



WATERTOWN **PARKS &** **OPEN SPACE** **PLAN**

DRAFT JUNE 2025 - V2



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INTRODUCTION

PLAN PURPOSE

Parks are typically at the top of the list when residents describe the places they love in their city or neighborhood. Parks are sources of civic identity and pride, and parks and recreation are essential to the physical, economic, environmental and social health of cities and their residents. High-quality parks, along with schools and access to transportation, are typically the top three criteria people consider when choosing a place to live.

The primary purpose of this plan is to proactively account for the City's future park and recreation needs. The recommendations in this plan will guide the acquisition, preservation, and development of land for parks, recreation, and other open spaces in Watertown to meet the needs of a dynamic population and to protect the community's natural resources into the future. This plan is aspirational with ambitious recommendations for the next five years and beyond.

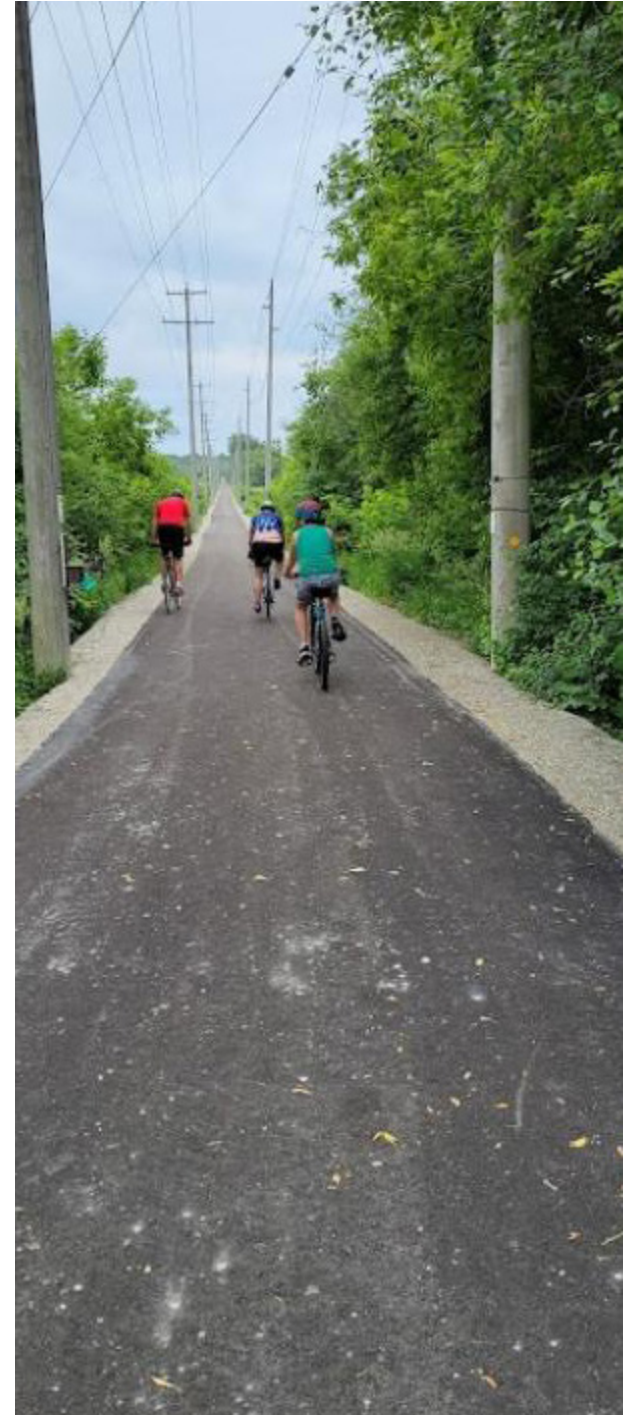
This plan was developed in 2025 through close collaboration with City staff, combined with input received from residents through public engagement, along with evaluation of previous findings and recommendations presented in the City's 2019 Park and Open Space Plan. The plan was prepared in accordance with guidelines to make it certifiable by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WisDNR) and is anticipated to qualify the City for matching grant funds through the funding programs administered by WisDNR. This plan was also prepared in parallel to the City-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which is anticipated to be completed in the spring of 2026. Detailed recommendations related to the City's on-street, off-street, and recreational trail network will be developed as part of the parallel planning effort.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Watertown's Park and Open Space Plan is organized into eight chapters:

- » **Chapter 1: Introduction** introduces and provides context for the plan.
- » **Chapter 2: Community Context** describes the city's physical and demographic make-up, as well as summarizes relevant and recent plans.
- » **Chapter 3: Existing Parks and Open Spaces Today** inventories the city's current offerings of parks, trails, and open spaces.
- » **Chapter 4: Needs Analysis** evaluates and synthesizes various identified needs within the existing park and open space system.
- » **Chapter 5: Trends in Parks and Recreation** outlines regional, state, and national trends in parks and recreation use that are mirrored or applicable to Watertown.
- » **Chapter 6: Goals and Objectives** outlines the guiding principles and tools for decision-making into the future.
- » **Chapter 7: Plan Recommendations** identifies future park search areas and outlines recommendations for future improvements within existing parkland.
- » **Chapter 8: Implementation** provides guidance on phasing, costs, and funding opportunities for projects outlined in Chapter 7.

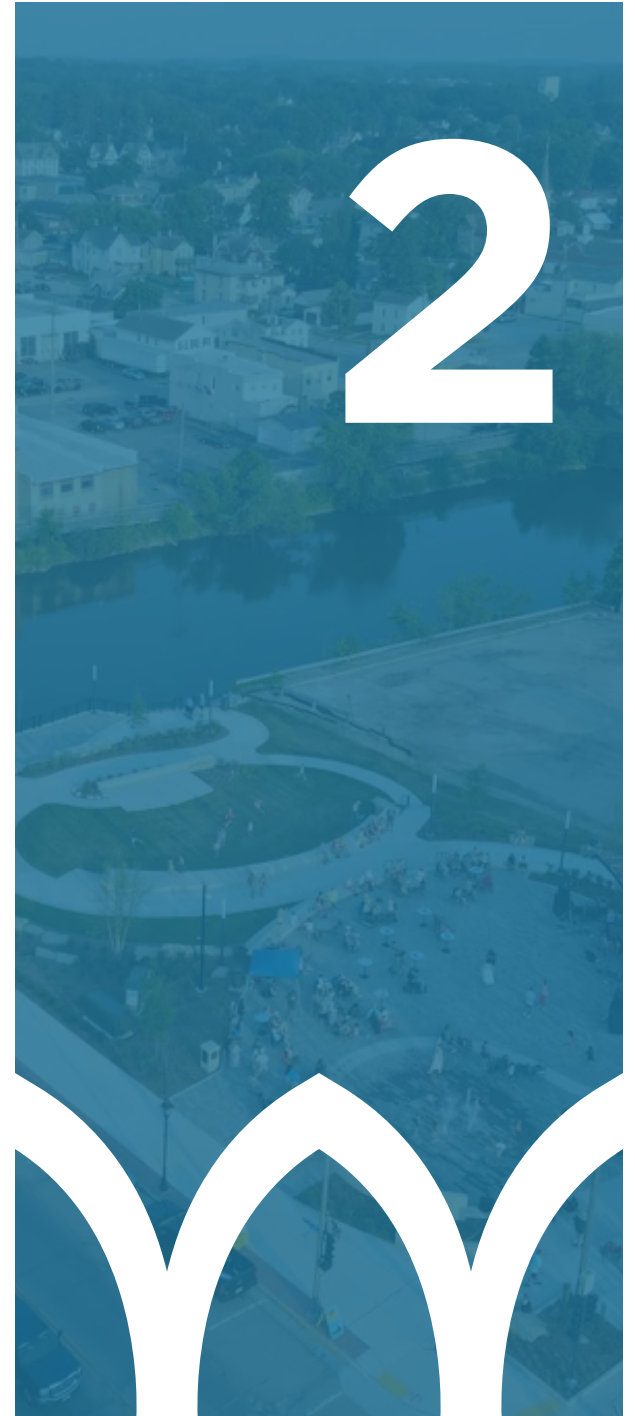


COMMUNITY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

This section of the plan examines the community context in which Watertown's Parks, Recreation, and Forestry department operates. A review of the physical landscape and environmental conditions alongside a summary of demographic characteristics helps situate Watertown's current parks system and provides a basis for looking at trends and future needs in the community.

Watertown is located in southeastern Wisconsin on the border of Jefferson County and Dodge County. It is approximately 35 miles east of Madison and 45 miles west of Milwaukee. The city has an area of approximately 12.5 square miles. A key feature shaping the city's physical geography and historical development patterns is the Rock River, which runs through the city. The river first flows north where it crosses into the city from the southeastern side, then flows south as it passes through downtown and out the southwestern boundary of the city.



WATERTOWN AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

By looking at demographic data, we can better understand current dynamics and potential issues and opportunities to plan for in Watertown. Are certain populations growing or shrinking? How have conditions changed over time? How does Watertown compare to its neighbors, the region, the state? How do these trends impact who and how people use parks and trails? The following section addresses such questions across a range of topics, drawing from the U.S. Decennial Census, American Community Survey, and other sources.

POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS

As of the 2022 American Community Survey, the population of Watertown is 22,978 and there are 8,756 households. There is an average household size of 2.52 people per household, which is greater than the 2.37 average household size for the State of Wisconsin, and slightly under the national average household size of 2.57. Jefferson County has a lower average household size of 2.42 and Dodge County has an average close to the state average at 2.39.

In Watertown, 28.3% of households have at least one individual under the age of 18 and 31.6% of households have at least one individual aged 65 or over.

HISTORICAL POPULATION TRENDS

The population of Watertown has continued to increase since 1860, with slightly larger population increases in the mid-1900s. The first decrease in population occurred from 2010-2020, with a 3.9% population decrease recorded between the two decennial censuses.

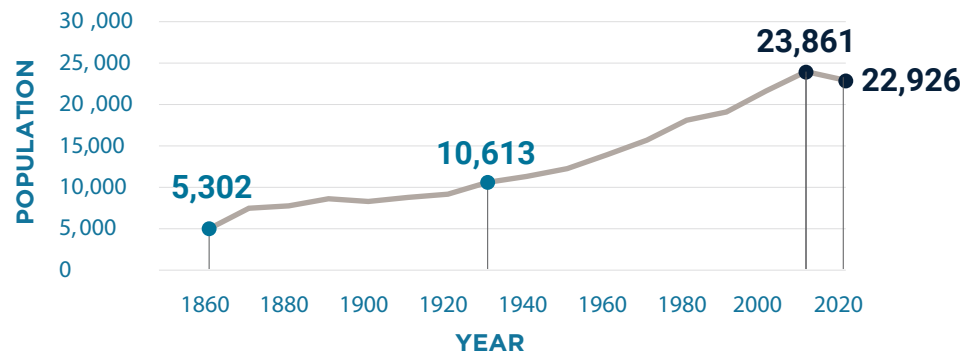
WATERTOWN 2.52



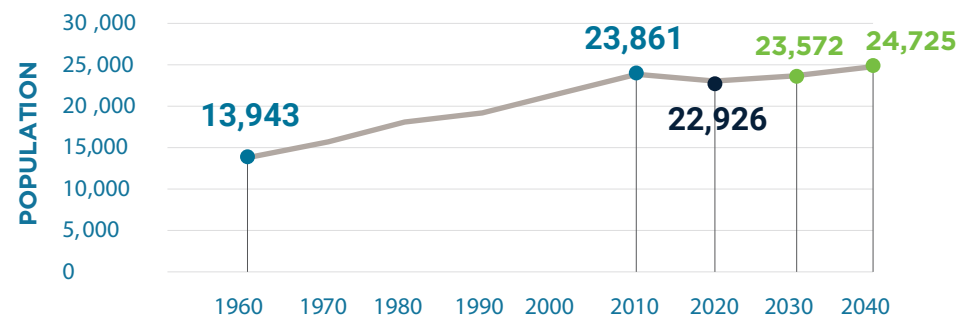
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AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE



HISTORICAL POPULATION TRENDS



LINEAR GROWTH PROJECTION

AGE AND GENDER

Watertown's gender distribution is skewed slightly female, with 51.1% of the population identifying as female and 48.9% as male. The population of Watertown is fairly evenly distributed across age categories with slight drop in the percent of the population aged 20 to 24. The median age in Watertown is 40, which is slightly younger than Jefferson County (41.0) and Dodge County (43.3), and the same as the State of Wisconsin (40.1).

RACE AND DIVERSITY

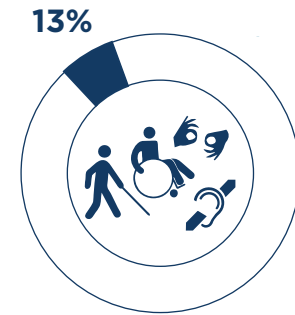
According to the 2020 Census, the population of Watertown is predominantly white (87.9%), with 6.2% of the population reporting as "two or more races", 1.2% as Black or African American, 3.5% as "some other race," and less than 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. 9.6% of the population is Hispanic.

INCOME

The median household income in Watertown is \$67,189 this is lower than the state median income of \$72,458 and that of Dodge County (\$71,747) and Jefferson County (\$77,018). According to the 2022 ACS, 6.3% of families are below the poverty line, with a total of 8.2% of people in Watertown falling below the poverty line. 13.2% of households received SNAP benefits (food stamps) in the past 12 months.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

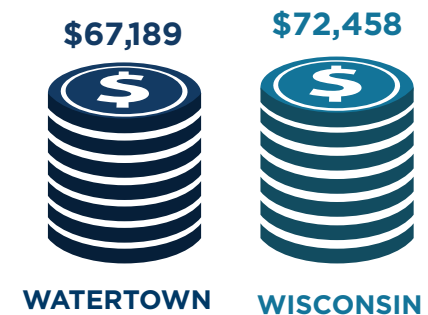
As of 2022, 13.1% of the Watertown non-institutionalized population was living with a disability. Of residents under age 18, 3.2% are living with a disability. Of residents aged 65 or older, 59.3% are living with a disability. Given the number of retirement and care facilities, the high percent of the population 65 and over with a disability makes sense. The data referenced includes a variety of disability types, specifically hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.



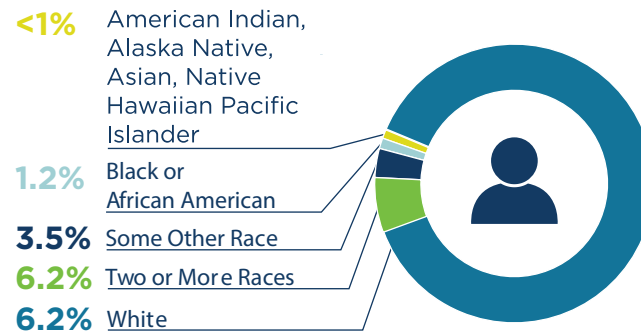
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



GENDER DISTRIBUTION



INCOME

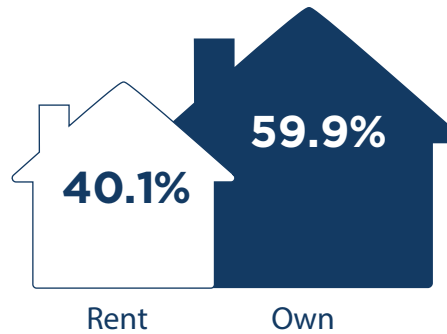


RACE DISTRIBUTION

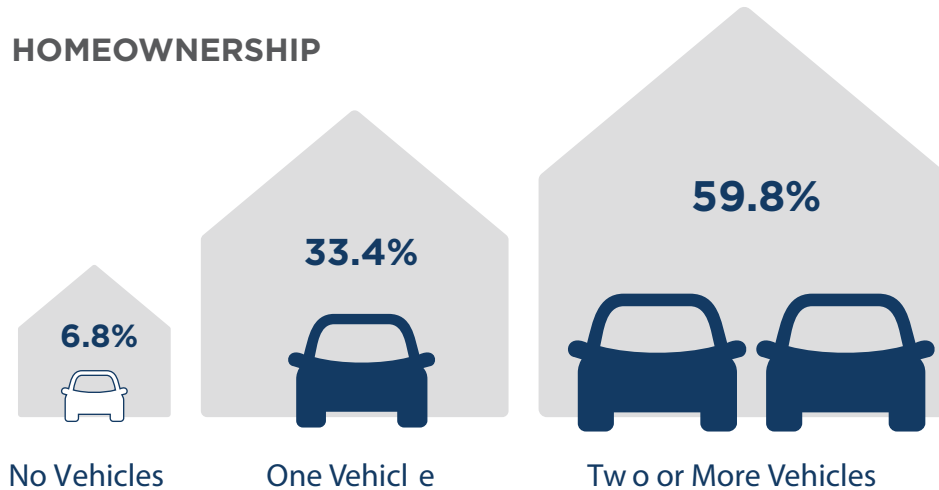
HOMEOWNERSHIP

Over half (59.9%) of Watertown residents live in owner-occupied housing units, with the remaining 40.1% renting units. This is a higher percentage of renters compared to the state (32.3%), Jefferson County (26.9%), and Dodge County (29.4%).

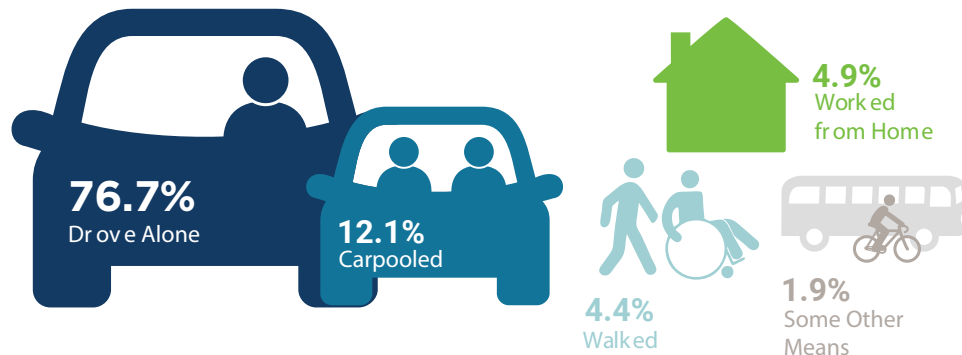
Households are considered housing cost burdened if they spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs. In Watertown, 41.5% of renters are housing-cost burdened, while 21.1% of homeowners with mortgages are housing cost burdened.



HOMEOWNERSHIP



VEHICLE OWNERSHIP



JOURNEY TO WORK

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

CLIMATE

Historically, southeastern Wisconsin's climate has been characterized by four distinct seasons. Warm summers generally span the months of June through August. The winter months of December, January, and February are cold, with average temperatures below freezing. The region is characterized by temperate conditions in spring and autumn. Over the last 30 years, Watertown has seen an average of 5.3 days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit and 141.2 days below 32 degrees Fahrenheit each year.

Over the years, average temperatures and seasonal norms have become less consistent. Over the last 35 years, Watertown's winters have seen an increase in average temperature of 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit and summers have seen a slight decrease in the average temperature by 0.7 degrees Fahrenheit.

Similarly, precipitation patterns are shifting. Southern Wisconsin is projected to see an increase in annual precipitation. Since 1950, Watertown has experienced a 22.9% increase in annual precipitation, for an average of 7.4 inches per year. This plays out differently across seasons, with spring seeing a greater increase in annual precipitation and fall experiencing less of an increase. Watertown is also experiencing more days each year with heavy precipitation. Heavy precipitation includes days with precipitation totals above 1 inch of rain.

SOILS

According to the Dodge and Jefferson County Soil Surveys, the majority of land within the city is covered by soils rated as generally unsuited, or poorly suited for development utilizing septic systems. The soils in the planning area are of two major types:

- » The Wacousta-Lamartine-Theresa association predominates in the vast majority of the general planning area. This association is characterized by very poorly drained, poorly drained, somewhat poorly drained, and well-drained soils with a silty or loamy subsoil and are underlain by silt loam, sandy loam, or gravelly sandy loam.
- » The Palms-Keowns-Milford association predominates to the south and west of the City along the Rock River corridor. This association is characterized by very poorly drained and poorly drained soils that have loamy or clayey subsoil and are underlain by silty, sandy, or clayey material. This association is also characterized by nearly level soils that are organic.



The Rock River



Rock River in Watertown



2008 Rock River Flood

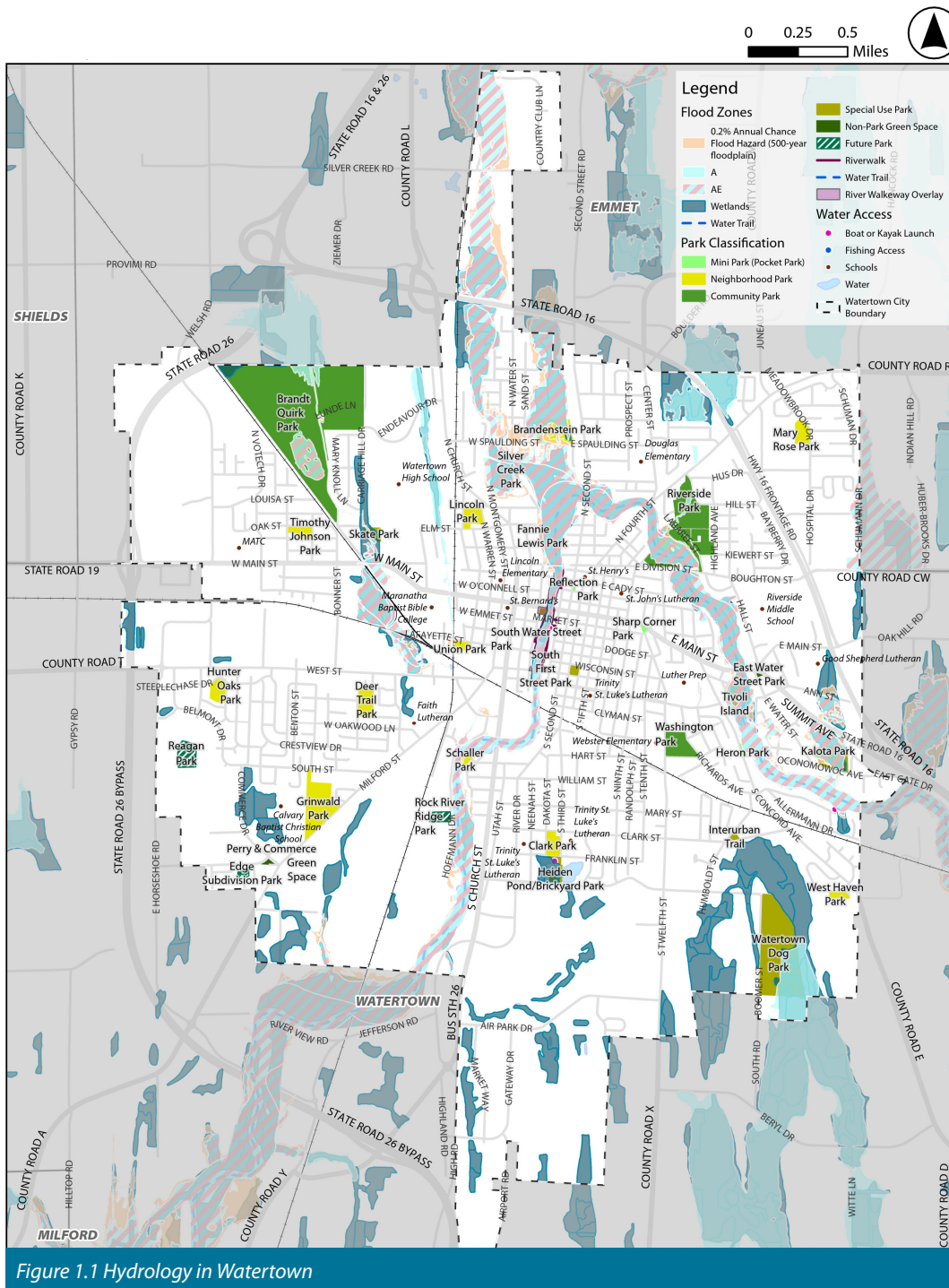


Figure 1.1 Hydrology in Watertown

HYDROLOGY

WATERSHEDS

The entire detailed planning area is located within the Rock River Basin portion of the Mississippi River system. The dominant feature of the area is the Rock River corridor proper. The Rock River runs from the east side of the planning area, through the City, and exits the planning area to the southwest. Silver Creek, which empties southward into the Rock River on the north side of the City, drains the majority of the lands to the north and northwest. Minor tributaries of the Rock drain south to north on the west, northeast, and east side of the planning area. Finally, the headwaters of Johnson Creek drain the extreme southeast and southern parts of the planning area.

GROUNDWATER

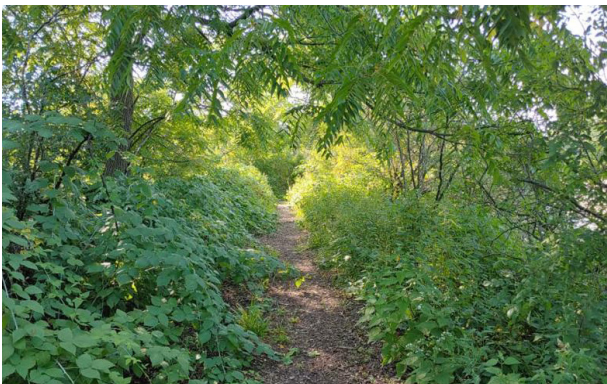
Groundwater resources are plentiful in the planning area at both shallow and deep levels. The shallow dolomite aquifers are likely to be linked to certain surface water features. In areas of granular soils, these aquifers are susceptible to contamination from both surface and subterranean sources. Most private wells draw from this shallow aquifer. The deep sandstone and limestone aquifers in the planning area are generally of higher quality and considered substantially less susceptible to contamination. In this regard, a few deep common wells are preferred over numerous shallow private wells. The water in the planning area is generally very hard, which can present problems with plumbing, taste, odor, and occasionally appearance.



Oak savanna



Agricultural land near Watertown



The Brickyard at Heiden Pond

VEGETATION

At the time of European settlement, much of southeastern Wisconsin was covered with prairie and oak savanna, oak woods, and lowlands. Since that time, most of the land has been converted to agricultural and urban uses. Small wooded areas are scattered throughout the city. Dominant forest types include oak-hickory and maple basswood woodlands.

WILDLIFE

Species of wildlife common to the southeastern Wisconsin region are rabbits, squirrels, woodchucks, raccoons, muskrats, and beavers. Larger mammals such as white-tailed deer, coyotes, and foxes also inhabit the region. Common bird species include pheasants, cardinals, robins, wood thrushes, great blue herons, and killdeer. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, there are occurrences of aquatic endangered species in the city near the Rock River. There were occurrences of both aquatic and terrestrial endangered species in the southwest and the areas surrounding Rock River.

REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

The following plans were reviewed with relevance to Watertown's existing and future park system.

2019 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



SUMMARY

The Watertown Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2019, provides the City with a vision and a plan for the next 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan offers guidance on sustainable growth and development and recommendations on how to bring the city towards its vision across a variety of topic areas. The areas covered in the plan include agricultural resources, natural resources, historic and cultural resources, community character and design, land use, transportation, utilities and community facilities, housing and neighborhood development, economic development, and intergovernmental cooperation.

Within the City's Comprehensive Plan, issues related to management and development of parks and open spaces are woven throughout many different chapters. A thorough summary of relevant existing conditions and recommendations are summarized below.

RELEVANT POINTS

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES Programs and Recommendations

- » Incorporate Community Gardens: The City can continue to promote community gardening in City plans such as the Park and Open Space Plan by identifying public lands and parklands that may be appropriate sites for community gardens, through specifically addressing community gardens in the City Zoning Ordinance, and continuing to partner with local groups and organizations on their efforts to develop new community gardens.

NATURAL RESOURCES Objectives

- » Link the preservation of natural resources with passive recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.

Policies

- » Site future parks in areas that forward the City's natural resource protection objectives.
- » Promote native vegetation restoration as passive recreational areas, outdoor laboratories, and open space amenities.

- » Continue to work with the DNR and Jefferson and Dodge County on future planning of bicycle routes, trails, and infrastructure to promote connectivity throughout the area.

Programs and Recommendations

- » Link natural area preservation with recreational opportunities: When siting new parks and considering improvements to existing park facilities, the City will identify areas that can accommodate both active recreation (e.g. ball fields, playgrounds, courts, jogging trails) and passive recreation (e.g. picnicking, recreation trails, bird watching). Natural resource preservation areas can serve as important components of the City's overall park system, providing opportunities for outdoor education, relaxation, and exercise. Such areas also maintain and enhance the beauty of a community or neighborhood and serve a variety of ecological functions. Through providing habitat for wildlife, enhancing water and air quality, and providing natural flood control.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER & DESIGN Goals

- » Preserve and enhance Watertown's unique features that contribute to its small-town community character

Policies

- » Integrate transportation network enhancements and connections into the development review process

LAND USE Existing Conditions

- » Definition of Parks and Recreation land use: Public and privately-owned open space facilities devoted to playgrounds, play fields, play courts, park shelters, picnic areas, recreation trails, and related to recreation activities.
 - Existing land use: 6% Parks and Recreation (public and private)

Policies

- » Require all proposed residential developments to dedicate land, or pay a fee in lieu thereof, for public park, recreation, and open space acquisition and development.

Programs and Recommendations

- » Planned neighborhoods: Promote traditional neighborhood design principles for new neighborhood development. Traditional neighborhoods typically include a full range of housing types (single-family, duplex, multifamily, townhouse); parks, plazas, and public squares; civic buildings and public art; bicycle and pedestrian paths/walkways; institutional uses (churches, schools, community centers, etc.); and neighborhood scale commercial, service, and office uses.
- » Parks and Recreation:
 - Provide parks within safe walking distance of all residential neighborhoods.
 - Follow recommendations of the City's Parks and Open Space Plan when acquiring new parkland or making changes to current parks.

TRANSPORTATION

Goals

- » Provide a safe and efficient multi-modal transportation system that meets the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, trucks, trains, and transit users.
- » Develop and maintain a comprehensive system of on-street and off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the Watertown area.

Watertown Community Garden

The Watertown Recreation Department offers community garden plots at Lincoln Park. The community garden has five raised beds measuring 4 by 12 feet and two handicap-accessible raised beds, measuring 4 by 4 feet. The garden was constructed in 2023 and had a successful first season due to significant community support and diligent stewardship of the plots. The garden provides an affordable and accessible means for residents to engage in outdoor recreation.



Community Garden at Lincoln Park

Objectives

- » Provide safe and convenient access between neighborhoods, employment centers, schools, service centers, and recreational centers
- » Consider pedestrian and bicycle accessibility when selecting new sites for public facilities such as schools, parks, libraries, and community centers.

UTILITIES & COMMUNITY FACILITIES Goals

- » Provide quality, accessible recreation and open space facilities to benefit all residents of the City of Watertown.

Objectives

- » Locate essential community facilities such as schools, churches, libraries, and community centers in strategic locations that provide convenient access to residential neighborhoods.
- » Work with the School District, private schools, University, and other large institutional uses to coordinate recreational facilities, land acquisition, boundary expansions, and cultural planning community-wide.

Policies

- » Require acquisition of park and open space lands to occur in coordination with development to provide for reasonable acquisition costs and facilitate site planning for development.
- » Design park system and recreational trail systems to meet the needs of all residents of the City.

- » Implement the recommendations of the City of Watertown Park and Open Space Plan.

Programs and Recommendations

- » Recommendations for parks and recreation facilities largely reflect the recommendations of the City of Watertown Park and Open Space Plan, 2019-2024. The general recommendations are to continue improvements to the City's many existing parks, and the eventual addition of 13 new neighborhood parks and 2 new community parks to develop as new neighborhoods are established. Other recommendations include a new indoor recreational facility, dog park, river access locations, and additional trail connections.
- » Further recommendations are:
 - Continue to collaborate and partner with private groups and nonprofit organizations to help in funding new recreational facilities and enhance existing facilities to complement the City's park system.
 - Continued development of Brandt-Quirk Park—including additional lighted and drain-tiled playfields, under 10-year old baseball field, new multi-use trails, basketball and volleyball courts, playground equipment, a community pavilion, and a splash pad.
 - Continue to update and develop master plans for each of its current properties. These master plans should indicate current use and conditions of the facilities, equipment, and park grounds. Once established, these master plans form the basis for developing a capital improvements program.

Change of Plans

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan and the 2019 Parks and Open Space Plan recommended the installation of a splash pad at Brandt-Quirk Park. With the development of the Bentzin Family Town Square and associated community programming in 2023, it was determined that the downtown location would be a better location for a splash pad amenity.



Splash pad at Bentzin Family Town Square

HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT Policies

- » Design livable neighborhoods that are well-served by sidewalks, bicycle routes, and other non-motorized transportation facilities and located within a ten-minute walk (approximately 1/3 mile) of a public park or open space area.
- » Design new neighborhoods so that they are centered on civic spaces such as parks, schools, churches, monuments, and similar features.

Programs and Recommendations

- » Promote traditional neighborhood design through Planned Neighborhoods – this means employing design principles including:
 - Establish community gathering places – design neighborhoods around community gathering places such as parks, public squares, outdoor dining establishments, schools, churches, and other community facilities.
 - Intertwine natural areas -- Integrate environmental features into the neighborhood as common open spaces for active or passive recreation, public gathering spots, or flood protection and stormwater management. Provide adequate vegetated buffers between development and natural features.

2019 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PLAN



SUMMARY

The 2019 Parks and Open Space Plan is a 5-year guiding document for Watertown's Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department. The plan provides an overview of existing conditions, analysis of future parks and recreation needs, and recommendations on how the City can meet these future needs through improvements to existing facilities and acquisition or development of new facilities. The Plan also provides calculations and information regarding Watertown's park dedication fees.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

The 2019 plan is organized into ten chapters, with three appendices that offer additional information and analysis of the parks system. Below are brief descriptions of what each chapter includes:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This chapter provides location context; natural environment/natural resource info; population and population projections; other demographic and census information (age, employment, household characteristics, etc.); and a review of existing plans.

CHAPTER 2: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

This chapter is an overview of the public engagement that guided the plan. The process included three Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Commission meetings; three focus group meetings; public open house, Plan Commission meeting, and small survey sent to local recreational stakeholders.

CHAPTER 3: EXISTING PARK AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

This chapter describes and classifies park facilities and gives an overview of the Park, Recreation, and Forestry Department staffing.

CHAPTER 4: GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

The plan identifies three goals, seven objectives, and 27 policies.

Goal #1 Ensure the provision of a sufficient number of parks, recreational facilities, and open

space areas to enhance the health and welfare of City residents and visitors. Such facilities should be diverse in accommodating to many different groups such as the elderly, the handicapped, adults and young families.

Goal #2 Preserve the City's natural resources and amenities for the benefit of current and future residents.

Goal #3 Prioritize keeping existing recreational and open space facilities and programming maintained and responsive to community interest over acquiring new park and recreational lands.

CHAPTER 5: PARK AND RECREATION STANDARDS

This chapter details the standards for parks and recreation facilities per 1,000 residents based on a combination of NRPA and local guidelines. The chapter includes standards for mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, school parks, special open space areas, recreation trails, on-street bicycle facilities, off-street recreation trails, and trailheads.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PARK AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The analysis looks at quantitative standards, such as parkland acreage per 1,000 residents and quantity of park amenities per 1,000 residents based on the guidelines in chapter 5, and qualitative analysis that factors in Watertown's characteristics to add nuance to the qualitative analysis. The analysis provides an estimate of future park system needs.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

The improvements detailed in this chapter are split into two categories. One focuses on future parkland and recreational trail acquisition and development to meet the standards and needs identified in chapters 5 and 6. The second set focuses on facility improvements to existing parks, detailed on a park-by-park basis.

CHAPTER 8: ESTIMATED COST PROJECTIONS FOR FUTURE FACILITIES

The cost estimates include projections for new parkland acquisition and development and other forms of improvements, such as play equipment and restroom facilities. The chapter also provides information to assist the City in park dedication calculations for both land and fee in lieu of land amounts.

CHAPTER 9: IMPACT ON LOW-INCOME HOUSING

This chapter demonstrates the impact of the park fee amount calculated in Chapter 8 on the cost of housing in Watertown.

CHAPTER 10: IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter broadly outlines how the plan should be implemented in a phased approach.

2022 DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET RECONSTRUCTION TASK FORCE



Watertown Downtown Main Street Reconstruction
Task Force Recommendations

SUMMARY

The Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force Recommendation Report details the recommendations from the Task Force, which was convened in response to the anticipated replacement of the Cole Bridge (completed in 2025) and reconstruction of 11 blocks of Main Street (now planned for 2028). The report provides design guidelines based on community feedback for the Main Street reconstruction and wider downtown area. There are two sets of recommendations – one specific to the Main Street reconstruction project, and one set applicable to the entire downtown area. The recommendations fall into four categories: Aesthetic Improvements; Infrastructure Improvements; Pedestrian-oriented Improvements; and Planning Recommendation; and three timeframes: before, during, or after reconstruction.

RELEVANT POINTS

MAIN STREET RECOMMENDATIONS

Install permanent “parklets.”

Permanent parklets, essentially extensions of the curb that re-purpose former parking spots, provide valuable space for eating and gathering. Well-designed spaces integrate landscaping and built in seating to create a more inviting streetscape and allow for more space along the existing sidewalk for pedestrian flow.

Create meeting spaces.

Having visitors stay and linger on Main Street helps give our downtown businesses more opportunities to attract customers. Spending time in well-designed gathering spaces and having conversations with fellow community members activates Main Street.

DOWNTOWN RECOMMENDATIONS

Remove vegetation to open views to the river and create vistas.

Watertown is blessed to have the Rock River run right through downtown. In order to take full advantage of its presence, it is recommended that obstructions and unmanaged brush be cleared in order to open up more viewing opportunities.

Install trees and/or plantings to soften aesthetic.

Incorporating greenscape into various locations throughout the downtown helps to soften the built environment, reduce urban heat effects and improve overall aesthetics. Maintenance is always a concern. The City and/or downtown organizations may want to explore different partnerships to facilitate collaborative maintenance of landscaping downtown.

Create and/or identify space for winter activities and programming.

Bringing visitors downtown year-round is a priority for assisting downtown businesses. Finding opportunities and locations to create winter events will ensure that Watertown avoids becoming a seasonal destination only.

2023 CITY OF WATERTOWN CITY-WIDE FLOOD STUDY



SUMMARY

The 2024 Watertown Flood Study Report provides flood risk projections for 10-, 100-, and 500- year events and details mitigation and management practices to decrease flooding risks in Watertown. The focus of the plan is on flooding in low-lying developed areas, related to older undersized storm sewer systems, open stormwater management ditches, and river tributaries.

The plan identifies focus areas with tailored recommendations to reduce flooding and provides regional best management practices for stormwater mitigation.

RELEVANT POINTS

AREA OF CONCERN #2: MRR5.2.

Residential Area of Concern on South Street between Milford Street and Maplecrest Lane

- » Stormwater storage in this area is not viable due to the wooded area being a protected part of the Grinwald Park system – the plan offers alternatives to storage that reduce flooding depths in this location.

AREA OF CONCERN #3: MRR5.10.

Existing residential, commercial, and institutional development in the area of the intersection of Main Street (STH 19) and Carriage Hill Drive.

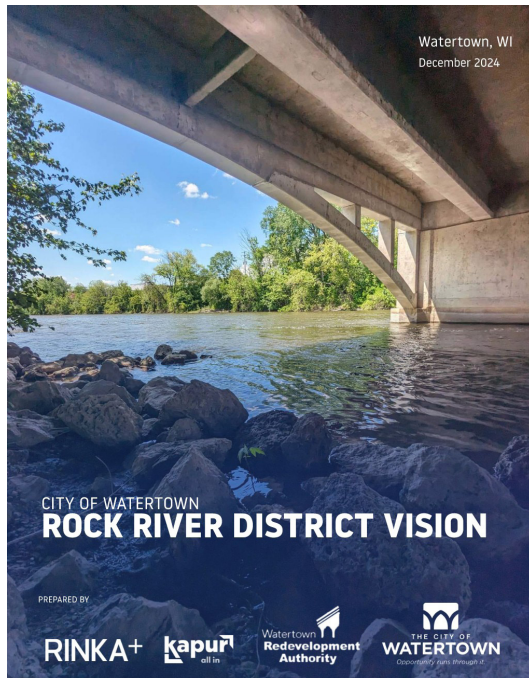
- » The proposed improvements in this area include a wet-detention basin at the existing skate park along the east side of Carriage Hill Drive with a volume of 2.3 acre-feet.

AREA OF CONCERN #9 - MRR6.2.

Hart Street Area, Hart Street between 9th and 12th Street

- » One recommendation to reduce flooding depths includes constructing an underground detention basin with a volume of 87,000 sf (7.98 acre-feet) in the outfield area of the existing baseball diamond at Washington Park.

2024 ROCK RIVER DISTRICT VISION REPORT



SUMMARY

This report outlines a vision and accompanying principles to guide redevelopment and shape the future of the Downtown River Corridor. The plan states desired outcomes and includes an overview of public participation and existing conditions analysis that offer direction for the vision in this corridor. The purpose of the plan is to promote cohesive and thoughtful development that expands public access and activated public spaces along the riverfront in downtown Watertown.

RELEVANT POINTS

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- » Establish publicly accessible spaces on both sides of the river for use as gathering spaces, recreational opportunities (walking, running, biking), and for fostering social interaction
- » The Riverwalk seeks to connect key public nodes including South First Street Park, Watertown Dam pocket park, Bentzin Family Town Square, and Fannie P Lewis Park
- » The Riverwalk is intended to be a key link in a cohesive network of parks and public spaces in downtown, which include planned and recently developed areas and trails

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- » Top-ranked planning principles that emerged included:
 - Amenity Rich Public Realm
 - Walkability
 - Watertown Character & Uniqueness
 - Encourage Redevelopment

FRAMEWORK

- » Parks & Open Space: the plan proposes integrating existing green spaces along the riverfront through improved pedestrian connections and green infrastructure – the vision is to offer an expanded recreational network that offers active and passive recreational opportunities; integrating these green spaces also promotes ecological preservation, another goal of the existing parks and open space plan.
- » Existing River Access Points – accesses used for recreational activities including kayaking, fishing, and hiking: Fannie P. Lewis Park, Riverside Park, Rivoli Island Park, Willow Street Access
- » Rock River is part of Rock River National Water Trail – Watertown should establish wayfinding and a clear portage route around the dam in the Rock River through improved access points
- » Placemaking Strategy
 - Goal of a continuous Riverwalk is to integrate existing parks and other fragmented community spaces
 - Streetscape design should include complete streets

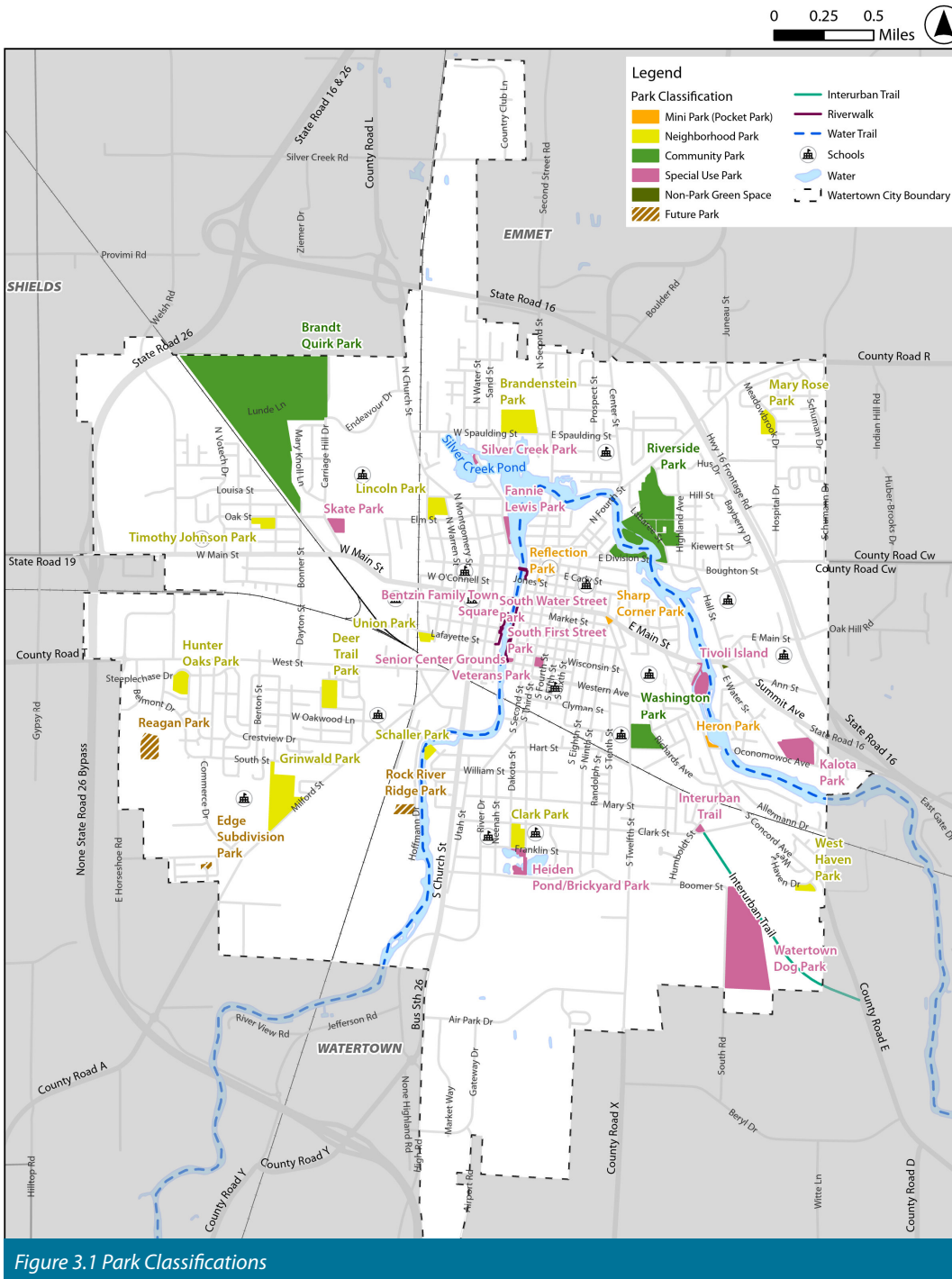
EXISTING PARKS AND OPEN SPACES TODAY

EXISTING PARKS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

The following is a summary of the existing park and recreational facilities in Watertown. As of 2025, the City has 320.24 acres of existing parkland (29 parks) and 10.72 acres of city-owned green space (3 properties). There are 13.68 acres of planned park areas (3 neighborhood parks and 2 public water access locations) for near-term development in the coming years.

Watertown's park system is organized according to park classifications. These classifications are based both on NRPA definitions, as well as local standards that have been established over the last 20+ years of park planning within the City. Local Standard Service Areas for each classification are noted – this is the assumed approximate distance that residents will travel to visit a park.

A large white number 3 is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. The background of the right half of the page is a teal-colored image of a forest path with trees. At the bottom of this teal section, there are three white, stylized arch shapes that resemble a decorative border or a series of connected arches.



PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

MINI PARKS

Mini parks, also called pocket parks, are small green spaces typically less than one acre in size. They are often passive recreation spaces providing niche recreation opportunities and may be home to public art, monuments, or picnic areas. Mini parks have been re-classified as special use parks for calculating park service areas and standards in Chapter 4.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood parks are designed to serve nearby residents. They provide recreational facilities to anyone within walking distance, or about a 1/4 to 1/2 mile radius, and are often 5-10 acres. A typical neighborhood park will have active recreation facilities, such as a playground, baseball field, or soccer field and informal gathering and open space areas.

COMMUNITY PARKS

Community parks are larger than neighborhood parks and are designed to provide recreational facilities for residents across a larger area, typically within a 1/2 mile to 3 mile radius. These parks may provide active recreation, such as tennis courts or ballfields, passive recreation, such as trails and picnic areas, and other types of educational, cultural, or programmed areas.

SPECIAL USE PARKS

Special use parks are those that are designed for a specific use or single-purpose activity. They may be intended for recreation or natural resource protection. Examples of special use parks include skate parks, disc golf courses, dog parks, river access points, woodland areas, and city plazas/public event areas. Special use parks vary in size due to the needs of the recreational amenity they provide.

COMMUNITY PARKS



Community parks are larger parks that are designed to provide recreational facilities for residents across a farther geography. These parks may provide active recreation (such as tennis courts of ballfields), passive recreation (such as trails and picnic areas), access to water features or natural areas, and/or provide other types of educational, cultural or programmed activities.

BASIC FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- » Active recreational facilities (swimming, boating, ballfields, playgrounds, tennis, pickleball courts, basketball courts, etc.)
- » Passive recreational facilities (walking trails, picnic or gathering areas, biking trails, etc.)
- » Restrooms
- » Shelters
- » Storage or maintenance buildings
- » Performance areas for plays and concerts
- » Community Center building with indoor activity areas
- » Lighting for nighttime security
- » Parking areas

PREFERRED SITE CHARACTERISTICS

- » Natural areas with access to water bodies or wooded areas
- » Accessible to nearby residents for walking, biking, and rolling
- » ADA accessible
- » Sized to accommodate the desired activities; typically 30 – 50 acres
- » Local Standard Service Area: 1.5 miles

INFORMATION					AMENITIES				WATER ACCESS				PASSIVE RECREATION								ACTIVE RECREATION								WINTER						
	CLASSIFICATION	ADDRESS	ACRES	YEAR EST.	PARKING LOT	RESTROOMS (PERMANENT)	RESTROOMS (PORTABLE)	DRINKING FOUNTAIN	BENCHES / SEATING AREA	RIVERFRONT	WATER FEATURE	TERRACE / OVERLOOK	FISHING PIER	KAYAK LAUNCH	WALKING PATH	PICNIC AREA	INTERPRETATION	PLAYGROUND	AMPHITHEATER	FITNESS EQUIPMENT	SHELTERS	PICKLEBALL COURTS	BASKETBALL COURT (FULL-COURT)	BALL DIAMONDS	BATTING CAGES	CONCESSIONS	DUGOUTS	SOCCER FIELDS	MULTI-USE TURF FIELD	TENNIS COURTS	VOLLEYBALL COURTS	DISC GOLF	HORSESHOE PITS	WARMING HOUSE	ICE SKATING RINK / SKATING
Brandt-Quirk Park	Community	800 Carriage Hill Dr	169.03	1980		x									x			1						6				9		10		x			
Riverside Park	Community	916 Labaree St	37.00	1910	x	x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x		1	x		x	4	2	3	x	x				4	7		x		
Washington Park	Community	641 S 12th St	9.16	1927		x											x	1			x			1	x	x	x								

Figure 3.1. Inventory of Community Parks

COMMUNITY PARKS IN WATERTOWN



BRANDT-QUIRK PARK

This 169-acre park is located in the northwest portion of the City next to the high school. The park was established in 1980 after the city quarry on this site was decommissioned. Hiking trails, cross-country ski trails, and pet exercise trails are provided, along with soccer fields, tennis courts, lighted baseball diamonds, a concession stand, playground equipment, a batting cage, picnic shelters and restrooms. The Rock River Disc Golf Course is located here, with shared access from the high school property.



RIVERSIDE PARK

Riverside Park is the primary community gathering location for the City of Watertown. At 37 acres, this is the first public park in the city, established in 1910. The park is located along the Rock River with towering shade trees and scenic views from multiple bridges. Community celebrations such as the Fourth of July and Riverfest are held here. There are multiple park shelters, newly constructed restroom facilities, softball diamonds, volleyball courts, fishing pier and kayak dock, tennis courts (with pickleball stripes overlaid), basketball courts, and a bandshell. Riverside Park is also the location for the Watertown Aquatic Center. Chamberland playground, a beloved play area, will be renovated in coming years, and a new inclusive play area will be constructed in the future. Labaree Street, which runs through the park, is also planned for reconstruction in the coming years with additional pedestrian amenities; this area is also used today as the Main Street Program's farmers market location.



WASHINGTON PARK

Washington Park, located in the southeast area of the City, is a 9-acre community park that was established in 1927. This park has a lighted baseball facility, batting cages, restrooms, a concessions stand, and playground equipment. Interpretive elements within the park highlight the City's legacy of baseball players.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS



Neighborhood parks are designed to serve nearby residents. They provide recreational facilities to anyone within walking distance, or about a 1/4 to 1/2 mile radius, and are often 5-10 acres. A typical neighborhood park will have active recreation facilities, such as a playground, baseball field, or soccer field and informal gathering and open space areas.

BASIC FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- » Active recreation (multi-purpose play fields, tennis or pickleball courts, basketball courts, ice skating rinks)
- » Passive recreation (playgrounds, shelters, seating and access to water or natural views)
- » Restrooms
- » Shelters
- » Storage or maintenance buildings
- » Lighting for night security
- » Off-street parking availability
- » Shade trees, community gardens, or other landscaped areas

	INFORMATION				AMENITIES				WATER ACCESS				PASSIVE RECREATION						ACTIVE RECREATION												WINTER					
	CLASSIFICATION	ADDRESS	ACRES	YEAR EST.	PARKING LOT	RESTROOMS (PERMANENT)	RESTROOMS (PORTABLE)	DRINKING FOUNTAIN	BENCHES / SEATING AREA	RIVERFRONT	WATER FEATURE	TERRACE / OVERLOOK	FISHING PIER	KAYAK LAUNCH	WALKING PATH	PICNIC AREA	INTERPRETATION	PLAYGROUND	AMPHITHEATER	FITNESS EQUIPMENT	SHELTERS	PICKLEBALL COURTS	BASKETBALL COURT (FULL-COURT)	BALL DIAMONDS	BATTING CAGES	CONCESSIONS	DUGOUTS	SOCCER FIELDS	MULTI-USE TURF FIELD	TENNIS COURTS	VOLLEYBALL COURTS	DISC GOLF	HORSESHOE PITS	WARMING HOUSE	ICE SKATING RINK / SKATING	
Brandenstein Park	Neighborhood	30 W Spaulding St	12.00	1980		x		x	x									1		x				x					1	1		1	x			
Clark Park	Neighborhood	223 Clark St	5.00	1941 / 2018		x												1			2		x	x					1	1	2	1				x
Deer Trail Park	Neighborhood	603 Deer Tr	6.46	1999			x									x		1						x					1	1		1				
Edge Field Subdivision Park	Neighborhood	Ryan Ridge	0.98																																	
Grinwald Park	Neighborhood	760 Milford St	18.89	1978 / 1992			x								x			1											2							
Hunter Oaks Park	Neighborhood	600 Arlington Way	4.41	1999			x								x	x		1						x					1			1	x			
Lincoln Park	Neighborhood	510 West Green St	5.00	1941		x												1			x		x	x					1			1				
Mary Rose Park	Neighborhood	1324 Meadowbrook Dr	4.40	1999			x									x		1			x		x	x					1			1	x			
Reagan Park	Neighborhood	Hunter Oaks Blvd	7.44																																	
Rock River Ridge Park	Neighborhood	Hoffman Dr	3.06																																	
Schaller Park	Neighborhood	1200 Riverview Ln	1.56				x	x	x	x						x		1																		
Timothy Johnson Park	Neighborhood	1115 Oak St	3.00	1967		x												1			x		x	x												
Union Park	Neighborhood	709 Lafayette St	2.00	1926		x		x										1			x		x	x												
West Haven Park	Neighborhood	236 West Haven Dr	1.50	2019														1												1						

Table 3.2 Inventory of Neighborhood Parks

PREFERRED SITE CHARACTERISTICS

- » Located within an easily accessible walking distance from residential development
- » Entrances are visible from the surrounding neighborhood
- » Connected to the city's sidewalk and bike network
- » May be developed as a shared school facility
- » Sized to accommodate the desired activities; typically 5 – 10 acres
- » Local Standard Service Area: ¼ to ½ mile uninterrupted by major roadway or other barriers

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS IN WATERTOWN



BRANDENSTEIN PARK

This 12-acre park is located in the northern portion of the city and was established in 1980. This park has playground equipment, a fitness pad, a baseball field, disc golf basket, restrooms with a small shelter and open space for future improvements. The park is named after Daniel Charles Brandenstein, a former NASA astronaut from Watertown.



CLARK PARK

This 5-acre park is located in the southern portion of the city and was established in 1941. The park has playground equipment, a multi-use baseball and soccer field, pickle and tennis courts, a picnic shelter and restrooms. The park also has a walking trail and nature area. In 2018, the City expanded the park to the north with a 0.3-acre acquisition.



DEER TRAIL PARK

This 6-acre park is located in the southwest portion of the city and was established in 1999. The park has playground equipment, volley standards, a baseball field, a soccer field and a picnic area.



GRINWALD PARK

This 18-acre park is located in the southwest portion of the city and was formerly known as Milford Street Park. The park was established in 1978 when the City purchased 9 acres of land along Milford Street. The park was renamed after receiving a donation for an additional 11 acres of land from Donald Grinwald in 1992. The park has playground equipment, two soccer fields, and a wooded walking trail.



HUNTER OAKS PARK

This 4-acre park is located in the northeast portion of the city and was established in 1999. The park has playground equipment, volleyball standards, a baseball field, a soccer field and a picnic/grill area.



LINCOLN PARK

This 5-acre park is located in the near northwest portion of the city and was established in 1941. The park has play equipment, a baseball field, and a shelter with restrooms. In 2023, raised community garden beds have been installed at this park.



MARY ROSE PARK

This 4-acre park is located in the northeast portion of the city and was established in 1999. The park has playground equipment, volley standards, a baseball playfield, a soccer field, a shade structure, and a picnic area.



SCHALLER PARK

This 1.5-acre park provides a quiet setting along the Rock River in the south-central portion of the city. The park has a picnic area, open playfield, and play equipment. Access is from Stimpson Street, which is somewhat isolated from view from the surrounding area.



TIMOTHY JOHNSON PARK

This 3-acre neighborhood park is located in the northwest portion of the city and was established in 1967. The park has playground equipment, a baseball field and a shelter with restrooms.



UNION PARK

This 2-acre park was established in 1926 and is in the west-central portion of the city. The park has play equipment, a baseball field and a shelter with restrooms.



WEST HAVEN PARK

This 1.5-acre park was established in 2019 and is located in the West Haven development on the east side of Watertown. The park has play equipment and an open play field.

PLANNED NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS IN WATERTOWN

EDGE FIELD SUBDIVISION PARK

This planned 1-acre park will be located in the southwest portion of the city as part of the addition to the Hepp Heights development. Access will be from Casey Drive to the south.

REAGAN PARK

This 7-acre park will be located in the Hunter Oaks neighborhood on the west side of Watertown as part of the Enclave at Hunter Oaks Subdivision. Access will be from Hunter Oaks Blvd, which will be extended with the future development. The fully wooded lot is today used by the neighborhood for informal hiking and a backdrop for family photos.

ROCK RIVER RIDGE PARK

This 3-acre park is a planned neighborhood park that will serve the developing Rock River Ridge neighborhood. Access will be from Hoffman Drive to the east. The park will overlook the Rock River and currently has a number of mature trees that will remain.

SPECIAL USE PARKS



Special use parks are those that are designed for a specific use or single-purpose activity. They may be intended for recreation or natural resource protection. Examples of special use parks include skate parks, disc golf courses, dog parks, river access points, woodland areas and city plazas or public event areas. Special use parks vary in size to meet the needs of the amenity that they provide.

BASIC FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- » Active recreational facilities (swimming, boating, playfields, playgrounds, tennis or pickleball courts, basketball courts, etc.)
- » Passive recreational facilities (walking trails, picnic or gathering areas, biking trails, etc.)
- » Restrooms
- » Shelters
- » Storage or maintenance buildings
- » Signage, trail markers, trash receptacles, information booths or interpretive panels
- » Performance areas for plays and concerts
- » Lighting for nighttime security
- » Parking areas (off- and on-street)

PREFERRED SITE CHARACTERISTICS

- » Accessible to nearby residents for walking, biking, and rolling
- » ADA accessible
- » Sized to accommodate the desired activities; varies
- » Local Standard Service Area: not applicable

Special use parks in Watertown are characterized by their primary features:

- » Riverfront
- » Waterfront (lake)
- » Plazas
- » Trailhead
- » Memorial
- » Dog Park
- » Skate Park

	INFORMATION				AMENITIES					WATER ACCESS			PASSIVE RECREATION					ACTIVE RECREATION										WINTER							
	CLASSIFICATION	ADDRESS	ACRES	YEAR EST.	PARKING LOT	RESTROOMS (PERMANENT)	RESTROOMS (PORTABLE)	DRINKING FOUNTAIN	BENCHES / SEATING AREA	RIVERFRONT	WATER FEATURE	TERRACE / OVERLOOK	FISHING PIER	KAYAK LAUNCH	WALKING PATH	PICNIC AREA	INTERPRETATION	PLAYGROUND	AMPHITHEATER	FITNESS EQUIPMENT	SHELTERS	PICKLEBALL COURTS	BASKETBALL COURT (FULL-COURT)	BALL DIAMONDS	BATTING CAGES	CONCESSIONS	DUGOUTS	SOCCER FIELDS	MULT-USE TURF FIELD	TENNIS COURTS	VOLLEYBALL COURTS	DISC GOLF	HORSESHOE PITS	WARMING HOUSE	ICE SKATING RINK / SKATING
Bentzin Family Town Square	Special Use - Plaza	1 W Main St	0.64	2023					x	x	x	x		x	x																				
Fanny P Lewis Park	Special Use - Riverfront	415 N Water Street	1.00	1983	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	x						x														
Front Street Fishing Area	Special Use - Riverfront	314 Front St	1.90																																
Heiden Pond/ Brickyard	Special Use - Waterfront	219 Franklin St	2.00						x				x	x											x										
Heron View Park	Special Use - Riverfront	249 S Concord Ave	0.61	2018						x			x	x																					
Interurban Bike Trailhead	Special Use - Trailhead	423 Humboldt St	0.15	2020	x	x		x													x														
Reflection Park	Special Use - Plaza	301 N 2nd Street	0.06	2024					x												x														
River Walk	Special Use - Riverfront	410 First St	1.50	1986					x	x				x	x																				
Senior Center Grounds	Special Use - Riverfront	514 S First St	2.43	1972		x				x		x									x														
Sharp Corner Park	Special Use - Plaza	914 East Main Street	0.40	2020					x												x														
Silver Creek Park	Special Use - Riverfront	730 N Water St	0.20	1960						x				x	x																			x	x
South Water Street Park	Special Use - Riverfront	301 S Water St	0.98	2000				x	x	x		x			x				x		x														
Tivoli Island	Special Use - Riverfront	101 Tivoli Drive	8.50	2016						x						x																			
Veterans Park	Special Use - Memorial	610 S 4th Street	1.00	1940s					x								x																		
Watertown Dog Park	Special Use - Dog Park	1534 Boomer Street	13.39	2000	x		x			x		x			x	x																			
Watertown Skate Park	Special Use - Skate Park	Carriage Hill Drive	3.00		x																														
Willow Street Boat Launch	Special Use - Riverfront	Willow Street	0.30																																

Table 3.3. Inventory of Special Use Parks

SPECIAL USE PARKS IN WATERTOWN



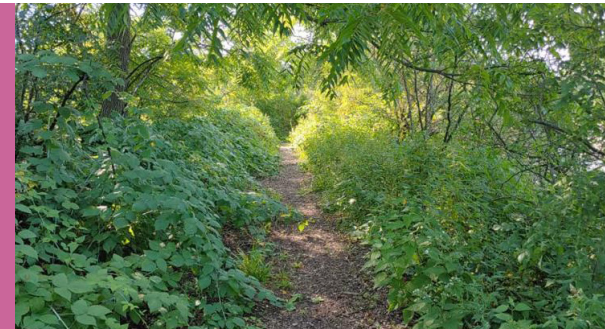
FANNY P. LEWIS PARK

This 1-acre park is located north of downtown and was established in 1983. The park offers a quiet setting along the Rock River with a boat landing, handicap accessible fishing pier, flower gardens and a small shelter. The Glacial River Trail passes through this park as well.



BENTZIN FAMILY TOWN SQUARE

Bentzin Family Town Square was constructed in 2023 and is located along the west side of the Rock River just south of Main Street. The plaza is 0.64 acres and is integrated with Water Street with a shared street design to allow for more space for events. The park features an amphitheater, decorative paving, an interactive water feature, a river overlook area and an ADA accessible kayak launch. This is the location for the city's summer music series and other gathering events in downtown Watertown.



HEIDEN POND / BRICKYARD

Heiden Pond is connected to Lake Victoria and is located just north of the airport and south of Clark Park. The city-owned area surrounding Heiden Pond is approximately 2 acres that is almost entirely in the floodplain. This is a great spot for fishing; Rock River Rescue, a local not-for-profit organization, regularly stocks the pond for fishing.



HERON VIEW PARK

This 0.6-acre park is located on the west bank of the Rock River adjacent to Oconomowoc Avenue. The intention of this park is to enhance the ecological function of the shoreline and provide a community access point to the river with a fishing pier and seating area.



INTERURBAN BIKE TRAILHEAD

The Interurban Trail is a planned 11-mile recreational multi-use paved trail that will link Watertown to Oconomowoc. A 7-mile segment of the trail was built in 2022. A trailhead with parking, bike parking, bike rental, a shelter with restrooms, and a green infrastructure element were built at the intersection of Clark St and Humboldt St. The trailhead serves as a gathering spot for group or individual rides on the Interurban Trail.



REFLECTION PARK

In 2018, the City acquired a 0.06-acre parcel across from City Hall to develop as a green space within the Central Business District. Today, the park serves as a plaza area with seating, a small shade structure, and green infrastructure improvements for stormwater management.



SILVER CREEK PARK

This small 0.2-acre park was established in 1972 and is located along the east side of the Rock River adjacent to the Water St bridge north of downtown. In addition to providing access to the Rock River, the park is the site of the City's largest and most heavily-used skating facility with skate rentals.



RIVER WALK

The River Walk, also known as the River Walkway, was developed in 1986 as part of the Downtown Revitalization effort. The walkway is located along the Rock River between Main St and Milwaukee St (6 blocks). In total, the park area encompasses 1.5 acres today. The River Walk is primarily a paved multi-use trail with a 500-ft boardwalk, kayak dock and a plaza area with park tables and benches. In 2025, the City adopted the Rock River District Plan, which has a significant number of proposed improvements for the River Walk.



SENIOR CENTER GROUNDS

This 2.4-acre park was established in 1972 and is located at Milwaukee St. and South First St. along the east side of the Rock River. This parkland is adjacent to the City's Senior and Community Center and is the southern access point for the River Walk.



TIVOLI ISLAND

This 8.5-acre park includes an island that is located in the Rock River. Connected to Tivoli Drive via a trestle bridge, the park offers a unique opportunity for picnicking and wildlife observation. In 2016, an additional 2 acres were added to the park along Tivoli Drive to provide a seating area and better access to the island.



SHARP CORNER PARK

Developed in 2020, Sharp Corner Park is a 0.4-acre plaza located at the intersection of Main St and Market St. The park land was created when the intersection was re-aligned to open up better visibility for drivers at this intersection, which was formerly nicknamed 'Sharp Corner'. The plaza was designed by a 2020 graduate of the Landscape Architecture program at UW-Madison who happened to be from Watertown. Today, the park is identified with sculptural letters along the sidewalk announcing the park's name, along with a seating area and shelter.



SOUTH WATER STREET PARK

South Water Street Park is a 1-acre park located on the east side of Water St along the Rock River. The park serves as a gathering space with seating, a small shelter and amphitheater area, as well as a sculptural piece of art. Views from the river can be seen from the walkway that runs throughout this park.



VETERANS PARK

This 1-acre park is located in downtown Watertown. It is the site of multiple monuments honoring veterans of various wars. The park was built after World War II.



WATERTOWN DOG PARK

The Watertown Dog Park is a 12.5-acre park located in the southeast portion of the city on the City's former landfill site. Designated as a park in 2000, the park has an informal off-street parking lot, picnic tables, an off-leash area for dogs, and a natural-surface trail.



WATERTOWN SKATE PARK

The Watertown Skate Park is located east of Carriage Hill Drive near the Watertown High School. The 3-acre park has a collection of metal ramps and obstacles for skateboarders and BMX bike riders. The park is lighted and has a small parking lot, footbridge, and service road. A small area is designated for graffiti artwork by the community.

PLANNED SPECIAL USE PARKS IN WATERTOWN

FRONT STREET FISHING AREA

The Front Street Fishing Area is a planned fishing access location on the west bank of the Rock River at Watertown Dam 2.

WILLOW STREET BOAT LAUNCH

The Willow Street Boat Launch is a planned boat access amenity within the Willow Street right-of-way along the Rock River just north of Oconomowoc Ave.

CITY-OWNED GREEN SPACES



The City of Watertown owns a handful of open green spaces that the City maintains. Some of these parcels were donated to the city; most are not currently developed as parkland, but could be improved upon in the future for nature-based neighborhood or special-use parks if a need is identified.



EAST WATER STREET

The City acquired this 0.2-acre property in 1933, and the City maintains the property with regular mowing. At this time, there are no plans to develop this green space with additional recreational facilities.



PERRY AND COMMERCIAL GREEN SPACE

This 0.55-acre parcel at the intersection of Perry Way and Commercial Dr is maintained by the City with regular mowing. At this time, there are no plans to develop this green space with additional recreational amenities, although there are plans for a future neighborhood park within very close proximity (Edge Field Subdivision Park) to this property.

KOLATA PARK

This 10.5-acre parcel is on the far east side of the city near the Rock River. The property was donated to the City in 1989 by former Mayor Carl Kolata. The parcel is currently undeveloped with no amenities, is home to many cranes, and is being preserved and managed as a wetland area.

SCHOOL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES



A number of private and public schools in Watertown partner with the City to provide recreation amenities which are open to the public.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS									
NAME	ADDRESS	PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT	BASKETBALL COURT	BASEBALL FIELDS	SOCCER FIELDS	OPEN PLAYFIELD	RUNNING TRACK	SWIMMING POOL	XC SKIING
Douglas Elementary School	101 Prospect St	x	x						
Lincoln Elementary School	210 N Montgomery St	x	x						
Schurz Elementary School	1508 Neenah St	x	x						
Webster Elementary School	634 S 12th St	x	x						
Riverside Middle School	131 Hall St			x		x	x	x	
Watertown High School	825 Endeavour Dr			x	x	x	x		x

PRIVATE SCHOOLS									
NAME	ADDRESS	PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT	BASKETBALL COURT	BASEBALL FIELDS	SOCCER FIELDS	OPEN PLAYFIELD	RUNNING TRACK	SWIMMING POOL	XC SKIING
St. Bernard's School	111 S Montgomery St		x			x			
St. Henry's School	300 E Cady ST	x	x			x			
St. John's School	317 N 6th St		x			x			
St. Mark's School	706 Jones St	x	x			x			
Trinity Lutheran School	801 5th St	x	x			x			
Luther Preparatory School*	1300 Western Ave		x	x	x	x			
Maranatha Bible College*	745 W Main St		x	x	x	x			
Good Shepherd Lutheran School	1611 E Main St	x	x			x			

*Limited public access

Table 3.4 Inventory of School Recreational Facilities

RECREATIONAL TRAILS



Recreational trails accommodate various outdoor activities such as biking, hiking, walking, jogging, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, roller-blading, and more. A well-designed recreational trail network connects users to parks, natural areas, and to community destinations. A trail network can consist of on-street (bike lanes, sharrows, bikeways) facilities and off-street facilities (multi-use trails or shared-use paths, greenways, and natural surface trails). A thorough, in-depth evaluation of Watertown's recreational trail and multi-modal transportation network will be conducted as part of the 2025 – 2026 City-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan development. With TAP grant funding through WisDOT, the City of Watertown will be developing and adopting a full plan that will address safety, connectivity and outline guidance for investments in the city's bicycle and pedestrian network. Recommendations for the recreational trail network will defer to this plan.



Interurban Trail

RECREATIONAL TRAILS IN WATERTOWN

Today there are a variety of city, county, and regional trails that make up Watertown's recreational trail network.

BRANDT-QUIRK TRAILS

Brandt-Quirk Park has a 4-mile trail system for hiking, cross-country running, cross-country skiing, and dog walking. These trails are maintained in collaboration with the Watertown Unified School District, and cross-country ski trails are groomed when adequate snow has accumulated. The Pet Exercise Trail within the park is a scenic trail through the woods. In parallel to the rail line along the east side of Brandt-Quirk Park is Story Book Trail, which displays segments of a children's story through signage along the way.

CITY BIKE ROUTES (ON-STREET)

Today there are 4.76 miles of on-street bike routes in Watertown. Located along Church St, Milford St, Carriage Ln, Boughton St and Fourth St. These routes are generally striped as bike lanes that are between 3 – 5' in width on either side of the roadway.

CITY TRAILS (OFF-STREET, PAVED)

Most of the paved, off-street trails within Watertown are within the City's community parks. A walking loop at Riverside Park is popular for year-round walking near the River. The City designates a Winter Walking Loop to encourage residents to get outdoors in the wintertime. An off-street trail along Carriage Hill Drive connects Watertown High School to Brandt-Quirk Park.

GLACIAL RIVER TRAIL

The Glacial River Trail is a 52-mile trail spanning from Janesville to the Wild Goose Trail in Dodge County. There are 9.17 miles of the Glacial River Trail within Watertown. These miles of the Glacial River Trail are primarily an on-street facility that utilizes wide shoulders and small wayfinding signs to indicate the route. There is a 0.79-mile segment of paved off-street trail in southern Watertown.

INTERURBAN TRAIL

The Interurban Trail is an 11-mile planned trail to connect between Watertown and Oconomowoc. Today, seven miles of the trail are built, with 1.2 of those miles falling within Watertown's boundary. The Interurban Trailhead represents a significant investment in this trail network.

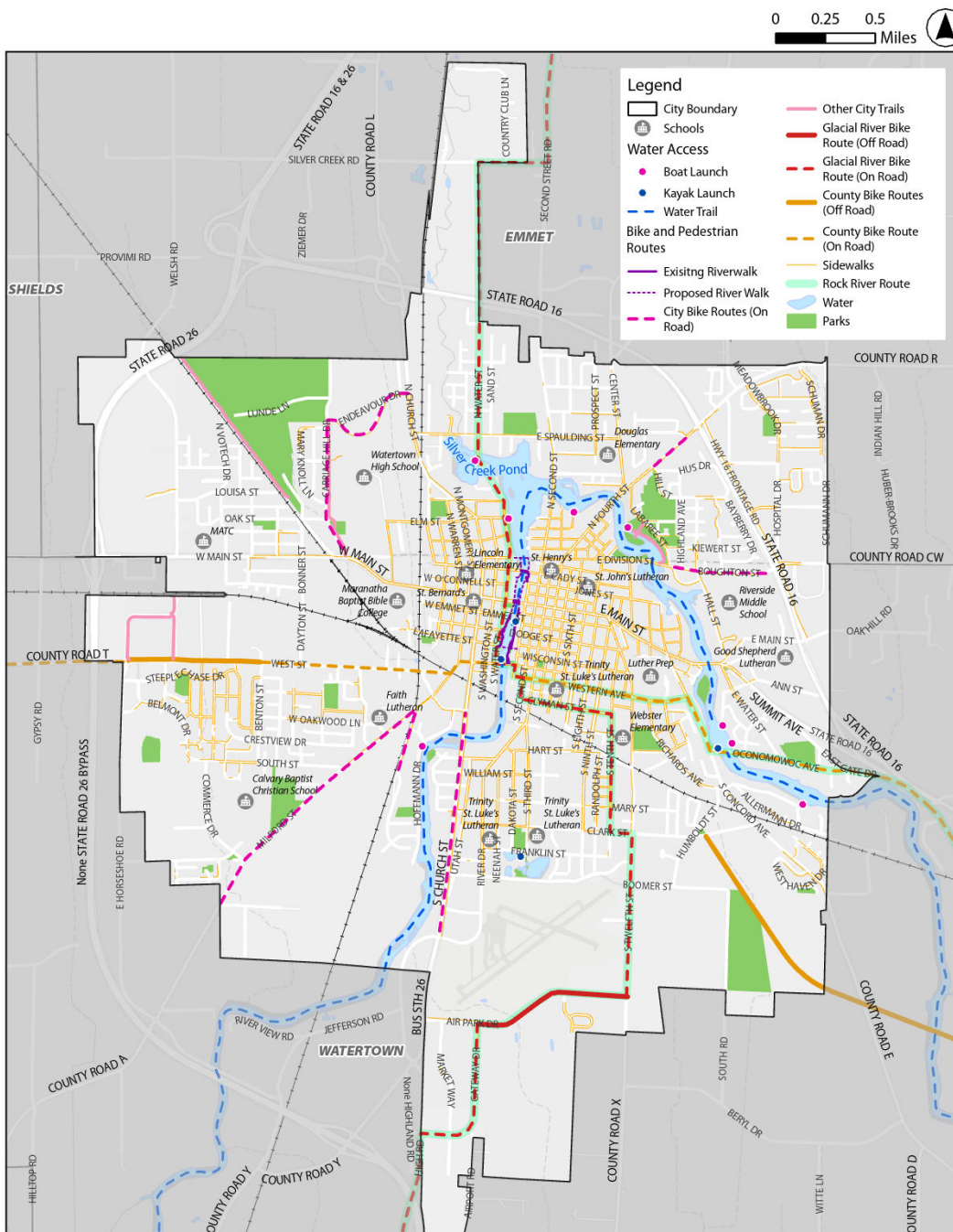


Figure 3.2 Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure Map

RIVER WALK

The River Walk is a trail network that runs along the Rock River in downtown Watertown between Cady St and Milwaukee St. The River Walk is an integral component to the recently completed Rock River District Plan; future improvements are planned throughout this corridor, including amenities for biking, walking, and additional river crossings.

ROCK RIVER WATER TRAIL

The Rock River Water Trail is a 320-mile water trail connecting following the Rock River from its headwaters in south central Wisconsin to where it meets the Mississippi River in the Quad Cities on the border of Illinois and Iowa. Within Watertown, there are nine water access points that provide opportunities for kayakers, canoers, and other water craft enthusiasts a means to enter and exist the water trail.



Rock River Water Trail

NEEDS ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

A number of methods were used to evaluate and assess the needs of Watertown's parks and open spaces for the next 5+ years. In-depth community engagement, staff input, analysis of current recreation trends, evaluation of local standards from previous park and open space plans, comparison to national park metrics, mapping analysis, and observation contributed to the needs identified at the end of this chapter. It is clear that the residents of Watertown value their parks, open spaces, and recreational programming. The existing facilities are well-used and loved. The needs analysis provides a snapshot of how well the City of Watertown's existing park and recreational facilities satisfy current needs in the community.

LOCAL STANDARDS

Since 2002, the City of Watertown has used a set of locally-derived standards to evaluate levels of service that are being met within the city's park system. The local standard uses acres per 1,000 residents as a baseline unit. The following table shows the local standard per 1,000 residents for the various park classifications in Watertown, along with the current quantity that exists today. At the 2022 ACS Estimates, the population of Watertown is 22,978 people. For the purposes of this analysis, the 2022 population is the baseline. Population projections based on least squares method to determine best fit trend lines for population values show a projected population growth to 23,572 people by 2030 and 24,725 people by 2040.

In previous park plans for Watertown, mini parks were a classification that applied to a handful of smaller parks within the system. Upon evaluation of the size and use of these spaces, it was determined that special use park is a more applicable classification for these parks.

Based on the analysis of existing Neighborhood, Community, and Special Use parkland in Watertown today, the City is meeting the standard set in the 2019 Parks and Open Space Plan of a minimum of 10.0 acres per 1,000 residents.

4

Using the 2025 park acreage to update the city standard to a minimum of 10.4 unconstrained acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, there will be additional need for 6.9 acres of parkland by 2030 and an additional 18.9 acres by 2040. As of today, there are 11.48 acres of planned neighborhood park development (Reagan Park, Edge Field Subdivision Park, and Rock River Ridge Park), along with 2.2 acres of Special Use parkland (Willow Street Boat Launch and Front Street Fishing Area). The planned parkland acreage has not been evaluated for constrained and unconstrained areas.

PARK TYPES	EXISTING TOTAL ACRES 2025	CONSTRAINED ACRES 2025	UNCONSTRAINED ACRES 2025	EXISTING UNCONSTRAINED PARK ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS***	CITY STANDARD UNCONSTRAINED ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS****
Neighborhood Parks*	64.2	18.0	46.2	2.0	1.9
Community Parks	215.2	38.0	177.0	7.7	7.5
Special Use Areas**	47.1	31.0	15.0	0.7	0.6
Totals	326.5	87.0	238.2	10.4	10.0

*Does not include planned neighborhood parks

**Includes City-Owned Green Spaces

***Based on 2022 Population of 22,978 people

****As established in the 2019 Parks and Open Space Plan

Table 4.1 Existing Park Acreage Per 1,000 Residents

PARK TYPES	CITY STANDARD UNCONSTRAINED ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS*	RECOMMENDED ACREAGE BASED ON ACRES PER 1,000 PEOPLE IN 2030**	RECOMMENDED ACREAGE BASED ON ACRES PER 1,000 PEOPLE IN 2040	MINIMUM ADDITIONAL ACRES NEEDED BY 2030	MINIMUM ADDITIONAL ACRES NEEDED BY 2040
Neighborhood Parks	2.0	47.1	49.5	0.9	3.3
Community Parks	7.7	181.5	190.4	4.5	13.4
Special Use Areas	0.7	16.5	17.3	1.5	2.3
Totals	10.4	245.1	257.1	6.9	18.9

*As established in the 2025 Parks and Open Space Plan

**Based on a projected population of 23,572 by 2030

***Based on a projected population of 24,725 by 2040

Table 4.2 Future Park Acreage Needs

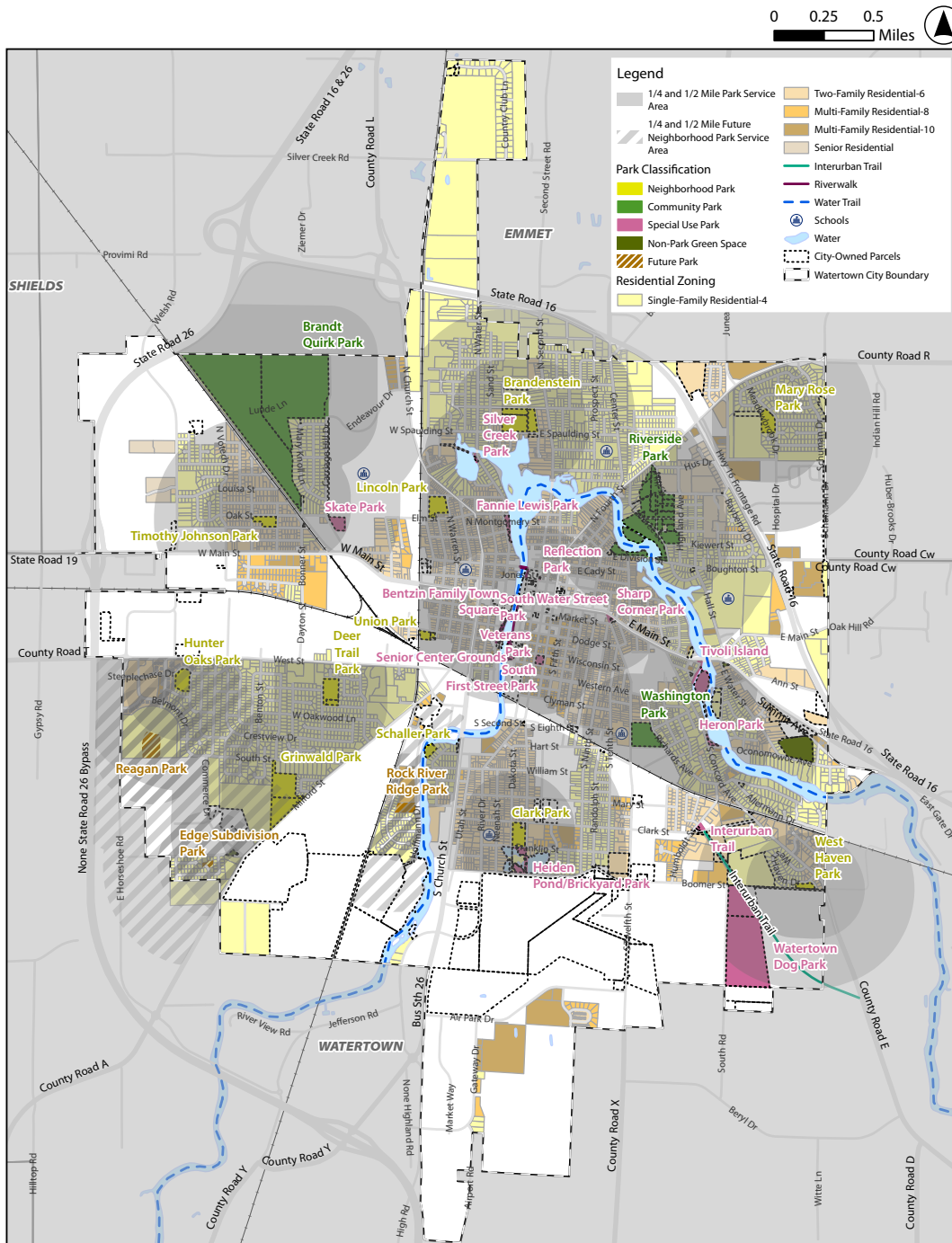


Figure 4.1 Neighborhood Park Service Areas

LEVEL OF SERVICE

The location and distribution of parks and recreational facilities across the City and in relation to residential areas provide an indicator of how well the park system is meeting the needs of residents. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) sets guidelines for the level of service expected for each park classification. The level of service is the minimum expected distance that people will travel to reach a park.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood parks, which provide park services to nearby residents, have a level of service of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a mile. For most able-bodied adults, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile is approximately a 5-minute walk and a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile is approximately a 10-minute walk. Providing access to parkland and neighborhood parks within reasonable walking distances of residents contributes to quality of life and is linked to health benefits.

Figure 4.1 shows the location of existing and planned Neighborhood parks in Watertown, along with a $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile service area radii. The service area radius has been modified to exclude areas that are beyond barriers to walking access, such as busy roadways, railroad tracks, or the Rock River. Because many neighborhood park amenities are also found within the many Special Use and Community Parks within Watertown, the service area analysis map also includes these parks. Areas with single-family, two-family, and multi-family housing are shown on the map as an underlay reference.

In conclusion, there are a handful of residential zoned areas within the city boundaries that are not currently served by neighborhood parks. The largest of these areas is in the northern expansion of the City surrounding Silver Creek and the Watertown Country Club. Areas in the south and southwest of the city that are not currently served with neighborhood park access have not yet been developed for residential use.

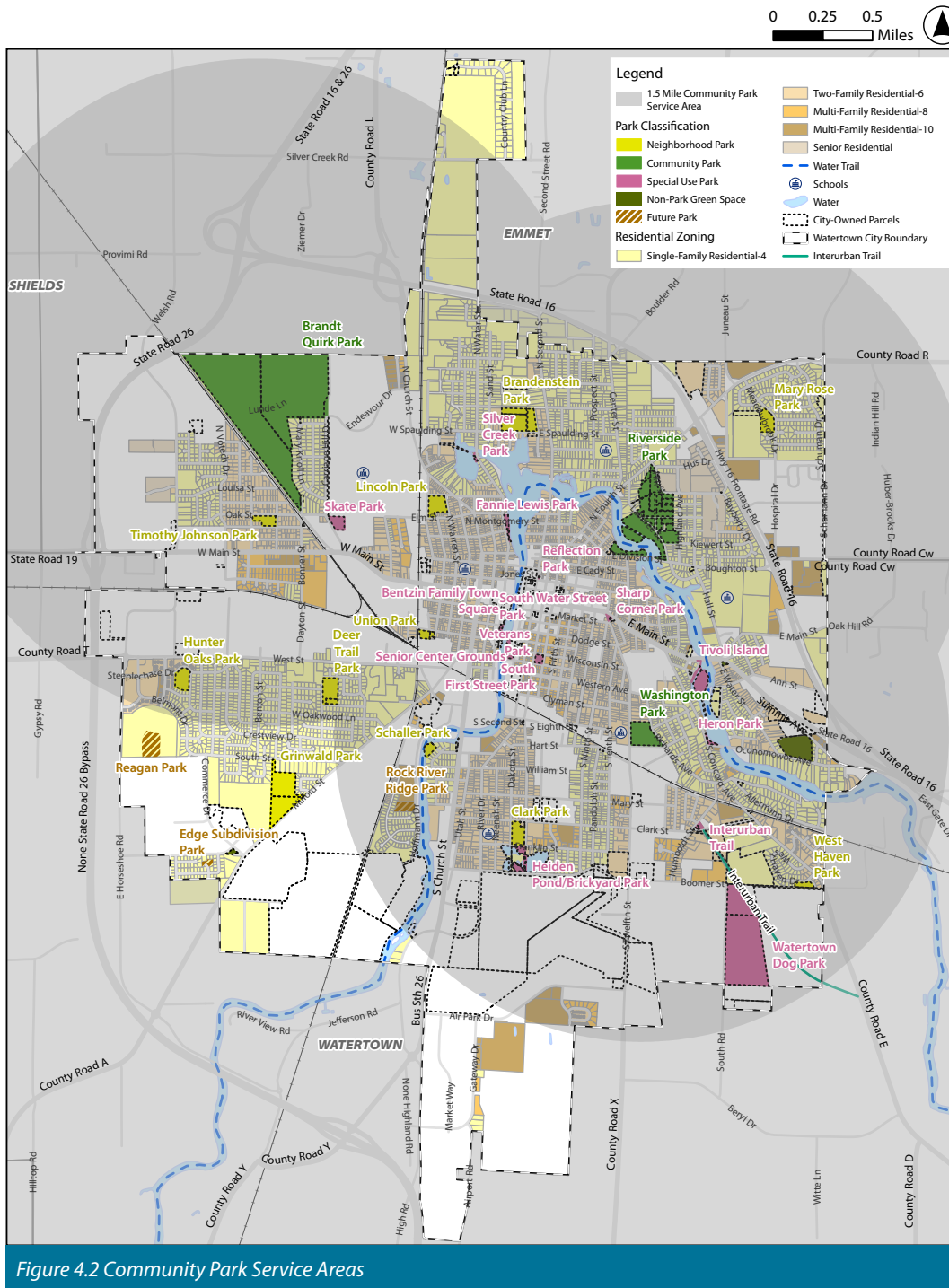


Figure 4.2 Community Park Service Areas

COMMUNITY PARKS

Community parks are expected to provide for a larger service area. In Watertown, precedent planning efforts have set this service area at 1.5 miles. Within Watertown, there is fairly broad coverage of areas serviced by Community Parks. The southwest and southern areas of the City are lacking in service, as set by the local standard. Future search areas for larger areas for a new community park could be evaluated for parkland development. As of current, there are many larger parcels of land that are city-owned in this area.

NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION METRICS

The NRPA collects data from communities and park agencies around the country on a volunteer basis. Not all park agencies classify their data the same or have the same needs. Climate, culture, and other variables affect the number of park facilities and the size of a park system. The following information offers one lens through which to compare Watertown's park system, and evaluate potential needs.

PARKS AND FACILITIES

Based on the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the typical park and recreation agency in the United States offers one park for every 2,386 residents, with 10.6 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. By comparison, Watertown offers one park per 792 residents, with 13.72 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The following table presents NRPA data on parkland and facilities provided by the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review for communities with a population between 20,000 – 49,999 people, with comparison to existing park and recreation facilities in

Watertown. Watertown generally meets or exceeds peer communities across the country in nearly every category of outdoor recreation facility, with the exception of inclusive play areas, golf courses and driving ranges.

STAFFING

The Park, Recreation, and Forestry Department in Watertown is staffed by 18 full-time employees and a single part-time employee, 7 of which are mostly in recreational programming and/or management roles, while 11 are generally park maintenance staff. As of 2025, the department was under in terms of both employees and hours. In order to provide the high level of service that the City desires, it is recommended that at a minimum, the existing ratio of full-time to part-time staff, in addition to the ratio of programming to maintenance staff remain the same over the next five years.

According to the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the median number of full-time employees in communities of similar size is 11.2. In comparison, Watertown has 7.8 full-time employees per 10,000 residents. If new or expanded programming, facilities, or land acquisition takes place, additional staff should be considered and is recommended to maintain a high level of service for the community.

	WATERTOWN	NRPA METRIC, BASED ON MEDIAN POPULATION PER FACILITY FOR COMMUNITIES WITH A POPULATION OF 20,000 - 49,999	MEDIAN (FOR NATIONAL COMMUNITIES SIZED 20,000 - 49,999)	WATERTOWN OVERAGE/ DEFICIT
Population (2022 ACS Estimate)	22,978			
Number of Parks	29.0	11.1		17.9
Total Park Acreage	315.3	257.4		57.9
Residents Per Park	792	2,062	2,062	1,270
Acres of Parkland Per 1,000 Residents	13.7	11.2	11.2	2.5
Playgrounds or Play Structures	13.0	7.4	3,105	5.60
Inclusive Playgrounds	0.0	1.2	19,729	-1.16
Diamond Fields (Ballfields)	18.0	7.6	3,007	10.36
Basketball Courts*	4.5	3.1	7,501	1.44
Rectangular Fields (Soccer Fields)	17.0	6.9	3,333	10.11
Dog Park**	2.0	0.8	27,508	1.16
Tennis / Pickleball Courts***	16.0	1.8	13,000	14.23
18-hole golf courses	0.0	0.7	32,812	-0.70
Driving Range	0.0	1.8	12,700	-1.81
Disc Golf Courses****	1.0	0.8	29,445	0.22
Ice Rink	2.0	1.2	19,770	0.84

*This count reflects 5 half-size basketball courts and 2 full size basketball courts.

**This count reflects the Watertown Dog Park and the Off-Leash Dog Walk Area at Brandt-Quirk Park.

****Today there are (16) tennis courts within the City of Watertown's park system. There are 12 striped pickleball courts at Riverside Park (doubling over existing tennis courts); however players need to bring their own net or pay \$30/year to access the locked nets on-site.

****This count does not include locations with a single basket or practice/driving range.

Table 4.3 Watertown NRPA Metrics

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Over the course of the project, a variety of methods were employed to gather information from residents and community members on how they use Watertown's parks today, and how they would like to see the park system grow into the future. Information collected through community input was used to develop the goals, objectives, and direct priorities for future projects and recommendations.

Early on in the planning process, a Communication and Engagement Plan was drafted in collaboration with City staff. This document guided engagement and helped to identify community stakeholders, as well as outline outreach and communication efforts. A project page was hosted on the City's website; printed flyers and social media posts were shared to let people know about events and ways to get involved.

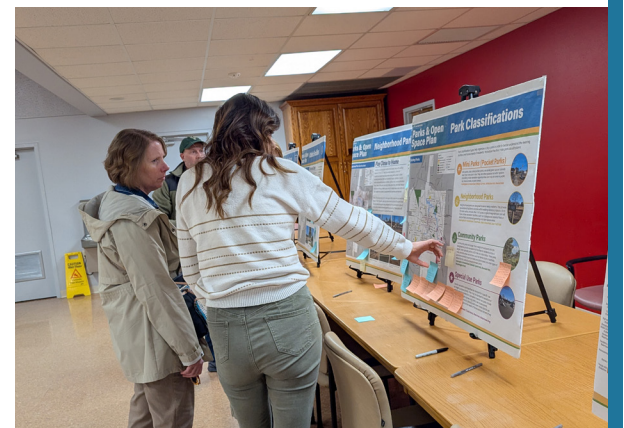
The following is a description of the engagement events, tools, and input collected.

OPEN HOUSE

A Community-wide Open House was held on Tuesday, April 16th, 2025 at the Senior and Community Center. The open house featured presentation boards and information about the project area topics (neighborhood parks, river access, athletics, recreational trails), trends in parks that are relevant to Watertown, and information about three new parks that will be developed in the coming years. Participants were invited to speak one-on-one with staff and the consulting team, as well as provide comments on comment cards or place comments directly on the boards. There were approximately 12 people who attended the open house. While the number of participants were on the low side, the conversations and ideas shared were incredibly valuable in shaping the plan.

Ideas shared at the open house:

- **Ideas for a new fishing pier facility at Heiden Pond**
- **Ideas for dog park development and enhancements**
- **Ideas about improving accessibility**
- **Ideas about incorporating nature-based play and recreation at Reagan Park**



STAKEHOLDER LISTENING SESSION

A stakeholder listening session was hosted on Tuesday, May 13th, 2025. Identified stakeholders representing organizations related to youth athletics, seniors, the YMCA, Maranatha Bible University, and Watertown School District were invited to learn about the plan and share their ideas.

Ideas and topics discussed at the stakeholder listening session:

- **Desire for more gathering events and programming in parks with food and drink vendors**
- **Desire for more winter activities**
- **Expand walking trails throughout parks**
- **Need for more dog parks**
- **Need for additional basketball courts, baseball fields**
- **Desire for more water features or splash pads**

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The City launched an online community survey to collect ideas and concerns from residents. The survey was open from March 1, 2025 until May 30, 2025. Over the three-month period, 196 people participated in the survey. Demographic information on survey participants was also collected.

SUMMARY OF PARK-RELATED QUESTIONS

- » Most residents are visiting Watertown Parks frequently, with over **53% visiting parks either daily or weekly**.
- » The most popular park activities are passive-recreation related. **Hiking, biking, walking or rolling are the most popular**, with visiting playgrounds, visiting a farmers market, listening to a music performance, or wildlife viewing are the next most popular activities.
- » **Most people are driving to parks (63%), while a significant number of people are walking (30%) or biking (5%)**.
- » Larger community parks, such as **Riverside Park and Brandt-Quirk Park are the community's favorites**, with Bentzin Family Town Square and Tivoli Island as also popular. Understandably, neighborhood parks tend to be more popular with the people who tend to live nearby (within walking distance).
- » **Overall, most residents are satisfied with the City's Park System**, with 92% of survey participants reporting that they are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied.

- » Suggested improvements to parks include:
 - Addition and maintenance of restrooms throughout the park system
 - Better hiking, biking, and walking connections to and within parks
 - Allow dogs (on-leash) in parks, provide more dog-friendly parks
 - More events such as outdoor concerts, art, vendor fairs
 - More consistent maintenance within the existing park system
 - Updated playground equipment
 - Updated and complete information on parks posted to the City's website

SUMMARY OF RECREATION / PROGRAM QUESTIONS

- » Most people who visit the City's larger recreational facilities (Aquatic Center, Indoor Pool, Senior and Community Center) do so a few times per year.
- » **Youth sports are the most popular programs**, followed by Community Center activities, aquatics classes, and free swim.
- » The **majority of residents hear about recreation programming and events through social media (63%)**, followed by the City's website (36%) and the City newsletter (30%).
- » **84% of residents are generally satisfied with the City's program offerings, and most (91%) feel that program fees are reasonable**.

» Suggested ideas for new programs include:

- **More programming for younger children** and families, such as yoga, zumbini, gymnastics
- **More programming for adults** – evening classes that have shorter durations
- Family enrichment programs
- Yoga for all ages
- More swim lesson offerings

» 85% of residents are satisfied with the City's ability to maintain and improve the park and recreation system.

» 87% of residents are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness and appearance of parks and recreation facilities.

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

- » Most survey participants are between the ages of 18 and 44.
- » Race and ethnicity of participants skewed slightly more white than other races or ethnicities, when compared to the overall make-up of the City's population.
- » 61% are part of a family with children who use the City's park system.
- » 14% are business owners.
- » 43% work in Watertown.
- » 83% live in Watertown.
- » 83% are homeowners.
- » 7% are renters.
- » 11% have a disabilities that affects their use of Watertown Parks and Recreation facilities.

SOCIAL PINPOINT

In addition to the community survey, the City provided an online map of the City's park system, linked to the project website. Within the map, visitors were invited to provide comments to explain places that they love, ideas, or concerns. Overall, the online map was viewed by 392 visitors who provided 142 comments. The map was open from March 1st to May 1st, 2025.

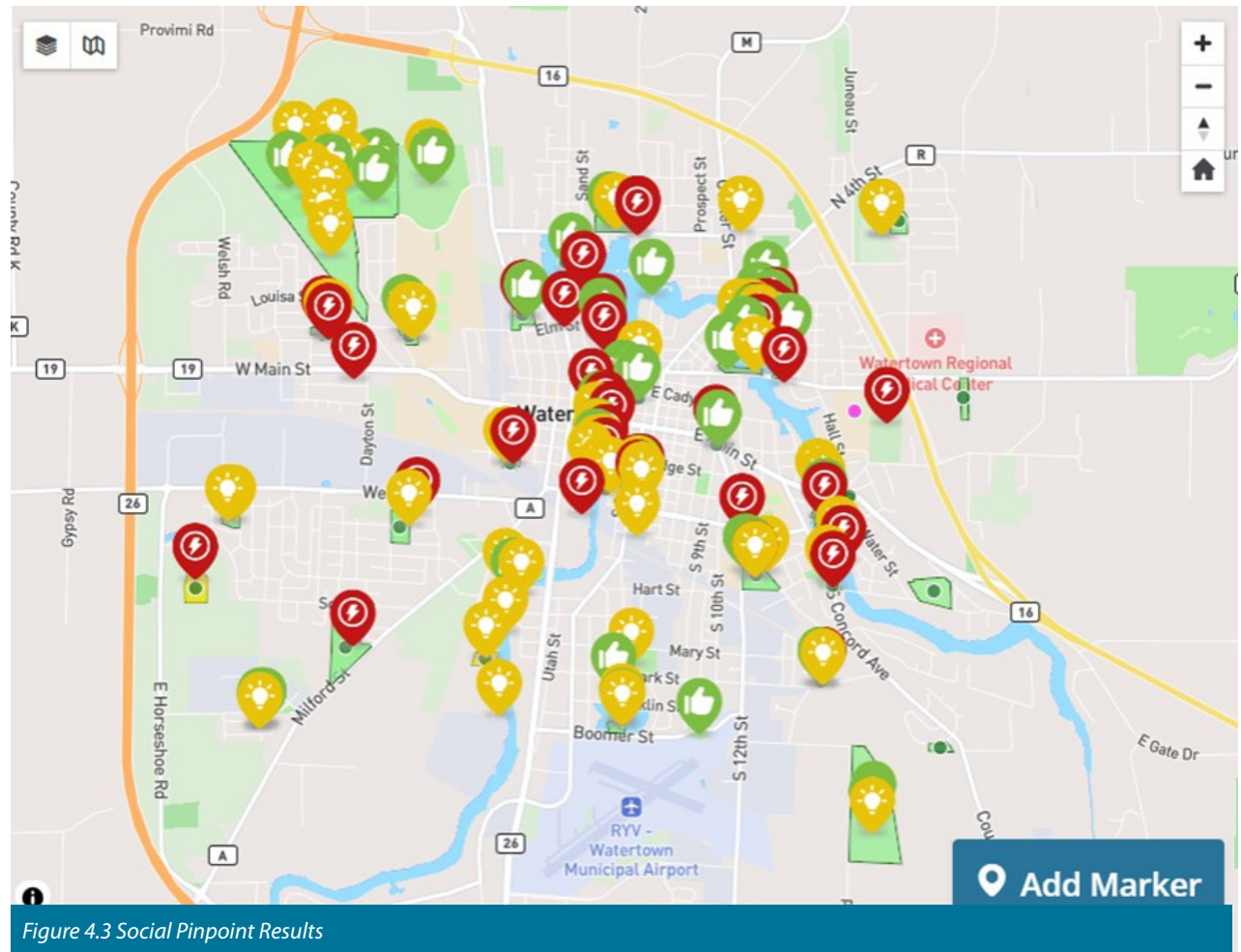


Figure 4.3 Social Pinpoint Results

SUMMARY OF PLACES PEOPLE LIKE

» Places that are well-loved by the community:

- Brandt-Quirk Park – ballfields, tennis and walking trails
- Riverside Park – Volleyball, walking trails, views of the river
- The Riverwalk
- Fanny P Lewis Park

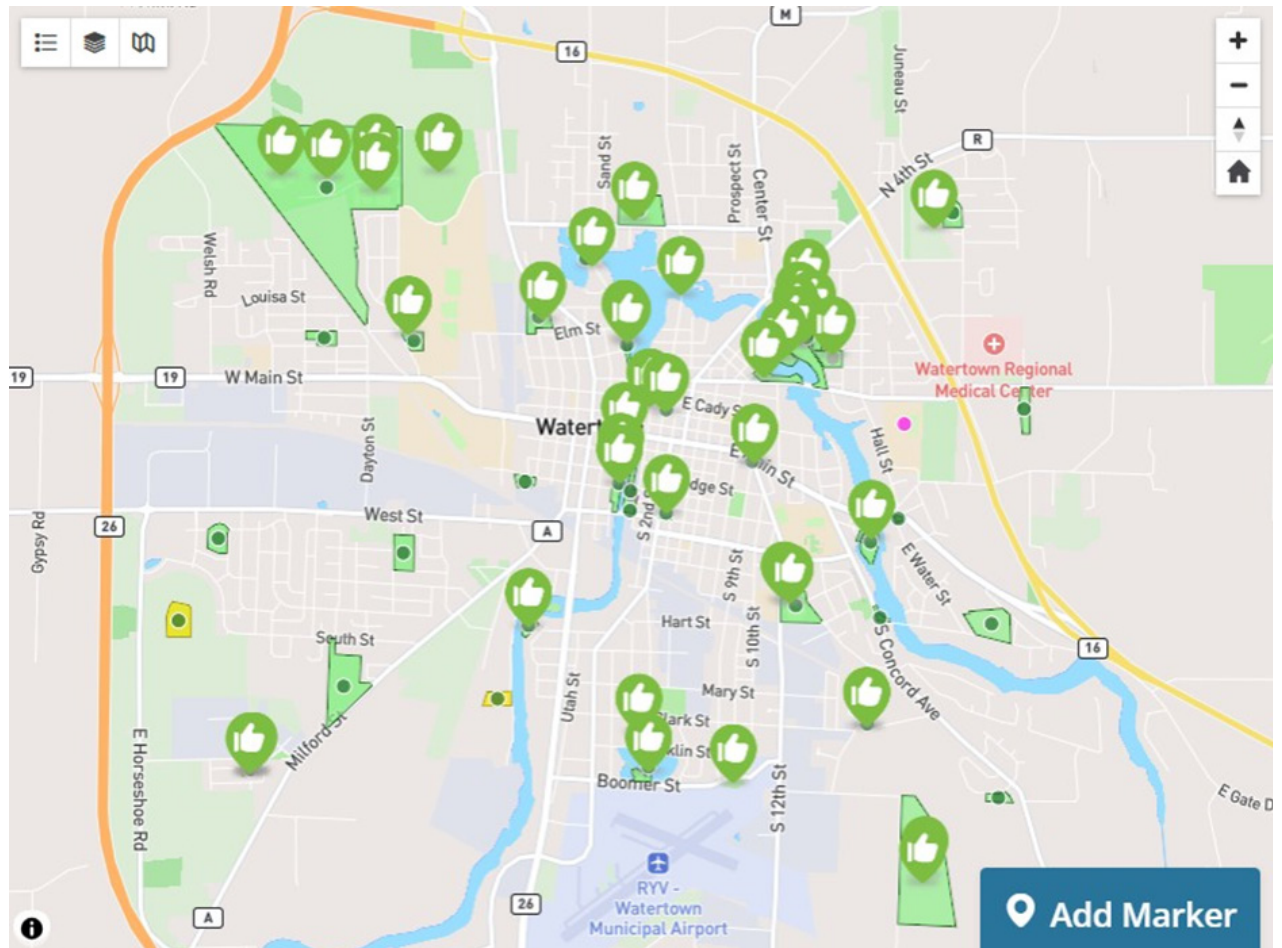


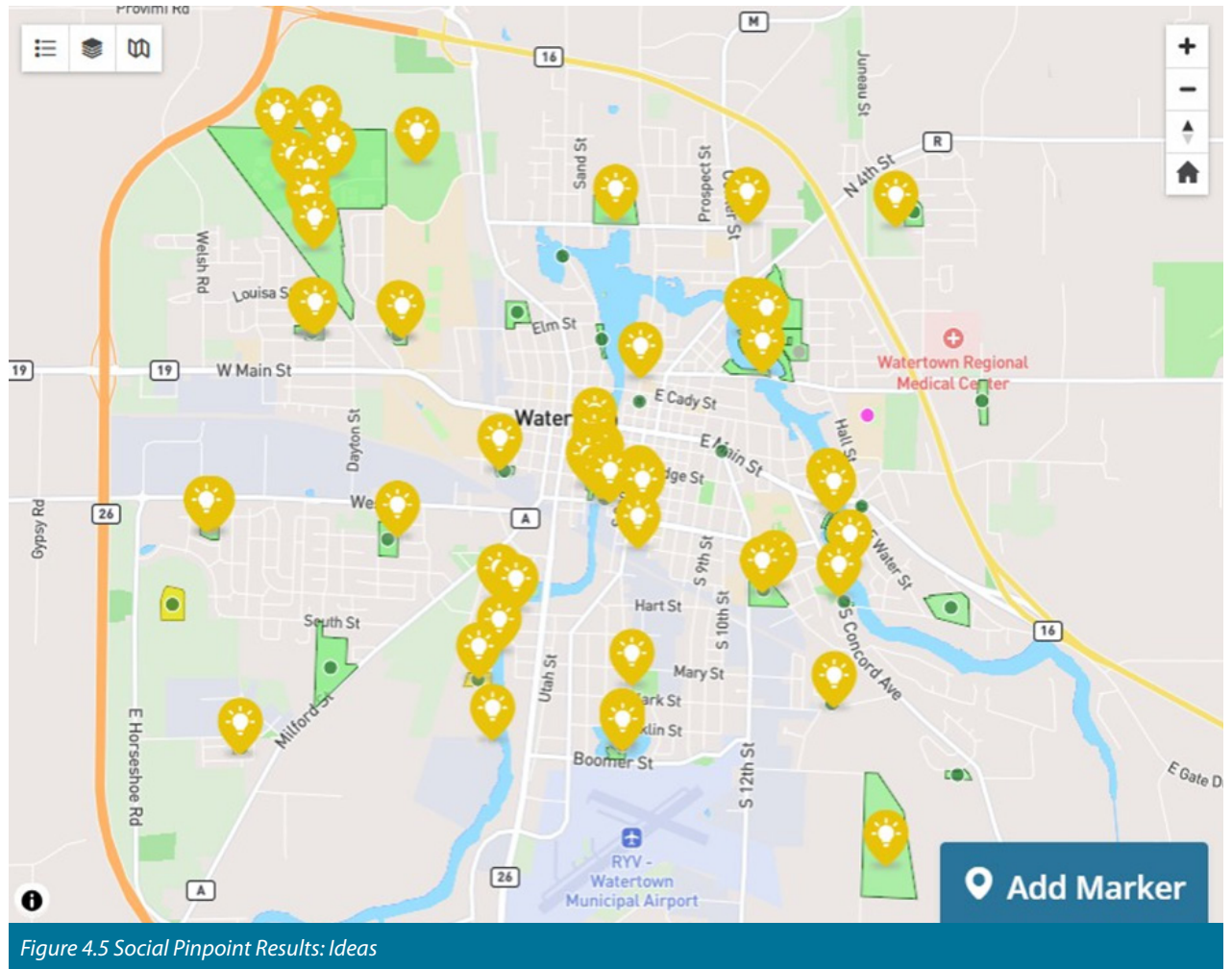
Figure 4.4 Social Pinpoint Results: Places People Like



PLACES PEOPLE LIKE

SUMMARY OF IDEAS

- » Future Rock River Ridge Park – music/outdoor performance venue
- » Many suggestions for additional fishing spots along the Rock River
- » Brandt-Quirk Park:
 - Ideas for additional trails
 - Indoor play facility
- » Riverwalk:
 - Extend in both directions to connect along a longer stretch of the river
 - Ideas for beautification along the walkway
 - Add more fishing spots
- » Veterans Memorial Park:
 - Add more benches
 - Consider a 'Friends' group or other collaboration to help with landscape maintenance
- » Riverside Park:
 - Add a kayak launch and more fishing spots
 - Bocce ball and other lawn games
 - Fence in the playground area
- » Tivoli Island Park:
 - Add more signage for parking and wayfinding



IDEAS

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS

- » Concerns with safety at intersections near park entrances
- » Playground equipment that needs upgrading
- » Veterans Memorial Park is getting too crowded with memorials
- » Maintenance, trash clean-up along the Riverwalk
- » Shade structure needs improvement at Bentzin Family Town Square
- » Facilities at Riverside Park get a lot of use and are in need up updating or replacing
- » Need for more trash receptacles within smaller parks
- » Concern that park development at Reagan Park will eliminate too many trees

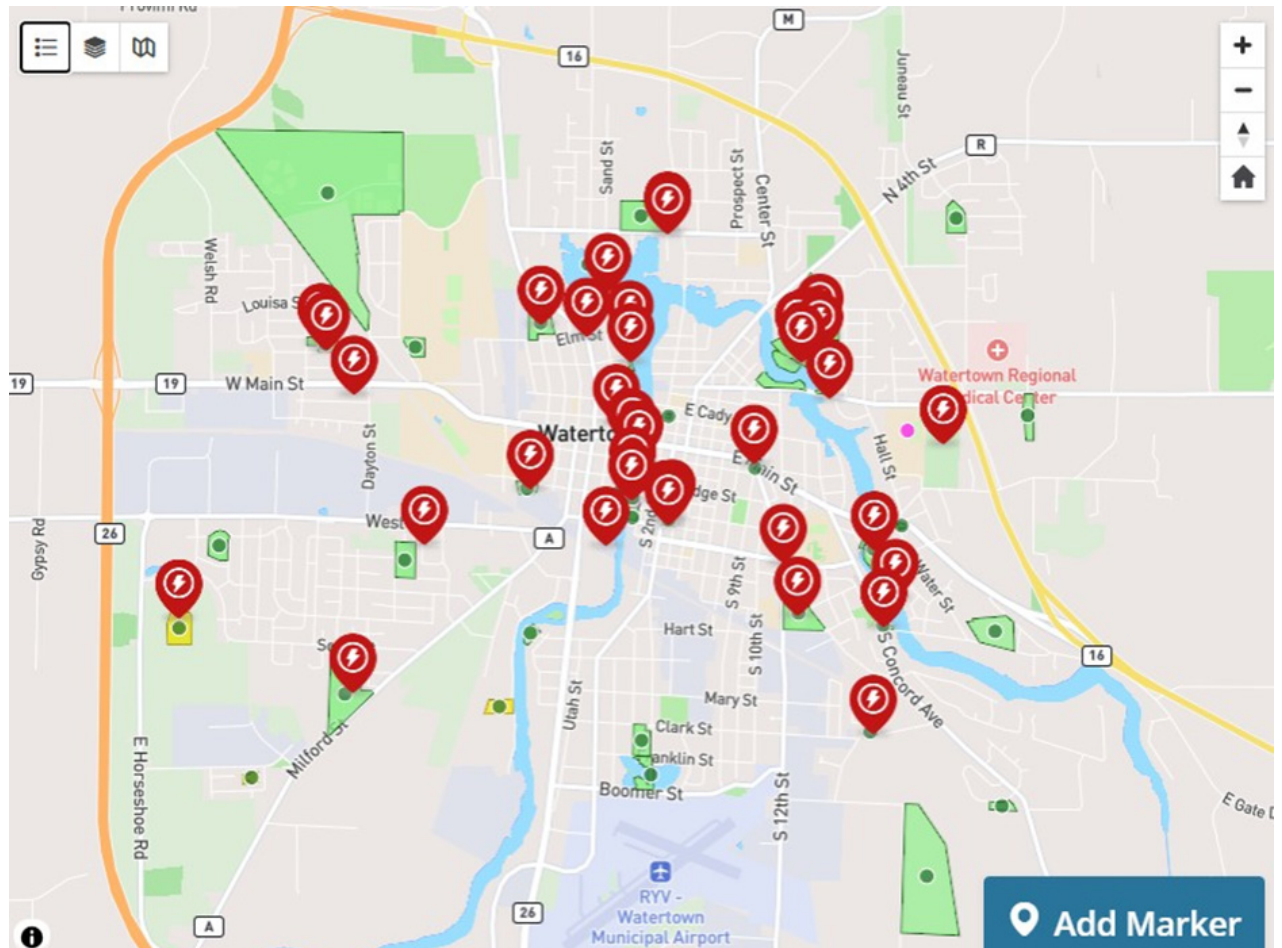


Figure 4.6 Social Pinpoint Results: Concerns



CONCERNS

IDEAS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES

The following is a summary of additional issues, opportunities, and observations on potential needs for Watertown's park system. This list was compiled through on-site observation, conversations with staff, and community input.

- » Many parks do not have any bike racks, or existing bike racks are challenging to identify and use.
- » Dogs are not allowed in any parks today. However, this is clearly a desire by residents.
 - **Idea:** allow dogs (on-leash) and provide waste receptacles
- » Play containers are not accessible; most have a 6 – 12" wood curb around the edges and engineered wood fiber (EWF) surfacing compacts lower than the edge of the curb, which creates an inaccessible step down into playground containers.
 - **Idea:** With surfacing upgrades, replace wood curb with landscape edging or an integrated seat wall.
 - **Idea:** With surfacing upgrades, overfill EWF to compensate for settling
- » Although pickleball courts are available today at Riverside Park, players need to bring their own net or pay \$30/year to access the locked nets on-site.
 - **Idea:** Permanently convert some tennis courts at Riverside Park for permanent pickleball and identify another location for dedicated pickleball courts.
- » Signage at parks is somewhat inconsistent; larger community parks have nice big signs; older neighborhood parks have older, less ornate signs. Many specialty parks today do not have any signs.
 - **Idea:** install 1-2 new signs every year to create a consistent city branding
- » Seating and shade is needed at playgrounds to encourage more intergenerational play.
- » There are many opportunities to decrease mowing areas (over time), increase habitat for birds and other wildlife along the river's edge throughout the park system with increased native planting. This will also alleviate some of the issues with geese overcrowding park areas.
- » There are opportunities to grow Watertown as a kayak and water sport destination. Additional launches, wayfinding, and outreach could bring in a lot of visitors to the area.
 - **Idea:** Map put-ins and take-outs and look for ways to create a water trail within the park system.
 - **Idea:** Integrate kayak rental into parks with river access.
- » Walking, biking, and hiking are the most popular activities with Watertown residents; there are opportunities to integrate more trails within and through parks
- » Playgrounds are closed in the wintertime, however there is a desire to integrate more winter facilities and programming.
 - **Idea:** keep playgrounds open during winter where possible.
- » Flooding is an issue along the Rock River. The Senior Center has had repeated flooding and this creates a challenge for investing and permitting of new facilities that are within floodplains.
- » Playgrounds – most within the system are aging and beyond repair and in need of replacement
- » Restrooms within parks are mostly older, some are closed because lack of function
- » K-3 Soccer is the biggest need for athletics – additional fields (up to 3) that fit this age group would be useful.
- » Full-size basketball courts is an identified need
- » ADA pathway and accessibility is inconsistent throughout the system. Consider performing an ADA evaluation and targeting improvements to address accessibility.

TRENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION

The following are regional and national trends in parks and recreation that are applicable to Watertown.

PARKS ARE PLACES TO CONNECT

As people spend more time on screens, they are interacting less with the people, community, and environment around them. Parks provide an opportunity to create places for people to gather, engage, and meet off-line and outdoors.

The average person spends 93% of their life indoors. Children aged 8-18 spend an average 7.5 hours per day on screens.

72.4% of Wisconsin's SCORP respondents cited connection with nature as a motivation for recreating.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARK & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Offer spaces that balance active recreation (eg. athletic facilities) with unstructured or creative spaces (eg. adventure play for younger kids, hammock groves and passive social spaces for teens).
- » Nature-based play, which incorporates natural elements such as balancing logs, is a growing trend. These areas are often less expensive to build than conventional playgrounds.
- » Expand inclusive play offerings based on universal design principles. Consider how playgrounds can accommodate residents of varying ages and abilities.
- » The future playground at Riverside Park is an example of an inclusive play offering.
- » Re-purpose under-utilized open space for community gardens, gathering spaces, and other low-impact social spaces.

5



AGING ACTIVELY

An increasing percentage of the population will be aged 65 or over in the coming years. It is important to consider the recreational needs and interests of older adults. From the growth in popularity of pickleball to more passive activities, like birdwatching, there needs to be a multi-generational approach to park and recreation facilities and programming.

In 2022, 17.3% of Americans were aged 65 or older, which is about 1 in 6 Americans. By 2040, it is predicted that 22% of the population will be aged 65 or older.

18.4% of Watertown residents are aged 65 or older.

Between 2019 and 2023, participation rates for American's aged 55-64 increased from 41.2% to 49.7% and for those 65 and older, rates grew from 28.8% to 39.5%

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Seek ways to add more senior recreation opportunities, including more mid-day recreation programs.
- » Develop park and recreation facilities for a variety of mobility, ability, and activity levels.
- » Promote passive outdoor recreation, such as walking, gardening, low-impact sports, etc.
- » Seek ways to engage seniors in volunteer opportunities within Watertown.
- » Ensure that information shared regarding parks and recreation does not solely rely on internet access, or other technologies that may not be used by seniors in the community.



PARKS AS FLEXIBLE, RESILIENT SPACES

Our changing climate means more severe weather events. Parks can, and often already do, serve multiple recreational and resilience purposes. Stormwater mitigation and treatment, floodwater storage, pollinator habitat, ecosystem restoration, and opportunities to manage invasive and native plant species are all functions parks can provide a city. Extreme heat events and warmer winters affect the recreational activities available to residents at different times of the year.

Parks can provide places to cool off, or warm up. Watertown currently has an excellent aquatics facility and the recently constructed Bentzin Family Town Square has a water feature. Watertown also benefits from great access to the Rock River, with 10 kayak and canoe access points throughout the city.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Adopt policies to prioritize native plantings, pollinator-friendly gardens, and other resilient landscaping practices.
- » Evaluate maintenance plans to balance manicured and mown spaces with restoring natural landscapes, such as prairies, which require less maintenance over time.
- » Provide splash pads and water-based recreation access as a way to stay cool and engage in outdoor activities on hotter days.
- » Seek ways to provide more opportunities for outdoor recreation in winter months that do not rely on snow or ice (ie – clearing trails for use throughout the year).



RIVER-BASED RECREATION

Like other trails, water trails generate economic benefits, capturing this benefit requires providing easy entry/exit points along the river. Watertown is unique because there are so many places to access and see the Rock River within the city. Currently, the City of Watertown has 10 parks that are along the Rock River waterfront, 7 parks with fishing access, and 10 parks with a kayak or boat launch. The Bentzin Family Town Square has an ADA-accessible kayak launch.

36.2% of respondents to Wisconsin's SCORP survey stated they participated in kayaking, canoeing, or stand-up paddleboarding within the last year and another 28.4% said they had participated in the past.

In 2012, Rock River became the first recognized National Water Trail in Wisconsin and Illinois. This water trail is 320-miles long and winds through Watertown.

Currently, the City of Watertown has (8) parks that are along the Rock River waterfront, (4) parks have a fishing pier, and (7) parks have a kayak launch. The recently completed Bentzin Family Town Square Park has an ADA-accessible kayak launch.

Water trails offer an alternative, accessible form of recreation and provide increased access to waterways and shorelines.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Accessible and high-quality entry and exit points to rivers and water bodies will increase access for all users.
- » Support amenities for river recreation, such as campgrounds and storage, in close proximity to entry/exit points.
- » Partner with local vendors to provide paddle-shares or other low-barrier ways to access water-related activities.
- » Wayfinding to guide visitors to river access points is important, from both the land and from the water.
- » Planning for riverfront shops and access along the river.
- » Planning for more docking areas along the river for day-trippers visiting from outside of the area.



EMERGING RECREATION ACTIVITIES

As new activities trend and more traditional recreational pursuits, such as baseball, softball, basketball, and soccer decline in popularity, there are new demands on park and recreation facilities. The role parks facilities play is changing, providing more variety in both passive and active recreational pursuits, from dog parks and nature centers to skate parks and other specialized facilities.

In a recent survey for Wisconsin's SCORP, only 16.5% of respondents reported participating in field sports (e.g. soccer, football, baseball).

According to Wisconsin's 2019-2024 SCORP, there is a moderate demand for dog parks, and disc golf courses, and a high demand for campsites in the Southern Gateways region, which includes both Jefferson and Dodge Counties.

Pickleball continues to grow in popularity across the United States.

45.5% of all households in the U.S. own dogs, and dog parks are increasingly viewed as needed recreational amenities in communities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Requests for additional specialized, single-use facilities, such as pickleball courts, are in high demand (nationally).
- » Consider programming to help young people and people new to outdoor recreation feel confident and welcome learning new types of activities, such as mountain biking or introduction to pickleball.
- » Accommodations for new or emerging sports may already exist within the park system. For example, cricket and lacrosse can be played on multi-use turf fields.



OUTDOOR RECREATION IS GROWING IN POPULARITY

The COVID-19 pandemic led to major growth in the number of participants in outdoor recreation due to the flexibility outdoor spaces provided for socializing, exercising, and passive activities that could no longer occur in indoor facilities. Since 2020, growth in the number of Americans participating in outdoor recreation has continued to grow, even as pre-pandemic routines return in other aspects of everyday life.

Since COVID, the number of users who are accessing parks has continuously increased

In 2023, national participation grew 4.1%, with a total of 57.7% of all Americans aged 6 and over participating in outdoor recreation. 22.2 million more Americans are participating in outdoor recreation in 2023 compared to 2019.

7.7 million people tried a new outdoor activity in 2023.

Many new participants are casual participants, meaning they do not participate regularly in specific activities, and there is greater diversity within this group compared to historical groups of core participants.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Facilities are potentially undergoing higher usage than in previous years, requiring more maintenance to address wear and tear on park facilities.
- » There is an opportunity to engage new participants with specific programming that encourages repeat involvement and reduces barriers to participation. These ideas are commonly understood as 'Active Living,' which aim to provide low- or no-cost ways for people to exercise and get outside on a daily basis. Examples of this include park bingo, birding, and hiking.



DISCONNECTION FROM NATURE

Much of life has moved online, including many services and social activities. This means Americans spend more and more time on screens and have limited opportunities to engage with the people, community, and environment around them. Park and recreation facilities and programs can offer alternatives to this trend.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the average person spends 93% of their life indoors. Children aged 8-18 spend an average 7.5 hours per day on screens.

The amount of unstructured play in a child's day is an average of 4-7 minutes per day.

Children's play has moved from outdoors to indoors since the 1950s, reducing people's connections to parks and nature

72.4% of Wisconsin's SCORP respondents cited connection with nature as a motivation to recreate, suggesting the desire to reconnect and spend more time outdoors.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Seek ways to integrate educational and interpretive programs that partner with schools and after school programs.
- » Seek ways to balance passive (unstructured) and active (structured) recreational opportunities for kids.
- » Offer spaces for unstructured, exploratory and creative play for a variety of age groups (eg. adventure play for younger kids, hammock groves and passive social spaces for teens).
- » Seek ways to offer adventure and non-traditional sport activities opportunities
- » Seek ways to incorporate technology into outdoor and exploration-related programming (ie- citizen scientist programs)
- » Nature-based play is a growing trend; this type of play incorporates natural elements into play experiences and offers unstructured, creative play environments. These types of play areas can often be less expensive to build than conventional 'off-the-shelf' play features and can be place specific or incorporate educational features.



COMFORT AND SAFETY

Safety is an important factor in how often and in what ways residents use park and trail facilities. Parks and trails that foster a sense of safety through their design and facilities, such as good lighting and open sight lines, provide recreational opportunities to more residents and for longer periods of time.

Though only 6% of Wisconsin SCORP survey respondents identified safety and welcomeness as a barrier to participating in outdoor recreation, the responses showed that a disproportionate number of people of color feel unsafe or unwelcome in outdoor recreation spaces. This was a sentiment reiterated in the SCORP focus group meetings.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Improving safety and the perception of safety along trail facilities will benefit a large number of recreation users.
- » Improved lighting within parks and trails can significantly increase perceptions of safety and availability of facilities throughout the seasons.
- » Review for potential crossing treatments for pedestrians and bicyclists at roadways may be necessary to address specific areas of conflict.
 - The City of Watertown will be completing a city-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan in 2025; specific areas for future improvements will be included in this plan.
- » Providing facilities within safe walking or biking distances of neighborhoods increases the ability for youths, seniors, and mobility-challenged residents to participate in outdoor recreation.
- » Ensure information and wayfinding is available in multiple languages if this is an identified need in the community.



INCREASING DEMANDS ON TIME AND CHANGING SCHEDULES

There are ever-increasing demands on Americans' time and schedules are becoming more structured at younger and younger ages. Remote work means some peoples' schedules are shifting, sometimes becoming more flexible. Finding ways to make parks and recreation opportunities easily accessible will ensure participants have more options to fit their day-to-day life.

Not having enough time or having other priorities was cited as the number one barrier to accessing or limiting outdoor recreation by Wisconsin SCORP survey respondents (54%).

20% of respondents cited costs as a barrier to participation and 19% of SCORP respondents identified the distance to go for outdoor recreation as being too far as an obstacle to participating

Increased mobility of the workforce (remote work, freelance work) has resulted in individuals choosing where to live based on lifestyle and proximity to family and friends rather than employment opportunities. In Watertown, 4.9% of residents work from home.

Although recreation participation has increased overall, the number of outings per person has decreased.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Seek ways to increase recreational opportunities for people close to their home.
- » Flexible hours and increased hours of operation could be a consideration. Programs that can be individualized or scheduled after school or after work hours may be needed.
- » Look for ways to increase multi-functional community spaces for more flexibility in programming.
- » Continue to grow partnerships with local organizations for programming
- » Consider how special events or seasonal closures may affect daily users of park and trail facilities.
- » Seek new technologies to allow for increased web-based registration for programs.



PARKS AS INCLUSIVE GATHERING SPACES

More communities are building parks and facilities that facilitate placemaking opportunities and offer places to gather. Fostering social interaction through inclusive recreation opportunities is a key role parks can play. In local communities, parks offer no- and low-cost ways for people to gather, engage, and meet off-line and outdoors. There is an increasing emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility, and parks can lead the way in providing spaces where all ages and abilities feel welcome.

Parks offer free and low-cost environments for people of all ages to gather, interact, and socialize, an increasingly important role given the loneliness epidemic impacting all generations in this country.

Creating inclusive spaces where people of all ages and abilities are able to participate and engage is recognized with increasing importance.

Over 90% of parents believe playground equipment should accommodate a wide range of abilities, a sentiment being realized across the U.S.

In a 2018 NRPA survey, 74% of parks and recreation-related agencies offer programs and activities for individuals with physical disabilities and 62% of agencies offer programs and activities for individuals with cognitive disabilities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Expand inclusive play offerings based on universal design principles. Consider how playgrounds can accommodate children and adults with varying needs. Seating, shaded areas, resilient surfacing, low-slope pathways, and proximity to parking areas are all ways to increase accessibility, in addition to upgraded play features or ADA-accessible equipment.
- » The future playground (2025) to be constructed within Riverside Park is an example of an inclusive play offering that will be available to residents.
- » Offer varied programming that is accessible to participants of different ages and abilities.
- » Consult with advocacy groups, schools, parents, and neighbors to match inclusive and accessible elements with the people who will most benefit from these investments.
- » Partner with organizations or school districts to use under-utilized open space for community gardens, gathering spaces, and other low-impact social spaces.



PASSIVE RECREATION

Trails provide universal and flexible facilities that can be used for both passive and active recreation, as well as commuting options and trail users include dog-walkers, walkers, bikers, runners, and commuters. Additionally, COVID-19 saw many activities move into parks and outdoor spaces, such as yoga and other fitness classes, putting flexible park facilities to use.

Over the last few years, there has been an increase in participation of passive activities such as biking, walking, running, and hiking at the expense of participation in organized activities, such as adult league softball and other sports.

According to Wisconsin's 2019-2024 SCORP, there is a moderate demand for bicycling trails (recreational/rail-trail) in the Southern Gateways region, which includes both Jefferson and Dodge Counties.

According to the most recent state-wide SCORP survey, 65.7% of respondents participated in walking/hiking/running (on paved trails) and 59.2% participated in Hiking/Walking/Running (on unpaved trails).

After trail usage, the most highly participated in outdoor activities include swimming in lakes, ponds, or rivers (46.3%), wildlife watching/nature photography (45.1% of respondents participated), and picnicking (43.9%).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Regular maintenance of trail networks within parks is important. Fog sealing, patching and other frequent and lower-cost maintenance activities on the existing paved trails within parks is vital to prolonging the life of these investments.
- » Consider how trails are used beyond walking, running, and biking. For example, dog walking, photography, and roller blading are all other ways that trails within parks can be used.
 - With the exception of the Watertown Dog Park and paths within Brandt Quirk Park, most parks within Watertown do not allow dog-walking. This may be a policy to reconsider to increase offerings and use of neighborhood parks without the need to build additional dog-walking areas to meet community demands.
- » Seek ways to support the use of parks for passive recreation through partnerships with organizations to host community-wide free classes and events.



PARKS CAN DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Park and recreation systems benefit local economies in a number of ways, from hosting tournaments to trail-based tourism, to park access increasing the desirability of neighborhoods. Recognizing and supporting recreation-related tourism and businesses can help support the local economy and increase awareness of the importance of access to parks and recreation.

According to Wisconsin's 2019-2024 SCORP, direct visitor spending in Dodge County was \$81 million and in Jefferson County it totaled \$95 million.

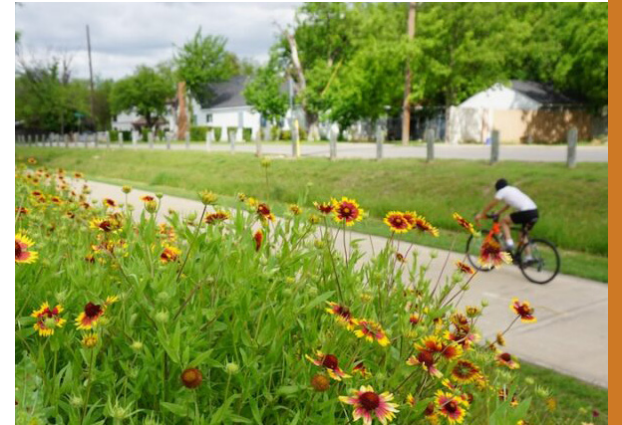
Proximity to parks and trails is valued by potential home buyers and can set a community apart when people are making decisions about where to live.

Home values near parks and trail facilities tend to be higher than those farther away.

With the recent development of the Rock River District Plan, there is an increased interest in redevelopment sites along the River in downtown Watertown. All of the identified opportunity sites are within very close walking distance to a handful of City parks.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING

- » Continue to work with county and regional partners to connect into regional trail systems and routes. More specific recommendations and initiatives will be identified through the city-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan effort.
- » Seek ways to partner with local businesses to provide facilities and amenities, such as bike racks and fix-it stations within parks. Trek is an example of a local business that could be a great supporter of this initiative.
- » Provide clear wayfinding and signage to ensure visitors can easily find, access and explore recreational offerings within the City's park system.
- » Today – there are a number of city parks that do not have signage, or are advertised as 'closed' during winter seasons.
- » Seek ways to provide pedestrian and bicycle paths between neighborhoods and parks to facilitate connectivity.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goals, objectives, and policies were developed through staff input, feedback collected by the community and through a thorough review of the 2019 plan to understand ideas that could be carried through this plan. The statements below will steer implementation of the plan and provide staff with tools for decision-making when new ideas or challenges arise.

DEFINITIONS

GOALS

Broad statements that express general public priorities. Goals are formulated based on the identification of key issues, opportunities, and challenges that affect the park system.

OBJECTIVES

These are more specific milestones or actions and are usually attainable through strategic planning and implementation activities. Implementation of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal.

POLICIES

Rules and guidance to ensure plan implementation. Policies often accomplish a number of objectives.

A large white number 6 is positioned in the upper right corner of a vertical blue rectangular panel. The background of the panel features a photograph of a park with green trees and a building in the distance. At the bottom of the panel, there are three white decorative arches that resemble stylized hills or a bridge.

GOAL #1

Provide inclusive, safe, and active places for all.



Provide a sufficient number of parks, recreational facilities, and open space areas to support active living, and to enhance the health and quality of life for City of Watertown residents and visitors.

Such facilities should be diverse in accommodating people of many different ages and abilities, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, adults, youth, and children. Parks should be welcoming, safe, and accessible for all.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1** Provide high-quality public outdoor recreation sites and open space lands **for each neighborhood** in Watertown.
- 1.2** Ensure that **at least one park is within a safe and comfortable walking distance** for all Watertown residents, generally within $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from where people live.
- 1.3** Provide a **diversity of recreational opportunities** (active, passive, water-based, and land-based). Where possible, ensure that these opportunities are **well-distributed** throughout the City.
- 1.4** Offer a wide range of recreational opportunities to adequately **serve different age groups**, including children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens.
- 1.5** Neighborhood Parks should be sited and designed to **enhance neighborhood cohesion** and provide a common neighborhood gathering place. Neighborhood parks should have **multiple access points** and should be visible from the surrounding roadways.
- 1.6** Community Parks should **accommodate the broadest variety of users** from across the city. Considerations for parking, restroom facilities, and gathering spaces should be integrated into the design and planning of community parks.
- 1.7** Work to ensure that existing park facilities are upgraded to **comply with ADA** design guidelines. Future parks should be designed so that they are **barrier-free and accessible** to persons with disabilities.

GOAL #2

Maintain and improve parks with community support.



Continue to manage and maintain existing parks, open space facilities, and recreational programming in response to community interest and needs. Leverage partnerships, grants, and agency programs to implement initiatives and to secure funding for projects.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1** **Leverage public-private partnerships, local associations and foundations, and other creative funding sources** to help improve and meet the long-term park and recreational needs of the community.
- 2.2** **Explore various means of funding land acquisition and improvements for parks and facilities.** This could include impact fees / park improvement fees, state and federal grants, conservation easements, and non-profit organizational funding sources.
- 2.3** **Integrate public health** in all decision-making processes city-wide by working with the Health Department on its “Health in All Policies” policy.
- 2.4** **Integrate projects identified through this plan into the City’s 5-Year Capital Improvements Plan** to prioritize new facilities and programs, in addition to maintenance of existing
- 2.5** **Develop partnerships** with the following organizations to assist in funding and implementing capital projects:
 - » Greater Watertown Area Community Health Foundation
 - » Local non-profits
- 2.6** **Continue to partner with the local school districts** to collaborate on programming and services.
- 2.7** **Explore formation of a Friends of Watertown Parks group** to lead private fundraising efforts, assist with park maintenance, and raise awareness about the City’s park facilities.
- 2.8** **Engage local neighborhood groups, stakeholder groups, and community residents** in the planning, design, and implementation of new park facilities, especially for neighborhood parks. Engage with local groups to assist with park maintenance, stewardship opportunities, invasive species removal, equipment installation or maintenance.

GOAL #3

Foster a resilient future.



Preserve, manage, and plan for the City's natural resources and outdoor amenities to create a resilient, sustainable park system that works for the benefit of current and future residents.

OBJECTIVES

- 3.1** **Balance the need to acquire and develop new park and recreational facilities with the need to maintain and upgrade existing park sites and facilities.**
- 3.2** **Acquisition of park and open space lands should occur in advance of or in coordination with new developments** to provide for reasonable acquisition costs and facilitate site planning to meet the needs of future and current residents. **Parkland in undeveloped areas should be acquired through land developer dedications,** where feasible. This land should be desirable and usable as park land. **Minimum sizes for land areas should correspond to park classifications. New parks should be accessible from adjacent roadways and sidewalks,** comply with ADA requirements for accessibility, and be reasonably suited for providing areas for play and recreation.
- 3.3** All new **residential development should meet the park and open space standards and recommendations as outlined in this Plan** and implemented by the City of Watertown zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- 3.4** Planning and budgeting for park improvements, updated features, and new park acquisitions should include **consideration and capacity for city staff** to operate and maintain facilities.
- 3.5** The preservation of city-owned primary and secondary environmental corridors, isolated natural resource areas, steep slopes, woodlands and forests, lakes, ponds, streams, lakeshores, floodplains, riparian habitats, and wetlands should be **maintained and managed to ensure their ecological functions** to support vegetative, wildlife and fish habitats. Where appropriate and feasible, **city-owned natural drainage and stormwater management areas can be utilized** for passive recreation.
- 3.6** The City should continue to **develop a diversity of park sizes** and types based on the characteristics and needs of individual neighborhoods, the surrounding land use and natural resource features. The City should continue its Neighborhood Planning process to **identify future land uses, road and lot layouts, and the locations of parks open space corridors, and trails.**

GOAL #4

Connect parks and open spaces to the city's multi-modal network.



Ensure that parks, recreational facilities, and open space areas are connected to the City's multi-modal network for driving, biking, walking, and rolling.

OBJECTIVES

- 4.1** Provide pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular **connections to all parks and recreation facilities.**
- 4.2** **New park developments should be integrated early** on in development planning to adequately link trails, bike routes, and sidewalks to parks.
- 4.3** Develop a City-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to prioritize active transportation facilities, connections, and utilization. This plan should **support a well-integrated network of sidewalks, recreation paths and trails, and bike lanes** throughout the city (and beyond) and should follow State and AASHTO standards. This plan process will include stakeholders from the DNR, Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force, Jefferson and Dodge County, as well as other community representatives.
- 4.4** **Encourage public awareness** of the City's parks, trails, and outdoor recreational facilities by promoting them through maps, signage, and other print and web-based materials.
- 4.5** **Coordinate with Jefferson County and Dodge County** in efforts to implement projects from their respective Bicycle and Pedestrian
- 4.6** **Prioritize the connection of regional and state multi-use trails** (such as the Interurban Trail) to connect to the city's parks, employment and commercial destinations, Watertown's historic downtown, and to other regional multi-use trails.
- 4.7** **Continue bicycle and pedestrian educational programs** like the Police Department's bicycle rodeo and other trainings to increase safety and utilization of trails, paths, sidewalks, and streets.



RECOMMENDATIONS & PROJECTS

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on information collected through community engagement, as well as suggestions from staff, along with issues and deficiencies identified through the needs analysis. With anticipated growth rates (see Chapter 4 Needs Analysis), additional acreage is needed to be added to the current system in order to meet local standards for neighborhood, community, and special use parks by 2030 and 2040. The timing of parkland acquisitions and development should coincide with the actual demand for recreational facilities in the City, along with available staffing to maintain the park system.

A large white number 7 is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. The background of the right half of the page is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this blue background is a faint, light blue silhouette of a large tree with a thick trunk and dense foliage. At the bottom of the blue section, there are three white, stylized arches that resemble the tops of trees or decorative elements.

FUTURE NEIGHBORHOOD PARK SEARCH AREAS

PARK DEVELOPMENT

Figure 8.1 identifies residential areas that do not fall within a 5- or 10-minute walk zone of a park with neighborhood park amenities. These areas should be considered for either future park development or improvements to pedestrian access to expand service area access. Where possible, City-owned land is identified for potential future parkland.

- 1 The neighborhood zoned for multi-family residential south of Main St and north of the railroad tracks on the west side of the City is currently under-served for neighborhood park access. There is a city-owned parcel within this area that could be developed as a future park. Improvements to roadway crossings along Main Street would also assist in expanding the service area for Timothy Johnson Park to this neighborhood.
- 2 The expanded senior housing areas on the west side of the City are lacking in walkable access to a neighborhood park. With future development in this area, neighborhood parkland development should be considered.
- 3 North of Riverside Park, there is a residential area that is not currently within a neighborhood service area. Douglas Elementary School, which is nearby, provides a playground and basketball court access. Also, future improvements to better connect residents via sidewalk or trail network to Riverside Park would improve park access.
- 4 East of Tivoli Island, there is a residential neighborhood that is not currently within a park service area. Future development along Ann Street could serve as a catalyst for future park development. City owned property in this area could be evaluated for future parkland.
- 5 The area east of State Road 16 at County Road CW has a significant amount of multi-family housing that is not currently within a neighborhood park service area. A narrow parcel along the City boundary could provide a potential future site for park development.
- 6 The Humboldt Street/Clark Street area near the Interurban Trailhead is currently under-served for neighborhood park access. There are a handful of City-owned properties in this area that could serve as candidates for future park development.
- 7 Redevelopment of the Watertown Dog Park with more neighborhood park amenities could also be evaluated in this area.
- 8 The area southeast of Air Park Drive is developing with multi-family housing. This area is completely under-served with walkable park access today; new park development should be prioritized in this area as housing units increase.
- 9 There is an area zoned for single-family residential southeast of Milford St. Pedestrian connections across Milford St. will better connect this future development area to neighborhood parks. Conversely, future development could spur another neighborhood park in this search area.



IMPROVEMENTS TO EXISTING PARKS

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

PLAYGROUND REPLACEMENT

The following playgrounds are past due for replacement: Brandenstein, Deer Trail Park, Hunter Oaks, Lincoln Park, Mary Rose Park, Schaller Park, Timothy Johnson Park, Union Park and Washington Park. Of these parks, priority should be placed on Lincoln Park, Timothy Johnson or Union Park, and Washington Park. The remaining parks should be included in future plans for replacement.



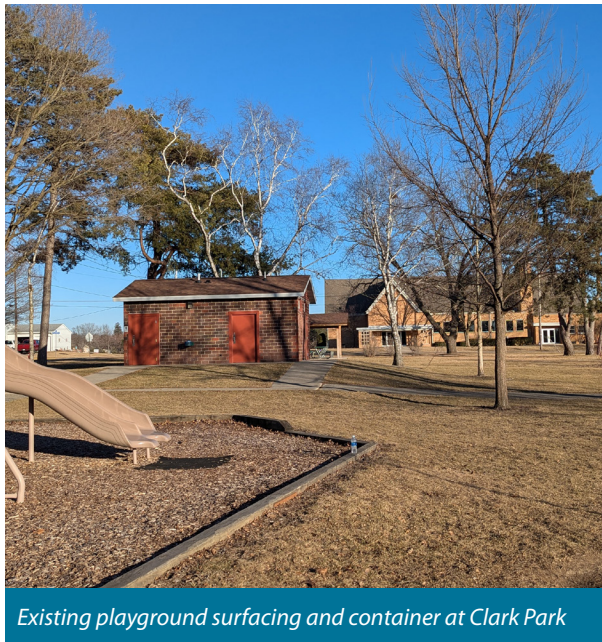
Lincoln Park playground



Timothy Johnson Park playground

PLAYGROUND SURFACING

Playground surfacing within Watertown is primarily made of engineered wood fiber (EWF). Over the years, this surface compacts and requires refreshing with additional layers of EWF to meet fall zone requirements and ADA requirements. The majority of playground containers in Watertown have a 6 – 12" wood curb, which poses a barrier to ADA accessibility. When refreshing playground surfacing, the wood curb should be removed and replaced with an ADA-compliant concrete perimeter walk with a minimum width of 4'-0" and a concrete pedestrian ramp with a 1:16 maximum slope at an entry point. When refreshed, containers should have 12" of engineered wood fiber throughout.



Existing playground surfacing and container at Clark Park

OTHER PLAYGROUND UPDATES

Other recommended playground upgrades include:

- » Additional bench seating at playground areas when updated.
- » Where possible, plant trees or incorporate shade structures around playground equipment.
- » Consideration for alternative play equipment that could meet neighborhood needs, such as:
 - Nature-based or adventure play
 - Sensory or educational features
 - Inclusive and universal play equipment
- » Modest splash or water features to provide cooling opportunities in the summer.



Example of inclusive play features

PLANNED NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

The following parks are in the process of being developed in the coming years due to development of residential areas. Ideas were collected through the community engagement process to identify amenities and features to be included at each location.



Example of nature-based play



Example of wooded, soft-surface walking trail



Example of large swinging benches (Dash Park, Onalaska)

EDGE FIELD SUBDIVISION PARK

As part of the Edge Field Subdivision in Hepp Heights in the southwest area of Watertown, this future park will provide a new 1-acre neighborhood park amenity for residents. Improvements should be focused on providing an access path from Casey Drive (to the south) and stormwater management within the park will need to be considered with the final design. A park shelter, low-impact nature-based play and seating are all recommended here.

REAGAN PARK

Reagan Park is a future neighborhood park that will serve the Enclave at Hunter Oaks Subdivision neighborhood of Watertown. Access will be from Hunter Oaks Blvd. Today, the park area is a fully wooded lot and is already used by nearby residents for hiking and also serves as a backdrop for family photos. The future park should be developed with minimal impact to the existing trees and focus on providing nature-based recreation, such as walking trails (soft surface), a mountain bike course, a simple park shelter and a nature-based play area.

ROCK RIVER RIDGE PARK

Rock River Ridge Park is a future neighborhood park that will serve the Rock River Ridge neighborhood. Access will be from Hoffman Drive on the east, and a new trail is under construction (2025) that will also connect to the park. Overlooking the Rock River, future park development should preserve the existing mature trees on site, and take advantage of the river views with seating areas. Ideas from the community for this park include integration of passive recreation, picnic area and large swinging benches.

COMMUNITY PARKS

The following are recommended improvements at the City's three existing community parks.

RIVERSIDE PARK

- » Riverside Park will be undergoing development of a master plan in the coming year. This planning effort should include a robust community engagement effort to identify and design future park improvements and amenities. Considerations for the master plan should include the following:
- » Labaree Street, which runs along the east side of Riverside Park, is undergoing improvements and re-design for better pedestrian accessibility. Other opportunities could exist to better connect to the basketball courts and other park amenities on both sides of the roadway.
- » There is already a plan and fundraising effort to develop a future inclusive play area.
- » Bank restoration and stormwater elements to manage flooding and stormwater, as well as provide habitat for wildlife should be explored at Riverside Park. This could be a continued partnership with the Rock River Coalition and Dodge County.
- » Chamberland Playground is in need of a large renovation and safety updates.

BRANDT-QUIRK PARK

- » Brandt-Quirk Park is a potential location for an expanded future dog park. Other recommended improvements at this park include expansion of the trail network. Long-term, the adjacent quarry will be considered for future park expansion and swimming area.

WASHINGTON PARK

- » The playground at Washington Park has been identified as a priority for replacement in the coming 5 years.



Example of stream bank restoration in a park (Steelman Park Greensboro, NC)

SPECIAL USE PARKS

The following are recommendations for upgrades within existing or future Special Use Parks:

- » Consider moving or developing a dog park at the former Fire Department Training Location on Twelfth St.
- » Identify a future location for another dog park – perhaps on the north side of the City, Brandt-Quirk Park.
- » Consider or explore future location for a municipal golf course or driving range. Potential locations include Brandenstein Park or Kolata Park.



Example dog park



Example of a municipal driving range

ATHLETIC FIELDS AND COURTS

The following are recommendations for expanding the existing city-wide offerings for athletic fields and courts:

- » Identify locations and develop (3) more soccer fields (multi-use natural turf fields).
- » Identify a location and develop (1) additional ball field.
- » Develop (1) additional full-size basketball court at Grinwald Park.
- » Identify a location and study the development of indoor facilities for pickleball and other indoor activities.
- » With high demand for pickleball today:
 - Convert (2) existing tennis courts to (4) dedicated pickleball courts at Riverside Park.
 - Convert (2) existing tennis courts at Clark Park to (4) dedicated pickleball courts.
 - Build (2) pickleball courts at Grinwald Park (long-term).
 - In total, these actions will bring the number of pickleball courts available to (10) dedicated courts and (8) temporary courts remaining at Riverside Park.



Example of indoor pickleball facility (Chicken N Pickle, San Antonio, TX)

RIVER AND WATER ACCESS

The following are recommendations that address access and management of the Rock River and other bodies of water in Watertown.

- » Work with City's Stormwater Management Department to integrate more native planting at lake and river edges both as a water quality project, but also to mitigate geese at parks along water.
- » Continue to expand kayak rental along the Rock River Water Trail . Today the City provides a rental station at Bentzin Family Town Square. Future expansion could provide locations downriver and be connected to the bike and pedestrian network.
- » Install a fishing pier at Heiden Pond in partnership with Rock River Rescue.
- » Explore future location for a constructed beach to provide additional swimming access within the city.
- » Develop water access locations as planned:
 - Front Street Fishing Area



Example Kayak Rental Facility

RECREATIONAL TRAILS

The City of Watertown is developing a city-wide bicycle and pedestrian network plan in 2025, with expected completion in 2026. This effort will include a robust community engagement effort and will identify gaps in the trail, sidewalk, and on-street bikeway network and intersection safety improvements that should be prioritized for development to support the city's recreational trail network, as well as to support multi-modal transportation within the City. Because this planning effort is currently underway, the Parks and Open Space Plan will defer to the future Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and abstain from specific recommendations at this time. Within the city's existing parkland assets, hiking, biking and walking on trails within parks has been identified as one of the most popular activities. For this reason, it is recommended to continue to expand and maintain trails within parks to create longer routes and more loop trails. Examples of future projects include:

- » Extension of the Riverwalk to the north and additional river crossings for biking and walking, as part of implementation of the Rock River District Plan
- » Trail expansion at Brandt-Quirk Park
- » Trail development at Watertown Dog Park to address accessibility

SIGNAGE / COMMUNICATION

The following are recommendations related to signage and communication within Watertown's park system:

- » Install signs where missing to City standard signs.
- » Explore additional ways to communicate about events, fundraising efforts within parks using kiosks or community bulletin boards.
- » Continue to advertise program registration through the City's website.



Watertown Park Signage



Example of an innovative park kiosk

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAMMING

The following are recommendations related to recreational programming within Watertown's park system:

- » Explore opportunities to host more gathering, music, and community events in parks.
 - Provide equipment rental or borrowing for informal yard games (bags, etc.)
 - Explore and continue to support public/private partnerships for vendors and concessions.
- » Explore expansion of winter programming:
 - Identify potential future locations for ice skating, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.
 - Program events, such as Kickball in the Snow and continue or revive events such as Winter Wellness Walks.
 - Explore hosting a Winter Festival at Riverside Park.
 - Consider keeping playgrounds open throughout the year (do not close in the winter).
- » Explore remote control (RC) events at Brandt-Quirk, Riverside and Washington Parks.
- » Create facility use agreements to structure partnerships with YMCA, Maranatha, Watertown Unified SD for shared use of facilities and programming; create facility use agreements to structure partnerships into the future and clarify roles and responsibilities.



Example of a food truck vendor as part of park programming



Kickball in the snow

FUTURE PLANNING / EVALUATION

The following are recommended planning and evaluation efforts:

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2026)

The Park, Recreation and Forestry Department is participating on both the Technical Advisory Committee and the Community Advisory Group for this planning effort.

Rock River District Plan (2025)

This plan was adopted in 2025; continue to support implementation efforts.

Riverside Park Master Plan

This master plan process is intended to be complete by 2027.

ADA Accessibility Audit

A complete audit of the City's outdoor public spaces should be prioritized in the next 5 years to identify specific areas and priorities for improvement. Other city facilities may need to be included in this audit.

Annual Park Survey

It is recommended that the Park, Recreation, and Forestry Department builds from the community engagement tools that were employed to create the 2025 Parks and Open Spaces Plan by administering an annual community-wide survey to gather information about user preferences, concerns, and ideas for the future. Information collected over repeated years can also serve to show how improvements or initiatives are improving the City's quality of life.

POLICIES

The following are recommended policy or ordinance changes that should be explored in the next five years.

- » Update the City's ordinance regarding dogs in parks to allow dogs if on-leash and require owners to clean up after dogs. Prohibit dogs on athletic fields or other signed areas where maintenance is a concern.
- » Adopt an asset management tracking system to budget for future replacements.
- » Explore easing city ordinances to allow for more flexibility in programming for events in parks related to vendors and concessions.

IMPLEMENTATION

PROJECTS, PHASING AND COSTS

The recommendations described in Chapter 7 will need to be implemented with a phased approach, which will depend primarily on funding and staffing capacity. The table below outlines the identified projects (capital improvements, long-term/exploration projects, programming initiatives, planning projects and policy initiatives). Each project is categorized by the project type, park location, park classification, anticipated budget year, estimated cost range, and potential project partners or funding sources. It should be noted that this table does not commit the City to implementing any projects by a certain year. This project list is ambitious and aspirational, and intended to serve as a guide for staff as annual budgets and work plans are established.

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CAPITAL PROJECTS							
PROJECT #	CAPITAL PROJECTS	PROJECT TYPE	PARK / LOCATION	PARK CLASSIFICATION	ANTICIPATED BUDGET YEAR	COST RANGE	PROJECT PARTNERS / FUNDING
1	Replace Playground	Replacement	Lincoln Park	Neighborhood	2027	\$75K - \$200K	
2	Replace Playground	Replacement	Timothy Johnson/Union Park	Neighborhood	2028	\$75K - \$200K	
3	Replace Playground	Replacement	Washington Park	Neighborhood	2029	\$75K - \$200K	
4	Refresh EWF Surface + bench seating/shade	Maintenance	Brandt-Quirk Park	Community	2026	\$5K - \$15K	
5	Refresh EWF Surface + bench seating/shade	Maintenance	Deer Trail Park	Neighborhood	2027	\$5K - \$15K	
6	Refresh EWF Surface + bench seating/shade	Maintenance	Hunter Oaks	Neighborhood	2028	\$5K - \$15K	
7	Refresh EWF Surface + bench seating/shade	Maintenance	Mary Rose Park	Neighborhood	2029	\$5K - \$15K	
8	Refresh EWF Surface + bench seating/shade	Maintenance	Schaller Park	Neighborhood	2030	\$5K - \$15K	
9	Reagan Park Development	Park Development	Reagan Park	Neighborhood	2027	\$400K - \$600K	Park Dedication
10	Rock River Park Development	Park Development	Rock River Park	Neighborhood	2026	\$400K - \$600K	Park Dedication
11	Edge Subdivision Park Development	Park Development	Edge Subdivision Park	Neighborhood	2027	\$400K - \$600K	Park Dedication
12	Fenced Dog Park	New Feature	Brandt-Quirk Park	Community	2028	\$15K - \$40K	
13	Driving Range	New Feature	Brandenstein Park	Neighborhood	2029	\$10K - \$40K	
14	Multi-use open field	New Feature	TBD	Neighborhood	2028	\$40K - \$100K	
15	Multi-use open field	New Feature	TBD	Neighborhood	2029	\$40K - \$100K	
16	Multi-use open field	New Feature	TBD	Neighborhood	2030	\$40K - \$100K	
17	Full-size basketball court	New Feature	Grinwald Park	Neighborhood	2029	\$60K - \$120K	
18	Pickleball court	New Feature	Grinwald Park	Neighborhood	2029	\$40K - \$100K	
19	Pickleball court conversions	Re-purposed Features	Riverside Park / Clark Park	Community/Nbhd	2026	\$500 - \$1,000	
20	Ball field	New Feature	TBD	Neighborhood	2030	\$150K - \$200K	
21	Inclusive Play Area (planned)	New Feature	Riverside Park	Community	2025	\$200K - \$400K	
22	Bank restoration and stormwater management	New Feature / Maintenance	Riverside Park	Community	2026 - 2030	\$10K - \$40K	Rock River Coalition / Urban Green Space Grants
23	Bank restoration and stormwater management	New Feature / Maintenance	Fannie Mae Park	Special Use	2027 - 2030	\$10K - \$40K	Rock River Coalition / Urban Green Space Grants
24	Bank restoration and stormwater management	New Feature / Maintenance	Schaller Park	Neighborhood	2028 - 2030	\$10K - \$40K	Rock River Coalition / Urban Green Space Grants
25	Front Street Fishing Area	Park Development	Front Street	Special Use	2026	\$10K - \$40K	Urban Rivers Grants
26	Willow Street Boat Launch	Park Development	Willow Street	Special Use	2027	\$10K - \$40K	Recreational Boating Facilities Grant / Urban Rivers Grants
27	Fishing Pier	New Feature	Heiden Pond	Special Use	2026	\$10K - \$40K	Rock River Rescue
28	Updated Sign Installation	New Feature	Various	All	2026	\$5K - \$15K	
29	Updated Sign Installation	New Feature	Various	All	2027	\$5K - \$15K	
30	Updated Sign Installation	New Feature	Various	All	2028	\$5K - \$15K	
31	Updated Sign Installation	New Feature	Various	All	2029	\$5K - \$15K	
32	Updated Sign Installation	New Feature	Various	All	2030	\$5K - \$15K	

Table 8.1 Capital Projects

LONG-TERM / EXPLORATION PROJECTS

PROJECT #	CAPITAL PROJECTS	PROJECT TYPE	PARK / LOCATION	PARK CLASSIFICATION	ANTICIPATED BUDGET YEAR	COST RANGE	PROJECT PARTNERS / FUNDING
33	Indoor Athletic / Recreation Facility	Park Development	Brandt-Quirk Park/TBD	Community			
34	Park Trail Expansion	New Feature	Brandt-Quirk Park	Community			Recreational Trails Program
35	Riverwalk Expansion	New Feature	Riverwalk	Special Use			Rock River District Implementation / Urban Rivers Grant
36	Park Kiosks	New Feature	City-wide	All			
37	Splash Water Feature	New Feature	TBD	All			
38	Fenced Dog Park	Park Development	New location - Fire Dept Training Site	Special Use			

Table 8.2 Long-term / Exploration Projects

PROGRAMMING INITIATIVES

PROJECT #	CAPITAL PROJECTS	PROJECT TYPE	PARK / LOCATION	PARK CLASSIFICATION	ANTICIPATED BUDGET YEAR	COST RANGE	PROJECT PARTNERS / FUNDING
39	Explore additional gathering/music/food events	Programming	City-wide	All			Vendor / Public - Private Partnership
40	Expand winter programming	Programming	City-wide	All			Vendor / Public - Private Partnership
41	RC events	Programming	Brandt-Quirk Park	Community			Vendor / Public - Private Partnership
42	Additional kayak rental	Programming	Water Access Locations	Special Use			Vendor / Public - Private Partnership

Table 8.3 Programming Initiatives

PLANNING PROJECTS + POLICY INITIATIVES

PROJECT #	CAPITAL PROJECTS	PROJECT TYPE	PARK / LOCATION	PARK CLASSIFICATION	ANTICIPATED BUDGET YEAR	COST RANGE	PROJECT PARTNERS / FUNDING
43	Riverside Park Master Plan	Planning	Riverside Park	Community	2026	\$50K - \$100K	
44	Brandt-Quirk Park Master Plan	Planning	Brandt-Quirk	Community	2030	\$50K - \$100K	
45	Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Network Plan	Planning	City-wide		2025	\$100K	Funded - TAP Grant + City Funding
46	ADA Evaluation Audit	Planning	City-wide		2026	\$100K - \$150K	
47	Annual Park Survey	Planning	City-wide		2026	\$1K - \$5K	
48	Annual Park Survey	Planning	City-wide		2027	\$1K - \$5K	
49	Annual Park Survey	Planning	City-wide		2028	\$1K - \$5K	
50	Annual Park Survey	Planning	City-wide		2029	\$1K - \$5K	
51	Annual Park Survey	Planning	City-wide		2030	\$1K - \$5K	
52	Update dog ordinance	Policy	City-wide		2027		
53	Adopt asset management tracking system	Policy	City-wide		2027		
54	Update event ordinance	Policy	City-wide		2027		

Table 8.4 Planning Projects + Policy Initiatives

LAND DEDICATION AND IMPROVEMENT FEES

The 2019 Parks and Open Space Plan explored detailed capital cost estimates for providing new park and recreational facilities in order to confirm the calculation for projected parkland dedication and fee-in-lieu of land dedication. At this time, the [City's ordinance](#) regarding parkland dedication and fees in lieu of land dedication dictates that at least 1,005 square feet of land shall be dedicated for each proposed residential dwelling unit within the approved final subdivision, minor subdivision, or planned development project and 402 square feet of land for each institutional project. Land to be dedicated shall be reasonably adaptable for the intended park and recreation uses and shall be at a location convenient to the people being served. The determination of land suitability will be at the sole discretion of the Plan Commission acting on the recommendation of the Park, Recreation and Forestry Commission. All lands dedicated under this section shall have at least 100 feet of frontage on a public street. Other provisions require convenient and accessible pedestrian and bicycle connections to park and recreation sites. Fees in lieu of parkland dedication may be permitted (or a combination thereof), per the Park, Recreation and Forestry Commission.

Recreation facility improvement fees are also imposed for improvement of land for public parks, including grading, seeding and landscaping, installing utilities, constructing sidewalks, purchasing and installing playground and other recreational equipment, and constructing or installing restroom facilities on land intended for public park purposes.

OPERATIONAL GOALS

The following goals have been developed and adopted as City of Watertown policy to guide budgeting decisions. These Operational Goals have been considered as part of this plan process and align with the Parks and Open Space Plan Goals, Objectives and Policies:

2025 City of Watertown Operational Goals

The purpose of our operational goals is to identify, prior to the budgeting process, what work the city intends to achieve in 2025. The goals should align with our mission. Not only will the operational goals inform budget prioritization, but they will also guide the creation of the 2025 Department Work Plans.

Present a budget that (in no particular order):

- 1. Invests in the strategic planning and maintenance of our city buildings.***
- 2. Proactively maintains and improves our parks and infrastructure to ensure safety, quality, and equity.***
- 3. Supports employee retention and growth, while also evaluating operations and the associated staffing.***
- 4. Fosters community growth by assessing opportunities, stakeholder input, environmental needs, and modern code and policy priorities.***
- 5. Maintains a safe and healthy community, with an eye toward future needs and trends.***

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of potential funding sources available to help finance implementation, including state and federal grant programs. Funds from any of these grant programs are subject to change due to fluctuations in federal, state and local budgets. The park and open space improvements recommended in this plan should also be incorporated into the City-wide Capital Improvement Plans and Programs, as recommended in the City's Comprehensive Plan. Generally, the City of Watertown should continue to utilize its existing planning framework and regulations to implement the recommendations, and should continue to use the development review process to secure parklands as development occurs.

The City should consider coordinating efforts with other units of government, such as Dodge and Jefferson Counties, other City departments, as well as public agencies and non-profit agencies to help fund projects. These partnerships can also be leveraged for pursuing grant funding. The following table outlines potential state funding sources that could be used to implement projects in Watertown.

STATE GRANT PROGRAMS 2025				
GRANT NAME	PURPOSE	FUNDING AGENCY	FUNDING CYCLE / DEADLINE	LINK
Aids for the Acquisition and Development of Local Parks (ADLP)	To acquire or develop public, nature-based outdoor recreation areas and facilities.	Administered under the Local Assistance Stewardship Grant Program (Wisconsin DNR)	Annual: May 1st	https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Stewardship/ApplyLUG
Urban Green Space (UGS) Grants	To acquire land to provide natural space within or near urban areas, or to protect scenic or ecological features.			
Urban Rivers (UR) Grants	To acquire lands, or rights in lands, adjacent to urban rivers for the purpose of preserving or restoring them for economic revitalization or nature-based outdoor recreation activities.			
Land and Water Conservation Fund	To acquire or develop public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.			
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	To provide funds for maintenance, development, rehabilitation and acquisition of land for motorized, non-motorized, and diversified trails.			
Recreational Boating Facilities Grant	Recreational boating facility projects.	Wisconsin Department of Revenue Aid Program	Annual: June 1st and September 1st	https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/RBF.html
Urban Forestry Grants	Supports new, innovative projects that will develop sustainable urban and community forestry programs.	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Applications for 2026 will be accepted from July 1, 2025 through October 1, 2025	https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/urbanforests/grants

Table 8.5 State Grant Programs 2025