La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department

2027-2031

Strategic Plan

City of LaCrosse
Parks, Recreation, & Forestry

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PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The groundwork for the Strategic Plan was compiled through community input, recreation partnerships, employee and city officials' input. This plan is a complete reflection of the importance of parks and recreation in the community of La Crosse and community-driven needs and desires for recreation facilities, trails, open spaces and recreation programs. The plan not only identifies these desired needs but also provides an action plan for projects that include timelines, potential costs, and responsibilities.

Importance of the Plan

- Provides a guiding framework for current and long- term future of the City of La Crosse's Parks and Recreation system.
- Outlines the goals and objectives the City of La Crosse is aspiring to achieve.
- Provides an inventory of existing conditions and recommendations for future parks, recreation facilities and programs, and development of open space areas and facilities.

Implementation

The Parks Department cannot accomplish the strategic plan's goals and objectives alone. Success will require partnership with the community, organizations, city officials and employees. Through partnerships, funding mechanisms, and leveraging available new and existing resources, the parks department can find ways to build on past accomplishments and create new opportunities for future success.

Next Steps

This strategic plan is a living document, one that is updated to reflect circumstances at that moment.

Mission Statement

The City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department's mission is to enrich our community through stewardship of the environment and through provisions of quality recreation, facilities, and fun.

Vision Statement

Make La Crosse the best possible welcoming and inclusive community to live, work, and play in.

IMPORTANCE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Purpose

- **Social benefits** by connecting people with neighbors of other ages, incomes, backgrounds, and abilities. Parks and recreational activities build community pride and spirit.
- **Economic benefits** by improving the quality of life in the community and helping to attract businesses and residents to the local area. Top-ranked parks and recreation programs and facilities are a competitive advantage for the entire area in economic development.
- **Environmental benefits** by connecting people with and educating them about nature. La Crosse is fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources and must continue to protect, sustain and restore our natural landscape, while at the same time offer recreational opportunities in harmony with nature.
- **Individual benefits** by promoting physical fitness and self-improvement. Opportunities for exercise and being outdoors results in greater physical fitness, emotional well-being, and connectivity to nature.

3 Harbors/Marinas
5 Boat Launch Facilities
86 Boathouses
2 Levees
1 Transient Dock
1 Kayak/Canoe Rental Facility
2 Beaches
47 Parks
36 Playgrounds
35 Reservable Spaces
3 Splashpads
3 Pools
18 Shelters
2 Cemeteries
3,000+ Acres of Blufflands & Marsh
20,000+ Boulevard Trees
6 Community Orchards
1 Arboretum
4 Seasonal Sustainability Initiatives
29 Tennis Courts
12 Athletic Fields
8 Pickleball Courts
2 Pump Tracks
1 Skate Park
3 Dog Parks
6 Adult Sports Leagues
205 Adult Sports Teams
1,900+ Adult Sports Participants
1,000+ Youth Program Participants
250 Special Olympics Participants
35 Senior Excursions
3 City Boards & Committees
40 Leases & Agreements
20 Community Partnerships
13 City Building/Facilities
70+ Miles of Trails & Paths

Chapter 1 Community Profile

COMMUNITY PROFILE

The City of La Crosse offers spectacular views, a charming downtown life, and welcoming community. It is the largest city on Wisconsin's western border. A regional technology, medical, education, manufacturing, and transportation hub, companies based in the La Crosse area include Mayo and Gundersen Health Systems, Kwik Trip, La Crosse Technology, City Brewing Company and Trane. La Crosse is also a college town home to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Viterbo University, and Western Technical College.

The City of La Crosse is positioned along the Mississippi River. Surrounding the relatively flat prairie valley where La Crosse is located are towering 500 ft bluffs, one of which is the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department's own, Grandad Bluff, that overlooks the three-state region. This region is composed of high ridges with carved out valley, also known as coulees, a French term. That is where the city of La Crosse gets its nickname of the "Coulee Region". Among the bluffs in the City of La Crosse are trails, parks, facilities, programs for all ages, and recreational opportunities all provided by the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department.

Demographics

The total population of the City of La Crosse is 52,185 with an expected growth of 2.2% per year. The metropolitan statistical area population is 139,627. City of La Crosse's median household income is $56,552. The median age for the city is 28.8.

Chapter 2 Goals & Objectives

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives provide the framework for guiding future recreation needs for City of La Crosse residents. These goals and objectives will serve as a guide for the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department's annual budget, capital plans, and work plans. These goals will be worked on over the course of the next five years. Each goal was taken into consideration by looking at the assessment needs of the city and the public input.

Goal 1 - Maintain long-term fiscal stability through responsible management, diversified revenue and beneficial partnerships.

Objectives:

- Partner with communities, organizations and businesses to support local initiatives, impact the local economy and generate revenue.
- Work with all levels of government to secure consistent, dedicated funding for park development, maintenance, and operations.
- Increase revenue and develop sustainable spending practices throughout the system that consider the short- and long-term costs and priorities for projects, programs and/or services.
- Explore and implement user fees, specifically for trails, tennis, and pickleball courts.

Goal 2 - Protect and manage natural resources through sustainable management practices.

Objectives:

- Focus on habitat protection, conservation and restoration on threatened resources such as wetlands, urban forests, bluff lands, rural landscapes and forests.
- Partner with other organizations to improve resource management education while maintaining the natural, scenic, and agricultural land.
- Improve air and water quality through the protection of open space, land stewardship, and public awareness.

Goal 3 - Engage people with nature and outdoor recreation.

Objectives:

- Encourage people to experience the natural environment by providing and maintaining trails and access points that serve people of all ages and abilities.
- Develop a strong connection between neighborhood and park center programming and the natural areas in the park system.
- Enhance educational experiences to connect visitors to natural, cultural, and

recreational resources.

Goal 4 - Provide a safe place to play, recreate, contemplate, and celebrate.

Objectives:

- Identify recurring safety concerns and devise new prevention plans using available resources.
- Pursue public and private partnerships to promote safety in the parks and expand available resources.
- Modify behavior that may cause harm to persons, the environment, or property within the park system.

Chapter 3 Maintenance Plan

Introduction

The maintenance and improvement plan is the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Departments' commitment to the City of La Crosse to provide safe and beautiful recreational areas to its residents and visitors. The plan's framework addresses all maintenance labor and improvement projects over a timeframe of ten years. This allows the department to appropriately address and budget for all labor tasks and improvement projects. The timeframe will be subjected to an amending process every two years throughout the entire ten years to meet the growing changes and demands of the park system.

The plan calls for the park system to undergo an inventory analysis of all its parks. The inventory analysis is a comprehensive study of the park's amenities. The study evaluates the current physical condition of each amenity to determine life expectancy. Life expectancies are used to categorize improvement projects into high priority, medium priority, and low priority. The plan defines high priority as one to three years, medium priority as three to five years, and low priority as five to ten years. The priority rankings make up our ten-year timeframe for the maintenance/improvement plan.

The maintenance and improvement plan allows the department to project future costs and adequately plan a funding source from local businesses, organizations, associations, foundations, state and federal grants, and the capital improvement projects fund. The diversification of sources will allow the department to meet its funding needs and the overall goals of the plan.

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1

Provide a safe and fun atmosphere within the park system.

Objectives

1. Provide more training opportunities to the park's maintenance department.
2. Increase the frequency of routine maintenance checks of parks.
3. Continue to amend the maintenance plan every two years or as changes/updates occur.

Goal 2

Provide adequate and steady funding for all projects.

Objectives

1. Reestablish funding for park maintenance and modest improvements that meet the needs of the community.
2. Create a timeline for all future maintenance projects with an estimated cost and funding plan.
3. Diversify funding through local community foundations, state and federal grants, neighborhood associations, private businesses, and donations.
4. Strive to use sustainable technology to reduce future operational costs.

Goal 3

Build partnerships throughout the community.

Objectives

1. Continue to recruit volunteers to help maintain cleanliness in the parks and recognize them for their contributions.
2. Continue to enrich and strengthen relationships with local schools, universities, associations, organizations, and businesses to maintain a healthy park system.
3. Enhance access to information and increase communication with the public on routine maintenance tasks.

Goal 4

Strive to use sustainable practices.

Objectives

1. Proactively incorporate green strategies in all projects.
2. Continually manage, preserve, and protect natural resource areas.
3. Aspire to become a sustainable leader within the state.

Chapter 4 Capital Improvement Projects

Capital Improvement Projects Process

Capital Improvement Projects are submitted by each city department and are projects they would like to see completed. Projects are identified as the department's needs within the city for the next five years. The department relies on the Maintenance Plan to determine the greatest needs.

The city is allotted a certain budget each year, and there are a few committees that oversee these projects to determine which ones get approved. Projects are first reviewed by the City Planning Commission. The commission shall prepare and submit a five-year capital projects budget to the Common Council through its Finance & Personnel Committee. Projects may be approved, unfunded, moved to different years, or amended throughout the course of these meetings. As much as the department wants to see all projects approved, it doesn't always happen; however, those projects can be resubmitted during the following cycle in hopes they are selected to be completed.

Once the process is complete, the projects selected are compiled in an Adopted Capital Project Budget document. To see the most recent document and what projects were selected follow the link below:

Capital Budgets | City of La Crosse, WI

Recent completed projects from the process include:

Carroll Field Concession Stand was a development of a combined concessions and restroom facility to support current and future park programming by expanding visitor services, increasing operational efficiency, and improving accessibility and convenience for park patrons.

Grand Crossing Trail project consisted of the resurfacing and rehabilitation of the existing multi use recreational trail to improve safety, accessibility, drainage, and long-term usability for pedestrians and bicyclists. Funding assistance was provided through the Federal Transportation Alternatives Program.

Cottonwood Trail Head project consisted of the removal and disposal of clay pigeon fragments and related debris, along with accessibility upgrades to improve site usability, safety, and ADA compliance.

Chapter 5 Parks & Forestry

PARKS HISTORY

On May 15th, 1908 the La Crosse Common Council passed an ordinance creating two park districts in La Crosse. The area south of the La Crosse River was named the first district and the area north of the La Crosse River was named the second. The ordinance also provided for the establishment of the Board of Park Commissioners. The ordinance, initiated by the current Mayor at the time, Dr. Wendall A. Anderson, marked the first significant official interest in the city's few parks. The board, composed of J.M Hixon, L.F. Easton, E.L. Colman and Henry Gund, selected John Nolen, a noted landscape artist and advisor, to design a park system for the city.

A public meeting was held on November 18, 1908, to give an overview of the plans and to gain support from the citizens. Nolen's plan included the proposal of improving and creating Copeland, Levee, Grandad Bluff, and La Plume Island, which still exist today.

Despite the Board of Park Commissioners in 1908, a few parks were already established with Burns Park in 1852 and Myrick Park (then Lake Park) in 1873. Pettibone Park was also established before the 1908 ordinance, and it was donated by A.W. Pettibone. Pettibone Park was still considered part of Minnesota at that time, but boundaries were later changed where it became land within Wisconsin.

Six months after that first public meeting in November 1908, enough money was raised to start working on Nolen's plan, and it has brought us where we are today. Currently the La Crosse Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Department maintains a 1,560-acre park system, consisting of 47 park sites, 18 parks shelters/pavilions, 12 athletic fields, an 18-hole frisbee golf course, 27 miles of paved trails, and 45 miles of natural surface trails. In addition, the department also has an 1,100-acre riparian marsh and 1,312 acres of public land across the bluffs on the city's east side. All of these parks are unique to La Crosse and provide the community with a wide variety of opportunities for leisure activities.

Types of Parks

Community parks are readily accessible from arterial streets and the commuter/recreational trail system. These parks may include playfields and courts for organized sports, a playground, and facilities for day use activities including a picnic shelter, restroom, seating, and walking paths.

Neighborhood parks are centrally located within areas of residential development. These areas typically include playgrounds, open space for informal games and activities or play courts.

Community Parks

- Carroll Park 1717 MARCO DR
- Chad Erickson Park & Vietnam Veterans Pond 3601 PARK LANE DR
- Copeland Park 1130 ROSE ST
- Erickson Park 2423 21ST PL S
- Grandad Bluff 3020 GRANDAD BLUFF RD
- Green Island Park 2312 7 ST S
- Houska Park 700 HOUSKA PARK DR
- Lueth Park 1200 LA CROSSE ST
- Myrick Park 2107 LA CROSSE ST
- Pettibone Park 101 PETTIBONE DR S
- Poage Park 500 HOOD ST
- Riverside Park 100 BLOCK STATE ST
- Springbrook Park 3519 SPRINGBROOK WAY
- Trane Park 1500 CHASE ST
- Weigent Park 1500 CASS ST

Neighborhood Parks

- Badger/Hickey Park 1007 PALACE ST
- Bluffview Park 2800 JACKSON ST
- Burns Park 702 MAIN ST
- Cameron Park 400 KING ST
- Civic Center Park 500 2 ST S
- Clayton E. Johnson Park 4701 33RD ST S
- Coulee Park 1201 COULEE DR
- Crowley Park 2100 CAMPBELL RD
- Diagonal Park 2935 23RD ST S
- Glendale Park 2600 29TH ST S
- Goose Green Park 629 KANE ST
- Hass Park 3600 EASTER DR
- Highland Park 2500 HIGHLAND ST
- International Friendship Gardens 405 E VETERANS MEMORIAL DR
- Merry Meadows Park 4200 MEADOWLARK LN
- Powell Park 1002 WEST AVE S
- Pumpkin Patch Park BRICKYARD LN
- Red Cloud Park 416 POWELL ST
- Roellig Park 600 LOSEY BLVD N
- Roesler Park COUNTY ROAD MM
- Schuh Park 2225 HORTON ST
- Seminary Park 3400 E AVE S
- Sherwood Park 3300 NOTTINGHAM ST
- South Goose Green Park 1012 ST ANDREW ST
- South Library Park 1616 FARNAM ST
- Starlite Park 2421 HENGEL CT
- Upper Hixon Forest 800 MILSON CT
- Verchota Park 1825 22ND ST
- Veterans Freedom Park 120 CLINTON ST
- Wittenberg Park 2940 GEORGE S

Future Potential Projects and Goals

- Complete a new paved walking path in Veterans Freedom Park
- Install a new ADA fishing pier at Veterans Freedom Park
- Rehab of Copeland Park shelters
- New shelter at Badger Hickey
- Stabilization of the trail in Chad Erickson Memorial Park
- Permanent fencing and amenities at Wittenberg Dog Park

- Upgrades to Glendale and Hass Park playgrounds
- Replacement of deteriorating old fencing at Weigent Park
- Replacement of the flagpole at Riverside Park
- Improvements to Civic Center Park
- Restoration of the Houska Park bathrooms
- Replace Grandad shelter roof

Forestry

The City of La Crosse's urban forest is a vital natural resource, providing ecological, social and economic benefits to the community. The 20,000 trees that line La Crosse's streets, and additional trees within city parks help to control storm water, improve air quality, reduce utilities expenses, increase property value, provide habitat for birds and other wildlife, and improve neighborhood aesthetics. As climate conditions change, and urban development continues, proactive forestry management is essential to maintaining a resilient and sustainable tree canopy.

This section of the Strategic Plan focuses on implementing the Urban Forestry Management Plan, which guides the City's efforts in tree planting, maintenance, conservation, and community engagement.

Vision: Healthy Trees, Healthy City: Our vision for La Crosse's urban forest is to cultivate a thriving, diverse, and well-maintained tree canopy that enhances the livability, health, and sustainability of our community for current and future generations

Arboretum

In June 2024 Arboretum Accreditation was awarded for the Myrick Park Arboretum. The mission of the Arboretum is to display the rich biodiversity of the Coulee Region and to promote and highlight the importance of trees to our community. An arboretum is a place of learning and public interest to enhance learning and quality of life for the community and engage in public outreach as an outdoor classroom, living laboratory, and an inspiration for a greener, healthier, and more beautiful world.

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1 – Preserve tree canopy cover and the urban forest through sound but fair policies and regulations that align with shared priorities in the City and best practices.

Objectives:

- Identify impediments to tree planting and opportunities where tree requirements could be strengthened.
- Utilize the urban heat and impervious surface study to target tree plantings and incentivize developers to support this effort.
- Complete a city-wide tree canopy assessment as an update and periodically reassess canopy cover to monitor changes and trends.

Goal 2 – Foster tree stewardship in our community through equitable and impactful community education and engagement.

Objectives:

- Maintain Tree City USA accreditation
- Host seasonal arboriculture education events, such as spring tree planting and pruning workshops, to teach homeowners best practices for tree care and maintenance.
- Work towards a Level II Arboretum accreditation including the development of an arboretum collections policy and enhanced forestry programs within the arboretum.

Goal 3: Foster a culture of innovation, collaboration and adaptability, ensuring the program remains responsive to changing environmental conditions and community needs.

Objectives:

- Assess and strategize improved communication and protocols to efficiently manage the urban forest.
- Continue to apply for funding to support innovative and essential tree management projects and utilize the resources and trainings provided by these reputable entities
- Strengthen existing and foster new collaborative partnerships to manage the urban forest.

<u>Potential Future Projects and Goals</u>

- Continue to address heat zones identified by the City's Climate Action Committee by planting more shade providing trees in such areas
- Continue work with Neighborhood Associations to utilize funding for tree planting.
- Forestry will continue to provide boulevard tree services to residents in a timely and efficient manner.

Chapter 6 Natural Resources & Sustainability

Natural Resources & Sustainability

The City of La Crosse values environmental sustainability by making decisions that help protect, maintain and preserve our natural and developed resources. The City of La Crosse aims to promote and practice the conservation, preservation and restoration of our unique natural spaces. Sustainable land management is a top priority that satisfies the needs of diverse habitat types as well as ensuring that the recreational potential for user groups is all inclusive. The quality land management practices and goals identified in this plan take our ecosystem health into high consideration when developing sustainable trails, natural areas and trailhead facilities.

Vision: Protect the land through multi-resources management

Mission: The La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department is committed to improving our wildland management by increasing partnership relations, conducting management on a landscape level, and considering the recreational abilities and needs of all user groups.

Natural Resources

Blufflands Overview

The City of La Crosse's Blufflands are a defining natural feature of the region, offering ecological, recreational and scenic value to residents and visitors alike. As demand for outdoor recreation grows and conservation challenges evolve, a strategic approach is essential to protect and enhance these vital lands. By aligning with regional conservation goals and leveraging partnerships with local organizations, the City of La Crosse aims to create a long-term framework that supports responsible recreation, biodiversity, and climate resilience within the Blufflands.

The City Parks Department has a long history of preservation and restoration of natural areas. Since the largest gift of Hixon Forest, the City has acquired ~2,000 acres of property that could have been otherwise sold to developers. Some of the properties more impacted than the others from agriculture and rock quarrying, these lands pose different challenges to restore than more primitive unimpacted lands.

Goals and Objectives – Blufflands

Goal 1: Develop a Comprehensive Blufflands Master Plan

Objectives:

- Conduct a comprehensive blufflands assessment including inventory current land use, ecological conditions, recreational infrastructure, and conservation needs.
- Facilitate an inclusive planning process with community stakeholders to shape the blufflands' future.
- Develop clear land management and recreational guidelines

Goal 2: Conduct ecological assessments and natural resource inventory of natural areas.
Objectives:
- Work with conservation organizations to conduct Ecological Assessments of City natural areas.
- Maintain an accurate database of findings.
- Work with area experts to make improvements to restore natural area

Goal 3: Enhance funding and financial stability through alternative funding sources.
Objectives:
- Provide a robust, long-term, and stable funding framework for natural areas and resources within the city.
- Identify ways for all users of natural to contribute equitably to the development and management of these natural resources.

Goal 4: Conserve Wetlands, Urban Forests, Blufflands, Rural Landscapes and Forests through Partnerships and Incentives.
Objectives:
- Encourage large-scale land conservation partnership projects.
- Manage lands and resources to protect rare plant communities, threatened wildlife species, and scenic beauty.
- Increase the number of pollinators and beneficial insect species in the city.
- Continue to plant native herbaceous species in parks and public lands

Goal 5: Cooperate and Coordinate with Neighboring Cities, Villages, Towns, Counties, and Property Owners to Provide Recreational Activities, Education, and Preservation of Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources for the Enjoyment and Benefit of all Citizens.
Objectives:
- Provide assistance with park and recreation planning services to neighboring communities.
- Utilize, when practical, a multi-jurisdictional approach to acquiring and developing outdoor recreation facilities, and land.
- Manage lands and resources to protect rare plant communities, threatened wildlife species, and scenic beauty.

La Crosse River Marsh Overview

It is the intent of the La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department to maintain the marsh for its hydraulic, ecological and recreation values. The marsh presently offers many opportunities for birding, fishing, and recreation.

The La Crosse River Marsh plays a unique and important role in the La Crosse and Central Wisconsin landscape, providing a critical stopping point for migratory birds, spawning area for

various aquatic species, outdoor classroom, destination for outdoor enthusiasts, and natural flood mitigation and water quality treatment. Despite its importance to the community and region, the marsh has degraded in recent years by man- made encroachments, upland changes in hydrology, and evolving weather patterns. An increasing proportion of the La Crosse's parks and public works budgets must be allocated to maintaining and repairing infrastructure in the marsh such as trails and utilities. These changes have also resulted in habitat loss, water quality, and other ecological impacts.

Goals and Objectives - *Marsh*

Goal 1: Improve hydraulic connectivity throughout the river/marsh system and increase flood water storage.
Objectives:

- Improve connectivity of flow between the river and marsh and between different cells of the marsh.
- Provide additional flood water storage by reconnecting floodwaters with areas isolated by berms, levees, streets, and trails.
- Identify and pursue property acquisition.
- Improve water level control structures to allow periodic summer drawdowns to enhance and restore emergent vegetation.

Goal 2: Improve biodiversity and native vegetation with habitat as the primary objective.
Objectives:

- Evaluate solutions to the floodplain forest.
- Address the disappearing submerged vegetation.
- Improve trail and marsh edge environments.
- Remove invasive species.

Goal 3: Cooperate and coordinate with friend groups, neighboring cities, villages, towns, counties, and property owners to provide recreational activities, education, and preservation of natural, historic, and cultural resources for the enjoyment and benefit of all citizens.
Objectives:

- Provide assistance with park and recreation planning services to local municipalities.
- Utilize, when practical, a multi-jurisdictional approach to acquiring and developing outdoor recreation facilities and land.
- Pursue grant funding and partnerships to accomplish projects

Natural Resource Management and Restoration of La Crosse Natural Areas Overview
Restoring land to its historic and geographic habitat must be strategic and calculated. Restoration practices are also unique because of the diverse ecosystems that exist within each Bluffland or Marsh property. Restoration practices include but are not limited to invasive cutting, pulling, girdling and treating, deer management, tree removal, prescribed fire, and

native plantings. Though volunteer work and grants these conservation areas will be expanded to include restoration of the hardwood timbers encompass many of the City's public lands. Several test timber stand improvement projects are being monitored for effectiveness and feasibility.

Prairie Management
To retain and restore the prairie communities within the City Blufflands the following is recommended:

- Prairie remnants found on scattered sites throughout the forest shall be protected and restored to remain as prairie remnants. Management priority shall be placed on those remnants most threatened by succession.
- The use of fire, as well as selective cutting and tree girdling may be used to carry out these management objectives, as well as to enhance biodiversity, attempt to restore natural processes to the forest, and reduce potentially hazardous situations.
- Herbicides should be used sparingly, and spraying avoided in sensitive areas.

Forest Management **Review the Hixon Forest Comprehensive Management Plan and Urban Forestry Management Plan for a more comprehensive understanding of the forest management recommendations provided here.*
To retain and restore the health of existing forest and tree canopy, the following is recommended:

- The existing forest and tree canopy shall be maintained to the extent possible.
- The management for communities such as oak woodland or savanna shall be focused upon existing edge and open areas.
- Remnant oak opening sites shall be restored to or remain as oak openings.
- The use of fire, as well as selective cutting and tree girdling may be used to carry out these management objectives, as well as to enhance biodiversity, attempt to restore natural processes to the forest, and reduce potentially hazardous situations.
- The former McBain Property and the old field located along the west side of CTH FA shall be managed for establishment of oak savanna or oak forest or for opportunities to allow natural succession to occur. Additional openings within the forest that consist of non-native vegetation shall be evaluated for opportunities to add to the existing closed canopy.
- The reforestation project located in the central portion of the lower forest shall continue to be evaluated as an effective restoration method.
- Oak trees are most susceptible to oak wilt in the springtime, from bud swelling until 2 to 3 weeks past full leaf development. During the period of April 15 to July 1, do not prune, cut or injure oaks. If an oak is wounded during this time, cover the wound immediately with tree wound paint.

Invasive Species Management

To retain and restore the health of Bluff and Marshlands, the following is recommended.

- Removal of invasive native tree species (such as black locust and aspen) in selected locations such as around remnant prairies and throughout wetlands.
- The removal of invasive woody shrub species (such as buckthorn, honeysuckle) is a management priority. Efforts should focus on those areas where the invasive species have not yet become dominant in the under-story. Woody shrubs should be treated according to best management practices.
- The use of herbicides shall be allowed for the management of invasive species when fire or mechanical removal methods are ineffective. Herbicides should be biodegradable and used responsibly according to directions.

Acquisitions & Easements

The presence of easements and grant agreements guide how La Crosse Parks and Recreation manages many bluffland properties. Trail development, habitat restoration, and public access improvements must align with these legal obligations to ensure compliance and sustainability. While these protections limit certain activities such as new development or off-trail use they also provide a framework for balancing conservation and recreation.

Property acquisitions are conclusive to property owner's willingness to sell, making a very short list for potential acquisition. Properties are evaluated based on habitat and recreation value, potential for development and accessibility in addition to the criteria listed below. As new properties become available, a discussion will be entertained with the Environmental Leadership Forum prior to the acquisition of new lands. Additionally, recreational easement and/or conservation easement may be utilized as tools to facilitate the negotiation process and fulfill the desires of the landowner and the city.

<u>Potential Future Projects and Goals</u>

- Ongoing hydrological improvements
- Improvement of marsh hydrology as measured by restoring/enhancing water exchange within the western portion of the marsh

Sustainability

Sustainability is a core priority for the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department, ensuring that environmental, social, and recreational systems support a thriving community for future generations. As climate challenges and urban development pressures increase, the City is committed to proactive sustainability efforts that enhance resilience, reduce environmental impact, and foster community engagement.

Goals & Objectives – *Sustainability*

Goal 1 – Enhance Native Landscaping and Planting Practices
Objectives:

- Develop and implement a native planting strategy for new park projects and landscape renovations.
- Require new plantings within parks or as part of beautification efforts to contain at minimum 50% native species

Goal 2 – Expand Sustainability Education and Community Outreach
Objectives:

- Use education programs and incentives to promote the use of native plants and trees on public and private property
- Host regular seasonal workshops, events focused on conservation, native planting, and sustainable park stewardship.
- Collaborate with local community groups, and environmental organizations on park-based sustainability initiatives

Goal 3 – Promote Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Restoration
Objectives:

- Maintain existing management plans aimed at protecting and enhancing existing wildlife habitats within parks
- Initiate habitat restoration projects that include the removal of invasive species, reintroduction of native vegetation and creation of wildlife corridors.

Goal 4 – Secure funding to expand sustainability programs
Objectives:

- Identify and pursue grant opportunities, public-private partnerships, and other funding sources to support sustainability initiatives including native planning and community education programs

Conclusion: The city's commitment to natural resource preservation and sustainability involves several key aspects including land management, blufflands preservation, marsh management, restoration practices and sustainable initiatives. The City of La Crosse aims to improve wildland management by increasing partnership relations, conducting management on a landscape level, and considering the recreational abilities and needs of all user groups. This involves cooperating with neighboring communities, pursuing grant funding and partnerships, and enhancing funding and financial stability for natural areas and resources. By focusing on these areas, the City of La Crosse strives to ensure a thriving community for future generations.

Chapter 7
Trail Systems

Trail Systems

The City of La Crosse is home to an extensive trail network that offers diverse recreational experiences, including natural bluffland trails, marsh trails, and paved multi-use paths. This strategic plan prioritizes maintaining existing infrastructure while identifying targeted improvements that enhance accessibility, sustainability, and user experience.

Natural Trails

Bluffland trails wind through forested ridges, steep terrain, bluffland prairies, and scenic overlooks, offering hiking, trail running, mountain biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and nature exploration. These trails rely on sustainable maintenance practices to prevent erosion, protect habitats, and ensure long-term usability.

Paved Trails

The city's network of paved multi-use trails supports walking, running, biking, and mobility devices, providing safe and accessible routes for all users. Marsh trails provide a unique wetland experience, supporting birdwatching, education, both paved and soft-surface recreation. Many trails serve as commuter corridors, connecting neighborhoods, parks, schools, and commercial districts. Proper surface maintenance and wayfinding improvements are critical to supporting increased year-round usage.

Protected Trails

Some trails in La Crosse exist on lands protected by conservation easements or subject to grant restrictions from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). These agreements limit or prevent the construction of new trails and impose specific stewardship responsibilities. The city must carefully manage these lands to maintain compliance while ensuring safe and sustainable public access.

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Maintain and Improve the Existing Trail Network

Objectives

- Conduct an annual trail assessment to identify and prioritize maintenance needs.
- Develop a sustainable funding strategy for ongoing trail upkeep, including city budget allocations, grants, and donations.
- Expand routine maintenance efforts by coordinating with volunteer groups, conservation corps, and trail advocacy organizations.
- Standardize maintenance best practices across all trail types to improve durability and safety.

Goal 2: Signage and Wayfinding Plan

Objectives

- Standardize Trail signage by developing a uniform signage system that includes trail names, difficulty ratings, permitted uses and regulatory information
- Standardize branding and logos within trail system to maintain consistency and limit commercialization of public lands
- Ensure all signage includes accessibility details, such as surface types, grades, and ADA compliant routes.

Goal 3: Enhance Accessibility and Inclusivity

Objectives

- Ensure paved trails meet ADA compliance standards, including smooth surfaces, gradual slopes, and rest areas.
- Improve trailhead facilities with accessible parking, restrooms, and clear signage.
- Develop an interactive digital trail guide with accessibility information, trail difficulty ratings, and real-time updates.
- Install wayfinding and interpretive signage to provide inclusive navigation and educational opportunities.

Goal 4: Foster Sustainable Trail Management

Objectives

- Implement erosion control strategies on bluffland and marsh trails, such as rerouting problematic sections and using sustainable materials.
- Increase invasive species management efforts along trails to preserve native ecosystems.
- Promote responsible trail use through community education on Leave No Trace principles.

Goal 5: Maintain Compliance with Easements and Grant Restrictions

Objectives

- Conduct an annual review of all conservation easements and grant agreements to ensure current trail use aligns with restrictions.
- Collaborate on grant opportunities for ecological restoration and low-impact infrastructure improvements.
- Increase invasive species management in cooperation with land trusts and conservation groups.
- Monitor and assess high-use trails for environmental degradation, adjusting management strategies as needed.

Conclusion

By focusing on the maintenance and enhancement of existing trails, this strategic plan ensures that La Crosse's trail system remains a valuable asset for recreation, transportation, and environmental stewardship. Prioritizing accessibility, sustainability, and community engagement will allow the city's trail network to serve diverse users while preserving its natural beauty for future generations. By recognizing and respecting the constraints of conservation easements and grant-restricted lands, the City of La Crosse can ensure the long-term sustainability of its trail system while fostering positive relationships with conservation partners. Prioritizing compliance, stewardship, and education will allow the city to continue providing high-quality recreational opportunities without jeopardizing the ecological and legal integrity of protected lands.

Potential Future Projects

- Complete reconstruction of the Willow Trail

Chapter 8 Aquatic Facilities

Aquatics

The aquatic facilities provide opportunities for youth and adult water recreation activities. The City of La Crosse owns Erickson Pool, North Side Community Pool, and Veterans Memorial Pool. Each of these pools has their own unique characteristics. From zero-depth entry to splash pads, they each offer something for the family to enjoy.

Erickson Pool
2512 Losey Blvd
Potential Future Projects

- Renovate bathhouse
- Replacement of slide

Veterans Memorial Pool
1901 Campbell Rd
Potential Future Projects

- Purchase and install shade structures
- Install security cameras on pool deck
- Repair concrete malfunction on the pool wall

North Side Community Pool
816 Sill St

(closed for the 2026 season due to budget cuts)

Chapter 9 Athletic Facilities

Ball Fields

Ball fields provide ample space for community baseball and softball games. The fields are used daily throughout the summer months hosting the city's baseball and softball programs, as well as tournaments. The ball fields benefit multiple organizations who gather to play sports at these facilities. Features include multiple fields, restrooms, storage sheds, bleachers, concession stands, water and power.

- **Bluffview Ball Fields**
- **Carroll Ball Field**
- **Copeland Softball Field**
- **Copeland Baseball Field**
- **Erickson Ball Fields**
- **Goose Green Ball Field**
- **Houska Ball Field**
- **Weigent Ball Field**

Tennis Courts

The city tennis courts are open to the public as well as used by local schools, adult tennis clubs, and the department's youth tennis programs. These courts facilitate several tournaments and events throughout the season.

- **Copeland Park (4)**
- **Weigent Park (2)**
- **Bluffview Park (2)**
- **Green Island Park (13)**
- **Red Cloud (2)**
- **Forest Hills (6)**

Potential Future Projects

- Replacement of tennis courts at Weigent, Green Island, Bluffview, and Copeland Park

Pickleball Courts

The city has two locations for pickleball, and they are currently not reservable spaces. As the sport grows in popularity, the department hopes to expand the pickleball possibilities.

- **Trane Park (8)**

Potential Future Projects

- Additional build of 8 courts at Trane Park

Green Island Ice Arena

In addition to the outdoor tennis courts, the Ice Arena is home to River City Youth Hockey, Coulee Region Sled Hockey, and youth figure skating programs. River City Youth Hockey currently leases the building from October to March and offers open skate times for the general public.

Potential Future Projects

- Replacement of roof from 1982

Chapter 10 Grounds and Buildings

City Owned Facilities

The department oversees city owned facilities, whether they are run by a third-party vendor, leased, or directly managed by our staff, they are diverse in their capabilities and what they offer to the public. The department oversees the general maintenance of the buildings, but the tenants can diversify their use to fit their desired plan within the guidelines of the lease. Neighborhood Centers are managed and staffed by the Parks Department. Neighborhood Centers focus on community activities such as programs for older adults during the school year as well as programs for adults and youth at night. Leased buildings are open to the public, can be reserved, or put on several events for the public.

Black River Beach Neighborhood Center
1433 Rose St

South Side Neighborhood Center
1300 6th St S

Myrick Park Center
789 Myrick Park Dr

- Leased by WisCorps/The Nature Place

Hatchery
410 Veterans Memorial Dr

- Leased by Hatchery LLC

Copeland Stadium
800 Copeland Ave

- Leased by the La Crosse Loggers

Pettibone Boat Club
600 S Pettibone Dr

- Leased by Pettibone Boat Club

Pettibone Resort
333 Park Plaza Dr

- Leased by Pettibone Resort

Pump House Regional Arts Center
119 King St

- Leased by the Pump House

Green Island Ice Arena
2312 7th St S

- Leased by River City Youth Hockey

Forest Hills Golf Course

600 Losey Blvd N

Forest Hills Golf Course has been under the management of Kemper Sports on behalf of the City of La Crosse since 2009. Forest Hills recreation is year-round as part of Hixon Forest. In the summer months, trails line the golf course, whereas in winter it becomes a popular cross-country ski location along with sledding, snow shoeing and dog walking.

<u>Potential Future Projects</u>

- Maintenance building to replace the current 80-year-old shop
- Expansion of par 3 tee boxes
- Driving range target greens
- Drainage additions to cure problematic wet areas on the course
- Refurbishing of club house exterior
- Additional forward tee boxes to accommodate junior, senior and women golfers
- Cart paths rebuild to update the aging paths

Chapter 11
Waterways

Boat Landings

The Parks, Recreation, Forestry Department is responsible for and maintains five public boat landings/launches. Funding for maintenance and future upgrades comes from launch fees charged at kiosks located at each landing. Launch fees are kept in a "boat landing" account specific to the needs of the landings.

7th Street Landing
2300 S 7th St.

East Copeland Landing (North and South)
421 Clinton St.

Municipal Landing
1500 Marco Dr.

Veterans Freedom Park Landing
1000 Boathouse Dr.

Potential Future Projects

- Plan for and fund complete parking lot replacement at West Copeland and East Copeland
- Continue to grow the number of fishing tournaments hosted at the landings

Riverside Levee

With the recent completion of an additional levee, the department has established long term agreements with Viking Cruise Lines and American Cruise Lines to promote Riverside Park and the city and encourage tourism in the downtown area.

Riverside Transient Dock

A pay to park, seasonal dock, is located along the shoreline in Riverside Park. People are able to experience all the downtown area has to offer by way of boat.

Municipal Harbor

1502 Marco Dr

- 169 boat slips

Veterans Point Marina

120 Clinton Street

- 124 boat slips

Copeland Park Marina

1121 Copeland Park Dr

- 14 slips

Potential Future Projects

- Replacement of gazebo on the west side of the property green space.
- Build a small campground between the dry storage area and south harbor shoreline green space.
- A new utility line at Municipal Harbor
- An additional Marina at River Point District
- A waterway development plan at River Point District

Chapter 12
Recreation

The Recreation Division strives to provide diverse opportunities, quality programs, and engaging special events for youth, adults, families, seniors, and individuals with special needs. The main objective is to enrich lives of City of La Crosse community members by offering social, active, leisure, enriching, and educational choices in safe environments. Staff is responsible for planning and implementing activities, promoting positive customer service, effectively promoting and publicizing programs, and utilizing financial resources efficiently. Not only does the Recreation Division hire numerous seasonal employees, but this division is also responsible for recruiting and managing hundreds of volunteers to assist with programs and special events.

Youth Programs

The department offers year-round sports and programs for youth in the community. Sports include Volleyball, Football, Basketball, Soccer, Track, Tennis, and Ice Skating. During the summer, day camps are offered for participants. Different day camps include Playground Program and Adventure Camp.

Adult Programs

The department offers year-round sports and programs for adults in the community. Leagues include Volleyball, Basketball, and Softball and instructional adult sports include Tennis and Pickleball. There is a variety of adult enrichment programs as well. Enrichment programs is the umbrella name that includes programs like Creative, Enrichment, Health and Wellness, Dementia Support and Education, Concerts and Dances.

Senior Programs

The department offers year-round programs for aging adults in the community. Participants ages 50+ are welcome to participate in any of the Adult Programs as well as Senior specific programs and excursions. Day excursions offer seniors a hassle-free way to enjoy trips to theater shows, museums and other tours by providing transportation. Excursions are always changing to ensure there is something for everyone. While the excursions are remote experiences, the senior programming classes take place in the city at a number of facilities.

Special Recreation

The City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department is proud to offer a variety of leisure, educational and recreational programs for individuals with special needs in our community. Our Special Recreation program offers year-round clubs, monthly events and trips. The Special Recreation programs are for all ages and all abilities.

Special Olympics Wisconsin - La Crosse Area is a non-profit agency that provides individuals with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate in sports competition, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy while participating in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, Special Olympics athletes, and the community. In order to be eligible for Special Olympics sports, athletes must be 8 years of age or older with an intellectual disability.

Future Recreation Goals

- Increase pickleball programs and number of participants
- Expand youth enrichment programs throughout the year (outside of sports)
- Add an adult flag football program
- Increase adult sports tournaments

Appendix

Strategic Plans & Supporting Documents | City of La Crosse, WI