



Bear Creek Museum and Nature Center

Strategic Plan: Concept and Partnerships



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INTRODUCTION

Marshall has always been on the cutting edge, forging a path for others to follow. Michigan pioneer settlements often centered around agriculture, but Marshall was a town founded mostly by doctors, lawyers, politicians, and businessmen.

During its early years as a village, Marshall residents Isaac Crary and Rev. John Pierce drafted a plan for a public school system that was voted into Michigan's 1835 Constitution. This plan (in some form) was later adopted by most states across the nation. Marshall was also home to Michigan's first senators and representatives, and its third governor, but its enterprising reputation is not all rooted in politics and public policy.

At its beginning, Marshall was a central hub for the stagecoach and railroad routes between Chicago and Detroit and, somewhat due to its central location, became a manufacturing hot spot for everything from Roy Roger's cap guns to windmills (an early form of green energy). Ford Motor Company's BlueOval Battery Park (BOBP) will continue this tradition as a national innovator in electric vehicle (EV) technology. The BOBP is situated within the Marshall Area Jobs Opportunities and Recreation (MAJOR) Campus, with the Bear Creek Complex along its eastern border.

With that history of educational reform, innovation, and preservation in mind, Marshall has a unique opportunity to bring together the past, present and future with a living museum, community gathering place and nature center. This area of Michigan needs a place to tell its unique stories, educate our youth and visitors about the land and the people, and to celebrate the past as we look to our future. This center will incorporate these activities in a location steeped in history, beauty, and nature.



BEAR CREEK COMPLEX

This concept plan has three parts: the Building Complex, the Trailhead, and the River Trail next to the Kalamazoo River. This property has always been held in private ownership, so only a select few have visited the grounds. In its past it has been a farm, a B&B, a photography studio, and the home of a community of like-minded families. This complex will allow locals and visitors to experience the beauty that Bear Creek offers and give Marshall another venue to explore nature, gather for events, and to have educational opportunities.

BUILDING COMPLEX The Bear Creek farm site includes three homes, two barns, a chicken coop, and certified organic gardens. The aerial view (see map) shows the Bear Creek property layout in detail.

Buildings are undergoing analysis to determine the load capacity of each. Once that is complete, final plans can be made for what each building will contain. The initial plan calls for the **Main House** to contain a Heritage Museum, the Marshall Historical Society archives and museum offices.

The **Carriage House** could provide space for educational and community activities, and a restaurant or community kitchen.

The **Old Farmhouse** could become a museum showcasing 19th century farm life, and the barns will hold agricultural and transportation history along with community organization exhibits.



The **grounds** will be open to the public to enjoy the beautiful scenery, hold social gatherings and educational programs, access the North Country Trail, and more. An open-air stage would provide opportunities for wellness activities, concerts, and festivals. Programming for Bear Creek could include folk arts, fine arts, nature, fishing and conservation, day retreats, scout camps, community presentations, community gardens, and plant sales.

This property will become infused in the fabric of Marshall and will create lasting memories and new histories that will last into the next generations of citizens and visitors.

PARKING Parking lots will be located on the west side of the houses/barns and will not be visible from the main road, preserving the views of nature visitors will experience within the grounds.

THE PROPERTY MAP



The Bear Creek property, consisting of two parcels, contains 13.5 acres on either side of the Bear Creek. This property will grow to 36 acres and connect to the 218 acre conservation easement that runs along the Kalamazoo River to the south.

THE MAIN HOUSE



The **ground level floor** of the Main House (the building seen from the road) could serve as the **Heritage Museum**. This museum could include the history of the property, and local and regional history exhibits.

The **upstairs** of the Heritage Museum may contain the Marshall Historical Society archives (historic papers). The structural stability of the building is being assessed to see if that floor can safely hold the necessary weight. This floor will also hold museum administrative offices and a research workroom.

The **basement** of the Main House may house the Marshall Historical Society artifacts (historic objects).

All spaces containing archives, artifacts, and exhibits would be moisture and temperature controlled and contain the appropriate fire suppression system for the materials being housed. ADA accommodations will be made, including outside ramps and indoor lifts.

THE CARRIAGE HOUSE

The **ground level floor** of the Carriage House could house a special exhibit space for area museums to display artifacts.

The **top floor** of the Carriage House could house an **artist-in-residence program** to attract artists, musicians, writers, and researchers who will enjoy access to the archives. These guests would create work while staying on the property for a period of time, entertaining visitors with their skills while taking inspiration from the beautiful surroundings and historic artifacts. In payment for accommodations and access, artists will hold a performance, a reception, a reading, or a lecture based on their research.

The **basement** of the Carriage House was most recently a full commercial kitchen. This area could remain a commercial kitchen for use by Marshall-area chefs and caterers or be used as a restaurant with both indoor and outdoor seating. This space could also be used as additional space for events.



THE OLD FARMHOUSE and LARGE BARN



The **Old Farmhouse** dates from ca.1905 and has been unused for many years, and has a foundation created from whole trees. The foundation must be repaired to make it stable enough to become a museum building, but eventually this structure could become a replica of a traditional 19th century farm house.



There are two barns on the property. Exhibits in the large barn could showcase the history of transportation in Marshall. This history may entail **modes of manufactured transportation** found in the Marshall area, including horse-drawn carriages and wagons, bicycles, and motorcycles.

This transportation-focused exhibit could showcase Ford Motor Company innovations, evolving from Model T to more energy efficient engines, and finally to the new electric vehicles. An exhibit on the science behind EV battery technology could educate the public about the BlueOval Battery Park, located right next door, and may attract science and engineering students wanting to learn about future careers in this industry.

This barn may also tell Marshall's **aviation history**, including Brooks Airfield as one of the first airports in Michigan. This space could also include a large model train exhibit to tell Marshall's railroad history in a unique way, and highlighting the Interurban, an electric railroad that once ran down the center of Michigan Avenue and eventually connected Ann Arbor to Kalamazoo. A goal for the complex is to bring history to life with activities, re-enactors, and entertainment.

THE SMALL BARN and CHICKEN COOP



The smaller barn could be an event space/ learning center or it could display **historic agricultural machines**, like the Maes Milking Machine that was invented on this very farm. This could be a dedicated place that **highlights farming, farm technology and engineering** to tell the great American farming story. Exhibits could include everything from seed technology to the importance of bees and butterflies. Small garden patches could be added during the growing season to show the actual planting and growth process.



THE TRAILHEAD

Many visitors will come to see the Bear Creek museums, but many will also come for the outdoor landscape. Accessed from the south parking lot, the Trailhead leads to two trails that follow along each side of the Bear Creek.

FAST PATH This paved, straight path, leads to 15 Mile Road, allowing for faster traffic like runners, rollerbladers, and cyclists.

SLOW PATH This path is a walking trail with proposed signage relaying nature facts, indigenous/cultural stories, and/or general history of the property.

Both paths will eventually meet up with the conservation easement and River Trail that runs along the north side of the Kalamazoo River, on the south side of the MAJOR Campus. With additional funding and support, this trail also could possibly connect to the City of Marshall's Riverwalk and River District.



MICHIGAN TRAILS



While trail creation is a separate project from the Bear Creek Museum, its importance to the area cannot be overstated. The current unfinished trail through Calhoun County will become a section of three major Michigan trails: the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT), the Great Lake to Lake Trail (GLTL), and the Iron Belle Walking Trail.

The map above shows the North Country National Scenic Trail, a footpath that stretches over 4,800 miles across eight states, from Vermont to North Dakota. This is the longest of the eleven National Scenic Trails authorized by Congress. As of early 2019 there were 3,129 completed trail miles, leaving 1,671 miles left to build. The current trail temporarily follows the dotted line above (along a road), between the solid lines at each end that represent the Battle Creek Linear Path to the west and the Marshall Riverwalk to the east.

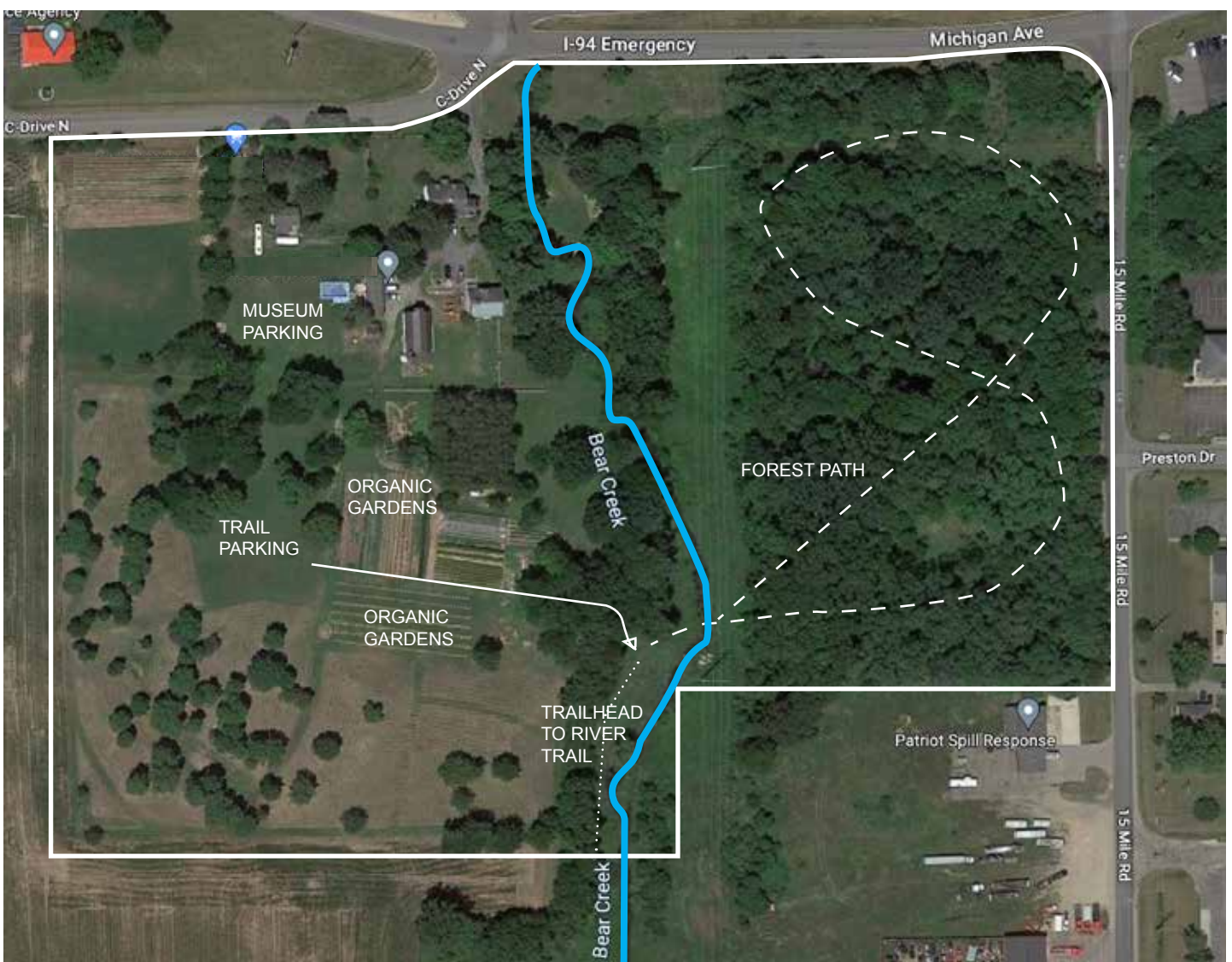
Almost all trails to the west of the state are complete. With the addition of this Bear Creek Trail section, only a small portion would need to be completed to **connect Marshall to Lake Michigan along the GLTL trail, and to the Upper Peninsula** along the other two Michigan trails (which turn north in Kalamazoo).



FOREST, COMMUNITY SPACE, GARDENS, and THE BEAR CREEK

FOREST The forest path would be open and free to the public, and the addition of an easily accessed forest path close to the BlueOval Battery Park site will encourage workers to visit nature during their breaks. Benches placed at intervals would allow for rest and reflection.

COMMUNITY SPACE In addition to visitors walking the trails, the grounds would be open for various events. Scout troops could camp in the grove of pine trees; photographers and artists could gain inspiration from its beautiful gardens; educational events could be held; and school groups and/or bus tours could visit the grounds and museums to learn about local history. This space will quickly become a major community asset.



GARDENS The gardens at Bear Creek are certified organic and every effort will be made to retain this designation. The spaces could be used to plant herbs, edible flowers, native plants, pollinator gardens, to host workshops, and more.



THE BEAR CREEK We are dedicated to preserving the health of the creek and the wildlife while also providing educational opportunities.



COST CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the numerous considerations of developing the Bear Creek Complex, a current, accurate budget is still being determined. However, prospective budget items are listed below.

1. Extensive renovations are necessary on the buildings including roofs, painting, windows, etc.
2. One or two parking lots and a 2-track entrance corridor.
3. Outdoor signage to guide guests to the correct parking lot, way-finding signs to guide them around the property, forest path signs, and interpretive signs along the Trailhead.
4. Conversion of the chicken coop, or building a new structure, for an admissions center and public restrooms.
5. Erection of fences to delineate the museum grounds from the free trail and path areas.
6. Security, especially for the museum buildings within the fenced-in area.
7. Exhibit preparations including cases, signs, and lighting.
8. Acquisition, transportation, and maintenance costs for loaned artifacts.
9. Installation of moisture and temperature controlled environments and fire suppression systems.
10. Two different paths, one for fast traffic and one for slow, along the trailhead leading to the river trail.
11. Office furniture and equipment, Wi-Fi, and other utilities.
12. Marketing materials - brochures, website, etc.
13. Museum staff.
14. ADA-compliant ramps and restrooms, and the creation of sensory packs and other materials to make the museums accessible to everyone.

A more detailed plan with phases, time frames, and budgets is being developed.



APPENDIX - PROPERTY DETAILS

Property tax records retrieved from BS&A Software for Marshall Township include the following information about the buildings on the property.

Main House3,133 sq ft.....Garage Area: 576 sq ft Year Built: 1946

Carriage House.....2,985 sq ft.....Garage Area: 57 6sq ft. Year Built: 1925

Old Farmhouse.....1,050sqft.....NoGarage Year Built: 1900

General Purpose Barn 11,344 sq ft

Commodity Barn (Storage Shed).....160 sq ft

Cylindrical Silo615 sq ft

General Purpose Barn 21,276 sq ft



