



Environment & Recreation Finalist: **Preserve Hickory**
Initiative: **Energy-Efficient Lighting for Hickory Hills**

OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVE

Preserve Hickory’s proposed initiative will complete Phase One of the Master Plan by replacing Hickory’s iconic lights with environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient fixtures. Over the last 20 years, increasing environmental considerations challenge the traditional view of the park’s lighting. Since 85% of skiing and ski programs take place after dark, this proposal addresses the need for a more sustainable and more cost-effective approach to lighting. The proposed initiative will replace the existing fixtures with new, energy efficient LED lights. These new lights will be 2.5 times more efficient than the existing lighting, reducing Hickory’s carbon footprint. This transformational project incorporates important “green” elements to the park’s site and operation and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the park through reduced utilities expense and expansion of night skiing.

The following sections contain key information from the application, as written by the applicant. Please note that while detailed financial information has not been provided here, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Community Investment Review Committee and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have been found to be fiscally sound.

FULL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 3, 1952, the City of Traverse City turned on Hickory’s first lights—lights that would brighten Traverse City’s dark, cold winter nights and draw children and families out from inside their homes to enjoy the outdoors. Over 30,000 children have learned to ski under the lights of Hickory while countless recreation enthusiasts enjoy its woods and terrain for hiking, biking, and disc golf. Nearly 70 years later, Hickory continues to thrive and grow due to the tenacity and generosity of community volunteers, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropists who collaborated with the non-profit Preserve Hickory to

revive and reimagine the park's future. In 2018, a public/private partnership of the City and Preserve Hickory funded an over \$4.0 million improvement project with a new lodge, parking area, expanded ski terrain and snowmaking, multipurpose trails and expanded disc golf. The community's enthusiasm for the new Hickory has been contagious: the park more than doubled its revenue its first year following the construction project. Hickory has not only survived the test of time but its values of vision, hard work and passion remain frozen in time. Just as originally envisioned in 1952, Hickory remains a community park—accessible and affordable for everyone to enjoy.

The proposed initiative will complete Phase One of the Master Plan by replacing Hickory's iconic lights with environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient fixtures. Lighting for the original alpine terrain was last updated in 1993 and 1999 when mercury-vapor street lights were replaced with 1000-watt high-pressure sodium lighting. Over the last 20 years, however, increasing environmental considerations challenge the traditional view of the park's lighting. Recognizing the need for a more sustainable and more cost-effective approach to lighting, the proposed initiative will replace the existing fixtures with new, energy efficient LED lights at an estimated cost of \$124,000. The gap between an Impact 100 TC grant and the project cost will be funded by Preserve Hickory. The new LED lighting will be 2.5 times more efficient than the existing lighting ultimately reducing Hickory's carbon footprint and immediately creating operational savings to help make the park more financially viable. In addition, updated LED lighting will include shielding to minimize the "halo" effect of the existing lighting thereby reducing the impact on neighboring properties and on Traverse City's night sky. This transformational project incorporates important "green" elements to the park's site and operation and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the park through reduced utilities expense and expansion of night skiing. Preserve Hickory will lead the effort with guidance and input from the volunteer Hickory Hills Advisory Committee, City Staff, the City's Green Team and environmental specialists at Traverse City Light & Power and SEEDS. Impact 100 funding will champion the implementation of an important sustainability initiative which will conserve natural resources, cut light pollution, and reduce the park's impact on climate change. By completing Phase One of the Master Plan, an Impact 100 grant will ensure that Hickory's iconic lights shine for another 70 years.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

An Impact 100 grant award to replace lighting at Hickory Hills will complete Phase One of Hickory's Master Plan. The initiative will serve not only users of Hickory Hills through expansion of night ski terrain (alpine and Nordic), but will also serve the broader

community by reducing the light pollution and halo effect of Hickory's current lights. The entire region benefits through completion of Phase One of the Master Plan resulting in a new, improved Hickory that will serve the community for generations to come.

Hickory's service area includes the five-county region as determined by a comprehensive market assessment done in conjunction with the Master Plan's development which defined local and regional market demographic profiles and analyzed existing regional recreation assets in the Northwest Michigan area. The research informed the planning team in making strategic decisions regarding all-season recreation at Hickory.

The research concluded that while Grand Traverse County residents, particularly youth and families, are the primary beneficiaries of Hickory Hills, thousands of residents throughout the five-county region benefit from the park regularly through all-season recreation including downhill and Nordic skiing, snowboarding, running, biking, disc golf and trail use. Hickory's demonstrates its regional importance for publicly accessible and affordable recreational services by serving area residents, nonprofits, schools, and neighboring parks.

Hickory Hills serves area children, families and recreation enthusiasts:

- 85% of the 15,000 annual skiers at Hickory are under the age of 17 years of age. Data from local school districts show that the percent of children receiving free and reduced lunch based on household income is at a staggering 35.6%. Many of these underserved children are well-served by a public park which offers public recreation accessible to all.
- Sales of annual ski passes indicate that winter park users, primarily youth and families, hail from the five-county region (Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, Kalkaska, and Antrim).
- Over 30,000 children have learned to ski at Hickory providing significant impact to the region's larger ski resorts which benefit from the park's "feeder" programs.
- Grand Traverse Ski Club programs are at capacity with over 400 participants resulting.
- Revenue from the Park's ski rental program includes sales from nine Michigan zip codes, 8 states and 3 countries.
- Thousands of area residents use Hickory's disc golf course, currently ranked among Michigan's top 5 best courses.

Hickory Hills serves area nonprofits, schools and neighboring parks:

- Nonprofits, including the Grand Traverse Ski Club, the VASA Ski Club, Norte, and local high school and middle school athletic teams (Nordic/alpine ski/cross country running) use the park for practice and competitions. An annual cross-town slalom race brings ski teams from all area high schools together for a night of competition under Hickory's lights.

- A new partnership with Child and Family Services' "Youth Work" program provides work experience and mentorship to at-risk youth.
- Neighboring Hickory Meadows and TART Trails benefit directly by shared parking and lighting, trail accessibility and infrastructure improvements, including a new barrier-free restroom close to trailhead parking.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The recent \$4.0 million investment at Hickory continues a legacy of healthy winter recreation opportunities for kids and includes free and accessible recreational opportunities in the spring, summer and fall. These improvements will create capacity to build upon existing programs and forge new partnerships for programming. Specifically, the proposed initiative to replace outdated lights at Hickory contributes to the goal of financial sustainability at the park by reducing operating expenses, sets an example for environmentally sustainable practices, and allows for the expansion of ski terrain at night. From its earliest days, Hickory has served the community as a public park, making recreation safe, accessible, and affordable to all. Hikers, disc golfers, bikers, and dog walkers all enjoy the park for free while ski ticket rates, both alpine and Nordic, are priced significantly below other area ski resorts. Hickory has a tradition of addressing the needs of the community through its public recreation offerings as well as through unique programs that serve the underserved.

A new, innovative partnership with Child and Family Services provides work and mentorship opportunities to at-risk youth working at Hickory's food service operation. The youth in the program are young adults who come from the foster care system, a low-income family or who otherwise may be considered disadvantaged. The program is designed to help them learn a particular skill or general employment skills to help them choose a career path or to help them be more employable in the future. Each member is on a small crew with a designated supervisor who provides them with leadership, mentoring and guidance to help them succeed.

Hickory's opportunities for outdoor, winter recreation help to address the area's challenges with physical fitness and childhood obesity. The need for increased physical activity among youth in the region is well documented through several community needs assessments that show children in northwest Lower Michigan are among the least fit in the state. The long-term implication of the growing number of low fitness children on society is staggering. Contributing to the area's health woes are long winters, limited recreational facilities with structured programming for kids and a significant and increasing percentage of low-income families and children eligible for free and reduced lunch. The City provides additional

financial assistance for ski passes to families who meet income qualifications. Our non-profit partner, the Grand Traverse Ski Club offers scholarships to underserved children who want to participate in their programs.

Community needs were determined through comprehensive demographic and market research and significant community input through the master planning process. Over 1000 individuals participated in a public planning process through two on-line surveys, two open houses, and a teen focus group. 92% of those surveyed supported enhanced recreation, activities, events and programs operated at Hickory. Feedback and identified needs from the public process served as a guide to recommendations for Hickory's future outlined in its Master Plan. User groups and nonprofit clubs continue to actively collaborate in needs identification, project planning and implementation through the Hickory Hills Advisory Committee.

GAPS IN SERVICES

Following Preserve Hickory's successful capital campaign through which over \$2.2 million was raised, we began Phase One of the Master Plan, an over \$4.0 million public/private investment to the park in 2018/2019. Completed elements of Phase One include construction of a new lodge and related infrastructure, ski area improvements and expanded terrain, a community sledding hill, the new trail system and Nordic loop. Gaps in funding and unanticipated construction costs forced replacement lighting, originally intended as a Phase One element, to be delayed until additional funding sources are secured. While this project component was delayed without impacting the completion of other infrastructure improvements, it is a necessary and important element of the Master Plan that ultimately needs additional funding to complete.

An Impact 100 grant award, along with funding provided by Preserve Hickory, will fund replacement lighting at the park to provide more energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly lighting. Lighting for the original alpine terrain was last updated in 1993 and 1999. At that time, mercury vapor street lights were replaced with 1000-watt high-pressure sodium lighting. Over the last 20 years, however, increasing environmental considerations challenge the traditional view of the park's lighting. Recognizing the need for a more sustainable and more cost-effective approach to lighting, the proposed initiative will replace the existing fixtures with new, energy efficient LED lights at an estimated cost of \$124,000. The new LED lighting will be 2.5 times more efficient than the existing lighting ultimately reducing Hickory's carbon footprint and immediately creating operational savings to help make the park more financially viable. In addition, updated LED lighting will include

shielding to minimize the “halo” effect of the existing lighting thereby reducing the impact on neighboring properties and on Traverse City’s night sky.

Impact 100 funding will, in effect, champion the implementation of an important sustainability initiative at Hickory which will conserve natural resources, cut light pollution, and reduce the park's impact on climate change. Importantly, an Impact 100 grant award will complete implementation of Phase One of Hickory’s Master Plan, a multi-year planning and advocacy effort led by Preserve Hickory. By improving a much-loved community asset and contributing to an economic and environmental model for its long-term sustainability, Impact 100 TC will help to ensure that Hickory’s iconic lights shine for another 70 years. By completing Phase One of Hickory’s Master Plan, Preserve Hickory will focus on addressing gaps in regional recreation services including:

- Expansion of non-winter opportunities at the Park to expand our reach and meet community needs;
- Collaboration with local schools to develop programming at the Park for area children;
- Work with the Joint Recreational Authority to develop an expanded trail system at neighboring Hickory Meadows (trails designed by Morton Trails in 2016);
- Collaboration with Garfield Township and others to connect the Buffalo Ridge Trail to Hickory's new trail to the south;
- Partner with TART to promote trail connections from Hickory Hills to TART Trails.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES & INDICATORS

Goal 1: Preserve the much-loved, rustic nature of the Hickory while improving trails, infrastructure, and accessibility by completing Phase One of the Master Plan.

Initiative Objective: Receive an Impact 100 grant award in November 2020 to fund replacement lighting at the park thereby completing implementation of Phase One of Hickory’s Master Plan, a multi-year planning and advocacy effort led by Preserve Hickory.

Indicators: Purchase and install \$124,000 of new energy-efficient and environmentally friendly lighting at Hickory Hills by November 2021.

Desired Outcome: Originally intended as a Phase One element, gaps in funding and increased construction costs forced this aspect of the project to be delayed until additional funding sources are secured. While this project component was delayed without impacting the completion of other infrastructure improvements, it is a necessary and important

element of the total project that ultimately needs additional funding to complete. This transformational project incorporates important “green” elements to the park’s site and operation and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the park through reduced utilities expense.

Related Current Efforts: Established to address the threat of losing a significant public asset, Preserve Hickory is leading a multi-year, multi-partner process to revitalize the park and nurture lasting partnerships. In 2013, Preserve Hickory, in partnership with the City of Traverse City, Garfield Township and the Grand Traverse Ski Club, funded the development of a professionally-developed Master Plan. The Plan's needs assessment concluded that to fund park operations, Hickory must address the following challenges:

1. The park's infrastructure is ailing.
2. Current revenues do not cover operating expenses.
3. Potential revenue sources exist, but have not been tapped.
4. The park remains underutilized, especially for all-season recreation.
5. Park amenities are not accessible to all and do not meet ADA standards.

The Master Plan consists of thoughtful design and construction of a new lodge and related infrastructure, ski area improvements, including new lighting, and the new trail system. The new and improved amenities completed in 2019 will address several of the Park's needs including:

- New revenue opportunities (lodge rentals, food and beverage, rental equipment);
- Universally accessible facility, parking and activities including barrier free trail;
- Increased opportunities for winter sports and disc golf enthusiasts;
- Expansion of ski terrain through new lighting and snowmaking;
- New comprehensive, multipurpose trail system; and
- Investment in aging infrastructure thus reducing the costs of utilities and deferred maintenance.

The completion of Phase One of the Master Plan through an Impact 100 grant award will allow Preserve Hickory to focus on addressing other gaps in recreation services in our region including:

- Expansion of non-winter opportunities at the Park to expand our reach and meet community needs;

- Collaboration with local schools to develop programming at the Park for area children;
- Work with the Joint Recreational Authority to develop an expanded trail system at neighboring Hickory Meadows (trails designed by Morton Trails in 2016);
- Collaboration with Garfield Township and others to connect the Buffalo Ridge Trail to Hickory's new trail to the south;
- Partner with TART to promote trail connections from Hickory Hills to TART Trails.

Goal 2: Reduce environmental impact of park operations through use of clean, renewable energy sources at Hickory Hills.

Initiative Objectives:

- Replace Hickory's high sodium lighting with low-glare, low impact, environmentally-friendly LED lighting.
- Work with the City's Green Team partners (SEEDS, TCLP, Groundworks Center for Resilient Communities, and MI Climate Action Network) to develop plans and specifications for replacement lighting at Hickory Hills as well as other opportunities to implement clean, renewable energy sources at the park.

Indicators:

1. Realize 2.5-3X improved efficiency from updated LED lights.
2. Experience visible change in night sky pollution and halo effect.

Desired Outcome: Through collaborative efforts and partnerships with the City's Green Team, replacement lighting at Hickory Hills will reduce environmental impact, energy use and light pollution.

Related Current Efforts:

- Coordinate with City of Traverse City's Green Team on City's goal to meet 100% of electricity demand with clean, renewable sources within 10 years and to become 100% carbon neutral by mid-century.
- Conduct a natural features inventory to guide design features at Hickory Hills that are sensitive to growing environmental challenges.
- Develop public education related to environmental benefits of shared infrastructure with Hickory Meadows for storm water management and septic field.

- Continue collaboration with the City of Traverse City, Garfield Township, Hickory Meadows Advisory Committee, Joint Recreation Authority, and Slabtown Neighborhood Association.

Goal 3: In conjunction with the City, develop a long-term economic model for self-sustaining park operations while balancing the community's desire and tradition for affordable, accessible recreation opportunities at Hickory Hills.

Initiative Objectives:

- Realize immediate operational cost savings by investing in new energy-efficient LED lighting at Hickory Hills.
- Expand night ski terrain capacity (both Alpine and Nordic) through the addition of four new light poles with seven fixtures each.

Indicators:

1. Reduce utilities expense realized through 2.5-3X improved efficiency of updated lights;
2. Increase revenue through increased use of park services (daily and season ski passes) based on expanded and improved ski and freestyle terrain and homologated Nordic track;
3. Reduce the City's General Fund allocation to Hickory Hills beginning in Year 3 of full implementation;

Desired Outcome:

The Master Plan's full implementation will result in an economic model that addresses many of Hickory's challenges, ultimately creating a self-sustaining operation and eliminating the City's annual subsidy for park operations. Success will be defined by successfully reversing the economic challenges of Hickory Hills while balancing the community's desire for affordable, accessible public recreation at the Park. The business plan anticipates cumulative savings to the City of over \$350,000 five years following full project implementation. Ultimately, this new economic model benefits the region by 1) protecting an important public recreation asset; 2) continuing the tradition of affordable rates for Hickory's passes (as much as 50% difference from other area resorts); and 3) maintaining the scholarship program for income-qualified children.

Related Current Efforts:

- Further develop partnership with Child and Family Services for food and beverage services;

- Expand retail sales and equipment rentals;
- Create and promote event rental program for Lodge;
- Develop 2-3 signature, annual competitive events hosted by the nonprofit;
- Automate snow-making operations to improve efficiencies and further reduce costs.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Established to address the threat of losing a significant public asset, Preserve Hickory is leading a multi-year, multi-partner process to revitalize the park and nurture lasting partnerships. Through its volunteer grassroots growth and thoughtful, collaborative process, the nonprofit has championed the investment of nearly \$4 million in a much-loved public park. This investment in public, recreational infrastructure and services improves lives and benefits all who call Traverse City home. It sets an example for future generations of good, public asset stewardship. Preserve Hickory's organizational and community capacity is established through its Board, Volunteer and Staff Structure, and Partnerships.

Preserve Hickory's Board includes six highly involved community leaders: Laura Ness, Maureen Madion, Matt Madion, Michael (Mac) McClelland, Eric Okerstrom and Renee Huckle Mittlestadt. Each brings years of volunteer and professional experience. The board has demonstrated its full support of the Master Plan and capital campaign through direct participation, facilitation, financial contribution and volunteer commitment to the Hickory Hills Advisory Committee charged with the Plan's development. 100% of Board members have contributed to the organization within the most recent 12 months.

Volunteer and Staff Structure: Much of the non-profit's 'work' has been accomplished through the partnership of volunteer board members, Maureen Madion and Laura Ness. We have engaged and relied on the leadership and expertise of many community volunteers including nonprofit user groups (GT Ski Club, VASA Ski Club, TC Track Club, Norte, disc golfers and other recreation enthusiasts). A group of 15 community volunteers led the nonprofit's successful capital campaign which raised over \$2.0 in less than 24 months. Facilitated by Preserve Hickory board member Mac McClelland, the Hickory Hills Advisory Committee meets monthly with all user groups and City staff to efficiently and professionally implement the Plan. The nonprofit contracts for professional accounting, financial, and support services.

Partners/Collaboration: Preserve Hickory enjoys partnership and collaboration with the City, its Commission and Staff, Garfield Township, the Joint Recreational Authority, parks

department staff from both Garfield Township and the City, local business owners, nonprofits, clubs and user groups. Our support from regional nonprofits includes and community organizations includes: The Grand Traverse Ski Club, VASA Ski Club, Northern Waters Disc Golf Association, Norte, local high school and middle school teams (Nordic/alpine ski/cross country running), the Disability Network and Traverse City Track Club. A new partnership between the City and Child and Family Services' "Youth Work" program provides work experience and mentorship to at-risk youth.

Funding partners: Preserve Hickory has met the funding requirements and evaluation performance requirements of all local foundations in the region (Rotary Charities, The Oleson Foundation, The Les and Anne Biederman Foundation, Art and Mary Schmuckal Foundation, Consumers Energy Foundation, Frey Foundation and The Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation). Our ability to meet the rigorous standards of these well-known and respected organizations speaks volumes to our organization's credibility in the community and worthiness for additional support.