

Van Meter

Park System Plan

December 2025



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Residents of Van Meter

This Park System Plan could not have been developed without the thoughtful input and feedback of the community. Thank you to all who took time to engage through the online survey and in-person engagement events!

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Van Meter
tradition with a vision



Executive Summary

As Van Meter continues to grow and evolve, a thoughtful, forward-thinking approach to the expansion and maintenance of park and recreation amenities is essential. The Park System Plan serves as a strategic blueprint to guide the development, enhancement, and stewardship of Van Meter's parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational facilities for the next decade and beyond.

Park system plans are essential tools for communities like Van Meter. They provide a clear vision rooted in community values, demographic trends, and environmental stewardship. This plan is not just a planning document, but a living guide intended to help city leaders, staff, and residents make informed decisions about land use, capital investments, and programming priorities.

It ensures that as Van Meter grows, it does so in a way that preserves its small-town charm while expanding access to high-quality recreational opportunities for all.

Through robust community engagement, data analysis, and best practices for park planning, this plan identifies current needs, anticipates future demands, and outlines actionable strategies to create a more connected, inclusive, and sustainable park system. Whether it's enhancing neighborhood parks, expanding trail networks, or introducing new amenities, this plan is designed to support the health, well-being, and quality of life for every Van Meter resident.

Introduction

Together, we are laying the foundation for a park system that reflects the spirit of Van Meter—welcoming, active, and ready for the future. The following project goals set the tone for the development of this document:

Project Goals

01. Engage the Community

Create opportunities for inclusive public collaboration to ensure the park system reflects the values and priorities of Van Meter residents.



02. Expand and Enhance Park Access

Ensure that all residents have safe, well-maintained parks and recreational facilities, regardless of age, ability, or neighborhood.



03. Support a Growing and Diverse Population

Plan for future parkland and amenities that reflect the needs of a changing community, including families, seniors, and youth.



04. Strengthen Community Connections

Develop a connected system of parks, trails, and open spaces that foster social interaction, community pride, and a strong sense of place.



05. Promote Health and Wellness

Encourage active lifestyles by providing diverse recreational opportunities such as sports fields, walking trails, playgrounds, and fitness areas.



06. Preserve Natural Resources and Open Space

Protect and enhance Van Meter's landscapes and ecological features through sustainable design and conservation practices.



07. Foster Economic and Community Development

Leverage parks and recreation as catalysts for economic vitality, tourism, and neighborhood revitalization.



08. Ensure Financial Sustainability

Develop responsible implementation strategies that align with the city's budget, staffing, and long-term maintenance capabilities.



The Plan & Process

This plan is a practical tool for the city to evaluate park improvements, develop realistic budgets, and align resources to enhance the park system. With steady and increasing growth, the city's park system must evolve—not only in physical assets but also in operations and processes. Establishing operational standards, maintenance schedules, program evaluation, and budgeting are essential topics addressed through collaboration among city staff, stakeholders, and the community during the plan's preparation. In addition to physical improvements, the plan guides the park department's operations and clarifies the Parks and Recreation Board's oversight role.

Development of this plan is rooted in community input and considers both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the park system. The following steps outline how the plan was developed:

01

Information Gathering

Inventory of existing park and trail amenities and assessment of current conditions and site features.

02

Public Outreach

Use in-person and online tools to gather feedback on current park amenities and programming, as well as ideas for the future.

03

Analysis

Review existing conditions, related planning studies, National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) metrics, and public input to identify improvement strategies.

04

Improvement Recommendations

Develop system-wide and location-specific recommendations, with budgetary cost estimates for capital planning and implementation.

05

Review, Refinement and Adoption

Compile, review, and refine the plan with city and steering committee input, then present to the city council for adoption.

How to Use the Plan

This document provides clear, flexible strategies for implementation. While recommendations are scheduled over a certain timeframe, the plan allows for adjustments based on funding opportunities, partnerships, and community needs. The goal is continual progress, proactive maintenance, responsive procedures, and sustainable growth of the park system for Van Meter residents.

Plan Organization

The Park System Plan is organized into the following chapters, each addressing a key aspect of Van Meter's parks and recreation future:

01: Executive Summary

- A concise overview of the plan's development, goals, and key recommendations.

02: Community Background

- An overview of Van Meter's demographics and insights from previous planning efforts, most notably the Vision Van Meter 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

03: Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

- Provides an overview of existing parks, trails and open spaces and their current condition
- Highlights issues with the park and trail system and discusses opportunities for improvement.

04: Parks and Recreation Trends

- Review of regional and national trends and participation rates to inform facility and amenity planning for Van Meter's future.

05: Recommendations and Implementation

- Clearly defined next steps, including recommended strategies, cost estimates, and anticipated timelines based on the community's priorities.

Vision & Guiding Principles

Van Meter is a great place to call home for people of all ages and abilities, with a top-ranked school district and a strong sense of small-town pride. As the city's population grows and infrastructure ages, this plan provides a proactive approach to maintaining quality outdoor amenities and attracting new residents. The following guiding principles inform every recommendation and investment:

Enrich the Park System

Elevate user experience with diverse amenities, natural features, and opportunities for social engagement; enhance ecological value; and create inclusive, accessible public spaces that support health and community.

Access and Connect

Remove barriers to parks and open spaces, connect them with neighborhoods, schools, and destinations, and plan for new connections as the city grows.

Maintain and Sustain

Foster safety and pride through regular maintenance, encourage community and partner involvement, and plan for the future through capital planning and fundraising.



Courtesy of City of Van Meter

Introduction to Improvement Strategies

Nearly 50 improvement strategies were identified and carefully evaluated with community priorities in mind. Through a priority-setting exercise completed by the steering committee, the top 20 strategies were selected and are summarized below, refer to Section 5 – Recommendations and Implementation for more detail on plan recommendations, timing and budget estimates.

Top 20 Recommendations

Priority Ranking	Park / Facility	Recommendation Type	Improvement Strategy / Description	Cost Magnitude
1	General / System-Wide	Operations	Develop and implement 5-Year Park Department budget and Capital Improvement Plan	\$
2	Recreation Complex	Facility	Rehabilitate athletic field turfgrass with consistent annual maintenance program including regular watering, fertilizer and herbicide applications, aerating, topdressing and over-seeding.	\$\$
3	Trails and Connectivity	Operations	Conduct sidewalk gap and walkability assessment and establish bi-annual (every 2 years) replacement/infill project.	\$\$
4	General / System-Wide	Facility	Develop new park in Grand Ridge Estates subdivision	\$\$\$
5	General / System-Wide	Policy/Code	Amend parkland dedication in City Code to ensure future parkland is established as city grows	\$
6	General / System-Wide	Facility	Acquire land for new recreation complex	\$\$\$
7	Johnson Park	Facility	Install picnic shelter adjacent parking lot	\$\$
8	Johnson Park	Operations	Monitor tree and vegetation health and actively manage invasive species	\$
9	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Connect trail access to school detention pond.	\$
10	Trails and Connectivity	Connectivity	Create accessible sidewalk connections into all Van Meter parks and incorporate sidewalk and trail routes within future parks.	\$\$\$\$
11	General / System-Wide	Communications	Create annual funding campaign and sponsorship program which indicates opportunities for donations and sponsorships for events and at facilities	\$
12	Recreation Complex	Facility	Update ballfields with skinned infields, moveable pitching mounds, and multiple baselines to function as more multi-purpose fields.	\$\$\$
13	Johnson Park	Facility	Install park map that indicates the different opportunities amenities that exist in the park including the disc golf course map, play areas and natural features.	\$
14	Memorial Park	Facility	Plant shade trees along walks and gathering spaces but not impact park functions	\$
15	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Pedestrian access into the park and to amenities.	\$\$
16	General / System-Wide	Operations	Re-evaluate/adjust recreation programming fees and establish schedule for adjusting fees in the future	\$
17	Memorial Park	Facility	Install portable toilet enclosure	\$
18	Trails and Connectivity	Policy/Code	Preserve natural drainage features and greenways for establishing trail connections between subdivisions and neighborhoods.	\$
19	Johnson Park	Facility	Replace drinking fountain (currently inoperable)	\$
20	General / System-Wide	Facility	Acquire/identify land for pickleball, tennis and basketball facility	\$\$



Yoga in the Park - City Facebook Page



Community Background

Residing along the Raccoon River in Dallas County, Van Meter, Iowa, is a growing community that blends small-town charm with proximity to the Des Moines metropolitan area. Known for its strong sense of community, excellent schools, and scenic surroundings, Van Meter is increasingly attracting families and professionals seeking a high quality of life in a peaceful yet connected setting. Located just about 20 miles west of downtown Des Moines, Van Meter enjoys convenient access to the larger city's employment centers, cultural attractions, and shopping districts. This close relationship means residents can easily commute for work, attend major events, or take advantage of the wide range of services and entertainment options available in the metro area.

However, as a smaller community, Van Meter itself offers a quieter pace of life and a more intimate atmosphere, which many families and professionals find appealing. While the town has excellent schools and a strong sense of community, its limited recreational amenities—such as fewer parks, restaurants, and entertainment venues compared to larger cities—can make residents more reliant on nearby Des Moines for leisure and social activities. This dynamic fosters a unique lifestyle: residents benefit from the tranquility and safety of a small town, while the amenities and opportunities of a major metropolitan area remain easily accessible, enhancing the overall quality of life in Van Meter.

The city's ongoing growth highlights its appeal as a peaceful yet connected setting. As Van Meter continues to expand, thoughtful planning and collaboration with the Des Moines metro will be important to balance the community's needs and preserve its distinctive character.

As Van Meter continues to expand, it is essential for the city to prioritize the maintenance of its existing parks while also thoughtfully planning for new green spaces to serve growing neighborhoods. With an increasing population and new developments on the horizon, the need for accessible parks, enhanced trail connections, and a greater variety of recreational amenities becomes even more important. By investing in both the upkeep of current facilities and the strategic creation of new ones, the city can ensure that residents of all ages and backgrounds enjoy a high quality of life and ample opportunities for outdoor recreation as the community evolves.



City Hall



Recreation Complex



Johnson Park

Demographics

As of 2025, Van Meter has an estimated population of 1,880, reflecting a robust growth rate of 4.33% annually and a 26% increase since the 2020 Census. This growth underscores the city's appeal and the importance of proactive planning to meet the evolving needs of its residents.

Van Meter's population is predominantly family-oriented, with a high rate of homeownership and a strong local school district that serves as a cornerstone of the community. The city's demographic profile reflects a relatively young, affluent, and engaged population—factors that are critical in shaping the future of its parks and recreation system.

As Van Meter continues to grow, this Plan will serve as a vital tool to ensure that the city's green spaces, recreational amenities, and natural resources evolve in step with the community's needs and aspirations.

Median Age

- 35.8 years (37.2 for males, 34.7 for females)

Racial Composition

- White: **96.4%**
- Two or more races: **1.7%**
- Black or African American: **0.95%**
- Asian: **0.82%**
- Native American: **0.14%**

Incomes

- Median Household Income: **\$133,750**
- Per Capita Income: **\$65,769**
- Poverty Rate: **3.16%**



Demographic Key Findings

The project team evaluated the demographics of the City of Van Meter and the Van Meter Community School District. In rural communities like Van Meter, school district boundaries are often much larger than the City. And the school district boundaries are often reflective of who uses City services, like parks and recreation. In the case of Van Meter the population more than doubles in comparing the City to the School District, which in turn creates a higher demand for programs and facilities. The demographics of a community can also impact rates of participation for programs and ability to pay for programs and facilities.

Summary of findings:

- The population within the City of Van Meter (1,880) and the School District (3,897) is small. As such, the community will need to be judicious with their future investments, and subsequently their ability to support and maintain those investments.
- **The median age in the City and School District is lower than the state and national figures. This points to the presence of families with young children, which are significant participants in parks and recreation programming and facility users.** This is further emphasized in that 43.5% (City) and 41.4% (School District) of households have children present, which is more than 50% higher than the state. While these are significant users, programming is typically multi-generational, and to that end 30.8% of the population in the School District are age 55+.

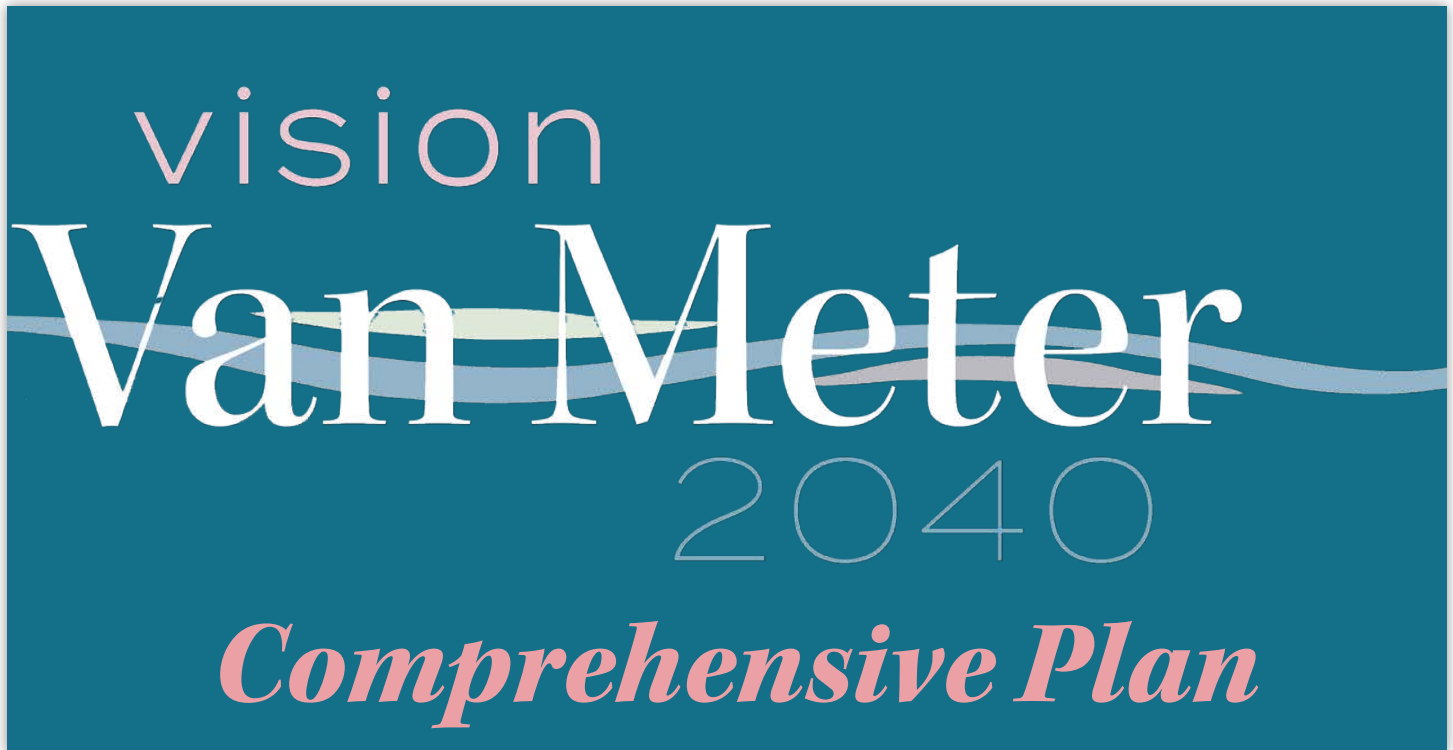
- **Both the City and the School District have a significantly greater median household income compared to the state and nation. A higher median household income typically suggests an ability to pay to participate in programs and use facilities.** Balanced with the cost of living in both services areas, this is an accurate statement.
- **The vacancies for housing in the School District are less than 6%. Based on similar studies the project team has completed, this points to a stable housing market, which can correlate to consistent participation and usage of parks and recreation programs and facilities.**

Based on the demographic analysis of the City and School District, the only obstacle is the total population. The other demographic indicators of age, income, cost of living, and spending point to a community that will embrace parks and recreation programs and facilities.

The City will need to be judicious in their future investments, but if they listen carefully to their residents and their needs, programs and facilities will be heavily used by a wide range of age groups.

Recent Planning Efforts

The Vision Van Meter 2040 Comprehensive Plan, adopted in November 2020, serves as a strategic framework guiding the City of Van Meter's growth and development through the year 2040. This long-range plan was developed through a robust public engagement process and is designed to reflect the community's values, aspirations, and priorities—including the enhancement of parks, trails, and open space.



Note: Vision Van Meter 2040 Comprehensive Plan - <https://vmmedia-evekdpgaayhzbxfe.a03.azurefd.net/media/VisionVanMeter2040FinalSmall.pdf>

A central theme of the plan is managed growth that preserves Van Meter's small-town character while accommodating increasing development pressures from the expanding Des Moines metro area. The plan establishes a planning boundary that is intentionally larger than anticipated growth needs, allowing flexibility in land use decisions and protecting agricultural lands and natural areas from incompatible development.

The Parks & Recreation chapter of the plan outlines a vision for a connected and accessible system of parks, trails, and open spaces that supports recreation, wellness, and environmental stewardship. It identifies existing assets and gaps in the system and proposes strategies to improve connectivity, expand recreational offerings, and enhance natural resource conservation.

2040 Comprehensive Plan Goals - For Parks & Trails



Developing multi-use trails that link neighborhoods, schools, and regional destinations.



Preserving and enhancing natural corridors along the Raccoon River and other ecological features.



Investing in park improvements that reflect community needs, such as playgrounds, sports fields, and gathering spaces.



Promoting green infrastructure and sustainable design in park development.

The plan also integrates parks and open space into broader land use and infrastructure planning. For example, the Future Land Use Plan designates areas for park expansion and trail development, ensuring that recreational amenities grow alongside residential and commercial areas. The Transportation chapter supports active transportation by recommending pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that complements the trail system.

Public input played a vital role in shaping the plan's goals and action items. Residents expressed strong support for maintaining access to nature, expanding recreational opportunities, and creating safe, walkable connections throughout the city. These priorities are reflected in the plan's implementation strategies, which include partnerships with regional agencies, phased capital improvements, and ongoing community engagement.

Key Growth Impacts on Trails in Van Meter's 2040 Plan

1. Population Growth and Residential Expansion

Van Meter anticipates significant population growth over the next two decades, driven by its proximity to the Des Moines metro and appeal as a small-town community. As new residential neighborhoods are developed, the plan emphasizes the need to integrate trail connections into subdivision layouts. This ensures that future residents have safe, walkable access to parks, schools, and downtown amenities.

2. Trail Connectivity and Regional Integration

The plan identifies opportunities to connect Van Meter's trail system to regional networks, and county-level greenways. Growth in surrounding communities and increased interest in regional recreation make these connections vital for tourism, economic development, and active transportation.

3. Mixed-Use and Commercial Development

As Van Meter grows its commercial base, the plan calls for multi-modal infrastructure that includes trails and bike paths. These trails are intended to support walkable commercial areas enhancing the livability and sustainability of new development areas.

4. Preservation of Natural Corridors

Growth pressures could threaten natural areas along the Raccoon River and other ecological corridors. The plan proposes using trails as a tool for conservation and education, by aligning them with riparian zones and floodplains. This approach helps protect sensitive habitats while providing recreational and interpretive opportunities.

5. School and Park Access

With anticipated school expansions and new park facilities, the plan prioritizes safe routes to schools and parks via trails. This includes off-street paths and sidewalk improvements that connect neighborhoods to key community destinations, supporting youth mobility and family-friendly infrastructure.

6. Phased Implementation and Funding

Recognizing that trail development must align with growth, the plan outlines a phased approach to trail expansion. It encourages leveraging development agreements, grants, and regional partnerships to fund trail segments as new areas are built out.

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Memorial Park

3

Existing Conditions & Needs Assessment

This chapter of the Park System Plan provides a comprehensive snapshot of Van Meter's current parks and recreation system, serving as the foundation for future planning. This assessment includes an inventory and analysis of all public parks, open spaces, trails, and recreational facilities within the city. It evaluates the size, location, condition, and amenities of each site, as well as their accessibility and connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods.

The analysis also considers operational aspects such as maintenance practices, staffing levels, programming offerings,

and budget allocations. In addition, it identifies strengths, as well as challenges, including gaps in service coverage, aging infrastructure, and limited trail connectivity.

By understanding what currently exists and how it functions, this chapter sets the stage for identifying opportunities for improvement and growth. It ensures that future investments are grounded in a clear understanding of Van Meter's assets, limitations, and community needs.

The Park & Trail System

Van Meter's park system encompasses four parks, comprised of either neighborhood parks that primarily serve adjacent residential areas or larger community-scale parks such as Johnson Park and the Recreation Complex, which provide a wider array of amenities for the broader community.

Reflecting the characteristics of many communities with modest populations and limited commercial tax bases, Van Meter's parks have been developed through the resourcefulness and collaboration of local residents. Despite constrained resources, the community has successfully established new parks, such as Memorial Park, and procured updated equipment and amenities. However, increased utilization resulting from community growth has led to deferred maintenance and the deterioration of certain park features.

With ongoing residential expansion, it is essential to prioritize both the development of new parks to serve emerging neighborhoods and continued investment in existing facilities. To mitigate the financial demands of new park establishment, enforcing the city's parkland dedication ordinance and, when appropriate, accepting cash in-lieu of land will contribute to funding these initiatives.

Although Van Meter currently lacks an extensive trail system, significant progress is being made toward connecting new residential developments with the greater community via newly planned trails. The city's gently rolling topography adds unique character to the landscape but also introduces planning challenges that can affect connectivity for trails and sidewalks.

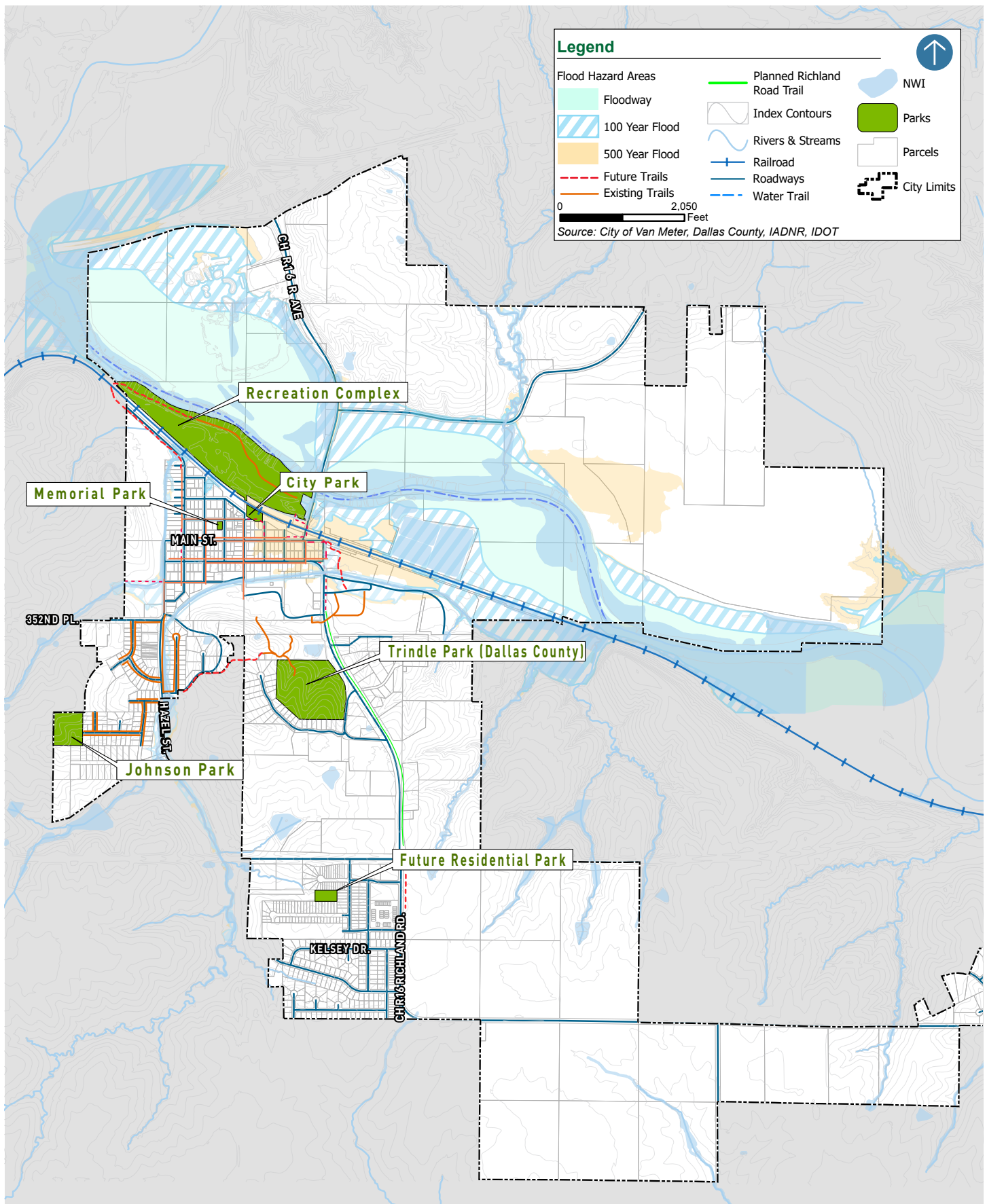


Raccoon River Days - Pop Up Event



As Van Meter grows, strategic use of natural drainage areas to create greenways and thoughtful corridor planning will be critical to supporting future trail development throughout the community.

The following pages in this section describe the existing conditions of the park system and examines the current Level of Service (LOS) provided by the parks and amenities throughout the community. This section also presents the outcomes of the community input process completed for the development of the plan. Evaluation of both the existing conditions and community input, help guide the community needs assessment and ultimately the recommendations resulting from this study.



Park and Trail Map

Park Inventory

Site Visit

Visiting Van Meter’s city parks provided valuable insight into both site-specific and system-wide needs. At the individual park level, observations highlighted opportunities such as improving shade and maintenance strategies at Memorial Park, enhancing ADA accessibility and vegetation diversity at Johnson Park, and addressing athletic field conditions and trail access throughout the community.

Aging park infrastructure and the need for annual maintenance strategies is evident at the Recreation Complex. Increasing demands on this facility can be seen throughout the park. Collectively, these visits revealed broader priorities for the park system, including creating inclusive and accessible spaces, diversifying landscaping for sustainability, strengthening trail networks for connectivity, and planning for future growth as community use and adjacent development increases.

Park Inventory Database

Documenting each park’s amenities and their quality in an inventory database provides the city with a centralized compilation of park features and assets throughout the community. This approach allows staff to track individual features—such as playgrounds, trails, and seating—as well as monitor overall system conditions, enabling data-driven decisions on where to prioritize improvements year over year. By having a clear record of current conditions and quality ratings, the city can strategically allocate resources, plan upgrades, and ensure equitable enhancements across all parks, ultimately improving efficiency and transparency in park management.

Key Takeaways

- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Prioritize ADA-compliant routes and features across parks to ensure all residents can participate.
- **Facility Expansion:** Add new amenities and expand existing facilities to meet the demands of rapid population growth and increased park usage.
- **Connectivity and Amenities:** Improve trail networks and upgrade essential features like shade structures and drinking fountains for better user experience.
- **Data-Driven Planning:** Leverage the online inventory system to track amenity quality and guide strategic, equitable improvements year over year.

Individual Park Summaries

Johnson Park

Johnson Park is a scenic and well-used community park, particularly popular for its challenging disc golf course with significant topography. The park offers room for expansion on the upper level, where improving ADA accessibility is a key opportunity. While the park is visually appealing, its vegetation could be more diverse. Removing invasive species and maintaining native trees and other vegetation communities, will enhance the ecology of the park. Additional improvements include replacing the drinking fountain, creating trails for better connectivity, and adding amenities near the parking area will expand the usage and appeal of the park to a broader audience.



Key Takeaways

- Accessibility Upgrades: Adding ADA-compliant routes to the upper level is essential for inclusivity and usability.
- Vegetation Management: Increase plant diversity and management of invasive species to promote ecological diversity.
- Connectivity & Amenities: Develop trails for better access and repair the drinking fountain to improve visitor experience.
- Future Growth Planning: Replace park features as they reach the end of their usable life cycle and consider adding amenities closer to the parking/access.

Amenities/Features

Bike Racks + Litter Receptacles



Shelter + Seating



Playground



Disc Golf Course



Individual Park Summaries

Memorial Park

Memorial Park is a relatively new community space, established as a neighborhood gathering space and commemorates an active community member. The park serves both neighborhood recreation needs but also accommodates small community events. While the park is active and well-used, it lacks adequate shade, making the addition of shade trees a key improvement opportunity. Maintenance is currently challenging due to heavy use, particularly in preserving lawn health and managing the loose playground surfacing.



Key Takeaways

- Shade Improvements: Add shade trees or structures to enhance comfort for visitors during concerts and playtime.
- Maintenance Simplification: Replace high-maintenance areas with low-maintenance grasses or groundcover.
- Visitor Comfort: Consider seating and shaded gathering areas to support events and frequent family use.
- Future Growth: Plan for sustainable landscaping that accommodates continued community use and minimizes upkeep costs.

Amenities/Features

Open Lawn



Playground



Seating



Memorial



Individual Park Summaries

Recreation Complex

The Van Meter Recreation Complex is a vital community asset that currently supports active recreation activities such as softball, baseball, and soccer. However, the existing fields and facilities are under significant strain due to years of deferred maintenance and increased user demand. Key challenges include limited field capacity and conditions, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient amenities such as restrooms and accessible routes.



Key Takeaways

- High community usage of existing softball, baseball, and soccer fields.
- Facilities are strained due to rapid population growth and increased demand.
- Infrastructure upgrades needed, including restrooms, equipment, and signage.
- Opportunity to enhance amenities such as shaded areas, water stations, and inclusive play zones.
- Trail connectivity improvements would link the complex to other city assets and promote walkability.
- Potential for long-term sustainability through strategic planning and investment.

Amenities/Features

Softball + Baseball Fields



Playground & Portable Toilet



Soccer Fields



Shelter



Individual Park Summaries

City Park

Van Meter's City Park is a unique mini park that primarily serves visitors from the adjacent library. Planned civic improvements—including a new library, fire station, and police facility—create an opportunity to reposition the park as a central community destination. Key considerations include modernizing play areas with unique features, improving roadway access through an extension of Grant Street, repurposing existing municipal buildings for parking, and enhancing connectivity to nearby amenities such as Memorial Park. These upgrades would transform City Park into a more vibrant, accessible, and integrated part of Van Meter's growing civic core.



Key Takeaways

- Underutilized and outdated, mainly serving library visitors with limited play features. Major civic upgrades planned nearby (new library, fire, and police facilities) create redevelopment opportunities.
- Potential to repurpose existing municipal buildings for parking after new facilities are built.
- Improve connectivity and access, including extending Grant Street for better integration.
- Opportunity to add unique, modern play elements to attract broader community use.

Amenities/Features

Slide and Swings



Seating



Merry-go-round



Donation Bin



Park Inventory - By the Numbers

The park inventory data collected provides a comprehensive snapshot of existing recreational assets across all parks in the community. Each park was assessed for its location, acreage, and amenities, including ballfields, courts, trails, community gardens, open-air shelters, kiosks, restrooms, dog parks, drinking fountains, pools, signage, playground equipment, and specialized facilities such as tennis, pickleball, and volleyball courts. This detailed inventory establishes a clear baseline of current resources and their distribution, identifying strengths and gaps within the system.

This information is critical for benchmarking Van Meter's park system against trends in similarly sized communities. By comparing inventory data to regional and national standards, planners can project future needs based on population growth, demographic shifts, and recreational trends. Such analysis ensures that enhancements to existing parks and the development of new facilities align with community expectations and best practices, supporting a sustainable and equitable approach to park system growth.

Notable gaps or what might be considered weaknesses in the current park inventory include:

Pickleball Courts - Pickleball continues to be the fastest growing sport in parks nationwide.

Basketball Courts - Interest and demand for basketball, especially in parks is strong and is the type of amenity that doesn't require a lot of equipment and can be enjoyed by many people of different ages and abilities.

Splash Pads / Spraygrounds - While these amenities come with considerable upfront and life cycle costs, they are still a lower cost aquatic amenity that are extremely popular in all communities and even more so in communities without pools and other aquatic amenities.

Open Air Shelters - With only one shelter at Johnson Park, additional shelters at each park should be considered in the future.

Basic Site Furnishings - It is important to consider benches, bike racks and litter receptacles in all parks. Shade structures also go a long way to promoting more use.

Park Inventory Data

		Acres	Ballfields (Baseball and Softball)	Full Basketball Court	Half Basketball Court	Bike Racks/Repair Station	Bike/Walk Trail	Community Gardens
PARKS	LOCATION							
City Park	505 Grant St, Van Meter, IA	0.3						
Johnson Park	320 Division Ave, Van Meter, IA 50261	6.2					1	
Memorial Park	Intersection of Grant St and West St, Van Meter, IA	0.3						
Van Meter Rec Complex	715 Pleasant St, Van Meter, IA 50261	22.0	4				1	
TOTAL		28.8	4	0	0	0	3	0

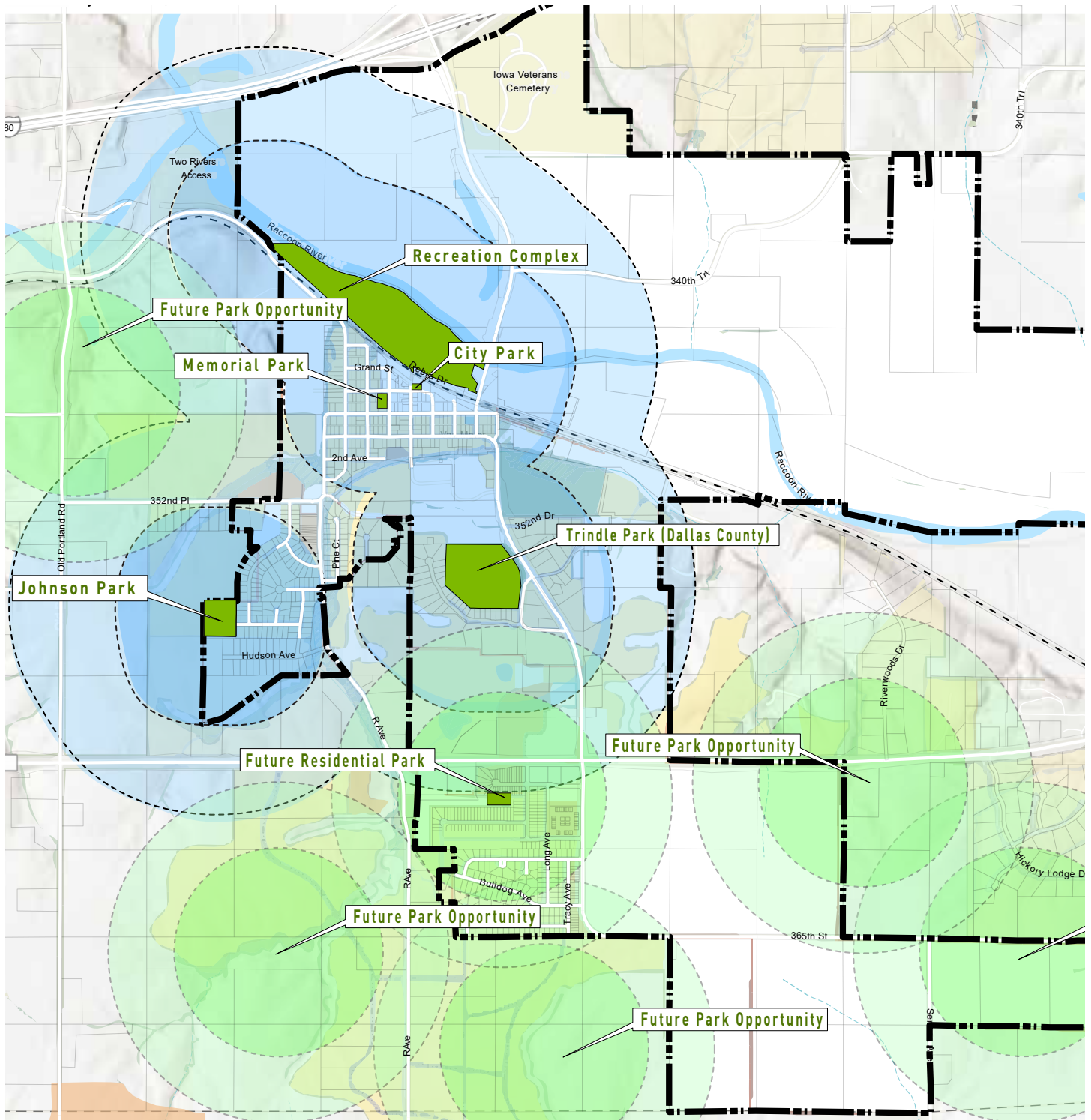


Memorial Park

Dog Park	Drinking Fountain	Disc Golf Course	Ice Skating/Hockey Rink	Kiosk (Interpretive/Educational)	Open Air Shelter	Open Field/Football/Soccer	Concessions	On Site Parking	Street Parking	Park Entry Signage	Pickleball Courts	Play/Interactive Equipment	Pool/Aquatic Facility	Portable Toilet	Restroom Facilities	Multi-use Trails	Splash Pad	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts	Bleachers
		1			1			1	1			1		1		1			1	
						1			1					1						
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Assesing City Parks and Gaps

Park Distribution Map

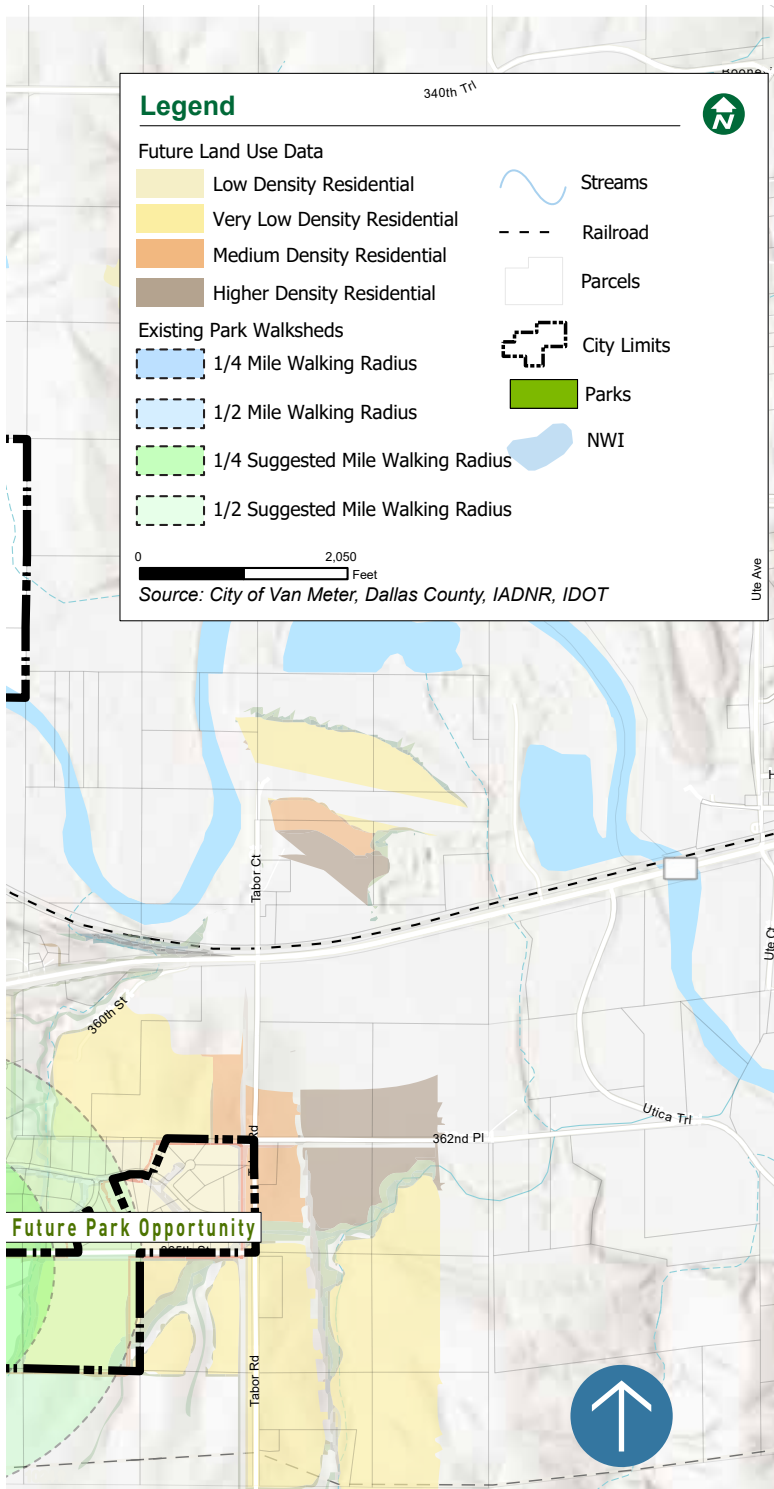


Existing and Future Park Service Areas

Level of Service Analysis

A common goal for communities when considering parkland distribution is that all residents should have access to quality parks within a 10 minute walk of their home. Neighborhood parks should be accessible with a 5-10 minute walk and community scale parks can serve multiple neighborhoods and typically include amenities that reach a broader audience and can accommodate larger events. Understanding where existing parks are situated relative to surrounding land uses and population density is essential for identifying gaps in accessible park space within Van Meter. By mapping park locations against residential, commercial, and undeveloped areas, the city can determine which neighborhoods lack convenient access to recreational amenities. This spatial analysis ensures that future park investments prioritize underserved areas, promoting equity and improving overall community livability.

Evaluating walkability and connectivity between parks and adjacent neighborhoods highlights opportunities to strengthen the city's trail network and pedestrian infrastructure. Areas with limited sidewalks or disconnected paths often present barriers to park access, reducing the effectiveness of existing facilities. Identifying these gaps allows planners to target land dedication opportunities for future parkland and trail corridors, creating a more integrated and accessible park system that supports active transportation and community health.

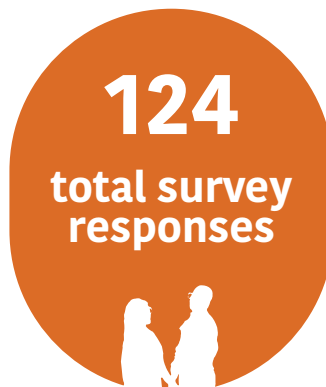


Community Engagement

A strong park system plan relies on community input gathered through an inclusive engagement process that involves all segments of the population. Because parks and recreation play a role in residents' everyday lives, their feedback is essential when designing facilities to meet community needs.

The plan was shaped by insights from city staff, elected leaders, and local residents. Throughout the process, city employees and the Parks and Recreation department contributed valuable expertise about the current state of the park system. A project steering committee—made up of city staff, Park and Rec Board members, City Council representatives, and residents—met regularly to review progress, offer feedback, and act as “ambassadors” by sharing updates with other residents and park-goers.

Over the course of the project, hundreds of residents were engaged, resulting in nearly 1,500 interactions through various outreach methods. The next pages explain the different strategies used to involve the community during planning. A summary of the engagement results provides meaningful guidance that helped shape the recommendations and final outcomes of the plan.



Community Input Survey

During a ten-week period, the planning team facilitated public engagement via an accessible online community survey. Throughout the survey's duration, both city staff and the planning team actively promoted participation within Van Meter. Upon conclusion, 124 residents contributed valuable feedback. The survey results were instrumental in shaping the existing conditions assessment, identifying community needs, and developing recommendations for the plan, thus providing the planning team with meaningful insights into the community's preferences and priorities concerning the future of the park and trail system.

Pop-up Events

One key strategy employed during the planning process was “engaging people where they are.” The project team participated in two pre-scheduled community events to facilitate direct interaction with residents and gather feedback regarding the future of the Van Meter park system. These events included the annual Raccoon River Days on June 7 and the Fan Fest event on August 22.

During Raccoon River Days, a “dotmocracy” exercise was conducted, enabling participants to indicate their preferences for various park amenities and opportunities by placing colored dots on images. Informational flyers were distributed to adults, directing them to the project website where the community input survey was available. Additionally, display boards depicted both the planning process and the current status of the park system, providing context and prompting further discussion. Community members expressed enthusiasm for the initiative and emphasized the significance of connectivity and walkability between parks and other local destinations, as well as general preferences for locations and programming.

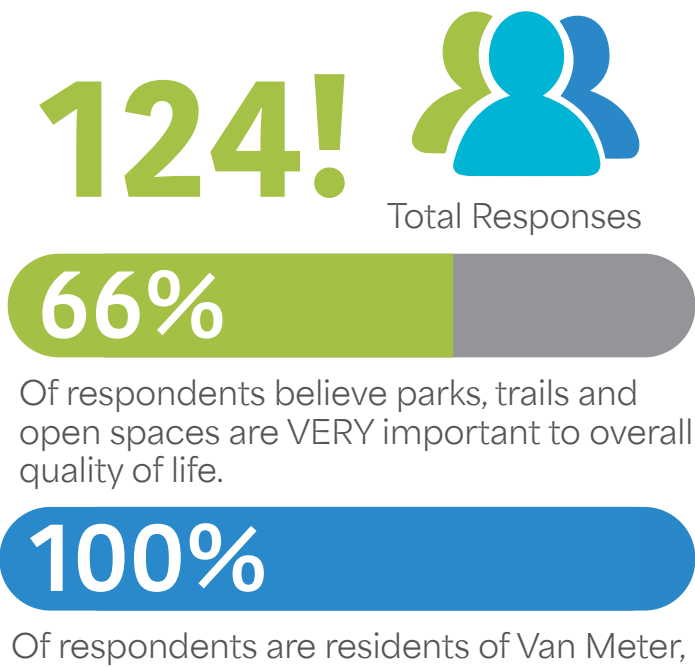
At the Fan Fest event, community members of all ages contributed input on improvement strategies across the park system. Participants voted on the four principal themes identified in the community survey: Trail Systems and Natural Features, Facility Enhancements, Maintenance and Upkeep of Existing Facilities, and Accessibility Enhancements. Visual materials illustrating these themes were presented and attendees were invited to select priorities for future city efforts.



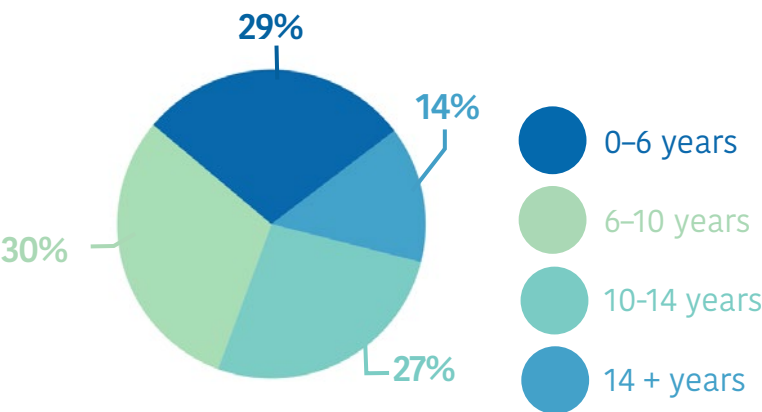
Raccoon River Days Pop-Up Event

Community Survey Results

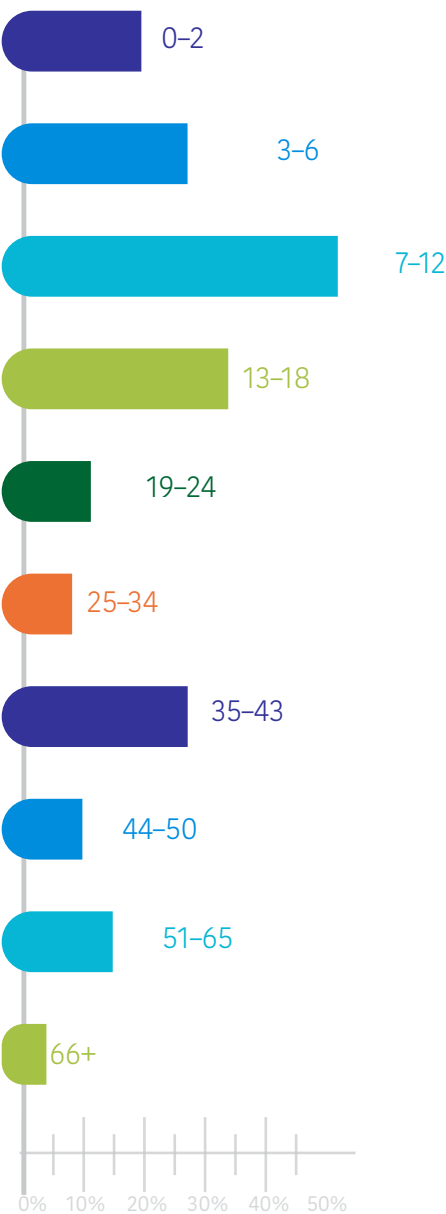
Survey responses



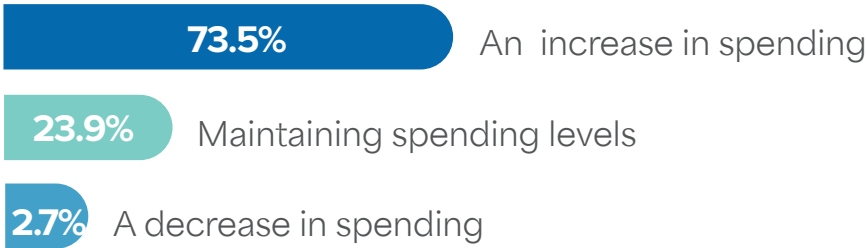
How long have YOU been a resident?



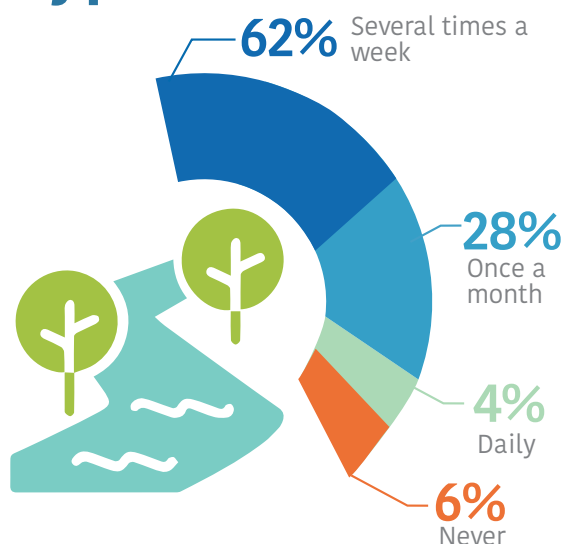
Age groups present in respondent households



When it comes to investing in parks, which do you support?



How often do people visit city parks or trails?



Top organized sports participation

Baseball/Softball

81.7% (89 out of 109 respondents)

Top informal sports participation

Soccer

45% (50 out of 111 respondents)

Why are some parks visited more?

50%

Respondents say proximity to work/

50%

Respondents say venue for team sports or community events

30%

Respondents say specific amenities the park offers

What facilities and amenities would you like to see enhanced?



1st

Using walking & running trails



2nd

Using park playgrounds



3rd

Soccer sports teams/leagues



4th

Baseball sports teams/leagues

Other mentioned activities include:

- Bike riding
- Dog Walking
- Hiking
- Softball
- Running
- Disc Golf

Top 3 words that summarize hopes for Van Meter parks ?

“Enrich”

“Maintained”

“Connected”

Parks Most Visited by Respondants



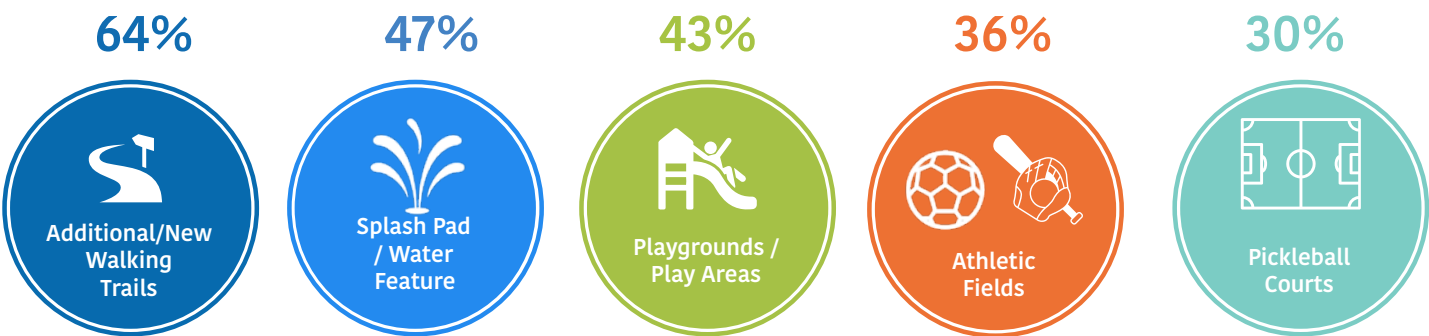
Additional Comments and Themes: # of comments related to...



4 Themes the Community Hopes to Focus On



Top Amenities the Community Hopes to Elevate



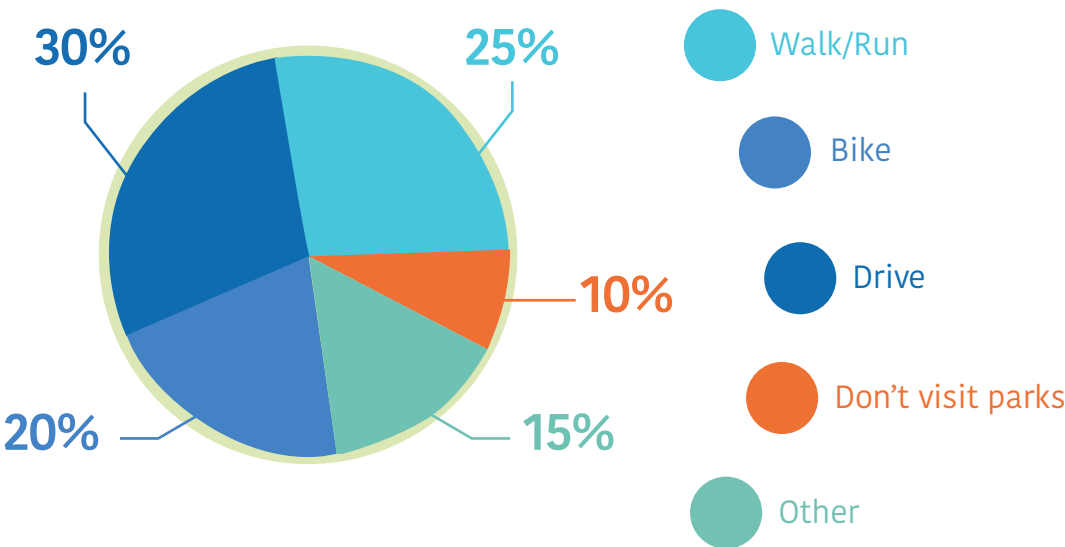
Other popular priorities:

- Basketball Courts
- Dog Park
- River Access
- Pollinator Habitats
- Prairie Restoration
- Baseball Fields /Softball

Top 3 Cold Weather Programs



Community Methods of Travel





4

Parks and Recreation Trends

To effectively serve both current and future residents, it is essential for park and recreation agencies to thoroughly understand emerging social, recreational, and demographic trends related to parks, trails, and open spaces. Consideration of the trends presented in this section of the plan will enable Van Meter to develop facilities and programs that are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs and preferences of the community. By proactively monitoring these developments and collaborating with park and trail users, residents, and partner organizations, park and recreation agencies can ensure decisions align with the best interests of their community.

Van Meter is expected to experience significant changes in the coming years,

including shifts in demographics, alterations in land use and considerable growth. These transitions present both challenges and opportunities for the city to adapt and grow alongside its residents.

The following pages detail several emerging trends in park and recreation, listed without prioritization, that apply to Van Meter. Incorporating these considerations into planning processes and maintaining adaptability in the management and upkeep of parks, trails, and open spaces will be vital as the community continues to evolve.

Outlined on the following pages is a summary of five key park and recreation trends for the city to consider over the next decade and beyond.

Trend 1

Rising Youth Sports Participation

Youth sports participation is rebounding post-COVID, with 2023 seeing the highest rate since 2015. Girls' participation is increasing, while boys' participation is declining. This is in part driven by the “Caitlin Clark effect”, the former Iowa Hawkeye basketball star who has dramatically boosted interest in girls basketball and youth sports overall.

Families now spend an average of \$1,500 annually per child on youth sports. This influx in participation and financial investment in youth sports presents a growing concern over early sport specialization, which can lead to burnout and injury. Experts advocate for multi-sport participation and recreational formats that emphasize fun and development over competition. **This aligns well with small-town values and school based sports systems.**

Source: 2024 State of Play report from Project Play through the Aspen Institute. <https://projectplay.org/state-of-play-2024-introduction>



Trend 2

Inclusivity & Accessibility

Adaptive, inclusive, and accessible programming and facilities in parks play an important role in promoting community diversity and cohesion. Focusing on inclusive park programming and facilities provides opportunities for social interaction and physical activity for people of various abilities and backgrounds. Diversity in recreational spaces contributes to improved understanding among community members and supports positive community dynamics.

Historically, some park and recreation agencies have experienced challenges in making their recreation spaces inclusive and accessible for all residents, regardless of physical or cognitive ability. To allow residents of differing abilities to participate in park programming and recreational activities, these agencies may need to increase efforts to support access for underrepresented groups.

→ **90%**

of U.S. adults agree it is important that local park and recreation agencies create and provide recreation programming that is adaptive and inclusive to persons of all abilities

→ **81%**

of U.S. adults want parks and recreation agencies to prioritize inclusivity and accessibility through their policies and practices

→ **1 in 3**

park and recreation agencies offer adaptive and inclusive sports activities for community members to engage in

Source: Top Trends in Parks and Recreation for 2024, NRPA



Trend 3

Partnerships For Success

Park and recreation agencies generally build, operate, and maintain park and trail systems with assistance from local, state, and federal grants and programs. Due to recent declines in public funding for parks, some outdoor recreational areas face deferred maintenance and limited opportunities to create new facilities and amenities. To meet community needs, agencies may need to explore alternative funding sources to sustain their recreation systems. **One approach is to develop partnerships that support parks.**

Partnerships with public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations can help address resource gaps and specific community requirements. These collaborations should be structured carefully, ensuring each partner understands their responsibilities in the design, development, and operation of park spaces. Some recommended strategies for maximizing partnership opportunities are provided in the Urban Land Institute's "Successful Partnerships for Parks" document:

- Utilize real estate development to improve park access and quality
- Support park funding by associating nearby development with new tax revenues directed towards park assets
- Collaborate to engage residents and address locally identified park priorities
- Establish relationships that invest in park infrastructure to strengthen community resilience
- Work with Van Meter School District to provide athletic facilities for youth within the district

→ **85%**

of U.S. residents identify proximity to parks, playgrounds, open space or recreation centers as an important factor in deciding where to live

→ **\$1 billion**

the total amount of deferred park maintenance in many large U.S. cities

→ **92%**

of U.S. residents say their communities benefit from local parks

Source: Successful Partnerships for Parks: Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space," https://americas.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Successful_Partnerships_for_Parks.pdf



Source: Van Meter School District

Trend 4

Non-Traditional Recreation

Recreation trends evolve in response to societal shifts and changing preferences over time. **In recent years, non-traditional and informal recreational activities have become increasingly prevalent in parks, trails, and open spaces nationwide.** These opportunities tend to be more inclusive, appealing to a broader spectrum of community members and fostering participation from individuals of varying backgrounds, age groups, and abilities. Furthermore, such programming can often be implemented without placing significant strain on the typically constrained budgets of park and recreation agencies.

For individuals who are unable to participate in higher-impact or competitive sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, and baseball/softball, passive and individual activities provide alternative means for physical activity and social engagement. Examples of these activities include walking, biking, hiking, paddling, fishing, skating, and skiing, which accommodate users across all ages, abilities, and interests. **Additional informal recreation initiatives may comprise family engagement events, seasonal festivals, karaoke or movie nights in the park, entertainment tailored to older adults, interactive programs for adults with youthful interests, and collaborative efforts with local libraries and schools.**

As demand for non-traditional and informal recreation options continues to shift, it is imperative for park and recreation agencies to periodically evaluate their offerings and adapt programming to meet evolving community needs.



Trend 5

Nature Based Recreation

Across the country, municipal park and recreation agencies are embracing nature-based recreation as a vital strategy for community well-being, environmental stewardship, and climate resilience. As urban areas expand and screen time increases, residents are seeking meaningful connections with nature—prompting a surge in demand for outdoor experiences that promote health, education, and sustainability.

Agencies are responding by investing in green infrastructure, such as pollinator gardens, native prairie restoration, and riparian buffers that double as recreational spaces and ecological assets. Trails, nature play areas, and outdoor classrooms are being designed to foster exploration and learning across all age groups. Programs like guided hikes, birdwatching, and citizen science initiatives are gaining popularity, especially among families and older adults.

Nature-based recreation also supports equity goals by offering low-cost, accessible opportunities for physical activity and mental health benefits. In smaller communities like Van Meter, Iowa, these trends align with local values and landscapes—creating spaces that reflect regional identity while addressing broader challenges like climate adaptation and social isolation.



NRPA Benchmark Comparison

470

Residents per Park
Median = 1,037

Community Comparison

Earlham	471
Adel	1,112
Elkhart	1,140
Huxley	808
Granger	658
Dallas Center	401

15.3

Acres of Parkland
per 1,000 Residents
Median = 14.8

470

Acres of Parkland
Median = 1,037

Per 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review

NRPA Metrics and Programs Comparison

The following pages use information produced by the NRPA and their annual survey of member agencies. It is estimated that approximately 1,000 different agencies participate in this survey from a total of more than 11,000 nationwide.

This information is meant to provide comparative purposes for the City of Van Meter to influence the outcomes of this park system plan and for future considerations about facility and programming needs.

Interpretation of Table Headings

Amenity - the physical structure of space.

% of Agencies - This is the percentage of agencies submitting information to the NRPA that offer a specific facility or facility type.

Less than 20,000 - Based on the data collected by the NRPA it is the number or residents within communities of a population from Less than 20,000 that a specific amenity will serve.

City of Van Meter - Using the information in the Less than 20,000 column and dividing that into the 2025 estimated population of School District (3,897) it is the approximate number of amenities that the City population will support.

NRPA Metrics and Programs Comparison

Data Use

The School District population can take the data included in the tables and compare to their existing inventory to determine where they either don't meet, meet, or exceed communities of a similar size submitting data to the NRPA.

Table A - Outdoor Park and Recreation Facilities

Amenity	% of Agencies	Less than 20,000	City of Van Meter
Diamond fields	80.0%	1,958	2.0
Rectangular fields	77.0%	2,578	1.5
Tennis Courts - Standalone	74.0%	3,500	1.1
Dog Park	70.0%	10,188	0.4
Skate Parks	47.0%	10,776	0.4
Pickleball Courts - Standalone	45.0%	3,483	1.1
Volleyball Courts - Standalone	51.0%	7,057	0.6
Splash Pads	38.0%	13,391	0.3
Walking/Running Tracks	36.0%	6,129	0.6
Synthetic Fields	17.0%	11,028	0.4
Overlay Fields	15.0%	7,932	0.5

Sample Interpretation: 38.0% of agencies submitting data to the NRPA offer Splash Pads to their community and it is estimated that in communities with a population of Less than 20,000 one (1) Splash Pad serves the needs of 13,391 individuals. Subsequently, Van Meter, with its 2025 estimated population of 3,897, would support 0.3 Splash Pads.

NRPA Metrics and Programs Comparison

Table B - Program Categories (national)

The information contained in Table B is static, which is to say it is not tailored to the population of the City of Van Meter. This data is reflective of the number of agencies submitting information to the NRPA that offer these types of programs.

Categories	% of Agencies
Themed Special Events	91.0%
Social Recreation Events	88.0%
Team Sports	86.0%
Health & Wellness Education	82.0%
Fitness Enhancement Classes	82.0%
Individual Sports	76.0%
Racquet Sports	76.0%
Safety Training	71.0%
Natural & Cultural History Activities	70.0%
Aquatics	68.0%
Cultural Crafts	67.0%
Visual Arts	65.0%
Performing Arts	64.0%
Trips & Tours	63.0%
Martial Arts	57.0%
Running/Cycling Races	55.0%
Golf	50.0%
E-Sports/E-Gaming	27.0%

- The median number of programs offered by agencies submitting information to the NRPA is 250 programs annually.
- The percentage of programs that are fee based according to agencies submitting information to the NRPA is 82.0%.

NRPA Metrics and Programs Comparison

Table C - Programs for Children, Older Adults, Disabilities (national)

Amenity	% of Agencies	Less than 20,000
Summer Camp	83.0%	93.0%
Specific Senior Programs	77.0%	85.0%
Specific Teen Programs	68.0%	82.0%
Programs for People w/ Disabilities	67.0%	85.0%
STEM Programs	60.0%	77.0%
After-School Programs	54.0%	74.0%
Preschool	33.0%	41.0%
Before-School Programs	18.0%	23.0%
Full Daycare	8.0%	12.0%
Summer Camp	83.0%	93.0%

NRPA Metrics and Programs Comparison

Table D - Responsibilities of Park & Recreation Agencies

Amenity	% of Agencies
Park Sites	98.0%
Recreation Programming & Services	93.0%
Indoor Facilities	93.0%
Trails, Greenways and/or Blueways	88.0%
Jurisdiction-Wide Special Events	82.0%
Racquet Sport Activities/Courts/Facilities	80.0%
Special Purpose Parks & Open Spaces	76.0%
Non-Park Sites	70.0%
Outdoor Swim Facilities/Water Parks	67.0%
Tournament/Event-Quality Outdoor Sports Complexes	56.0%
Community Gardens	50.0%
Tourism Attractions	40.0%
Golf Coursers	38.0%
Large Performance Outdoor Amphitheaters	35.0%
Indoor Swim Facilities/Water Parks	32.0%
Beaches (all waterbody types)	27.0%
Farmers Markets	22.0%
Campgrounds	22.0%
Tournament/Event-Quality Indoor Sports Complexes	21.0%
Indoor Performing Arts Centers	19.0%
Marinas	13.0%
Professional or College-Type Stadium/Arena/Racetrack	10.0%

Sports and Recreation

Participation Evaluation

The project team provided a variety of participation data to the City as part of the overall master plan. Three sets of data were included:

- MRI-Simmons with application by ESRI to adult participation.
- National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) – data for participants aged 7 and up from most recent (2024) survey.
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) – data for all ages, data collected post COVID.

The adult participation data from MRI-Simmons shows a very active adult community, with only 9 of the 28 activities having a rate of participation below the national average. An active adult community typically indicates an active youth community. It is also important to note that some of the activities outlined can be self-directed and do not necessarily need a dedicated facility, while others require more specialized facilities and/or instruction

Using the data from the NSGA, the project identified activities that were similar to programs the City offers or facilities that they maintain. These participation percentages provided by NSGA were used to develop an average that is unique to the Primary Service Area. That unique average is based on participation by age distribution, median household income, and region of the country. Most of the field activities that were highlighted show growth, or they are static in their participation history. There are some activities that are decreasing on a national level but are still popular because of their broad age spectrum appeal.

The participation data from the NEA is not as robust as that of the NSGA and cannot be regionalized or manipulated in the same way. Therefore the percentages of participation are national figures. The participation information does illustrate growth in participation for what the project team would refer to as “enrichment” opportunities. It is important to note on the national level that a decrease in these types of class opportunities at school has led to an increase in demand for parks and recreation departments to offer this type of programming.

To continue to offer existing programs, and to expand those offerings, the project team feels the City needs to pursue two paths. The first, is that the City will need to invest in parks and recreation infrastructure (fields, facilities, equipment, sidewalks, trails, etc.). The second is that the City should strongly consider strengthening the partnership between the City and School District as it relates to both indoor and outdoor facility usage. The City cannot afford to build their own indoor facility, but based on participation data, there is the market to suggest they could offer indoor programming. Use of School District facilities would be a primary method of delivery for these programs.

Sports and Recreation

Market Potential Index for Adult Participation

Using ESRI the project team accessed data regarding adult participation in a variety of activities that could take place at an indoor facility. The following data (Table A) illustrates the Market Potential Index (MPI) in the service areas.

MPI measures the relative likelihood of the adults or households in the specified trade area to exhibit certain consumer behaviors or purchase patterns compared to the U.S. An MPI of 100 represents the U.S. average.

Source: This data is based upon national propensities to use various products and services, applied to local demographic composition. Usage data were collected by MRI-Simmons in a national representative survey of U.S. households, with ESRI providing forecasting.

This table indicates that the overall propensity for adults to participate in activities is only lower than the national number of 100 in 9 of the 28 activities. In many cases, when a participation number is lower than the National number, this is due to a lack of facilities or an inability to pay for services and programs. In addition to analyzing the demographic realities of the service areas, it is possible to project possible participation in recreation and sport activities.

Participation Numbers: On an annual basis, the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) conducts an in-depth study and survey of how Americans spend their leisure time. The data is collected in one year and the report is issued in May of the following year. This information provides the data necessary to overlay rate of participation onto the Primary Service Area to determine market potential.

B*K takes the national average and combines that with participation percentages of the Primary Service Area based upon age distribution, median income, region and National number. Those four percentages are then averaged together to create a unique participation percentage for the service area. This participation percentage, when applied to the population of the Primary Service Area then provides an idea of the market potential for a variety of recreation activities.

Table A - Market Potential Index (MPI) for Adult Participation

Adult participation:	Number of Adults	Percent	MPI
Aerobic Exercise	283	8.9%	120
Baseball	91	2.9%	96
Basketball	185	5.9%	102
Bicycling (mountain)	127	4.0%	127
Bicycling (road)	447	14.1%	141
Boxing	46	1.5%	81
Cornhole	301	9.5%	100
CrossFit	50	1.6%	92
Football	89	2.8%	102
Frisbee	85	2.7%	93
Golf	325	10.3%	128
Jogging or Running	402	12.7%	123
Kickboxing	39	1.2%	88
Marathon/Triathlon	31	1.0%	87
Martial Arts	33	1.0%	79
Pickleball	147	4.7%	128
Pilates	141	4.5%	138
Ping Pong	152	4.8%	120
Soccer	125	4.0%	106
Softball	57	1.8%	100
Spinning	68	2.2%	129
Swimming	607	19.2%	118
Tennis	153	4.8%	136
Volleyball	78	2.5%	93
Walking for Exercise	1,256	39.7%	123
Weightlifting	622	19.7%	129
Yoga	379	12.0%	125
Zumba	76	2.4%	88

Sports and Recreation

Participation Evaluation

Table B - Participation Rates in the Primary Service Area

	Age	Income	Region	Nation	Average
Baseball	3.8%	4.2%	2.2%	3.5%	3.4%
Cheerleading	1.4%	1.8%	0.4%	1.3%	1.2%
Exercise Walking	33.3%	35.0%	33.8%	34.0%	34.0%
Football (flag)	2.4%	2.7%	0.6%	2.2%	2.0%
Football (tackle)	2.3%	2.6%	1.7%	2.1%	2.2%
Football (touch)	2.3%	2.2%	0.7%	2.2%	1.9%
Golf	6.9%	7.7%	5.7%	7.0%	6.8%
Lacrosse	0.9%	1.5%	0.6%	0.9%	1.0%
Pickleball	5.1%	5.7%	2.3%	5.0%	4.5%
Running/jogging	13.1%	13.3%	10.8%	13.1%	12.6%
Soccer	5.6%	5.7%	2.9%	5.1%	4.8%
Softball	2.7%	3.3%	1.2%	2.5%	2.4%
Tennis	5.0%	5.1%	3.3%	4.8%	4.5%
Volleyball	3.7%	3.8%	3.2%	3.5%	3.6%
Wrestling	1.2%	1.2%	0.5%	1.2%	1.0%
Yoga	9.0%	9.5%	7.2%	9.3%	8.7%

Age: Participation based on individuals ages 7 & Up of the Service Area.

Income: Participation based on the 2024 estimated median household income in the Service Area.

Region: Participation based on regional statistics (West-North Central).

National: Participation based on national statistics.

Average: Average of the four columns.

Anticipated Participation Number: Utilizing the average percentage from Table B above plus the 2020 census information and census estimates for 2024 and 2029 (over age 7) the following comparisons are available.

Sports and Recreation

Participation Evaluation

Table C- Participation Growth or Decline for Activities in Primary Service Area

Indoor Activities	Average	2020 Pop	2024 Pop	2029 Pop	Difference
Baseball	3.4%	111	122	142	30
Cheerleading	1.2%	40	44	51	11
Exercise Walking	34.0%	1,107	1,209	1,410	303
Football (flag)	2.0%	64	70	81	17
Football (tackle)	2.2%	71	78	91	19
Football (touch)	1.9%	61	66	77	17
Golf	6.8%	222	243	283	61
Lacrosse	1.0%	32	35	41	9
Pickleball	4.5%	148	161	188	40
Running/jogging	12.6%	409	447	521	112
Soccer	4.8%	157	172	200	43
Softball	2.4%	79	86	101	22
Tennis	4.5%	148	162	188	40
Volleyball	3.6%	116	127	148	32
Wrestling	1.0%	34	37	43	9
Yoga	8.7%	285	311	362	78

Note: These figures do not necessarily translate into attendance figures for various activities or programs. The “Did Not Participate” statistics refers to all 58 activities outlined in the NSGA 2024 Survey Instrument.

Sports and Recreation

Participation Evaluation

Table D - National Sports Participation Summary

National Summary of Sports Participation: The following chart summarizes participation for indoor activities utilizing information from the 2024 National Sporting Goods Association survey.

Sport	Unique Percent	Nat'l Rank ¹	Nat'l Participation (in millions)
Exercise Walking	33.6%	1	105.1
Exercising w/ Equipment	17.0%	3	50.7
Swimming	15.1%	4	46.9
Bicycle Riding	13.7%	5	40.6
Running/Jogging	13.2%	6	40.4
Weightlifting	12.8%	8	37.6
Workout @ Club	9.6%	9	30.7
Yoga	9.2%	12	28.6
Basketball	8.3%	13	23.9
Golf	6.5%	16	21.6
Soccer	5.2%	18	15.8
Pickleball	4.3%	19	15.4
Tennis	5.0%	20	15.0
Volleyball	3.7%	26	10.8
Baseball	3.5%	27	10.7
Pilates	2.4%	30	8.0
Softball	2.5%	31	7.9
Canoeing	3.3%	32	7.3
Football (touch)	2.0%	35	6.8
Football (flag)	2.0%	37	6.7
Gymnastics	2.4%	40	6.5
Martial Arts/MMA	2.1%	41	6.3
Boxing	2.0%	45	6.0
Cheerleading	1.2%	50	3.7
Wrestling	1.1%	51	3.7
Lacrosse	0.9%	56	2.6

Nat'l Rank :
Popularity of sport based on national survey.

Nat'l Participation:
Population that participate in this sport on national survey.

Sports and Recreation

Participation Evaluation

Table E - Participation by Age Group:

National Participation by Age Group:

Within the NSGA survey, participation is broken down by age groups. As such B*K can identify the top 3 age groups participating in the activities reflected in this report.

Activity	Largest	Second Largest	Third Largest
Aerobic	35-44	25-34	45-54
Baseball	7-11	12-17	35-44
Basketball	12-17	25-34	35-44
Bicycle Riding	7-11	35-44	25-34
Boxing	25-34	35-44	18-24
Canoeing	25-34	35-44	45-54
Cheerleading	12-17	7-11	35-44
Exercise Walking	55-64	25-34	35-44
Exercise w/ Equipment	25-34	35-44	45-54
Football (flag)	7-11	12-17	25-34
Football (touch)	12-17	25-34	35-44
Golf	35-44	25-34	55-64
Gymnastics	7-11	12-17	25-34
Lacrosse	12-17	25-34	7-11
Martial Arts/MMA	7-11	12-17	35-44
Pickleball	55-64	45-54	35-44
Pilates	25-34	35-44	45-54
Running/Jogging	25-34	35-44	12-17
Soccer	7-11	12-17	25-34
Softball	7-11	12-17	35-44
Swimming	35-44	25-34	7-11
Tennis	35-44	25-34	12-17
Volleyball	12-17	25-34	35-44
Weightlifting	25-34	35-44	45-54
Workout @ Clubs	25-34	35-44	45-54
Wrestling	12-17	35-44	25-34
Yoga	25-34	35-44	45-54

Largest: Age group with the highest rate of participation.

Second Largest: Age group with the second highest rate of participation

Third Largest: Age group with the third highest rate of participation.



5

Recommendations and Implementation

The Recommendations chapter outlines a strategic roadmap for enhancing Van Meter’s parks and recreation system in alignment with community needs, growth trends, and long-term sustainability. Building on the findings from the existing conditions analysis and community engagement, this chapter presents a series of actionable strategies designed to improve access, equity, quality, and connectivity across the city’s park network.

Key recommendations include the development of new neighborhood parks in underserved areas, expansion of the city’s trail system to improve walkability and regional connections, and upgrades to existing facilities to ensure they are

inclusive, safe, and adaptable for year-round use. The plan also emphasizes the importance of preserving natural areas, integrating green infrastructure, and enhancing recreational programming to serve all age groups and interests. As the city grows, one of the most important strategies to implement and enforce, will be the establishment of new park space through parkland dedication in new developments or accepting parkland dedication fees, in-lieu of land. The following provides an overview of the city’s current parkland dedication ordinance, along with suggested modifications for consideration.

Parkland Dedication Summary

The City of Van Meter requires that all new residential developments—such as subdivisions, planned unit developments (PUDs), and site plans—contribute to the city’s park system through parkland dedication, per the city’s zoning code. This requirement ensures that as the city grows, adequate public park space is provided to support the health, safety, and welfare of current and future residents.



Here is a summary of Van Meter’s current Parkland Dedication according to chapter 173 of the Zoning Code of Ordinances, highlighted items are of critical importance to follow as the city considers new parkland.

Purpose:

Ensure new development includes or supports public parkland in alignment with the City’s Comprehensive Plan and long-range community goals

Applicability:

Applies to all residential developments, including subdivisions and PUDs.

Dedication Requirement:

Developers must dedicate a portion of land or provide a fee-in-lieu if land dedication is not feasible

Trail Easements:

In some cases (where indicated in the comprehensive plan), developers may be required to dedicate land or easements for trails to enhance connectivity

Stream Buffers:

Dedication of stream buffers may be required and can count toward parkland requirements

Minimum Standards:

Dedicated land must meet minimum size, location, and usability standards to be accepted
Min. 20,000 square feet

Shall be considered usable park space, shall not be located within a floodplain, not used for storm water detention and shall not have cross slopes that exceed 5%

Alternatives and Credits:

Developers may receive credits for private recreational amenities or other contributions that align with city goals

Enforcement and Compliance:

The ordinance includes provisions for agreements, surety, and penalties to ensure compliance

Park Dedication Fees: A Strategic Tool for Van Meter's Growth

As the City of Van Meter experiences increasing development pressure, it is essential to proactively plan for the recreational needs of a growing population. Park dedication fees are a critical funding mechanism that ensures new developments contribute fairly to the expansion and improvement of the city's park system.

Why Park Dedication Fees Are Needed

01. Population Growth & Development Pressure

Van Meter is seeing a steady rise in residential development. Without dedicated funding, the city risks falling behind in providing adequate parkland and recreational amenities to meet the needs of new residents.

02. Equitable Park Access

Park dedication fees ensure that all neighborhoods—especially new ones—have access to quality parks and open spaces, supporting community health, cohesion, and quality

03. Sustainable Funding for Capital Improvements

These fees provide a predictable, long-term funding source for land acquisition, park design, and construction—reducing reliance on general funds or bonds.

04. Alignment with Comprehensive Planning Goals

The Parks & Recreation Vision Statement within the Comprehensive Plan is “Provide a high-quality parks and recreation system in Van Meter”. Implementation of parkland dedication fees and careful review and approval of establishing new parkland within development, align with Action Item 1 of the comprehensive plan. This is a critical mechanism to support the city's long-range planning objectives by enabling the timely development of parks and trails in tandem with residential growth.

Decision-Making Criteria: Land Dedication vs. Fee-in-Lieu

Accept Land Dedication When:

01. Meets Minimum Size and Usability Standards

- Parcel is large enough to support meaningful recreational use (e.g., 5+ acres for neighborhood parks)
- Land is flat, accessible, and not encumbered by wetlands, floodplains, or easements
- The city should establish a requirement for providing a MOU at time of preliminary plat and final agreement at final plat

02. Strategic Location

- Land is of sufficient size to support an area identified as underserved in the city's Parks System Plan
- Parcel enhances connectivity to existing parks, trails or other public amenities

03. Supports Long-Term Planning Goals

- Aligns with the city's Comprehensive Plan or Capital Improvement Plan
- Fills a gap in the park system or supports future growth areas

04. Cost-Effective to Develop and Maintain

- Site has access to utilities and infrastructure
- Development and maintenance costs are reasonable, sustainable and consistent with city standards or national public park standards

05. Community Benefit

- Land provides unique natural features, scenic value, or ecological benefits
- Offers opportunities for diverse recreational uses that serve multiple age groups and user types





Accept Fee-in-Lieu When:

01. Land Offered is Inadequate

- Parcel is too small, poorly located, or unsuitable for park development
- The land is fragmented, lacks connectivity, or is isolated from existing public spaces and infrastructure

02. City Has Higher Priority Projects

- Available funds may be more effectively used to enhance or expand existing parks in alignment with identified priorities
- City has identified a more strategic location for park investment

03. Administrative Efficiency

- Managing small or scattered parcels would strain city resources
- Fee allows for more flexible and impactful park development

04. Equity and Fairness

- Ensures all developments contribute equitably, even if land isn't feasible
- Supports balanced park access and investment across all areas of the city

Park System Improvement Recommendations

The City of Van Meter requires a comprehensive strategy for maintaining existing park and recreation facilities, implementing proactive operational and maintenance approaches, and establishing policies and procedures that support the expansion of the park system in alignment with community growth.

The recommendations developed through this planning process are intended to serve as a framework for preserving, restoring, and enhancing the community's parks and open spaces in response to identified community needs. While some improvements may be accomplished with minimal capital investment, others will require securing funding, developing detailed plans, and managing phased construction over time. This plan anticipates that cumulative enhancements—both within individual parks and across the broader system—will be implemented incrementally as financial resources become available and partnerships with public and private stakeholders are established.

As is common in many municipalities, the demand for funding park and open space initiatives frequently exceeds the city's budgetary capacity and may be deprioritized relative to other critical infrastructure investments. Consequently, it is essential for the city to pursue both public and private funding sources. Completion of this plan, along with corresponding construction cost estimates, positions the city to strategically identify and secure the additional resources required to implement specific projects.

It is important to recognize that each project will necessitate further analysis and design, which will refine project scopes and cost estimates. The information provided herein is intended exclusively for planning and budgeting purposes. All recommendations are the result of a thorough evaluation of existing park and recreation infrastructure, analysis of community feedback, and comprehensive review by city staff and the project steering committee.

While considering the recommendations it is important to remember:

- **73% of community members that participated in the survey, support an increase in city funding for parks**
- **Continual increase in population demand will continue to put increase demand and wear on existing park facilities**
- **Growing the park system while growing the population is important and should be done so to reduce gaps in park distribution across the community**

The subsequent pages include an implementation matrix summarizing each project, policy, strategy, or program arising from the planning process. This matrix offers essential details on implementation, including project priorities and phases, locations, estimated budgets, anticipated operational impacts, and revenue generation considerations.

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Park System Improvement Matrix

Estimated Timing	Priority Ranking	Park / Facility	Recommendation Type	Improvement Strategy / Description	Estimated Cost	Operational Impact	Revenue Increase (Yes, No, Maybe)	Impact (High, Medium, Low)
0-5 Years	1	General / System-Wide	Operations	Develop and implement 5-Year Park Department budget and Capital Improvement Plan	Min. / Staff Time	Staff Time difficult to estimate impact.	Maybe	Medium
0-5 Years	2	Recreation Complex	Facility	Rehabilitate athletic field turfgrass with consistent annual maintenance program including regular watering, fertilizer and herbicide applications, aerating, topdressing and over-seeding.	\$ 15,000.00	Additional staff time, potential contract of services.	Yes	Medium
0-5 Years	3	Trails and Connectivity	Operations	Conduct sidewalk gap and walkability assessment and establish bi-annual (every 2 years) replacement/infill project.	\$ 50,000.00	Initial impact will be bigger, long term impact, less.	No	Low
0-5 Years	4	General / System-Wide	Facility	Develop new park in Grand Ridge Estates subdivision	\$ 450,000.00	Will increase the responsibilities of current and future staff.	Maybe	High
0-5 Years	5	General / System-Wide	Policy/Code	Amend parkland dedication in City Code to ensure future parkland is established as city grows	Min. / Staff Time	Minor impact on staffing time. Be sure to develop in a way that the City doesn't get "left over" parcels.	No	Low
0-5 Years	6	General / System-Wide	Facility	Acquire land for new recreation complex	TBD	Some impact on staff negotiating terms	Maybe	Low
0-5 Years	7	Johnson Park	Facility	Install picnic shelter adjacent parking lot	\$ 75,000.00	Will require some additional staff time monthly/annual.	Maybe	Medium
0-5 Years	8	Johnson Park	Operations	Monitor tree and vegetation health and actively manage invasive species	\$ 1,500.00	A new initiative for the City, who will be responsible for this, existing, new position?	No	Medium-High
0-5 Years	9	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Connect trail access to school detention pond.	DCCB	May require some additional staffing time with annual maintenance of trail, opportunity for partnership with SD.	No	Low
0-5 Years	10	Trails and Connectivity	Connectivity	Create accessible sidewalk connections into all Van Meter parks and incorporate sidewalk and trail routes within future parks.	TBD	Long term impact is minimal in terms of operations.	No	Low
0-5 Years	11	General / System-Wide	Communications	Create annual funding campaign and sponsorship program which indicates opportunities for donations and sponsorships for events and at facilities	Min. / Staff Time	Someone has to spearhead this project, not always a great fit within parks and recreation. There is also follow-up to donors and how dollars are spent.	Yes	Medium
0-5 Years	12	Recreation Complex	Facility	Update ballfields with skinned infields, moveable pitching mounds, and multiple baselines to function as more multi-purpose fields.	\$ 130,000.00	This could have an increase on staff responsibilities as it will likely facilitate more use of the spaces.	Yes	Medium
0-5 Years	13	Johnson Park	Facility	Install park map that indicates the different opportunities amenities that exist in the park including the disc golf course map, play areas and natural features.	\$ 3,000.00	Minor impact on staffing time and maintenance. Will need to be updated at some point. Also consider inclusion of QR code and some updates can happen electronically.	No	Low
0-5 Years	14	Memorial Park	Facility	Plant shade trees along walks and gathering spaces but not impact park functions	\$ 5,000.00	Long term impact will be to prune trees, so there will be some impact on staff time.	No	Medium
0-5 Years	15	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Pedestrian access into the park and to amenities.	DCCB	Depending on the type of access (pavement) there can be an impact to the staffing and improvement budget.	No	Low
	16	General / System-Wide	Operations	Re-evaluate/adjust recreation programming fees and establish schedule for adjusting fees in the future	Min. / Staff Time	Initial impact on staff could be significant, but will lead to less time in the future as it relates to establishing fees. It will also likely lead to greater revenue generation.	Yes	Medium

Park System Improvement Matrix

Estimated Timing	Priority Ranking	Park / Facility	Recommendation Type	Improvement Strategy / Description
0-5 Years	17	Memorial Park	Facility	Install portable toilet enclosure
0-5 Years	18	Trails and Connectivity	Policy/Code	Preserve natural drainage features and greenways for establishing trail connections between subdivisions and neighborhoods.
5-10 Years	19	Johnson Park	Facility	Replace drinking fountain (currently inoperable)
5-10 Years	20	General / System-Wide	Facility	Acquire/identify land for pickleball, tennis and basketball facility
5-10 Years	21	General / System-Wide	Facility	Construct pickleball, tennis and basketball facility
5-10 Years	22	General / System-Wide	Communications	Update parks and rec information on city website to include locations of parks, maps and pictures to promote the different outdoor resources in the community
5-10 Years	23	Recreation Complex	Facility	Replace/upgrade restroom building at ballfields
5-10 Years	24	Recreation Complex	Facility	Create accessible parking options with connections to field/spectator areas
5-10 Years	25	Johnson Park	Facility	Install safety surfacing at swings
5-10 Years	26	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Expand playground with nature based/themed amenities to expand opportunities for 2-12 age visitors.
5-10 Years	27	Recreation Complex	Facility	Install drinking fountain at soccer fields
5-10 Years	28	Johnson Park	Facility	Install permanent restroom
5-10 Years	29	Johnson Park	Facility	Install portable toilet enclosure
5-10 Years	30	Memorial Park	Facility	Add bike parking with 2-3 bike racks
5-10 Years	31	Memorial Park	Facility	Install small picnic shelter
5-10 Years	32	Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Interpretive signage and education

Estimated Cost	Operational Impact	Revenue Increase (Yes, No, Maybe)	Impact (High, Medium, Low)
\$ 5,000.00	Minimal impact on staffing but will require regular upkeep and eventual replacement.	No	Low
TBD	Minimal initial impact but could require unique maintenance solutions when complete	No	Low
\$ 6,000.00	Minimal impact on staffing but will require regular upkeep and eventual replacement.	No	Low
\$ 45,000.00		Maybe	Low
\$ 750,000.00	This will have a significant impact on staffing. It will require annual inspection to make sure surfaces are playable and weekly inspection when in use. Basketball and tennis/pickleball typically get resurface every 6-8 years so a CIP impact. Will allow for expanded drop-in availability, and some programming depending on staff abilities.	Yes	Medium
Min. / Staff Time	Depending on who is responsible for updating and maintaining the site, it could have an impact on staff. More and more clients are allowing staff to have some ability to edit information to keep it current.	Maybe	Medium
\$ 200,000.00	Will not impact staff, just required continue level of support that they currently receive.	No	Low
TBD	Minimal staff impact, but will impact budget to maintain and upkeep.	No	Low
\$ 20,000.00	May decrease staff time depending on what is currently being used, but will need to be reflected in CIP budget.	No	Medium
DCCB	Will expand the staff's responsibilities with regards to playground inspections. Will also anticipate higher use of this playground.	No	High
\$ 7,000.00	Will impact staff seasonal for winter and de-winterization, and also minimal cleaning and upkeep.	No	Low
\$ 125,000.00	Will impact staff seasonal for winter and de-winterization, and also minimal cleaning and upkeep.	No	Low
TBD	Minimal impact on staffing but will require regular upkeep and eventual replacement.	No	Low
\$ 5,000.00	Will impact staff with respect to annual inspection and will add to replacement schedule.	No	Low
\$ 60,000.00	Will impact staff with respect to annual upkeep. If these are rentable spaces, may result in increased cleaning with rentals and usage.	Maybe	Medium
DCCB	Will add to replacement schedule.	No	Low

Park System Improvement Matrix

Estimated Timing	Priority Ranking	Park / Facility	Recommendation Type	Improvement Strategy / Description	Estimated Cost	Operational Impact	Revenue Increase (Yes, No, Maybe)	Impact (High, Medium, Low)
5-10 Years		33 City Park	Facility	Develop replacement plan to be included in downtown redevelopment scenarios. Consider opportunities for programming of space to accommodate small downtown gatherings, play features and seating.	TBD	Community special are often the responsibility of parks and recreation departments. Depending on the number of events they may require dedicated staff positions, but definitely will require dedicated staff hours from existing staff. Some departments have entire special events series that are offered year around. This could have a significant financial impact on the department.	Maybe	Medium-High
		34 Recreation Complex	Facility	Install permanent restroom at soccer fields	\$ 200,000.00	Will impact staff seasonal for winter and de-winterization, also daily/weekly cleaning that could be addressed by staff or via contract.	No	Low
10+ Years		35 Recreation Complex	Facility	Replace soccer fields with synthetic turf	TBD	There is the possibility that this will slightly decrease the maintenance needs, but if they are heavily used, it could likely be a continuation of current staff levels. This will allow for significantly higher fees to be assessed. Biggest note is that the turf will need to be replaced in 8-10 years depending on usage, which is a significant capital improvement investment.	Yes	Medium
		36 Recreation Complex	Facility	Install drinking fountain at ballfields	\$ 7,000.00	Will impact staff seasonal for winter and de-winterization, and also minimal cleaning and upkeep.	No	Low
10+ Years		37 Recreation Complex	Facility	Replace pedestrian bridge between B1 and B2 fields	\$ 250,000.00	Will not have a significant impact on staff, but will need to be factored into replacement schedule.	No	Low
10+ Years		38 Johnson Park	Facility	Pave parking lot	TBD	Will not have a significant impact on staff, but will need to be factored into replacement schedule.	No	Low
10+ Years		39 General / System-Wide	Facility	Develop park system signage family and install park entry signs at each city owned park	\$ 80,000.00	Will add to replacement schedule.	No	Low
10+ Years		40 General / System-Wide	Facility	Consider site for future splash pad	TBD	Impact on staff will be winter and de-winterization, unless they contract out that service. Depending on design and filtration, can have a significant, daily, impact on staff to manage chemicals and keep in working order.	Maybe	High
		41 Recreation Complex	Facility	Resurface facility roadway	TBD	Will add to replacement schedule.	No	Low
10+ Years		42 Recreation Complex	Facility	Install portable toilet enclosures (3) and move to more desirable location	\$ 15,000.00	Minimal impact on staffing but will require regular upkeep and eventual replacement.	No	Low
10+ Years		43 Recreation Complex	Facility	Update playground areas and equipment	\$ 250,000.00	Will expand the staff's responsibilities with regards to playground inspections. Will also anticipate higher use of this playground.	No	Medium
		44 Recreation Complex	Facility	Replace batting cages	\$ 30,000.00	Batting cages may impact staff if the choose to set-up and take-down on a seasonal basis.	Maybe	Low
10+ Years		45 Recreation Complex	Facility	Fix scoreboards	TBD	Minal staff impact, inspect seasonally. Will impact replacement schedule.	No	Low
10+ Years		46 Trindle Park (DCCB)	Facility	Additional park shelter	DCCB	Will impact staff with respect to annual upkeep. If these are rentable spaces, may result in increased cleaning with rentals and usage.	Maybe	Medium