



# 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Trails and Open Space Plan

Adopted February 2, 2022



Compiled by Isanti Parks, Recreation & Culture

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Isanti is located approximately 45 miles north of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The community is divided by Trunk Highway 65, which serves as a strong north-south transportation connection between Isanti, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, to the south; and the City of Cambridge, to the north. County State Aid Highway 5 serves as the primary east- west transportation corridor through the community. These main corridors carry high volumes of traffic and are easily accessible to area residents. Many of Isanti's services and community facilities have been located on or adjacent to these corridors, while residential neighborhoods and area parks have been placed along local or residential streets that tie into these main thoroughfares.

Since 2002, the City has experienced significant levels of growth and development. Currently, the community is home to 6,804 residents, as estimated by the State Demographer's office for 2021. After the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the City experienced significant growth in 2021 that will continue into the near future. While the level of growth as well as the amount of time necessary for a full economic recovery is undetermined, in order to ensure that the community continues to be a place where people want to live, work, and play, Isanti is committed to planning for the future and providing recreational amenities and opportunities for all that may live, work, or visit the area. The City of Isanti is also committed to working with surrounding entities to establish regional facilities and amenities that can be utilized by more than just area residents. These interconnected facilities will further enhance active living and alternative modes of transportation throughout the region.

In 2020, the City of Isanti updated the Comprehensive Plan and includes Chapter 5 Natural Resources and Chapter 6 Parks, Trails, and Open Space. These chapters analyze existing conditions from a broad perspective and made general recommendations that would aid in the future development, expansion, or conservation of City parks, open spaces, and natural areas. In addition, these two Chapters enabled the City to establish overall goals, policies, and objectives that the City wished to pursue; as they pertained to the preservation of natural resources and development of future parks, trails, and open spaces. As a supplement to the 2020 Comprehensive Plan; the 2022 Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan utilizes these objectives and recommendations as a basis for a more in-depth look at the City's existing and future parks, trails, and open space system. Specific parks, open spaces, and trail segments will be examined and recommendations will be made for future improvements.

Each section of this Plan will provide City staff and City officials with key information and the building blocks that will help to better define the community, and its goals for both the existing and future park system. The Plan can be used as a reference for the City, to be reviewed when confronted with decisions regarding the location, timing, replacement, maintenance, and development / redevelopment of the overall park system.

The City of Isanti envisions a park, trail, and open space system that will not only enhance the quality of life for its current residents; but will create a system that can be easily built upon in the future as Isanti continues to grow. The Plan will serve as a guide and will offer an opportunity to improve, develop, and create a system of planned green spaces and parks that emphasize safety, innovation, and conservation. The intent of this overall park system is not only to provide

residents with recreational opportunities, but to protect and enhance the natural resources that can still be found throughout the community. While the establishment of a greenway system in developed areas of the community may be considered a challenge; ensuring that areas located in undeveloped portions of the community and within future planning areas have been identified will help to reduce these types of challenges as the community grows and new development takes place.

The anticipated outcome is to produce a park, trails, and open space plan that meets the needs of both existing and future community residents; encourages healthy, active lifestyles; and preserves those natural areas found throughout the community, so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

## **PLAN PURPOSE**

The Comprehensive Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan is intended to serve as a guide for maintaining and enhancing the existing parks, trails, open spaces and other associated natural and recreational amenities found within the City of Isanti. The Plan will also provide an overall framework for the development of future active and passive recreational amenities; as the community continues to grow. The Plan acknowledges that there are both opportunities and constraints, which will work to both assist in the advancement of the Plan's goals and objectives or may place limits upon those ideas and principals. These limits may require the City to further evaluate some future plans. However, these limits are not to be seen as barriers, but as crossroads allowing the City to weigh additional options, so as to meet the specified goals and objectives of this plan. Despite this acknowledgement, the Plan will provide a framework for the future of the City of Isanti Parks, Trails, and Open Space system.

The Plan also recognizes the goals, objectives, and recommendations provided within the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, which focuses on Natural Resources and their importance for inclusion within the overall park system as well as the general standards provided for within the Parks, Trails, and Open Space portion of that same document. It is the purpose of this Plan to supplement and expand upon the recommendations provided for within these chapters of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and to provide further direction for the implementation and creation of a successful Parks, Trails, and Open Space system. When developing this Plan, the following general objectives will be essential throughout the park planning process:

- Maintain a consistent high level of service when developing new amenities and facilities within the overall park system; which is similar to what has been provided today in existing park and recreation areas.
- Determine the needs of the community and the activities to be provided within each park or open space, ensuring that both are in accordance with the community's overall vision for the park system.
- Guide decision makers, developers, and City staff in planning for future growth and development within the community through the integration of existing and future parks, open spaces, natural areas and other recreational amenities; and ensuring that all residents have reasonable access to these amenities.
- Assist the community in the continued establishment of goals, objectives, and strategies for the development of future parks, trail, and open space connections.
- Commit to the preservation, conservation, and enhancement of natural areas and wetlands located throughout the community.
- Create a trail system that provides for an interconnected network of open spaces, parks, and natural resource areas that are open and accessible by the public.



- Plan for an interconnected park and trail network to be utilized for recreational purposes as well as for alternate transportation options; ensuring the connection of neighborhoods, schools, commercial services, recreational facilities, and parks.
- Promote an increased quality of life for current and future residents through the promotion of active, healthy lifestyles.
- Encourage cross jurisdictional planning with neighboring townships, cities, and the County; to ensure that current and future trail connections will promote a more expansive, integrated regional park and trail system.
- Establish a continuous and permanent Greenway system, which loops through Isanti; linking neighborhoods, commercial areas, parks and open spaces via linear natural features that have been identified throughout the community.
- Develop, monitor, and amend; as necessary, a short-term and long-term capital improvement and maintenance program that will guide the City in property acquisition, capital improvement projects, and operations; which not only shows continual investment in the park system, but advancement of the overall community vision.
- Build a park system and provide recreational opportunities and amenities that are balanced, multi-dimensional, and adaptable to the changing attitudes and interests of the population; catering to all ages and levels of ability.



## **THE COMMUNITY**

### Historical Background

Today, the area surrounding Isanti can be characterized as cropland containing both large open spaces as well as small remnants of the original natural vegetation that was once found within Isanti County. Areas containing high natural resource value include the Rum River, several streams (Park Brook, Isanti Brook, and Spirit Brook); woodland areas, and wetland complexes; all of which have brought and continue to bring value and quality to the lives of area residents. The natural resource significance found throughout this area continues to be recognized as perhaps one of leading factors for the initial settlement of the area and one of the main reasons for its continued growth.



“Old Isanti” was first settled in 1860, as a logging and farming community. After the construction of the railroad, the location of the community changed, and “New Isanti” was soon re-built between the Rum River and the Great Northern Railroad. Fields growing potatoes and navy beans flourished on the natural landscape surrounding the community. But, after years of farming, crop lands became depleted of nutrients and the farming industry began to decline. With the decline of agriculture; the environment in Isanti County began to change as well. The natural areas originally found within Isanti County became separated by croplands, roads, and eventually development. Today, Isanti has become an exurban bedroom community located within a collar county of the Twins Cities Metropolitan Area, where residents commute to work and return at the end of each day to enjoy the small-town atmosphere that Isanti provides.

Historically, the City of Isanti and its residents have continued to have a close relationship with the outdoors and the natural environment, through its park and open space system. The Municipal Rose Garden, the Old Band Stand, as well as the community’s continued participation in sporting activities such as baseball, and tennis have attributed to the types of parks and open spaces that have developed over time within Isanti. The park and open space areas continue to be of great importance to the residents of this community and will continue to be so as the City develops in the future. Planning for future parks, facilities, and amenities will continue to be increasingly important to the promotion of healthy, active lifestyles for future residents. In addition, these types of facilities and amenities will continue to serve as a focal point or a gathering place for area residents.

## Demographics

The City of Isanti has seen significant growth and change in recent years. The rapid growth in population and households, coupled with increased commercial and industrial development has changed the dynamics of the community.

In order to plan for future park and recreation system amenities and facilities, an understanding of the characteristics of the existing population is necessary as the characteristics of the population will determine the needs and the demands for particular types of services. While the needs and demands of the community will change as it continues to grow and composition of the age cohorts will change, the current statistics will provide the City with a basis from which to begin its planning are the best estimates available to the City for projecting the types of services that may be required in the near future. In recent years, the City has seen a significant increase in the number of young families with school aged children. This demographic shift has placed high demands upon area schools, recreational facilities, and community services. But, while these age cohorts are increasing, there is still a need for the City to accommodate the demands for services for the middle-aged and senior-aged cohorts.

When compared to the overall City population, the City of Isanti has a lower percentage of senior citizens residing within the community. While the City will continue to add to the senior population, the overall number of seniors when compared to the total population is anticipated to remain quite low in the years to come. The middle-aged individuals, ages 36-54, will also see some level of increase in the population; however, when compared to the total estimated population of the City this number too will remain fairly low. The lower percentage of residents within these two demographics, middle-aged and senior-aged, has been attributed to the type of housing that is currently found within the community. The majority of the housing stock provided in the community are new developments appealing to family home buyers. While the City has planned for and has encouraged the development of different housing types, many of the larger single-family residential units, as well as attached multiple-family units, are anticipated to be developed at a later date as the community grows and the population diversifies. The age group of individuals ranging in ages 34-44 is anticipated to increase for the City in the coming years, due to the attractive moderately-priced housing options provided throughout the community. As a result, it is anticipated that those under the age of 18 will also continue to increase. Much of the recent park development has catered specifically to this age group and would appear to be the focus for the City in the near future.

The City will need to balance the interests and needs of the various age groups and ability levels that will continue to characterize the residents of the community. While the interests and needs of the younger adult and school aged children population may continue to be more prevalent, parks and other associated facilities and amenities will need to cater to older adults as well. When developing the parks, trails, and open space system, conscious efforts should be made to include various types of programming and activities within each area that will cater to a more diverse public. Creating and establishing varying types of programs and activities aimed at different age groups will enable the City to better adapt to potential changing demographics in the future.

## Related Planning Efforts

The City of Isanti updated their Comprehensive Plan in June 2020. This Comprehensive Plan update was made to the original, which was completed in 2008. Since the 2008 Plan, many changes had occurred with respect to the City, as a large amount of land, primarily areas surrounded by the City “donut holes”, were annexed. The 2020 Comprehensive Plan took into consideration those properties within the existing City boundaries, as well as areas outside of the City limits that may be subject to future development as the City grows and expands beyond its existing boundaries. The Comprehensive Plan set forth the goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for the City of Isanti as it expands within these areas. The goals and strategies for the implementation of the Plan were divided into various categories, to include: Community Vision, Goals & Strategies, The Community, Housing and Neighborhoods, The Economy, Natural Resources, Parks, Trails and Open Space, Land Use and Growth and Transportation. Many of the goals and strategies found in specific Chapters of the overall Comprehensive Plan have been incorporated and will be supplemented by the 2022 Park, Trail, and Open Space Plan.

The City has also completed several other planning related studies and plans, which include a Multi-Modal Transportation Plan, Development Impact Study, and a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). Each of these documents will be used to further the goals and objectives of the City of Isanti, as the community moves into the future. These documents will become increasingly important as the demand and need for City services and infrastructure evolve or increase for both existing and new development. These documents provide guidance for the location and / or redevelopment of City-related services and amenities. The Capital Improvement Plan will provide a strategy for how funds will be allocated over future years for specific projects, so as not to create an undue financial burden on the community or its residents. Park related projects and amenities for both new and existing facilities/ equipment have been included within this document. The City will need to continue to utilize this plan for the future costs associated with the construction and/or monitoring and replacement of City park facilities and amenities. Replacement items or redevelopment projects associated with City parks are funded under the general budget funds or CIP funds.

In addition, plans have been prepared and adopted at the County level, which have an effect upon the City of Isanti. Isanti County has adopted a 2017 Trails and Bikeways Master Plan, 2006-2030 Transportation Plan, 2008 Isanti County Parks and Recreation Plan, and 2009 Land Use Plan. These documents provide a larger framework for planning across Isanti County. Natural resources, transportation systems, park and recreation amenities, and land use implications do not end at the City limits; but are extended into neighboring communities, townships, and Isanti County. The City acknowledges that planning for the conservation of natural resources, trails, and park amenities need to be reviewed in a broader context that will contribute to the overall function of City, Township, and County systems. This 2022 Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan will take into consideration the components identified in other City and Regional Planning documents, to ensure that Isanti is meeting the goals, objectives, and vision for the region as well.



## **PARK AND TRAIL SYSTEM CLASSIFICATION**

Parks and trails have been classified into various categories depending upon the types of amenities provided as well as based upon location and size criteria. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA, 2006) has established general descriptions for each park type, which have been used throughout this Plan as a guide for classifying components of the City's park system. The various types include:

### **Mini-Park**

The mini-park is created to address the limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs associated with a small area. This type of park must be located within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile distance of a residential area and is generally between 2,500 square feet to 1 acre in size.

### **Neighborhood Park**

The neighborhood park is considered the most basic unit of the park system. This park serves as the recreational and social focus for a residential neighborhood; and provides for both active and passive recreational opportunities. This type of park is usually within  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distance of a residential area and is not interrupted by non-residential roads or other types of physical barriers, making it readily accessible to area residents.

### **School Park**

The combination of parks and recreational amenities with school sites has been found to fulfill the space requirements for other types of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex, or special use parks. The proximity of a school park to residential neighborhoods is determined by the location of the school property. The size of the park will vary depending upon the types of recreational facilities or amenities that are offered and the overall size of the school property.

### **Community Park**

The community park serves a much broader purpose than a neighborhood park. The park focuses on serving larger community-based recreational needs, rather than just those of the surrounding residential neighborhood. This type of park also focuses on preserving unique landscapes, natural areas, and open spaces. The community park usually serves two (2) or more neighborhoods within one-half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) to a three (3) mile distance. The overall location and types of amenities provided in these parks will be based upon the size, quality, and suitability of the site.

### **Large Urban Park**

The large urban park serves an even broader purpose than the community park. This type of park can be used when community or neighborhood parks are not of adequate size or do not contain the necessary amenities to serve the needs of the overall community. The focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs. The preservation of unique landscape areas as well as passive open spaces is also a main focus for this type of park. The large urban park serves the entire community and the amenities provided are determined by the quality and suitability of the area. The overall area of the park will be determined based upon the uses that are provided. Different

types of recreational opportunities require less or more land area. Generally, the large urban park is around fifty (50) to seventy-five (75) acres in size, in order to accommodate the necessary planned amenities that would service a community.

#### Natural Resource Areas

These are lands that have been set aside for the preservation or conservation of significant natural resource amenities, remnant landscapes, open space, and / or visual aesthetics and buffering. The location is dependent upon the availability and opportunity for access to these types of natural resources. The size of the overall area will also vary depending upon the location of natural amenities found on the site.

#### Greenways

Greenways tie the park system components together to form a continuous linear park environment, which tie natural resource elements to the overall park system. In some instances, utility corridors have been utilized as areas for greenway systems.

Greenways are situated based upon the availability and location of natural resources or utility corridors, so the overall size of these areas can also vary.

#### Sports Complex

A sports complex places programmed athletic fields and other types of associated facilities on larger and fewer sites within the community. The sports complex is strategically located, so as to serve the entire community. The size of the facility is based upon the demand for a specific type and / or a certain number of recreational facilities and amenities. A minimum of twenty-five (25) acres is necessary; however, forty (40) to eighty (80) acres are strongly recommended.

#### Special Use

The special use park can actually cover a broad range of recreational activities and/or facilities. These parks are usually developed with a particular single purpose use in mind. The location and size are variable, and are based upon the specific use involved. Examples may include, but are not limited to a dog park or golf course.

#### Private Park / Recreation Facility

These types of parks and recreational facilities are owned by a private entity, yet may contribute to the overall City park and recreation system. These facilities vary in size and location; and are dependent upon the types of activities that are involved.

Each of the parks and facilities found within the City of Isanti have been reviewed and compared against the criteria established for each park type by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Oftentimes, it is difficult to classify a particular park or amenity within a specific group, as the general description, size or location may not precisely meet the requirements established by the NRPA. When difficulties were found in the classification of a particular park or facility, staff has reviewed the park against the general description and location. The actual size of the park may be disregarded for classification purposes. An inventory has been conducted of each park currently found within the park system, which has been

included within this plan as a reference. The inventory focuses on the classification, size, and the amenities that have been or will be provided within each of the City's existing parks.

In addition, the NRPA has also prepared a classification system for various types of trails. General descriptions regarding the trails purpose as well as the materials and uses permitted on the trail are all factors that are taken into consideration when reviewing the trails throughout the community. The various trail types include:

#### Park Trail

Park Trails are multi-purpose trails that are located within greenways, parks, and natural resource areas. The focus of the trail is based upon the recreational value of the overall facility and its unity with the natural environment. There are three (3) different classifications for Park Trails.

- A 'Type One' trail is a single purpose hard-surfaced trail for pedestrians, bicyclists, or in-line skaters.
- A 'Type Two' trail is a multi-purpose hard-surfaced trail for pedestrians, bicyclist, and in-line skaters.
- A 'Type Three' trail is a nature trail for pedestrians, on which the surface may be composed of hard or soft materials.

#### Connector Trail

The Connector Trail is a multi-purpose trail that emphasizes safe travel for pedestrians to and from parks, and provides access to other areas within the community. The focus for this type of trail is as much on transportation, as it is on recreation. Again, there are various types of trails that fit this category.

- A 'Type One' trail has a separate or single purpose and is hard-surfaced for pedestrians, bicyclists, or in-line skaters. This type of trail is generally located within an independent right-of-way area.
- The 'Type Two' trail is a separate or single purpose hard-surfaced trail for pedestrians, bicyclists, or in-line skaters, which is located within roadway right-of-way.

#### On-Street Bikeways

These are paved segments of a roadway that serves as a means to safely and effectively separate bicyclists from the motor vehicle traffic. On-street bikeways are placed in two categories; bike routes and bike lanes. A bike route is a designated portion of the roadway that is for preferential or exclusive use by bicyclists. A bike lane is a shared portion of the roadway that provides separation between motor vehicles and bicyclists, for example a paved shoulder.

#### All-Terrain Bike Trail

This is an off-road trail for all-terrain mountain bikes. These trails are usually single purpose loops that are located in larger parks or within natural resources areas. The trails consist of natural

materials that may be prevalent within the area, in which the trail is located. Hard-surfaces generally are not provided as a base for the all-terrain bike trail.

#### Cross Country Ski Trail

These trails are developed for traditional and skate-style, cross country skiing activities. Often times, these trails are located in larger parks with natural resource amenities. Again, these trails are mainly utilized during the winter months for this particular type of activity.

#### Equestrian Trail

These trails are developed for the sole purpose of horseback riding. The trails are looped through larger parks or natural resource areas. Rather than just limiting these trails to equestrian activities, the trail can be developed to accommodate hiking or all- terrain biking. Conflicts between the various uses should be anticipated and control mechanisms should be in place to avoid such conflicts.

## **EXISTING PARK SYSTEM**

Isanti has approximately 190 acres of park land spread throughout eleven (11) parks within the current City limits. Isanti has one (1) large urban park, four (4) community parks, five (5) neighborhood parks, and one (1) mini-park. Sandbrook Golf Course, Martin's Landing, the David C Johnson Civic Arena, and the Isanti Firefighters Rodeo Grounds; none of which are owned or operated by the City of Isanti, have provided significant additional recreational amenities and facilities for community and area residents. Isanti also has a partnership with the City of Cambridge to maintain a joint trail that connects the two cities. Area residents are able to use the Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail year-round for numerous recreational activities. The Isanti Indoor Arena- BMX track is owned by the City of Isanti, but is leased to the Rum River BMX Association and also provides significant recreational amenity to the community and area residents. In addition, the Isanti Primary School, Isanti Intermediate School/School for All Seasons, Isanti Middle School/Minnesota Center, Arts and Science Academy (ASA) Elementary School and ASA Middle School all provide additional passive and active recreational opportunities and amenities for area residents. A brief description of the activities and facilities provided on each of the school parcels has been provided. Despite each of these organizations' contribution towards the overall recreational amenities for the City, these facilities have not been included in the overall park totals presented within this document though their importance in the overall recreational system should be noted.

The City also leases portions of Bluebird Park to the Cambridge-Isanti Soccer Club, Rum River BMX Association, and the Redbirds Organization (Baseball). Each of these groups work in conjunction with the City to provide additional recreational elements that service the community. The property may be owned by the City; however, each of these entities is responsible for the implementation of recreation programs and maintenance associated with their facility.

In order to develop this plan, the City analyzed the existing conditions found within each park. Each park was evaluated based upon these conditions. Opportunities were determined for the development of new and/or expanded services as well as for re-development of existing facilities. Recommendations have been provided for each park within the City's system. These recommendations have been based upon the perceived opportunities and/or constraints that would appear to be present for each park. Opportunities or constraints are based upon physical attributes, level of service standards, the need to balance the kinds of facilities and amenities provided across the park system, and comments provided by area residents.

The recommendations are conceptual only and will be further evaluated to determine what future improvements can and should be made, and the timeframe in which those improvements should occur. The availability of funds and the needs of the community will be weighed heavily when making these types of future decisions.



## In General

Over time, the City of Isanti has worked to create a park system that caters to residents and visitors alike. In general, there are a number of features and activities to which the community would like to see remain or would like to see changed in the future, so as to promote the overall park system. In many of the City's parks; bench swings had been provided in the past for adults that have brought their children to the park to play; however, vandalism to bench swings and damage due to improper use of such equipment has resulted in the need for their removal. In those parks that currently have bench swings, once the swings have outlived their use, they should be removed and replaced by a different piece of play equipment or by an additional bench.

In addition, the City has a long-established tradition of Community Park Builds and Community Tree Plantings. Both activities are open to all residents of the community, business owners, and other civic and non-profit groups; wishing to help in a community service project. These types of activities give individuals the opportunity to participate in the community-building process; which gives residents a sense of pride, responsibility, and ownership in the community and its improvements. If possible and feasible, the City should aim to continue this tradition in the future.

Also, upon creation of a new public park, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Board has established Park Naming Contests. In these instances, City residents are given the opportunity to present a potential park name for Council consideration. Again, this process brings City residents into the park planning process and instills a sense of pride and ownership within the community. Other park related contests and awards have been created and provided to City residents, to include the City Flag Contest, naming of park areas and items within parks.

Many of the City's parks are located along trail or sidewalk corridors, in which residents have the opportunity to ride a bicycle to each of the City's park facilities. In an effort to reinforce the need for an active lifestyle; safe and convenient places for the storage of bicycles while residents or visitors are enjoying the amenities of the park system are considered a necessity. As the City continues to grow and develop additional parks, open spaces, trails, and the greenway system; the demand for bike racks in convenient locations will increase. A portable toilet and garbage cans have also been provided at each park to support extended use and cleanliness efforts.

Lastly, the City of Isanti has been monitoring the play equipment provided within the parks for compliance. The City of Isanti will continue to strive to protect the health and safety of those children using the park equipment. When necessary, play equipment will be removed and possibly replaced, in a timely manner.

## Academy Park

Location: 901 6<sup>th</sup> Ave Ct NE

Academy Park is located on the east side of Trunk Highway 65 and Cajima St NE.



### Existing

A full-size tennis court is located in the center of this park area. Chain-link fencing surrounds the tennis court.

There is an open space area located to the east side of the park. Coniferous and deciduous trees have been scattered throughout the park. A soccer field/multi-purpose field is along the east side of the park with a chain link fence to separate it from the storm pond and wetland area.

The play equipment is located along the trail on the north side of the park. Four (4) regular swings have been provided. The playground area includes slides, climbers, Spinami, Loopy Whoop, Spin Cup and rope walls. The play equipment area is surrounded by wood chips and a concrete edge. Two (2) benches have been strategically located around the play equipment.

A trail wraps around the outside edge of the park and ends along the southeast corner for future City expansion. Parking for this park area is available along the street. When this park was first opened it was a cooperative effort with the Arts and Science Academy and they had exclusive use of the park during school hours. In 2018, the school and City agreed that this will become an exclusive City of Isanti park.

## Bluebird Park

Location: 201 Isanti Parkway NW

Bluebird Park is generally located within the southeast corner of the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW and Isanti Parkway NW. A portion of the park, which consists of the Soccer Complex, is located within the northeast corner of the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup>



Avenue NW and Isanti Parkway NW. Bluebird Park is bisected by an access road, which is an extension of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NW. The park stretches along both sides of this access roadway, extending from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW on the west to the BNSF Railroad on the east; and south from Isanti Parkway NW to the Isanti Firefighters Rodeo Grounds and the Isanti Centennial Complex Industrial Park.

### Existing

Two (2) large parking lots are located within the park, one at the north end and the other at the south end of the park. The parking lots contain approximately one hundred thirty-one (131) parking spaces for park patrons. In 2018, the original skatepark surface was redesigned for an additional parking lot with 45 parking spaces. Trails meander through the park and connect to a trail provided along the west side of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW via a pedestrian crossing. The Cambridge-Isanti Bike/Walk Trail along the east side of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, just north of Isanti Parkway NW provides additional pedestrian access to the park as this trail links from the City of Isanti to the City of Cambridge.

Play equipment is located near the center of the park, which includes both small and large play structures to accommodate a wide variety of age groups. The smaller play structure, with a Clifford theme, has slides, a bridge, and climbing equipment. A larger structure for older children consists of slides, climbing walls, and climbing bars. A large net climber stands in the middle of the play equipment area. Several small play elements known as spring creatures have been provided for smaller children. A large swing set containing three (3) toddler seats, one (1) ADA accessible swing, and four (4) regular seats can also be found onsite. Two (2) to three (3) benches of varying styles and materials have been provided around the perimeter of the play equipment for parents accompanying their children at the park. One (1) open-sided picnic shelter has been constructed to the southwest of the play area and contains four (4) to five (5) picnic tables.

Amenities for additional sports activities are included within the park. A full-size basketball court with two (2) benches was constructed in 2009. The court has been striped accordingly for regulation games. A lighted pleasure skating rink is provided during the winter months for area residents.

A skateboard park, which is heavily used by the City's young residents, supplements the amenities that have been provided within the park. Ramps, pikes, and other obstacles were added to the concrete surface area, which once housed the outdoor hockey rink. This area can be used year-round with the lighting system in place.

A public green space or passive park area has been located within the northwest corner of the park. This area is available for other activities, such as kite flying, frisbee throwing, or playing catch. In 2020, the border of the northwest corner was shaped into a winter sledding hill, which provides additional recreation for residents during the winter months. A picnic shelter with four (4) tables and electric connection resides between this green space and the playground.

In 2021, the Bluebird Amphitheater was erected along the walking path on the south end of the green space. This amphitheater provides an outdoor venue for community events and programs and can be utilized year-round.

Mature trees line the east side of the park area and new trees are continually planted each year, in accordance with an approved landscape plan. Portable toilets and garbage cans have been adequately provided for throughout the park.

In 2015 a rain garden was created and added to the east side of the Isanti Indoor Arena (IIA). This was developed to capture rainwater from the building and filters the pollutants from the storm water before it is returned to lakes, streams and rivers.

A Dog Park was added in May 2019 to the northeast corner of Bluebird Park, between the IIA and the railroad tracks. The 1-acre park is fenced in with one (1) maintenance gate and one (1) transition gate area for entry for dog park users. A bench and dog waste depot were added during construction. In November 2019, Rotary Club of Cambridge & Isanti donated money to be used to purchase an additional bench, dog park accessories (i.e., agility apparatus), and the addition of the entrance concrete pad and bench pad. The west parking lot is shared with the IIA and signs were added stating certain spots were for dog park users only.



In 2022, an archery range is to be constructed in the southeast corner of the park near the red barn. The range will feature multiple range targets and a fence line will enclose the space due to safety concerns.

There are several additional athletic elements that have become synonymous with Bluebird Park, given their close proximity. These include Sportsman Field, the Soccer Complex, and the Isanti Indoor Arena (IIA)- Rum River BMX Facility. In each instance, the City may own the property in which these amenities are located; however, each individual recreational group has an agreement with the City and is responsible for improvements and maintenance of their respective facility. Each facility has been briefly discussed below.

#### **Sportsman Field – (Redbirds Baseball Organization)**

Sportsman Field, home of the Isanti Redbirds, is a regulation size baseball facility located near the southwest corner of Bluebird Park. The field is lighted. Bleachers, dugouts, a cement block building with concession stand and upstairs press box have all been constructed on the site. A small outbuilding stores team equipment and field maintenance items. Improvements



to and maintenance of the facility is provided by the Redbirds Organization, which raises funds through concession/ticket sales, as well as numerous fundraising events that may occur throughout the year. Water is provided to the facility by a private well. Sewer service has not been installed, so portable toilets are provided by the group for the season. Connection to City water and sewer services should be considered in the future.

### **Isanti Soccer Complex – (Cambridge-Isanti Soccer Club)**

The Isanti Soccer Complex was established through the use of grant funds awarded by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Due to such funding, the area is to remain in perpetuity for recreational purposes. The Soccer Complex, which is located just north of Bluebird Park



across Isanti Parkway, contains nine (9) regulation size soccer fields. Two (2) small open-sided shelters, located on the south and east sides of the complex; and one (1) large open shelter located on the west side of the complex have been provided onsite for those utilizing the facility. A small equipment storage facility is located near the middle of the soccer complex. Graveled parking areas are provided along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, as well as along Isanti Parkway NW for patrons to the facility. Similar to Sportsman Field, the Cambridge-Isanti Soccer Club is responsible for improvements to and maintenance of the soccer fields. The Cambridge-Isanti Soccer Club has an agreement with the City of Isanti for the leasing of the land and the operation of the Soccer Complex. Updates to the existing Agreement are necessary to accommodate changing conditions.

### **Isanti Indoor Arena (IIA) – (Rum River BMX Association)**

The IIA, which is located within the northeast corner of Bluebird Park, was constructed in 2015. The building contains the race track made out of compacted dirt, and is surrounded by



areas of pavement. It has a concession area, and several sets of bleachers, and picnic tables are within the concession area for visitors to the facility. There are restrooms available inside the building along with a set of restrooms that are available on the outside of the building to be used by the public year-round during park hours.

A warming house is also available during the winter months. The Rum River BMX Association is responsible for the operations of, improvements to, and maintenance of the facility. The Rum River BMX Association has entered into an agreement with the City for the leasing of land and the operation of the track. The Agreement is reviewed occasionally and updated as needed.

### **Recommendations**

Prior to the initial construction of Bluebird Park, the City Council had approved a site plan for the future development and layout of the park. While many aspects of the site plan have been implemented to date, such as a full-size baseball field and recreational basketball court, there are many more amenities and facilities planned for development in the future. The City should



continue its efforts to develop those facilities identified in the plan. The timeline for each element's construction will depend upon whether or not funds are available and the overall needs of the community for each type of facility or amenity. As part of this plan, several recommendations for modifications to the original site plan have been noted based upon current needs of the community, including adding additional shade structures and landscaping, and removing the need for a second full-size basketball or tennis court.

The skate park is heavily used and could use an expansion to allow more residents to utilize the park, and to keep the equipment fresh. Experience-appropriate equipment can be added to allow for beginners and more experienced riders to use the equipment symbiotically.

A warming house/concession stand with public restrooms was planned to the south of the concrete area that houses the skatepark equipment. The outdoor hockey rink boards were removed in 2016 due to safety concerns, and it was not budgeted to replace this equipment. The skatepark equipment was relocated to the concrete pad where the hockey rink was housed. Bluebird Park sees a great deal of use throughout the year, so the restrooms/concession area is considered a fairly important project. Concerns have been raised regarding the maintenance costs, as well as the potential vandalism that may occur with permanent restroom facilities. However, despite the issues that such a structure may present, the components associated with this structure will be important as the City continues to grow and further recreational amenities are added to the park, in which subsequent additional recreational events will be held that may require these types of facilities.

A splash pad has been recently proposed in the northwest corner of the park. This project has been considered as a way to encourage increased use of the park during the hot summer months and would keep the City of Isanti properties competitive as splash pads have begun to take shape in surrounding cities. Concerns over the cost of water systems and associated waste have been raised and will be a major consideration in the development of this feature. A restroom facility has also been proposed for this area and will need to be located within twenty (20) feet of any splash pad in order to meet state code.

## Eagle Park

Location: Railroad Ave & Broadway St SW

Eagle Park is a mini-park nestled behind the downtown district and to the edge of a residential area along the railroad tracks. The park is bordered by a parking lot that acts as an overflow parking area for nearby businesses. The park is often used by downtown employees as a break space.

### Existing

In 2021, as part of the Main Street Improvement Project, the park was expanded to cover the southeast corner of the parking lot. The park currently includes one picnic table and three benches for seating.



### Recommendations

Due to the proximity of the railroad tracks to this park, it has been proposed that the space be used as a railroad viewing park. A viewing platform would be added to the southeast edge of the property, overlooking the tracks, to allow people to watch the trains as they come through. Coordination with the BNSF rail company could be utilized to manage a schedule and placards with historical facts about the railroad could be added to the park.

The park, especially with the expansion, is lacking seating options for users. Adding some more picnic tables and benches would help increase use of the park.

Landscaping for the park is also recommended to create a more visual space. Flowering bushes and limited maintenance shrubs would be an easy addition that could make a big impact on the appeal of the park.

## Isanti Hills Neighborhood Park (Formerly Isanti Tot Lot)

Location: 518 Dogwood Street SW

The Isanti Hills Neighborhood Park is nestled behind residential homes, which line Cottonwood Street SW, Dogwood Street SW, and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. The park is completely surrounded by residential homes with very little visibility from the public street.



### Existing

The Isanti Hills Neighborhood Park underwent a name change in 2017 with the city asking for the community input on new names to encompass a more overall name for the park. This park contains a wide variety of play equipment and structures. Play equipment includes a super scoop, Buck-A-Bout, several spring creatures, swing set with three (3) regular swings and one (1) toddler swing, tunnel slide, and climbing play system. Wood chips have been provided around all of the play structures. A concrete curb was added in 2017, around the play equipment area.

A wooden shelter with shingles placed upon a concrete slab is located within the park. The existing roof is wearing and shingles are missing. Three (3) picnic tables and two (2) benches have been provided for those utilizing the park. Limited green space is available for other types of activities. There are some trees that have been located onsite. Trails providing walkway access to the park have been provided from Cottonwood Street SW and Dogwood Street SW. The trails link to the overall sidewalk system along the west side of Cottonwood Street SW and the east side of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. The trail sections, as well as the park area, is surrounded by chain link fencing so as to separate the park area from the residential lots that are immediately adjacent to the park.

### Recommendations

The Isanti Hills Neighborhood Park is heavily used by the neighborhood residents. While the equipment is adequate for the age groups of children living within the area today, the equipment may need to be changed in the future to accommodate an aging neighborhood. A theme or other

types of recreational activities will need to be considered. Additional trees should be considered, so as to provide adequate shade and buffer between the activities within the park and residential properties.

The shelter that is located onsite was constructed by the Cambridge-Isanti High School Trades class. While the shelter is in fairly good condition today, it will need to be replaced in the future. At this time, it is difficult to know how much use the shelter does receive, given that this is a small neighborhood park that is utilized mainly by surrounding residents. If the shelter were to be replaced in the future, the shelter should blend with the residential feel of the area.

The Isanti Hills Neighborhood Park is located in similar fashion to that of Whisper Ridge. The park is hidden behind the existing residential homes located within the area. In order to ensure that residents of the community know the park is located within the area, additional park signage should be considered near the entrance walkways into the park.

In the past, discussions have been held regarding the paving of a third access entrance into the park from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. A small parking lot could also be considered. There is vacant land, owned by a private individual adjacent to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. Not only could an area be obtained for a third access point, but potential additional park land could be acquired to expand the park and provide direct access and visibility to the area from the public street. At this time, many residents and visitors to the community do not realize or do not understand that this is a City park. The location of the park is deceiving and, oftentimes, goes unnoticed.

In 2021, a neighborhood survey was conducted. The results highlighted the use of playground equipment, shelter, and open green space. The results also noted concerns about the park being hidden from view and becoming a gathering point for misbehaving teenagers. Recommendations were made to increase the monitoring of the park; creating another access point may act as a deterrent as visibility is increased. The survey results also encouraged the addition of recreational elements, fitness equipment, and early childhood learning features to enhance the park for its changing population.

## Legacy Park

Location: 1043 Bellaire Blvd NW

Legacy Park is located in the northwest area of the City and is off of the Rum River. This park is a 21-acre natural area with lime ag and natural trails that run along the Isanti Brook, that was built in 2015.

The trail system encompasses an ADA path for a portion and the total trail system is 2.5 miles. Picnic tables and benches are located throughout the park along the trail. In 2016, a name contest was conducted to name points of interest along the trail system. Isanti schools



were provided an opportunity to input names. These names were chosen by the Parks, Recreation and Culture Board. In 2020, the final stretch of Bellaire Blvd was completed to connect to the entrance of the park. A parking lot was installed with 8 stalls.

## Mattson Park

Location: 311 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW

Mattson Park is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Main Street W and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW. The park stretches along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW to the north, until its intersection with Heritage Blvd/County Road 5 NW and stretches to the west along the creek. The park is surrounded by various types of residential units.



### Existing

A full-size basketball court is located within the northwest corner of the park, adjacent to Heritage Blvd/County Road 5 NW. The court receives a large amount of use by area residents.

Two (2) full-size tennis courts with benches line the northeast corner of the park, which had a surface crack improvement in 2018. Five (5) bituminous parking spaces have been provided for this general area of the park. Chain-link fencing surrounds the tennis courts and a retaining wall with handrails is provided along the east side of the park between the sidewalk and the tennis courts due to the change in grade. In 2021, pickleball lines were added to the court to allow for multi-functional use.

Near the middle of the park, four (4) horseshoe pits with corresponding benches have been located to the south of the tennis courts. There is an open space area located between the play equipment to the south and the horseshoe pits to the north that could be utilized for various types of active or passive activities. Mature trees line the west side of the park along the banks of Park Brook and are scattered throughout the park.

The play equipment is located within the southern portion of the park. Four (4) toddler swings and four (4) regular swings have been provided. A Mountain Climb and Slide as well as a Climber with Skywheels and Loop Ladders are more recent additions to the play equipment at the park. A Buck-A-Bout has been onsite for many years. The new play equipment areas are surrounded by wood chips and a concrete edge was added in 2018 to each play area. Five (5) benches have been strategically located around the play equipment.

A shelter is located within the southeast corner of the park. The structure is made of wood with a shingled roof and a concrete floor pad. The shelter provides a roof over four (4) picnic tables. In 2010, a message center was constructed by City staff and placed near the shelter to display



reservations for the park shelter, but was removed in 2011 due to vandalism. Four (4) grills have also been scattered throughout the park for picnic-goers.

A sidewalk has been provided along the west side of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW. The sidewalks are connected to the overall sidewalks system along the north side of Main Street W and the south side of Heritage Blvd/County Road 5 NW. Handicapped parking has been provided along Main Street W due to the grade differences between the street (5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW) and the park below. Appropriate pavement markings and signage designates the handicapped parking area.

### Recommendations

Replacement equipment will be needed in the future, particularly for the swings. Funds will need to be put aside for their replacement within the capital improvement plan. In the future, a new shelter or larger shelter will be necessary. City staff does receive requests for reservation of this shelter for events. If a new shelter were constructed in the future, the City should look at a different type of structure than is currently found onsite. A new shelter should blend with the surrounding residential uses. In addition, given the increased amount of usage the park shelter has seen in recent years for family gatherings and other types of functions, the City may look to have electricity extended to the Mattson Park shelter as well.

## River Bluff Preserve Park

Location: 1111 Rum River Dr SW

River Bluff Preserve is a 38-acre park in the DNR Wild and Scenic River Easement Area. This park opened in July 2015. This park has a large trail system of 5 miles, which connects north to Martin's Landing (MN DNR site).

The park consists of two areas, an upper area and lower area along the Rum River. The upper area has a 10-acre natural vegetation pollinator area with a natural trail that leads to a lime ag trail which



then leads to the river bank along the west side of the park. Along the north area of the natural trail, it leads to steps that bring you to the riverbank and connecting trail system. Once along the river bank a dirt and lime ag trail run adjacent to the Rum River.

During the summer months a dock/bridge is installed along a portion of the trail where a side





stream cuts off access to the north trail system. This dock allows for fishing access during the summer months and connects the trail to Martin's Landing, which is a MN DNR site.

The entrance to the upper area of the park includes a Community Garden. The garden is enclosed by a 10' tall chain link fence and is secured by a locked gate. The garden includes sixty-six (66) ground plots, seven (7) raised beds, and one (1) elevated bed. Plots are available to residents to rent for the gardening season, which opens in early spring and closes in the fall. The plots are surrounding by mulch to prevent or limit weed growth outside of the gardening areas.

Two (2) large plots are positioned in the corner. One (1) is planted by the City and has commonly grown sunflowers and a small assortment of vegetables; the other is reserved for expansion and/or educational gardening opportunities through area programs and partnerships. Vegetables that are harvested are donated to the Senior Dining program that takes place at the Isanti Community Center. Gardeners can also donate excess harvest for this program throughout the season.

The garden also includes a supply shed with standard gardening equipment available for gardeners to use. A picnic table, bench and shade canopy are positioned in the space as well. The City maintains the general property and equipment throughout the season. They also remove compost and weeds surrounding the plots. Gardeners are responsible for all maintenance within their rented plots.

In 2022, the Garden will undergo a renovation to freshen up the current plots, add additional raised and elevated beds, and to separate the large plots for distinctive use.

Portable toilets and garbage cans have also been provided. Bituminous surface parking has been provided for thirteen (13) vehicles, including one (1) handicap parking space.

### Recommendations

In 2022, a recreation program has been planned for building and decorating bird and bat houses. These houses would be added to the pollinator area in the upper level of the park. The houses would add color to the surrounding environment and support the natural habitation of birds and bats in the area. Due to standing water along the river bank, this park is a major nesting ground for mosquitoes. Encouraging bat habitation can help monitor insect levels and reduce the need for City-wide spraying.

The walking trails at River Bluff offer a number of opportunities to incorporate artwork into the area. Not only would art and sculptures add color to the dull surroundings, but it could increase park usage by encouraging resident participation and creating a more visually appealing park and trail system.

The trail system is not host to lookout points, which could be added to encourage longer use of the park grounds. Adding benches or passive use features could create more gathering opportunities for residents.

## Riverside Park

Location: 503 Rum River Drive NW

Riverside Park is located near the corner of Rum River Drive NW and Hillock Street NW. Riverside Park is located to the east of the Rum River. This area is also surrounded by residential neighborhoods.



### Existing

Riverside Park contains various types of play equipment, which caters to both small and older children. The toddler equipment is comprised of a small toddler climber with a slide and a spring car, which is located on the south end of the park. A larger play structure with slides, climbing equipment, tunnels, and bridges is located on the north side of the park. Very little open area is available on the site for passive activities. One (1) bench and two (2) picnic tables have been provided for park patrons. Wood chips surround all of the play equipment. Portable toilets and garbage cans have also been provided. Bituminous surface parking has been provided for eleven (11) vehicles.

The park is buffered by a heavy line of trees located to the west. Some new trees have been planted to add shade at the park; however, it will take many years before these trees can provide an appropriate tree canopy.

A wooded lot, which is considered part of Riverside Park, extends back to the Rum River. A fence with access gate has been provided along this lot line. Questions have arisen as to how and whether access from this lot to the river could be accommodated, so residents are able to enjoy the scenic natural amenities of the area.

A new safety light was installed at the park during the summer of 2008, in an effort to increase park safety for those utilizing the facilities as dusk. There is a trail which leads into the park from the north side. The trail begins at its intersection with Whiskey Road and runs the length of Hillock Street NW, behind the residential homes into the park. A sidewalk is located on the west side of Rum River Drive NW also provides pedestrian access to the park.

### Recommendations

In the future, upgrades and replacement of park equipment will be necessary. The play equipment within the park has been located at opposite ends of the area. In the future, play equipment should be concentrated within one general vicinity, to allow for better visibility by parents that may be watching over their children at the park.

The City should consider the possibility of expanding the park towards the river and allowing for public access via trails to natural areas along the Rum River. The topography and the ponding area located behind the park, as well as the type of trail that the City could provide, would need to be further reviewed due to the flood plain and scenic river designation of the Rum River. While the option may not work for the site, walking paths providing access to the Rum River

would be an asset to the community and its residents. An issue that may arise if trails and access was provided would be the potential trespassing issues, if the public were to go beyond any constructed City trails due to the large number of privately held lots that are located along the river, both to the north and to the south of the Riverside Park area. If the City wishes to provide additional trail linkages along the river heading to the south or north, easements would need to be obtained by the City from each of the owners along the proposed trail.

## Rum River Meadows Park

Location: 1108 South Passage SW

Rum River Meadows Park is located along the north side of South Passage SW, just to the west of the intersection of South Passage SW and Maplewood Avenue SW. The park is surrounded by residential properties.



### Existing

Rum River Meadows Park contains both a larger play structure for older children, as well as a smaller structure that is geared towards younger children or toddlers. The smaller structure contains a slide with stairs. Several spring creatures have also been provided for smaller children. The larger play structure consists of slides, climbing equipment, poles and a bridge. A swing set with two (2) regular seats and two (2) toddler seats has been located onsite. A bench swing; along with two (2) regular benches and two (2) picnic tables have been provided. Wood chips have been provided around the base of the play equipment and in 2020 a concrete border was installed surrounding the play equipment area.

There is some green space surrounding the play equipment, which could be used for other types of activities. A volleyball court was added to the east side of the park area in 2016. Posts and a net are provided on a grass surface.

Trees have been planted in an attempt to add shade to the property. An irrigation system is also in place to ensure that the landscaping is adequately maintained. An imitation rock is located on the property, which houses the irrigation control panel.

A sidewalk is located on the north side of South Passage, which connects to the overall City system via trail along the west side of County Road 23 and north side of South Passage on the east side of County Road 23; and via sidewalk along the east side of County Road 23. A streetlight has been placed along South Passage SW, which provides some light for park patrons in the evening. The two adjacent properties to the west and east of the park were acquired in 2012 for future expansion of this park.

### Recommendations

Additional trees and landscaping have been discussed in the past for the park. The park was developed on vacant property within the Rum River Meadows subdivision, and such parcels did not have any existing trees in place. In order to have adequate shade for park patrons in the future, additional trees should be considered to aid in the expansion of the tree canopy. When planting trees, care should be taken when digging, so as not to disrupt or break the underground pipes associated with the irrigation system. There is ample room for natural elements to be added to enhance the attractiveness of the property and to create more functional areas for residents to use.

Fencing has been proposed for the perimeter of the park. The private property owner to the north has constructed a privacy fence. Should the City move forward with placing additional fencing along the east and west sides of the park; the type, materials, and height of the fencing would need to be determined. However, the fencing may detract from the openness of this small neighborhood park and may hamper other activities from occurring on the park property.

In the future, the equipment will need to be replaced in an effort to maintain safety standards for the park and to continue to draw people to the area. Expanding or adding new equipment to the park may utilize the expanded property and allow the park to grow with the residents.

Whether the park is eventually converted from an active park to a more passive park, additional park signage should be considered, so as to provide better identification for City residents. Such signage and the type of signage would need to be reviewed and should be placed near the walkway entrances into the park.

For improved ADA convenience, a walking path could be paved from the sidewalk up to the playground to ensure access for all residents.

In 2021, a resident survey was conducted to understand the surrounding community needs and struggles with this park. The results highlighted the need for additional shade structures and gathering areas. It was suggested that a park shelter or shade unit be constructed to allow for neighborhood gathering. Residents highlighted the desire for additional recreational elements, fitness equipment, natural elements and early childhood learning features to be incorporated into the park.

## Unity Park

Location: 420 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW

Unity Park is located to the north of Unity Boulevard NW and runs the entire length of this street segment. The western corner of the park, which contains the softball field, is located within the northeast quadrant of the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW and Unity Boulevard NW. The more passive area of the park is located within the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Unity Boulevard NW and First Avenue NW. The park is surrounded by residential units to the south, the Isanti Primary School to the west, additional



recreational amenities and the Isanti Area Firefighters Rodeo Grounds to the north, and industrial uses to the east.

Unity Park was also developed with the aid of grant funds provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The park was developed to include both passive and active areas.

#### Existing

Unity Park is the location of the community's only softball field. A stand-alone field is located within the western portion of the park. The field is lighted and is surrounded by chain-link fencing within the outfield. The field is often rented for recreational league games, as well as for private games like kickball. In 2020, boulders were added to the edge of the parking lot to create a boundary between the grass and the lot. New bleachers were installed in 2021.

There are several bird houses that have been constructed on the property near the ball field. The bird homes were constructed by private individuals and placed within the park at the time of its development.

There is also a mature line of trees that surround the outfield. A gravel parking lot is located along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, which has been used by not only park patrons, but the Isanti Primary School as well. In 2015, a memo of understanding was established between the City and School District for use of the parking lot by the district during the school year. A portable toilet and garbage cans have also been provided.

The more passive area of the park is located to the east. This area contains a wide-open green space, as well as a small wetland complex with native vegetation. Mature trees line the north side of the park. A park shelter currently exists on the site, along with a small wooden picnic table with a cover. A grill has been provided onsite for those wishing to picnic in the park. Sidewalk is located along the west side of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, providing pedestrian access to the park.

#### Recommendations

Improvements will need to be made to the field in the future. Limeag was added and the infield was reshaped in 2017. Limeag, striping, and lighting will all need to be replaced in the coming years. The lighting system within the park is currently being turned on and off via the breaker box. The turning of the lights on and off, in this fashion, is considered to be hazardous. The City will need to update the lighting system in the near future to avoid any safety issues. In order to ensure that the field is adequately maintained for those groups using the field, the City has implemented a fee structure for field use by organized teams. The revenue received from the fees will be used to help off-set the costs associated with the maintenance of the field now and in the future.

Additional seating may be considered for the passive portion of the park, particularly in those areas overlooking the natural area provided on the property. Seating may consist of a few benches. Landscaping can also be considered to make the area more appealing and useful.



The Parks, Recreation and Culture Board has discussed the existing park shelter and does not see the need to re-construct or replace this shelter in the future, as the shelter and this portion of the park is perceived to have very little use. If an Eagle Scout were to rebuild the shelter in the future as part of a required project, the City would likely accept a new shelter; however, the City would look to have the shelter constructed within a different park.

## Whisper Ridge Park

Location: 795 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SW

Whisper Ridge Park is located behind the existing homes on the corner of Cottonwood Street SW and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SW. The park directly abuts and is located to the southeast of the residential homes located on Birch Court SW and is directly to the north of a residential neighborhood. The railroad borders the property for a short distance on the east, while the property to the north is vacant. Spirit Brook runs through the northern portion of the property.



### Existing

Whisper Ridge Park is the location of one (1) full-size basketball court and one (1) full-size tennis court. The courts are combined into the same space and surrounded by a chain-link fence. A trail leads back to the area, which links the two entrances, one from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SW and one from Birch Court SW. Fencing has been placed along the entrance from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SW. Lighting has been provided at each of the access entrances as well.

Mature trees surround this area to the north and east. Much of the area is left in its natural state and would be considered a passive park area. Spirit Brook and a large wetland area are located to the north of the park. This area is controlled by a private property owner at this time; however, little, if any, of this area can be developed due to the natural resource significance of the area and the location of the existing floodplain.

### Recommendations

Due to the park's location, many of the City's residents do not know that the park exists. The City has had issues with individuals riding recreational vehicles within the area, which has disturbed the surrounding neighborhood and cut up the natural areas that exist on the site. The Public Works Department has placed bollards along the railroad tracks within the area, in an effort to prevent ATV and vehicle use on the property. However, due to the isolation of the park and its lack of use, additional illegal activities have been known to occur in the park.

In previous discussions of the Parks, Recreation & Culture Board, members agreed that due to lack of use, the courts should not be replaced in the future. The courts should be removed upon their deterioration.

There is area located to the north, which is unbuildable due to flood plain and wetland issues. In the future, the City may consider working with the property owner in an effort to expand the park to the north. Additional passive and natural areas would then be available to City residents. In addition, access to and visibility of the park may be better attained from the north.

There have also been numerous discussions about connecting this park to the Downtown area via a boardwalk. The path would lead through a natural wetland and serve to support the surrounding neighborhoods in getting to and from Downtown. It would also offer access to and highlight the City's natural environment. This project was stalled in early 2015 due to projected costs, but should be researched again in the future as a viable option for continuing to build convenient access points throughout the City.

## **FORMER PARK PROPERTIES**

In 2019, the City Council discussed their intention to reduce the number of parks in the City and to focus energy on building a centralized destination for the community's events and programs, with Bluebird Park being the preferred destination. In an effort to preserve a sustainable balance in park properties City staff is required to maintain and to move toward this goal, decisions have occasionally been made to reduce park properties that are managed by the City.

### VFW Park

Location: 410 Railroad Avenue SW

VFW Park was located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Railroad Avenue SE and Palomino Drive SE. The



park was located to the south of the VFW Post facility, to the west of an existing residential neighborhood, to the north of a less densely populated residential area with future growth potential, and the east of the railroad tracks. The area to the north and west is guided for residential and commercial mixed uses; while the area to the south and east are guided for low density residential development.

### Former Features

The City of Isanti had entered into a lease agreement with the VFW in 1987, which set forth the terms and conditions for the use of the area identified as VFW Park. The original agreement allowed for a chain-link fence to surround the perimeter of the park, for play equipment to be placed within the area, and for the installation of two (2) bituminous parking spaces with a corresponding trail to be placed along the south edge of the property. While the area designated as park had been surrounded by chain-link fence and play equipment had been installed; the

parking spaces and trail had not been constructed. The overall size and dimensions of the park were quite small. Additional open space area, military equipment, and horseshoe pits are located to the north and west of the site; however, these areas were not considered part of the park.

The area is surrounded by mature trees, which provide more than adequate shade for those visiting the area.

A sidewalk was placed along Palomino Drive in 2019. Residential homes can be found to the east, with future residential designated to the south of the site. However, much of the area located immediately to the south is classified as floodplain and wetland; rendering additional development immediately to the south of the park quite difficult, if possible, at all. Currently, the lack of development and the variety of uses within the area, as well as the lack of pedestrian and motor vehicle traffic, has fostered a sense of isolation and seclusion to the park. In addition, neighboring properties have added recreational elements to their private parcels that deter children from entering the park. These conditions resulted in the park receiving very few visitors from the surrounding area. Despite these conditions, this was the only neighborhood park located adjacent to the existing residential properties to the east that is easily accessible and within a short walking distance.

In 2021, the City Council and the VFW decided to terminate the lease agreement and remove all City property from the park land. The fencing remained in place, as requested by the VFW, but all playground and park elements were removed. The City no longer maintains the property or any features on the land.

## **Isanti Community Center**

Location: 208.5 1<sup>st</sup> Ave NW

The Isanti Community Center is positioned just north of the Isanti City Hall, behind residential properties and a storage business. The center is available for public and private rental with a user fee.

### Existing

The center includes a main entertainment room with a 215 person capacity, restroom facilities, office and storage space, a small stage, and a multi-use kitchen. The kitchen includes a wash sink, refrigerator and freezer units, counter and cabinet space. Tables and chairs are provided, as well as a mounted TV with DVD player. Renters also have access to a speaker sound system, projector with screen, and microphones for an additional user fee.

The center also provides monthly rental options and is often rented by area organizations for weekly meetings.

## **Isanti School System**

The City of Isanti has five (5) public schools located within its municipal boundaries; Isanti Primary School, Isanti Intermediate School/School for All Seasons, Isanti Middle

School/Minnesota Center, Arts and Science Academy Elementary, Arts and Science Academy Middle School. The City also includes one K-12 private school: St Scholastica HSC Academy. Each of the schools provides recreational opportunities and amenities on school property that can be accessed and utilized by City residents. While these areas are not owned, operated, or maintained by the City, the recreational facilities provided at each of these sites fill gaps that may be seen within the existing park and recreation system. For this reason, a brief discussion and description of the existing facilities found on each of these school sites has been provided below.

### Isanti Primary School

Location: 301 County Road 5 NW

Located on the northwest corner of the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW and County Road 5 NW.

The Primary School has both a small and medium sized play structure located along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW. The equipment consists of slides, climbing bars, tubes, and bridges. Two (2) swing structures are also located within this same general area. Benches have been strategically placed around the play equipment area. The play area is surrounded by a chain-link fence, protecting children playing within the area from the adjacent residential street. Poured in Place sand has been placed as the base of the equipment area.

The Primary School also has a larger play structure for older children located on the west side of the school. Slides, tubes, and climbing equipment make up this larger play structure. A swing structure has also been located within this area. Similar in design to the other play area, benches have been located around the outer perimeter of the activity area and sand has been provided around the base of the equipment. A ball field as well as additional open space area can be found to the north of the play structure and to the west of the parking lot. In addition, a hard surfaced area has been located adjacent to the school building, which has two (2) funball goals.

### Isanti Intermediate School/School for All Seasons (IIS/SFAS)

Location: 101 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW

Located to the south of the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE

The IIS/SFAS has two (2) ballfields, as well as a vast amount of additional open space area, which could be used for other types of organized play activities or sports. This area is irrigated and is surrounded by a chain-link fence, so as to separate this area from the residential lawns that abut the fields on the south, southeast, and southwest sides. A basketball hoop and hard surfaced play area has been provided on the south side of the school, immediately adjacent to the school building. Several large play structures consisting of slides, bridges, swings, and climbing equipment has also been located within this area.

### Isanti Middle School/Minnesota Center (IMS/MC)

Location: 201 Centennial Drive NW

Located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Centennial Drive NW and County Road 5 NW, immediately adjacent to the Rum River.

The IMS/MC has two (2) practice football fields as well as two (2) baseball fields with benches. Soccer facilities with goals are located on the south side of the school. A paved area with four (4) basketball hoops and tetherball equipment has also been provided within this same general area. Climbing equipment, while only small stand-alone pieces, can be found in various locations on the property. These pieces of equipment were part of a larger physical activity course used by the school during physical education classes.

### Arts and Science Academy – Elementary School

Location: 903 6<sup>th</sup> Ave Ct NE

Located in the cul-de-sac of 6<sup>th</sup> Ave Ct and south of Cajima St NE, next to Academy Park.

The public charter elementary school was built in 2015, it has one large playground area, a small basketball court and is adjacent to Academy Park, which is used by the school during school days.

### Arts and Science Academy – Middle School

Location: 1005 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE

Located on the north side of 7<sup>th</sup> Ave.

The public charter middle school was built in 2017 as an expansion from the elementary school.

### St Scholastica HSC Academy

Location: 207 Whiskey Road NW

Located on the south side of County Road 5 next to Isanti Middle School.

The co-ed private school provides a Catholic-based education from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **EXISTING TRAIL SYSTEM**

Trail and sidewalk connections have become an increasingly important part of the City's park and transportation system. Trails not only provide an opportunity for additional recreational opportunities, but are an important link between schools, neighborhoods, parks, commercial areas, and other community facilities throughout Isanti.

The trail system in Isanti started development in the early 2000s, after trails became a requirement of new development in 2002. Previously, pedestrian thoroughfares consisted of narrow public sidewalks that were added minimally within or adjacent to new residential developments.

Isanti now requires new development to provide both sidewalks and trails; as these facilities are considered to be important in the creation of an overall pedestrian way system. Both types of facilities are required to meet the City's adopted construction specifications and location standards, included within the City's Subdivision Ordinance and Engineer's Design Manual.

Trails and sidewalks now connect most new developments to one another and have been dispersed throughout the community. While there may be some gaps within the system, the City remains dedicated to closing these gaps in the future, to ensure that the sidewalk and trail system will only become stronger and more well-connected.

While some of these gaps in the system are located within developed areas of the community, a great majority of these infill pieces are located on parcels that have not yet developed. In 2021, a trail was added along the north end

of Heritage Blvd NW from Hillock Court NW to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW to allow for safe passage to and from the Isanti Primary School property, and additional trail projects have been proposed to connect new developments with school properties.



City policy and ordinances would require the developer to construct these trail or sidewalk segments upon the development of the property. The City of Isanti realizes that it cannot control the timeframe in which these areas will develop in the future. If the City would decide that a particular segment is necessary prior to such development, the City would become the responsible party for obtaining easements and constructing these sidewalk or trail segments.

The majority of the trail linkages found within the community can be classified as Type Two, Park Trails or Type Two, Connector Trails. Both of these trail categories will continue to be important as well as the most predominant types of trail found within the community.

However, as the City continues to grow and develop, and as the needs and demands of the community change, additional trails with different types of purposes may be necessary and may need to be included in the overall sidewalk and trail system.

In review of the existing Sidewalk and Trail Map, it has been determined that there are gaps within the system that need to be filled. There have also been discussions to extend City trails to connect to more regional trail systems, such as to the Sunrise Prairie Trail near North Branch and to other County trails. The proposed “infill” segments have been discussed in more detail below.

## **PROPOSED PROJECTS**

In an effort to ensure that area residents and visitors have a safe crossing over State Trunk Highway 65 (TH 65), the City has easements for connecting trails to cross TH 65. These sidewalks and trails are still considered important, even without a pedestrian bridge, to ensure connectivity along each side of the corridor. The City will need to continue looking towards options to provide safe passage across Highway 65.

- East TH 65 trail extension is considered to be an important connector between the residential neighborhood, future commercial area, and the school property.
- Main Street trail improvements would connect the west entrance of TH 65 to the existing sidewalk that is currently located on the south side of Main Street East. Currently, this sidewalk segment ends at the intersection of Main Street East and Credit



Union Drive NE. Again, this trail segment would still be necessary to fill a gap in the current service area.

- CSAH 5 Trail and Sidewalk Improvements along the south side from Elim Lane NE to Credit Union Drive NE and along the north side from Hillock Court NW to Third Avenue NW (Isanti Primary School). The project would involve the completion of sidewalk or trail segments that had previously been identified as necessary for the safety of pedestrians walking to school along CSAH 5 as well as to local businesses in these areas for surrounding residential neighborhoods. Applications had been submitted for Safe Routes to School funding, but to date, the project has not been granted funds. The City continues to pursue funding to aid in the construction of these sidewalk areas. Easements would also need to be obtained from private property owners in several areas along this roadway, due to the limited amount of existing right-of-way.
- CSAH 5 Trail Improvements to the west of Whiskey Road. This trail segment should connect the bridge that currently crosses the Rum River to the existing trail that is located within the southwest corner of Whiskey Road NW and CSAH 5 NW. Currently, pedestrians walk along County Road 5 NW within this area to get to the Rum River Bridge. A trail would provide the separation necessary between pedestrians and motor vehicle traffic.

Second enhanced pedestrian crossing on County Road 5 NE. A second enhanced pedestrian crossing has been identified within the Comprehensive Plan, which would cross County Road 5 NE, just to the east of its intersection with 8th Avenue NE. As this area to the north and southeast begins to develop, additional residential neighborhoods will need a safe crossing that would tie these newly developed areas into those of the existing community. Additional sidewalk and trail extension or infill projects may be necessary, which have not been summarized here. The City should look to conduct a Walkable Workshop of the community utilizing its sidewalk and trail system, so as to identify additional areas where connections may be needed or signs/signals for safe pedestrian crossing should be included or displayed. Once identified, these areas can be further prioritized to ensure that construction is completed for these segments as well.

The City has also previously discussed a major development to build a pedestrian bridge crossing TH 65 and providing safe passage across this high-traffic transportation corridor. The City currently has easements for connecting trails that were to lead to the entrance of the bridge on both east and west sides of the highway. The project was stalled in 2010 due to a lack of funding and federal support for infrastructure developments. The project has been re-addressed many times in years since, but has yet to receive the support for funding that would be needed to complete the project. It is still, however, a valuable project to consider to connect the City across TH 65.

## **FUTURE PARK AND TRAIL SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**

## Future Park Development

In order to ensure that a wide variety of play area types, sizes, amenities, and facilities can be found throughout the City of Isanti Park System that reflect the overall vision and values established by the community, an overall framework that provides direction for the creation of new parks and the redevelopment of existing facilities is needed. This framework will ensure that the Isanti Park System embodies the essence of the community and meets the needs of residents now, and in the future.

1. All residents should have the opportunity to play.

Play areas within parks should be created, so as to be stimulating and developmentally appropriate for all age groups and abilities. The play area should be designed to allow children the opportunity to investigate and influence their environment. The areas should enable children to thrive, contribute, and begin to create a healthy, active lifestyle. Furthermore, parks should be located and designed so as to accommodate the physical and developmental needs of all age groups and abilities, including for adults. A better quality of life will be experienced by all if equity and diversity are achieved within the facilities and services provided in the park system.

2. Parks should be both accessible and located within a reasonable walking distance.

Play areas should be readily accessible and located within walking distance for all age groups and all abilities. Most play areas should be located within ¼ mile of a residential neighborhood. Crossing of major barriers such as collector or arterial roadways should be eliminated. A network of multi-use, non-vehicular pathways, sidewalks, or trails should be created to ensure that accessibility and walking distance standards are met for the community.

3. The connections between Parks, Open Spaces, and Natural Areas should be enhanced.

Every park, play area, and open space within the community should be connected to every other park, play area, and open space through a linear greenway or sidewalk and trail system. This circulation system, which connects these amenities will encourage biking and walking within the community; and will foster a more positive community image for residents. Safe pedestrian connections will enhance community connectivity for both recreational and transportation purposes. Utility corridors such as storm water drainage systems or above and underground utility corridors may be considered as prime locations for a greenway system, as these areas can provide usable open spaces that remain consistent with their main purpose and function.

When possible, these areas should be considered, in an effort to provide a more cohesive park and trail system.

4. Parks should offer a variety of amenities and should be considered a destination for residents.

Each park or play area within the overall park system should be different and should include a variety of different play settings and amenities. Each park area should be programmed to provide a unique experience, so that the system as a whole creates an exciting and diverse set of activities for all age groups. Residents come to identify with a particular amenity or facility located within a particular park. These unique places encourage healthy, active lifestyles.

5. The overall park system should provide access to natural settings.

As part of the overall park system, the City should aim to protect wild and natural areas, which should then be made accessible to the public. Native landscaping should be provided throughout the park system when it is appropriate to do so. Education programs should be encouraged adjacent to these areas, in an effort to stimulate interest and encourage increased environmental awareness. All age groups can benefit from viewing and acquiring an appreciation for the natural environment.

6. Open spaces should encourage sustainability for future generations.

Good park design maintains and respects the natural features that may be found on a given site and take into consideration such things as natural drainage patterns, topography, plants and wildlife. Parks and open spaces should be built on the existing environmental conditions or such features should be re-created on the site to help further define and enhance play areas. Respecting the natural environment found in a particular area; will not only help to create more unique spaces, but will preserve natural areas for future generations to enjoy.

7. Play areas should be designed with the recreational activities that may be provided in mind.

Playground areas should contain more than one type of recreational activity. Many parks contain manufactured play equipment alone; however, encouraging activity amongst the youth of the community requires more than play equipment. The number and type of activities provided should be determined by the area, location, size, function, adjacent uses and the overall community need for specific types of play activities. A variety of stimulating activities and facilities will help to encourage more active lifestyles.

8. Play areas should be site specific and sensitive to the surroundings.

Play areas should be designed to meet the character of the site. The activities provided should ensure that the area is seen as a destination. A master plan should be considered for each new park, even if the entire project cannot be constructed immediately. The overall features of the site should reflect the values, history, and needs of the area that it is intended to serve. Elements provided within the park should inspire community connection to the area. High quality building materials should be incorporated, along with a well-thought landscape plan to make the area aesthetically pleasing.

9. The neighborhood and/or community should be involved in the design of a new park or open space area.

When designing a play area, meaningful community involvement, which includes children, youth, adults, maintenance staff, and recreational leaders; should be a focus in the design process. After the park has been designed and constructed, all attempts should be made to keep the community involved in the park's development in the future. New play areas should be designed and based upon community or neighborhood needs. When redeveloping an existing park or continuing to build upon the concepts provided within a new park, community participation from those residents within the surrounding neighborhood should be considered and included at each

stage of the development process. This type of citizen participation encourages “ownership” of the space that is created.

10. Maintenance standards and a Capital Improvement Plan should be implemented during the design process.

Each area should have an on-going maintenance guide, which is considered at the beginning of the park planning and design phase. Each item within the play area should be documented and included within a maintenance program and Capital Improvement Plan, so as to ensure that funding is available in the future for the upkeep of the equipment and the maintenance of the overall play area.

11. Adequate funding and resources must be identified when designing a new park or implementing a program.

The play area design should be reviewed to incorporate capital, operations, and maintenance costs in the allocation of funds so that there is complete financial understanding of the play area in the future. The City should continue to use partnerships and collaboration efforts when possible as a funding option. Cost estimates should be prepared for each project, which includes a full accounting of all costs at the design stage. Once a park is planned and created, on-going maintenance and replacement costs are a concern and should be addressed at the beginning of the park planning process.

12. Realize that park areas and needs will change over time. The ability to adapt to changing preferences is necessary.

Neighborhoods change over time and the play areas located within these areas should consider potential future changes at the design stage. Flexible space should be added to the overall park area to allow for changes as the community grows and changes.

Full funding for the construction of a park may not always be available, so incremental development of a park allows sites to evolve as needs change in the future. This phased development over time will allow for changes in user types, patterns, and preferences. In addition, the City must consider the changing demographics and the new trends that may arise in the future when planning for new play areas. The City should also consider and balance the value of existing parks to determine if their continued existence is beneficial to the community and worth the resources they require to maintain.

13. Develop a centralized destination for the entire community to experience and enjoy.

In 2019, the City Council established a goal to create a centralized park location that would become an overall destination for City-run activities. Bluebird Park, being centrally located and offering an abundance of open space, continues to be enhanced to meet the needs of the growing community and to offer amenities that will draw in residents from the entire City. This park will continue to be used and promoted for City events, programs, and activities to meet this goal.

## Future Trail Development

Linkages from existing and future parks, open space and natural areas to residential and commercial areas of the community will continue to be an important part of the overall park system. Not only will these linkages encourage an alternative form of transportation, to include walking and biking, but their inclusion within the overall park system will encourage active living and healthy lifestyles throughout the community. In order to ensure that these options are in place for community residents, an overall framework that provides direction for the construction of new trail segments is needed. This framework will ensure that the trails providing access and linkage to the overall Park System will continue to meet the needs of City residents.

1. Build a safe and secure community-wide trail system that links neighborhoods, recreational areas, community facilities, regional destinations, and natural areas to one another

The sidewalk and trail system has been identified as a highly desired infrastructure improvement for the City of Isanti. The existing trail system should be evaluated, maintained, and expanded upon to continue to accommodate both recreational and transportation needs. Providing a safe and secure pedestrian transportation system will help to encourage active and healthy lifestyles for area residents. Connections should be monitored on a regular basis, so as to ensure that the proper infrastructure is in place to continue to provide safe pedestrian connections for area residents.

2. Establish a continuous greenway system both around and through the community where possible.

Natural features can be found, which can be construed to be linear in form; and thus, have the potential for being linked to create a more continuous system. If these areas could be preserved, they would serve as natural stormwater buffers, trail corridors, nature areas, and neighborhood links throughout the community. The community should strive to identify those areas throughout the community that could be used for such a greenway system.

3. Continue to develop new trail segments in conjunction with the subdivision of land.

New trail segments should continue to be required as part of the platting and site design process. New residential and commercial developments have been required to provide both sidewalk and trail linkages, so as to ensure that the existing system is tied to new growth areas. This will enable the community to fill gaps that may exist and ensure that future gaps are avoided when possible.

4. Trail location should take into consideration natural areas and features.

Trail alignment should take into consideration the location of natural areas and features. The exact location of a future trail should be determined by studying in the field the conditions of the proposed trail location prior to development. While trails are a necessity within the overall park and trail system; care should be given to trail placement to ensure that natural areas are protected from construction and development. In addition, the preservation of these natural areas will help to enhance the aesthetics along any given pathway.

5. Work with the State, County, Township, and other governmental entities to ensure that existing and future trail connections take into consideration regional linkages.



The community should continue to work with other governmental entities to ensure that existing and future trail linkages provide access to regional trails that may be constructed within or near the community. Regional collaboration to construct a larger trail infrastructure system for both recreational and transportation purposes will continue to be increasingly important in the future. Not only will these partnerships help to strengthen regional planning efforts, but will help these governmental entities to share resources for the common good.

6. Maintenance standards and a Capital Improvement Plan should be implemented.

Similar to that in park planning, the continued maintenance and reconstruction of sidewalk and trail segments should be considered during the planning and design phase. These amenities will also need to be replaced and maintained to ensure that the system is safe for pedestrians. Funding must be made available in the future for maintenance and construction and/or reconstruction of these segments.

## **FUTURE PARK, TRAIL AND OPEN SPACES**

The City of Isanti is anticipating future population growth and continued residential, commercial, and industrial development. This additional growth and development will require additional park, trail, and open space areas to be incorporated within each new development; to be added to the existing park system. The City of Isanti believes that future expansion of the park system will be necessary to ensure that future residents and visitors to the community have the same opportunity to utilize parks, trails, and open spaces within the immediate vicinity of their homes and/or destinations. The connection of these future park areas to the overall park system will be important and should be reviewed prior to park development. While several future projects have already been identified and will be constructed in the near future, other projects may not be constructed for many years, pending the economic climate of the community.

- **Future Expansion of Outlot A (Villages on the Rum 3rd Addition, 2nd Replat - Park Addition)**

While the actual amount of land area to the north of the Villages on the Rum 3<sup>rd</sup> Addition is limited for future planning, the City of Isanti may look to expand upon the park area that has been platted as Outlot A, now Legacy Park, and continue this area along Isanti Brook as it heads to the north. Significant natural resources lie just north of the current city boundary along Isanti Brook, which should be conserved within its natural state. Trails that may be constructed within the current portion of Outlot A may need to be expanded upon, as the City annexes property for future development to the north. Preservation of these natural resource amenities will continue to be important as the City grows.

- **Fairway Greens Future Neighborhood Park**

As part of the Fairway Greens Development, a small neighborhood park had been proposed along 10th Avenue NE. While this small park would serve the residential units that had been planned for this general area; the size of the park and location would be unable to accommodate the total number of anticipated residential households that could be developed throughout the entire Fairway Greens Development in the future.

Additional park locations and facilities would need to be planned and developed in the area, as additional residential units are platted.

The platted area, in which the park was scheduled to be constructed, has undergone a number of changes. Pending the type of residential uses and layout of any new development, the location and size of the park may need to be re-examined.

- **Fir Street Parcels**

The City owns two residential lots on Fir Street Southwest, in the Southwest corner of the City, that have yet to be developed. These parcels offer an opportunity to add an additional neighborhood park to the current system. This area has previously been discussed as a prime location to create an exercise park or to add a multi-use sports court as one is not present in this region of the City. The City has until 2030 to develop these parcels. If parks are not developed on these properties at that time, the land will need to be turned over to the State.

- **Future Active and Passive Park Areas (East Side of TH 65)**

On the east side of Trunk Highway 65, additional park and open space area will need to be considered prior to and at the time of development. To date, all City-owned park facilities, with the exception of Academy Park, are currently located on the west side of Trunk Highway 65. In order to continue in the Isanti tradition, through the provision of vast park and open space areas, which are easily accessible and available to all City residents, plans will need to be implemented for the development of new facilities along the east side of the corridor as well. Within the planning area identified in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, there are a number of large wetland complexes and associated natural areas that should be considered when reviewing proposals for future development.

A number of other types of parks and park facilities may be reviewed and considered for this area, which may include but is not limited to: a dog park, a large passive park, nature conservatory, a sports complex, small pocket parks etc. Each facility should be reviewed based upon the needs of the community and locations should be carefully considered.

- **Future Greenway System**

When encouraging healthy lifestyles and active living, it becomes increasingly important to provide residents and visitors to the community with an integrated and well-planned park and recreation system. Green spaces and parks should be more thoughtfully planned to create a connected system of multi-purpose greenways throughout the community. As a result, open spaces and parks become part of a larger multi-purpose greenway system; that results in the preservation of key natural areas that will not only offer community residents additional green spaces and passive recreational areas, but will contribute to a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly development pattern. These greenways or natural area corridors can be integrated into the existing and proposed future trail system. Such linkages will provide residents with an integrated park and trail system, which will enhance the quality of life for the community.

- **South Park Future Neighborhood Park**

Upon approval of the South Park Preliminary PUD Plat, a small neighborhood park was to be located within a future phase of the development. While the exact location of that park had not been determined, the City did request that one be added for residents living in this area. The economic downturn, as well as the resulting foreclosure crisis, has stalled this development. While the overall approvals for the development are still in place, once those approvals have expired, development in this area will need to be reviewed again at a future date. However, a park should continue to be considered for this area, due to the lack of such facilities nearby.

## **FUNDING SOURCES FOR FUTURE PARK AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT**

In order to maintain the existing park and trail system and to develop future park system amenities, funding sources must be identified. The City of Isanti has identified the following funding sources from which to draw from for future park and trail maintenance and development needs. While some of these funds may be easier to draw from than others, such sources are all still noted as options.

### **General Tax Levy**

The general tax levy has been and will continue to be an important funding source, particularly towards operation and maintenance of park and trail facilities. Some capital improvements are also funded through the general tax levy. Additional sources of funding may need to be reviewed.

### **Park Dedication Fund**

With the increased levels of development seen throughout the community in past years, the park dedication fund has become an increasingly important funding source for new and developing City parks. The fund can be used for both capital improvements as well as land acquisition costs. However, with the decreased levels of development experienced by the community in more recent years, the park dedication fund will be in need of replenishment. Unfortunately, additional funds for this source only come through development and subdivision proposals. Unless development continues, additional funding sources may be necessary in the near future.

### **User Fees**

The City of Isanti has recently implemented a user fee system for specific park amenities, including use of the Unity Park Field, tennis courts at Mattson Park, park shelters, and the Bluebird Amphitheater, all of which see a fair amount of use by organized groups throughout the summer. The intent of the user fee is to help fund the maintenance and operation costs associated with these facilities. Use of these facilities results in yearly maintenance obligations. The user fees enable the City to ensure that the field is kept in good condition and is operational for those wishing to use the facilities. In the current economy, user fees may be looked to even more as a way to help finance general maintenance and operation improvements.

### **Donations**

Charitable organizations and/or individuals often donate funds to park and recreation efforts. The City may receive funding, providing that those funds are used for designated purposes or activities. However, the funding would enable the City to provide amenities or services that would not otherwise have been made available within the park system.

**Grants**

Grant opportunities are continuously available for park and trail improvements. Many grant opportunities are available at both the state and federal level. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has many grant options that are available each year. Grant information can be obtained through the DNR website. Transportation funds are also available to local units of government for the purpose of trail construction and maintenance. The City of Isanti has received grant funds in the past, which enabled the development of parks and trails throughout the community. In the near future, these types of grant funds will become even more important as other funding mechanisms become more limited.

**Partnerships with Other Government Entities**

Establishing partnerships with other communities, townships, and the County will become even more critical in future years. This type of collaboration and combining of valuable resources will better able these entities to ensure the success of a future park or trail system. These collaborative efforts will also help entities to avoid duplication of services and will enhance the park and trail planning process, so as to avoid wasteful spending of precious budgeted funds.

**LAND ACQUISITION STRATEGIES**

As is current practice, the City of Isanti will acquire most new park and trail land through the dedication of such land by private property owners, as required by the Zoning Subdivision Ordinance. While the City of Isanti could purchase properties, when available for park, open space, and trail development and/or expansion; funds to do so in upcoming years may be limited.

The acquisition process to pursue parcels or areas that are already developed may be more difficult. Instances where this would occur include those areas that have been identified as greenway areas for the interconnected park system. The City has identified certain greenway areas along the Rum River, as well as along Spirit and Park Brook. There are also several smaller connections through wetland/woodland areas. While some of these identified segments are located on property that may develop in the future and would be subject to the subdivision ordinance requirements, many of these areas are located along residentially developed parcels. In these instances, land may not necessarily need to be purchased, as there are other options to consider. Below is a list of methods for consideration.

**Conservation Easement**

This type of easement can be either purchased from the property owner or may be donated by the property owner. The easement would allow for an outside party, the City, to have limited use and access to a designated portion of the property without having to pay the price to purchase the property. Terms of the easement can be negotiated between the outside party and the property owner. For the City, the easement would allow for not only the construction of the trail

through the easement area, but would permit maintenance and use of the trail by the public. The greenway area would be preserved in its natural condition in perpetuity. Restrictions on tree removal and land alteration may be required; however, for the private property owner, the individual may receive future development credits and would be able to restrict the types of public uses that may be permitted on the trail segment. If a non-profit organization, such as a land trust, is involved in the easement process, then the property owner may be entitled to tax write-offs or credits.

There are advantages to using this type of easement. The property, while listed at a diminished tax value, is not taken off of the tax rolls. The property owner is able to have continued enjoyment and profit from their property as well as allow the property owner to have some flexibility in the level of public use that is allowed on the trail within the easement area. For the City, these types of easements are less expensive than purchasing the property. However, with anything there are disadvantages, which include the potential for on-going conflicts between the underlying property owner and the outside party. Even if such conflicts and confusion does not occur under one property owner, the selling of the property to a different party may result in conflicts with the new owner in the future. Lastly, the conservation easement limits the activity on the land to specific functions. Obviously, upon creation of the easement, the activities that are able to use the facility have been specifically identified. Changing the requirements in the future may be difficult, if the needs of the community change in the future.

#### **Fee-Title Ownership**

Simply purchasing the property and having the City as the owner of the property is the cleanest process and allows for the greatest amount of flexibility. This ownership allows the City to preserve, develop, and maintain the area as the City feels fit over time. If the use of the property evolves over time, given changing dynamics of the community, there are no restrictions on the use of the property. While the advantages to ownership are obvious, the disadvantage to ownership is the cost associated with purchasing the property.

Other land acquisition strategies may be taken into consideration, which have not been mentioned here. However, these strategies may need to be further reviewed and examined on a case-by-case basis so as to ensure that they are meeting the goals and needs of the community.

The City of Isanti envisions a park, trail, and open space system that will not only enhance the quality of life for its current residents, but will create a system that can be easily built upon in the future. This plan will serve as a guide for future improvements and developments that will create a system of parks, trails, and open spaces that emphasize safety, innovation, conservation, and accessibility. The intent of this overall park system is not only to provide residents with recreational opportunities, but to protect and enhance the natural resources that can still be found throughout the community. The anticipated outcome is to produce a park and trail system that meets the needs of both existing and future community residents; encourages healthy, active lifestyles for all; and preserves our natural surroundings so they can be enjoyed by future generations.