala Beach and connects into the park road from the northwest. Although the road is in fair condition, some repair is needed. Larger vehicles pulling boats frequently access the boat launch near Whihala Beach through the park.

Parking is another issue within the park. Currently, the primary place to park is a gravel lot running along the width of the lakeshore. Spaces are not well marked, so it is difficult to determine actual parking lots and spaces. There are asphalt areas located near the old harbor boat launch and the Gun Club; however, parking appears limited in this location. Parking on event days is confusing, and monitoring lots is difficult. A major issue is the location of the gravel lot near Lake Michigan, which permits vehicles close to the shoreline but limits uses for pedestrians at the waterfront. Overall, parking is not clearly marked or dispersed throughout the park.





Rock shoreline along Lake Michigan at Whiting Lakefront Park

The condition of the shoreline extending the width of Whiting Lakefront Park from the breakwater at the Whihala boat ramp to the fishing pier is an important issue. The existing rock, concrete, and debris along the shoreline extending from the Whihala boat launch harbor to the pier is dangerous and unsightly. The condition of the shoreline detracts potential park users.

The Whihala boat launch harbor has become difficult to use to its potential. Due to the water currents and the positioning of the breakwater walls, silt frequently builds up near the launch. It has become challenging and, in some cases, impossible to launch boats. This area needs attention to determine if it is to serve as a draw for both Whiting and Hammond. The old harbor boat launch at the eastern end of the park shares the same problem as the Whihala boat launch harbor and is dredged annually. The breakwater walls and the currents have created a silt buildup in this harbor as well. There are fences serving as a barricade in the area around the launch and the Gun Club. For park guests, this area becomes confusing and segmented from the rest of the park. The fishing pier is nearby and accessible from the parking lot; however, it needs to be removed from the water during the winter months. The pier requires storage space on land and renders the area unusable.

The pier has also been located in water depths that may limit fishing opportunities. One of the drawbacks to a steel and concrete pier structure is the maintenance required over time.

The Gun Club building, although admired by the community, is in disrepair and cannot be safely used for park functions. The original brick and stone structure has been expanded to include a steel frame building. The steel building is in poor condition and its use should be reevaluated. The existing fencing detracts from the building and creates a barrier to this part of the park. Just off the far eastern edge of the park, lead has been found in the lakebed. Trap shooting was the source of the contamination and an opportunity exists to improve lakefront access and address this contamination issue at the same time.

**The condition of the shoreline extending the width of Whiting Lakefront Park from the breakwater at the Whihala boat ramp to the fishing pier is an important issue.**



Landscape features in Whiting Lakefront Park



Gun Club in Whiting Lakefront Park



Parking area at Whihala Beach



Sand volleyball courts at Whiting Lakefront Park

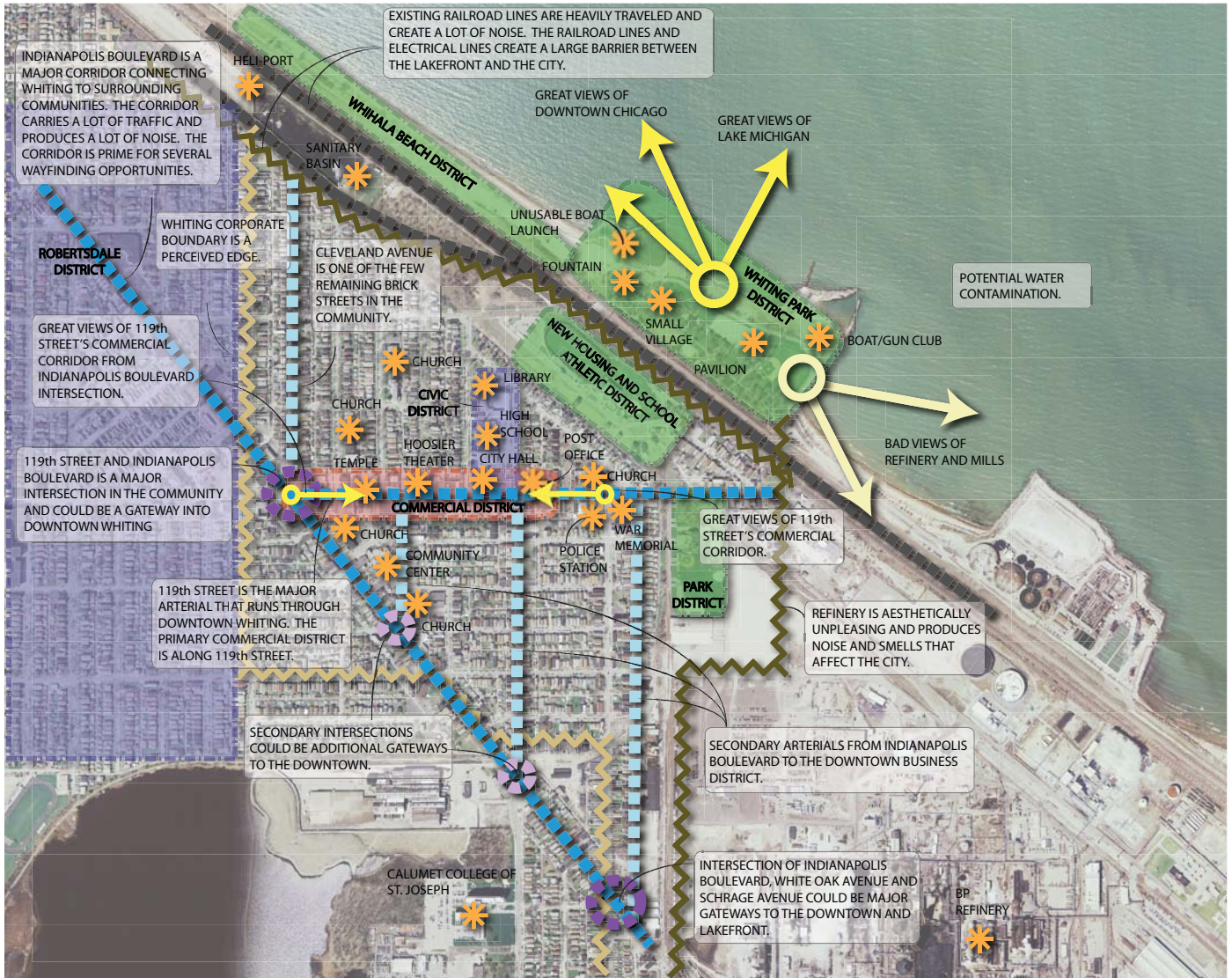
The pavilion is located central to the interior of the park. It serves the community year round with events and performances. The building is in need of some minor repair, and the restrooms facilities located in a building to the rear are no longer adequate. The performance area space is limited inside the pavilion. Park guests view performances from the hillside to the south, but seating is limited. It becomes difficult for audiences to see inside the building during events as they wrap around the pavilion. There is no concession stand in the park at the present time.

Recreation facilities include a baseball diamond east of the pavilion, which takes up a sizeable amount of space. Tennis and volleyball are located near the railroad tracks. These recreation uses promote active sports, and relocation may be considered. The existing play areas are dispersed in the central area of the park along a path. The playground equipment has recently been updated. The new equipment primarily serves one age group, still leaving the potential to create different play areas for different age groups. There are no other defined areas for recreation and games. Picnic tables and grills are located in some areas but not central to defined activity areas. Most noticeable is the lack of recreation and gathering space at the lakefront. With the exception of the fishing pier, activities at the waterfront are limited. The path system connects activity areas within the central part of the park; however, access for disabled guests is limited, especially by the lakeshore. Many of the paths are eight feet wide, making it difficult for bikes to safely share trails with pedestrians. At the present time, there is not a safe connection to Whihala Beach without mingling with traffic. Intersections and crosswalks are not clearly marked at key crossing points. Lastly, there is no clear path system along the lakefront.

There are several garden areas within the park, including a water feature. There is no irrigation system at the present time. The majority of existing trees are located along the ridgeline and central to the park. Memorial trees have been planted throughout the park. In order to accommodate new park facilities, it may be necessary to remove a



limited number of trees. Alternative locations for removed trees will be identified. Lighting and landscaping are limited within the park. All paths, trails, gathering areas, and significant buildings should be well lit. The gateways and entries into the park are not clearly defined, and wayfinding is an issue at the present time.



LEGEND

- PRIMARY NODES
- SECONDARY NODES
- LANDMARKS
- PRIMARY PATHS
- SECONDARY PATHS
- RAILROADS
- COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS
- CIVIC DISTRICTS
- RECREATION DISTRICTS
- HARD EDGES
- SOFT EDGES
- GOOD VIEWS
- BAD VIEWS



Site Context Map



### Vision

Whiting is a close-knit and vibrant community built upon the industriousness of its citizenry. It prides itself on its historic park, which serves as a center of recreation for residents and visitors alike. The City sees its park as an easily accessible and inviting retreat for year-round recreation and a place to commune with fellow neighbors and nature alike. In the spirit of the Marquette Plan, it provides for pedestrian and bicycle connections to a regional trail network and a safe and engaging connection for people to visit the Lake Michigan waterfront. It is a park that exemplifies the richness and vitality of Whiting and its citizens—a place to celebrate, a place to contemplate, and a place to play.



Proposed lakefront promenade and gazebo

### Vision Forming Into Goals

Strategic plans are about preparing for and managing change. The plan acts as a management tool designed to help the City of Whiting maximize the results of their efforts. Creating the strategic plan for Whiting’s Lakefront Park relied on gathering information; assessing the community’s resources and needs; identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the community; and adopting goals and objectives. All of this gathered information allowed the public to answer the ultimate question of “What does Whiting want the Whiting Lakefront Park to be in 10 to 20 years?”

The strategic plan for the lakefront park began to take shape when a vision for what the park should be in the next 10 to 20 years was created. The vision statement was created for the lakefront park to generally reflect how the park should look and function in the future. The vision served as the foundation for a variety of goals and objectives that were created to help determine and provide the framework on how to get from where the park is today to where the park should be in 20 years.

Goals and objectives were created to serve as the basis for development decisions. Goals are concise statements that describe in general terms a desired future condition

**Strategic plans are about preparing for and managing change.**





that further defines the vision. They are the future of the lakefront plan and address those things the City wants to accomplish over the life of the plan. The goals also form the framework for more detailed decision making and will be used by the City to establish priorities for public and private discussion and consideration, as well as to identify needed public improvements and services.

The objectives describe a specific, measurable, future condition that is to be attained during a stated period of time and, ultimately, the course of action required to achieve a stated goal. Furthermore, the objectives are tasks that recommend how a goal will be accomplished. Objectives are statements of community intent against which individual actions and decisions are evaluated. Objectives are sufficiently quantifiable in order to gauge the appropriateness of development applications and have a general timeframe, and are understood by both the decision makers and the general community.

## Goals

- Provide for connectivity for pedestrians, bicycles, watercraft, and automobiles throughout Whiting Lakefront Park
- Link Whiting Lakefront Park to the regional multi-use trail network
- Improve upon natural habitat opportunities along the Lake Michigan shoreline
- Improve human connection to the lakefront through better access and amenities
- Preserve Whiting Lakefront Park's history and value to the community
- Improve upon Whiting Lakefront Park as an economic asset and attractor for the Whiting community
- Provide for year-round recreational opportunities within Whiting Lakefront Park
- Expand opportunities for additional residential and commercial development around Whiting Lakefront Park and 119<sup>th</sup> Street
- Improve the connection between Whiting Lakefront Park and 119<sup>th</sup> Street



Proposed formal garden and gathering space along the lakefront

# Whiting Lakefront Park Concept Plan

