



Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan

2026-2031

Acknowledgments

The *Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026-2031* reflects the commitment and collaboration of City of Whitewater staff, leadership, and the Parks and Recreation Board. Their guidance and expertise ensured that this plan represents the community's vision for its parks and open spaces.

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1. Introduction

Parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities are part of what makes Whitewater a great place to live. From Cravath Lakefront Park's community events and lakeside views, to the everyday activities at Starin Park and the trails that connect our neighborhoods, these public spaces strengthen health, community, and local identity. They provide safe places to gather, play, and enjoy nature, while protecting our lakes, woodlands, and natural areas for future generations.

As Whitewater grows and changes, planning ahead is essential. Shifts in population, new development, and aging infrastructure bring both opportunities and challenges. This plan ensures that our parks remain safe, welcoming, and high-quality spaces for all residents — children and families, students, older adults, and visitors alike.

The *Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026-2031* serves as a roadmap for maintaining, enhancing, and expanding the community's parks, trails, natural areas, and recreational amenities. It identifies both immediate needs (2026–2031) and long-term goals (through 2036) to guide investments and decision-making. The plan focuses on equitable access, environmental stewardship, and sustainability, while also supporting broader community goals around health, inclusion, and climate resilience.

This plan was prepared in accordance with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) guidelines to maintain eligibility for critical funding programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Wisconsin Stewardship Program. DNR certification requires that the plan be updated every five years to reflect changing community needs and priorities.

Finally, the plan is adopted as an element of the City of Whitewater Master Plan under Wisconsin Statutes §62.23. It builds upon earlier City of Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plans and integrates with related documents such as the Whitewater Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and neighborhood development plans. A separate Strategic Plan will follow, providing site-specific recommendations and project-level details. Where inconsistencies arise, the recommendations of the 2026-2031 Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan shall take precedence.

2. The Vital Role of Parks and Recreation in the Community

In Whitewater, parks and recreation are not luxuries — they are fundamental to the quality of life. From everyday moments like children playing at Big Brick Park or neighbors meeting on the trails at Moraine View, to community traditions such as the Fourth of July celebration at Cravath Lakefront and concerts at the Frawley Family Amphitheater, these shared spaces shape the character of the city.

Parks and Public Health

Access to parks is directly tied to the health and wellness of Whitewater residents. Trails, playgrounds, athletic fields, and the Whitewater Aquatic & Fitness Center provide year-round opportunities for physical activity. These resources help reduce chronic health risks while also improving mental and social wellbeing. For older adults, walking loops, shaded seating, and accessible paths encourage mobility and community connection. For students and families, sports facilities, splash pads, and open spaces provide active outlets that support lifelong healthy habits.

Community, Identity, and Inclusion

Parks are also where community identity is built. They are the backdrop for weddings, festivals, youth sports, and volunteer events that bring residents together across generations. Starin Park hosts the Senior Center and Treyton's Field of Dreams, serving as a hub of intergenerational activity. Cravath Lakefront is home to markets, music, and multicultural celebrations that reflect Whitewater's diversity. UW-Whitewater students and long-term residents alike rely on parks for recreation and social life, creating common ground that unites the city.

Economic Value

A strong park system supports the local economy. Festivals, tournaments, and community events draw visitors who support small businesses, restaurants, and lodging. Families considering a move to Whitewater, or graduates choosing to stay, often point to parks, trails, and quality of life as deciding factors. Well-maintained parks enhance property values and make the community more attractive to employers, further strengthening Whitewater's long-term vitality.

Environmental Stewardship

Whitewater's parks and natural areas also serve as vital green infrastructure. Conservancy lands like the Whitewater Creek Nature Area and the Effigy Mounds Preserve protect cultural and ecological resources while offering opportunities for quiet reflection. Ray Trost Nature Preserve and other natural sites provide habitat for wildlife and space for environmental education. Trees, wetlands, and greenways reduce flooding, improve air and water quality, and increase resilience to climate change. Investments in tree planting, invasive species management, and shoreline restoration make parks an important part of the city's environmental strategy.

Equity and Accessibility

Above all, parks and recreation are public resources that serve everyone. Inclusive playgrounds, ADA-compliant facilities, affordable programs, and safe connections ensure that all residents — regardless of age, ability, or income — can benefit. Parks are places where barriers break down and where Whitewater's values of equity, inclusion, and community pride are lived out every day.

A Reflection of Whitewater's Values

Ultimately, the Whitewater park system reflects community values: health, equity, sustainability, and shared quality of life. By investing in and caring for these spaces, the City ensures that parks and recreation will remain at the heart of Whitewater for generations to come.

3. Background Information and Community Profile

Whitewater is both a small city and a regional hub, shaped by its unique mix of long-term residents, families, and a large student population. The city straddles Jefferson and Walworth Counties, covers roughly nine square miles, and is served by the Whitewater Unified School District (WUSD). This dual identity — a tight-knit community and a university town — influences housing, recreation, and transportation needs and directly shapes the role of the park system.

Since 1980, Whitewater has experienced modest but steady population change, influenced by both permanent residents and enrollment at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater (UW–Whitewater). For planning purposes, this plan uses the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 decennial census count of 14,889 residents as the baseline population for the 2026–2031 planning period. Between 2020 and 2025, preliminary estimates indicate that Whitewater's population grew to approximately 15,646 residents, reflecting an increase of about 757 people (5%). UW–Whitewater continues to be a major driver of demand for recreation and social spaces, with 2025–2026 enrollment projected at approximately 12,075 students, including the Rock County campus (University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, 2025).

3.1 Population Trends

Between the 2020 U.S. Census and 2025 population estimates, Whitewater's population increased, rising from 14,889 residents in 2020 to approximately 15,646 residents in 2025. This growth represents an addition of about 757 residents, or a 5% increase citywide. The Jefferson County portion of the city grew modestly, while the Walworth County portion accounted for the majority of the increase (Wisconsin Department of Administration, 2025 Preliminary Municipal Population Estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census).

Population Change (2020–2025)

Whitewater Population: 2020 Census vs. 2025 Preliminary Estimates

Source / Geography	2020 Census	2025 Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Jefferson County portion	4,416	4,029	-387	-8.8%

Source / Geography	2020 Census	2025 Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Walworth County portion	10,473*	11,617	+1,144	+10.9%
Whitewater Total	14,889	15,646	+757	+5.1%

*Note: The Walworth County portion is derived by subtracting the Jefferson County population (4,416) from the Census total (14,889).

In practical terms, this means that Whitewater has slightly more residents today than five years ago — and its service population remains especially high when UW-Whitewater students are factored in.

3.2 Age Distribution

Whitewater remains younger than many surrounding communities due to the student population. In 2025, 88.7% of residents are age 18 or older, compared to 88.2% in 2020. At the same time, seniors (65+) are projected to grow steadily in number, while family-age residents remain relatively stable.

This unique age mix — a large student population alongside a growing senior population — creates diverse recreation needs. Students drive demand for trails, sports fields, and social gathering spaces, while older adults benefit from accessible paths, shaded seating, and low-impact recreation.

3.3 Implications for Parks Planning

Demographic trends carry important implications for the city's parks and recreation system:

- **Population growth and stable family-age households** mean the city must focus on reinvesting in existing assets, ensuring they remain modern, safe, and attractive while also accommodating gradual increases in demand, rather than relying solely on new growth to fund amenities.
- **Student influence** drives strong demand for active sports facilities, trails, multipurpose courts, and flexible spaces that support informal recreation and social connection.
- **The increasing Latino population** contributes to the city's cultural diversity and underscores the need for welcoming, family-orientated gathering spaces, bilingual communication, and inclusive programming.

- **Aging residents** require accessible parks with smooth walking loops, benches, shaded gathering areas, and universally designed facilities. Investments in ADA compliance will ensure parks serve residents of all ages and abilities.
- **Community identity** depends on parks that bring people together — from student intramurals and youth sports to senior activities and citywide festivals.

Together, these dynamics underscore the importance of a balanced system: one that maintains and modernizes existing parks, expands trail connectivity, and provides amenities that serve Whitewater's full spectrum of residents — from students to seniors.

4. Planning Process

The development of the *Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026-2031* was a collaborative process designed to combine data, professional expertise, and the voices of residents. Each phase built upon the previous one, ensuring that the final plan reflects both technical needs and community priorities.

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Background Review

The planning process began with a thorough review of existing documents, including the 2008–2013 Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan, the 2015 Strategic Plan, neighborhood development plans, and the Whitewater Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. This step established a baseline by updating demographics, land use patterns, growth indicators, and facility inventories. Reviewing past plans allowed the City to identify which recommendations had been implemented, which remained outstanding, and where new priorities were emerging.

Phase 2: Community Engagement

Public input played a central role in shaping the plan. In 2025, a citywide survey gathered responses from hundreds of residents, providing insight into how people use parks, what amenities they value most, and where they see gaps. A second survey is planned for the end of 2026 to broaden representation and measure progress as the plan is implemented.

Phase 3: Park Inventory, Site Assessments, and Mapping

Every park, open space, and facility was inventoried and assessed for size, classification, amenities, condition, and accessibility. This included documenting whether facilities met ADA standards, identifying where infrastructure such as restrooms or shelters were aging, and mapping service areas to show geographic equity. GIS-based mapping also highlighted gaps in access, particularly in developing neighborhoods, and opportunities for future trail connections.

Phase 4: Needs Assessment and Strategic Themes

Data from the inventory was synthesized to identify key needs. These included modernizing aging facilities, expanding trail connectivity, addressing equity and accessibility gaps, and increasing shade, natural restoration, and environmental

stewardship. Strategic themes emerged around maintenance, connectivity, inclusion, and resilience.

Phase 5: Goals, Recommendations, and Draft Plan

Building on these findings, City staff and the Parks and Recreation Board drafted the mission, vision, and core values for the plan. Goals were established around quality, equity, connectivity, stewardship, engagement, and sustainable funding. System-wide and site-specific recommendations were developed to guide future investment, ensuring that the plan not only sets priorities but also identifies strategies for implementation.

Phase 6: Review, Adoption, and Integration

The draft plan is being reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Board, Plan Commission, and the Common Council. Following adoption, it will be submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for certification, maintaining the City's eligibility for Stewardship and LWCF grant programs. Once certified, the plan will be integrated into the City's Comprehensive Plan. A follow-up Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan will provide more detailed project phasing, cost estimates, and site-specific implementation steps.

5. Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

Enhance quality of life in Whitewater by providing safe, inclusive, and inspiring parks, recreation programs, and open spaces for all.

Vision

Whitewater will be a community where parks and recreation are central to daily life — places where residents and students connect with nature, gather with friends and family, celebrate traditions, and build a healthier, more sustainable future.

Core Values

Our work is guided by values that reflect the spirit of Whitewater:

- **Inclusion and Accessibility** – Every park and program should be welcoming, safe, and usable for all ages and abilities.
- **Stewardship and Sustainability** – We protect and enhance the city's natural, cultural, and financial resources for future generations.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – Parks and recreation support physical activity, mental health, and community resilience.
- **Community Pride and Connection** – Parks bring people together, strengthen neighborhoods, and build civic pride.
- **Innovation and Excellence** – We embrace creativity and continuous improvement to deliver high-quality services.
- **Environmental Responsibility** – Sustainable design and maintenance practices keep Whitewater's parks resilient and inspiring.

6. Park and Recreation System Overview

The City of Whitewater manages a diverse system of parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities that provide opportunities for play, wellness, cultural expression, and environmental stewardship. To organize this system and evaluate future needs, the plan uses the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) classification system, adapted to Whitewater's context.

Park Classification and Standards

Two benchmarks guide system planning:

- **Gross Acreage Standard** – NRPA recommends 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 residents (not including conservancy lands). With more than approximately 160 acres of developed parkland, Whitewater exceeds this guideline.
- **Service Area Standard** – Each park type has a typical service radius. This ensures residents can reach a park within a short walk or bike ride, and helps identify gaps in access in growing or underserved neighborhoods.

Park Classifications

- **Mini Parks (up to 2.5 acres)**
 - **Service Area:** Within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile
 - **Population Served:** 0.25–0.5 acres per 1,000 residents
 - Small, walkable greenspaces designed to serve nearby residents.
- **Neighborhood Parks (2–10 acres)**
 - **Service Area:** $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ mile
 - **Population Served:** 1–2 acres per 1,000 residents
 - Moderately sized parks serving surrounding residential areas, typically including playgrounds, courts, or open green space.
- **Community Parks (10+ acres)**
 - **Service Area:** 1.5 miles or more
 - **Population Served:** 5–8 acres per 1,000 residents
 - Large, multi-purpose parks that serve the entire community and often support regional visitors.

Park Type	Typical Size	Service Area	Population Served	Typical Features
Mini Park	Up to 2.5 acres	¼ mile radius	0.25–0.5 acres per 1,000 residents	Tot lots, benches, pocket greens
Neighborhood Park	2–10 acres	¼–½ mile radius	1–2 acres per 1,000 residents	Playgrounds, sport courts, picnic shelters, open lawns
Community Park	10+ acres	1.5+ mile radius	5–8 acres per 1,000 residents	Ballfields, aquatic facilities, event space, trails, parking

Recreation Area Classifications

- **Active Recreation Areas** – Facilities for structured, high-use activities such as athletic fields, playgrounds, courts, skateparks, splash pads, dog parks, and community gardens.
- **Passive Recreation Areas** – Open/natural areas designed for less-structured recreation like walking, picnicking, or nature viewing.
- **Special Use Areas** – Unique or civic facilities such as amphitheaters, plazas, or historic sites that provide cultural or interpretive value.
- **Conservancy Areas** – Permanently protected natural lands, often sensitive environments such as wetlands, floodplains, and wildlife corridors. These areas are not counted as developed parkland but are essential to habitat protection and ecological resilience.

Note on Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve

The Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve holds unique cultural and spiritual significance as a sacred Native American burial site. It is managed as both a Special Use and Conservancy Area, with an emphasis on preservation and education. The preserve, approximately 21.5 acres, is not included in the developed park acreage but remains one of the most meaningful sites in the park system.

7. Existing Parks and Open Spaces Inventory

The City of Whitewater manages 22 properties. Each listing includes the park name, classification, location, acreage, features, and notes.

Armory Gym & Community Building — *Special Use Area*

- **Location:** 146 W North St.
- **Acreage:** 0.9 acres
- **Features:** Gymnasium, summer camp space, dance studio, classroom space, community food pantry, kitchen space.
- **Notes:** Multifunctional public facility; polling location for Wards 1–7.

Big Brick Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 611 W Center St.
- **Acreage:** 1.1 acres
- **Features:** Open green space, playground, basketball court, drinking water.
- **Notes:** Seasonal community ice rink and warming house.

Brewery Hill Park / Skatepark — *Neighborhood Park*

- **Location:** 116 W North St.
- **Acreage:** 7.3 acres
- **Features:** Open green space, drinking water, multipurpose trail, 8,000 sq. ft. skatepark, fishing access.
- **Notes:** Popular with teens and young adults.

Clay Street Nature Park — *Mini Park (Conservancy designation)*

- **Location:** 511 E Clay St.
- **Acreage:** 1.41 acres
- **Features:** Open green space, fishing access.
- **Notes:** Passive recreation elements; portions managed as natural preservation area.

Cravath Lakefront Park — *Community Park*

- **Location:** 341 S Fremont St.
- **Acreage:** 6.1 acres

- **Features:** Open-air picnic shelter, indoor rental (Cravath Lakefront Building), drinking water, restrooms, boat ramp, fishing, trails, ungroomed XC skiing, snowshoeing, amphitheater, open green space, lakeside views, trail connections.
- **Notes:** Central gathering space; home to Christmas at Cravath, Tuesday Market, Food Truck Festival, Concerts in the Park, Fourth of July, and other major events.

Flat Iron Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 402 W Main St.
- **Acreage:** 0.7 acres
- **Features:** Birge Fountain.
- **Notes:** Summer “Savory Sounds” music series hosted by Whitewater Arts Alliance.

Main Street Shoppes Courtyard — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 112 N 1st St.
- **Acreage:** 0.1 acres
- **Features:** Seating area with picnic tables.
- **Notes:** Small plaza-style site in the downtown district.

Meadowsweet Park — *Neighborhood Park*

- **Location:** 601 N Tratt St.
- **Acreage:** 4 acres
- **Features:** Open green space, detention area, sidewalks.
- **Notes:** Lightly developed site; no formal amenities.

Mill Race Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 124 W Main St.
- **Acreage:** 0.6 acres
- **Features:** Lake access, fishing access.
- **Notes:** Small site with water access for passive recreation.

Minneiska Park — *Community Park*

- **Location:** Parkside Dr. & Tanner Way
- **Acreage:** 20 acres

- **Features:** Trails, playground equipment, open space.
- **Notes:** Serves surrounding residential areas with trail connections.

Moraine View Park — *Community Park*

- **Location:** 1201 Innovation Dr.
- **Acreage:** 45 acres
- **Features:** Multi-use trails, community gardens, soccer fields.
- **Notes:** Large, partly developed site with mixed recreational uses.

Optimist Turtle Mound Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 1302 Turtle Mound Ln.
- **Acreage:** 1.0 acres
- **Features:** Playground, open-air picnic shelter, open green space.
- **Notes:** Used for both recreation and cultural purposes.

Ray Trost Nature Preserve — *Mini Park (Conservancy designation)*

- **Location:** 130 W Starin Rd.
- **Acreage:** 2.0 acres
- **Features:** Multi-use trails, seating, reflection garden.
- **Notes:** Dedicated in honor of former city naturalist; contemplative and educational value.

Skyway Park — *Neighborhood Park*

- **Location:** Tower Hill Pass (Park Crest Subdivision)
- **Acreage:** 4.0 acres
- **Features:** Playground, open green space.
- **Notes:** Serves adjacent residential neighborhood.

Starin Park — *Community Park*

- **Location:** 504 W Starin Rd.
- **Acreage:** 34.6 acres
- **Features:** Multi-use trails; community building; public restrooms; Senior Center; Arboretum; historic water tower; Treyton's Field of Dreams; open-air shelters; horseshoe pits; basketball courts; baseball diamonds; outdoor fitness equipment.

- **Notes:** One of the city's oldest and most-used parks; major intergenerational hub.

Trippe Lake Park — *Community Park*

- **Location:** 407 S Wisconsin St.
- **Acreage:** 24.2 acres
- **Features:** Picnic area, open-air picnic shelter, restrooms, playground, boat ramp, fishing, trails/hiking.
- **Notes:** Popular destination for nature access and passive recreation.

Walton East Gate Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** Jakes Way & Ash Ln.
- **Acreage:** 2.0 acres
- **Features:** Playground, open green space.
- **Notes:** Neighborhood green space.

Walton Oaks Park — *Mini Park*

- **Location:** 654 Stonefield Ln.
- **Acreage:** 2.6 acres
- **Features:** Open green space.
- **Notes:** Serves Walton Oaks subdivision.

Whitewater Aquatic & Fitness Center (WAFC) — *Special Use Area*

- **Location:** 580 S Elizabeth St.
- **Acreage:** Facility footprint within school campus
- **Features:** Indoor pool; leisure pool with slide, lazy river & water play; fitness center; locker rooms; concessions; fitness studio; meeting room; program space.
- **Notes:** Partnership facility with School District; provides year-round aquatic and fitness opportunities.

Whitewater Bark Park — *Special Use Area*

- **Location:** 546 N Jefferson St.
- **Acreage:** 3.64 acres
- **Features:** Fenced dog park, seating, shade structures.
- **Notes:** Heavily used; volunteer-supported amenity.

Whitewater Creek Nature Area — *Conservancy Area*

- **Location:** 685 N Fremont St.
- **Acreage:** ~60 acres
- **Features:** Woodlands and stream corridors; informal trail access; wildlife viewing.
- **Notes:** Conservancy land managed for habitat and passive use.

Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve — *Special Use/Conservancy Area*

- **Location:** 288 Indian Mound Pkwy
- **Acreage:** ~21.5 acres
- **Features:** Sacred Native American burial mounds; interpretive and natural setting.
- **Notes:** Managed with cultural and ecological sensitivity; not included in developed acreage totals.

Park / Facility	Classification	Acreage
Armory Gym & Community Building	Special Use Area	0.9
Big Brick Park	Mini Park	1.1
Brewery Hill Park / Skatepark	Neighborhood Park	7.3
Clay Street Nature Park	Mini Park (Conservancy)	1.41
Cravath Lakefront Park	Community Park	6.1
Flat Iron Park	Mini Park	0.7
Main Street Shoppes Courtyard	Mini Park	0.1
Meadowsweet Park	Neighborhood Park	4.0
Mill Race Park	Mini Park	0.6
Minneiska Park	Community Park	20.0
Moraine View Park	Community Park	45.0
Optimist Turtle Mound Park	Mini Park	1.0
Ray Trost Nature Preserve	Mini Park (Conservancy)	2.0
Skyway Park	Neighborhood Park	4.0
Starin Park	Community Park	34.6
Trippe Lake Park	Community Park	24.2
Walton East Gate Park	Mini Park	2.0
Walton Oaks Park	Mini Park	2.6

Park / Facility	Classification	Acreage
Whitewater Aquatic & Fitness Center (WAFC)	Special Use Area	N/A*
Whitewater Bark Park	Special Use Area	3.64
Whitewater Creek Nature Area	Conservancy Area	~60.0
Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve	Special Use / Conservancy Area	~21.5

Total Developed Acreage: 161.25 acres

Conservancy Lands (not counted as developed): 81.5 acres

Grand Total (All Managed Lands): 242.75 acres

* WAFC footprint lies within the School District campus and is not counted toward parkland acreage.

8. Needs Assessment

The needs assessment combines input from residents, data from surveys, site assessments, and professional evaluations of the park and recreation system. Together, these findings highlight what Whitewater values most, where the system performs well, and where improvements are needed to ensure equitable access, long-term sustainability, and high-quality experiences for all.

Community Engagement Themes

The 2025 Open Space Community Survey (427 responses) and the 2025 Recreation Programs Survey (135 responses) provided a comprehensive view of community needs. Respondents represented a range of age groups, with strong participation from households aged 35–54 and retirees. UW–Whitewater students were underrepresented, which is notable given their impact on local recreation.

Park access is strong, with 66.2 percent of residents reporting they can walk to a nearby park and 64.7 percent able to reach destinations by bicycle. Most residents visit parks weekly or monthly, with Starin Park, Cravath Lakefront Park, Trippe Lake Park, and the Whitewater Bark Park seeing the highest levels of frequent use.

Recreation program participation is also significant, with 61.5 percent of residents reporting attendance at a recreation program or event in the past three years. The most cited events were Concerts in the Park and Christmas at Cravath, with additional participation in youth sports, fitness programs, arts, and family events.

Priorities Identified by Residents

Maintenance and modernization are the top priority, with 74.6 percent of households identifying the need to keep parks clean, safe, and functional. Trails and connectivity were strongly supported, with 55.1 percent prioritizing hiking trails and 53.9 percent paved trails. Open-ended comments emphasized the importance of neighborhood trail connections, particularly east–west across the city. Accessibility and inclusion also emerged as key themes, with 28.2 percent identifying accessible parks as a top priority. Satisfaction ratings were lowest for restrooms and playgrounds, reflecting outdated equipment and ADA barriers. Environmental stewardship was another strong theme, with 44.9 percent requesting more shade and tree canopy, and 41.2 percent supporting restoration of natural areas. Residents highlighted invasive species control, habitat protection, and

shoreline improvements as important environmental strategies. Expanded amenities were requested by smaller but notable groups, including a splash pad (19.8 percent), pickleball courts (20.4 percent), and kayak or canoe launches (15.0 percent).

Programming and Events Needs

The Recreation Programs Survey identified demand for a wider and more diverse range of offerings. Residents prioritized music and arts (58 percent), nature and environmental education (49.5 percent), adult fitness (40.1 percent), multicultural events (34.2 percent), and senior activities (30.6 percent). Emerging interests included STEM and educational programs (41 percent), outdoor adventure (67 percent), performing arts (36 percent), and arts and crafts (44 percent). Desired events included seasonal celebrations (66 percent), community festivals (61 percent), arts and crafts fairs (58 percent), outdoor movies (45 percent), and cultural or heritage celebrations (39 percent).

These results suggest programming should not only expand but diversify, meeting resident interest in both traditional recreation (fitness, sports, nature) and new opportunities (STEM, cultural events, outdoor adventure).

Barriers to Participation

Barriers to participation vary between park access and program attendance. In the Recreation Survey, only 46.7 percent of residents said they were fully aware of program offerings, while 48.1 percent were only somewhat aware. In the Open Space Survey, 20.8 percent cited lack of awareness of events as a barrier to use. Scheduling conflicts were also significant, with 39 percent reporting that program times do not fit their schedules. Evenings and weekends were the most preferred times for participation.

Other barriers include program cost (20 percent), transportation (7 percent), and mobility limitations (6.6 percent). While most residents (90.9 percent) reported feeling safe in parks and trails, a small percentage (6.6 percent) cited safety concerns as a barrier.

Facility and Infrastructure Needs

Survey results and site assessments identified facility reinvestment as a core need. Restrooms and playgrounds received the lowest satisfaction ratings and require

modernization. Many playgrounds need replacement and inclusive design with accessible surfacing and routes. Trails remain incomplete, limiting connections between neighborhoods, schools, and parks. Natural areas require sustained investment in tree planting, invasive species management, and shoreline stabilization.

Climate and Resilience Needs

Residents expressed strong support for strategies that address climate resilience. Priorities include stormwater and flooding solutions such as dredging, shoreline stabilization, rain gardens, and bioswales; expanded tree canopy and shade structures at high-use sites to address heat; invasive species control and native plantings to support biodiversity; and sustainable operations through light-colored, heat-reducing pavements, water-wise landscaping, and transitioning to electric landscaping equipment where feasible.

Senior Recreation Needs

The Recreation Survey highlighted significant gaps in awareness and use of senior programming. Among respondents over age 55, 64 percent were unaware of the Senior Center. Barriers included limited awareness, lack of variety in programming, and scheduling conflicts. Expanded promotion, diversified program offerings, and partnerships with local organizations will be essential to meeting the recreation needs of older adults.

9. Recommendations and Strategies

The recommendations in this plan are designed to balance community priorities, address identified gaps, and ensure sustainable management of Whitewater's park and recreation system. They reflect the findings of the 2025 Community Surveys, site assessments, and best practices in parks and recreation planning.

Recommendations are presented in two categories: system-wide strategies and site-specific improvements.

System-Wide Recommendations

High Priority

- **Maintenance and modernization** – Residents ranked maintaining clean and functional facilities as their highest priority, with 74.6 percent identifying it as essential. This includes restrooms, shelters, signage, roofs, and other core infrastructure.
- **Accessibility and inclusion** – With 28.2 percent of residents identifying accessible parks as a top priority, upgrades are needed to ensure ADA compliance and universal design. Improvements include accessible restrooms, inclusive playgrounds, and safe trail access.
- **Connectivity and trails** – Hiking trails (55.1 percent) and paved trails (53.9 percent) were the most requested amenities. Expanded trail networks and safe walking/biking connections between neighborhoods, schools, and downtown should be prioritized.

Medium Priority

- **Shade and environmental enhancements** – 44.9 percent of households requested more shade trees and 41.2 percent supported natural area restoration. Tree planting, shade structures, shoreline stabilization, and invasive species management are central to this strategy.
- **Expanded amenities** – Smaller but notable groups supported the addition of splash pads (19.8 percent), pickleball courts (20.4 percent), kayak or canoe launches (15.0 percent), and multipurpose fields and courts.
- **Programming and events** – The Recreation Programs Survey identified strong demand for music and arts (58 percent), nature and environmental education (49.5 percent), adult fitness (40.1 percent), multicultural events (34.2 percent), and senior activities (30.6 percent). Emerging interests included STEM and educational programming (41 percent), outdoor

adventure (67 percent), performing arts (36 percent), and arts and crafts (44 percent). Events such as seasonal celebrations, community festivals, arts and crafts fairs, outdoor movies, and cultural or heritage events were also frequently requested.

- **Partnerships and funding** – Partnerships with UW–Whitewater, service clubs, businesses, and nonprofit organizations will be essential to expand capacity. Continued pursuit of grants, sponsorships, and other funding sources will support both capital and operational needs.
- **Marketing and communication** – While previously considered lower priority, both surveys demonstrated significant gaps in awareness. In the Recreation Programs Survey, only 46.7 percent of respondents said they were fully aware of program offerings, and 48.1 percent were only somewhat aware. Expanded communication through social media, email newsletters, signage, and community outreach are necessary.

Low Priority

- **Specialized amenities and promotions** – While less broadly supported, interest remains for niche amenities such as agility equipment at the Bark Park, expanded disc golf, and other specialized facilities. These should be considered opportunistically in partnership with community groups.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Armory Gym & Community Building

- Sealcoat parking lot.
- Refinish Gym floor.
- Install drop ceiling in Dance Studio.
- Better defined program space and utilization.
- Continue routine maintenance and community programming.

Big Brick Park

- Discontinue ice rink maintenance due to rising staff costs and low community usage.
- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Brewery Hill Park / Skatepark

- Repair skatepark features, possible relocation to Big Brick Park.
- Improve access to creek for increased fishability.

Clay Street Nature Park

- Replace pier.
- Remove nonnative shoreline trees.
- Add benches for passive recreation.
- Include in Lakes Management planning for invasive species and shoreline improvements.

Cravath Lakefront Park

- Repair sinking sidewalk bricks to improve accessibility.
- Address dam issues required by state regulations.
- Improve flower gardens.
- Install new sign structure for informational signage.
- Replace roof on Cravath Community Building.
- Replace roof on picnic shelter.
- Improve seating for concerts.
- Consider increased community event planning.
- Sealcoat parking lot.
- Installation of new fishing/kayak pier.
- Installation of new fountain.
- Include in Lakes Management planning for invasive species and shoreline improvements.

Flat Iron Park

- Installation of digital signage.
- Repair Birge Fountain.

Main Street Shoppes Courtyard

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Meadowsweet Park

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Mill Race Park

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Minneiska Park

- Improve playground accessibility with paths, ramps, borders, and surfacing.
- Repair pathways and replace damaged benches.
- Replace pathway connection to Trippe Lake Park.
- Add disc golf and link to Trippe Park.
- Install soccer practice goals.
- Evaluate potential pickleball site.
- Long term installation of restroom facility.

Moraine View Park

- Construct restroom/concession building.
- Create maintenance management plan for facility.

Optimist Turtle Mound Park

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Ray Trost Nature Preserve

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue ecological monitoring and stewardship. Continue routine maintenance.

Skyway Park

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Starin Park

- Replace roofs on shelters and restrooms.
- Replace Senior Center restrooms.
- Install splash pad.
- Install new shelter.

- Replace playground equipment.
- Replace grills with larger picnic-size grills at both shelters.
- Ballfield complex improvements:
 - Install shade structures at bleachers.
 - Inspect and repair bleachers.
 - Repair or replace fencing.
 - Resurface diamonds, prioritizing FCCU field.
 - Improve turf in outfields.
 - Replace outfield screens.
 - Paint dugouts.
 - Inspect and repair/replace timbers on stairs west side of Southern Lakes Field.
 - Repair scoreboards, install protective screen on Treyton's Field of Dreams scoreboard.
 - Evaluate concrete pads.
 - Purchase aerifier.
 - Purchase infield rake.
- Maintain Arboretum with dedicated resources.
- Sealcoat parking lots and repaint lines.

Trippe Lake Park

- Replace outdated playground equipment.
- Address dam and shoreline issues as required by the state.
- Improve rain garden.
- Reconstruct retaining wall and hillside improvements.
- Replace walkway and railings on bridges.
- Repair or replace pathway behind condominiums.
- Remove/replace brick veneer from wall behind condominiums.
- Install parking lot at top of sledding hill.
- Replace roof on upper shelter.
- Repaint and stain upper shelter.
- Replace grills with larger picnic-size grills at both shelters.
- Repair and sealcoat existing parking lot.

Walton East Gate Park

- Improve playground accessibility and safety surfacing.
- Evaluate potential for a basketball court, pickleball court or splash pad.

Walton Oaks Park

- No major improvements recommended at this time. Continue routine maintenance.

Whitewater Aquatic & Fitness Center (WAFC)

- Major improvements anticipated, but to be addressed through upcoming capital campaign.
- This plan does not list individual projects to avoid duplication; recommendations will be integrated with campaign outcomes.

Whitewater Bark Park

- Install new drinking fountain.
- Add improved signage.
- Add benches.
- Plant additional shade trees.
- Installation of shade structures.
- Explore addition of agility equipment.

Whitewater Creek Nature Area

- Parking lot improvements.
- Invasive tree removal.
- Continue ecological monitoring and stewardship.

Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve

Management activities at the Effigy Mounds Preserve will continue to follow the guidelines established in the *Effigy Mounds Preserve Maintenance Plan (2011)*, including prescribed burns, native vegetation restoration, and invasive species control.

Lakes Management

Cravath Lake, Trippe Lake, and Clay Street Nature Park contain important water resources that provide recreation and community value but face ecological challenges requiring active management. A coordinated lakes management plan should be developed in partnership with the Wisconsin DNR, consultants, and

local stakeholders guided by SEWRPC's Lake Protection Plan (2011) and Aquatic Plant Management Plan (2025).

Cravath Lake

- Invasive species removal.
- Cattail removal and shoreline management.
- Long-term management strategy to be developed with partners.

Trippe Lake

- Invasive species removal.
- Cattail removal and shoreline management.
- Long-term management strategy to be developed with partners.

Clay Street Nature Park

- Invasive species removal.
- Shoreline and pond management.
- Long-term management strategy to be developed with partners.

System-Wide Pathway Maintenance

- Sealcoat and maintain multi-use pathways throughout the city to preserve surface condition, safety, and accessibility.

Veterans Park

- Develop a new dedicated Veterans Park to honor those who have served in the armed forces.
- Consolidate all existing veterans' monuments from throughout the community into this park, creating a single, unified location for remembrance.
- Include new memorial features such as monuments, flags, interpretive signage, and contemplative seating areas.
- Design the park to support community ceremonies and gatherings, while maintaining a quiet and respectful atmosphere for daily use.
- Integrate accessibility, shade, and landscaping consistent with other civic spaces in Whitewater.
- Establish ongoing partnerships with veterans' groups and community organizations to guide design, programming, and long-term stewardship.

Summary

Together, the system-wide and site-specific recommendations form a balanced roadmap for Whitewater's parks and recreation system. They reflect what residents emphasized in the 2025 Community Surveys—maintenance, trails, accessibility, shade, programming diversity, and communication—while also addressing Board and staff observations of urgent facility needs. The next section, the Implementation Plan, translates these recommendations into phased actions, and responsibilities to guide the City of Whitewater in carrying out this plan over the next five years.

10. Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a framework for translating recommendations into action. It outlines priorities, timelines, funding opportunities, and responsibilities for carrying out improvements across Whitewater's parks and recreation system. While the plan emphasizes the next five years (2026–2031), it also considers longer-term strategies to guide investments through 2036.

Guiding Principles

The following principles inform implementation:

- **Maintain first, expand second.** Reinvestment in existing facilities will be prioritized before adding new amenities.
- **Leverage partnerships.** Collaboration with UW–Whitewater, community organizations, and regional agencies will extend capacity and resources.
- **Pursue grants and funding strategically.** Maintaining DNR certification ensures eligibility for Stewardship and LWCF grants, which should be paired with local funds, sponsorships, and donations.
- **Advance equity and inclusion.** Every project will be evaluated for its contribution to accessibility, safety, and welcoming design.
- **Plan for resilience.** Projects should integrate sustainable practices, from energy-efficient equipment to nature-based stormwater management.

Phasing and Prioritization

Projects are phased into three categories:

Immediate (2026–2027)

- ADA upgrades to playgrounds, restrooms, and surfacing at high-use parks.
- Roof replacements at Cravath Lakefront, Trippe Lake, and Starin Park facilities.
- Skatepark repairs at Brewery Hill Park.
- Installation of splash pad and picnic shelter at Starin Park.
- Moraine View concession stand and restroom construction.
- Dam compliance projects at Cravath and Trippe Lake.
- Communication improvements: updated website, program guide, and coordinated marketing.
- Expanded program offerings in music/arts, fitness, and nature education.

Mid-Term (2028–2030)

- Shade structures at Starin Park ballfields, Bark Park and other high-use play areas.
- New amenities: kayak/canoe launches at Trippe and Cravath, and multipurpose courts.
- Playground replacements at additional neighborhood parks.
- Expanded programming in STEM, multicultural events, and outdoor adventure.
- Senior Center renovation and program expansion.

Long-Term (2030–2035)

- Continued natural area restoration, invasive species management, and canopy expansion.
- Ongoing upgrades to shelters, signage, and restrooms as needed.
- Trail connections linking neighborhoods, schools, and downtown.
- Evaluation of emerging recreation trends and future amenities.

Funding and Partnerships

Implementation will require a blend of local investment and external funding. Key opportunities include:

- Wisconsin DNR Stewardship Program
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- Wisconsin DOT Transportation Alternatives Program (for trails)
- Partnerships with UW–Whitewater, Whitewater Unified School District for facilities and program expansion
- Service clubs, businesses, and nonprofit sponsorships for targeted projects
- Volunteer and “friends of parks” groups to support stewardship and programming

Monitoring and Updates

Implementation will be tracked through annual reporting to the Parks and Recreation Board. Progress will be measured against the following benchmarks:

- Number of facility upgrades completed.
- Miles of trails added or improved.
- New amenities introduced.
- Program participation and satisfaction levels.

- Grant dollars leveraged.

The Implementation Plan is intended to be flexible, allowing projects to shift as funding, partnerships, and opportunities evolve. Regular updates and community input will ensure that the City of Whitewater remains responsive to changing needs and priorities.

11. Conclusion

The 2026-2031 Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan establishes a comprehensive framework for guiding the future of Whitewater's parks, open spaces, and recreation programs. Developed with significant input from residents and City staff, the plan reflects the community's shared values of health, inclusion, environmental stewardship, and civic pride.

Through a combination of system-wide strategies and site-specific improvements, the plan prioritizes reinvestment in existing facilities, expansion of trail connections, improved accessibility, and a broader range of recreation opportunities. Survey results clearly demonstrate that residents' value clean and well-maintained parks, safe and inclusive play spaces, and diverse programs that serve all ages and abilities.

Implementation of this plan will require collaboration, creativity, and sustained investment. Partnerships with UW-Whitewater, service clubs, nonprofit organizations, and regional agencies will expand the City's capacity. Continued pursuit of state and federal grants, along with innovative funding approaches, will be essential to leverage local resources.

This plan also positions Whitewater to remain eligible for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) funding programs, ensuring that the City can maximize external support for future projects. Annual monitoring and reporting will keep the plan responsive to changing community needs, and the next five-year update will build upon the accomplishments of this cycle.

Ultimately, the plan affirms that parks and recreation are essential to the identity, vitality, and resilience of Whitewater. By committing to the recommendations outlined here, the City can ensure that its parks, open spaces, and recreation programs continue to enrich daily life, foster community connections, and protect natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Call to Action

The success of this plan depends on collective commitment. City leaders, partner organizations, and residents all have a role to play in sustaining Whitewater's parks and recreation system. By working together—through stewardship, volunteerism, advocacy, and investment—the community can transform the goals of this plan into tangible improvements that enhance daily life.

The creation of Veterans Park, which could consolidate all existing veterans' monuments into a unified, dedicated space, represents a legacy investment that reflects Whitewater's values of remembrance, honor, and community pride. The next chapter for Whitewater's parks begins with the choices we make today.

Appendix A. Public Engagement Summary

Community Survey

Two community surveys were conducted in 2025 to guide this plan:

- **Open Space Community Survey** – 427 responses, focused on park use, facilities, and priorities for investment.
- **Recreation Programs Survey** – 135 responses, focused on awareness, participation, barriers, and program/event preferences.

Key findings are integrated throughout Sections 7, 8, and 9 of this plan.

Open Space Community Survey (427 responses)

- **Access:** 66.2% of residents can walk to a nearby park; 64.7% can access by bicycle.
- **Most visited parks:** Starin Park (40.8%), Cravath Lakefront (33.0%), Tripp Lake (13.1%), and Whitewater Bark Park.
- **Priorities:** Maintenance (74.6%), infrastructure modernization (44.2%), shade/trees (44.9%), natural area restoration (41.2%), accessible parks (28.2%).
- **Amenities requested:** Hiking trails (55.1%), paved trails (53.9%), open space/natural areas (49.0%), playgrounds (48.8%). Smaller groups requested splash pad (19.8%), pickleball courts (20.4%), and kayak/canoe launches (15.0%).
- **Programming priorities:** Music and arts (58.0%), nature/environment (49.5%), adult fitness (40.1%), senior activities (30.6%), multicultural events (34.2%).
- **Barriers:** Not aware of programs/events (20.8%), lack of time (20.8%), mobility limitations (6.6%), safety concerns (6.6%), transportation (2.9%).
- **Safety:** 90.9% of residents reported feeling safe in parks and trails.

Recreation Programs Survey (135 responses)

- **Awareness:** Only 46.7% of respondents were fully aware of recreation programs; 48.1% were somewhat aware.
- **Participation:** 61.5% participated in a program/event in the last three years. Top events included Concerts in the Park and Christmas at Cravath.

- **Barriers:** Lack of awareness (45%), program times not fitting schedules (39%), cost (20%), no programs of interest (13%), transportation (7%).
- **Preferred times:** Weekday evenings (65%), Saturday mornings (46%), Saturday afternoons (41%), Sunday afternoons (39%).
- **Program interests:** Outdoor adventure (67%), sports/fitness (59%), arts and crafts (44%), STEM/educational programs (41%), performing arts (36%).
- **Event preferences:** Seasonal events (66%), community festivals (61%), arts and crafts fairs (58%), outdoor movies (45%), cultural/heritage celebrations (39%).
- **Senior programs:** 64% of respondents over 55 were unaware of the Senior Center, citing lack of awareness, variety, and scheduling as barriers.

Conclusion

The community surveys provided a clear and consistent picture of Whitewater's priorities. Maintenance, accessibility, trail connectivity, shade, and program diversity emerged as the most significant themes across all forms of engagement. These results directly shaped the needs assessment in Section 8 and informed the system-wide and site-specific recommendations in Section 9, ensuring that this plan is rooted in the expressed values and aspirations of the community.

Appendix B. Maps

A series of maps were developed to support the planning and analysis of the City of Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031. These maps illustrate existing park and open-space conditions, walkability, and regional connectivity. Full-resolution versions are included in the digital appendix.

Map 1. Existing Parks and Open Spaces

Displays the distribution of community parks, neighborhood parks, mini-parks, special-use areas, and conservancy lands. Highlights geographic service gaps, including neighborhoods that currently lack a park within a short walking distance.

Map 2. NRPA 10-Minute Walk Access to Parks

This map illustrates the National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) “10-Minute Walk” accessibility model, representing the distance most residents can comfortably walk—approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile—to reach a park or recreation area.

The shaded areas show locations within Whitewater that fall inside a $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile walking radius of an existing park, open space, or recreation facility.

Areas outside the shaded zones identify neighborhoods and future development areas that lack a nearby park within a 10-minute walk.

This analysis helps the City evaluate geographic equity in park access and prioritize future park sites or trail connections to ensure that all residents—regardless of neighborhood—can reach a park safely and conveniently by foot or bicycle.

Map 3. Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Reference Maps (2013)

The following maps are drawn from the City of Whitewater Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, prepared by the Wisconsin Bike Fed (November 2013).

They are included here as legacy reference materials to illustrate the evolution of Whitewater’s bicycle and pedestrian network and to provide context for ongoing connectivity goals.

While several of the proposed facilities have since been constructed, modified, or reprioritized, these maps remain a valuable foundation for understanding long-term network vision.

Updated mapping will be produced in coordination with the forthcoming Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan.

Included Legacy Maps

- **Map 3-1. Existing Conditions (2013)** – Baseline inventory of on-street and off-street bicycle facilities and shared-use paths.
- **Map 3-2. Opportunities and Constraints (2013)** – Identifies network gaps, barriers, and opportunities for improved bicycle and pedestrian connections.

- **Map 4-1. Recommended Bikeway Network (2013)** – Illustrates the recommended citywide bikeway and shared-use-path system.
- **Maps 7-1 through 7-4. Project Prioritization (2013)** – Depict short-, medium-, and long-term phases for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure implementation.

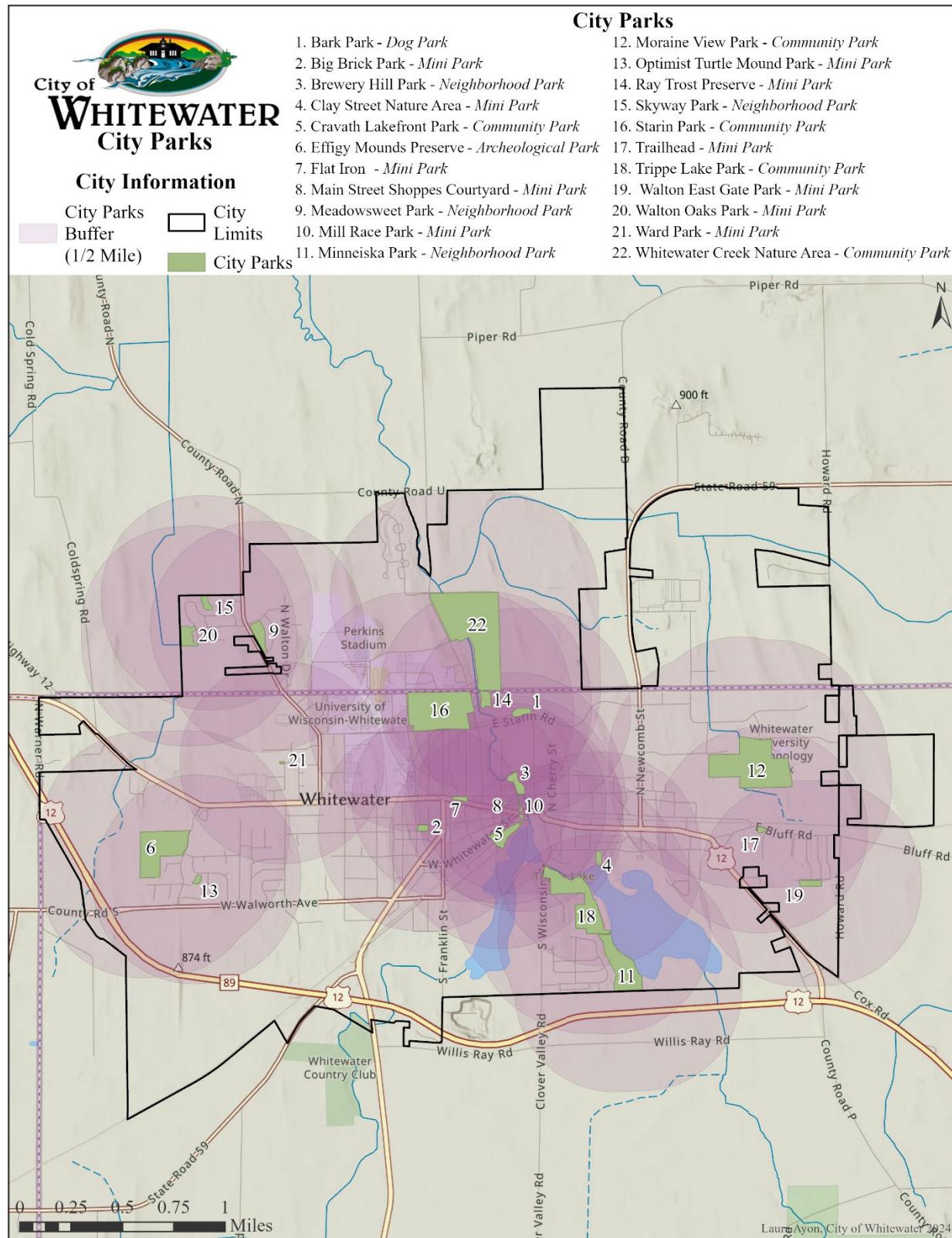
Source: City of Whitewater Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan 2013.

Note: These maps are retained for reference purposes only. They depict recommendations and project phasing from 2013 and may not reflect existing conditions or recently completed infrastructure.

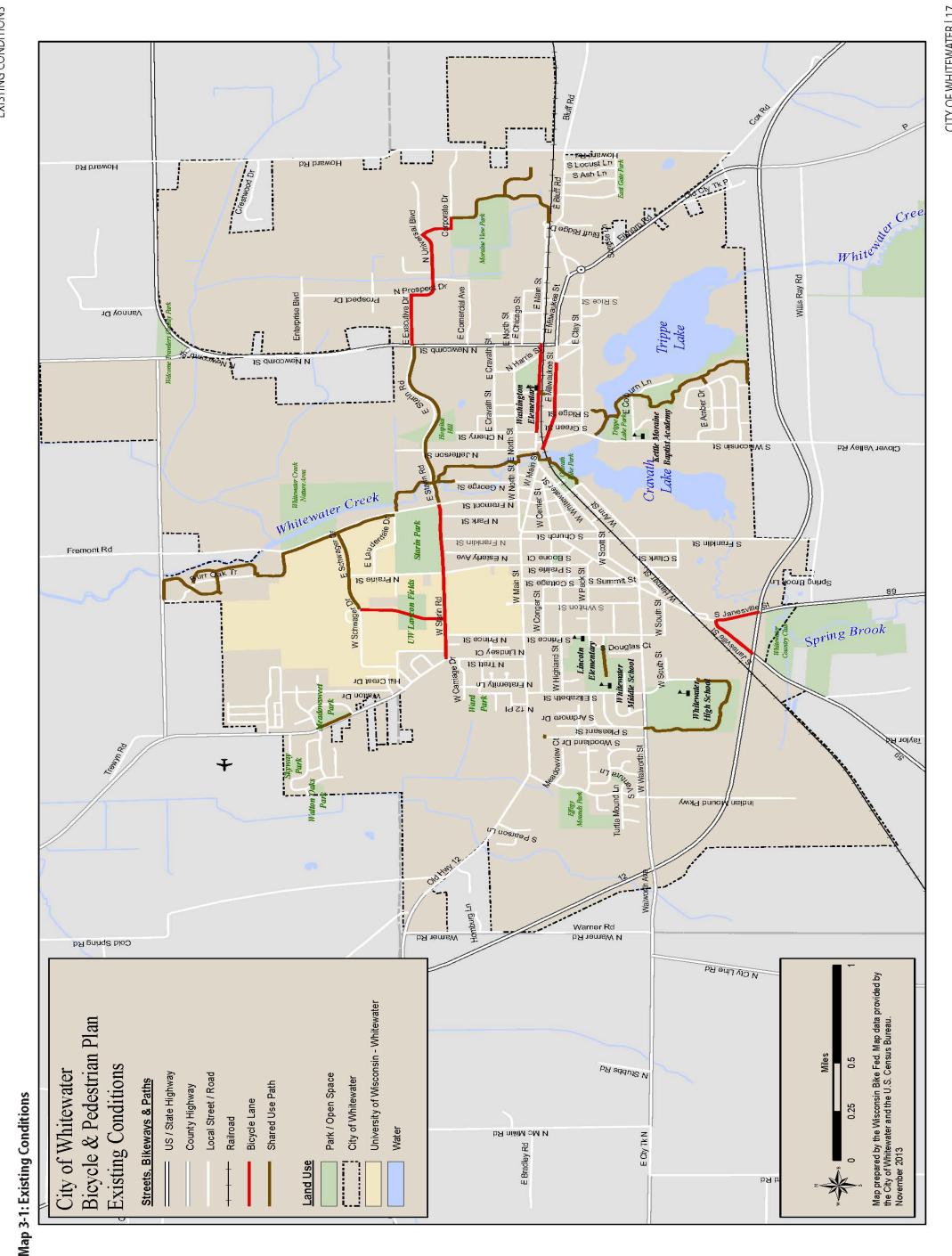
Map 1: Existing Parks and Open Spaces



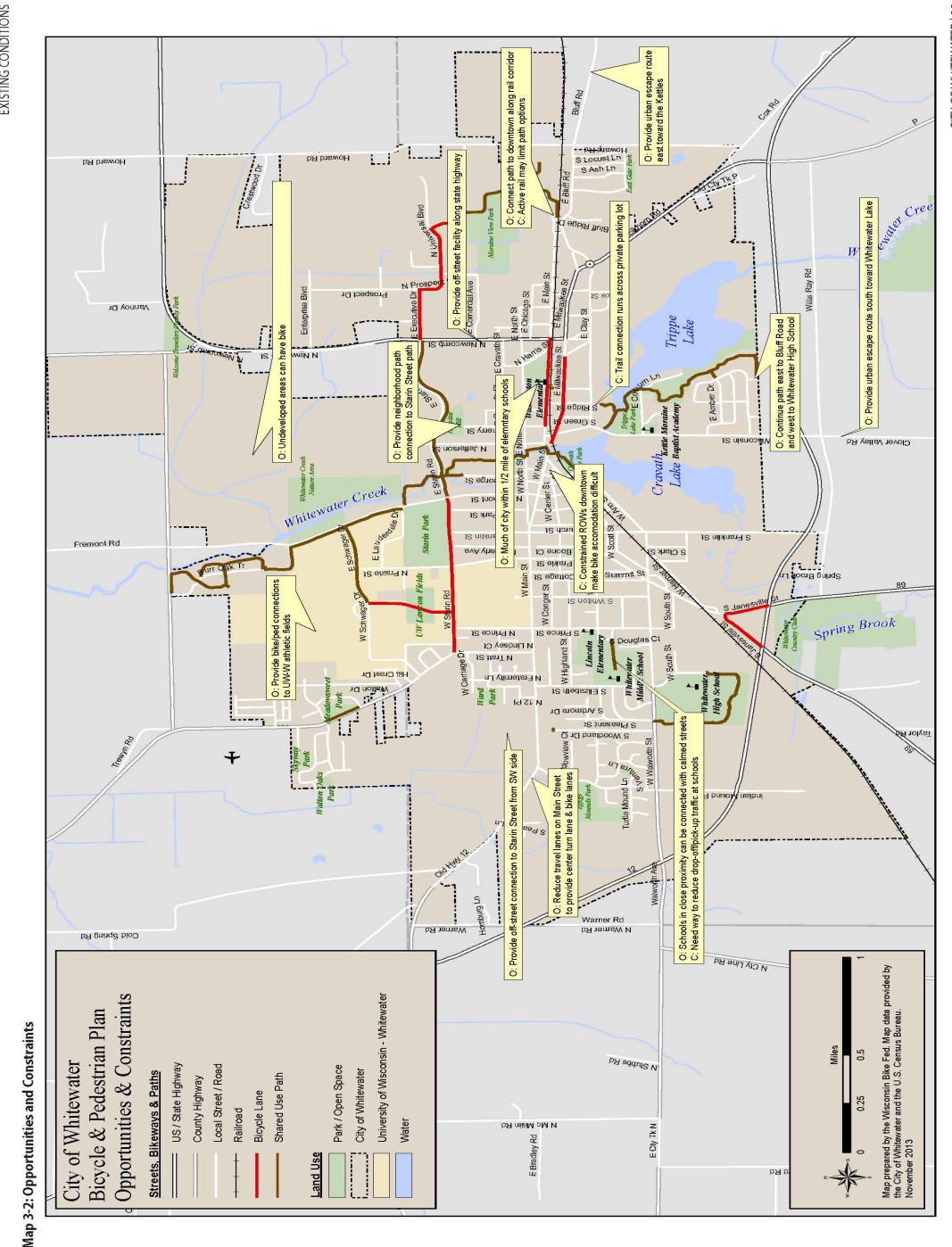
Map 2: NRPA 10-Minute Walk Access to Parks



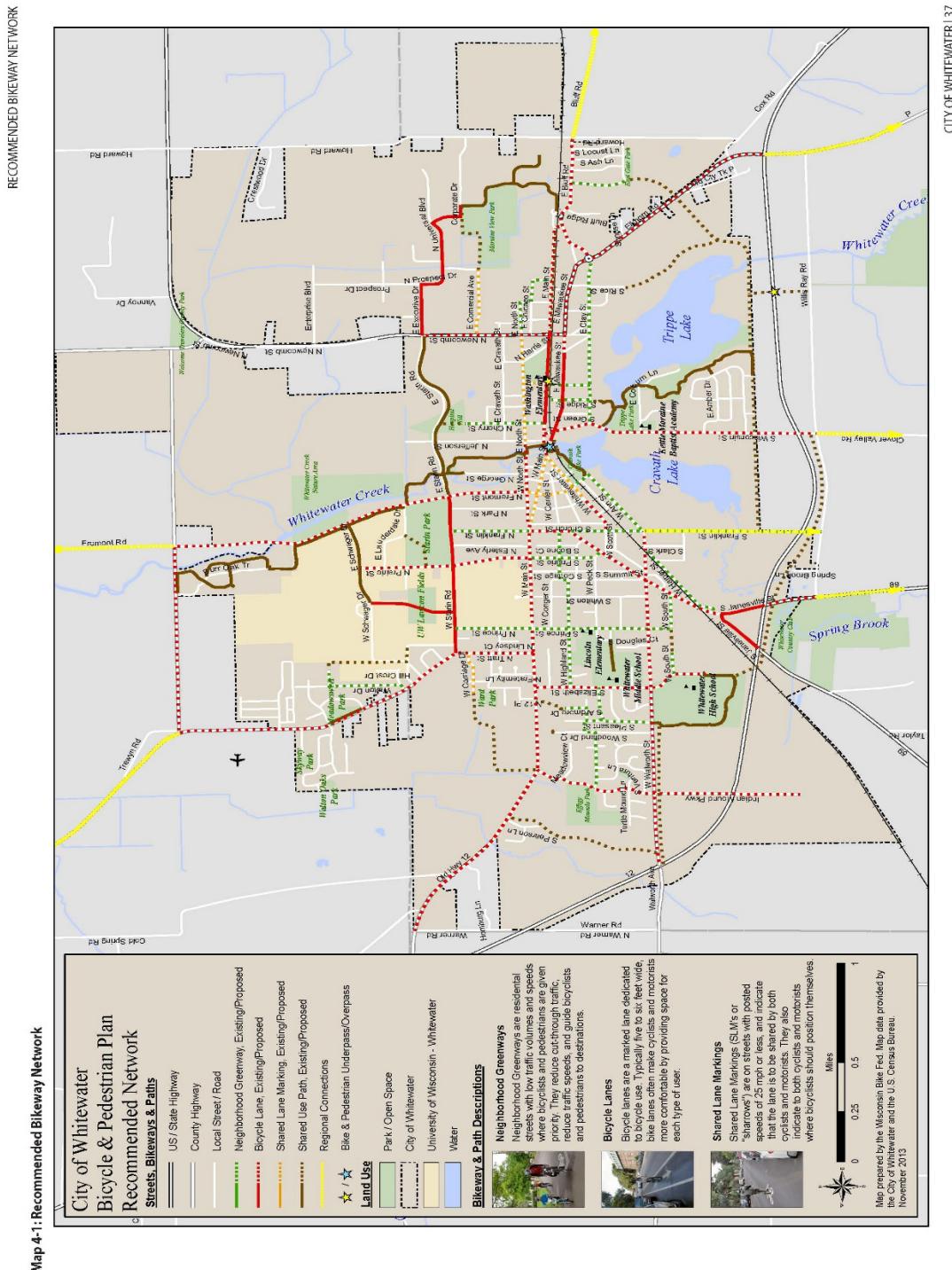
Map 3-1. Existing Conditions (2013)



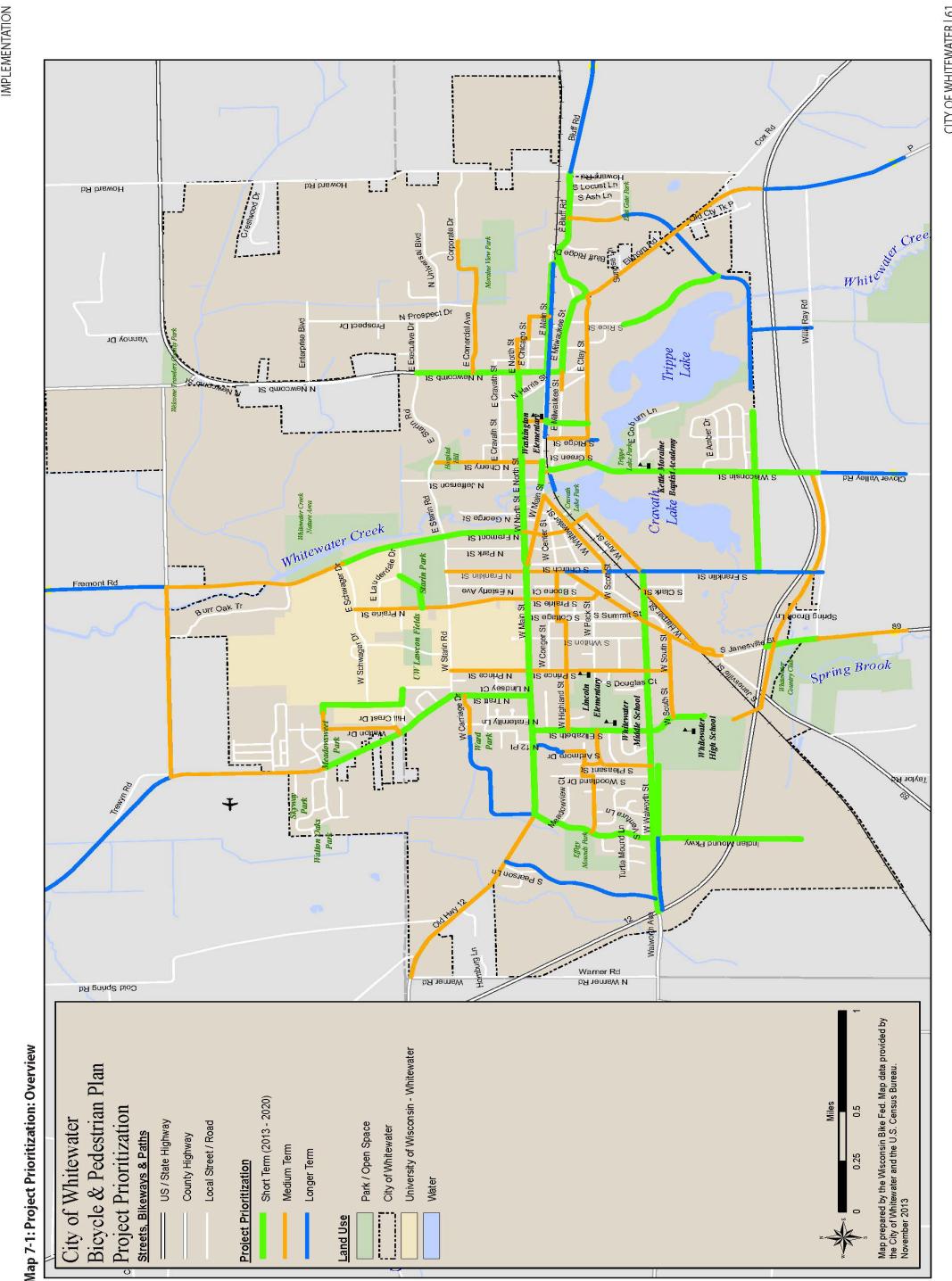
Map 3-2. Opportunities and Constraints (2013)

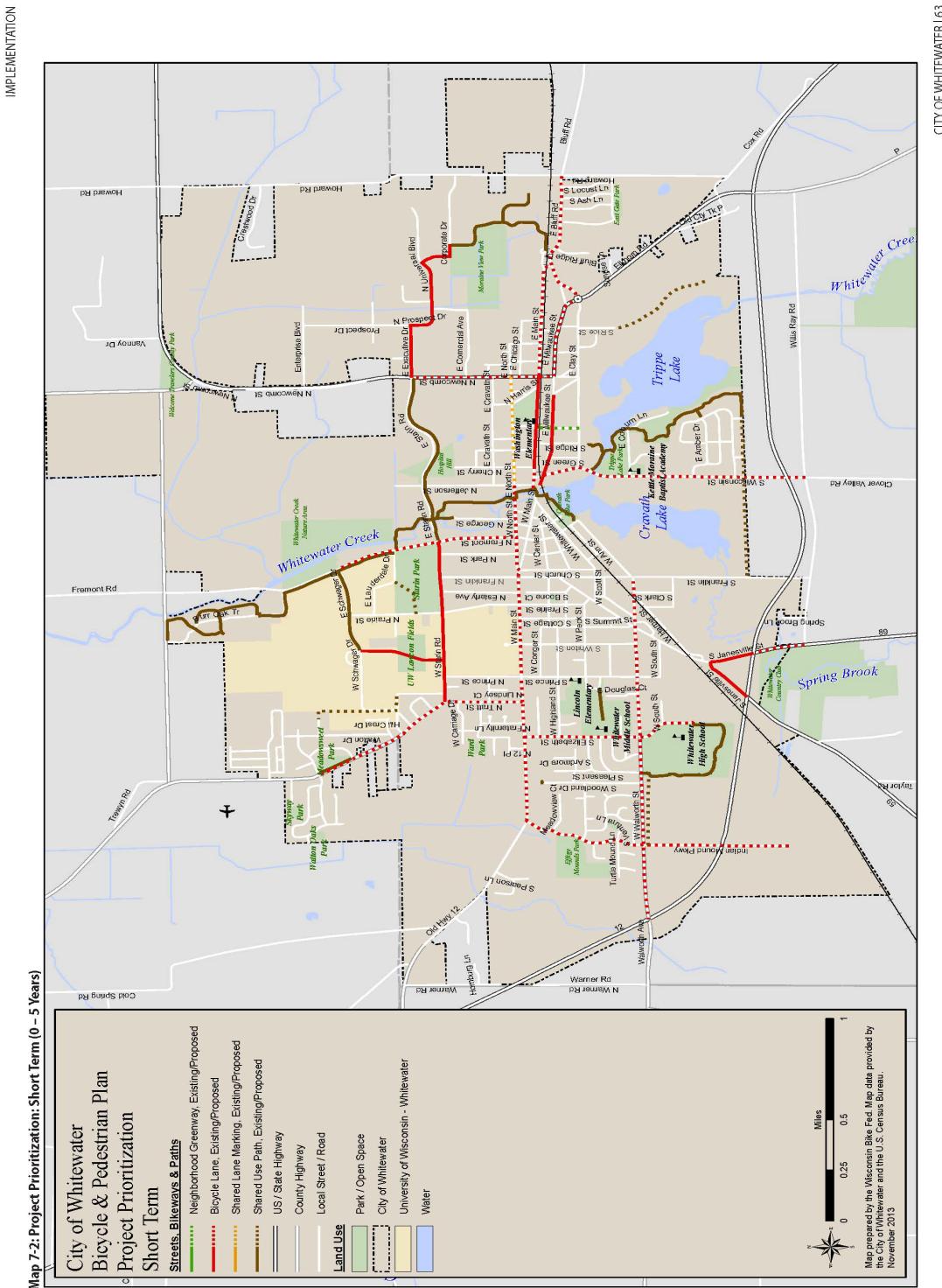


Map 4-1. Recommended Bikeway Network (2013)

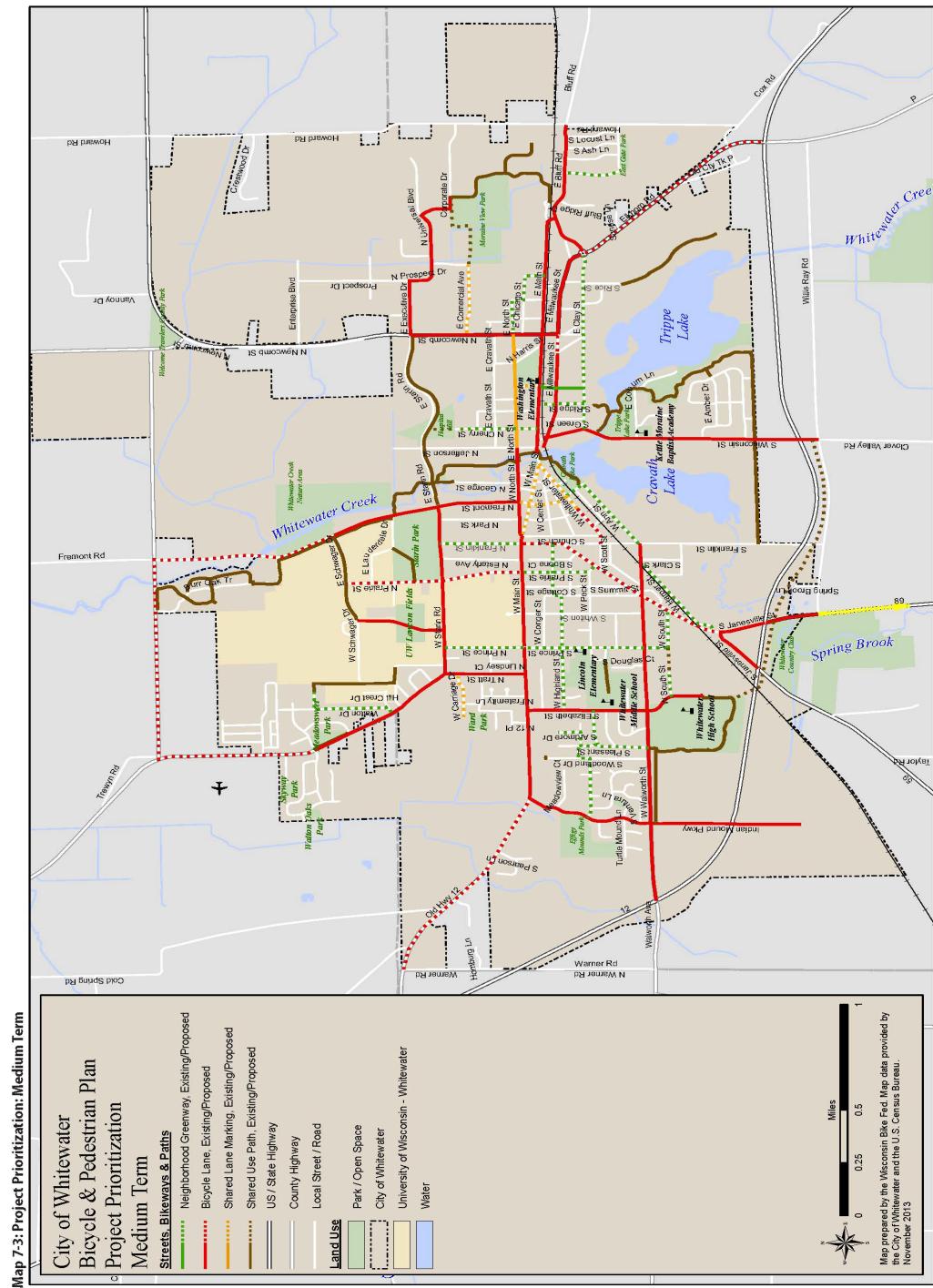


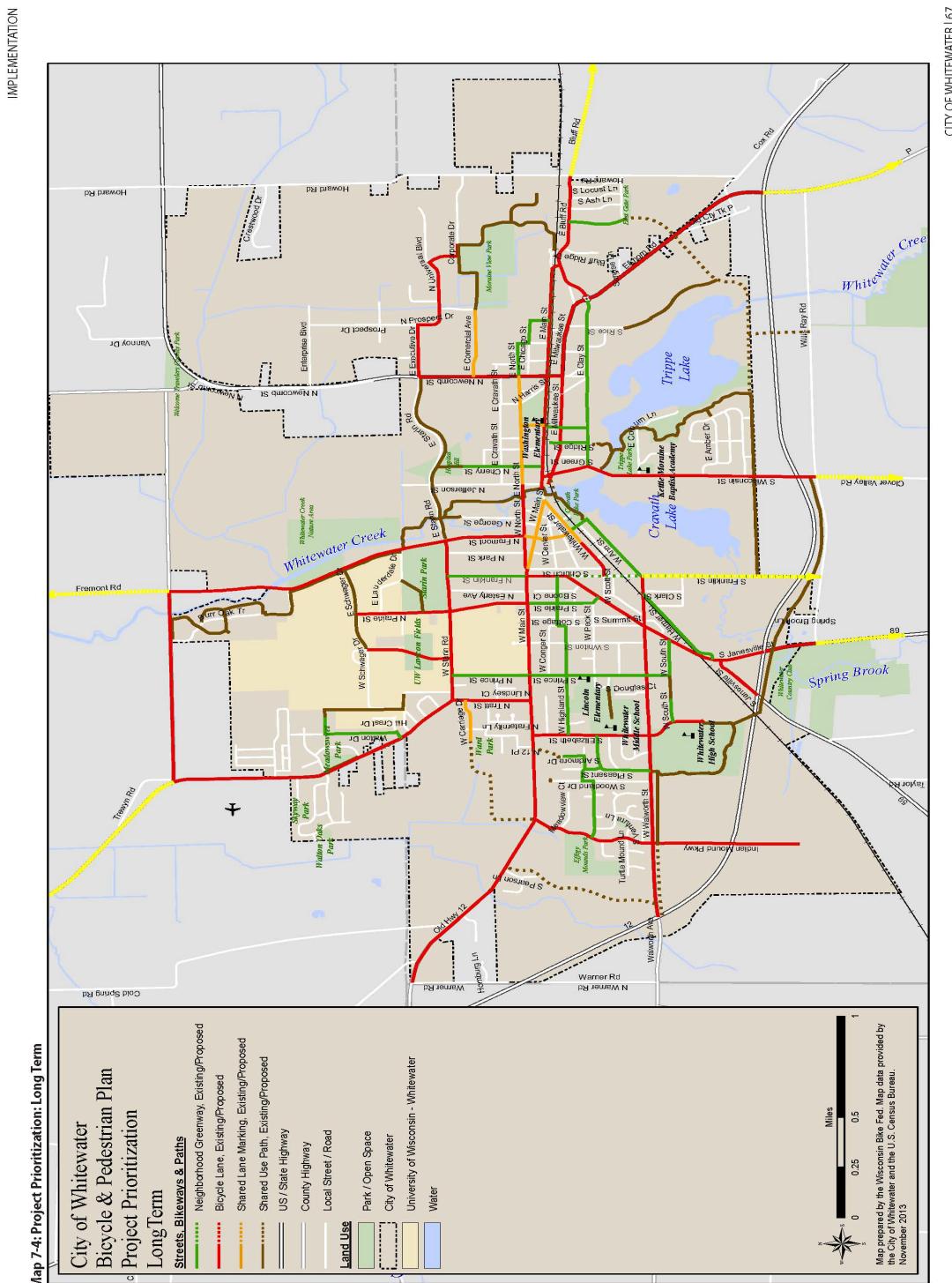
Maps 7-1 through 7-4. Project Prioritization (2013)





IMPLEMENTATION





Appendix C. Implementation Matrix

Purpose and Approach

The Implementation Matrix serves as a bridge between the policy framework of this Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan, 2026 – 2031 and the day-to-day work of delivering park improvements, programs, and maintenance.

Rather than a static table of cost estimates, the City of Whitewater will maintain a living Implementation Matrix as an internal working document. This allows staff and partners to track progress, update priorities, and adapt to new funding opportunities while maintaining consistency with the adopted plan.

Integration with the Strategic Plan

A detailed, project-level Implementation Matrix—including cost ranges, phasing, responsible parties, and potential funding sources—will be incorporated into the forthcoming Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan. That document will provide the depth needed for capital planning, grant applications, and coordination with the City’s annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Annual Review and Updates

City staff will:

- Update the working matrix each year to reflect completed, in-progress, and upcoming projects.
- Present progress reports to the Parks and Recreation Board and Common Council as part of annual budget deliberations.
- Record changes in project timing, costs, or scope to ensure continued eligibility for Wisconsin DNR Stewardship and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) programs.

Summary Statement

The Implementation Matrix is therefore understood as a dynamic management tool, not a fixed appendix. It ensures that the recommendations of the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (2026 – 2031) remain actionable, measurable, and responsive to evolving community needs, fiscal conditions, and partnership opportunities.

Appendix D. Community Survey Reports

This appendix includes the full results of the two community surveys conducted in 2025 to guide the development of this plan. Together, the surveys reflect the perspectives of more than 550 residents and provide the foundation for the needs assessment and recommendations in Sections 8 and 9.

- **Appendix D-1: Open Space Community Survey Report (2025)**
427 responses focused on park use, facilities, and investment priorities.
- **Appendix D-2: Recreation Programs Survey Report (2025)**
135 responses focused on awareness, participation, barriers, and program/event preferences.

The complete PDF reports, including frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and open-ended comments, are included in the digital appendix.

Appendix D-1

Open Space Community Survey Summary (2025)

Purpose

The Open Space Community Survey was conducted in 2025 to gather community input on the use, condition, accessibility, and priorities for the City of Whitewater's parks, trails, and open spaces. The results informed the inventory analysis, needs assessment, and recommendations contained in Sections 7, 8, and 9 of the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031.

Survey Methodology

The survey was administered citywide in 2025 and received 427 responses. Questions focused on park access, frequency of use, park and trail preferences, satisfaction with facilities, investment priorities, perceived barriers, and overall safety. Not all respondents answered every question; response totals vary by question.

Key Findings

Park Access and Use

- 66.2 percent of respondents reported being able to walk to a nearby park, and 64.7 percent reported being able to access parks by bicycle.
- Most residents reported visiting parks on a weekly or monthly basis.
- The most frequently visited parks include:
 - Starin Park (40.8 percent)
 - Cravath Lakefront Park (33.0 percent)
 - Tripp Lake Park (13.1 percent)
 - Whitewater Bark Park

These findings indicate strong overall access to parks, with certain parks serving as core community destinations.

Investment Priorities

Respondents clearly identified reinvestment in existing facilities as the highest priority:

- 74.6 percent identified maintenance of parks and facilities as the top need.
- Additional priorities included:

- Shade and tree canopy (44.9 percent)
- Infrastructure modernization (44.2 percent)
- Natural area restoration (41.2 percent)
- Improved accessibility (28.2 percent)

The emphasis on maintenance and modernization reflects the aging condition of several park assets.

Desired Amenities and Facilities

Residents expressed strong interest in both active and passive recreation amenities:

- Hiking trails (55.1 percent)
- Paved trails (53.9 percent)
- Open space and natural areas (49.0 percent)
- Playgrounds (48.8 percent)

Smaller but notable interest was expressed in:

- Pickleball courts (20.4 percent)
- Splash pad (19.8 percent)
- Kayak or canoe launches (15.0 percent)

Programming and Events (High-Level)

While the survey focused on physical spaces, respondents also identified programming themes they value in parks:

- Music and arts (58.0 percent)
- Nature and environmental education (49.5 percent)
- Adult fitness (40.1 percent)
- Multicultural events (34.2 percent)
- Senior activities (30.6 percent)

These findings support the role of parks as community gathering spaces beyond passive use.

Barriers to Park Use

Reported barriers to park use were relatively limited:

- Lack of awareness of events or amenities (20.8 percent)
- Lack of time (20.8 percent)
- Mobility limitations (6.6 percent)
- Safety concerns (6.6 percent)
- Transportation challenges (2.9 percent)

The low percentage of safety concerns suggests strong overall confidence in the park system.

Safety and Comfort

- 90.9 percent of respondents reported feeling safe in City parks and on trails.
- Requests for additional lighting, shade, and improved restrooms suggest opportunities to further enhance comfort and usability.

Conclusion

The Open Space Community Survey demonstrates strong community support for Whitewater's park and open space system, with clear direction to prioritize reinvestment in existing facilities, expand trail connectivity, enhance accessibility, and strengthen environmental stewardship. These findings directly informed the needs assessment and recommendations presented in the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031.

Appendix D-2

Recreation Programs Community Survey Summary (2025)

Purpose

The Recreation Programs Community Survey was conducted in 2025 to better understand community awareness, participation, preferences, and barriers related to recreation programs, special events, and Senior Center activities offered by the City of Whitewater Parks and Recreation Department. The results were used to inform the needs assessment and recommendations contained in Sections 8 and 9 of the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031.

Survey Methodology

The survey was administered citywide in 2025 and received 135 responses. Questions addressed program awareness, participation history, scheduling preferences, desired program types, accessibility, special events, youth programs, and senior programming. Not all respondents answered every question; response counts vary by question.

Key Findings

Awareness and Communication

- Only 46.7 percent of respondents reported being fully aware of Parks and Recreation programs and events, while 48.1 percent were only somewhat aware.
- Social media was the most common source of information (61.5 percent), followed by word of mouth (37.0 percent), flyers/posters (25.9 percent), and email newsletters (20.0 percent).
- These results indicate a significant opportunity to improve communication and outreach.

Program Participation

- 61.5 percent of respondents reported participating in a Parks and Recreation program or special event within the past three years.
- Among those who participated, respondents generally cited positive experiences and community value.

Barriers to Participation

The most frequently cited barriers included:

- Lack of awareness of programs (45.0 percent)
- Program times not fitting schedules (39.0 percent)
- Cost to participate (20.0 percent)
- Transportation challenges (7.0 percent)

Safety concerns were minimal, with most respondents indicating they feel safe attending programs and events.

Scheduling Preferences

- Preferred times for programs and activities include:
 - Weekday evenings (65.1 percent)
 - Saturday mornings (46.0 percent)
 - Saturday afternoons (41.3 percent)
 - Sunday afternoons (38.9 percent)

These preferences suggest that evening and weekend offerings are most accessible to residents.

Desired Programs and Events

Recreation Programs

Respondents expressed interest in a diverse mix of programming, including:

- Outdoor and adventure activities
- Sports and fitness programs
- Arts and crafts
- STEM and educational programs
- Performing arts
- Community and team-building activities

Interest was spread across age groups, with particular demand for youth and family-oriented programming.

Special Events

Highly requested event types included:

- Seasonal events (fall festivals, spring markets)
- Community festivals

- Arts and crafts fairs
- Outdoor movie nights
- Cultural or heritage celebrations
- 5K runs and community races

Weekend afternoons and evenings were the most preferred event times.

Youth Programs and Camps

- 23.0 percent of respondents indicated that someone in their household currently participates in after-school or summer camp programs.
- Barriers to participation included pricing, program variety, locations, and transportation.
- Desired camp activities emphasized outdoor adventure, sports and fitness, arts and crafts, STEM, and performing arts.

Senior Programming

- 64 percent of respondents over age 55 were unaware of the Senior Center.
- Only 35.7 percent reported participating in Senior Center programming.
- Barriers included lack of awareness, limited program variety, and scheduling conflicts.
- Respondents expressed interest in expanded social, fitness, educational, and hobby-based offerings.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- 64.1 percent of respondents felt programs were accessible to everyone, while 30.5 percent felt they were only somewhat accessible.
- A small number identified mobility and accessibility challenges, reinforcing the need for inclusive program design and accessible facilities.

Volunteer and Community Capacity

- 10.8 percent of respondents indicated interest in leading or assisting with programs.
- 4.8 percent expressed willingness to help deliver programs in another language, indicating limited but valuable capacity for multilingual engagement.

Conclusion

The Recreation Programs Community Survey highlights strong community support for Parks and Recreation offerings, alongside clear opportunities for growth. Improving communication and awareness, expanding evening and weekend programming, diversifying program offerings, and strengthening senior and youth engagement emerged as consistent themes. These findings directly informed the needs assessment and recommendations presented in the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031.

Appendix E. References and Data Sources

The following sources provided the demographic, mapping, and technical background used in preparing the **City of Whitewater Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2026–2031**. These references ensure transparency and accuracy in the data, mapping, and analysis that informed the plan’s findings and recommendations.

Demographics and Population

- U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Census of Population and Housing*
- Wisconsin Department of Administration, *Preliminary 2025 Population Estimates*

Parks and Recreation Data

- City of Whitewater, *Park and Facility Inventory (2024–2025)*
- Whitewater Unified School District, *Facility Use Agreements and Enrollment Data*
- UW–Whitewater, *Campus Recreation and Student Enrollment Reports*

Surveys

- City of Whitewater, *2025 Open Space Community Survey (427 responses)*
- City of Whitewater, *2025 Recreation Programs Survey (135 responses)*

Mapping and Environmental Data

Geospatial information and environmental layers used to prepare maps and spatial analyses for this plan were drawn from the following primary sources:

- **City of Whitewater GIS Department** – base maps, park boundaries, and community facilities.
- **Jefferson and Walworth County GIS Departments** – parcels, road networks, hydrology, and topography.
- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** – wetlands, floodplains, surface waters, and stewardship lands.
- **U.S. Census Bureau and Wisconsin Department of Administration** – municipal boundaries and population geography.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** – soils, land cover, and elevation data.

These datasets were integrated to produce the plan’s park inventory maps, service-area analysis, and the NRPA 10-Minute Walk access model, helping identify areas of strong coverage and neighborhoods that would benefit from improved park access.

Plans and Policy Documents

- City of Whitewater, *Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (2008–2013)*
- City of Whitewater, *Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (2015)*
- City of Whitewater, *Whitewater Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2013)* Used as a reference for existing and proposed bikeway routes shown in Appendix B (Legacy Mapping).
- City of Whitewater, *Effigy Mounds Preserve Maintenance Plan (2011)* – Guides long-term cultural and ecological stewardship of the Effigy Mounds Preserve, including prescribed burns, invasive species control, and native vegetation restoration activities. Referenced in Section 9 for site-specific management practices.
- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), *Aquatic Plant Management Plan for Cravath and Trippe Lakes*, Memorandum Report No. 275 (2025) – Prepared for the City of Whitewater in partnership with the Wisconsin DNR. Provides detailed survey data, management recommendations, and implementation strategies for aquatic vegetation, invasive species control, and cattail management in Cravath and Trippe Lakes, including prescribed burning, drawdown evaluation, and lake restoration measures.
- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), *Lake Protection Plan for Cravath and Trippe Lakes (2011)* – Provides early baseline data on water quality, watershed conditions, and aquatic-plant communities. Establishes initial recommendations for sediment reduction, shoreline restoration, and storm-water management, forming the foundation for subsequent SEWRPC and DNR lake-management efforts.

Closing Statement

This Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan represents the collective vision of the Whitewater community. By combining technical data, public engagement, and professional analysis, it provides a clear roadmap for the next decade of investment and stewardship. The appendices preserve the supporting data and engagement materials that guided this process, ensuring transparency and continuity for future updates. With this plan, the City of Whitewater reaffirms its commitment to maintaining and enhancing parks, open spaces, and recreation opportunities for all residents—now and in the years to come.